

UNITY VERSUS UNIFORMITY: AN ECUMENICAL QUESTION

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The Church of Christ is a Communion of Individual Churches. In order to maintain a correct and balanced ecclesiology two things have to be kept: they are, "individuality" and "communion". Individuality is a basic characteristic of the particular churches (Rites). Each Church is authentic in its existence and mission. But an exaggerated individuality can lead to separatism and groupism, which is sinful. Individuality is relevant only in the context of communion. Individual Churches are not

independent and autonomous bodies. Church is basically a Communion.¹ But when the communion aspect is exaggerated one will fall into the error of uniformity, conformity and loss of identity. It can result in slavish borrowings from other churches, so as to be detrimental to the organic growth and authentic existence of the Individual Churches. Individual Churches must project the image of communion within themselves and among themselves – they must have the legitimate autonomy that

1. Recapitulating the doctrine of Vatican II, His Holiness Pope Paul VI spoke to the French Bishops of the South Eastern region during their 'ad limina' visit in April 1977, "The Church is a communion." Cf. Jeevadhara, vol. VII, no. 40. (1977): the whole issue is on "Catholic Church, the communion of Churches." cf. also Jeevadhara, Vol. VIII, no. 46 (1978).

will enable them to express their life of faith and worship within their specific human context – they must have the opportunity to share their faith-experience with their Christian fellowmen; they must feel the corporate responsibility towards the whole Church.²

One of the achievements of Vatican II was the rediscovery of the importance of Individual Churches in the Catholic Communion.³ The Oriental Catholic Churches contributed substantially to the rediscovery of this basic idea. Although the idea was in the tradition and ecclesiology of the Church, it was diminished and until very recently a faulty idea spread around regarding the nature

of the Church. The Church of Christ was often thought of as a pyramidal structure, the Individual Churches (Rites) as mere administrative units; some tended to think of them as similar to the religious orders in the Church. Communion aspect was overstressed by many and unity was confused with uniformity. The Vatican Council made it absolutely clear that the communion aspect is to be brought to the forefront, especially in view of the Catholic Church's relation with the non-Catholics. The Council says, "That Church, holy and catholic which is the mystical body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the

2. Letter of the participants of Bishop's Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA II) organized by the mission office of F. A. B. C. at Trivandrum, India, in November 20-30, 1980, to the Bishops of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India (= *Letter BIMA II*).

3. During the visit of His Holiness Abuna Tekle Haimanot, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to His Holiness Pope John Paul II at Castel Gandolfo, on October 17, 1981, the Pope summing up the teachings of Vatican II on Ecumenism addressed the following: "The heritage handed down by the Apostles has been lived by our Churches in different forms and ways, and it has had a varied development in accordance with the natural gifts and circumstances of life proper to each (Ecum. 14). This has also led to different liturgical disciplinary and theological expressions; in themselves, as long as this variety is complementary rather than contradictory, these different expressions are an enrichment for the life and the mission of the Church among all nations (Ecum. 14-17). Hence unity of faith can be clothed with the particular cultural and spiritual contribution of each people and of each local Church." (*L'osservatore Romano*, n. 43 (707) 26 October, 1981, p. 9).

Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government and who combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy form separate churches or rites. Between these churches there flourishes such an admirable brotherhood, that this variety within the church in no way harms her unity, but rather manifests it. For it is the mind of the Catholic Church that each individual Church or rite retains its traditions whole and entire, while adjusting its way of life to the various needs of time and place."⁴ There are in fact, strong ties of unity among the Individual Churches, such as faith, the sacraments, the divinely instituted hierarchy etc. The feeling of oneness was seen from the very beginning in the life of the Church. Here is an attempt to make a brief historical analysis, with special

emphasis on the Indian context, the development of the idea of "unity and uniformity as an ecumenical question."

Birth and Growth of Diversity

In fact, in the strict sense, there is no concrete existence of a Universal Church outside these Individual Churches. The mystery of Christ's Church is fully realized in each of the Individual Churches; but no Individual Church exhausts the whole mystery of the Church. The Christ-experience which the Apostles proclaimed through the Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is the decisive element which makes a Church Individual. The Christ-experience of the twelve was not uniform and identical. They received the salvific message and assimilated it in each one's status as an individual

4. Vatican II: Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, art. 2; Constitution on the Church, 13. 23; Decree on Ecumenism, art. 14-17; cf. M. Vellanickal "Biblical Theology of the Individual Churches", *Christian Orient*, I, 1 (1980), p. 5ff. (= Biblical Theology); idem. "Individual Churches: The Biblical Perspective", *Jeevadhara*, vol. 8, no. 46 (1978), p. 274-289; X. Koodapuzha, "The Indian Church of the Thomas Christians", *Christian Orient*, I, 1 (1980) p. 20ff. (= *Indian Church*); idem, "Ecclesiology of the Thomas Christians of India", *Jeevadhara*, vol. 8, no. 46 (1978), p. 290-308; idem, "Evangelization and the Individuality of Eastern Christianity in India", *Orientation Paper 1. Consultation on 'Evangelization and Oriental Churches in India'*, Kottayam, 1-3, December 1973, p. 16-24 (= *Evangelization and Individuality*).

and in accordance with the grace each one received. We have the explicit example in the formation of the four Gospels.⁵ Even in the Jerusalem Church at Pentecost one finds this diversity (Acts, 2:5-12). When the Apostles encountered the world with a diversified culture and tradition, the Christ-experience took further diversified shapes. "The Apostles went to different places and founded Christian communities from which emerged different Individual Churches. These Churches were called the Church of God. They were generally known after the name of the place or of the inhabitants. Thus every Church was the concrete manifestation of the Church of Christ which is fully realised in a local context. These different Churches which came into being in their own socio-cultural contexts reveal the realization of the Christ-

event. The Risen Lord is present among them through His Spirit.

