INTERACTIVE DYNAMICS OF CHRISTIAN MISSION

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1.   KEY NOTIONS

1.1.   Mission

Mission is a 'special task' given to a person or a group of people. It denotes a 'higher power', which has commissioned the missioner. As a 'calling from above', mission is an undertaking that is just provisional or that transcends the limits of time and space. The former involves one's entire life, whereas the latter, a short period. Reaching out to far and wide as well as one and all affirms its larger nuances, while engaging one's self with a profound commitment confirms its deeper. Mission evolves from the vision, universally conceived but locally applied. A 'sense of mission' is the core of any mission and it is that sense of mission that motivates one to invest oneself to a cause with the whole heart, mind and spirit. Besides, it is the same sense of mission that decides the enhanced 'quality' of whatsoever is undertaken and performed in life. Attaining 'higher altitudes' as well as 'larger magnitudes' in life, for oneself and for others, is the outcome of a mission in life, of course to the credit of the one who empowered the missioner.

1.2.   Christian

The term 'Christian' derives obviously from the name 'Christ'. Christ or Messiah is 'the anointed one' for the spiritual uplift of the world. Christ Jesus as 'Immanuel' is the embodiment of 'God with us', in diverse dimensions. To be a Christian is to be 'like Christ' and to 'follow Christ' in being 'God with us', for all those who come in touch with one's life. Being Christian, in the right sense of the word, never admits an idle and cozy idea of worshipping Jesus. The mission of a Christian necessarily emerges from the mission of Christ Jesus. It is not exactly preaching the message of Jesus, too. It would mean 'living the values' lived and taught by Jesus, at all times and in all places. It would also mean making a living example out of one's self in facilitating the process of enhancing the quality of human lives, environmental, ethical and spiritual. Being a member of the Christian community does not make a real Christian missioner, but one who qualitatively 'radiates the character of Christ' in one's life, may be even out of the stipulated campus.

1.3.   Dynamics

'Dynamics' implies the technicalities as regards the process of forces acting on each other. It covers the entire range of properties that motivate change, development and growth within a group or a system. It is the 'dynamism' that stimulates a movement and expresses itself in dynamics. It not only regulates relations among the components of social life but also maintains the balance, poise and dignity within the given composition. It is an enthusiastic and progressive phenomenon that is oriented to an intense play of energy among all the elements of the collection or the organism. Dynamics is the essence of interaction in all living entities and is the inner principle that supplies meaning and newness to life. In this context, dynamics undertakes to maintain the 'Mission Quotient' (MQ) of the Christian missioner, as well as of mission in general. It also balances the diverse ingredients of the mission in the given human society, such as divine logic and human commitment, along with all the connected cultural characteristics.

1.4.   Interactive

The word 'interactive' has three components -- 'inter', 'interact' and 'interactive'. 'Interaction' is the central reality that emerges from these words. 'Inter' connotes "between', when the dynamics affect two persons or entities and 'among', when the dynamics involve more than two people or things. 'Interact' refers to two or

more persons 'influencing each other'. 'Interactive' signifies a 'two-way flow that acts upon each other'. 'Interaction' implies an 'interface, dealings or relations between/among persons or things. It is a double-sided stream of ideas, feelings, insights and experiences. It is a reciprocal engagement between/among persons of diverse backgrounds and affiliations. The interplay of information between the computer and the computer-user could be a case in point. Interaction covers a large gamut of areas, like gender, language, ideology, culture, faith, economy, business and other social associations. It implies all types of 'give and take' as well as 'sharing'. Interaction takes the form of its adjective 'interactive' as the heart of its process and dynamics. In the current context, the term 'interactive' modifies, enhances and elevates the quality of the missionary engagement, whatever be its place and mode.

