

Rev. Jerome D'Souza (Madras:General): Mr. President, I wish to pay a warm and sincere tribute to the spirit which has animated this momentous Resolution of the Hon'ble Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Sir, it is the custom among all sections of our people to accept in an unquestioned manner the democratic creed as universally applicable to us. But I do not know, Sir, if people who make this verbal profession realise all the implications of it and are prepared to carry it out in every way in practical life to the extent to which such profession really does imply.

Sir, whatever may be the objections that may have been raised against this or that part of the Resolution, I take it as an adequate, as a careful, and as an entirely acceptable profession of the democratic creed, of the Government of the people, for the people, and by the people. I think, Sir, that if the spirit that animates it, continues to be applied to the details of the Constitution that this great Assembly will draw up, if it is applied in the daily administration of the Provinces and of the Centre, there will be no section of our people that will have reason to complain, and contentment is bound to follow.

Dr. Ambedkar remarked in the course of his speech, that the ideological or the theoretical part of it contained an expression of opinion which is accepted by all, almost implying that it was something of a common-place in political and journalistic thought. I am not sure, Sir, if that is quite true for any part of the world, and even if it were broadly true, there are occasions when these ordinarily accepted things need to be repeated and asserted solemnly and forcefully. It is said of a great European statesman, Talleyrand, that, when a certain sentiment was declared to be unnecessarily repeated, that "it went without saying," he remarked that "it would go all the better for being repeated, once again". I take it, Sir, that on this solemn, occasion, this profession of our democratic belief is made in a solemn, public, and irrevocable manner. In this sense I believe that every section of our people will welcome the very carefully-weighed and poised manner in which these convictions have been expressed. No doubt, Sir, all this will require amplification, elucidation. Permit me, Sir, to draw the attention of this House to a double danger which, I think, it is necessary to be prepared against. On the one hand, in applying those principles of individual liberty, for which ample provision has been made in this preambulatory declaration, it will be difficult to resist, I say it will be difficult to resist from the very motive of love of country and the desire for rapid improvement and progress in our land, the desire to do things more by force and regimentation, more by the authority and power of the Central State, than by agreement, than by persuasion. It is a temptation to which many great men and lovers of their country have succumbed. But in the manner in which provision will be made to prevent such suppression of individual liberties, I hope and trust, that our great country may give an example of a consistent adherence to those principles of agreement and consensus of opinion, and not overweight the power of the State in a manner, as one of the previous speakers said, that will reduce the individual to a mere robot. That is one danger, Sir.

The other danger, undoubtedly present, is one which affects us as members of a minority community. The danger would be not that the minorities would have any of their special rights or necessary safeguards overridden by any mistaken some of jealousy or opposition or lack of fairness;--I do not think that the great majority communities of India or any of their most honoured representatives would be guilty of all that unfair overriding of privileges and safeguards; but by a genuine, though mistaken love of country and desire for unanimity and homogeneity, which it is not possible to have and which perhaps is not even necessary, they may try to pass measures which will seriously wound and grieve the minorities or special groups. In the last session of this Assembly one speaker said, among things -which were acceptable to every part of the House,--used an expression in regard to minorities which I respectfully submit we could not possibly accept. It was said that no nation, no great people could prosper and survive with permanent minorities within, that, somehow or other, they have got to be "absorbed", and he quoted the example of the United States as a country in which this process of absorption is taking place. I do understand, Sir, the sense in which this was said, viz., that there should be a certain degree of homogeneity and that there should be a common recognition of common interests and rights and that the State and the nation should be organised on the recognition of these common Tights and interests. This is essential. But, Sir, "absorption" in the sense of cultural or religious or any other absorption is something against which it is necessary for us to guard, and it is, I am sure, not the wish of the majority communities nor the sober reflecting opinion of this great House, that they should impose any thing on any minority, which would lead to such absorption. Sir, I wish the example of a country like Switzerland is borne in Mind. Even in the United States, in spite of their common language and a universally accepted Constitution, linguistic minorities are permitted to develop the culture of their motherland, whether it be Germany or Italy or France. There remain still, in the great Commonwealth of Canada, two sections of people, Scottish and English on the one hand, and the ancient French community on the other, living in complete amity following the customs and the spirit of their own motherlands and developing their own literature. One section of the Commonwealth of Canada finds it easy to cooperate and collaborate with the other sections and world for the glory and success of a country which is recognised to be a single nation. In Switzerland, three groups with three languages and with a difference of religion, sometimes sharply pronounced, are maintained in a confederation which has known how to defend itself against the onslaught of envious people and has defended itself in no uncertain manner through centuries. I am sure, Sir, that the strength of this land will be based upon the strength of individual members of the different communities. And they will not achieve their full strength unless they base themselves upon convictions and ideals which are their very own. Cultural autonomy for which I am pleading and which has been promised as far as it is not inconsistent with national strength, even though it may an appear in some sense as opposed to national unity, is still consistent with if undoubtedly there is a way of exaggerating these cultural peculiarities.

