A MATTER OF RITE

(AN EXAMINATION OF THE ONE-RITE MOVEMENT)

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(an examination of the one-Rite movement)

"In an exaggerated devotion to unity
and concord.....certain zealots have
attempted to corrupt these sacred (Oriental) Rites."

Pope Pius XI

* * * *

"Let all Orientals know and be sure that
they may and must always keep their
legitimate liturgical rite and their discipline."

II Vatican Council

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Preamble

A new and disturbing development in Kerala is the emergence of a movement that seeks to suppress the existing Eastern and Latin Rites and to erect a single new Rite in their place. A close examination of the One-Rite movement has now become necessary because of its deeply damaging implications and of its anti-Oriental slant.

An able presentation of the case for 'One Rite' has appeared in the Kerala organ of this movement.* This 5000-word article is a vigorous plea for "a single indigenous Rite for the whole of Kerala". We have selected this article for special treatment because the chief arguments of the One-Rite movement are set forth in it. Further, the author, a learned priest, writes in the first person plural indicating thereby that he is the spokesman of a group.

It is clearly stated in that article that 'rite' is used in it not in the restricted sense of 'liturgy', but in the broad sense of 'church' with its hierarchy, discipline and spirituality. So, then, their demand is not merely for one common liturgy for Kerala but for the suppression of the existing particular churches in Kerala and for the creation of a new church in their place. This demand is not lightly made; it is supported with the following arguments:

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* 'Rite Pluralism in Kerala' by Rev. Fr. S. Kappen, S. J., published in 'Vaidikamitram', Jan. 1969.

1 There are inter-ritual conflicts in Kerala and a proliferation of institutions and church buildings.

2 The Rites in Kerala (the people and their liturgies) are in conflict with the culture and the religious genius of the people of the land.

3 The Kerala Rites being alien on the whole, the church in Kerala is anaemic and infertile and the christians here have no authentic religious experience.

4 Pluralism of Rites impedes pastoral action; it adversely affects ecumenical prospects and evangelisation.

5 The suppression of the Eastern Rites in Kerala is not against the spirit of Vatican II.

6 Rite pluralism is against the very nature of the Church which is "the sign and instrument of the unity of mankind".

These are specious arguments and must be carefully examined. We shall deal with them in the order given above.

I Rite Conflicts

The one-Rite treatise begins with an analysis of the socio-cultural differences between the Latins and the Orientals in Kerala. The sponsors of One Rite claim that Rite pluralism is in itself a source of tension and that the different Rites cannot justify their existence. * They are of the view that the duplication of institutions by the different Rites breed rivalry and suspicion. One new Rite in the place of the existing Rites, they say, is the only remedy.

* A Jesuit Father from Ranchi writes in Vaidikamitram (March, 1969) as follows: "The fact that one or other of these [oriental] Rites has been in use for many centuries is a poor excuse for survival. The fact is that the Church has not benefited by them. They are at present a positive hindrance to united effort and progress."

In the course of their analysis of Rite conflicts, however, they make some significant admissions. They admit that "Rite pluralism need not necessarily lead to disunity" and that there may be conflicts even inside a single Rite. They take the view that "inter-ritual tension in Kerala is maintained only by a small minority of ecclesiastics" and that it has little popular support. Another conclusion they draw is that "as a result of the forces of symbiosis and the forces of convergence both Latins and Orientals are coming closer to each other". They admit that caste prejudices, too, are a source of conflict.

These admissions virtually take the wind out of the argument that the Rites in Kerala should be buried unsung because they are in serious conflict. The naked truth is that conflicts in Kerala are often inflated to support the thesis that the Rites should be suppressed. The one-Rite group does this, but then they have also got to deflate the baloon of conflict in order to argue that the people of the various Rites are almost ready to accept 'one Rite'! Thus the latter part of their argument cancels out the former! A truth that is expressed out of proportion with other truths sometimes becomes strangely changed into its direct opposite, as in this instance.

The conflicts in Kerala must be seen in their historical perspective; their sources are chiefly racial and communal. The Northists and the Southists among the St. Thomas Christians have been using the same Rite for over twelve centuries; they were also under the same ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This situation had the semblance of 'one Rite under one ecclesiastical jurisdiction'. Nevertheless dissensions between the two groups were not mitigated until separate Bishops were given to each within the same territory. Again, for over four centuries the two sections in the Latin community, known as the seven Hundred and the Five Hundred, were following the same Latin Rite and were under the same

ecclesiastical jurisdiction. They could not go on peaceably together and now each section has its own Bishop (of Cochin and of Alleppey), each Bishop exercising jurisdiction not only in his territory, but also over parishes of his community in the territory of the other.

It is clear, then, that a single Rite or single jurisdiction has not been able to ensure unity among the christian communities in Kerala. The dissensions now in question are not precisely between the Latins and the Orientals, but fundamentally between the communities which happen to be of the same Rite or of the different Rites. * Some rivalry and tension may be traced to the many anomalies created by western missionaries who insisted on establishing the Latin Rite even in Kerala, the home of the St. Thomas Christians. It will, however, be nearer the truth to say that conflicts are not caused by the Rites as such but occasionally manifested through them. Sequence should not be confused with consequence.

Any conflict that exists among the various communities must be stopped effectively, but to propose the suppression of Rites as the only means for this will be unrealistic as well as unwise. One need not be a prophet to see that this proposed remedy will be worse than the disease. If it is argued that an atmosphere of christian harmony, in which the people will accept one Rite, already exists in Kerala or that that harmony can be created with a little effort, it can also be argued that the people can be persuaded to live together in charity and harmony in the existing Rites. Mutual understanding and christian charity among the communities as well as pastoral co-operation and unity among the Bishops and the priests seem to be the only realistic remedy for conflicts and rivalries.

* If in Kerala communities are generally constituted on the basis of caste, occupation etc., in Europe and elsewhere they are constituted on the basis of race, language, and nationality.

The Vatican Council directs that where there is multiple jurisdiction, the Bishops of the different Rites should meet together from time to time for consultation and common planning. There are, besides this, various practical ways in which the harmony among the Rites can be fostered: (a) Common conferences and Retreats for priests of the various Rites working in one area as well as the exchange of pulpits by them would strengthen their fellowship. (b) Various common undertakings (such as united celebrations for Mission Sunday and Feast of Christ King) to bring together the parishioners of various Rites in one area could be planned and put into effect by an inter-Rite co-ordination committee. (c) If there is a church or institution of one Rite in an area, another Rite should not build a new church or an institution of the existing type there. (The Catholic Bishops in Kerala have already come to an understanding on this.) (d) If there are peoples of several Rites in a locality, one church building may be used for the worship of the different Rites at different hours. (e) The Holy See can take effective steps to bring about the necessary agreements between the Rites and to ensure that they are implemented.