The Spirit of the Lord Himself is the basic principle of unity and diversity.⁶ The Spirit creates different expressions of the Christ-experience in terms of the life, theology liturgy and discipline. He calls men of all languages and cultures into the unity without destroying their individuality. The Spirit gives them unity, which can absorb differences.⁷

The different Individual Churches which exist today have handed down to us the expression of the Christ-experience which they have inherited from the original testimony of the Apostles.

The Vatican II is very clear on this point. It affirms that the Church in her origin and growth is diversified.⁸

5. cf. John Berchmans, "Unity of the Church in the New Testament", *Jeevadhara*, vol. 7, no. 40 (1977), p. 234ff. M. Vellanickal, *Individual Churches*, p. 274ff.

6. M. Vellanickal, *Biblical Theology*, p. 16: "The Spirit is the essential animator of the Church. It is when the relation of the Church to the Spirit is forgotten that unity is replaced by uniformity."

7. M. Vellanickal, *Individual Churches*, p. 284-285.

8. Constitution on the Church, art. 23; Ecumenism, 14. 15; Eastern Catholic Churches, 17; cf. X. Koodapuzha, *Evangelization and the Individuality*, p. 17.

Uniformity and Plurality

From the seventh century onwards the Western Church under the Frankish Emperors tended to uniformity. Under Charlemagne and others there was effected in the West a unification-policy in the life of the Church. With the Crusades, the Western Church came to be established also among the Easterners.⁹ Thus we find Latin Patriarchates in Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem. This act from the part of the Latin Church aggravated the already tense ecclesiastical

situation between the East and West.¹⁰ Latin Church began to be extended among the Easterners; some of the overzealous missionaries compelled the Orientals to latinization: "A good catholic must be a Latin" was their catchword. When the explorers from Europe 'discovered' 'the new worlds' in America, Asia, Africa and Oceania, the religion which accompanied them was Latin Christianity. With the Padroado, extended by the Popes of the 15th and 16th centuries,¹¹ the whole world was divided among the Portuguese and

9. The fourth Lateran Council in 1215 wanted to enforce the 'unity of jurisdiction' in a given territory or diocese (canon 9). i. e., one bishop only, whatever be its rite. In fact, owing to the mentality of the time, it meant that wherever Latin jurisdiction had extended over territories normally covered by already existing Oriental hierarchy, the latter lost its status and got submitted to latin bishops. It led to the conviction both in the East and in the West that the Christian West was superior to the Christian East and therefore that the Latin Rite was superior to any other Eastern Rite. Even two decades after the Vatican II one can hear such Medieval unbalanced sentiments, perhaps in a still cruder form from some of the latin dignitaries. In the above mentioned conference, (BIMA II) one was heard saying, "After all the Catholic Church is the Latin Church and we tolerate the Orientals; now you make your ecclesiology by saying that the Catholic Church is the communion of Churches."

10. It was only in 1964 that papal decree abolished these Latin "Patriarchates" of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople. The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, once suppressed, was reconstituted on July 23, 1847 by Pius IX.

11. Pope Nicholas V's bull, "Romanus Pontifex", of January 8, 1455 is the foundation of the Padroado: "All lands and seas that have been discovered or will be discovered belong for ever to the king of Portugal. "The subsequent Popes confirmed it and further clarified it between the Spaniards and the Portuguese,

the Spaniards of the Latin tradition. Thus the Western Church extended territorially to the whole world. Even where there was already an Eastern Church and hierarchy, the Latin Church came to be established.¹² Thus, it was the Latin Church which introduced multijurisdiction among the Easterners. So, on the one hand we find a tendency towards uniformity, and on the other, a tendency towards plurality both in the worship and jurisdiction, both sponsored by the Latin Church.

Eastern Catholic Churches

After the divisions in Christendom, there were several attempts for the reunion of the divided Christians.¹³ One can find partial success every now and then. Generally speaking in those days it meant joining the 'Roman System', i. e., the type of Papacy as developed in the West during the Middle Ages. Thus there arose the united Eastern Catholic Churches known as Uniates.¹⁴ Most of the Uniate Churches found themselves estranged

12. In India among the Easterners, the Thomas Christians, the Latin missionaries introduced double jurisdiction: the bishop of the Thomas Christians was, "Metropolitan of all India." His jurisdiction was slowly restricted; the Latin missionaries themselves became the bishops of these Oriental Christians and the Latin Church was established everywhere in India. cf. T. Vellilamthadam, "Jerusalem or Rome? Towards an interpretation of the historical imbroglio of Christianity", *Jeevadhara*, vol. 10, No. 58 (1980), p. 302-315; cf. G. Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Bahai the Great*, Kottayam, 1982. p. 198.

