Indian Christians and Cooperation with Non-Christians

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I

What strikes one as an eminently reasonable proposition, that a Christian should work with non-Christians in all fields of activity that do not involve a challenge to his loyalty to Christ or a temptation to stray away from the ethics of Jesus, has always met with some opposition in the history of Christianity. Though in the West the non-cooperation doctrine survives as a rudimentary organ in an effete theology, in the East, owing to the historic circumstances of the origin of the Christian community, it has assumed sizeable dimensions and has formed the bulwark of separatism.

It may not appear to be necessary to canvass extensively the theology, temper and mood which lurk behind the aversion to cooperation with Hindus and Muslims in national efforts. Since the resistance to cooperation is not rational but subconscious and creates submerged antipathies, prejudices and inhibitions symptomatic of psychic obsessions and repressions, we have to subject it to psycho-analytical treatment. This necessitates dragging the fears, premonitions and vague dreads into the light of consciousness and showing that they have very little substance and value in them. We shall therefore first trace the history of the doctrine of 'withdrawal from the world' in Christianity and of 'cooperation or flowing into and directing the forces of life and history towards a pre-ordained end'.

Come Ye Out from Among Them

The Christian process was often regarded as unrelated to and unconnected with the natural and historic. Christianity was held to be either an election that uplifts the Christian above the world or an escape from the world, life and their contaminations. The capital text quoted for this view occurs in 2 Corinthians 6 : 14, 15, 17 :—Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers : for

what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate . . . and touch no unclean thing. By identifying non-Christian faiths entirely with unrighteousness, infidelism and uncleanliness, this highly reasonable admonition was turned into a charter of isolationism. Early Christianity received this doctrine as a heritage from Judaism. The Jews regarded themselves as a select people detached from the rest of the nations and chosen for a particular mission. The sense of a national vocation often degenerates into racial and spiritual pride and a kind of touch-me-not holiness that shuns with contempt the lesser breeds that know not the law. In the third century when Christianity spread into Egypt, it imbibed the asceticism of the East and regarded flesh, society and life as essentially sinful and contaminating and as something to be escaped from. Christians fled to the deserts and subjected themselves to tortures. In the Catholic Church, monasticism which in its higher aspects meant dedication and consecration to the service of God was by a series of falls reduced to a fear of earthly life and society which were deemed to be enemies of the godly life. Austerities, penances and mortifications became marks of spirituality. Protestantism on the whole was non-ascetic but the old strain found new expression in it also. Puritanism, an essentially moral and ecclesiastical reform movement, had in it elements that predisposed it to the type of recoil from life that was instinctive in asceticism. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* offers the classical theory of the world as doomed, with Christian as a pilgrim or more accurately as a refugee fleeing from the wrath to come. The sudden upsurge of science and the consequent new love for life, characteristic of the Renaissance, has washed away the Church from its ascetic moorings. Nevertheless the old outlook has reappeared and we have an illustration of it in twentieth century Barthianism which proclaims in a more refined and philosophic way its misgivings about the world. Barthians hold that Christianity represents a vertical descent from above on the horizontal flow of history and that the life from above touches life below without confluencing with it. To change the simile, the incarnation of Jesus should be conceived as a tangent touching humanity at a point without cutting into it. At the Tambaram Conference, Dr. Kraemer in his *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* applied this view to the relation of Christianity to non-Christian religions and, disputing Dr. Farquhar's theory that Christianity was the crown of Hinduism, maintained that an unbridgeable chasm divides Christianity from other religions and that these religions cannot flow into Christianity by any process of evolution. This was the orthodox reaction to *Rethinking Missions* which advocated inter-religious cooperation.

The Christian Church in India is an extension of the sectarian Churches of the West and reflects faithfully some of the outworn

theologies of the past. Any original thinking was not only absent but was considered a sort of sin against the Holy Spirit. Naturally in such a context we cannot expect anything more than a docile submission to imported doctrines. Nevertheless two factors conspired to break this pathetic harmony. The convert who rebelled against Hinduism felt it impossible to submit to doctrinal thraldom. Among the born Christians there were some who, touched by the enfranchisement of the intellect in modern times, chafed at their shackles. A group of them essayed to interpret the Indian Christian mind in *Rethinking Christianity*, intended to be a constructive criticism of Kraemer's thesis. They pointed out that racial training and memory are, as it were, the 'spiritual eye' of the Indian, and the Christian inheriting the past has in Hinduism an organ of sight that reveals new phases of Christ and His message. The attempt to piece together petrified Hinduism with equally petrified Christianity may not yield any hopeful results and yet the living forces and insights of Hinduism that respond to Christ may disclose the preparation of the Hindu for accepting Christ. They pointed out that but for his Indian heritage no educated Indian would have seen in Jesus an avatar and that living Hinduism in a Christian forms part of his spiritual equipment, with which to interpret the significance of Christ to humanity.

