

Prof. Mathew Vellanickal

Evangelising Mission of the Syro-Malabar Church

(May 2009)

Dr. Vellanickal, a world renowned biblical theologian, explains the unique evangelising mission of the St Thomas Christians on the basis of a strong biblical foundation of the same. He formulates it from the Christ-experience of Apostle Thomas, the Father-in-faith of the St. Thomas Christians with reference to the conciliar teachings on evangelising mission of the Church.

Introduction

Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* says, "Evangelizing is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" (EN 14). In the same encyclical the Pope again reminds us, "Evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act; it is one that is deeply ecclesial ... an ecclesial act" (EN 60). These statements show how intimately evangelisation is related to the Church. When we discuss about the evangelising mission of the Syro-Malabar Church, we have to take into account this ecclesial dimension of evangelisation.

Evangelisation: Proclamation of the Gospel

"As the Father has sent me, so do I send you" (Jn 20:21). These are the words of Jesus to his apostles. Hence it is the same mission that Jesus and the Church have. The Church has to continue the same mission as that of Jesus. The mission of Jesus was pre-eminently to evangelize (proclamation and completion of the plan of the Father). Jesus, inaugurating his mission, said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim the 'good news' to the poor" (Lk 4:18). Evangelisation is "proclamation of the good news". Jesus came proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14-15).

Gospel of the Kingdom

The 'good news' that Jesus proclaimed is the good news of the Kingdom of God. Kingdom of God means 'reign of God', i.e. a state of being under the rule of God, namely a new order established through the eschatological upheaval. This new order is based on a new relationship of humankind with God and with one another. This relationship is specifically a relationship with God as the Father and with one another as the children of the same Father. Therefore the good news of the Kingdom of God is the good news of the Kingdom of the Father. In fact, Jesus synthesized the whole of his redemptive mission in terms of the establishment of the Kingdom of the Father (Mt 25:34; Jn 10:29).

Gospel of the Kingdom: Salvation and Life

Gospel of the Kingdom is a Gospel of salvation, an integral liberation of the whole person from whatever alienates him/her from the integrity and fullness of existence as a child of God (Lk 4:18-19). It is fundamentally liberation from sin and its consequences, a restoration of humankind to the status of the children of God (Lk 1:77; 3:3-6; 24:47). It is presented in the framework of an eschatology that has been realized and goes on realizing itself in a historical process stretched between the past of Christ's glorification and the future of our glorification (Rom 8:18-25). It is this fullness of life of the children of God that Jesus came to give according to John (Jn 10:10). It is the good news of this Kingdom, Salvation and Life that Jesus came proclaiming and that he wants the Church to proclaim.

Church: an Evangelised and Evangelizing Community

The Church is the community of those who have accepted the good news of the Kingdom, Salvation and Life. The Church is the family of the children of God, born out of the evangelising activity of Jesus and the twelve. The words of the missionary commissioning in the Gospels show how the process of evangelisation gradually results in the formation and development of the Church. If evangelization in the early Church is expressed in terms of proclaiming the Gospel (Mk 16:14-16), later it takes the form of life-witness of the Church members (Lk 24:48) of which are to be formed in the new way of life according to the Gospel values (Mt 28:18-20). Having been born out of being sent, the Church, in her turn, is sent by Jesus, "As the Father has sent me, so do I send you" (Jn 20:21). Those who sincerely accept the good news through the power of this acceptance and of shared faith gather together in Jesus' name in order to seek together the kingdom, build it up, and live it. They make up an evangelised community which is in its turn evangelising (Cf. EN 13).