13. "It is evidently forgotten by Latin Christians that it was precisely these various 'reunions' which restored 'universal character' to the See of Rome." John J. Mowatt, 'The Courage to be Ourselves'. *The Future of the Oriental Catholic Churches*, ed. by J. Madey, S. T. Erackal, Tiruvalla, 1979 (= *The Future*), p. 7.

14. Uniatism comes from the word 'Unia' (Polish) adapted from 'Unio' (Latin). It was adopted first by the Russians. The Orthodox used it to designate the Orthodox who came to communion with the Roman Catholic Church. This word had from the very beginning a pejorative meaning; an inferior status and the latinizing attitude. It presupposes suppression of genuinely 'eastern' and absorption into the Latin way of life. Uniatism could be spoken as the latinized outlook generally prevailing among many of the Eastern Catholics; it indicates a psychological behaviour which creates an inferiority complex towards most Oriental ways, and a constant tendency towards Latin ways; it expresses itself in the following way: things Western

in the vast Latin majority, and isolated among their own Eastern brethren.¹⁵ Because of the pressure from the Western missionaries and owing to the formation of the Eastern Rite clergy by the Latin "formatores" the Eastern Catholic Churches tended to adopt Latin ways of religious life and thinking. Their 'forma mentis' became increasingly Latin and outlook 'Western'. Slowly these Eastern Catholic Churches became 'parts' of the Western Patriarchate; they were treated not as Individual Churches but part of the Latin Church. Many of the Latins could not understand at all that there is a basic meaning for the authenticity of the Eastern Churches in

front of the Orthodox World. They could not see the particular oriental vocation of the Easterners and found no difference between the Latin authenticity and Oriental authenticity. "Despite the fact that the Roman Church has made efforts to maintain the Oriental Rites, some of its representatives are diligently working to deprive the Eastern Churches of their own inheritance in different ways. This is a great sin against the Catholicity of the Church. The Latin West is in need of a conversion to Catholicism and to the universality of the heritage of Christ".¹⁶ From the part of the Uniates themselves, they have adopted the Latin administrative system, and their

(Latin) stand for civilization and progress; they enjoy greater influence and prestige; they are more practical and convenient. Uniates want to be different from the Orthodox, in most cases leading to latinization. They give up the basic outlook of the Christian East; introduce Western devotions of a deviated piety; they try to adorn themselves with Western dignities such as Monsignori etc. A crude juridical outlook at Christian life is the worst effect of uniatism. Because of their Latin-oriented education they are brain-washed and consciously or unconsciously will accept the verdict of the 'superior' Western Church. They have the inferior feeling that 'Vatican is always right'. The folly of this erroneous thinking is all too evident today in the mass-confusion which we see battering the Church on all sides. (On this point I am indebted to Rev. Fr. E. Hambye S. J.)

15. In the recent years, the Melkites have shown increasingly what a genuine Eastern Church should be within Catholic Unity. The voice of Patriarch Maximos IV was the voice of authentic Eastern mind.

16. M. Vellanickal, *Biblical Theology*, p. 17.

theology and spirituality became Latin.¹⁷ These Eastern Rite Catholics have forgotten that they have a great obligation towards the Latins and the Orthodox; that their vocation is unique. In their desire to be united with the Latin Church, which is genuine and legitimate, they lost sight of their ecclesial identity which is as vital as the communion aspect. Vatican II had to tell the Easterners to be aware of their identity,¹⁸ but even after that they cannot see it because they live in the Latin world of ideas. The various kinds of religious orders working among the Oriental Catholics spread their own peculiar mode of piety at the risk of genuine Eastern liturgical tradition; thus there grew hybridism and amalgamation and not organic growth; it was neither Eastern nor Western but a mixture. Together with that the Western Canon Law was imposed upon the Easterners in one way or other. As a result, in most

cases a hostile attitude is seen between the Uniates and the non-Catholic Eastern Churches.

World-Wide Latin Hierarchy

After the Second World War and with the growth of technology the modern world became closer and closer. People of any nation are found anywhere in the world. No one can live in complete isolation; people of all cultures and religions move faster than before.

Today we find the world-wide Latin hierarchy and non-Catholic Eastern Rite hierarchies. But even though one finds Eastern Rite Catholics throughout the world, one will be surprised to find that territorial restrictions are imposed on them. The Oriental Catholic hierarchies in most cases are canonically prohibited to go beyond the territories assigned to them by the Western

17. Even in the post-conciliar meeting in Bangalore in 1969 (The Church in India Today Seminar) some of the latinized Orientals argued together with the Latins against the expressed teaching of Vatican II, for "one bishop one territory". Even though it was against any sound ecclesiology, the latinizers called it, "the Seminar's most magnificent moment"—an expression of neo-colonialism! (cf. V. Pathikulangara, "The Chaldeo-Indian Church", *Christian Orient*, vol. II, 1. p. 5ff.).

18. Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, art. 6.

Church.¹⁹ The territorial division originated with the pagan emperor Diocletian (284–305). The Church adopted this imperial division. Ever since, the West is standing for jurisdiction based on territory, while the Easterners argue for personal jurisdiction.

In practice, even today many of the Latin ecclesiastical authorities stand for one bishop and one territory, and according to them that should be the Latin rite and its bishop. They can understand the church of Christ only in terms of jurisdiction and territory. Often their argument takes this shape: The Catholic Church (= Latin Rite) is spread everywhere. Why multiply other Rites? As a Catholic it is enough to follow any Rite. For such people, rite is like an overcoat which could be changed at will. But according to the genuine Eastern traditional perspective, the Church is essentially a worshipping community, centered around the Eucharist.²⁰

Equality of Rites - an eschatological reality?

