

TOWARDS AN INTERACTIVE FAITH

TAKING OFF FROM NOSTRA AETATE

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1. NOSTRA AETATE – AN INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council, certainly, was an outstanding Synod. "The second Vatican Council was a serious attempt to take the church back to its roots"¹, comments Pope Francis.

Nostra Aetate² was its commendable landmark, with its ground-breaking Declaration on 'Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions', which saw the light of the day on 28 October 1965.

Nostra Aetate bears witness to a Church that has become of age in faith as an adult. This was also a laudable attempt to make Christians radical, in the sense of taking the Church back to its roots, the perennially innovative values of Jesus.

This was the golden time when the Catholic Church truly deserved its adjective 'catholic' by imbibing the values of being 'universal' in spirit. 'Nostra Aetate' is the new 'run way' from where the Catholic Church took off towards a radical regeneration of faith, yes, a faith that is ever 'interactive' in its essence.

'Nostra Aetate' outlines the larger horizons of Christian faith the Church intends to take off towards. It defines the new orientation of faith the Church undertakes to live. It affirms the decisive launch of the new 'journey of faith' the Church shoulders. In other words, it is a 'new way of being' the Church. It is a major point of reference for all times to come.

Obviously, the journey of the Church is already set in motion in that direction. A considerable distance is travelled, too. Yet, a long distance remains to be covered, as regards the altitudes and magnitudes of the living faith it professes. The destination is still far ahead. The speed as well as the altitude of the journey requires being reviewed and accelerated. In other words, Nostra Aetate is both already and not yet, at the same time. 'Our time' is still in the process. We need to keep evolving along with the time that enfolds us and gives meaning to our lives.

2. NOSTRA AETATE – A CONTEXTUAL APPLICATION

2.1. Nostra Aetate – The Declaration³

2.1.1. NA 1 – NA awakens an awareness of the time and context. It is an increasingly globalizing world. Networking and bonds of friendship among peoples require being strengthened.

2.1.2. NA 1 – NA proposes an examination of the relation of the church with other faith traditions. This is the result of an intentional scrutiny of the mental and emotional processes of the church. It articulates the realization of her duty to foster love and unity among individuals and communities.

2.2. In our Time – Implications

2.2.1. 'In our time', the English equivalent of *Nostra Aetate*, is not merely the first words of the document. It is indeed due response to the question of Jesus 'why do you fail to read and interpret the signs of the times'⁴.

2.2.2. 'In our time'⁵ highlights the new awareness of the Church as regards its multi-religious, social, cultural and universal setting. It is an attempt to adapt the Christian faith to the time and context of its existence. It is an effort to apply the teachings of Jesus more effectively to the colloquium of the cultures and civilizations of the world.

2.2.3. 'In our time' signifies the readiness of the Church to 'restart' and 'refresh' its faith, in view of reinventing and restoring the values of Jesus. It indicates a major 'introspection' that is geared towards re-interpreting and reconstructing the social ways of the Church. In other words, it presents a 'new way of being Christian', here and now in the given temporal and cultural setting.

2.2.4. 'In our time' draws our attention to a harmonized 'sense of time' -- past, present and future. It is specifically a 'wake-up' call to those who have almost lost themselves in the past, to revise their faith in terms of the eternity of time. It is an ardent invitation to all Christians to follow the footsteps of the person of Jesus, more as 'a lived reality of the present and of the future', than to worship him as an iconic figure of the past.

2.2.5. 'In our time' underscores a major 'shift of paradigm' in the way one conceives and lives one's faith in God the Father, as advocated by Jesus. It is a clarion call to update one's faith constantly and keep it relevant, in terms of one's time and context. It is a powerful mandate to become a Christian anew, by staying perfectly tuned to believers of all faiths, ideologies and cultures.

3. FILIAL STATUS AT STAKE

3.1. *Nostra Aetate* – The Declaration⁶

3.1.1. NA 5 -- 'We cannot call God our Father, if we treat any people as other than sisters and brothers'.

3.1.2. NA 5 -- 'There is no basis for any discrimination, in theory or practice, between individual and individual, or between people and people'.