2.   FAITH AS AN INTERACTIVE REALITY

2.1.   Faith – an inclusive and secular concept

The term 'faith' means 'belief, confidence, trust', etc. It is a complete belief in the truth, value and trustworthiness of a person, idea or a thing. Faith takes shape as a result of a series of ideas, feelings and deeds, like drops of water come together to form a flow. It does not have any essential connection with any religious doctrines and dogmas. It is grounded in the personal experience of the human being and is primarily oriented to a living reality, human or divine. It surpasses ceremonial stereotypes and theological categories. It does not contradict the sacred, not even the least. On the contrary, it celebrates a sense of the sacred in an all-encompassing manner, deeply applied to the human nature. It is geared towards the source and destiny of life in the vertical context and towards the human and environmental realities in the horizontal context. The sacred sentiment of faith is deep and all-pervasive as well as replete with human and divine experiences in a dynamic and inventive fashion. Manifestly, faith, as a wide-ranging phenomenon of the world, is clearly secular and has in its niche the sacred in a more applied and realistic form. That would amount to say that the traditional notion of faith as contrary to the sacred requires being revisited.

2.2.   Faith – its triangular dynamics of oneself, the other and God

Faith has a three-sided dynamics -- faith in oneself, faith in the other and faith in God. Trusting oneself or the core of one's being is 'individual faith'. Trusting another person as the extension of one's own being is 'social faith'. Elevating one's trust in oneself and in others and applying the same to God is 'spiritual faith'. These triangular realities of life make a complete faith. The inter-connectedness of these aspects as well as the quality of faithfulness makes faith balanced and worthwhile. In other words, faith can be described as self-confidence, confidence in the other and confidence in God, all at the same time. When any of these facets of faith is missing, faith becomes insipid and fruitless; faith ceases to be faith, as well. The parable of the talents (Mt 25.14-24) motivates one to attain one's self, to the fullest stature. This is what Jesus came to the earth for, too (Jn 10.10). The golden rule (Mt 7.12) advocates measuring out to the other what one would have the other due to one. Such a measure, for sure, maintains the equilibrium of social life. The last judgment (Mt 25-41) illustrates how what is done to the other human being, however little he or she may be, reaches God. This is a perfect blending of the human and divine logic of life.

2.3.   Faith – its Dimensions of religious and non-religious

Faith has two dimensions -- religious and non-religious. When a certain religious system is the locus of faith, there is a religious faith. On the other hand, when an ideology, culture, experience, science, etc. is the context of trust, faith is positively non-religious or humanistic. Religious faith entertains philosophy, doctrines, dogma, myths, stories, fasts, pilgrimages, symbols and rituals, in view of experiencing eternal truth. Non-religious faith relies on all available realities in the world, engages in scientific research and

evolves truth in diversely innovative ways. Faith, as a perspective and approach to life, can be both theistic and humanistic or atheistic. The two aspects of faith are not contradictory poles, but are complementary aspects of faith and require being dovetailed. Besides, faith does not become religious when a collection of people share certain beliefs and performs certain rituals. But, it does, when a community of people stays tuned to each other in trust, care for each other and join hands to live together harmoniously. Further, a stream of faith is powerful not when it is rigid in what it professes, but when it radiates the sublime values of love and brotherhood/sisterhood towards one and all, in a mutually inclusive manner.

2.3.   Faith -- a multi-way process of interaction

Faith, in its essence, is dynamic and interactive. Interaction is oriented to action between persons. It would mean 'people talking with each other or doing things with each other together', as Merriam Webster Dictionary puts it. Being mutually or reciprocally active, it is a thorough crossing point between two or more persons. Similarly, faith is a two-way process of communication, when two persons or entities are involved and it is a multi-way process when more than two persons or entities are involved. Faith, as a perception, conviction and an orientation, necessitates that the components influence each other or act on each other, in varied ways. It is a 'continual exchange of live information between or among persons'. Such reciprocity affirms the social character of faith. Evidently, religion is a system and faith is abstract and neither of them can interact with their counterparts. Persons or believers interact, one with another. When human beings meet one another, faith becomes a live reality. In other words, the meeting of human beings is what is actually implied by 'faith meeting faith'. Moreover, faith is creative in its character. A single element cannot create anything. Faith in its spirit is a multifaceted and inventive reality and not a dead phenomenon of the cemetery. Faith is inclusive, participatory and collaborative as well as resourceful and insightful in disposition. It is equivalent to the very process of life, which is interactive.