With regard to the ascetic doctrine two pertinent remarks may be made. While there has been no period in Church history when it has been totally absent it has always been the creed of a microscopic minority. Christians found no difficulty in dealing with the world in all its activities, political and economic. A few warned the Church about the contaminations of sin. The rest established empires, extended trade, accomplished a partnership between the State and the Church without any protest of conscience or moral struggle. The Christian world by-passed monasteries and monasticism.

The view served the purpose of penance for the too enthusiastic plunge Western Christianity took into the flood of history. A hungry man dreams of banquets and feasts which give him a momentary relief in his destitution. Even so the more the West was dragged into world culture, the more it clung to this doctrine with the automatic impulse of a drowning man catching at a straw. The revulsion to life was conspicuous by its absence in the waking life of the West. The doctrine lost its bite, could not touch, much less plunge its teeth into the flesh.

Just when it received a quietus in the industrial West, the doctrine was revived by missionaries for the benefit of weaker converts from non-Christian faiths to Christianity. Most of these conversions are mass conversions motivated by a desire to escape the impossible conditions of society in Hinduism. Early Christians were babes requiring protection from outside contaminations. Hedges had to be built round and converts had to be admonished that safety lay in staying indoors away from the perils

of traffic. Not that the Western Christian was not subject to such infections. But the missionary did not see it as clearly in his country as he saw in other countries. In the West and in the East the Christian runs into the arms of the world cheerfully. Indian Christians trade, enter government service, are engaged in all professions, where they work along with non-Christians without any challenge from his faith. Within the Church, away from life they cling to the doctrine which imparts to them an aura of sanctity.

Go Ye into the World

Curiously enough, the opposite view of associating and working with all the good and noble in the world, derives its strong support also from St. Paul, whose injunctions torn from their context and slightly misinterpreted formed the foundation of the Christian ascetic practices. In Phil. 4:8 the apostle says: Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Law and morality existed before Jesus. Hinduism and Buddhism condemn adultery as strongly as Judaism did. The high ethical precept of Jesus, do good to them that hate you (Matt. 5:44), finds its echo in Sri Buddha's precept, Never does hatred cease by hatred, Hatred ceases by love.

St. Paul found the light of the Jews, the Law, written in the hearts of the gentiles. He was a Roman citizen and proud of it. Both he and St. Peter thought Roman magistrates were ordained of God. The whole humanity travails to bring forth children of God. That God has spoken to every generation and has had witnesses in every race expresses what history confirms. Christianity doubtless brings a higher way, a new light to a world not entirely living in darkness but in the twilight. The direction not to be unequally yoked does not forbid being equally teamed.

There have been periods in history when non-Christians put Christians to shame by their higher ethics. The Ahimsa technique of Gandhi Mahatma and no-war ethics of Sri Buddha are instances. In direct contrast stand the two world wars where Christian nations tore each other to pieces. The destruction of Hiroshima in Japan where thousands were killed by atom bombs speaks of the lower moral standards of Christendom. In such a situation it sounds absurd to say that working with non-Christians weakens Christian faith. The theoretical superiority of the ethics of the Mount, rarely translated into practice except by occasionally saintly individuals, need not prevent us from joining others in efforts to reform, reclaim and redeem the world. We should not forget that Christian and non-Christian alike have a common human background. We can never promote Christianity by renouncing humanity. Reason, logic, and common sense are in favour of cooperation. The come-out view never

survived except when applied within a narrow limit. The broad currents of humanity flow into each other. Cooperation expresses the inner illumination of Christianity which hopes to expand till it covers all mankind.