3.1.3. NA 5 – 'Church reproveth, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them, based on race, colour, condition in life or religion'.

3.2. Filial Status – Biblical Foundations

3.2.1. 'He sends sunshine and rain on the righteous and the unrighteous'⁷. / 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect'⁸.

3.2.2. 'God created man in his own image...male and female he created them'⁹.

3.2.3. 'You yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst'¹⁰.

3.2.4. 'Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love'¹¹.

3.2.5. 'Conduct yourselves well among gentiles'¹² / 'Live at peace with all people'¹³

3.2.6. 'Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven'¹⁴.

3.2.7. 'What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul (filial status)? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?'¹⁵.

3.2.8. 'Sabbath is for man and not man for the Sabbath'¹⁶.

3.3. Insights from Popes

3.3.1. "Being a Christian entails promoting the dignity of our brothers and sisters, fighting for it, living for it",¹⁷ Pope Francis, Mass in Cuba, 2015

3.3.2. "Dogmas and rituals are not the centre of the concerns of the church, but human beings"¹⁸, Pope Francis, General audience, St Peter's Square, Vatican City, 2015

3.4. Filial Status – Implications

3.4.1. Christians lose their right to call God 'Father' and therefore lose their filial status with God, if they discriminate. Discrimination is the violation of the most fundamental teaching of Jesus. This shakes the very foundation of Christian faith. Consequently, one ceases to be Christian.

3.4.2. All human beings, irrespective of religious and other affiliations, are endowed with the same human dignity. Every human being is the image of God in the same measure. Every human being is the temple of God in the same way. Every human being has human rights, in the same manner.

4. PLURALITY OF RELIGIONS

4.1. Nostra Aetate – The Declaration¹⁹

4.1.1. NA 2 -- Different religions are different answers to the unsolved riddles of life – humanity, life, meaning, purpose, right and wrong, suffering, happiness, death, judgment, reward, ultimate mystery, etc. All religions have evolved well-defined concepts and answers to questions.

4.1.2. NA 2 -- Hinduism explores the divine mystery. It expresses itself in myths and philosophical insights. It aspires for release from life through ascetical practices, meditation and recourse to God in devotion and love.

4.1.3. NA 2 -- Buddhism exposes the essential inadequacy of the changing world. It looks for liberation and supreme illumination.

4.1.4. NA 2 -- Other religions are different ways to overcome the restlessness of life. They evolve a programme of life with doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites, too.

4.1.5. NA 2 -- Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in other religions.

4.1.6. NA 2 -- It has high regard for the manner of life, conduct, precepts and doctrines that are different in other religions.

4.1.7. NA 2 -- There is a ray of truth in other religions, which enlightens all men and women.

4.1.8. NA 3 – Catholic Church has high regard for Muslims. It acknowledges Islam for its common link of God and Abraham, recognition for Jesus as a prophet, space for Virgin Mary, Day of Judgment and resurrection of the dead.

4.2. Insights from Popes

4.2.1. "Different religious traditions of India are a hope for a better future for the human family"²⁰, Pope John Paul II, Meeting of Religions, New Delhi, 1999

4.2.2. "Religion should be what God intended it to be, a source of goodness, harmony and peace"²¹, Pope John Paul II, Meeting of Religions, New Delhi, 1999

4.3. Implications

4.3.1. Life is composed of both individual and social characters. One and many, as 'one body and many parts'²², are the two dimensions of life and they require being harmonized.

4.3.2. Religion cannot be equated with theology. Life is more important. Religion cannot be reduced to a mere theory. Practice is more important, too. God is much greater than the God Scriptures have outlined and theology has comprehended.

5. COMMONALITIES

5.1. The Declaration²³

5.1.1. NA 1 – There is a search for what is common among people and what brings them together.

5.1.2. NA 1 -- Humanity forms but one community. All people share common origin, common existence and common destiny.

5.1.3. NA 2 – There is an awareness of a hidden power behind the course of nature and events of human life. There is a wide recognition of the common Supreme Being, too.

