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Decolonization of Formation

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Abstract: An essay on decolonization has to be written in the very language of the colonizers! It is realistic to think of decolonization of formation only when Christianity becomes once again a religion and less of an organization, the Church in India becomes an Indian Church, ridding itself of the Western mould by drawing abundantly from the rich and ancient Indian cultures, with its legitimate autonomy as a truly local Church, with financial and other forms of autonomy proper to a local Church, and above all, the Spirit of God is recognized as the animating power and guide. Such a Church can facilitate decolonization of formation, and those thus formed will persevere and serve as ministers renewed Indian Church. The first question on 'decolonization' springs from a kind of scepticism: is it possible? Detoxification in the therapeutic field is reportedly mostly successful but decolonization, a process similar to detoxification, is less so. History provides many instances of abortive and unsuccessful efforts. Experiments like the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Turkish experiment under Kamal Pasha, the *Swadeshi* movement in India are often cited as examples. At home we have our own stories to tell to each other!

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An essay on *decolonization* has to be written in the very *language of the colonizers!*

It is realistic to think of de-colonization of formation only when Christianity becomes once again a religion and less of an organization, the Church in India becomes an Indian Church, ridding itself of the Western mould by drawing abundantly from the rich and ancient Indian cultures, with its legitimate autonomy as a truly local Church, with financial and other forms of autonomy proper to a local Church, and above all, the Spirit of God is recognized as the animating power and guide. Such a Church can facilitate decolonization of formation, and those thus formed will persevere and serve as ministers renewed Indian Church.

The first question on 'decolonization' springs from a kind of scepticism: is it possible? Detoxification in the therapeutic field is reportedly mostly successful but decolonization, a process similar to detoxification, is less so. History provides many instances of abortive and unsuccessful efforts. Experiments like the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Turkish experiment under Kamal Pasha, the *Swadeshi* movement in India are often cited as examples. At home we have our own stories to tell: of

inculturation and 'option for the poor'; much talked about but with little accomplishment. Internalised values and habits that are of advantage for the self are not easily detected, isolated or surrendered.

What is precisely intended by the project 'decolonization'? Is it possible as a cultural phenomenon? Clarity and precision as to what needs to be achieved, what has to be jettisoned, and what new steps have to be initiated, is required for the project to succeed.

Sociologists and anthropologists are of the opinion that there is no pure culture, pure race, pure language, still less pure religion. Each of these items is virtually a composite product achieved by mutual influence and interaction, and has contributed to the emergence of a race, a language, a religion and a culture. Thus Judaism had been deeply influenced by the neighbouring religions and cultures. As high tide and low tide invade and recede, depositing something and taking away something from the sea and sea-linked backwaters, so are cultures and civilisations: interacting among themselves and mutually enriching each other. One cannot erect imaginary walls between cultures to preserve what each culture has achieved from being contaminated by other forces. A

breakthrough achievement by one individual of a race or culture becomes a heritage common to all humanity, irrespective of distant or neighbouring races or cultures. What is of permanent, universal value crosses borders and travels far and wide. Thus Siddharth in India, Aristotle in Greece, Einstein in Germany (later America) did 'travel' beyond their geographic-cultural space. Mohammed and Jesus Christ have no border-restrictions. Literary authors are immortalized across cultures. Similarly in the field of medicine, science and technology, one invention benefits all humanity. Modern 'Patentism', the ill-begotten progeny of capitalism that wants to restrict such a heritage, for one's own pecuniary enhancement, goes counter to this perception.

But then this mutual acceptance and creative interaction among diverse cultures seem to be governed by certain criteria: the freedom and autonomy of the recipient cultures, and the compelling values of the incoming. Although historians are wont to hold that the military conquest of Athens by Rome was repulsed or repudiated by the Greek cultural conquest of Rome, it is equally true that Rome had its own identity and culture, and therefore the interaction was rather one of adult-to-adult relationship and not necessarily weaker-stronger, conquer-vanquished. Only those with internal strength and rootedness can be open to other cultures and values, without being stormed away by the strength of the incoming. Greek culture has had its homes in many other cultures and retains them even today. Indian culture did spread through neighbouring countries East of India.

