

"Sileman" in Beyrouth in 1947 and have been reprinted since then. The translation was made by a non-Christian Kurd and a French professor (Dominican father) and publishing was done by ABS and BFBS together. So there was a real Oikumene.

The Old Testament has never been translated into Kurdish and the plan of publishing a new Kurmanji-Kurdish version (in Latin characters) of the New Testament was recently dropped by the ABS. The ABS is "editorially responsible" since years for Kurdish Bible translations but after studying the said idea carefully I decided to wait as there is only extremely small demand for Kurdish Bibles.

This indicates much of the situation of Christianity in partitioned Kurdistan to-day. It may be added that Panislamism is against Kurdish patriots Arab chauvinism is so too. "Peaceful coexistence" of Kurds and Arabs in Iraq and Syria would certainly add to a new climate of tolerance in general, in which Christian activities too could flourish. Modern Kurdish leaders are in favour of linking up their cause with that of small national and religious groups in West-Asia (Armenians, Assyrians and others). It was Thuraya Bedir-Khan, who first organised the Kurdish national movement on modern political lines who came out in favour of cooperating with the Christian Armenians in the twenties. Assyrian-Kurdish relations are good also. In Turkey, where Islamism and anti-clericalism are competing (it is one of the big issues) the situation for Christianity seems to be nearly as disadvantageous as it is for Kurds. In Iran, things are somewhat different. Even to-day, there are still Kurds writing Christian poetry. As far as the writer can judge this movement, chances for Christianity in divided, oppressed and underdeveloped Kurdistan depend greatly on active international Christian solidarity with that unhappy nation as a whole. The Kurds have a fine "instinct" to feel who is their friend or foe and only people with non-egoistic purposes can approach them without "backthoughts" and win their hearts and minds.

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## THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND POSSIBILITIES OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN INDIA \*

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It is a fact of history that Christianity reached India during very early times, and that till the sixteenth century it continued to maintain itself as a branch of Eastern Christendom. However,

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the community which it perpetuated came subsequently to be divided into several sections, owing allegiance to different ecclesiastical affiliations and loyalties. Among them all the major body that keeps to its eastern character and tradition is the Syrian Orthodox Church. The question, therefore, regarding its task in free India is not without any importance.

For one thing, if Christianity is to be taken as consisting of the three broad divisions of Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, the first two have a fairly considerable following almost all over India, and it is possible for them to make their respective Christian contributions to the life of the nation. As for the third, the one body through which it can show forth its spiritual dynamism in India is the Syrian Orthodox Church. The work and witness of this ancient Church should therefore awaken interest, not only in the entire eastern Christendom, but also in Christians everywhere who are concerned to see it fulfil its God-given task in the land of its existence.

But there is one difference. Whereas many at the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church or of any one of the major Protestant Churches in the world are very well acquainted with the problems, needs, and opportunities of the Church in India, practically none of the leaders of any one of the eastern Churches outside India know much on the subject. To say this is not to blame any one, but to state the fact, so that it may change. It is gratifying in the present context to take note of the meeting of ecclesiastical representatives of eastern Christendom that has been held in Rhodes during the last week of September. That the conveners of the assembly extended their invitation to the Syrian Orthodox Church in India to send two official visitors is most certainly an important event. Though the gathering at Rhodes may not have devoted much time to discuss the Church in India, it may legitimately be hoped that at similar assemblies of eastern Churches in future this will find a prominent place even on the agenda, and that thus the oversight of a long period of history will be amply rectified.

### **The Church and its Mission**

As regards the task that lies before the Syrian Orthodox Church in India in our times, three areas may be specially mentioned. They are:--(i) the Church in relation to the changing pattern of social, economic and political life of the nation; (ii) the Church in relation to the renaissance of Hinduism; and (iii) the Church in relation to Church union movement in the country.