Evangelisation: an Ecclesial Act

If the Church is the embodiment of the Gospel, then there cannot be a proclamation of the Gospel which is not ecclesial. The missionary is an emissary of the Church which is basically a communion of sharing in the apostolic experience of the Christ-event. One who does not participate in the divine life of salvation communicated by Christ cannot proclaim this Gospel of life. The very term 'proclamation' is indicative of this. It is true that the Greek term 'Kerusein' is translated often with the word 'preach' and hence refers to the proclamation in words. The 'Good News' being the news implies communication and therefore 'preaching' is really important in the proclamation of the Gospel. But the term 'proclamation' means more than mere preaching in words. As it is used about Jesus, it is inclusive of his words, deeds and life. The summary of Jesus' proclamation of the Gospel is presented by Matthew thus, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity" (Mt 9:35). So it was a question of the whole life of Jesus.

Jesus' life itself was a proclamation of the 'Good News'. The 'Word made flesh' was the 'message made life'. The good news of human salvation and participation in divine life was proclaimed by Jesus' life as the Son of God. The same lifestyle is demanded from his disciples also. It is this event of Jesus' proclamation of the good news that should be continued by those who believe in Christ. Hence one who does not belong to the Church, the communion of those who share in the divine life, cannot proclaim the Gospel in the proper sense of the term.

Life of the Church and Proclamation of the Gospel

The statement 'evangelisation is an ecclesial act' means much more than saying that one cannot proclaim the Gospel without belonging to the Church. It is the very life of the Church that becomes the proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus was the 'Gospel made life' because he was the 'Word made flesh'. The Church is really Jesus Christ' extended in history. The Church is to be traced back to the proclamation of the Word by the Apostles, "Those who received his Word were baptized" (Ac 2:41). The good news of the Christ-event which the apostles preached is here simply referred to as 'the Word'. Also John, in speaking about his apostolic experience of the Christ-event, qualifies it as 'the Word of Life' (Jn 1:1-3). It is this Word that the community of believers received, and thus according to Peter the Church is born out of this Word, "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God" (1 Pet 1:23).

The Church lives by this Word and finds her identity in ministering to it. It is practically identical with the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that "the Word grew" or "increased" or "was strengthened" in places where actually it is a question of the "growth" or "increase" of the Church (Ac 6:7; 10:24; 13:49; 19:20). This identification of the Word with the Church is consequent to the identification of the Logos with Christ (Jn 1:1-2,14). So the deepest identity of the Church is to be found in the Word and its power. The Church is always at the service of the Word and is carried forward herself by the power of the Word. Hence the life of the Church itself becomes the proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclamation and Ministry of the Word

The apostolic ministry through which the Church is born and sustained is called the "ministry of the Word". The twelve considered it as their proper ministry. When the number of the disciples increased and there came up the question of the service to solve the social problem, the twelve said, "It is not right that we should give up the Word of God to serve at tables.... We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Ac 6:2-4). Hence the apostolic 'ministry of the Word' constitutes the essence of the life of the Church. It is through this apostolic ministry of the Word that God's word is kept alive in the Church and the life of the Church becomes proclamation of the Gospel.

A Blueprint of the Church

We have in the Acts of the Apostles 2:41-47 a description of the life of the first Christian community that came into existence as a result of the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel on the day of Pentecost. This can be considered as a blue-print of the Church that lives and is sustained by the apostolic ministry of the Word and thereby becomes in its turn the proclamation of the Gospel. In this passage, the first verse (v. 41) speaks of the formation of the Church through the apostolic ministry of the Word. This verse is parallel to the last verse (v. 47b) which speaks of the Lord adding to the Church daily people who are being saved. The Church is considered as the evangelised community of those who have come to experience salvation through faith (receiving the Word) and baptism. "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:15-16). The community which received the Word continues to live a life centred on this Word and thus becomes an evangelising community sharing this salvation daily with more and more people.

The verse 42 is a summary statement about the life of the first Christian community centred on the Word by means of the threefold apostolic ministry of the Word, while vv. 43-47a are further elaborate descriptions of the summary statement in v. 42.