Vatican II solemnly taught the equality of all Rites and the obligation to take care of the faithful of every Rite in its own liturgical tradition. It proclaimed that wherever necessary Eastern Catholic hierarchies should be established.²¹ Now it is high time to put into practice the decisions of Vatican II. The Melkites and the Maronites have succeeded to implement this decision to some extent. Regarding the other Eastern Rite Catholic Churches, as far as it could be ascertained, no serious effort has so far been made for a healthy implementation of this decree. There are several disastrous consequences because of this grave negligence.

The Eastern Rite Catholic Churches are not seen today operating as a bridge between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The Orthodox see them as so many communities tolerated by the vast Latin world in certain

19. The Melkites, the Maronites and the Ukrainians have a few parishes outside 'their territories'.

20. V. Pathikulangara, *art. cit.*, p. 22.

21. Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches, art. 4.

restricted areas. The Eastern Rite Catholics in the 'diaspora' are in a bad predicament. In the diaspora they have no facility to take part in their own liturgical services and they cannot live in their ecclesial spirit, rather they are alienated and estranged in Christian life. They are in danger of losing their faith, contact with the Mother Church and its traditions and as a result lost entirely to the Catholic Church.

Evangelization - duty of the whole church

Evangelization is the basic mission of the church. Church is by nature missionary. Vatican II²² and Pope Paul VI have clearly taught it. His Holiness Pope Paul says, "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize."²³ This proclamation is to be done not in the air but concretely in the life of the Church, through the ecclesial structures. Evangelization is undertaken by Individual

Churches. Word of God is proclaimed with the power of the Spirit in a variety of ways.

The growth of a church depends on her missionary activity. Only a living organism can grow; that alone has dynamism. The missionary element is inherent in the very nature of the church. It is also an inalienable and unquestionable right of all the Individual Churches. We may here refer to a few points indicated in the Consultation on Evangelization in 1973:²⁴

1. The relation between the Individual Churches should be one of mutual openness, love and fellowship. Her authenticity and individuality depend on her own ecclesial awareness and the genuine openness towards the other churches.

2. Openness and authenticity of a Church do not mean the giving up of one's own responsibility to another church... If one Church leaves the essential obligation of evangelization to another rite, the former will

22. Decree on Evangelization, art. 2.

23. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

24. X. Koodapuzha, *Evangelization and Individuality*, p. 22-24. Cfr. also *idem*, "The church as essentially missionary", in *Jeevadhara*, 2, 10 (1972), p. 293ff.

be lacking something which constitutes her own being. Every Individual Church should allow the other churches to be authentic to their own mission.

3. The churches are expected to help each other, maintaining their own identity. The assistance of one church should not lead to social and religious dependence. The genuine Christian assistance is not to make others surrender their rights but to help them grow and to have their fulfilment. The growth of the different Individual Churches with their own heritage should be the aim of this assistance.

4. The right to preach the Good News is the Christ-given mission of every Church. Therefore, it should not be considered a concession from one Individual Church to another.

5. The special obligation of an Apostolic Individual Church should not be confused with that of a parish or a diocese. The parishes and dioceses belong to an Individual Church. The Individual Church has its own Apostolic heritage.

Any attempt to ignore this basic structure of the

Catholic Church will produce a strange ecclesiology. It is clear that evangelization is the obligation also of the Eastern Rite Catholics. But the presentday arrangement in the Catholic Church is against the very nature of the Church. Today after the colonial predominance, evangelization in the Catholic Church is understood in practice to be evangelization to the Latin Church. Even if the Oriental Catholic Churches are taking part in this proclamation of the Word, it has to be done in the Latin Church and conversion must be done in the Latin Church and to the Latin Church. This is the situation one finds in more than one place. Even in one's own mother country the Orientals are denied the basic Christian right. Here we find that one Church is standing in the way of another with outdated imperialistic claims on territory. The idea that the Church is primarily a liturgical community of the people of God is forgotten, and a faulty picture of the church is presented as one entertaining territorial and jurisdictional expansionism. "After all the territory belongs to the mother country,

and not to any Church".²⁵ Again, the non Christians are deprived of the opportunity to come into contact with the various traditions (in certain cases richer) of the Church. They have no choice but to become Latin. The non-Catholics in the diaspora on becoming catholic, cannot follow their own rite there.

Eastern Catholic Churches- Individual ?

Today most of the Eastern Catholic Churches function like Latin Rite dioceses, as part of the Western Church, not as Individual Churches. "As far as rites, traditions, disciplines and institutions of the various Oriental Rite Catholic Churches are concerned, they have not been properly safeguarded and honoured...on the contrary, they have been constantly judged, doctored and changed to suit Western and Latin mentality. Contrary to all the bi-lateral agreements made at the time of the various 'unions' and contrary to the spirit and

written decree of Vatican Council II, the Oriental Catholic Churches have been made the victims of a type of Caesaropapism hitherto unknown. History is the best recorder of events in time and it also has a habit of repeating itself. The present is no exception."²⁶

