

CHRISTIANITY – THE HARBINGER OF PEACE

Dr M.D. Thomas

I am extremely delighted to participate in this important gathering of diverse ethnic groups, nationalities and religious affiliations.

I greatly admire the awakening to the higher human value and the collective commitment to a better society reflected in this conference. On behalf of the Christian community in India, I have the pleasure of presenting my deep sentiments of appreciation and felicitation to the organizers of this international conference and all those who contributed their mite towards making this conference a significant event.

Peace is the biggest achievement a human being can dream of in his or her life. Enjoying peace of mind even while being deprived of many essential things of life is to recognize the fundamental importance of life. Peace is the fruit of harmony. Harmony is the equilibrium of life. That would amount to saying peace originates from harmony and is in turn facilitated by inter-religious dialogue.

Inter-religious dialogue is not dialogue between or among religions. Systems cannot be in dialogue because they do not have life. Dialogue between or among human beings is creative interaction between persons of different religious or social perceptions. Creative interaction is not merely exchange of ideas or views but would also include sharing of experience and feelings. Inter-religious dialogue would mean enriching one another by sharing realities of life: it is making joint journey of life in the search for the meaning and purpose of peaceful living. It is setting off on a pilgrimage towards a higher power in a spirit of togetherness. It would also mean cooperative endeavour for the betterment of the society. Inter-religious dialogue is a fraternal as well as spiritual way of life.

The Christian perspective of inter-religious dialogue is fundamentally creating a culture of harmony and peace. The Christian outlook of life is grounded on the filial experience of Jesus Christ. Jesus approached the higher power as if it were the father. This father is beyond gender difference and also means mother. Father is the most highly refined relational reality in the human society because it enjoys the widest application in the human life. Jesus addressed the Divine Power by the Hebrew word *Abba*, meaning ‘my dear Father’ with all the freedom and affection worthy of a son. His personal relationship with the father was evidenced by the saying: “I hear the voice of the Father, I do His will, The Father and I are one, Father, in your hands I recommend my spirit, etc.” But the father experience of Jesus was definitely not a private one. It was not limited to his own disciples either. It has a universal significance. It was as wide as to include the whole humanity across boundaries.

The filial experience of Jesus had a fraternal dimension. It had a vertical and horizontal one. Considering the divine as father would necessarily mean accepting him as the brother and as the sister. The filial and fraternal dimensions are complementary to each other, as if two sides of the same coin. The concept of brotherhood or sisterhood knows no boundaries. It is beyond all sorts of communal divisions found in human society. Every human being is my brother or sister irrespective

of caste, creed, class, profession, ideology, nationality, culture, etc. That is the modern Christian realization.

Moreover, Jesus showed a preference for those who are poor, weak, illiterate and marginalized by being a friend to them so that the balance of human society is maintained. The dynamics of this fraternal style of life is governed by the values laid out in the Bible. “Do to others as you would have him or her do to you. Love your enemy as yourself. Consider the other greater than yourself. Love your enemy for your father in heaven does not discriminate between evil and good or the righteous and the unrighteous when he sends sunshine or rays. You are like one body which functions in many parts. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.”

Finally, the Christian perspective of life does stand for an all-encompassing vision of harmony and mission of peace. Experience is verified in expression. The filial consciousness in relation to the divine is expressed in terms of fraternal attitude towards other human beings and the rest of creation. This perspective surpasses the temporary division of human society and concentrates on the downtrodden sections. A genuine Christian life and mission would mean promoting a universal culture of harmony and peace beyond all human-made boundaries.

Therefore, a Christian, while being rooted in his or her faith, has to ever remain related to people of other faiths, and join hands with them in a spirit of togetherness in tune with our rich cultural heritage of unity in diversity and *vasudevakutumbakam*- world family. In response to the communally-challenged context of India, this, and this alone, is the dire need of the hour. The leaders and members of spiritual traditions need to be further motivated and empowered to evolve and celebrate the human and spiritual culture and foster togetherness both on national and international levels. May the same common Creator of all of us awaken us to this imperative mission of ours today. That is our simple but lofty and ever-elevating aspiration.

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