2.4.   Faith – a relational way, like 'one body, many parts'

Faith, as a social experience, is a relational entity. It would mean 'being in close relation with other constituents of life', beyond all boundaries. 'One body with many parts' is a perfect model of true faith. Faith is one, but has many aspects, just like spirit is one and has many manifestations. Humanity is one, but has many expressions. The body exists as one, but functions as many. All the parts of the body have their own singular identities and roles. They are equal in their dignity and status, as well. What happens in one part of the body necessarily affects other parts. The relational characteristics of the different parts of the body illustrate clearly the logic of a relational and interactive faith. In a similar way, specificities and commonalities of the diverse aspects of faith require being harmonized, just as the different parts of the body. In fact, faith is a partnership of faiths, just like the body that is a shared existence of parts. That would amount to state that believers of diverse faiths, as a matter of fact, have a collective existence, even though they have specific identities, roles, dignity, status and functions. They are naturally other-oriented, one to another. Therefore, they need to learn from each other, enrich one another and celebrate fellowship with each other. They require walking together to the same divine, like a shared pilgrimage, and working together, like partners, to make human lives more humane and harmonious, as well.

2.5.   An interactive faith -- a blessing

Faith signifies surrendering one's entire being to the higher power, though in more or less degrees. However, trust or confidence can imply a stoppage of thinking. Therefore, faith is inclined to become a 'blind faith', which definitely is a liability, though ironically so. This is indeed tragic and suicidal. For that reason, faith has the need of being examined, reconsidered and updated constantly. The active involvement of the mind and spirit has to be ensured, in favour of inventive insights and convictions that

enhance the liberating quality of faith. Only a faith that is enlightened, settled, serene and sublime is a pure faith. A childish faith is a stagnant faith and is a burden and a curse to life. It arrests the process of growing or blossoming up, which is vital for faith. Faith has to grow along with one's age, education and life experience. Only a progressively evolving faith proves to be a blessing. This attainment is an outcome of an interactive process, both within oneself and with other believers. Faith is a spiritual drive, which permeates into all areas of life in an integrated manner. Besides, faith is a radical reality and has to be grounded in the 'roots or origin' of life. It has also to be founded on the fundamental values of human life that supply divine sap to faith and nourish it. Vitality is its hub and 'imbibing the quality of life' in an imaginative way is that which makes faith spiritually sound and meaningful. Networking with all streams of faith and life and celebrating a 'communion of faiths' with one and all, including the creation, is the core ethos of faith, worth its name.

3. CHRISTIANITY AND ITS UNIVERSAL VISION

3.1. The Universal Values and Principles of Christianity

Christian values and principles, obviously, derive from the person, life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The fact that human beings are 'created in the image of God' (Gen. 1.27) and are 'divine abodes' or 'living temples of God' (1 Cor 3.16) establish their inviolable dignity as well as the universal fatherly character of God. Christian values are grounded in the three-faceted and mutually related dynamics of life -- oneself, the other and God. Investing oneself towards a life in full, as in the parable of the talents (Mt 25.14-30), justifies the incarnation and mission of Jesus (Jn 10,10). 'Doing to the other what one would have the other due to one' (Mt 7.12) is naturally and systemically directed to God himself' (Mt 25.40) and completes the triangular cycle of life. Besides, 'pursuing perfection by non-discriminating (Mt 5.45,48), loving enemies (Mt 5.44) as well as one another (Jn 13.34, 35), forgiving the other unconditionally (Lk 23.34), washing the other's feet (Jn 13.14), considering one another as friends (Jn 15.15), reaching out to the weak (Lk 15.3-7), being 'good news' to one and all (Mt 4.23), honouring the other above oneself (Rom 1.12.10) and being a brother or a sister to everyone, after the fashion of Jesus (Jn 10.30, Mt 25.40), summarize the core values of Christianity. These principles underscore a culture of human life that is thoroughly humane and spiritual as well as universal and interactive. These values defy all boundaries, as well.