Some of the Oriental Churches do not have a ritual head— a Patriarch, or Catholicos, or Major Archbishop and consequently no permanent synod. Their bishops are appointed by the bishop of Rome, their dioceses are divided at the will of the Roman Curia, as they do with the Latin dioceses. Although Vatican II undoubtedly proclaimed the equality of Rites, in the day to day life, one is prone to doubt about the meaning of the statements. One becomes more and more sceptical and critical. An Easterner cannot digest all these latinisms, happening in the name of universality and catholicity. "This is not generosity nor real catholicity, but a remote preparation for suicide"²⁷

25. X. Koodapuzha, *Indian Church* p. 54.

26. John J. Mowatt, *art. cit.*, p. 26.

27. Placid J. Podipara, *The Rise and Decline of the Indian Church of the Thomas Christians*, Kottayam 1979, p. 47.

Openness and Catholicity would mean for many the adoption of the Latin Rite and the giving up of the Eastern traditions. The latinized Orientals are made to think that it is narrow-mindedness to think of one's own Church and its heritage.²⁸

Uniatism

The Eastern Rite non-Catholic Churches are fast throwing away the aloofness which they kept as a reaction to Latinism, and are prepared to have a bilateral discussion based on mutual respect. These Easterners are judging everything Christian according to Eastern standards. The Latins are prepared to accept them on equal footing. But regarding the Uniates, the West is still showing a paternalistic attitude and they are judged

according to the Western standards. Some of the Uniates themselves are incapable of having an Eastern vision in theology, spirituality, and Christian life.²⁹

Among the Orientals the latinized Orientals are the worst anti-Oriental; these Uniates hate all that is Eastern and stand fully for the Latin type of Christianity; they work in the Latin dioceses for the growth of the Latin Church, forgetting all that is of their own church and traditions. A classical example is the Church of the Thomas Christians in India³⁰ Some of the closed uniate communities feel the need of becoming more open and more universal and the way they seek is latinization. Such latinized communities are the least suited for practising today's ecumenism. Such

28. cf. X. Koodapuzha, *Indian Church*, p. 42.

29. In some cases the Uniates feel obliged to give guarantee that they were 'good catholics', meaning sufficiently assimilated to the Latin ways. They were in some cases almost morally obliged to do so in order to be palatable to either an already existing latinized majority of Oriental Catholics or to the Latins themselves.

30. "A particular ritual Church has been made and has become the servile feeder of another particular ritual church. Will a particular rite which is conscious of its identity and mission in the Catholic Church slavishly make of itself the vocation market for all sorts of persons and religious institutes of another rite?... It is strange to see in India mission dioceses some of which are Syro-Malabarian in rite with Syro-Malabarian bishops while some are latin in rite with bishops who are Syro-Malabarians by origin, but who follow the latin rite" (Placid J. Podipara, *The Rise and Decline*, p. 47.)

Christians feel more at ease with the Latins than with the other Oriental-Catholics and non-Catholics.

In spite of its latinization, the Eastern Catholicism bears witness to the universality of the Church, which is still overwhelmingly Latin and Western in mentality. In some cases the Easterners were able to challenge the exclusive Roman type of administration and missionary system. They thus help to keep the pluralism in the Catholic Church. They helped the Latin Church to restore the character of its universality, which it lost during the past centuries, when it was busy with the affairs of the Western Patriarchate alone. After a survey of the present Eastern Catholic Churches, John J. Mowatt says, "Eastern Rite Catholicism is by no means small or mediocre. The various 'unions' and 'reunions' have not only complemented the Apostolic See of Rome, but have also enhanced the position of the Pope as 'successor of St Peter' and as 'supreme pontiff.' As Chief Pastor of all Catholics, Eastern and Western, he is truly

the visible head of a Universal Church and not merely of a Western (Roman) Patriarchate".³¹

Orientalism and Catholicism

Returning to the sources is the solution for any relevant existence for the Eastern Rite Catholics, and to bear witness to the double reality confronting them, namely Orientalism and Catholicism. They have a double allegiance; it is a painful task but it is the thing which makes their existence relevant. Their future consists in restoring the authenticity of both these realities. They must bear witness to the pluralistic Christianity within Catholicism and be prepared to take the measures necessary for their implementation. It is not enough that they realize it, they must be prepared to act according to their convictions. Their vocation is not the same as that of the Latins. Latins on the other hand should not close their eyes to this basic reality and ask the Orientals to be like

31. John J. Mowatt, *art. cit.* p. 24.

them in their existence and mission³².

Unity vs. Uniformity

If we consider the Church of Christ in the context of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, mystery of Jesus Christ, and the mystery of the Holy Spirit, we will truly understand the nature of the Church and then we will realize the difference between unity and uniformity. There is one God in three persons, there is one Jesus Christ, with His humanity and His divinity, there is one Spirit of God but the manifestations of the one Spirit are different. Unity is deep and includes plurality: "Variety within the Church is not an unavoidable evil. God Himself is not an inflexible monotone unit, but the living Trinity... In the Church there is one Spirit, but many gifts, one Word of God, but many languages, one body but many members, one people of God but many

nations, one faith but many theologies, one worship in Spirit and Truth, but many liturgies, one law of love but many disciplines, one life in the Spirit but many spiritualities. Variety in the Church is a gift of God."³³

"The genuine Christian concept of unity includes legitimate diversity. The Catholic unity does not demand a concentration of everything into the centre. The diversity of the Church is not a mere superficial difference. It included the areas of spiritual, liturgical, theological, canonical and pastoral fields. It is in these fields that each Eastern Church manifests its own identity."³⁴

Even in the divided Christianity there are several points of agreement between Christians. Unity has not been completely lost. The perfect unity can be realized with the unity of faith, and plurality of expression, with communion in the one Eucharist in an organic body

32. "Eastern Christianity has a view of God, of man, of the church, of dogma, of Scripture, of tradition, of spirituality, which frequently seems very close to catholicism in its expressions, but which is experienced in an utterly different manner". (D. Attwater, *Christian Churches of the East*, II, p. 282).