If we are sincere and earnest about putting an end to the conflicts of communities, there certainly are ways of doing it. If, on the other hand, the conflicts are merely made a smoke-screen for maligning the Rites, that will be superlatively contemptible.

The multiplication of institutions is good or bad only in relation to the needs of a particular area. If, however, it is a crime in itself, not only the Rites but also the Religious Orders are guilty of it.* If, therefore,

* Let us give one of several instances known to us. When the Society of Jesus tried to set up a college outside the window of Mar Ivanios College in Trivandrum (against the written assurance already given by them), the Mar Ivanios College authorities complained to the Jesuit Superiors and to ecclesiastical authorities and they were told that the breach of promise did not matter juridically and that the Jesuits had the right to start a college where they wanted !

Fr. Kappen and his friends argue that the Rites must be abolished because they lead to the proliferation of Catholic institutions, they should, in fairness, first ask for the suppression of the Religious Orders which have had no small share in the multiplication of Catholic institutions in Kerala. May we ask Fr. Kappen if he would care to apply his criticism of the 'duplication of institutions' and his complaint about the 'excessive power wielded by a minority' first to his own Society in Kerala?

We should like to ask the sponsors of one-Rite a simple question. If after one-Rite is established in Kerala, there are still conflicts among Kerala Catholics, what, then, will be the remedy? To destroy the one Rite and revive the suppressed Rites? The supremely important thing needed today is a real conversion of heart and the building up of christian charity among us and not the suppression of Rites. We wish to God that the skill and the resources converging behind the one-Rite movement were directed towards the building up of harmony among the people of God and not the sowing of seeds for further dissension among them!

II (a) The 'Foreignness' of St. Thomas Christians

The one-Rite enthusiasts concede that there may be a slight degree of difference between the Latin and Oriental liturgies in their foreignness to India, but they are categoric in their belief that the people of all the three Rites in Kerala are 'in conflict with the culture and religious genius of the people of the land'. According to them, neither the Latins nor the Orientals have struck cultural roots in the Indian soil; they and their liturgies are alien to India.

The one-Rite group seems to claim the right to speak with equal authority about the Latins and the Orientals, but we must limit ourselves to the Oriental traditions in India. We repudiate most emphatically the very notion that the heritage of St. Thomas Christians is foreign to Indian culture.

Those good fathers who have come to India from Europe and some of those Indians trained by them may well feel that they are foreigners to Indian culture. They may have a right to feel that way, but they have no right to thrust their complexes upon the people of this land. In all modesty we claim that, as St. Thomas Christians, we are no less Indian than the present (Muslim) President of the Indian Republic. In fact, Christianity came to India long before Islam and the Eastern Christian traditions in India have become an integral part of Indian culture. We have been organically integrated with the main stream of life in this country.

Students of history know that at Diamper (may her tribe not increase!) the complaint against the St. Thomas Christians was not that they had disowned Indian culture, but that they were so much like the Hindus, hardly distinguishable in their pattern of life. * They had embraced Christianity without in any way cutting themselves off from the culture and civilization of their ancestors. Even a cursory reading of the decrees of Diamper and of the reports subsequently sent to Rome by the missionaries will convince anyone of this fact. Today the Christians in Kerala are in no way different in their cultural outlook from their non-Christian neighbours. A good many of the socio-ecclesiastical customs of the St. Thomas Christians (especially those related to birth, marriage and death) are christianised Hindu customs. Perhaps Kerala is the one part of India where Christianity is looked upon as native to the soil. Even Pandit Nehru paid that compliment to the ancient Christians of Kerala. The Eastern Christians in India, including the strong non-Catholic groups, are a constituent of the wonderful cultural symphony of this ancient land. Indian heritage, it is well known, is a synthesis of many strands of culture—Dravidian, Aryan, Christian, Muslim etc. Why should the Christian tradition alone be labelled un-Indian?

* Vide Hough J., The History of Christianity in India [London, 183-], p. 543 f.

Here we are tempted to raise a very relevant question. Why do the protagonists of 'one Rite' not demand the suppression of all foreign Religious Orders in India and the evolution of a new indigenous Religious Order for India? The Catholic Religious Orders in India, as far as we know, (with the exception of the C. M. I. and the O. I. C.) have little that is Indian. If the Church that has existed here from the first century can be dubbed as foreign, how much more do most of these Religious Orders deserve to be labelled as foreign in India? Take, for instance, the Society of Jesus, whose spirituality is Ignatian, not Indian. Can it not be said that even their idiom of life is more foreign than Indian? There may be a few individuals to whom this does not apply, but is this not true of the life and spirit of the Society of Jesus as a whole? If the Eastern Rites in India are to be suppressed because "they are not fully Indian", how much more reasonable will it be to demand the suppression of the Religious Orders that are manifestly un-Indian? If it is argued that each Religious Order has its own particular discipline, witness and contribution, by the same token one can argue for the diversity of Rites, too. The Rites have a deeper, truer and more distinctive contribution to make than the Religious Orders. After all, Religious Orders are not constitutive of the Church in the sense in which the Rites are.

The Jesuit Father, who so lightly sits in judgment over the Eastern Rites in India and so presumptuously tells them, it is desirable that they cease to exist, may not perhaps find it so comfortable to sit in judgment over his own Religious Order. We ask forgiveness of Fr. Kappen for reminding him that the men of his Order (as well as of some others) had once before sat in judgment over the Eastern Christians in Kerala. It will be a pity if, while asking us to see the finger of God in the incipient one-Rite movement in Kerala, Fr. Kappen and his confreres fail to grasp the meaning of the big events in history in which our fore-fathers were confronted

by the Portuguese and the Jesuits. The efforts now made to propagate 'one Rite' remind us of the Diamper days of long ago, when essays were written and speeches were made by the Jesuits and the Portuguese to convince the St. Thomas Christians that conformity with the Latin Rite would make them better Christians! Let it, however, be said to the credit of the sponsors of Diamper that they at least had not demanded the wiping out of the Oriental Church in Kerala.