5.2. Biblical Foundation

5.2.1. All stem from one stock created by God²⁴.

5.2.2. God's providence, goodness and saving designs extend to all humankind²⁵.

5.2.3. "That they all may be one"²⁶. This was the ultimate spiritual aspiration of Jesus.

5.3. Insights from Popes

5.3.2. "We have to look at what unites people, rather than what divides them"²⁷, Pope John XXIII.

5.3.3. "What we all have in common is greater than what separates us"²⁸, Pope John XXIII.

5.3.1. "We don't have to meet only as tourists, but as pilgrims and start a journey searching for God, not in buildings of stone, but in the hearts of humankind"²⁹, Pope Paul VI, Meeting of Religions, Bombay, January 1964.

5.4. Implications

5.4.1. There are similarities and dissimilarities, in the entire creation, in all civilizations and traditions. Similarities are more than dissimilarities, beyond comparison. Difference is a positive quality and is an enriching factor. Similarities and dissimilarities are complementary in character. They compose one reality. It cannot be otherwise.

5.4.2. 'Common origin, common existence and common destiny'³⁰ of the diverse affiliations of faiths and ideologies are to be recognized. The earth is the shared home of all individuals, communities, nations and peoples. This is the 'mantra' of making the family of the one and only God on earth.

6. INTERACTION OF FAITHS

6.1. The Declaration³¹

6.1.1. NA 2 -- Enter into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions with prudence and love.

6.1.2. NA 3 -- Together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.

6.1.3. NA 2 -- Christians have to acknowledge, preserve and encourage (promote, persuade and support) the spiritual and moral truths in people of other religions, cultures and traditions.

6.2. Insights from Popes

6.2.1. "By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we open ourselves to God"³², Pope John Paul II, Public Meeting, Madras, 1986

6.2.2. "Dialogue is an act of love, which has its roots in God himself"³³, Pope John Paul II, Meeting of Religions, New Delhi, 1999

6.2.4. "Interreligious dialogue is an indispensable condition for peace and a duty for all believers"³⁴, Pope Francis, Meeting of diverse religious communities, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2015

6.2.3. "Churches, parishes and institutions with closed doors must not call themselves a church; they must call themselves museums"³⁵, General audience, St Peter's Square, Vatican City, Pope Francis, 2015

6.3. Implications

6.3.1. Life is social in its character. It is dialogical and interactive. Interaction enriches life, as well. Interaction is the pathway of growth in human life and of the progress of nations and civilizations.

6.3.2. Ways of dialogue are immense. Main forms are -- dialogue of life, dialogue of ideas, dialogue of feelings or experiences and dialogue of deeds. They are inclusive to each other, too.

6.3.4. Interaction is the spirit of faith. Faith cannot survive without interaction. Faith, when interactive, lives in full measure and grows towards fuller degrees and proportions.

7. RECONCILIATORY MEASURES

7.1. The Declaration³⁶

7.1.1. NA 3 – Forget the past of quarrels and dissensions. Make sincere effort for mutual understanding.

7.1.2. NA 4 -- Jews cannot be indiscriminately charged for the crimes committed during the passion of Jesus. Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed.

7.1.3. Church rejects the charge, long leveled against the collective Jewish people, that Jews are guilty of killing Christ.

7.1.4. NA 4 -- Do not teach anything that is not in tune with the spirit of Christ. Church deplores all hatred, persecution and anti-Semitism.

7.1.5. NA 2 -- Jews and Christians have a common spiritual heritage. Encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation. Engage in biblical and theological enquiry and friendly discussions.

7.1.6. NA 2 -- The common roots are the spiritual ties that link the people of the new covenant to the stock of Abraham, Moses and prophets, being daughters and sons of Abraham and nourishment from the good olive tree.

7.1.7. NA 4 -- The suffering of Christ is voluntary. It is within the universal design of God's love and is the source of grace.

7.2. Efforts of Popes

7.2.1. Pope John XXIII (1958-1963), facilitated self-reflection and reformed Vatican politics in the backdrop of Christian culpability in the genocide³⁷.