33. M. Vellanickal, *Biblical Theology*, p. 17; cf. V. Pathikulangara, *art. cit.* p. 6ff. Decree on Ecumenism, art. 14.

34. Koodapuzha, *Evangelization and the Individuality*, p. 19.

with various types of organization.

Uniformity is superficial, not deep and spiritual. It can put on the mask of a spirituality. It can apparently appear as Catholic. It was perhaps suited to the colonial period. But it cannot maintain the unity envisaged by Christ. Before the division in the 16th century the Western Church was uniformly structured but it could not avoid the division. Uniformity cannot command the attention of the Oriental non-Catholics. They stand for plurality and diversity. Hence ecumenism can take place only on the basis of the principle: "unity in essentials and diversity in all the rest." That is fortunately the official attitude of the leading ecumenists, Catholic as well as non-catholic. A balanced ecclesiology which keeps the balance between unity and diversity should be developed. That will be an organic ecclesiology. Then we will realize that Christian liberty is the basis for diversity and pluralism. There, legalism will have only a second place, and theology will become more a contemplation than a mere science. A readiness from all quarters to accept the diverse realities

within the Church is a must. Above all it presupposes openness, trust and desire. Openness means openness to truth and to the teachings of the Church. Trust can be had only through justice and love. When one feels that he is denied the basic rights, it is difficult to command trust. Desire is necessary to know the other realities in the Church which are different from ours. That will be helpful for a psychological change of heart and mind. No ecumenism will thrive in the colonial, unjust and overlooming life-situation. Sooner or later it is condemned to failure because it is not based on evangelical values. But let us hope for the opposite.

Indian Situation

In India there are three Catholic Individual Churches (Rites): the Syro-Malabar Church, from the Apostolic times, the Latin Church, from the 16th century, and the Syro - Malankara Church, from 1930. At present there is a growing tendency towards destroying the Individuality of these churches in the name of Indianization and adaptation. Therefore the Individual Churches of India seem to be heading towards becoming a colourless and

compromising community rather than organically grown genuine Indian Churches.³⁵ The Latin Church in India is spread all over India while the other two Oriental Churches are restricted to a very tiny tip of land in South India. After the independence, the political colonial situation changed, but the ecclesiastical colonialism continues. Everybody expected a change with Vatican II. But even after two decades the situation remains as it was before. Here is a situation where we find the conflict between the official teaching of the Church and the inability of the ecclesiastical leaders to implement it; it is the crisis facing the Oriental Churches in India today.³⁶

After the independence of India the Eastern Rite Catholics migrated to the different parts of India and outside India; i. e., many began to live outside the territory of the Eastern bishops in India. So far no effective step is taken for the spiritual care of these Eastern Rite Catholics in the

diaspora. The Eastern Rite Catholic hierarchies cannot go beyond the canonical limits drawn for them by the Western Church. In 1973 "The Consultation on Evangelization and Oriental Churches in India" under the auspices of the Commission for Evangelization of the Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference, held at Kottayam, 1-3 December, strongly recommended the following.³⁷

"As tens of thousands of our people living in various cities and industrial areas in other parts of India are cut off from their parent communities and deprived of facilities to foster their spiritual heritage and to evolve themselves into a living community fruitful in vocations and capable of evangelization, we request that the Oriental Hierarchies be given freedom to appoint pastors of their own Church through dioceses erected for the purpose".

But there was no effect! This consultation was not greater than the Ecumenical Council!

35. M. Vellanickal, *Understanding of Evangelization in the Context of Present-day India* (C. B. C. I. General Meeting, Calcutta, 6-14 Jan. 1974), (= *Understanding of Evangelization*), p. 26.

36. X. Koodapuzha, *Indian Church*, p. 36.

37. *Consultation on Evangelization and Oriental Churches in India* p. 94

Recently a one-member commission made a fact finding study and it had to meet the opposition of the Latins and the latinized Easterners. Even after 16 years the Vatican II teaching regarding the Orientals has not come into effect in the Indian situation. On the other hand the Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Jacobite and the Marthomite Churches—three Oriental non-Catholic Churches in India—have parishes and bishops wherever they wanted in the whole world. The discrimination towards the Oriental Catholic Churches in India is not at all an optimistic picture for a fruitful ecumenism. I do not find any reason why our Latin Catholic brethren oppose us, the Orientals.