These were not colonial conquests but could be termed values penetration.

Some Indian poets, novelists, short-story writers, literary critics, were largely influenced by French or German writers early in the century. But of late criticism has been levelled in some quarters against imitation, considering that such wholesale modelling can be a form of submission to subtle colonization and prevent authentic native developments. What, then, can we say about the influence of new theologies born abroad and taken in? What about wholesale borrowing from abroad and marketing at home of disciplines like psychology, scripture, theology, and spirituality; the areas are too vast to enter and point out.

Oliver Cromwell and the so-called 'Plantation of Ulster' still remains a living volcano. European conquest of the Americas: more light is being shed on the dark and untold side of the sordid history. The tale of the destruction of the Alexandrian library, Portuguese destruction of ritual literature after the Synod of Diampher, Napoleon's effort at hoisting and enforcing his lineage on the thrones of conquered European monarchies – these belong to another category. India's experience of the uninvited entry into the Indian soil of armed merchants who later became the rulers of the country can be listed in the latter category.

What is the Demand, and Why?

T.B. Macaulay is too entrenched to be sent back! Suppressors of the Chinese Rite and the Malabar Rite still reign supreme! But, Galileo was absolved – after centuries. Matteo Ricci

will be declared right – one day. History tells us to live with hope!

The Mexican wasp invades the small cave of the tiny fly, seizes the fly, inserts its sharp nasal projectile deep into its neck, injects its semi-poisonous liquid, and waits. When the fly is semi-active, the wasp carries it home and is kept it 'alive' as feed for the young ones in the coming winter. Neither alive nor dead, the fly is fully in a state of control.

This may be a graphic way of describing the phenomenon of colonization but it is what a colonizer does to the colonized; enters forcefully or deceitfully into an alien land and culture, seizes first the military then the political-economic power, next injects the semi-poisonous cultural anaesthesia and keeps the colonized peoples and cultures semi-assertive, mesmerized for its own good. It is reported that the Chinese Emperor was dazed by the magic of Western artifacts presented by Matteo Ricci. Under the impact of the semi-poisonous liquid, namely, the new culture of the colonizer, the minds of the colonized people is taken control of, then the freedoms and finally the creative powers and sources. The rights of the colonized are partially benumbed so that they are neither destroyed nor fully active or autonomous, but kept in 'suspended animation', incapable of asserting and affirming themselves.

Then begins the next process. The colonized begin to look up to the new masters, and set themselves the task of refashioning themselves 'unto the image and likeness of the colonizer'. To be like the colonizer is the be-all and

the end-all of all aspirations, relationships and strategies. The most potent instrument for this melt-mould process was soon introduced: education. The misguided 'mission' schools, perched on cool heights, took the contract for the task. English, French and Portuguese in the captured Indian territories replaced the language through which the mother normally shaped the soul and behaviour of the child, the future Indian citizen.

In dress, in food habits, in life-style, in social relationship the new 'slave' and servant begins to become like the new master. Then begins the deeper phase of self-deformation: the values, the beliefs, the thinking patterns, even the world-view of the arrogant conqueror is slowly yet steadily absorbed, internalized. The literature, art and architecture, music and sports, nay even the deepest in the conqueror is gradually absorbed. The colonized takes pride in being the copy of the colonizer. Scrutinise the westernized of India, and the educated leaders of Africa. The American Dollar and Western dress have been almost universalized!

The story was not dissimilar in matters religious. To be a Christian was in all respects similar to the process above. There were the additional factors too: the content of the Faith. Belief in Jesus Christ, born in Asia, but wrapped up in clothes woven fresh by the Greeks, and then by the imperial Romans, reached the shores of the Indian ocean. Since the arrival of Christianity greatly coincided with the coming of the colonizers, the treasure was identified with the bringers. For want

of good knowledge of quite a number of vital concerns – like the cultures of India, the scriptures and the religions of India, the histories of the kingdoms of India – the missionaries fell easy victims to the prevailing dangerous assumption: that the European culture was superior to any other. The result was that until recently, in dress, in life-style, language and areas of life, in theology and spirituality, in worship and celebrations, practically) in all matters, elements alien shaped the Indian Christian.

