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INDIAN GURUS AND BISHOPS IN EUROPE Some Missiological Considerations

Among the Indian travellers coming to Europe, particularly two types of people stand out: the gurus and the bishops. The gurus come here mostly on invitations from groups of Europeans interested in the Hindu spirituality and its practice. They are also invited, but rarely, by the Indian Hindus settled in the West. The bishops on the contrary come almost uninvited. Making use of an *ad limina* visit, they extend their tour to several European countries. But what is very striking is that the gurus travel with a heavy spiritual baggage, whereas the bishops go about empty-handed, with no spiritual message whatsoever to give to the Europeans.

This comparison, however strange it might seem, gives rise to several missiological considerations. It is to be noted in the first place that neither the gurus nor the bishops usually travel to the poorer countries of the world. Their coming to Europe is evidently linked with financial interests, that is, fund-raising for all sorts of projects in India. In the case of the bishops, this motivation takes enormous proportions. For, after respects paid to the Pope, they go about almost exclusively in search of benefactors and generous funding agencies like Misereor, Caritas and the Swiss Lenten Fund. I have not heard, for example, Indian bishops offering a series of lectures to the Europeans on spirituality or conscientizing people here on social or economic problems peculiar to countries like India. The gurus on the contrary project a spiritual image of their tour. The financial motivations rarely come to the fore in their activities, which seem to be always centered on spirituality. They seem to be concerned with Europeans apparently hungry for spiritual nourishment. How is it that such a concern towards the Europeans is completely absent in the case of the Indian bishops? How is it that both of them coming from the same country, both of them charged with a mission of spiritual life, have an altogether different attitude towards the Europeans who are their funding agents and benefactors? Can one give or receive financial aid without showing a personal concern in life?

This is a typical phenomenon of a multiple boomerang. It is first of all a colonial boomerang: whereas a certain section of the Indian popu-

lation still looks to Europe, another section of it seems to vindicate its spiritual superiority over their former colonial powers. It can also be seen as a missiological boomerang: the implantation of the European Christianity in India shows today its fruits of unproductivity and dependence. The Indian bishops have nothing to share with the mother churches of Europe, nothing to offer to them. Christians in India are so dependent on Europe both for ideology and material aid that they seem to be more in touch with what happens here than in their own country. We hear sometimes Indians complaining that their government mistrusts them. I should think that it is just the contrary: in fact, it is the Indian Christians that do not have confidence in their own country and in its future. Here is the deep estrangement that Christianity has directly or indirectly created in India. In this spiritual poverty our bishops play the role of administrators more than spiritual leaders. The Hindu gurus, on the contrary, are more than ever convinced of their strength with regard to the Western Christianity to which they now come following in many a respect the same missionary pathways as those created by the first Europeans who came to India for the conquest of souls.

The comparison raises another poignant question: why do the Europeans need gurus? And why do they not need the Indian bishops?

The gurus coming to the West is a complex question. Apart from the aspects just mentioned, their coming here - a journey which is normally forbidden to them by their disciplinary code - is often motivated by more than the missionary goals. A guru recognized in the West commands in fact more respect in India. Much can be said on such motivations. However, a discussion directly on the gurus is a little irrelevant here in our present seminar for the simple fact that the gurus are absent.

The guru-phenomenon in Europe, in reality, is a Western problem. It is the state of Christianity here which paves the way to the coming of the gurus. The ghastly fact that over 80% of the Europeans have given up the practice of religion - a fact to which little attention is paid by the churches, ecclesiastical authorities and theologians - points to a deep spiritual vacuum which needs to be filled. I do not have the impression that the churches command spiritual leadership in the contemporary European culture. Our Sunday church services to which the Christian practice is on the whole reduced and, in fact, the whole ecclesiastical structure on the level of parishes and dioceses cater, if at all, to a small minority of the practicing Christians and they have practically nothing to offer to the vast de-Christianized population of Europe. However, it