Secondly, the question of Evangelization: In India the two Oriental Catholic Churches are forbidden to do mission work.³⁸ If the Orientals want to do mission work, they have to do it in the Latin Rite. They have to leave behind the Oriental Catholic Rite and tradition and become latin Catholic in practice and work for the

Latin Church. It is the case in almost all the Latin dioceses in India. The Oriental Catholics are denied the right to undertake missionary activities maintaining their own ecclesial traditions while a Latin Catholic has no such restriction imposed on him. One Individual Church is denied its fundamental right for evangelization and is encouraged to be a constant and ready feeder of another Individual Church. The above mentioned consultation passed the following Recommendation in 1973:³⁹

“The Individuality of a Church grows in as much as it deepens its Christ-experience and shares it with others which is the very process of evangelization. The genuine growth of an Individual Church and evangelization go together. Therefore evangelization is enhanced by the autonomy i. e., freedom for organic growth of the Individual Churches.”

“The Syro-Malabar and Malankara Churches which trace back their origin to St Thomas the apostle are Individual Churches. Since evangelization is the sharing

38. The Syro-Malabar Church is given seven exarchates, mostly in Madhya Pradesh.

39. *Consultation*, p. 88-89.

of the Christ-experience embodied in an Individual Church, a genuine growth of these Churches will ensure the legitimate fulfilment of their missionary responsibility."

"While we acknowledge that the process of evangelization in Kerala itself is to be continued, the responsibility of our Churches to preach Christ especially to the responsive groups in other parts of India is urgent. Hence we consider it our imperative duty to preach the Gospel to our countrymen all over India."

"Since all the Individual Churches have the same dignity and rights and responsibilities the Malabar and the Malankara Churches have every right and responsibility to share their Christian heritage with their countrymen (cf. OE. 3)." But there was no effect and no effort was made to implement it. In the C.B.C.I. General Meeting on 6-14 January 1974, there was an appeal to implement the conciliar decree:⁴⁰ "India being a land of different established Individual Churches namely, Latin, Malabar and Malankara Churches, this context

also is to be taken into account in our understanding of evangelization in the present day India". "India is a land of different non-Catholic Christian Churches and therefore evangelization in India should take into consideration also the context of ecumenism in India." "Since the Christ-experience as expressed in the Church of India is handed down to us through the three Individual Churches (Latin, Malabar and Malankara) a genuine concern for evangelization in India should impel all these Individual Churches to help each other to preserve their authenticity and grow in their Individuality. Thus all of them will be better equipped to share their Christ-experience with their fellowmen in the country. For fulfilling this task of evangelizing our country an authentic growth of these Individual Churches is indispensable. Therefore, optimum conditions should be maintained for the proper and organic growth of all the three Individual Churches in India by making the best use of their personnel and resources." "The context of the cultural and ecclesial pluralism in India demands a better un-

40. *Understanding of Evangelization*, p. 27, 44-45, 47-48.

derstanding of the relationship between the process of evangelization and the process of authentic growth of Individual and Particular Churches and a better organization of the work of evangelization." As usual, nothing happened. The sentiments of the Easterners received a very unsympathetic response from the part of the Latins and the latinizers.

Six years later in 1980, the participants of Bima II at Trivandrum expressed the very same sentiments with deeper concern. Some of the participants of the conference from Pakistan and Sri Lanka were shocked by the present day painful situation in India. In their letter to the Bishops of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma and India they wrote⁴¹, "In order to evangelize, the churches need to be authentic in their very existence. This puts before us the reality of the local and Individual Churches of South Asia as the concrete realization of the mystery of the church of Christ in our region... The existence in India of three Individual Churches, the Latin, the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-

Malankara, is a manifestation of the richness of the mystery of the Church. Fostering communion among them through mutual acceptance and acknowledgement is felt by us as an essential requirement for fulfilling our common evangelizing mission The essential missionary character of the Church leads us to reflect on the peculiar condition in which the Individual Churches find themselves in India. *We are painfully aware of a situation in which the Oriental Churches feel unable to exercise their evangelizing activity as Churches in proportion to their missionary potential. We would hope that the authorities of the three Individual Churches of India will face the problem in full sincerity and mutual openness and devise adequate solutions, having for their paramount concern the common evangelizing task of the three churches.*"

Nowhere else in the history of the Christian church will we find such a situation as we find in India. Even the Latin church in all its missionary activities was working for the Latin church, even in Oriental regions

41. *Letter BIMA II*, para. 3, 5, 10,

among the Orientals.⁴² Can we present it as a good picture before the Eastern Rite non-Catholics who require no such permission from anybody to preach the Word of God and to bear witness to Christ in their own life-style and liturgical tradition? From the point of ecumenism it will definitely make the Easterners suspicious. The attitude of the latinized orientals too is anti-ecumenical. It is not catholicity but a false sense of universalism in order to limit the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches.⁴³

Thirdly, the Eastern Rite Catholics in India cannot present to the Eastern Orthodox an ideal picture of a governmental system. The Orthodox and Jacobites have a catholicos each. The Marthomites have a Metropolitan as head. The Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara churches do

not have proper hierarchical heads. Their heads are like the latin Archbishops. The Orthodox and the Jacobites have permanent synods, the Marthomites also have a synod. The catholics have nothing of this sort. They have conveniently the ruling system of the Roman Church. This situation is to be changed very soon. The Vatican II made provision for it, but the administrative bureaucracy is not prepared for any change in the existing order, and that is detrimental to the growth of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

One Rite Movement in India

There is a movement in India sponsored by some latin catholics and latinized Orientals to have a merging of the three existing Individual Churches in India into a uniform one; it may be the Latin Rite or a modified

42. "It is doubtful whether we can find anywhere else in history a parallel to this bitter experience of paying the loss of one's own identity in Apostolic Christ-experience, as the cost of preaching the Gospel in one's own mother land". (V. Pathikulangara, *art. cit.* p. 19).