There are other areas of interest and amusement. Gulliver the mighty found himself tied to the ground on all sides by threads that ran all over the body. One often wonders: Is not the Indian Christian fastened by a thousand laws, visible and subtle, by powers outside India? Reports and requests for permissions flow westward, and permissions and indults stagger from the West.

The awakened Indian Christian in dismay asks oneself: how much of theme is essential for one to be a disciple of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-Asian. Is it not time to distil the components of an Indian Christian identity and separate the essentials from the non-essentials, and the Indian from the non-Indian, as the basis of further planning for the dawn of the third Millennium.'

Formation houses were, evidently, replicas of the same in Europe. To enter a seminary or formation house was a virtual transplantation experience, in early times. You are transported into England or France or Portugal or Italy.

The holy pictures of Mary were Italian maidens. The piano and the hymnals, the missal and the vestments, the chalice and the candlesticks – the West was duly present in all details in the East. The worship in language and rituals sounded equally alien. Even today, in spite of the marathon struggle for ritual rights, the right of India to have a mode of worship congenial to the Indian ethos remains ignored. The soul of India cannot pour out its inner sentiments in and through worship forms shaped by the ethos of this ancient land. To enter the psychic chambers of the products of training of these western enclaves in the east, theological centres or seminaries was to confront the core of the puzzle. The imageries, the figures of speech, the laws and customs, the syllogisms and mode of argumentation, the categories of interpreting the core of Christian experience – were traceable to their western sources of origin. Charism and their interpretations, the myriads of religious rules and regulations too. Much water has gone down the Ganges ever since, but still there are religious in India whose local assemblies decide for the mode of dress that befits the weather and the culture and convenience but the clearance to wear them, has to come from centres and councils located across ocean!

Again, for the sake of truthfulness, the question can be legitimately asked: is not 'formation' too a kind of subtle colonization? Imagine young men of the same class and with shared sentiments and perception joining one in the army, one in the police, another in the seminary, and a last one in the religious life. Because of the focused drilling of val-

ues and life-styles we notice that each of these four young men has become truly different from each other. This reveals the power of 'indoctrination', or to use a milder terminology, the role and use of training, of moulding and controlling the mind. The products are truly diverse in this case.

Is not, then, formation a kind of colonization?

India was denied the privilege of receiving the God experience in Jesus Christ in its true form and beauty. Since it came in much-resented alien form response was varied. India's response ranged from acceptance, indifference, ignoring, suspicion, antagonism to hostility – the spectrum of response varied. Accusations of alien origin and extra-territorial loyalty and inspiration began to be levelled against the new arrival. Elements of dissimilarity with the native religions, social and cultural elements that further highlighted the differences, and worsened the negative perception, have been pointed out in defence of their antagonism and suspicion and even rejection. It reached even some state legislatures some of which succumbed to the pressure groups, that demanded banning of change of religion.

These are issues that call for serious consideration at various levels. The most serious charge is that the persistence of alienation may take the form of further vivisection of the country!

On occasions like the Millennial Jubilee a bold and fearless search into these allegations, and the possible reasons for them, augurs well.

When consciousness returned to the natives, the colonizers were driven

out. Then began a process of re-discovery of the lost or suppressed native heritages. The third phase is on now: search for the damages done to the psyche of the colonized. De-colonisation of formation, just like in other areas of the life of the Christian communities the world over, is part of that effort. When Gandhi introduced the novel 'boycott of foreign clothes', some mischievous questions were raised: why not return the goods to those brought them to this land rather than burn them?

In the following pages the difficult task of de-colonization of formation, both with regard to content and method, is taken up for consideration. The reflections end with some concrete suggestions with regard to formation.

