

Love, In Us

By Bishop George Khodr

My having no affinity to Hinduism and Buddhism explains my uneagerness to visit India as a tourist. Buddhism, which came after Brahmanism, does not acknowledge a God, something which is difficult for the people of our country to understand since religion here is founded on the God who has wrought that religion or even dwells in it. What is there in the religion of India then? The God of the Hindus is outspread universally, that is he is in all parts of this universe; that is called “pantheism” a school of religious thought in which one does not distinguish between the created and the creator or between what is visible and what is invisible. Thus, in Hinduism, there is a fusion, a melting and dissolution of the Deity and the Humanity in each other; there is no encounter between God and Man. There is no “I” and “You” because there is no “created” facing the Creator. There is no one “above” and another “below”. All existence is one great expanse; much as the Indian continent is.

This view of religion does not mean that Buddhists are not of the most moral and good people; that is so because religion, for them, is Ethics and they strive in asceticism and they purify themselves on their own without a god. The center is “one’s self”; and if they get to purify themselves, what need do they have for a god? That is how they think.

I think that the basic difference between them and us is that they begin in themselves and we begin in God; we come from our “contemplation of Him” and we feel that we grow morally in Him and that “in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17: 28). We examine ourselves checking as to whether He dwells in us by Grace as St. John says in his gospel. And what we call piety is only an expression of His indwelling in us. And what we call virtue and good is only a revelation of Him in us. This is so not in the sense that he is “contained” in us because He cannot be contained, but that we are His presence; in that He does not make His presence known in the world except through the grace that He has poured in us and the words He has spoken to us that have become a part of us.

Between us and Him there is a union. And union implies the presence of two persons since one does not unite with himself. And the Christians dare to call that union a participation in or communion in the Holy Spirit. The separation has been abolished when God proclaimed His love for us. And this union or communion comes from Him in His mercy as we accept it and receive it face to face according to what He says in Matthew 11: 27, “No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.” The Holy Trinity is the one who knows Himself in the sense that He exists in the Love that flows in Him; that love itself is His “oneness”. And He brings us

to communion with Him through His “bending down” towards us. Union between us and God is a gift. And that reveals His independence from us but at the same time His love for us.

God has to be distinct from us as the Islamic philosophers say. Here I borrow their vocabulary only to emphasize the possibility of our union with God, something that is not found in Islam. Since if God is not willing to unite with me, then what do I have to do with Him. In that case His word would be above me but not in me. He, then, would be my supervisor who cares to be above me but not with me. In that, His words carry the power of uniting with Him only through having me understand them. At that, my communion is not with Him but with His words. But His words are not mine though mine can be the underwriter of His words.

He and I are face to face with each other; that is His “face” is His Divinity and mine is my humanity. And since Divinity and humanity do not annihilate one another, we remain two distinct beings but we are able to be together in His love.

And since the Son became human, I am able to meet other humans in the sense that I offer them my Lord through loving them; that is, our point of meeting is the Divine love that dwells in me and not my humanity. I must give them God himself so that each of them would become a “real” human being, thus leaving their sins which bring them to the destruction of their humanity. From that we see that God is essential in human communication.

The atheist does not understand that since his mind is not set on God, even though in the pureness of his humanity, he is not fully void of God. Yet the atheist does not offer humans “humanity”; he offers a certain divinity of himself though he does not realize that.

Communion among the believers is a divine one which, though corrupted by sin, yet is not canceled by it. Such communion is carried by the people of God who enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong.

After the only Son of God came to our world, God adopted us since before that we were the children of wrath; not only did He reveal His love for us, but He revealed that He loves us with the same measure He loves His Christ with. “Our adoption” is not a poetic phrase here, it is rather the essence of the relationship we have with the Lord as our Savior.

God then is not one who is “up there” for there is nothing “up there” except the atmosphere and what is beyond it. God is not in a place. God dwells “down here” in the hearts of those who love Him and those who do not love Him since through the “uncreated enenergies” that proceed eternally from Him, as the Orthodox Christians say, He cannot but have a dwelling. The human soul cannot be void of God even for a moment, or it will essentially die. Every atom in us exists due to the Divine compassion that surrounds it. Even our body holds well

together due to the Grace that bends down on it. It will rise on the Last Day because it has put on the Grace that will not leave it. In the light of that, I understand what came in the Koran in Sura 39: 42 “Allah carries off the souls of men upon their death” meaning that God does not leave us on our own but gathers us to our bodies on the Last Day. After He has brought us back to Himself through death, He brings back our bodies to us.

Our life would be meaningless if we do not “know” God’s presence with us, and Christianity goes further in saying that He is in us, and that He is the source of our love for Him and the strength to obey Him. And our love comes from His tenderness. And our love is in contingent with His love; and His love is the “beginning” of love in us and its “end”. Such love is my religion wherever it is found; since the One Who gives such love in the gratuitousness of His compassion, is the Source of all things in us and all things in us end in Him.