We are pained and astonished by the propaganda now being made in India and abroad to belittle and even malign the ancient Eastern Catholics in India.* We would humbly ask these detractors to imagine what the Indian Church minus the ancient Eastern Christians of India would be. This ancient community has its weaknesses, but foreignness is not one of those. Our 'foreignness' exists only in the imagination of some intellectuals who are neither here nor there. Some of these self-authenticated judges seem to be more anxious to disprove the Apostolic origin of the Eastern Christians in India and to discredit their cultural heritiage than to build up the Church of God. We say this not for the pleasure of raising an accusing finger, but to show how the 'one Rite' movement appears to us as part of a continuing endeavour to discredit us and to destroy our identity.

II (b) Eastern Liturgies Alien in India?

The one-Rite advocates bracket the Eastern Liturgies in India with the Latin and label them all as 'foreign and exotic'. They are, in their view, 'out of harmony with the Indian mind and they have faild to strike roots in the life of the masses.' They make a small concession regarding the Syro-Malankara liturgy, which has "some emotional appeal to the people." (We should be thankful for small mercies!)

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* We have in mind articles that have recently appeared in the Jesuit magazine 'Die Katholischen Missionen' (published from Bonn) and in a few magazines published from the U. S. A.

In principle there is nothing against the plan to adapt a liturgy to changing conditions of time and place, but we must not allow the adaptation of the liturgy to become an obsession. The primary purpose of adaptation should be the building up of the faithful and not cultual syncretism. The faithful are not guinea pigs! Great care should, therefore, be taken in any adaptation not to uproot the people's devotional life. This must be the reason why the Vatican Council recommends that when liturgical reforms are contemplated, "care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 23.)

In this context it would be profitable to ponder over an Anglican experiment for an Indian Liturgy. A group of Anglican scholars working in India (among them were the Rev. J. C. Winslow and the Rt. Rev. William Lash) published some years ago what they described as a 'plastic model' for an Indian Liturgy.* In its original form it was prefaced by a series of essays pleading the need of a distinctive vehicle for the Eucharistic dovotion of Indian worshippers. The argument of the compilers was that the Eastern liturgies provided a form of worship more congruous to the religious temperament of an oriental people than the forms of Western liturgies. In compiling the Indian liturgy they laid under contribution an Eastern liturgy (Syriac St. James) with which they had come into contact.

The makers of the 'Indian liturgy' saw in their model several distinctive features which, they believed, would commend themselves to the Indian mind. Here is a summary of their arguments: 1. This Eastern liturgy gives full play to the mystic and contemplative instinct of India and at the eame time corrects its defects by its emphasis on the historical and by its demand for holiness from the worshippers. 2. The emphasis on the fellowship of the

* The Indian Liturgy, Oxford University Press, 1948.

Saints and the veneration of spiritual leaders in this liturgy will appeal to the Indian mind. 3. Akin to the veneration of Saints is the reverence paid to the deceased ancestors in India. The liturgy of St. James is rich in this emphasis. 4. Sacrifices are a feature of Indian religions and the emphasis on the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist in this liturgy commends it to the Indian situation. 5. The colour and ceremonial surrounding this Eastern liturgy, its sense of mystery and majesty, appeals to the Hindus accustomed to colourful religious pageants and observances. 6. The large share of the people in this liturgy and the frequent biddings by the Deacon guiding the people make this liturgy truly congregational and give it a remarkable spontaneity. 7. The carefully ordered sequence of prayer, penitence and praise in this liturgy, its universal sweep, the focus of the whole economy of salvation in it and, above all, its centrality in the worship and life of the people will make this liturgy a truly memorable experience for any devout Indian.

The above points are more or less applicable to the restored East Syrian liturgy of the Syro-Malabar church, too. Perhaps the greatest tribute to these Eastern liturgies is the fact that many of the liturgical reforms inspired by Vatican II are a return to the values enshrined in them. The Eastern liturgies have always had an exalted place in the symphony of Eucharistic worship offered by the universal Church. They offer us a precious link not only with the undivided church of the Nicean era but also with the Apostolic cell in the early church. They began and grew with the church. They drew their spirituality and took their shape from the very lands and christian people that are the source and historic cradle of our faith. The liturgy of St. James or of 'the Apostles' SS. Addai and Mari is no more foreign to India than the Holy Scriptures. They are Asian in origin. Even the kinetic shape of these Eastern Liturgies, the postures and gestures, are in tune with the

Orient. After all, the essential structure of the liturgy handed over to the Apostles by Christ and cannot, therefore, be altered, first took shape in Jerusalem and Antioch. This structure cannot be considered foreign anywhere.

Competent scholars have acclaimed the Eastern liturgy of St. James as "one of the most sublime liturgies in christendom." Adrian Fortescue laments that this great and venerable parent liturgy is possessed by a small church. In the Indian context, however, Fortescue's lament is not entirely relevant. For, in India, this liturgy is used by the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church and the Mar Thoma Church (Reformed). The oldest liturgy of India is that of 'the Apostles' SS. Addai and Mari. In its genuine form this liturgy is most semitic in its ethos and deeply Biblical in its style and idiom.

Now that the Syro-Malabar rite (East Syrian) has been restored to proper form and many of its Latinisms removed, it can together with the Syro-Malankara rite (West Syrian) form a living witness to the Eastern tradition of life and worship in India. If newness in the liturgy does not become an obsession and if prejudice is not made the last ditch of pride, the Anglican experiment for an Indian liturgy should open our eyes to the inestimable value of the Eastern Liturgies in the Indian setting.

A living liturgy cannot be created in the study and it would be a good thing, therefore, to make a sincere effort to adapt the existing liturgies bringing them closer to Indian cultural modes rather than to manufacture new ones. This is important because it will be foolish to cut ourselves off from the immense experience of the Eucharist in the past. Continuity is on the whole more complete in the liturgy than in other Christian traditions. The liturgy was before the first lines of the New Testament were written. In the liturgy, thus, we pray not only with our contemporaries but also with men who have lived in all centuries.

"The Eastern Liturgies", says Salaville, "possess a common fund of great qualities—a wealth of theological teaching, devotional spirit, richness in ascetical doctrine, a frequent and special use of Holy Scripture, importance assigned to Patristic elements, a variety, a splendour and a popularity which give these liturgies a clear superiority over the corresponding western rites..... In fact the Eastern liturgies, even more than the Roman liturgy, form a locus theologicus or theological source[1]."