The Problem of Procedure

Very important and even non-negotiable issues are at stake. Human, religious, national, and cultural consciousness has been growing steadily over the years. First of all a re-discovery of what is proper to being a human in a particular place or time. The many rights and duties, obligations and privileges of being a human, form the foundation of all other considerations.

Secondly, to be human is to be related to others in a particular time and place. This has also to do with the problem of living and therefore the life-struggle of the people of the place. This life-struggle is largely influenced by a large number of factors, chief among them being the particular climate and weather that determines the life-struggle in many ways. It is in and through this life-struggle that the cul-

ture of the place or of a society is born and disseminated. Culture also influences, inversely, the becoming of individuals that are born and bred in the place. Thirdly, there is the issue of the nation. Culture, economic well-being, etc. determine the identity of the nation. Sovereignty is part and parcel of the culture and of the nation. These are interrelated. Finally, religion constitutes an essential aspect of the human the cultural and the national identity of the individual.

All these sectors of the individual and of the culture are affected by colonization. Consequently decolonization also will invite our attention to these areas.

How to Re-shape Our Authentic Indian Christian Identity

1. Decolonization of formation comes after decolonization of our Church. The first essential requirement for the Church is *to be* the local Church and exercise the rights and responsibilities proper to a local Church in communion with the universal Church. The tender legs, the bones, the muscles, and the young mind of the child becomes stronger, and begins to grow to adulthood only *by exercising them*. Otherwise there is the danger of malformation and even infantile adulthood. The Church in India should assume responsibility for its own adulthood. As far as formation is concerned, the Church in India has to make efforts to evolve a de-colonized formation programme dictated by the *apostolic needs* of the local Church, assisted, of course, by tradition and history.

2. For such a task do we have the required *autonomy culture*? Our culture is to a large extent handicapped because of the *dependence ethos* we have inherited. As a consequence of the millennia-old caste-culture, there is a very high degree of dependence and subordination culture almost ingrained in the psychic behaviour. Submit to those above and yet treat with contempt those below – is central to caste culture. Such a culture blocks the growth of healthy autonomy, a fundamental property of the human person.

This dependence ethos was further compounded by the colonial culture. A nation lay under the feet of the conqueror! And, the religions of the country, native or fresh also submitted! For more than two hundred years the Indian collective psyche, with awe and fear, looked up at the British Crown thousands of miles away!! A similar ethos prevails in the Christian community too. A 'young Church' or 'mission land' is often treated with a lot of attention and care. This should aim at eventual adulthood of the 'young' church. But if that is not fostered, the collective mind of the young Church can be captured by the interests, favours, protectiveness, the well-intentioned vigilance, and other similar traits of the controlling mechanisms.

The horrendous phenomenon of bonded labour, the practice of employing 'servants' and '*ayats*' in homes, palanquin bearers and their kin in other professions, the night-soil culture – are on one end of the spectrum of a subordination and dependent culture. And on the other we had Nawabs and royalties,

and maharajas who opted to live in splendour by surrendering to the conquerors and even receiving their benefits of booties granted by the colonial conquerors. The excessive veneration of holy places, holy books and holy traditions, as well as holy persons, also contribute to an uncritical submission of minds to the unholy 'holy', a disease of the mind rather than sound religiosity or awe before the Supreme. Obedience in India is often an admixture of many an intellectual surrender and laziness.

Psychic and cultural elements like these have largely contributed to a colonial culture in the subject nations.

Further questions are to be raised. Do we have our own way of thinking or are we dependent on Western tutors? What had been India's way of thinking, feeling, and deciding and organizing one's life? Digging one's own well, cutting one's own paths, mapping one's own territory, singing one's own songs, telling one's own stories – had been a feature of Indian seekers and of those on quests.

But then after the Indian 'Renaissance' this trend suffered. Western philosophical edifices had dazzled many of the colonized minds in India – intellectual, political, sociological, anthropological, and even religious. Some eminent among them had to don the missionary mantle to be upstage among Indians and Europeans! The deeply hidden 'apologetic' tone of such thinkers and writers was manifest in some of the first and second-generation Indian religious and philosophical leaders.