7.2.2. John Paul II (1978-2005) made the first papal state visit to the Jewish state and the first papal visit to a synagogue and established diplomatic relations with Israel³⁸.

7.3. Implications

7.3.1. Healing the wounds of the past is the first step to reconciliation. Ending the nearly two millennia of Christian enmity toward Jews and Judaism that had led to violence and death peaking tragically with the Holocaust is a great gesture of being truly Christian.

7.3.2. God's eternal covenant with the Jewish people was inherited by Christians. The shared roots with Jews have to be duly recognized.

8. NA – DYNAMICS OF FAITH

8.1. The word 'faith'

The word 'faith'³⁹ means 'belief, confidence, trust', etc. Accordingly, faith stands for a complete trust or confidence in someone or something. In other words, faith is an unquestioning belief in the truth, value or trustworthiness of a person, idea or a thing.

Faith is primarily oriented to person. Its relation to an idea or a thing is of secondary level only. It does not count on proofs, but bases itself on personal experience. Evidently, it has no indispensable connection to doctrines and dogmas.

8.2. Faith is a sacred sentiment

Faith is a sacred, deep and complete sentiment, which permeates through the entire human life. It is the essence of human nature, which is endowed with a sense of divinity. Consciousness of the littleness of one's understanding of the universe substantiates the logic of faith.

Faith surpasses theological categories and ceremonial stereotypes. Faith is a dynamic and inventive reality of day-to-day life. It is geared towards the source and destiny of life in the vertical context and towards the human and environmental realities in the horizontal context.

8.3. Faith can be religious or non-religious

Faith can be religious or non-religious. It is religion-based when religious system is the locus of faith. Faith is non-religious when ideology, culture, experience, etc. is the context of trust. They are not contradictory poles. They could and should be effectively dovetailed, too.

In fact, faith does not become religious when a collection of people share certain beliefs. But, it does, when a community of people stay tuned in trust with one another, care for each other and join together to make life meaningful. Besides, a stream of faith is powerful not when it is rigid in what it professes, but when it radiates the quality of love towards one and all.

8.4. Dimensions of Faith

Faith has three dimensions. Trusting oneself, the core of one's being, is individual faith or faith in oneself. Trusting another person, the best of his or her being, is social faith or faith in the other. Sublimating all one's trust in oneself or in others and applying the same to God is spiritual faith or faith in God.

The above triangular dimensions compose a complete faith. The quality of faithfulness is the acid test for all the three dimensions of faith. The inter-connectedness of these dimensions proves faith as balanced and worthwhile, as well.

8.5. Faith a blessing or a liability?

Trust becomes a blind faith when it is not examined or when the involvement of mind and spirit is negated. Trust becomes a pure faith when it is enlightened, settled, serene and sublime. The latter faith is a blessing, whereas the former faith proves a liability.

8.6. Faith is a spiritual drive

Faith is easier experienced than defined. To describe in a round-about way, it is the way one conceives and lives one's life. It is the integrated approach to life. It is a conviction. It is an attitude. It is an orientation. It is a spiritual drive. It is a never-ending process of life. It is the sum-total of one's life, as well.

8.7. Faith as a radical reality

The first meaning of the word 'radical'⁴⁰ is 'going to the root or origin'. It signifies being faithful to the fundamentals of faith. To be radical would mean, first and foremost, 'imbibing the spirit of Jesus again' or even better, 'being like Jesus'. It is a continuous and an imaginative process that involves one's entire life. Faith in this sense is the spiritual process of life.

8.8. Idea of faith evolving from NA

Faith, according to NA, stresses on being up-to-date. It pursues reconciliatory measures for healing the wounds inflicted on the other in the past. It values differences and learns from them. NA stresses on a faith that is networked with all streams of life and with the entire creation, with a sense of unity.

Faith is altruistic, even to the point of promoting the other. It is a spirit of communion with all human beings under the large umbrella of the divine that is shared together. It celebrates harmony as the most cherished ethos of life.

9. NA – INTERACTIVE DYNAMICS OF FAITH

9.1. Interaction

The word 'interactive'⁴¹ would mean 'action between persons'. Merriam Webster Dictionary puts it, 'people talking with each other or doing things with each other together'⁴² or being mutually or reciprocally active. Interaction is a complete interface between two or more persons.