Of these three areas, the first two have been taken seriously both by the Roman Catholic and by the Protestant Churches in

India. From the time western missionaries of both these ecclesiastical affiliations arrived in the country they have been interested in trying to fulfil their Christian obligations in those areas. To begin with, however, it was the work of missionaries from other lands. This has come to change lately and in our times Indian Christians have begun to take the lead in carrying on the work. Of the several attempts that are being made in this way primarily under Protestant auspices, the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, founded in Bangalore a few years ago, deserves special mention. Many thinking Christians of all Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have recognised the importance of the Institute and the work which it has so far accomplished.

It has to be admitted that the Syrian Orthodox Church has so far done very little in fulfilling its obligations in the two areas mentioned above. In order to show the gravity of the omission a few words may be said in the present context to explain these areas.

Since independence India has made great strides in the realm of industrial progress and socio-political spheres. This does and will continue to affect the relation of man with man and one social group with another. The distribution, for instance, of heavy industries in many parts of the country brings in people of all castes, classes and creeds from all over the land, and they form themselves into communities which often transcend traditional restrictions. This new development can find full support in the democratic form of government with its emphasis on secular state and universal adult franchise. In this way the Indian people have begun to enjoy a new sense of individual as well as national freedom, which is bound to result in the formation of new patterns of life in the country. In the face of this fact, the Church in India has the great responsibility of making its existence and spiritual contribution felt on the Indian society.

Equally important is the task of the Church in India in relation to the religious claims of renascent Hinduism. The old religion of this ancient land has had in modern times very able apologists. They have interpreted their faith in the light of contemporary thoughtforms, offering a rational explanation for almost all religious symbols, rites and customs, and have made the claim that the religion of their ancestors is not only as good as any in the world, but that it is the best for India. Moreover many modern Hindu writers see in Christianity a religion alien to India and one which offers no spiritual ideal or principle that is not already found in Hinduism.

These two developments, as a matter of fact, are, in the opinion of the present writer, clear opportunities for the Church

in India to enhance its area of service. The first, for instance, should be taken advantage of, not merely to carry on educational and social work, but also to explain why the Church is constrained to take interest in running schools, colleges and hospitals, or carrying on social service. This is specially relevant, because there is a rather widespread tendency among many educated Hindus to insist that Christianity should confine itself to social and educational work, without at all including evangelistic campaigns in its programme of activity. Since it comes from the Hindu emphasis that Hinduism is an all sufficient religion which is being misrepresented by Christians, it is necessary for the Church to make clear its faith: the Church should explain to the Hindu the spiritual basis of its social action. Needless to say, it is by meeting problems of this kind that Christianity will be able in India to expound its faith in relation to society.

Furthermore, when once the Church opens its eyes to see these avenues of creative work, it will realise the need for trying to solve social and economic problems that are there in its own community. The Christian community, for example, is not above criticism in regard to its handling of economic disparities and social evils of various kinds found within itself. These should not have been there at all, but they are there and most certainly need solution; a sense of responsibility towards the world outside will give a deeper awareness of them. In any case, a neglect on the part of the Church in India to take seriously its task in the social, economic, and political spheres will leave it behind other communities to maintain itself an isolated and closed group—a position which is opposed to the very nature of the Church in the Christian faith.

The problem raised by renascent Hinduism helps the Church in India in another way. The emphasis, for instance, made by modern Hindu apologists that Hinduism comprehends all spiritual ideals and principles ever known to man, or that Christianity does not include anything of ultimate meaning and significance which Hinduism does not already contain, is an occasion for the Christian to make clear his faith to the Hindu. However, this can be fruitfully undertaken only on the ground of an objective study of both classical and modern Hinduism by the Christian who, on his part, has a clear grasp of the Church's faith.

What is described here is not anything peculiar to India. As a matter of fact, Christianity does not exist anywhere in the world, whether in Europe or America, Russia or the Middle East, without being challenged in one way or another by the world outside. In all these places the Church has, according as the anomalies of history would permit it, to work out ways and means of communicating the faith,

### Cooperation with other Churches

As already noted, both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches in India have done a great deal of work in the two areas referred to above. There is, in fact, no need for the Syrian Orthodox Church to duplicate what has already been accomplished. On the contrary, it can avail itself of the fruits of their labours. Now it is pertinent to ask, Can the Syrian Orthodox Church cooperate with members of these two ecclesiastical bodies in trying to fulfil its task in the two areas? It must be added at the outset that experience has shown that cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church is no quite feasible for the Syrian Church. What, then, about the Protestant Churches?