The colonial virus invaded also the Christian leadership, ecclesiastical and lay. Superseding the local by the regional, of the regional and the national by the one central power grew out of this unchecked psychic and cultural behaviour pattern. Over-centralisation was the tragic result of such a culture in religion. Is sound Catholic faith in India mature enough to handle affairs of common good on its own? The habit of frequent appeals to central powers with issues that could very well be attended to by a mature and responsible local collective or community did contribute to the continuity of the culture under consideration. Without looking into such deeper areas of our identity, the attempt at the decolonization of formation can prove fruitless.

3. Decolonization of formation demands that the trainers as well as those in training get immersed in the various dimensions of *Indian cultures*. Asian cultures are very rich and ancient. One has to be possessed by the urgency of the problems from the apostolic point of view. Indian life and literature, Indian folklore as well as philosophies, Indian religious as well as secular 'pilgrimages' have to be experienced to know India.

Formators who never had such an experience while in formation, and who continue to receive further studies in centres outside India, will not be competent to undertake such a task. How can colonized minds decolonize formation in an ex-colonial culture that is almost being swallowed by neo-colonial invasion via economics and the media?

4. The *Indian people* can help us to de-colonize formation *if we are not* capable of doing this on their own. An example is introduced to initiate consideration of this significant issue. In the course of an exciting dialogue session at Snehasadan, Pune, a decade ago, with a dozen distinguished scholars from Pune, attention of the group was drawn to the lack of rootedness of Christianity in India. The following was the remedy proposed by a participant: you who are given to taking orders from outside India on all matters religious, even the most personal and concerned even with the conscience, if you are desirous of being authentically Indian, give up your present formation plans and fortresses, and come and live with us. The message is ruthlessly communicated!

The implication is this: *experience of the Indian people* will be a most potent means of decolonization of formation. Fill your lungs with fresh air, and the foreign elements in the blood stream can be gradually replaced. The more you enter into the complex lives and life-problems of the people of India, the more you are assimilating and being assimilated into the Indian cultural ethos. You begin to discover the degree of alienation in contrast. Many formation centres, especially of the early phase, are run by trainers obsessed with the idea that only in isolation from engagement with the 'world outside' will one grow deep in one's vocation. Laws and traditions are cited to support this questionable practice. The main lesson that the history of the

Church teaches us today is that the decline of Christianity began when the Church began to withdraw from secular realities, and moved away from real problems of 'the world'. A concern behind such sheltered nourishment is the fear of being contaminated by the 'unhealthy' atmosphere outside the training centres. Theologies and spiritualities, developed in isolation, were of little help for the Church in times of major challenges. It is these theologies and spiritualities, and other aspects, especially the theological methods, that reached India. We need a thorough reconsideration of many of the assumptions behind them, from the Indian religio-cultural ethos angle.

By experience is meant: participating in some ways in the hard struggles of the great majority of the people, in the poverty and the humiliation that a great majority of the people of the country are daily subject to, the kind of inequality that exists in the community, the nature and degree of violence of all kinds that threaten so many of our people, the role of power (economic-political-social-religious) that oppresses and dehumanizes the people, the values that are operative in society, the many oppressive and dehumanizing customs and traditions operative in society, the many structures, systems and institutions that sustain society, the many religions and the role played by them either to oppress or to liberate them. If those in formation get affected by the humiliating reality of those who have no house but live in huts, have no food worth the name but only '*roti*' and salt or *chili*, have no decent clothes to wear especially in winter, and have to struggle all their life against disease and death, against evic-

tion and migration, against the police and their collaborators, live with rejection and diminution of worth all their life, they and those helping in their formation, will eventually get plunged in and rooted in the land and its complex problems.

An often raised question is: is working with the poor the only source of knowing the people of India? Why not the early experience of the candidates themselves? Why not knowledge derived from well-documented books and articles about India and the struggle of the people. Such questions reveal deep-seated ignorance of the entire problem, and the only pedagogical answer will be a counter question: is not one deep breathing-in in the morning sufficient for the day, instead of repeated and sustained breathing? These are needed, yes. But only *after* the experience of the hard life of the Indian people.