Abbe Quenet, writing of Eastern Christians says: "The Church has no wish to upset them in their faith by upsetting them in their rites..... The loss of the treasures found in the Eastern liturgical tradition would be for the Church a grave impairment of her catholicity, a retreat entailing grave, incalculable consequences[2]."

If the Eastern liturgies are, indeed, a valuable treasure in the Church, how glad should we be, in that, by divine providence, we have these venerable liturgies preserved in our midst. It gives us a chance in India to have the dynamic experience of the liturgical diversity and richness of Catholic worship. How easy it is to pull down the ancient edifices, but how insuperably difficult to erect new ones in their place! The Eastern Liturgies in India cannot be relegated to the museum without vitally impoverishing the liturgical life of the Church in India. Those who refuse to discover the Eastern Rites fail to discover the Indian church.

When one sees the inroads that Liberal Protestantism appears to be making in the Catholic Church today, one longs for the continued witness of the venerable Eastern traditions, wherever it is possible, in the Church. For, the over-balance of sanity in theology seems to be, more than ever before, on the side of Eastern christianity.

When it is proposed that a new liturgy that will be drawn up by some scholars (presumably Europeans) in their

1. An Introduction to the Study of Eastern Liturgies
2. L' unite de l' Eglise

study should replace the ancient and glorious Oriental liturgies in India, we are tempted to ask, Where is christianity or even sanity in that proposal? We do not ask that the Latins in India should adopt the Eastern liturgy or Rite; we shall welcome their efforts to make for themselves a liturgy better adapted to India. What we do ask is that we should continue to enjoy the catholic liberty to live and worship in our ancient Oriental Rites. Far be it from us to forfeit our Oriental patrimony or to resign our inalienable right in the Catholic communion.

III. Anaemia and Infertility in the Kerala Church

'Dr'. Kappen and his friends make a diagnosis of the church in Kerala and give the verdict that it is 'anaemic, infertile, devoid of original thinking and incapable of authentic religious experience or even true ecclesial experience.' Their prescription, of course, is simple: take a dose of 'One Rite!'.

It is always a delicate matter to speak in self-defence: either you seem self-complacent or appear to be 'holier than thou.' Even so, the above charges must be faced. Anyone can prepare a catalogue of blemishes that applies to the Church in most parts of the world. Where, we may ask, is the perfect Catholic Church? Most of the original thinkers and able theologians of the Church today belong to Europe and many in India have learnt to look up to them for the last world in theology and spirituality. And yet, on closer scrutiny, what do we find in the home grounds of these same thinkers and theologians? What is the percentage of people who participate in their indigenous liturgies in those countries? What is the state of morals and family life there? Are not some of them perilously close to paganism? Let us judge Kerala in this wider context.

Kerala christians have their shortcomings; they have some assets, too. Kerala Catechism has no Dutch flavour, but the church here is one of the most fertile, vigorous and

disciplined units in the Catholic Church today. It may be claimed that the church in India as a whole derives considerable strength from the church in Kerala. As of today, there are over 700 Diocesan priests, 650 Religious priests, 700 Religious Brothers and 6900 Religious Sisters from Kerala labouring in different parts of India. A good number of parishes in Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and other cities derive strength from the support of the Eastern Christian diaspora. The number of vocations from Kerala is perhaps the highest anywhere in the world. Kerala has a far higher proportion of enlightened and competent laity compared to any other part of India. Kerala christians on the whole are a great witness for the sanctity of the family. Nearly 70% of the Catholic university students in India belong to Kerala. Are these the signs of anaemia and infertility? It is, alas, true that all these have never been adequately reflected in the life and administration of the Catholic Church in India; but that is another story.

The Syro-Malabar church has not been, until very recently, given a chance to be itself. This church was forcibly Latinized by the Portuguese and the western missionaries and their priests were trained in Latin Seminaries for centuries. Until recently they were forbidden to extend their missionary labours beyond Kerala * Perhaps no other part of the Catholic Church has been dominated and stifled so long. Yet the sadly ironic thing today is that this very church is now accused of being not original and not different from the Latins! Give them the liberty to be

* Art. 3 of the Decree on Catholic Oriental Churches deals with the equality of all rites in preaching the gospel. A knowledgeable commentator of this Decree states as follows:

"The real reason why the right to preach the Gospel (for missionary activity) is especially mentioned among the rights and obligations of all the individual churches is to be traced to the situation in India where the Malabar Church was until recently only permitted to convert people to the Latin Rite (outside Kerala)". P. 315, Vol. I, Comm. on the Documents of Vat. II, H. Vorgrimler.

entirely Eastern and be themselves and give them the opportunities for mission work; the chances are that inside of half a century they will blosom with a distinctive character and originality. With a Patriarch to preside over them, and with the support of the whole Church, they may well become the glory of the Asian Church.

The Syro-Malankara church, restored to full communion with the Holy See less than forty years ago, has become one of the greatest Re-Union movements in history. There are not many parallels to its growth in the history of the Catholic Church. We guess that the one-Rite propagandists have the Malankara catholics in mind when they speak of a minority, the magnitude of whose influence they do not relish. Today the Malankara catholics number over 1,63,000 and they have about 500 churches and mission centres. They have more than 300 priests and 600 monks and nuns. Their apostolate is by no means limited to Re-union, and their witness to the abiding values of Oriental christianity has been positive.

If some people choose to portray these Eastern catholics in India as anaemic and infertile, the obvious conclusion is that they have a purpose in doing so. When our shortcomings are inflated and used as an excuse for demanding our liquidation, how are we supposed to react? They even deny us the possibility of 'authentic religious experience' and 'true ecclesial experience.' This is unpardonable uncharitableness. Our only hope is that God will judge us more mercifully than the protagonists of 'one Rite.'

IV. Rite Pluralism and Ecumenism

The one-Rite group, in opposing Rite pluralism, argue (a) that the Church cannot bring about the unity of all christians if there is disunity within herself; (b) that where there is more than one Rite the dialogue with the separated brethren becomes the concern of individual Rites, not of the whole Church; (c) that even the Jacobites will prefer a new

indigenous liturgy to the 'Syrian' one and that even if they don't, "we cannot sacrifice truth for the sake of unity with the Jacobites."

Let us closely examine each link in this chain of arguments: we shall see that each link is a weak link!