I am sure that quite apart from subscribing to different beliefs, it is possible for members of all communities, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi, to accept the common heritage of this great land and secure that degree of uniformity, that degree of common agreement, on the basis of which national unity can be built up. I know, Sir, speaking for my own community, the Christian community, that there have been times when our countrymen looked upon this community and religion as being unduly associated with a culture that was not Indian, unduly identified with what has been called Europeanising ways, but I should like to assure great Assembly that it is not necessary, that it has not always been the case, that again and again people of my persuasion, whether they came from another land or whether they were from this land, have acted in complete conformity with the finest traditions of this country. On the opening day, Sir, the esteemed Vice-Chancellor of the Benares University, Dr. Sir S. Radhakrishnan, referred to the first Englishman who had come to this land, the Jesuit Thomas Stevens, and said that after him there came merchants and conquerors and that now we see that end of that "invasion" I should like to assure this House, Sir,-- what I am sure, Sir S. Radhakrishnan knows--that the merchants, the traders and the conquerors had nothing to do with the Jesuit who preceded them. On the contrary, Sir, he came to India at a moment when there was no hospitality for him in his own land, from where he was banished under the threat of persecution. This great country offered him hospitality and he made this land his own, learnt its language and has written a book which Marathi scholars tell me is a classic, the "Purana" of Thomas Stevens. It is in that spirit, Sir, that the adherents of that faith wish to come here and it is in that spirit that we wish to collaborate in the task of national reconstruction for the Prosperity and the greatness of this land. I should not like to take the time of the House much longer but, I cannot avoid saying something upon another point about which much, has been said, but I hope to be able to say something about it, which may perhaps be a new point of view. Much has been said about the sovereignty of the people, about the possibility of that principle being inconsistent with the principle of monarchy, and about the dangers and difficulties which might arise therefrom. Sir, this doctrine of the sovereignty of the people is not a new doctrine. It is not a 19th century doctrine. The history of political thought in Europe shows that there was a struggle round about that doctrine in the 16th century when certain kings claimed the Divine Right of Government; and against them, it may interest this House to know, even conservative thinkers, thinkers who were monarchists, asserted the sovereignty of the people. St. Robert Billarmine and Suarez asserted this against James I of England, though they interpreted it in a different way from Rousseau, who in later times conceived that the power of the State came from the people by the pooling and the coalescing of all the rights of the people which they are imagined to surrender. But the State, Sir, is not a sort of undesirable excrescence resulting from the surrender of individual liberty. The State is a natural outcome of the nature of man who has to perfect himself in social and community life, with a necessary central authority. That authority comes as Sir S. Radhakrishnan stated, from the moral law and that is the basis upon which the rights of individuals and of the State have to be maintained. That ultimate authority, Sir, some would prefer to express it as coming from Almighty God as the author of nature and of all moral law. I cannot help expressing a regret, Sir, that the name of Almighty God finds no place in this momentous declaration. I understand, Sir, the reasons which moved the hon'ble framer and mover of this Resolution in not bringing in anything which may look like a religious profession, but you will permit me, Sir, to say before concluding my remarks, that if by some way in this momentous preambulatory declaration the name of Almighty God had been brought in, it would have been in conformity with the persuasion, with the convictions, with the spirit of this vast land of ours and its ancient civilisation.

Sir, although it has not been brought up here, I do believe that the State ultimately receives from Him that sanction and approbation which gives it a certain sacredness. I am not pleading here for a doctrine by which the State is made divine. But I do mean that the subjects of the State, when they accept that State and are citizens of it, must obey it conscientiously, must feel that it is their duty to accept the authority of the Government of their land. Sir, we believe in Providence; we believe that the unfolding of History with all its vicissitudes still reveals a Providential design. Even though His sacred name is not here, I sincerely believe that we have met here under the covert of His protection and His Grace which alone moves the hearts of men. We hope and pray that the deliberations that we have begun this solemn and preambulatory declaration will be taken to their legitimate conclusion by the same grace and that the land for which we are labouring will rise Again with new strength, with new prosperity, with new happiness.