3.2. The Launch of an Interactive Faith in the Second World Council of Vatican

The Second World Council of Vatican of the Catholic community initiated the vision and mission of dialogue, interaction and fellowship with communities of other faiths in the 60s of the 20th century. This epoch-making event marked the new wave of inter-faith relations in the history of the world. The foundational document called 'Nostra Aetate', meaning 'In Our Time', certified that the Catholic Christian community became an adult in age and faith. Accordingly, 'if Christians treat other individuals, groups and peoples in a manner that is not befitting sisters and brothers, they have no right to call God their Father'. That would amount to losing the filial status with God, once and for all. Therefore, Catholics and Christians are bound to think as large as the world and to engage in fostering relations, fellowship and collaboration with people of all communities, lest they cease to be Christians, tragically so. Believing in God as Father would clearly mean being part of a family or a community as large as people of all religious and non-religious or humanistic ideologies. Such an all-inclusive and 'catholic' disposition categorically defines Christian faith today. Pope John Paul II summarized this faith in his public meeting in Madras in 1986 thus, 'By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we open ourselves to God'. Implicitly, not opening one's self to others without boundaries and conditions is to run the risk of remaining closed against God as well. They are like two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. An interactive faith would demand interaction between the horizontal lines as well as between horizontal and vertical lines, without any condition and limit.

3.3. The Ground-breaking Implications for a Relational Fabric of Faiths

Being grounded in a Trinitarian monotheism of 'Father, Son and Spirit' as God (Jn 15.26), a Christian is well-founded in the framework of 'one-in-three' and 'three-in-one'. He or she is bound to pursue the spirit of 'God with us' (Mt 1.23), while following Jesus as 'Immanuel'. The implication of such a faith is to have a faith in the family or community of God the Father, which inevitably involves all civilizations of people, as 'many parts in one body' (1 Cor 12.12-31). 'Making the family of God' on earth is the esteemed mission of a Christian and it involves humans of all communities and nations including the creation, with a preferential service to the voiceless, the weak, the least, the lost, the deprived ones and those on the margins of the society. Motivated by the universal mandate of being 'good news to one and all', a Christian has to awaken in himself or herself the consciousness of a 'common origin, shared existence and a common destiny', along with all people, especially by reading the signs of the times' (Lk 12.56) in the extremely multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ideological context of the present day times. 'Sabbath is for man and not vice versa' (Mk 2.27) and faith has to be an agent of unity among peoples. That is what Pope John Paul II affirmed at Meeting of Religions, New Delhi, 1999, 'religion should be what God intended it to be, a source of goodness, harmony and peace'. This exactly was the aspiration of Jesus as he prayed 'Father, that they all may be one' (Jn 17.21) and what Pope John XXIII articulated 'We have to look at what unites people, rather than what divides them' and 'what we all have in common is greater than what separates us'). What a profound realization!