(a) Disunity within the Church is certainly a negation of the Church's essential nature. But the trouble starts with the assumption that if there is more than one Rite in one country that must necessarily mean disunity. It is as erroneous as it is harmful Even if one Rite is imposed in the whole Church, will there not be ever so many possibilities of conflicts and rivalries? Is 'one Rite' a guaranteed preventive against conflicts? Were there no conflicts in the Church even in the Apostolic age? Are there no conflicts in India outside Kerala? Conflicts, like the poor, will always be with us! If we are willing and ready to live peacefully with our separated brethren, cannot we, the brethren in the same household of the Holy Father, dwell together in unity and concord? If this cannot be done, all our profession of Ecumenism and Dialogue will be evacuated of all meaning and motive. What is required today is christian charity and a real sense of catholicity and not 'one Rite'.

(b) Who said that the dialogue with the separated brethren should be the concern only of individual Rites? What, then, is the 'Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity' supposed to be doing? Is it not a fact that in the ecumenical study groups and conferences in various centres in Kerala priests and laymen from the various Rites participate actively? If the one-Rite group's complaint is that Jacobites seeking reunion are expected to join the Syro-Malankara Rite, it will mean that in their thinking dialogue is always conducted with a view to the reunion of individuals. This is not so. Even if it were so, why should the one-Rite people, who pretend to be detached from every Rite, worry about the Jacobites joining the Syro-Malankara church in which they can feel quite at home? Do they want

the Jacobites to become Latins or to resign their ancient christian heritage and live like displaced persons?

(c) The 'one-Rite' group surpass themselves when they suggest that the Jacobites might prefer some new study-room liturgy to the ancient liturgy which has become the core of their life. At the Kerala Regional Seminar in Alwaye in December 1968 the delegates at a plenary session listened in silence to the authentic voice of the Jacobites through their representative, the Very Rev. Cor-Episcopa T. S. Abraham, who was also his church's observer at the Vatican Council. This venerable priest declared emphatically that if the unity of churches would mean the suppression of the Syrian Orthodox heritage and liturgy in India, his church would have nothing to do with that unity. Let us quote also from an ecumenical declaration made recently by the Orthodox, Mar Thoma, C. S. I. and Syro-Malankara churches in Kerala: "We declare that unity is not to be sought in the absorption of one church or groups of churches in another, but that every church should retain all that is authentic in its christian tradition, its liturgical rites and customs, its ecclesiastical discipline and system of church government and its spiritual patrimony, in so far as these are compatible with the Holy Scriptures and the unity of the whole Church."

(d) Although they hopefully suggest that the Jacobites might agree to give up their liturgy (they do not say 'Rite'), they have a hunch that the Jacobites might not oblige and so they provide for that eventuality. They say that we will then have to leave out the Jacobites because we cannot "promote Christian unity at the cost of sacrificing truth and the good of the whole Church". This truth they have in mind can only be truth of a private brand; this good they have in view can only be the good of a narrow clique. These cannot have any ecumenical dimension. The One-Rite group may, in their prejudice, discard the feelings of the Orthodox Church in India, but the Eastern Catholics cannot and will not do this. "A Catholic should dread nothing so much as to make

access to the Church more difficult for some soul by giving the impression by word or action, that such a soul must renounce things to which he is legitimately attached..... the true catholic will sincerely try to profit by the differences of others" [1]

We have a solidarity with the Oriental Churches that we would cherish. "The double function of Eastern Catholics is to be witnesses of diversity in unity within the Catholic fold and of universality within particularity as far as the Eastern Church is concerned." [2] This is our vocation. We cannot, therefore, tamper with our liturgy and heritage, without taking into account the feelings of our Orthodox brethren. Otherwise the harm done to the cause of ecumenism in India will be incalculable. "It is too often forgotten that the Eastern communities united to Rome represent test cases for the Catholic ecumenical movement." [3] The united Church that is the goal of ecumenism, will not be a monolithic structure built on uniformity; it will be characterized by a great diversity in unity.

Rite pluralism, in the one-Rite view, impedes Pastoral action, too. They feel that in Kerala it is not possible to organize pastoral action on the basis of what Karl Rahner calls "the social differential principle" in order to meet the spiritual needs of social and professional groups of students, teachers, doctors, etc. We must say, they talk here like lunarians. Have they not heard of the AICUF, the Newman Association, the Catholic Medical Guild, The Catholic Women's Association, the Vincent de Paul Society, the Legion of Mary, the Catholic Congress and a host of other organizations that cut across all the Rites and bind together all Catholics in common prayer and corporate action? The Rites in Kerala, after all, do not live in water-tight compart-

1 Fr. De Montcheuil: Aspects de l'Eglise
2 Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh: "The Eastern Churches and Catholic Unity"
3 Ibid

ments. We can quote several instances when members of one Rite have helped substantially in the building up of churches and institutions of other Rites in Kerala. All men of good will should do all they can to deepen the existing spirit of charity and fraternity among our people and to widen the areas of co-operation. All propaganda for one-Rite, unfortunately, will only tend to be new wedges to separate the Rites in Kerala.

Ecumenism, like charity, begins at home. How can the Western Rites in the Catholic Church pretend that the doors of the Church are open to all, especially to the Orthodox, if under various pretexes they try to undermine the existing Eastern Rites in communion with Rome? How can we face the most important issue involved in ecumenical dialogue, that of diversity in unity, if we are unwilling to experience it here and now in our present milieux? Further, it would be strange if in this era of Ecumenism Catholics attempt to go it alone and evolve one Indian liturgy or Rite without the collaboration of the other christian churches in India.

V. *The Council and Eastern Rites*

In advocating the suppression of the Eastern Rites in India, the one Rite group anticipate the objection that this is against the Vatican Council's declaration that all lawfully acknowledged Rites should be preserved and fostered. Their answer to this objection is as follows: "To this we answer that the Council has in mind those Oriental Rites which have sprung out of indigenous cultures. To understand the conciliar wish in absolute sense would contradict the more fundamental concern of the same Council to foster the Catholicity of the Church."

If the proponents of 'one Rite' choose to defy the Vatican Council's decree, that is understandable, but their assumption that the Council has shown the green light for the suppression of the existing Eastern Rites in India or elsewhere passeth understanding. As Coleridge said about a

bad critic, it shows a sixth sense which is very far from common sense!

Let us first take a look at what the Council has actually said about Rites in general and about Eastern Rites in particular:

1. "....the sacred Council declares that Holy Mother Church holds all lawfully acknowledged Rites to be of equal right and dignity; that she wishes to preserve them in the future and to foster them in every way." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 4.)