The final court of appeal in such matters should be Jesus himself. His life and teachings, His hopes and visions for man leave no room for doubt. We do not find in Him the least trace of isolation. The very concept of incarnation implies the descent of God into man in order to divinize him. If ever the 'touch not the pitch' maxim has to be applied it should be in the relation of saints to sinners. Among Jews, the Samaritan, among Hindus the panchama, were put beyond the pale of social communion for fear of contamination. Jesus violated all the taboos of His race in consorting with publicans and sinners. That was the gravest charge brought against Him. Jesus did not yield an inch to the Jews. When John the Baptist hesitated to baptize Christ He remarked it 'becomes us to fulfil all righteousness'. His sermon on the Mount implies an intimate relation between His followers and the world. Jesus praised the syrophenecian woman (Matt. 15:26) and the Roman centurion (Matt. 8:10) for faith wanting in Jews. Seeking the lost and saving the sinners can only be achieved by a love that identifies itself with the lost and the condemned. Jesus brought to humanity a conquering power that leavens, and transforms, and His followers can descend with Him even to Sheol without fear. A weak-kneed, pusillanimous, Christianity fears contaminations and bashes in disinfectants to escape epidemics.

Cast Away All Doubts

If the above arguments have any force the choice between the austere and the brotherly way should not present any difficulty. God's love descends not only on Christians but also on non-Christians. His theatre of operation is humanity, not Church. If Christ was ordained to be the redeemer of the world, it was necessary that response to His call by way of moral training should have been distributed in all races and religions and hearts. The duty of the Christian, the necessities of evangelism, alike command him to discern the pathway which Christ opens towards Himself in every religion, to promote the moral sensitiveness in man to Jesus and to work with and lead men along this prepared road to Christianity. Christian ideas and ideals are not imprisoned in Christians and Churches. They have spilled over into the broad world. Cultures have mixed and religions have absorbed much from outside. In most fields of activity a Christian may choose, he may meet his own ethics and the handiwork of his Lord. Let us therefore leave all doubts behind, eschew pharisaism and march boldly without misgivings into the stream of life. The main issue that confronts us is not whether we should cooperate with the non-Christians but where and how to do it in practical life. We propose to enquire in the second

part what fresh fields are open for cooperative activity for Christians in India.

II

Regions for Cooperative Activity

The regions within which Christians may cooperate with non-Christians are six in number, namely religion, morality, society, politics, economics and international affairs. We shall concern ourselves here with the first two of these, religion and morality, since it is in these regions that cooperation of Christians with non-Christians is most frequently criticized.

Cooperation in Religion

The orthodox Christian may think it preposterous to suggest any cooperation between Christians and non-Christians in Religion. But looked at from a different angle the proposal wears a different aspect and sounds reasonable. The Kingdom of God under different names has been a common dream of humanity. Moreover we observe a family resemblance between the vices and virtues of Christianity and other religions, though it may be true that each has also its characteristic moral traits. Indian national vices, caste- and class-consciousness, communalism, corruption and characterlessness are possessed by Christians and Hindus alike. I do not see why religions should not combine their reformist activities where they serve a good purpose. Such a combination may give mutual courage and strength. A group of reformers drawn from different religions, pooling their resources to root out these vices, may help to see with a kindly eye the values in other religions. Such a group offers a living contact to transmit the vital energies of one religion to another far better than wranglings, disputations and mutual recriminations. These will be silenced in the comradeship of the crusade. The impression that religion deals with sin and redemption only emphasizes one half, the lesser half, of the truth. Perfection, the other half of the truth often forgotten, stresses Christian growth and goal. Be ye perfect as your father in heaven is perfect, is as much a command as, Sin no more. The tendency in each religion to look at spots, the leprous spots, in other religions warps and distorts normal vision and turns us into moles and bats averse to light. Should we restore normal vision to religious men, the gains of cooperation may be more than we think it possible. A Christian may learn more from Keshab Chandra Sen's fervent love for Jesus, more about the Holy Spirit from Arabindo's exposition than from the tepid normal Christian services in the Church. The advantages to non-Christian religions would be even more conspicuous. A communion of religions at the highest levels—to adopt current political jargon—may be both revealing and inspiring. Such a cooperation need not involve any sacrifice of principles or essential loyalties.

The Parliament of Religions at Chicago did a good deal to educate each religion about other religions. The contacts however remained at intellectual level. An advance was made at a London session to have common worship at Westminster. Though members of other religions participated in the worship, Christian obscurantists distributed pamphlets and raised objections to such a course. Now that secularism has become a pressing danger to all religions, closing the ranks among their followers to meet their common adversary seems both prudent and wise and urgent. Science arms secularism with powerful instruments of persuasion and religions will forfeit their hold on humanity unless a common plan of action is devised. Response will be forthcoming once we cross the barricades of tradition and grasp the hands of fellowship stretched across the borders. My experience in this matter proves that if the inter-religious conferences draw the chaff on one hand, on the other they skim the cream in other faiths. Sincerity, love, respect and honesty form the right atmosphere for the Spirit to thrive. The United Nations' common prayer hall contributes more to promote international amity and fellowship than its political debates in open sessions.

