

The Great Jubilee and the Purification of Memory

We celebrate with joy and thanksgiving the Great Jubilee of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are glad that we are given the grace to see the true face of God in Jesus Christ. When we celebrate this Great Jubilee, we are proclaiming the immeasurable clemency of the Almighty God on behalf of humanity in sending His Only Begotten Son, and we kneel before His love in unending thanksgiving. In Kerala the culmination of the Jubilee celebration was the Eucharistic Congress at Ernakulam in November. Throughout the whole year of grace there were several inter-church gatherings and prayer services in various zones in Kerala. Pastors of various churches of definite regions gathered together in the name of the Lord to celebrate the Great Jubilee. It was a new ecumenical experience. There were formerly occasional such gathering in Kerala, but this year it has become widespread and everybody expressed the desire that it should continue even after the Jubilee celebrations. Throughout India, there were such ecumenical and inter religious gatherings. On the National level, the final program was at Bangalore in October. It ended with a public demonstration of faith. The Christian Churches in India, as elsewhere, considered the Jubilee as occasions for thanksgiving, and of humble self-examination of conscience in presenting the shining face of Christ before the world. It was not an occasion for triumphalism, or of arrogance or exclusiveness. In various places of celebrations the Christians tried to get the participation of the leaders of other religions. Almost every Christian community participated in this common act of thanksgiving.

In connection with the Great Jubilee, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church asked its members, both Pastors and faithful, to examine themselves and the past and ask pardon for the faults committed by its members. In an official public ceremony in Rome, the Holy Father John Paul II, together with the Cardinals of the Roman Curia, made a public penitential act, in which His Holiness asked pardon to God for

all the human frailties and mistakes, irresponsible acts, and omissions, committed by its former members. It was indeed a touching experience and is for the first time in the history of the Church that such a penitential act took place. It was a moment of grace for the entire Christian community and for the world at large. Furthermore, the *International Theological Commission* of the Catholic Church prepared a document entitled, “*Memory and Reconciliation: “The Church and the Faults of the Past”*”(=MR).

The documents of the Vatican Council recognized the sins against the unity of the Church and asked pardon to the separated brethren. (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7). The Council recognized that for the separation of large bodies from the Catholic communion, men on both sides are to blame. The division among Christians is in open contradiction to the explicit will of the Lord. It is indeed a great scandal to the world and it damages the most holy cause of proclaiming the Gospel to every creature. The Popes and the Council Fathers were aware of the various factors, which led to the division and the continuation of the separation. They realized that the restoration of mutual love is very essential after a history laden with opposition, mutual mistrust and antagonism. The cultural factors, historical conditioning and prejudices fed the separation and mutual distrust among Christians, although they do not have anything to do with matters of faith (MR, 5,2). Together with the Second Vatican Council there were several acts of reconciliation and purification of memory, based on ecumenical studies, common statements and understanding. It started with the lifting up of anathema of 1054, in 1965, between the Eastern Church and the Western Church. There is yet a very long way to go before establishing full unity among all the followers of Christ.

The Council Fathers deplored certain attitudes that led people to think that faith and science are mutually opposed (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36). They noticed that in the “genesis of atheism” Christians might have had some responsibility in so far as they failed to present the shining face of Christ (*Ibid.*19). The Council also deplored the persecution

and manifestations of anti-Semitism in every time and on whatever past (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). The Council declared: 1. “What was committed during the Passion of Christ cannot be imputed either indiscriminately to all the Jews then living nor to the Jews of our time (*Ibid.*). 2. One cannot charge with the sin of separation those who now are born into the separated communities and who in these are instructed in the faith of Christ (*UR.3*).

Both His Holiness Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II on more than one occasion asked pardon to the separated Christians for the responsibility from the part of Catholics for the separation. John Paul II expressed regret for the “sorrowful memories” that mark the history of the division among Christians. He asked forgiveness to a multitude of historical events in which the Church or individual groups of Christians were implicated in different respects. He dealt with it extensively in his document *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* (=TMA), No.33-36). The Church recognizes its own mistakes in the forms of “counter witness and scandal.”

Now during the Great Jubilee, Catholic Church is turning to the whole humanity. Church is reexamining the past in the light of better studies and reflection in a new perspective and showed its readiness to correct the mistakes of the past. This purification of memory is aimed at liberating personal and communal conscience from all forms of resentment and violence that are the legacy of past faults, through a historical and theological evaluation of such events. It means the recognition of guilt, and contribution to the path of reconciliation (*Introduction to MR*).

Catholic Church asked its members both individually and collectively to “become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children”. She “acknowledges as her own her sinful sons and daughters” and encourages them “to purify themselves through repentance of past errors, and instances of infidelity, inconsistency and slowness to act”. Christians are reminded of their responsibility for the evils of our time. Church asks pardon for the “methods of violence and

intolerance” used in certain cases in the past to evangelize. Thus the Church thinks that the remembrance of the scandals of the past, obstacle to the Church’s witness today, can be removed and can foster renewal and reconciliation in the present.

Catholics are asked to examine whether at any period they have employed doubtful means in the pursuit of good ends, such as the proclamation of the Gospel or the defense of the unity of the faith: intolerance and even the use of force in the service of truth”(TMA.35). This refers to forms of evangelizations that employed improper means to announce the revealed truth or did not include an evangelical discernment suited to the cultural values of the peoples or did not respect the consciences of the persons to whom the faith was presented, as well as all forms of force used in the repression and correction of errors.” Attention should also be paid to all the failures to denounce injustice and violence in the various historical situations.

The document asks the Christians to examine their conscience in regard to the endless persecutions of the Jewish people down through the centuries. It asks in a special way to see whether the Christian attitudes have in any way paved the way for the cruel pagan Nazi Anti-Semitism. (MR 5,4). Catholics are asked also to examine how far they react to the various forms of atheism prevalent today in the modern society, such as, religious indifference, lack of transcendent sense of human life, a climate of secularism and ethical relativism, the denial of the right of life of the unborn child, great indifference to the cry of the poor.

Finally the document desires that these acts of repentance would stimulate the members of other religions to acknowledge the faults of their own past. The history of the various religions is marked by intolerance, superstition, complicity with unjust powers, and the denial of the dignity and freedom of conscience. Christians have been no exception and they are aware that all are sinners before God. (MR.6,3).