2. "Everyone should realize that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve and foster the rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches." (Decree on Ecumenism.)

3. "Far from being an obstacle to the Church's unity, such diversity of customs and observances (of the Orientals) only adds to the Church's comeliness and contributes greatly to carrying out her mission." (ibid.)

4. "This sacred Council....declares that this entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology (of the Orientals) in their various traditions belongs to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church." (ibid.)

5. "These particular churches of both East and West, though partially differing from one another by their Rites–i.e., their liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline and spiritual patrimony–are all equally entrusted to the pastoral government of the Roman Pontiff.... All have thus the same dignity." (Decree on the Catholic Oriental Churches).

6. "Everywhere, therefore, care must be taken to preserve and develop all particular churches." (ibid.)

7. "..... All catholics, as well as the members of any non-catholic church or community who enter into the fulness of Catholic communion must everywhere retain their own Rite." (ibid.)

8. "..... Let all Orientals know and be sure that they may and must always keep their legitimate liturgical rite and their discipline." (ibid.)

9. Those who live and work among the Oriental churches "must..... acquire an accurate knowledge of and an esteem for the rites, discipline, the doctrine, the history and the character of the Orientals." (ibid.)

10. "The Oriental Churches in communion with the Apostolic Roman See have a special duty to promote the unity of all Christians ..... by careful fidelity to the ancient oriental traditions." (ibid.)

The Council documents bear witness to the fact that these decisions of the Council were almost unanimous and made after careful study and long discussions. Add to these the authentic voice of the modern Popes, and the mind of the Church regarding the Eastern traditions will be perfectly clear.

Pope Benedict XV said: "In our fatherly love we embrace..... the Eastern Churches..... The Church of Jesus Christ, because it is neither Latin nor Greek nor Slav but Catholic, makes no difference between her sons."

Leo XIII said: "The maintenance of the Eastern Rites is more important than might be thought. The antiquity that adds lustre to these Rites adorns the whole church and affirms the divine unity of the Catholic Church."

Pope Pius XI said: "In an exaggerated devotion to unity and concord..... certain zealots have attempted to currupt these sacred rites.... The Roman Pontiffs... have wished these Eastern Rites to be maintained in their integrity. For the Roman Pontiffs hold that liturgical diversity.... far from lessening the unity of our holy faith and worship, is rather a recommendation and an adornment for this unity."

Pope Pius XII explained that the Eastern Rites are to preserve not only their liturgy and their hierarchical orders

but "all that concerns other aspects of christian life, provided that they are in complete accord with the true faith and with the norms of good conduct."

Pope Paul VI in his homily preached during the Syro-Malankara liturgy at the Eucharistic Congress in Bombay said: "The plurality of these three traiditions (Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and Latin) in India is a living witness to the catholicity of the Church of Christ."

We should like to know if these clear and authentic declarations of the Vatican Council and of the Popes are to be brushed aside simply because they do not suit the 'one Rite' thesis. It is supremely important that on such grave issues a good catholic should consult the Church and not his own personal preference or whim.

The Council decree, quoted in the 'one Rite' thesis, about preserving and fostering all lawfully acknowledged Rites (Constitution on the sacred liturgy, 4) applies to *all* the Rites in the Catholic Church, but the one-Rite enthusiasts deliberately distort its scope and twist its meaning. They first suggest that the passage applies only to the Orientals and then slide into the presumption that it can apply "only to those Oriental Rites sprung out of indigenous cultures." * This is clever manoeuvring to suggest that the Eastern Rites in India are not indigenous and do not, therefore, come under the purview of the Council's decision to preserve and foster all lawfully acknowledged Rites. It is a little strange that the Vatican Council that was in session for four years should have left such an important matter to the inference of a theologian like Fr. Kappen!

* In the U S A. and Canada eparchies (Dioceses) have been established for Eastern Catholics: 7 for the Ukranians and 2 for the Ruthenians. Well over 100 parishes have also been organized for the less numerous Eastern groups. According to the 'one-Rite' version of the Vat Council's decision all these Eastern Catholics should be suppressed or made to join 'one American Rite'. If 'indigenous Rites' alone deserve to be preserved, it would be interesting to inquire what would happen to the Latin Rite in those countries where that Rite is not indigenous.

Even granting, for the sake of argument, that the Council desires the preservation only of those 'Oriental Rites sprung from indigenous cultures', the question still remains how this will shut out the Eastern Rites in Kerala. Fr. Kappen and his confreres of the anti-Oriental movement may not recognize the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara Rites, but these are as lawful and authentic as the Latin Rite in the Catholic Church. The dignity and status of these Rites are established and fostered in the Catholic Church through their Apostolic origin and through sacred and inviolable covenants.

The Eastern Christians in Kerala possessed from the start an Apostolicity and a closeness to the living springs of original Christian tradition. It is recorded that in the 16th century the Kerala Christians, speaking through their leader the 'Archdeacon', repeatedly told the Portuguese, "you follow the law of St. Peter and we follow the law of St. Thomas". It is clear that 'Law' in that context meant the whole ethos of church tradition. It is remarkable that the spokesman of the Eastern Christians could so spontaneously express the basic reason for his church's autonomy and diversity, namely its Apostolic foundation. This is not a concession shown to the Eastern Christians in India by the West, but a heritage they have entered into through divine providence. The Eastern Churches in India and elsewhere have survived and they are what they are today because of their Biblical and Apostolic origins. Their permanence in the Catholic communion is as primary as the primacy of the Pope.

The St. Thomas Christians in India have a Christian tradition that is longer than the Christian tradition in many western countries. Ours is a foundation as Apostolic as that of the church in Rome. If these churches that have an unbroken history and tradition reaching back to the Apostolic times, if these people who have been culturally integrated with this country from the very beginning, if these Orientals

who have been privileged to use the most ancient and glorious liturgies in Christendom, are now labelled as 'unlawful' and 'alien' in the Church, who, we may ask, is 'lawfully acknowledged' or indigenous anywhere in the Catholic Church ?