5. The inner logic and dynamics of such an *insertion* into India will necessitate the next step: languages of India to replace the language of Clive and Macaulay. As red and white corpuscles flood the plasma, the cultural elements of the people flood the bloodstream that is the language. To know well a language is to enter deep into the people. In and through it we have access to the culture of the people.

In spite of the mild transition from Latin or Syriac to English in the formation houses, the reluctance and facile reasons advanced for justifying the current obstinate adherence to the language of the British Isles, is an index of the feeble goodwill and commitment of those in formation houses.

To persist in the use of a foreign language is to permit oneself to be influenced, controlled by the culture of which that language is only one aspect. It is such subtle control that perpetuate the colonization of the mind.

Appeal is often made to the all-India dimension of the Church or of the religious congregations with inter-state apostolic commitments calling for transfers across linguistic borders etc. Supporters of such arguments could very well visit other parts of the world and learn how the problem is solved elsewhere. Each state in Europe uses its own language. There is no common language across Europe in which formation is imparted. It is granted that India's case is unique. But that does not justify the blocking of legitimate needs of the local church of which language is an essential aspect. The pointed question is: Can there be any maintainable justification for keeping English as the medium of instruction in seminaries?

6. Announcing the Kingdom of God and collaborating with God and His people of the land for its emergence is our concern here. To work for transformation of the distorted human situation in collaboration with people of other faiths and ideologies a very important and necessary requirement is the development of *analytical skills* to have a deeper knowledge of the forces and structures of Indian society. This will imply knowledge of the forces at work, the structure of the society, the role of the economic, the political, the cultural and religious factors in the formation and fossilization of the Indian social structures, institutions and values. Caste

system is a major Indian phenomenon, and no knowledge of Indian reality is possible without sufficient knowledge of the caste system.

They should also know the religions with their scriptures and their interpretations.

All these need to be understood, illumined, and interpreted in the light of the Gospel, guided by the Word. These should become increasingly part of the syllabus in formation houses.

7. Since there is a substantial link between liturgy, theology and the life of the Christian community, living as it does in the midst of the people of other faiths, a fourfold link has to be re-established and formation in India should have the freedom and the right to enter into it. The first is the life-struggle of the Christian community. Both theology and liturgy are related to this life-struggle: theology, as effort at interpreting the Word in dialogue with the life of the community, and liturgy, as the faith-community's actual surrender of life and worship, as well as celebrations. The Eucharist mediates these twofold functions. But then these are taking place in a milieu that is marked by diversities of faiths and human deprivations. Therefore, Christian life and liturgy should interact with these also.

To actualise this fourfold relationship in a dialectical manner we need to re-enter the field of Christian worship once again. In the field of Christian worship, India lost the race and Rome and the Middle East prevailed, unfor-

tunately. We should open our eyes to the facts of recent Indian history, and turn our ears to the lessons of the same history. Four hundred years of Hindu-Muslim interaction did have some interesting results: like the birth of the Urdu language, influence on certain areas of art, architecture and music, and some interaction with Sufism and *Bhakti* spirituality. Nothing beyond that.

Given the nature of the impact of colonization on Hindu-Christian relationship is it not time that, before tragedy strikes, one more serious re-consideration of the Christian existence and above all, *interaction* with other religions and cultures of the land, is attempted? For the past fifty years and more quite a bit of writing on inculturation, on dialogue and collaboration with the Indian religions, on a more authentic expression of Christian faith in and through the Indian cultural ethos, has been taking place. Some experimentations of a private nature also have been taking place in the area of liturgy. But at the official level, in worship, in language, in life-style, in taking the issues of the country seriously, it is worth considering what strides have been made. A liturgy that reflects life in India, is shaped by its culture, has social content and which breathes the native air, is an essential aspect of a decolonised formation.

8. Probably a most urgent task for the decolonization era of the Church in India, would be: to clarify a major ambiguity that still pertains to the real meaning of evangelization. Many in the country are disturbed by the phenomenon of any one changing over to an-

other religion. There are cultural, religious, social and economic reasons behind such apprehensions. There is a particular understanding today of culture and nationalism and its relationship with religion.