The Threefold Ministry of the Word

Though the ministry of the Word can be carried out in the Church in different ways, as the description in Ac 2:42-47 shows, this is carried out basically in three ways, namely, receiving the Word, living the Word and celebrating the Word. The threefold apostolic ministry corresponds to these. The teaching ministry corresponds to 'receiving the Word'. The shepherding ministry corresponds to 'living the Word'. The sanctifying ministry corresponds to 'celebrating the Word'.

Receiving the Word

The Church is the Assembly of God's people who have received the Word (Ac 2:41), namely who have come to believe in Jesus Christ, the Word of God and profess their faith in it. The Christian community was known as the community of believers (Ac 2:44; 4:32). It was not sufficient that they received the Word once but had to continue in the Word. Hence the ministry of the Word in the Church took the form of teaching, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Ac 2:42). This apostolic teaching in the Church that sustains the Church as a community of believers takes different forms such as preaching, teaching, catechesis and theology. As part of the preaching there were also signs in Jesus' ministry, "And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Ac 2:43).

Living the Word

The Church is the Assembly of God's people who also live the Word that they believe and profess. This practically takes the form of fellowship. The experience of the Word of Life and its communication results in communion and fellowship (Cf I Jn 1:1-3). The first Christian community was the best example of it, "All who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as they had need" (Ac 2:44-45). When the Word enters in daily Christian living, that Christian life is bound to be a life of fellowship and love, which is the distinguishing mark of the disciples of Jesus (Jn 13:34-35). The shepherding ministry is the ministry of leadership and it is in view of establishing order and unity in the community. Since it is a question of practical daily life of the members of the Church, this apostolic ministry of the Word concretely takes the forms of spirituality and discipline.

Celebrating the Word

The Church is the Assembly of God's people who celebrate the Word that they have received. The Word resounds in joy and praise in the liturgy of the Church. Again this is exemplified in the first Christian community, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people" (Acts. 2:46-47a).

After the preaching of Paul and Barnabas the response of the people is described thus, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the Word of God" (Acts. 13:48). The sanctifying apostolic ministry is in view of building up the Christian community as a worshipping community through their celebration of the Word of God. The celebration of the Word concretely takes the form of liturgy in the Church.

Proclaiming the Word

It is this threefold service of the Word that constitutes the essence of the Church and which enables the Church to proclaim the Word of God. The Ac 2:47b reads thus, "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved". The Church became an evangelising community precisely as a community which constantly received, lived and celebrated the Word which it received from the apostles.

The written Word of God or the Bible has to be situated within the context of this living Word of God embodied in the Church. Preaching the message of the Bible independent and isolated from the living Word of God in the Church is an aberration of the concept of evangelisation. It is the whole people of God that preserves the Word or the Gospel.

The Church as a body receives, lives and celebrates the Word or the Truth revealed in Jesus Christ. Hence the Bible, the written Word, has to be received in the living community of faith in the Church. The Word proclaimed by the apostles, out of which the Church was born, and preserved in the Church through the threefold ministry gradually becomes the 'Divine Tradition' including the Bible, the written Word within a broader ecclesial tradition of Theology, Spirituality, Discipline and Liturgy. Hence the essential unity of the Word of God is to be admitted. This unity is recognized even by St. Paul who is the apostle set apart for the ministry of the Word. In his epistles, he depends entirely on the Kerygma (I Cor 15:2-7), liturgy (I Cor 11:23-25; 16:22; Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15), hymns (Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20) confessional formulas (I Cor 12:3) and theological terminology (I Thes 4:1-11; I Cor 6:9-10) of the early Church.

At times, Paul speaks of handing down what he has received (I Cor 11:2, 23; 15:1-3). All these show that the Word or the Gospel Paul preached was simply the proclamation of his life in the Church. This unity of the Word of God is explicitly stated by Vatican II in its Decree on Divine Revelation, "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one Sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is committed to the Church" (DV, 10).