The Syrian Orthodox Church is a member of the World Council of Churches, in which Protestant, Anglican and Eastern Orthodox Churches are members. Cooperation, therefore, with Protestant Churches is not against the principles of this ancient Church. There is nothing un-Eastern or un-Orthodox about it has sufficiently been shown by the fact that most of eastern Christendom has already accepted membership in the World Council. In this context it is gratifying that the Russian Orthodox Church has applied for membership in the World Council and will most probably be accepted in that capacity at the New Delhi Assembly. In other words, cooperation with Protestant Churches is not a matter on which Eastern Orthodoxy would raise objection.

Unfortunately, the experience of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India with Churches from the west has not always been cordial. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, began sending out missionaries to the Malabar Coast from the sixteenth century. From that time to this very day that Church has done everything in its power to hamper the growth of this Church. In the nineteenth century, though the Syrian Church welcomed the Anglican missionaries sent to it by the Church Missionary Society and maintained very good relation with them for about quarter of a century, subsequently they broke with each other. This led to the division of the then existing Syrian Christian community into three bodies. Ever since this incident the Syrian Orthodox Church has been on the whole reticent to enter into relationship with almost any Christian body in the world.

This attitude on its part has often been taken amiss by members of Protestant Churches. But more seriously than the misunderstanding its effect on the Church itself as also on the wider Christian cause to be represented in the country should be taken into account India, for instance, stands undoubtedly in need of the unstinting labours as much of this ancient Church as of all the others in the country; and by being isolated from bodies that are engaged in evangelistic works of various kinds, without at the same time having

a programme of its own for this service, the Church is not likely not to lose by and by a great deal of its Christian vitality and concern in these matters.

The isolationist tendency of the Syrian Orthodox Church and the lack of a missionary programme have other implications. It is, in fact, the entire eastern Christendom that is, by this state of affairs, sustaining the loss of a great opportunity. For, as already observed, the only body in India through which the eastern ecclesiastical tradition has the possibility of showing forth to the world in a concrete way its vision of the Church and the way in which it would carry on its mission. This last point becomes all the more poignant in the face of the fact that apologists for extreme conservatism in the Church have often endeavoured to defend themselves by asserting that theirs is the eastern and the orthodox view of things. Whether this is so or not, the fact remains that the other eastern Churches have a share of responsibility in the matter of guiding this Church. From this point of view one may express the hope that in future questions of this kind relating to the Church in India will engage the serious attention of ecclesiastical gatherings of the eastern Churches.

**The Church in Relation to Union Movements**

Christianity in India deserves to be credited with two achievements in the realm of Church union. In the first place, the major Protestant bodies in the south, namely the Anglican, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, and the Congregationalist, have formed themselves into a united Church known as the Church of South India. Secondly, a similar scheme is under way in the north, where negotiations are progressing satisfactorily towards the realisation of a union of the various Protestant Churches found in those regions. When the latter achieves the anticipated goal, the two united Church bodies will most certainly recognise each other as branches of one Church in India.

Behind these two union movements there lies a recognition on the part of the Church bodies involved in them that the call to evangelism is the primary task of Christ's Church; that division in Christendom, on the one hand contradicts the nature of the Church, and on the other offer a far-reaching hindrance in the fulfilment of its missionary obligation; and that therefore the Church in India should not perpetuate them any longer. It is assumed by them that on all occasions of schism there must have been at play both theological and non-theological factors. Of these two, the latter, so they believe, is not to be considered binding on the Church in India, for the simple reason that it had no part in those schisms or in the doctrinal controversies raged in the Church in the past, and that therefore the non-theological factors which divided one Christian body from another cannot be real to it. On the other hand, they maintain that if the Church in India accepts the historic faith of the

Church and carried on its mission, without being led by prejudices inherited from other parts of Christendom, it will be able, as the Holy Spirit guides it, to realise a union, so rich in content as to offer Church union movements anywhere in the world a healthy guidance or at least a sound example.