In the Christian tradition two major developments have taken place: theology of religions and inter-religious dialogue. There are people in other religious traditions who have serious doubts about the goal of these two developments. The suspicion is that dialogue and new-found acceptance of other religions by Christianity is only a device for securing more recruits to Christianity. There are also people in the Christian tradition who believe, or seem to do so, that dialogue and theology of religions are new strategies for old practices. In this situation when lack of clarity marks the relationship among religions in India, it is up to Christianity to state clearly and unambiguously what its stand is.

Such a clear stand would be constituted of the following elements: deep-commitment to the Judæo-Christian faith tradition (of which the core is Jesus of Nazareth), evangelisation as working for the promotion of the Kingdom would call for a new way of being humans where all are equal, all have their fundamental rights and freedoms and the all-round welfare of all the peoples is the objective of the Christian service, and people of all faiths and ideologies live and work together for such a society. Perhaps what we need for the Millennium will be a Comprehensive Creed for Asia, for India, which incorporates Christian rootedness in the country, and

yet being open to the wider values. The rootedness would highlight the new Christian understanding of religions other than Christian, and how dialogue is probably the best way of functioning in a multi-religious situation. Such a stand can assuage feelings of some and apprehensions of others. It is the stand of authentic Indian Christian belief and practice.

9. The question with which we should start our investigation and plan the steps towards de-colonization of formation is: formation for what? Our objective should be clear.

Conviction as well as consensus is growing in Asia, in India, that given the present situation of the human community, there is the great urgency to a better and different way of being human. A way of being human that is truly worthy of the human nature as designed by God. But today human living is quite a degraded one. The great blot on Asian humanity, namely, structural inequality, legitimised caste, is the worst form. Poverty, illiteracy, traditionalism and superstitions that are unbecoming of the human person, crime and violence, fraud in private and public life, violence on the weak, denigration of woman in society – all these are dreadful signs of a social situation that calls for serious action by the religions of India. It is up to Christianity in India to elicit the collaboration of other religions and ideologies, so that all work together for bringing about a different and better humanity. The proclamation of the Gospel has to address the tragedies of Asia.

This effort to bring about transformation in the degraded and deformed

human society, and help evolve a better way of being human, is the growing consciousness among all those who are affected by India, all those who are committed to the welfare of India.

A second major concern, known to many but not yet recognised and operationalised, is the already-late interaction with the religions of Asia. The gains made in inter-religious dialogue, theology of religions etc. are not yet internalised by the theology programme itself, and do not enter into other branches like missiology, liturgy, ministries. This is a most urgent ask for theology in India.

If formation elsewhere has distinct goals which are dictated by the specificity of the place and the times, formation in India has to be dictated by the specificity of the situation prevailing here. The Indian Church has to know fully and comprehensively the Indian situation, and gear formation to the goal perceived as specific to India. The Indian Church should preside over the formation of the personnel, although interaction with and listening to other cultures is desirable and enriching for the Indian experiment.

10. In most cases the decision normally made by young men and women to opt for religious or priestly life is motivated by certain vague quest. What is uppermost in their minds and hearts at that phase of the journey may not necessarily be 'service of the people'. Something attracts the young candidate: a way of life, certain ideals, or perhaps some models. It is something different from the many professions most of her/his companions opt for. Later on, in

course of time, it turns out to be a meaning and fulfilment and finally a desire for a deep relationship with God.

A large number of men and women who have shaped India's culture are the sages – be they in Hinduism or Buddhism or Jainism or Sikkism or Islam. Their chief contribution was in and through what we now call experience of the divine. Hermitages and caves, mountain resorts and places of withdrawal for penance and contemplation – have been their resorts. Their other competencies – have been their resorts. Their other competencies like knowledge or skill in various arts, came secondary. Primarily they were seekers of God, in search of God-realization.