Cooperation in Morality

The challenge of M.R.A. has not been widely responded to by the Churches. Judging without any predilection towards or bias against and not allowing theological views to shape opinion, it may be said that M.R.A. demonstrates three truths for Christians. 1. What seem to be the most inhospitable and unpromising areas for moral work such as politics and economics turn out to be not so formidable when we enter to deal with them in a proper way. 2. The cooperation between Christians and non-Christians in these aspects of national life are practicable and when practised mutually uplifting. 3. Divisions of men into warring camps throughout society interposes insuperable difficulties. Interestingly however the Christian meets unsuspected difficulties and also unexpected allies and supporters who respond to moral appeals. The main source of misunderstandings in industrial labour has been the pictures drawn of the Boss and the Worker in popular press and propaganda, but when brought together they find they are in reality unlike the portraits they have formed in their minds of each other, that both sides are human and willing to accommodate. The experience of M.R.A. has shown that in all circumstances there are some, larger in number than we anticipate, who respond to higher ideals. The division of mankind into goats and sheep does more harm than charity can repair. The Society of Friends in their several experiences have a similar tale to tell. We hope Christian leaders will try the M.R.A. and Friends' techniques more extensively than they have done in communal conflicts where the need for reconciliation remains as great and urgent as elsewhere.

Morality has a tendency to extricate itself from will and emotion from which it generates and to create a ground of its own to stand upon. If we study the life of Jesus, we find much that can be communicated as life only, as well as much that stands after emerging from His personality, apart from Him. The Sermon of the Mount can be adopted by a Hindu and Christian alike. Morality travels into the universal life quicker than religion. Our Constitution takes for its foundation liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. These morals of democracy though born in the French Revolution have spread all over the world and influenced political idealism and ethics. The objectivity of morals make it a common vineyard for labourers. Christians in this country have almost a virgin forest to cultivate with regard to fundamental morals. They can not only be vigilant in protecting them but also propagate them among masses. The golden rule of Christianity, to do unto others as you would like to be done by, of socialism, Give according to your talents and receive according to your needs, of utilitarianism, the highest good of the largest number—are ethical foundations of secular life. These foundations have to be laid by Christians and non-Christians together.

Unfortunately, religious ethics flounders at the base and talks more of the Ten Commandments than of the Sermon of the Mount. At the base, morality presents a choice between two incompatibles, good and evil, and at higher altitudes a choice between lower and higher, between grades of compatibles. Theft and adultery are incompatible with property and chastity respectively. One cannot have both and one has to choose between them. Selfishness within bounds may be not a sin but a lower virtue than selflessness. We have not risen to the level of regarding the choice between good and better to be as imperative as the choice between good and bad. The highest moral virtues of religion call for comradeship, joint action and planning, so far unknown to history. Religions agree about immorality but have no consensus of opinion of basic morality. I have seen the sinners in all religions forming a masonic brotherhood. I have yet to see saints in religions shaking hands.

Recently some of our prominent politicians issued a manifesto calling attention to the national vices of casteism, linguism, communalism and provincialism—all new manifestations of the spirit of caste. The appeal looks like bolting the door after the colt is stolen. Politicians who clamoured for linguistic provinces have forfeited the right to preach sermons on unity. All the same whoever errs and however egregiously, facts have to be faced. To separatism, we have to add corruption and want of character to get anything like an adequate list of national vices. Corruption prevails in the administration and among people. It runs through the whole of the body politic—being in the blood and not localizable in a limb. Since everybody is involved in it, nobody is anxious to eradicate it. Commercial immorality has

cost us a good deal of the foreign trade which we so much need for implementing the Second Plan. It has lowered us in the estimation of the world. The mechanism of correction, tardy, clumsy, defective, has to be changed. The bribe-giver and the bribe-taker deserve short shift. The third of the trio, characterlessness, takes a heavy toll. All may not have attained to saintly morality but elementary principles shaping life, called character, are within everybody's reach. The proportion of moral failures in India in social and political life stands dangerously high. National morality offers a hitherto unavailed opening for action. National vices are hard to deal with as everybody turns a blind eye towards them. They are called national because they infect all religions, though they are rarely confessed. To cope adequately with them demands men of strong will and determined purpose from every religion. No Christian can afford to throw stones at his unredeemed brethren as these vices taint him quite as much. M.R.A. in India should bring within its jurisdiction national morality.