Whether all this defense of the union movements in India is to be accepted or not, it is correct to say that their significance can on no account be explained away. In fact, it is true of schisms and doctrinal controversies of Christendom that they took place as much without the involvement in them of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India as without that of any other Christian body in the country. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to expect this ancient Indian Church to rise above a great deal of the hatred and prejudice that have marred the relationship between divided Christian bodies both in the east and in the west.

The last sentence should be underlined, bearing in mind at the same time that the Syrian Orthodox Church has its own prejudices against other Christian bodies. However, if it does, as the Holy Spirit guides it, get over them, it may prove a means in the hands of God to lead the way to union of Christendom, by which Churches of the east and the west will come together.

What is meant here may be explained in a few words. In the Indian context, whether they realise it now or not, the Churches have to work together in areas of common concern. From such cooperation there can emerge an atmosphere of deeper mutual understanding, appreciation, and wanting to stay together. According as the Holy Spirit directs, an atmosphere of this kind will enable the Churches to seek a more abiding basis for staying and working together. If and when this experience of being together leads them to a union in which no principle has been sacrificed, it will be something worth having. Union of the Churches is the work, not of man, but of God. It can never be forced on any Church, but if the various bodies work together, they will be able to move towards a union which will be acceptable to them all.

There is one thing to be noted in this connection. The Church of South India today is not a Protestant body of any description known to west; neither will the Church of North India be when it comes to be formed. If in its cooperation with these bodies, the Syrian Orthodox Church conserves its theological and ecclesiastical principles, the union between the two traditions, if it comes into being at all, will produce an ecclesiastical body that is qualitatively different from either the Church of South India or the Church of North India as it is going to be formed.

This may be conceived as possible on the ground that the Syrian Orthodox Church believes its faith to be essentially the historic faith

of the Church Universal, and that the Protestant Churches claim for the Reformation that it only restored the uncorrupt in the Churches. However, it has to be granted that, like the rest of eastern Christendom, the Syrian Christianity has also been subject to influences of various kinds from the world outside. Therefore, one thing is certain; everything that is found in the Orthodox Syrian Church in India or in any other eastern Church is not part and parcel of the Faith once for all delivered to the saints. The same must be said about the Protestant Churches also. Although the reformers claimed to have restored the historic faith in its purity, it is a fact that they had drunk deep from the fountain of the Renaissance and the Scholastic metaphysics, so that the faith as they taught was not so pure as they endeavoured to make out. Protestant Churches after them have not existed in the world without being influenced by forces of different kinds.

The two traditions can therefore, if they so decide, come together in India, and, in the providence of God, arrive at a union which will be more Indian than any so far achieved and also more representative of the Church Universal. A movement of this kind, if initiated, will not stop with India or with the Syrian and the protestant ecclesiastical traditions. It may be reasonably hoped that at one stage the Roman Catholic Church will join in, and thus the resulting union will be a blessing to the Church as a whole.

### **A Word of Conclusion**

The Syrian Orthodox Church in India has before it great possibilities. They will be realised in the providence of God only if the Church begins to fulfil its responsibilities. This article is written with a very deep concern to see the Church do it.

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## **PRIME MINISTER NEHRU'S SPEECH AT THE WORLD ASSEMBLY**

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India commended delegates to the World Council of Churches' Third Assembly for bringing religious insights to bear on current international problems.

In a 20 minute address at the plenary session December 4, he advised them to contribute toward peace by encouraging their people and governments to follow "the friendly approach" instead of aggravating "the war psychosis".

The Indian statesman expressed confidence that what the Assembly had to say about the problems of the day would "exercise influence over large numbers of people in the world".