It is in this background that we find a major lacuna in our formation. The candidate is presumed to be, eventually, for a journey with God, for God. The Indian religio-cultural ethos also is marked by this quest for God, experience of God. In contrast, the Indian formation houses, especially philosophy-theology centres, are largely degree-oriented, certificate-proffering centres. The disciplines are overly result-guided. The mind of the candidate is for years on end taken over by the demands of study, examinations, excelling others in marks, acquisition of skills for later ministries.

This degree or certificate oriented pursuit of vocation we have inherited from the West. A major factor for the decline and practical death of Christianity in Europe is to be found here. We forget the lessons from Church history that the Church's reforms and rejuvenation were often accomplished prima-

rily by individuals like Assisi, Benedict, Ignatius, Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross and others. There is no denying the role of outstanding theologians and philosophers. But their service if not related to the former kind of charism cannot accomplish what the saints did. Conversion of hearts, change of habits of individuals and groups, takes place not necessarily by the brilliance of ideas and argumentations, but by the moral and spiritual influence of men and women like those referred to above.

What sages did in India, was accomplished by saints in Europe.

But in course of time the academies prevailed over hermitages. Philosophical systems and schools of theologies grew but not necessarily transformative experiences of the kind the great reformers of the Church had. The quality of the life of individuals and groups are drawn to change of life more by the witnessing power than by weight of learning, although sound learning is required. The Word of God, received by the prophets in the Old Testament times, affected the prophets first and foremost, and through them, the society. The reform of the society take place primarily through mediacy of such powers and influences which we may call spiritual, capable of effecting change. On the other hand, the mere study of the same Word of God, undertaken by those in formation houses, is primarily a tussle of the mind, and not a relish of the heart or the flaming of the will. The hearts are not on fire, the will is not inflamed, in spite of the 'study' of the Word of God, in spite of the 'study' of the Resurrection experience. It is this system that we have inherited.

Hence, a major step towards decolonization of formation is to consider whether the original motivation for joining the religious or priestly life can be nourished and priority given by de-linking it from the degree-oriented study of the Word of God. India excelled in this a did the early phase of Christianity. In other words, re-introduce experience of God, search for God, and its nourishment, and subordinate the 'study' oriented formation programme, brought in by colonial Christianity, to the experience-based formation.

This presupposes that the Church in India should turn her attention to the country, its history and culture, the way God had been operative over centuries in this land, especially the role of spiritual experience and transformation.

Arhat is a term specific to Buddhism, but embodying much of the essential features of Asian religiosity. It implies that the liberated or self-realized person teaches or shares, of the divine as in Hinduism or of Truth as in Buddhism. An *arhat* has no juridical power. It has no institutional reliance. It has no financial power. Such 'powerlessness' is the source of its authority and moral-spiritual power.

In the Christian tradition, a religious leader (sister/brother/priest), is charged with authority of a different kind. Whether God-realized or not, the mode of exercising this function or power is quite different from the Asian/Indian standpoint. He/she is all-powerful in his/her domain, – institutional, financial, social – and dependence disposition is unwittingly generated in the

beneficiaries of her/his service. What are the sources of this authority? How much of it is acquired in the course of the journey of Christianity via Greece, Rome and Europe till it reached the shores of Asia? This, probably, belongs to the core areas of decolonization. Such a mode, irrespective of its historical or cultural source, does not fit the Indian religio-cultural landscape.

The ancient laudable tradition of one church coming to the help of another church in need, as expressions of genuine ecclesial charity, has over the years grown to gigantic proportions with consequent abuses. Today Church finance has weakened the ethical moral fibre and quality of the members using

them. Cases of embezzlement are reported. Finance being used as a source of control, has enfeebled the vigour of religion at the regional national and international level. Worse still, it does corrupt the users and recipients of money. A life-style unsupported by resources earned by personal labour, is adopted and thereby suffocation of the ethical moral, and especially the spiritual is the end result. Reliance is on money, organisation, power and influence. This probably is the worst effect of colonisation. Decolonisation will call for a serious examination of the entire system. Religion should be enabled to restore its original nature and purpose.