The Word does not exist in the abstract, but concretely in the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary faith-

expressions of the Church. Therefore an authentic proclamation of the Word demands a fidelity and solidarity with the heritage handed down by the apostles as enshrined in the faith-expressions of the Church.

Liturgy and Proclamation of the Gospel

The liturgy or the celebration of the Word is the noblest and highest self-expression of the Church (SC 41). The old maxim also has it that the "Eucharist makes the Church". It is in the liturgy (especially the Eucharist) that the Church lives at full stretch and in its purest form. In the New Testament times the Christians identified themselves as "the Church" precisely in their act of coming together. This happened especially when they were celebrating the Eucharist and praying. Then they realized that they transcended the World, so that they formed one people of God. St. Paul qualifies the Eucharistic gathering as the formal gathering of the Church, "For in the first place, when you assemble as a Church, I hear that there are divisions among you" (I Cor 11:18; Cf. also I Cor 14:19, 28, 34, 35). When St Paul speaks of "The whole Church" in I Cor 14:23 it is also meaningful. The Christians did not always come together in a full gathering, but formed small groups which met less officially in particular houses within the same town. Rom 16:23 where the expression "Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole Church" may mean that the house of Gaius was the place for the full liturgical gatherings of the Church of Corinth as distinct from other informal gatherings. The official liturgical gatherings had a pre-eminent position in expressing the Church in New Testament times.

The Second Vatican Council also acknowledges this pre-eminent position of the liturgy in the Church, "The Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows" (SC. 10). The Council in the same text makes it clear that all apostolic works are directed to the liturgy.

In fact, the celebration of the Word has a pre-eminence in the threefold ministry of the Word in the Church. It is in the context of the celebration of the Word that we receive the living Word of God in the Church. The celebration of the Word is the best expression of our living the Word of God in the Church. Hence the ministry of the Word in the Church becomes a cyclic experience of the Word or the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ centred on the celebration of it especially in the Eucharistic liturgy. Hence the liturgy (especially the Eucharist) can be rightly qualified as the best proclamation of the Gospel.

Church: A Communion of Individual Churches

When we speak of the Church, the general tendency is to think of the universal Church as the first realization of it and then think of the local Churches as part of it. The local and universal Churches are born together and exist together. Since the Church is the 'icon' of the Trinity, we can say that the local and universal Churches are inside one another. The local Church is the true realization and manifestation of the one Church of God. The local Church is wholly the Church though it is not the whole Church. Each local Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The communion of all these makes the universal Church. Therefore the universal Church is a communion of communions. The universal Church has no concrete existence but in and through the local Churches.

In the first century after Christ there were several local Churches established through the proclamation of the Word by the apostles and their successors. Though all these Churches had the Word or the Gospel as the central reality of their faith received, lived and celebrated, they were pluriform in nature. This pluriformity resulted from the specificity of the apostolic experience of the Word and the particular social, cultural and religious milieu of the people with which it encountered. Vatican II says, "However, the heritage handed down by the apostles was received in different forms and ways, so that from the very beginning of the Church it has had a varied development in various places, thanks to a similar variety of natural gifts and conditions of life" (UR 14). This pluriformity of Churches is attested by the Churches of the New Testament times which are theologically (not merely locally) different local Churches. These Churches of the New Testament times are also called by R.E. Brown 'Individual Churches', taking into account their different theological approaches and emphases depending on their particular ecclesial situations. The pluriform local Churches which the apostles left behind gradually developed into certain families of Churches having a homogeneous character in the concrete forms of liturgy, spirituality, theology and discipline. This is succinctly explained by Vatican II, "It has come about through divine providence that, in the course of time, different Churches set up in various places by the apostles and their successors joined together in a multiplicity of organically united groups which, while safeguarding the unity of faith and the unique divine structure of the universal Church, have their own discipline, enjoy their own liturgical usage and inherit a theological and spiritual patrimony" (LG 23). These Churches we call Individual Churches because of their distinct individuality in liturgy, spirituality, theology and discipline. Thus the Church is a Communion of Individual Churches. In this sense the Syro-Malabar Church is an Individual Church.