The one-Rite canvassers reveal that if the Eastern Rites in Kerala are allowed to continue as separate Rites (this must, of course, apply to the Syrian Orthodox Church, too), that will even be a negation of the catholicity of the Church! (*sic*)

Fortunately for us this one-Rite brand of catholicity will today be laughed out of court. "Catholicity", says Fr. De Montcheuil, "does not consist solely in the ability and the wish to reach all men and all peoples, but in the ability and the wish to gather them all together into one, not imposing a rigid uniformity on them, but maintaining their differences."[1] Ande Retif has this to say about the catholic spirit: "With regard to our brethren in Christ the catholic spirit demands that we pray for them and accept them as they are with all that differentiates them from ourselves."[2] Writing on 'Diversity of Rites and Christian Unity' Fr. Dalmais O. P. says: "Diversity of rites, with all it implies, is one of the points on which they (Eastern Catholics) can make a unique contribution to solving the problems faced today by a Church that must show by its behaviour that it is truly Catholic."

Most of the ills that have afflicted the Eastern Churches in India have been caused by undue influences of Western Christianity, under various forms, often with good intentions. These churches are now well on the road to the recovery of self-dignity and autonomy. And the Vatican Council has officially given them a basis for confidence and hope that should not be frustrated anymore.

The currency given to exaggerated versions of Rite conflicts, the plea for uniformity, the confusion made between

1. Aspects de l'Eglise.
2. The Catholic Spirit.

church and rite and the clever manipulation of conciliar texts, appear to be the signs of a widening tendency to deny the Eastern churches the very confidence and hope that the Council has legitimately given them. To argue that the Eastern Catholics in India do not qualify themselves for the protection guaranteed by the Vatican Council is disingenuous. To cast away so lightly a church with such deep roots in christian antiquity and in Indian culture is to prove oneself blind to the profounder realities of what is meant by the Church Catholic.

VI. *Unity and Uniformity*

Rite pluralism, according to the One-Rite thesis, is hardly compatible with the nature of the Church which is "the sign and instrument of the unity of mankind." They are also of the view that "the search for unity justifies the unification of all Catholics under one Rite." (on the basis of this view they should demand 'one Rite' for the whole world and not just for Kerala!)

It is strange that in the year of Our Lord 1969 any Catholic should fall into the old temptation of the Latins and identify unity with uniformity. The diversity of Rites in the Church in no way impairs her unity; on the other hand it is a mark of her universality and genuine catholicity. "The Roman Church", wrote Pius XII, "has always venerated them (the Rites) and religiously maintained them, ordering them to be preserved and arraying herself in them like a Queen in a golden robe of rich embroidery." Each Rite is, thus, a precious inheritance of the Church and goes to make up the full splendour of Catholic life and worship.

"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." *

* P. 357, The Documents of Vat. II ed., W. M. Abbot.

It is, therefore, both a privilege and a duty of those who belong to the different Rites of the Church to preserve all that properly belong to the traditions of their Rites.

The existence of the Eastern Rites within the Catholic Church is a guarantee and a sign of her catholicity both geographically and liturgically. The Eastern traditions are as important for the wholeness of the Church as the succession of St. Peter is for her unity and integrity.

Ande Retif in " The Catholic Spirit " describes diversity in unity as " the wonderful fecundity of the true faith " and considers it as " the mark of the divine presence and of the multiform action of the one Spirit ". He warns the Latins: " Catholics of the Latin Rite should have it at heart to show a more active interest in the Christian wealth of the East and to avoid any tendency towards narrow uniformity in the Church." How relevant this advice is in the situation in India today !

The Church is typified in the Old Testment as " the figure that is clothed in variety " and in the New Testament as " the community of all nations and peoples and tongues." Catholicism can, therefore, never be a monolithic faith. Moreover, no fruitful unity can emerge in Christendom if our declared aim is uniformity.

The argument (of the one-Rite group) that Rite pluralism is against the very nature of the Church " which is the sign and instrument of the unity of mankind " betrays a total ignorance of the pneumatological view of the Church with its structural principle of the 'koinonia' of individual churches. " One of the achievements of the Vatican Council was the re-discovery of the universal Church as the sum and communion of the local churches, understood as fully themselves and the re-discovery of the universal Church in the local church. The local churches enrich each other and also the universal Church." *

* H. Vorgrimler, Commentary on the Documents of Vat. II, P. 167.

Nicolas Zernov * (Russian Orthodox) makes a powerful plea for diversity in the Church. "God has created the world in unity and diversity. The Church is the summit of creation and it discloses and reflects the divine order. It is one, but its manifestations are many.....Uniformity is a particularly dangerous form of disobedience to the will of God, because it pretends to fulfil the divine command. It insists that the acceptance of one identically worded creed, the use of one rite, the imposition of the same church discipline for all, is God's intention and that this would strengthen Christians and make them more efficient and obedient to the call of the Holy Spirit. But in reality this longing for uniformity has no support in the New Covenant and is condemned by Church history. ....The persistent attempts of Christians to introduce uniformity have not only undermined their fellowship but also obstructed the vision of the Holy Trinity."

The very climax of irony is reached when the zeal for Indianness impels some people to demand the suppression of the only genuinely Indian part of the Christian Church. It is nothing short of perversion. This perversion is equalled by the further demand for uniformity made in the name of Catholicity.

Our aim must always be to preserve the wholeness of the body of Christ, recognizing gladly that it will not be a cast-iron uniformity, but will always include many varieties of rite, function and theological emphasis, if the Church is to present to the world all the riches of Christ, the whole treasure, in its earthen vessels.

* The Re-integration of the Church

Conclusion

(a) The Eastern Rites in India cannot and will not acquiesce in the demand for a new single Rite for Kerala or for India. We reject the one-Rite project because:

it will pave the way for the domination of the Kerala Church by those outside;

it is a positive threat to the identity and even the very existence of the Eastern Rites in India;

it will lead to deep conflict and strife in the Indian Church;

it will damage ecumenical prospects in India and bring Eastern Catholics into ridicule;

it will immeasurably impoverish the Catholic Church and disfigure the universal image of the Church;

it will be clearly against the mind of the Church expressed by the Popes and the Vatican Council;

it will adversely affect the Indianness of the Church in Kerala;

it will be contrary to the very genius of India which is a quest for unity in diversity.

If the Latin Rite Catholics in Kerala or outside favour a new Indian Rite they have the right to do this for themselves. It is legitimate that that church which is foreign in its origin as well as in its expressions should feel today the need for Indianization The Eastern Christians in India, too, may find further room for the adaptation of their forms of worship, but the difference here is profound. The Eastern Church in India has always been Indian. It has retained its authenticity, right and duty as an Apostolic Church just as the Church in Rome or Alexandria has. Any adaptation of the Eastern liturgies, therefore, will have to be done by Eastern Catholics themselves according to the genius of their liturgies and in collaboration with the Orthodox.