9.2. Two-way process

Free Dictionary defines 'interaction'⁴³ as a two-way process of communication. Telephone is an example. The flow of information between a computer and a computer-user – the input of the user and the response - is another example for the two-way process.

9.3. Influencing each other

'Interaction' necessarily involves 'people or things influencing each other' or 'acting or capable of acting on each other'. It also refers to 'being in close relation with each other'. It is a 'continual exchange of live information between persons'.

9.4. Reciprocity of life

The idea of life basically is double-faceted. It has male and female components. It has individual and social dimensions, too. Existence has to be supported by co-existence. A passenger has to relate to co-passengers. A believer has to meet other believers. Inter-personal interaction is the spice of interfaith.

9.5. Believer meets believer

Religions cannot interact, for they are systems. Faiths cannot interact, because they are abstract. In fact, persons with faith interact. Believers interact with each other. In fact, they have to interact, in order to make faith a live reality. They cannot be one against the other. They are complementary to each other, like two sides of the same coin. One human being meeting another human being is interfaith endeavour proper.

9.6. The creative character of faith

The idea of creation is always a joint endeavour. A single element does not create anything. Faith also is in essence a multifaceted reality. It has several components. Faith is not a static entity, but is a dynamic phenomenon. If it does not interact, it is doomed to die and become a phenomenon like that of the cemetery.

Faith is an inclusive and interactive reality. It is participatory and collaborative in disposition. It is creative and innovative. It is harmonious in mindset. Only then, it can facilitate inner change and humane living.

9.7. Faith is relational like 'one body, many parts'

Faith is one, as spirit is one. Faith has many aspects, as spirit has many manifestations. It is like 'one body with many parts', that function as many, but exist as one. The relational characteristics of life justify the logic of an interactive faith. Specificities and commonalities of the diverse aspects of faith require being harmonized.

9.8. Partnership of faiths

Faith, multi-faceted as it is, advocates partnership of faiths. The interactive process facilitates learning from each other, towards mutual enrichment. It calls for walking together to the same divine, as a joint pilgrimage. It also involves working together to make a more humane and harmonious society.

9.9. Notion of interactive faith advocated by NA

NA advocates the notion of a faith that is essentially interactive. Considering every human being a sister or a brother without any border or condition is a familial way. It is the celebration of a continuous relationship with all the members of the human family, without discriminating anyone on any ground. That is the innate quality of the family of God.

Consciousness of the common roots and the common roof nourishes the spirit of sharing in the best of the other as well as sharing with the other the best one has. The search for the same divine in each other and beyond makes the journey of life truly a joint pilgrimage to the divine.

The combined efforts to enrich oneself from the singular faith perception of the other ensure the making of a more harmonious society on earth. I suppose, becoming co-passengers and co-pilgrims in day-to-day lives with one and all, is, in reality, the experience of the bliss of heaven, in anticipation. Without doubt, Nostra Aetate has laid the highway of an interactive faith, which is truly human as well as Christian faith.

10. TAKING OFF FROM NOSTRA AETATE – A CRITIQUE

10.1. ALREADY

10.1.1. Overall change in the Church and outside⁴⁴

10.1.1. The second Vatican Council has the credit of having defined the new concept of 'interfaith'. It has thus pioneered the new wave of relations beyond the borders of faith-based communities.

10.1.2. Catholic Church in particular and Christian community in general emerged, more than before, as a peaceful and peace-promoting community world over.

10.1.3. Nostra Aetate, having reformed antipathy toward other religious communities as well as to Jews and Judaism, motivated Protestant churches to create their own documents,

10.1.4. Relations between Catholic and other religious communities as well as other Christian communities, improved and fairly matured, the world over. Of late, better strategies are applied by leaders of religions for settling disagreements among religious communities.

10.1.5. The trend of interfaith spread to communities of Christians other than Catholic and Christian. The idea of interfaith is being recognized and practiced more widely today, though in a more or less fashion.