Word of God and Individual Ecclesial Traditions

If the Catholic or universal Church has no concrete existence except in and through the Individual Churches, the Word of God or the Divine Tradition in the Catholic Church is enshrined in the Individual Ecclesial Faith-Traditions. The Second Vatican Council says, "The Catholic Church values highly the institution of the Eastern Churches, their liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions and their ordering of Christian life. For in those Churches which are distinguished by their venerable antiquity, there is clearly evident the Tradition which has come from the

Apostles through the Fathers" (OE 1). Hence an authentic proclamation of the Word can be done only within the context of an Individual Ecclesial Tradition. Thus the Word or the Christ-event or the Gospel which comes to us through the apostles' Tradition preserved in the Church becomes normative for evangelization. Genuine evangelisation is possible only in the context of the realization of authentic Individual Churches. It is an authentic experience of the Word received, lived and celebrated in one's Individual Church that should become the source of the missionary urge to share the same experience with others.

The Right and Obligation for Evangelisation

Every Individual Church has its god-given right and obligation to proclaim the Word or the Gospel that it has received and is enshrined in the faith-traditions. Evangelisation is a necessity laid upon every member of the Church as St. Paul says, "If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel" (I Cor 9:16). This necessity is not only by virtue of the commission by the Lord but also by virtue of experiencing the Word or Gospel that is embodied in the Acts of Apostles as every member of the Church proclaimed the Word according to the given opportunity (Ac 4:34; 8:4).

The Second Vatican Council in its Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches states, "Individual Churches, whether of the East or of the West ... are of equal dignity so that none of them is superior to the others by reason of rite. They enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligations, even with respect to preaching the Gospel to the whole world (Cf. Mk 16:15) under the guidance of the Roman pontiff" (OE 3). Walter M. Abbot gives a special note in this context that by this statement the Council condemns the theory of those who claimed a sort of precedence of the Roman rite over the others. He also remarks that here the Council took into account the strange situation of the Syro-Malabar Church regarding evangelisation, namely a situation where the members of this Church were forced to adopt Roman rite to undertake missionary apostolate.

The Syro-Malabar Church and Evangelisation

Adequate Provisions for the Evangelising Mission

In the light of the above study it is very clear that the Syro-Malabar Church has the right and obligation to proclaim the Word or the Gospel, being faithful to its faith-heritage which is liturgical, spiritual, theological and disciplinary. The present situation of the Syro-Malabar Church is not an ideal one in this regard. The jurisdictional restriction that is imposed upon her in this matter goes against the biblical teaching and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Authority in the Church is given by God in view of its ministry of the Word as enshrined in its faith traditions. Jurisdiction is not sought for its own sake. It is meant to help the Church to keep up its authenticity as a community of apostolic faith in its authentic expressions in the liturgical, spiritual and disciplinary life. Such an authentic existence is necessary to fulfill its task of evangelisation. Therefore the Syro-Malabar Church is to be given full jurisdiction for pastoral care and of evangelisation in India and abroad which is rightly sanctioned in all documents of the Church, including the both codes of canon law.

Because of the lack of such an adequate provision for evangelisation, a great number of the missionaries of the Syro-Malabar Church had to give up and still gives up their ecclesial tradition in order to fulfil their evangelising mission. Many priests and Religious have joined in the past and still join Latin Dioceses and Religious Congregations in order to respond to their divine vocation. Even the Religious Sisters who belong to the Syro-Malabar church are forced to adopt the Latin ways of ecclesial living in order to respond to their missionary vocation. This is a very serious situation that affects the growth and missionary dynamism of the Syro-Malabar Church.