43. "The exodus into latin rite for the sake of undertaking missionary activities can never be called a sign of Catholicity and healthy development. . . . How can it be called a sign of openness, equality and catholicity when there is a claim for territorial monopoly at the expense of the Oriental Churches in India? A false sense of universalism and catholicity is being spread by which the latinized Orientals are made to think that it is narrow-mindedness to think of one's own Church and its heritage". (X. Koodapuzha, *art. cit.* p. 41-42).

form of the Latin Rite or something else.⁴⁴ The very idea of one Rite for the whole of India is colonialistic, uniformistic, anti-ecumenical and against the very nature of the church and foreign to the ecclesiastical teachings. The agents of the one rite movement make a very systematic propaganda both in and outside India, and they can very easily convince the latinized Easterners since they are already alienated and estranged from their ecclesial life.

This one-rite movement will do and is doing great harm to ecumenism and the openness exhibited in Vat. II. It is an attempt to undo the conciliar decree on ecumenism and on Eastern Rite Catholic Churches. Since it is against the very nature of the Church, to propagate it is heretical. It creates suspicion.

Let us preach ecumenism at home, then we will be able to preach it to non-catholics. The United Eastern Rite Churches are test cases for the Orthodox. "As long as

the conditions laid down for Oriental Catholics disappoint the Orthodox, accordingly, the unity of the churches will remain out of reach. The conclusion that must be drawn from the present situation in the united Eastern Churches is that in the opinion of those who are not favourable towards them, it had been possible and even better if in the past these Churches had not been inaugurated. But since they exist and are a fact which one is not able to ignore, it would not be the disbanding of these Churches which would contribute more to the unity of Orthodox and Catholics, but rather the concession of a satisfactory statute which would reassure the Orthodox concerning the intentions of the Catholic Church towards Christians of the Eastern tradition in the future. For an attempt which has the validity of a test to end in failure, not to speak of betrayal, means, not to give guarantee for a more agreeable union to be concluded in the future, but not to leave any hope of it at all".⁴⁵ Let us be open to

44. Cf. Guru Yohend, "The Doors are closed again and against on the Future of the Chaldeo-Malabar Church", *The Future*, p. 251.

45. Antonios Vakondios, "Our Double Vocation; Testimony and Reminder. The Hellenic Catholic Church in Greece," *The Future*, p. 215-216.

accept a plurality of traditions within the catholic communion instead of trying to crush legitimate ecclesial traditions. If the one-rite movement is against the official teaching of the church why is it that it is not disowned by the authorities concerned? Is their silence a sign of its approval?

Now the questions one may be prone to ask are the following:

1) Should the Oriental Catholic Churches in India continue or not?

2) Should these Oriental Catholic churches in India be limited as antiquities in a tiny part of India or should they be permitted to grow organically?

3) Do all concerned mean and foster seriously the teaching of Vatican II regarding the Eastern Rite Catholics?

4) Are we sincere in our ecumenical discussions?

5) Are we standing for unity or uniformity?

6) Are we prepared for plurality in the life of the Church?

7) Are we motivated by the evangelical ideal and the

teachings of Christ when we oppose the genuine and legitimate growth of the Eastern Catholic Churches in India?

8) Is it not some kind of false fear that compels us to act in a manner detrimental to the growth of the Eastern Catholic Churches in India?

When one sees the miserable predicament of the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches in India, one is reminded of the prophetic words of one of the Prior Generals of the CMI (Fr. Alexander Kattakayam - Valiachandian a century ago. He wrote to the Propaganda Fide on May 16, 1877:⁴⁶

“Est haec natio nostra antiquissima ritus syriaci; nihil habemus quod ad ritum pertinet; multi sunt ritus in Ecclesia; nullus praeter nostrum est adeo miserabilis.”

“The historical past has not been kind, nor has it been just, to the catholic Eastern Churches and we seriously question if the present ecumenical trend will make things any different for future attempts at reunion. As long as attitudes

46. Quoted by V. Pathikulangara, “Liturgical Reforms in the Chaldeo-Indian Church”, *Diakonia*, 16, 2 (1981), p. 151.

in the West remain as they are, especially in the understanding of what the Church is, then it can be said with almost absolute certitude that there never will be any true or lasting union between East and West'.⁴⁷

Conclusion

All the Catholics in India must be prepared to understand the new ecclesiology of Vatican II; this demands an experience of agony within a process of self-discovery and renewal. Confusion in thinking and self understanding of the church is but a natural consequence of change of old ways and habits. Many in the past were taught to think of the Church of Christ as identified with the Latin church and the Oriental Individual Churches as rites in this one uni-

fied whole as there are religious orders in the Latin Church. In view of wider of ecumenism, the 'communion aspect' and its ecclesiology must come to the forefront. But even today many think in the old fashion.

Let us be prepared to be ourselves. Let us be frank in the mystical body of Christ. Let us be prepared to accept historical realities as they are; let us not be hypocrites; East is East and West is West; the role of the Easterner is unique and in fulfilling his task he finds his authenticity. Let us not be silent nor be affected by fear, nor be moved by flattery. Frankness and self acceptance are necessary for any lasting union between the Churches, for any fruitful ecumenism.

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