10.1.6. Courses on diverse religions and interfaith as well as research on comparative themes have been accepted in seminaries and study centres either as mandatory or have been encouraged.

10.1.7. In the last few decades, several universities have established departments and centres of religious studies, separately or together. There is a lot of talk about interfaith in the society today, though more shallow than deep.

10.1.2. Journey of interfaith

Having taken off from NA, first and foremost, the mission of interfaith engaged itself with dialogue of theologies or philosophies of religions. It took the form of comparative religion in academic institutions and of discussions on theological themes on multi-faith platforms.

The complexity and futility of the theological endeavour gave way to interfaith prayer sessions. Since much of it ended up in mere rituals, the mission further proceeded to presenting diverse religious perspectives. All the same, most of it was only monologues.

Leaving the classical theories of religions aside, more realistic activists opted for addressing social problems from diverse angles. Today, those who wish to genuinely engage with people of all faiths prefer an applied approach to interfaith, which is more practical and fruitful.

Of late, interfaith mission shows signs of an integrated approach, which involves persons of all sectors, like government/administration, political parties, all religions, senior-junior, men-women, religious-non-religious, and the like.

The applied and integrated approaches to interfaith are more realistic. Besides, the above journey is not always linear. It only presents the leading tendency. However, the journey proves that the mission of interfaith is in the process of maturing, with its aspiration to engage with larger horizons. Nevertheless, Indian society has a very long way to go before it reaches anywhere near the goal.

10.1.3. Prospects of an interactive faith

Faith in its real sense is a phenomenon of growth in life. This growth has both individual and social aspects. Growing up would mean touching the broader horizons of life. In other words, faith assists one to grow towards other traditions and reach out to other communities. A grown up faith is an obligation to live the larger proportions of life. Larger proportions, in its turn, would mean living life in full measures, by attaining higher altitudes as well as wider magnitudes.

Faith empowers one to liberate oneself from the clutches of the past and to live in the present, with the face oriented to the future. This requires not only information of all religions and cultures but also a deeper grasp of their esteemed values. Understanding each other will facilitate bridging the gap between similarities and dissimilarities in ideologies and traditions. Learning to live together is the sign of an interactive faith.

Faith has to be driven by a process of enlightenment. A rational approach and a scientific temper only can help this process. Faith in God, in humanity and in oneself has to be translated into individual, family, community, national and universal values of ethics. 'Becoming a good human being' is the real test of having a faith that is worth the while.

10.2. NOT YET

10.2.1. Language

10.2.1. Even after fifty years of the Second Vatican Council and *Nostra Aetate*, there are lots of people in the Catholic and the Christian community, who speak about people of other religious affiliations as 'pagans, gentiles, non-Christians', and the like. Such exclusive language not only is offensive to others but also renders Christians unworthy of being Christians.

10.2.2. The Church entertains even now several theological formulations that are primitive and outdated. They smack of being self-centred and self-possessed and are misleading for others. They betray the adult insights invented by NA and Vatican II.

10.2.3. The Church is habituated and even obsessed with several theological terms, like 'only saviour, evangelization, conversion, proclamation and planting the Church'. While those jargons are heavy weights for most Christians, on the one hand, they confuse people of other communities, on the other. Of late, in India, often they bring unwanted and bitter shocks to the missionaries in the field, as well.

10.2.4. The charismatic movement in India today has mostly become a very thriving business, in spite of the fact that it benefits a lot of people. Their passionate and unenlightened speaking as well as the literal

interpretation of the Bible is mostly not in tune with the spirit of Jesus and his values. Their misplaced fervor and distasteful presentations very much violate the spirit of *Nostra Aetate*, as well.

10.2.5. Several words from ancient languages, like 'alleluiah' and 'karozuza', are in use in the Christian circles of prayer and conversation. Since Christianity does not believe in any language as 'God's Language', the archaic words and concepts are to be regionalized. This spirit of the Second Vatican Council and *Nostra Aetate* are yet to be fully acted upon.

10.2.6. The International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM) 2008 made a clarion call to the Christian world, especially in Asia, to revise the missiological language and make it non-threatening to people of other faiths. Much needs to be done to make such a people-friendly language a reality, especially in India.