Evangelisation and Pastoral Care

If the evangelisation is necessarily related to an authentic life of the Church, Pastoral Care of the emigrants is very important for evangelisation. It is a Community that is built up properly in its ecclesial identity that can become an effective agent of evangelisation. Especially in the context of the present situation in India, where isolated missionary efforts through education and social apostolate are looked upon with suspicion, it is better to concentrate our attention more in building up authentic ecclesial communities among the emigrants. Their ecclesial life will indirectly proclaim the Gospel.

Rediscovering Our Ecclesial Identity

The fact that the proclamation of the Gospel has to be in fidelity to the faith-heritage of the Individual Church demands from the members of the Syro-Malabar Church a rediscovery of their ecclesial identity and spiritual heritage. As we know, the Syro-Malabar Church has fallen away from its authentic Oriental identity as a result of its past history of four hundred years. As the Council says we have to take pains to return to our ancestral ways (Cf. OE 6). The demand for pastoral care and evangelisation on the part of the Syro-Malabar Church has no meaning if it does not arise from a genuine experience of the Word in her heritage of spirituality, liturgy, theology and discipline as an Oriental Individual Church. So our first attempt should be to recapture the identity of the Syro-Malabar Church. The preoccupation on the need of adaptation should not be a hindrance to the process of restoring our ecclesial identity. There has been a polarization in this regard and consequently a mutually exclusive approach to both restoration and adaptation.

In the heat of the controversy the very identity of the Syro-Malabar Church as belonging to the East Syrian Christianity is being questioned. This is certainly a precarious situation and it will take us nowhere and we will end up in a sort of syncretism without being firmly rooted in any of the early apostolic ecclesial traditions which are the legitimate heirs and living witness of the Divine Tradition or the Word which had come from the Apostles through the Fathers (Cf. OE 1).

Particular Ecclesial Style of Evangelisation

Since evangelisation is essentially an ecclesial act and the missionary urge is an inner urge arising from living an authentic ecclesial life with its particular and specific features of experiencing the Word or the Gospel, the very style of evangelisation and missionary method of our Church will also differ from that of the other Churches. The Syro-Malabar Church being the legitimate heir of the East Syrian ecclesial tradition which evolved in the Indian soil as the Law of Thomas should be able to evolve a missionary method and style which will be different from the existing one in the different parts of India which is evolved by the Latin West.

In fact, there are indications of missionary enterprises of St. Thomas Christians. In this context, it will be interesting and profitable to do some research and study into the missionary methods of St. Thomas Christians in ancient India and abroad. But above all, to evolve a missionary method of our own, the members of the Syro-Malabar Church themselves should regain the proper perspectives regarding the Church and its mission regarding evangelisation and how it is intimately related to the authentic existence of the Syro-Malabar Church as an Oriental Individual Church. As members of the Individual Church, the bishops, priests, religious and laity should become aware of and be formed in the particular ecclesial and spiritual heritage of our Church so as to be able to share it effectively with others.

Witness as a Worshipping Community

If Christianity was rather widespread in India before the arrival of the Portuguese, it was due to the missionary enterprises of the St. Thomas Christians. India, being a land of ancient Religions and Sages, its people has a special appreciation for mysticism, spirituality and God-experience. As we can make out from the tradition of the St. Thomas Christians, the missionary and spiritual life was pioneered by monks in the East Syrian and Indian ecclesial tradition. The missionary outreach by means of educational and social apostolates is of later and western origin. Of late, this missionary method is also subject to suspicion. In the present situation the Syro-Malabar Church should adopt a missionary approach that is more in tune with her traditions and more appealing to the Indian mentality, namely giving a witness as a praying and worshipping community.