3.4. The New Way of Being Christian

The brilliance of Christianity is its all-encompassing idea of God as the Father of all. The relational idea is the plinth of a universal family of the humans, along with the entire creation. It is like a 'large umbrella' under which the entire family of the humans and the nature becomes a united and an integral whole. Discrimination and considerations of high and low, familiar and strange, friend and enemy, and the like, are totally alien to a true Christian. The sense of 'equality and relatedness' constructs the dynamics of that family. The sisterly and brotherly spirit that makes the family of God is the essential character of a Christian. An adult Christian is mandated to live this quality of faith by making a communion of communities, traditions and cultures with all communities of Christians and other faiths, the world over. One has to be a Christian anew by developing innovative and wide-ranging perspectives and attitudes to people of all civilizations. Only in such a context, the universal values lived and taught by Jesus will really make sense. Sustained efforts for advancing interaction, collaboration, fellowship and harmony among people of all affiliations only can make the Christian a 'Christian', in the right sense of the word. This is precisely what Pope Francis meant sharply and ironically in his General audience, at St Peter's Square, Vatican City, in 2015, 'Churches, parishes and institutions with closed doors must not call themselves a church; they must call themselves museums'. 'A new way of being Christian' is the clarion call of the hour.

4. CHRISTIAN MISSION AND ITS INTERACTIVE DYNAMICS

4.1. The Best of Missio Ad Gentes

'Missio Ad Gentes', meaning 'mission to the nations/peoples' is a 'mandate impelled by the love of Christ' and certainly is the continuation of the mission of Jesus as a pilgrim and missionary Church. It is admirably a step forward in extending pastoral care to all peoples, by reaching out to people of other religious communities. Some of the exceptionally larger musings of Missio Ad Gentes are the following -- 'being familiar with the national and religious traditions of fellow beings', accepting them as 'co-members of the same group of humans', 'being united with them in a sense of esteem and love', 'sharing in their

cultural and social life', 'learning the treasures God has distributed among the nations of the earth', 'absorbing their ways and culture' and 'collaborating with people of other denominations and faiths'. Moreover, Missio Ad Gentes acknowledges 'the presence of God' in other traditions and 'living according to one's conscience'. Going beyond the old idea of 'there is no salvation outside the church' and 'shedding the exclusive right over the salvific grace of God' are landmark shifts in the understanding of the mission. Better relations with people of other Christian and religious communities are to be proudly credited to Missio Ad Gentes.

4.2.   Beyond Missio Ad Gentes

All the same, the pastoral care of Missio Ad Gentes has as its objective 'founding new churches' and this smacks of a scheme of extending the boundaries of the Church towards 'potential Christians'. Its characteristic concept of being 'exclusive, superior and unique' as well as 'definitive, normative and absolute' reflects colonial overtones and is oriented to 'conquering and displacing the other'. One's faith in the centrality of salvation by Jesus and Christianity, however honest, shows up highhandedness, especially when imposed upon people of other convictions and affiliations. This certainly is not approved by Jesus, in anyway, and therefore requires being overcome. Missio Ad Gentes also has in it an institutional pedestal of pre-eminence and strategy for colonizing the other. Besides, the giver-complex of the missioners considers others mere beggars and violates the reality that 'God was already there in the world before the Christian missioners arrived'. As per Mission Ad Gentes, the missioner claims all importance and makes the other an object. Mission cannot be a one-way activity and for that reason Missio Ad Gentes lags behind the central spirit of the Second Vatican Council, too. As a self-absorbed concept, it is a dominating, un-negotiable and out-dated approach to mission. A self-righteous notion of faith is bound to belittle others as well as contradict the spirit of interfaith dialogue. Obviously, the mission of Jesus and of the Church has to go much beyond Missio Ad Gentes, in line with the essential spirit of the Second Vatican Council as well the noble, serene and unique values lived and taught by Jesus.

4.3.   Towards Missio Inter Gentes

'Missio Inter Gentes' signifies 'mission between or among the peoples/nations'. It is a mission 'from the people, of the people, by the people and for the people'. It implies that the 'mission emerges or evolves from the people'. 'Missio Inter Gentes' as a term was first proposed by William R. Burrows and as a concept, was advanced by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference'. This model of the mission not only transcends 'Missio Ad Gentes', but also is markedly different from it in essence. The concept emerged as interfaith dialogue from the Second World Council of Vatican, as well. Missio Inter Gentes is truly a model of incarnation. It is grounded in the socio-cultural and religious landscape of plurality in Asia in particular and the world in general. Its approach to mission is one of an interactive mode and recognizes the identity and dignity of all major and minor streams of faith, ideology and culture. The realization of Nostra Aetate of having 'a common origin, a shared life and a common destiny' with people of other religions is the nucleus of Missio Inter Gentes.