10.2.7. Reference to people other than Christians could be better made as 'people of other religions or faiths'. Still better is to use their proper names, such as 'Buddhists, Jains, Muslims', etc. Using 'our Hindu/Muslim sisters and brothers' is still more a polite, friendly and respectful way.

10.2.2. Myths in the perceptions of faith

Some myths block the interfaith world. Some are inclined to believe that 'my faith is for me and your faith is for you'⁴⁵. Another set of people think that 'all religions are the same, all faiths are the same'. Yet a third category of people tend to assert 'let us look for only commonalities', and unfortunately they neglect differences, which are equally valid, too.

A fourth group of people 'consider faith as a religious property'. No wonder, faith gets stereotyped and suffocated. Still another group 'argues for faith as a theological property'. Consequently, it becomes complicated, abstract and insipid. All these positions smack of sheer exaggeration and as a result these extreme views violate the real spirit of interfaith.

10.2.3. Problems

Some of the problems that are still prevailing in the interfaith world are the following. Exclusivist believers exclude others and appropriate an attitude of 'I am ok, others are not ok'. They remain secluded, as if living in an island. 'Only' is their catch phrase.

Absolutist believers enlarge and laminate their faith to a hundred percent and zero other believers down. They survive in an insulated world of superiority and declare 'I am ok, you are not ok'. 'Fully' is their watchword.

Inclusive-minded believers are open to include others. But, they are at the centre, truly right, and agree that there is something right with others, too. 'I am ok, you are also ok, to some extent' is their approach. 'Also' is their slogan.

Relativist believers satisfy themselves with an attitude of 'I follow my path, you follow your path'. Their happy-go-lucky philosophy is 'I am ok, you are ok'. This is a self-centred and unconnected approach to life. This is like travelling along parallel lines.

Pluralists believe that 'there are many paths and all are right'. 'All are ok' is their attitude. Though there is something right about this position, but it is not enough.

'Mutually inclusive pluralism'⁴⁶ or 'harmonious pluralism' or 'interactive pluralism' is the best position that justifies a dynamic and dialogical faith. But, this is an ideal and is rarely found. It calls for a truly grown up and interactive faith.

Moreover, there is a lot of confusion among people regarding one's identity. The mistaken notion of identity makes people consider religious identity as the most basic identity and that threatens the human identity and dignity. As a matter of fact, 'human identity' is the real identity of human beings. But, people with vested interests hijack and exploit the confused state of the people and use it as a strategy for foul purposes.

Further, religious heads mostly are threatened by interfaith perspectives and are not very committed to it. They feel either insecure and cling to their chair or keep themselves on the shore as they are not equipped to engage in it. Corrupt ways in the religious sector also is another factor why religious heads do not want to get exposed to others.

In addition, interfaith, for the most part, does not interest political heads, media and most of the followers of religions, because this area is not sensational and hardly benefit them. No wonder, the mission of dialogue is still in the periphery and has not taken the centre stage. Interactive faith, as visualized by Nostra Aetate is still an ideal. The goal is far ahead.

10.2.4. Cosmetic engagement in interfaith by the Church in India

Diversity of traditions is the hallmark of Indian culture. The Constitution of India upholds it by its characteristic ethos of secularism. The interfaith concept that evolved in the Catholic Church has motivated various individuals and institutions of other religions to engage in interfaith activities.

But, the engagement of the Church in interfaith is very much cosmetic. It is limited to a few individuals and institutions, by way of academic research and field involvement. Much remains yet to be explored and achieved. The Church in India has to travel a long way still.

CONCLUSION

'Walking the talk'⁴⁷, in line with the spirit of Nostra Aetate, is still very much a challenge before Christianity in India. The Christian community in India has a long way to go yet, before it really becomes the salt and light in living and sharing the sublime values of Jesus Christ. I believe, hope remains alive, that the ball of interactive faith Nostra Aetate set in motion will be played towards a decisive win by those who emerge in life with a vision and mission, empowered by the values of Jesus Christ that are larger than the world itself.

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