Witness as a Loving and Sharing Community

About conversions among the St. Thomas Christians, Fr. Paremakal says that those accepted the faith belonged to the prominent and also to the poor families, houses and classes of Malabar, but that they all live as one community, as children of the same father, in the spirit of Christian charity and unity. Regarding those who were converted by the Portuguese he says, "You have kept them as separate groups calling some Mundukar, some Margakkar and some Kuppayakkar. You have also given them another rite and different customs" [Cf. Paremakal Thomma Cathanar, Varthamanapusthakam, (Engl, trans. Fr. Placid, Rome, 1971), pp. 262-263]. The Syro-Malabar Church must regain its original image as a loving community. Formation of our parishes as loving and sharing communities will certainly give an effective witness to our Christian faith.

Witness of Ashram Spirituality

Ashram life and spirituality is characteristic of the Indian tradition. The missionary dynamism of the Church of the East was primarily due to the asceticism and monasticism cultivated in their ecclesial tradition. Hence a recapturing of the spirit of asceticism and monasticism will enable the Syro-Malabar Church to be more effectively missionary in its outreach.

The religious Orders and Congregations should imbibe the spirit of asceticism and monasticism. The missionaries should have an authentic monastic formation. However, the Ashram way of life should not be a blind imitation of the Hindu or other religious models. Christian Ashrams are characterized by prayer, study, work and community life. They are communities that live radically the ecclesial life and spirituality. They are closed communities but open to the public.

Witness of a Culturally Integrated Community

In the context of the cultural pluralism of India, evangelization should take the form of living one's faith and ideals in the local cultural situation. Inculturation should take place, first of all, in all strata of the life of the missionaries such as language, food, clothing, building, ideas, ethics etc. The inculturation of the local communities should be always be in harmony with the faith of the Individual and Universal Church. Liturgical inculturation should be a spontaneous outcome of the inculturation of faith and life.

Witness of a Community in Dialogue

In the context of the religious pluralism of India, missionaries and the ecclesial communities should be committed to a life of dialogue with the members of other religions. This demands respect for other religions and readiness to acknowledge truth in them. However this does not mean watering down one's own faith. Dialogue will help us ultimately to rediscover the authenticity of our own faith.

Witness of a Community Committed to Service

In the context of injustice and oppression on various levels in the Indian Society, the Christian Community should take on the character of a Servant-Church, committed to the liberative mission of Christ. The educational and social involvement and activities of the Church should be characterized by truth, justice and integrity and should be authentic expression of love and service as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Notes

Cfr. M. Vellanickal, "Understanding of Evangelization in the Context of Present day India". *CBCI General Meeting*, Calcutta, Jan. 1974, 13-16.

Cfr. L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, New York: 1963, 190.

For a Biblico-Theological evaluation of the relationship between the Local and Universal Church, Cfr. M. Vellanickal, "Biblico-Theological Foundations of Ecclesial Identity", *Ecclesial Identity of the St. Thomas Christians*, OIRSI, 87, Kottayam: 1985, 32-60.

Cfr. J. J. Von Allen, "L'Eglise Locale Parmi les autres Eglises locales", *Irenikon*, 43, 1970, 512.

Cfr. R. E. Brown, "New Testament Background for the Concept of the Local Church", in *Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Annual Convention of CTSA*, Vol. 36, 1981, 9.

Cfr. R. E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, New York: 1984.

Cfr. M. Vellanickal, "Communion of the Churches, A Biblical Perspective", *Communion of Churches*, OIRSI, 160, Vadavathoor: 1993, 28-46.

Cfr. M. Vellanickal, "Syro-Malabar Identity and Evangelization", *Mission and Community Building*, Ed., G. H. Ambooken C.M.I, 1993, 24-39.

Cfr. W. M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* New York: 1966, 374.

Cfr. M. Vellanickal, "Individual Church, Evangelization and Apostolicity", in *The Inter-ritual Dialogue*, Delhi: 1983-84, 75-94.

Cfr. Mar Abraham Mattam, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas Christians and Her Missionary Enterprises before the Sixteenth Century*, OIRSI, 92, Vadavathoor: 1985.

Ref.: Third Millennium XI (2008) 1,07-21.