4.4.   The Multi-Religious Implications of Missio Inter Gentes

The term that differentiates Missio Inter Gentes from Missio Ad Gentes is 'inter' and that term is common with inter-faith dialogue. Further, the word 'dialogue', meaning 'across, with, through, between and among' and 'converse or speak', respectively, also refers to the nuances of the term 'inter'. As dialogue is an 'exchange of ideas, views and experiences or conversation between two or more', so also Missio Inter Gentes affirms 'sharing in and sharing with' other ideologies and traditions as well as individuals and communities, in an equal and dignified manner. Both Missio Inter Gentes and Multi-Religious Dialogue or interaction honour equal footing as a strategic measure. They do not admit superiors or inferiors. On the

contrary, they allow the mission to occur as a two-way process, in a spirit of partnership. Here, mission becomes an 'interface' or 'crossing point' between persons from different backgrounds, beliefs, persuasions and interests. Such a spirit of honest sharing calls for being free of prejudices, fixed positions and vested interests. Evidently, the Missio Inter Gentes implies that both partners are committed to a mutually enriching and elevating journey of faith, in human as well as spiritual arenas. Missio Inter Gentes is truly a shared pilgrimage of faith in and towards the same divine power.

4.5. Christian Mission as Celebrating the Spirit of Togetherness

Being plural is part of the inner dynamics of life. Balancing 'one and many' is the fundamental mission of every human being. However, 'being many' is not only 'being more than one', but also 'being different'. Difference is never to be considered a negative quality, but a positive reality and an enriching factor. Complementary character of male and female in the wise design of the Creator is a perfect model for social harmony. Likewise, the diverse civilizations, histories, cultures, languages, philosophies, values and traditions do not in any way contradict each other; they are complementary to each other. Recognizing the divine logic and design of diversity is the foundation of faith, in its right sense. In addition, the creative interaction among the diversities contributes to the richness of their interactive and harmonious co-existence. When the basic identity of humanity is accepted by all partners further than secondary identities, even of religions, life is bound to become a celebration by itself. As diverse colours and shades of colours are in an exceptional harmony in the 'rainbow' and they radiate a 'unity and beauty in diversity', so are the diverse perceptions, philosophies, faiths, experiences, and convictions, when harmonized, contribute to the 'spirit of togetherness' in life. With a faith that is firmly grounded in the Fatherhood of God, 'making the family of God' with people of all peoples as sisters and brothers, along with the entire creation, is the core of the Christian mission. That defines the dynamics of an interactive faith, as well.

CONCLUSION

Mission is an ever-evolving occurrence. A 'sense of mission' is the essence of any mission. Christian mission, rooted in the perennial and stimulating values of Jesus, has to keep evolving according to the time and context of the given society. A grown up Christian mission is never a one-way traffic, but is one that keeps emerging from the partners of faith in the given context, in a spontaneous fashion. When Christian mission as well as faith is interactive, participatory, collaborative and innovative, faith in God the Father of all, for that matter, in Jesus as well, makes full sense. The mission of Christ gets embodied in a new way of being Christian, every moment, in line with mission among persons and people. 'Faith meets faith' is the road to 'harmony of faiths' as well as to spirituality and fulfillment in life. Interactive processes among the diverse facets of faith pave the way for larger magnitudes as well as higher altitudes in faith and life, at the same time. Such is the pedestal of a faith, because of which Jesus Christ the Master would feel proud of Christians as his worthy disciples as well as God the father, Creator of all, would feel proud of human beings as his beloved children. Yes, that is the family of God on earth!

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