

DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS AND MST

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The Church, as a community of the disciples of Jesus, has to dialogue with people of other religious affiliations—this was the new awakening the Catholic Church received in the Second Council of Vatican. The new understanding of Jesus that emerged from the historical situations down the centuries seems to have facilitated this new insight. Having traveled decades, this realization has passed over to the twenty first century, with new avenues as well as diverse challenges. Today it has become highly imperative for the Church to appropriate an all-embracing mission of religious dialogue with people of all faiths and cultures, in order to make her very existence worthwhile.

A *Christian* cannot be a Christian in the right sense of the word if he or she does not dialogue. As *Ecclesia in Asia* records, dialogue ‘has its origin in the Father’s loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit’ (EA 29). That would mean to say, dialogue is an ever-going process of Trinitarian love, which overflows towards people of all religious affiliations. The document continues, ‘the dialogue which the Church proposes is grounded in the logic of Incarnation’ (EA 29). The principle of self-emptying (Phil 2.5-11) is the basic model for the mission of dialogue.

The charisma of Christian dialogue emerges from the filial experience of Jesus (Jn 14.9-11). Charged and empowered by the same filial experience, a Christian rises up to a universal fraternal spirit (Mt 5.43-48), which knows no limits. It goes beyond all boundaries of caste, ethnicity, creed, faith, language, ideology, class, profession, nationality, culture, and the like. Paul says, ‘honour one another above yourselves’ (Rom 12.10). This is the basic spirit of dialogue. This is the real proof having a faith worth being mentioned. This is the short cut to make this human life heavenly, too. The end result of such a spirit of dialogue is harmony. Paul highlights the central dynamics of life by citing the most fundamental example ‘one body, many parts’ (1 Cor 12.12-31). This is the most perfect model for harmony across all bounds.

The word’ dialogue’ means word or conversation between two or more. In addition to its intellectual meaning, it also means emotional, spiritual and physical dimensions. Although it refers to speaking, it also presupposes listening. Although it starts with dialogue of ideas, it includes exchange of feelings, spiritual experiences, action and life as well. Dialogue is a multi-faceted human endeavour, which brings about perennial spiritual results in life. It permeates through all the aspects of life and ameliorates its details. Dialogue has to be the pivotal force, which maintains the equilibrium of life.

Dialogue of religions would mean inviting believers of different religious persuasions to be open to one another in a friendly disposition. It is respecting, loving, serving and promoting

each other. It is initiating a creative interaction with one another. People of diverse faith affiliations have to recognize divine promptings and action in each other's tradition. They have to accept each other as fellow travelers to God. They have to maintain a spirit of joint search for truth and ulterior values. They have to co-operate with each other with a brotherly-sisterly spirit for the making of a better society. Together they have to care for the less fortunate sections of the society. Through such an ever-going process of fraternal concern they need to travel the path of a higher spirituality, which is a 'spirituality of togetherness'.

MST (Missionaries of Saint Thomas), being a society of Apostolic Life, has a specific missionary genius, which emerges directly from the apostolic nature. It is primarily wedded to the less Christian areas. Pioneering missionary activity is its essential character. The mission of dialogue, essentially so, becomes among the first priorities of its social involvements. Promoting harmony outstands as fundamental to its raison d'être. A perspective of dialogue and harmony should permeate all the schemes and activities of MST. The most significant missionary line should be one of promoting dialogue and harmony among the different religious affiliations. Facilitating dialogical relations seems inevitable for making effective the other schemes of MST, too. The missionary vision of MST will find itself fully blossomed only then.

MST has to proceed to envisaging and venturing major steps in order to promote the mission of dialogue and harmony of religious traditions in the different regions and areas of its presence across the globe. It has to monitor diverse schemes of awareness-building, capacity-building, training, animating, empowering, promoting and co-ordinating its human resources in this line. Financial schemes are to be developed in view of supporting the human efforts. An action plan has to be chalked out in line with the basic concept evolved, for the effective implementation of the same. It appears to me that the perspective of dialogue and harmony among the diverse religious persuasions is the most leading dimension of the mission of MST, by which its charismatic identity will flower to its full capacity, with a fruit of singular quality for the years and decades to come.

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