Ethics has enlarged its domain very widely in the last two centuries. The Ten Commandments were sufficient for the primitive tribe of Israel but hundreds of such prohibitions in the Indian Penal Code are insufficient for modern India. Under the name of codes, professions have framed their own laws of conduct. The underworld has its own code and there are things which even criminals cannot commit without losing caste such as 'peaching'. Ethics has invaded sport and games have enriched the moral vocabulary. Gamblers abhor marked cards. Woodhouse, writing mostly about the sick, lazy, good-for-nothings known as lounge lizards, points out that they too have their totems and taboos in his 'code of Woosters'. A research of this baffling phenomenon of morality, contracting at the brain-end and expanding at the tail-end, may throw much light on national morals and arm the reformers with knowledge that may be of much help. Whether a similar expansion of morals has taken place in the East as in the West requires investigation by reformers from every religion, in view of their vociferous complaint of the decline of morals.

The Goals of Cooperation

Cooperation may be static or dynamic, may stand still or move towards a goal or destination. Towards what goals should our cooperation be directed? Our study will be defective without a glance at aims and objectives of cooperation. To the Christian the grand terminus of all his efforts should be clear. It rings through life and teachings of Jesus, Kingdom of God. What does this mean in concrete terms?

1. The extension of the family into the State. Primitive races based their expansion on the blood-bond, that is descent from a real or supposed ancestor. Thus they developed clan

from family. In the modern world we have to transcend the blood-bond. A new cement has to be discovered. Territory and nationality have been tried and found wanting. Where and how shall we discover the new bond ? Anyway the encroachment of State into the family has to be countered, for it robs life of love and sacrifice and other higher ethical values of the family. The family has to be enlarged but in the process we should not lose all that constitutes the family as the high water mark of life. The State ought to be family writ large and not family a State writ small.

2. In India custom has to be replaced by conscience. The great obstacle to progress in India during the last few centuries has been custom which has imprisoned the spirit of India in traditions and institutions. Custom preserves life in cement-moulds and ultimately kills all desire for progress. Custom has accomplished its purpose of preservation. We are in the transition stage between yugas. Moulds have to be broken and the spirit liberated to brood over the waters of life and bring forth a new creation.

3. The aim of the Kingdom of God should be kept in view. We should be not only pragmatic but also idealistic. A new earth and a new heaven, a new mankind, are our ambitions. For the salvation of Sagar's children heavenly Ganges had to be brought down to earth. So also for the redemption of mankind Jesus brought down the Holy Spirit from heaven. We should make it available for mankind. This is true evangelism. The State and Science are both rivals of religion. They are both trying to take the Kingdom of God by violence. Can we impart it naturally ?

4. Democracy, a dynamic concept, develops and unfolds. Neither capitalism nor communism has exhausted its possibilities. If democracy signifies government of the people, through the people, by the people, we have to make much headway and look beyond representative government. Self-governance of the people by themselves has yet to be explored and realized. The circle has to be completed by restoring this missing arc to the orb that is incomplete.

We have considered the two ways of the Christian life—the apartheid and the brotherly, and tried to show that the latter and not the former embodies the spirit of Jesus. Christianity brings us the power that enters humanity in all its parts and transmutes and transfigures them. This cannot be done by preaching and teaching or by dogmas and creeds. It can only be done by skin-to-skin contact transmitting the life-energies.

We have nothing to do with the world ; we are in the world but not of the world ; we are for transforming the world into the Kingdom of God. Thus expressed in varying ways the mission of Christians in the world was conceived in the past and has to be conceived in the future. Christianity, itself light, life and love, does not shun darkness and death, and is not afraid of hatred.

To reduce these attributes of life into a notation of ideas and propositions is completely to misunderstand the religion of Jesus. Christianity descends, transforms and loves. The great reformation of Christianity in India reverses the process of the Reformation in the West. There religions were made propositional—dogma and doctrine. Here they can be made prepositional—religion that works *with* the people.

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I seek Whom I know not

I seek whom I know not!
He draws my soul;
I go and know not that I go!

Through the shoreless dark
A still small voice calls me;
I grope my way unseeing, unthinking:
I know only that God is.

Who shall tell me
By what name to call Him,
Where to find Him?

I have neither knowledge
Nor have I yoga;
I only follow the scent.

Ah, where shall I find Him
To whom I have given my heart?

Bengali Hymn