We believe that the support that the One-Rite group claims comes chiefly from some Latins and a few Orientals who either have not grasped the implications of this movement or are wanting in liturgical experience and formation. Make no mistake about it that when the full implications of the one-Rite demand are brought home to the Eastern Catholics, they will rise to a man and 'spue it out of their mouths.'

(b) A word about an 'Indian Rite' will be relevant in this context. In any plan to evolve an Indian Liturgy or Rite, the basic fact that should be borne in mind is that India is a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation. The plurality of cultures and religions in India make 'one Rite for India' an unwise and impracticable proposition. If a Rite more adapted to Hinduism is evolved, the same will have to be done with regard to Budhism, Jainism, Islam and other established religions in India. For, the identification of Indian national culture with Hindu culture is only one step lower than the identification of Indian nationality with the membership of the Hindu religion.

Even if Indianization is paraphrased as Hinduization, there again, the fact has to be faced that there is a bewildering variety of Hindu customs, religious practices and mutually exclusive systems of thought. Benares, Calcutta and Madura have their own patterns of Hindu worship: the Adivasis and others have their own modes. This variety is not casual in Hinduism; that is its genius. Unity in diversity is the very principle of Hinduism. So, then, even the adaptation of Hindu modes and customs would make a plurality of Rites imperative in India. If the other prominent religions in India are also to be reckoned with, the number of Rites is bound to go up. The wisdom of evolving one Rite for the whole of India thus becomes highly questionable.

Closer adaptation to Indian forms can be effective and meaningful only if it grew out of the living experience of the various Christian communities that are genuinely Indian and

authentically Christian. This cannot be merely a product of the study room. To pretend that the use of some prayers from the Upanishads or the substitution of candles with oil lamps, with a few dancing measures thrown in for extra flavour, will make the Church indigenous to India, is as superficial as it is unrealistic. (How about offering flowers before images and divestment instead of vestment for priests?). What should come first is the Indianization in depth of our life and thought; that is the real challenge facing us today.

Whether we decide to make one new Rite or many, it is supremely important that this should not be undertaken either by foreigners with bookish knowledge of some Indian systems or by those Indians who, through their training or prejudice, have become aliens to oriental thought and idiom of life. The ability to enter into the spirit of the Oriental liturgies and Rites and to appreciate them is in a way a test of the ability to enter deeply into the spirit of Indian heritage and culture.

(c) Finally, we should like to touch on two important problems. First, of the very large number of Eastern Catholics living in Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and other cities in India. Bomby city alone has about 30,000 Orientals who are constrained to live the Latin Rite. Some of them know only Malayalam and would not be able to make use of the facilities provided by the Latin Rite churches. Several are in danger of drifting away from the Church altogether. The Orthodox and Mar Thoma Churches of Kerala take good care of their diaspora in various parts of India, but the Catholic Orientals had so far been forbidden to fulfil their responsibility in this. The Vatican Council has now prescribed (Art. 4, Decree on Catholic Oriental Churches) that parishes and even eparchies may be established for these people. This would be an effective means of projecting the idigenous image of the Catholic Church in India. Will this decree be translated into action? This will be a real test of

ecumenism within the Catholic Church in India. We hope against fear that the one-Rite movement is not an attempt, among other things, to circumvent this vital problem concerning a large section of Eastern Catholics in India.

The second problem concerns the constitution of the C. B. C. I. All the three Rites in India have to take their fair share of the responsibility and burden in the life and work of the Catholic Church in India. In order to enable each particular Rite to make its maximum contribution, it may perhaps be necessary to re-constitute the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India in such a way that it becomes a confederation of the three Bishops' Conferences. The division of work and responsibility will then have to be made not on the basis of a majority or otherwise, but on the basis of the rights and duties of the particular churches.

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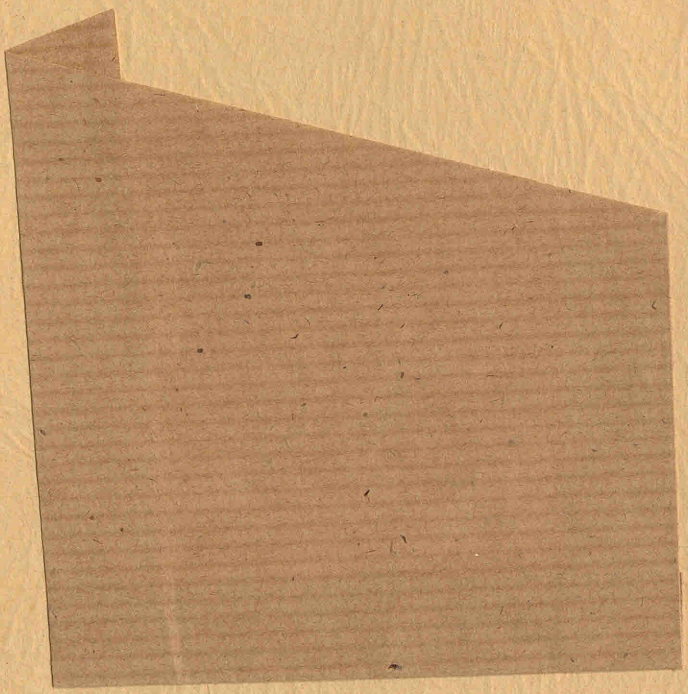
This *expose* of the one-Rite movement is made more in sorrow than in anger. Our purpose is to articulate the fear that the 'one-Rite movement' is not only ill-conceived but also part of an endeavour to discredit and eventually stifle the Eastern Catholics in India. Posterity will judge whether this fear was entirely justified; but we do not want history to say that we saw the danger that threatened the Eastern Rites and closed our eyes to it either for fear or for favour. The matter of Rite is also a matter of right.

This *apology* of the Eastern Churches is made with the deep conviction that the Oriental heritage has a positive relevance for our times. Today when western theology is passing through the trauma of a frustrating self-examination and western Biblical scholarship, following an excessively formal and critical line of investigation, has begun to dry out in spiritual values, we need the refreshing wisdom, depth and range of Asian theology to show us the way. We need to re-discover the Eastern Fathers as our mentors in order to

correct the many imbalances of an overly western spirituality which we have in recent times acquired. In short we need to re-discover the Eastern Churches. This alone can offset the perversions of a shallow pragmatism and a naive functionalism which come before us in the attractive garb of the "new theology" and the "new morality."



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