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**Workshop “Spiritualities and identities in the dialogue of civilizations”
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(A priest from Southern India, in the Tamil Nadu State, Fr. Edwin initiated a grassroots – level movement which he calls **Neighborhood networking of communities**. He has already organized, with the help of other people, 7000 neighborhood parliaments in the district of Kanyakumari, in Tamil Nadu. It is a new political culture, a new democratic culture that is set on motion.)

This sharing will have three parts: first a very short introduction and how we link to the topic; Secondly, I share a dream; third, if it is only a dream, people do not take it seriously, so we will also have to say how we try to succeed in the direction of that dream.

The first one, with regard to spirituality. One definition of spirituality that applies especially here was given by a Buddhist scholar. He said, spirituality is your sense of responsibility based on your awareness of the absolute.

Responsibility presupposes response and ability. Unless you have situations and structures that make you able to respond, you will not be able to be responsible. So, you see, structures are needed to make a spiritual response, to be spiritual. So, before elaborating further, I am going to give you a dream for a conditioned structure where you could be spiritual.

So, this is a dream with people at the base. So, join with us in dreaming big, dreaming of a new world. And whenever we propose a dream, some people have a tendency to talk first of difficulties and say it will not work. So, when they think of difficulties, their energies are drained. They do not have the energy anymore to push their dream. What I would ask you is to suspend for the time being your thinking with regard the difficulties. We'll take them up later. Now, let us concentrate on possibilities.

Dream of a world where no direct elections to national parliaments take place.....

Join with us in dreaming big. Dreaming of a new world.

Dream of a world where no direct elections to national parliaments take place. Nor direct elections to state assemblies. Not even to panchayat councils.

Dream instead of a world where parliaments come to the streets.

The whole world gets organized into neighbourhood parliaments of about 30 neighbouring families. Each neighbourhood of 30 families becomes a kind of a mini-world or a mini-nation.

Each neighbourhood parliament has a neighbourhood cabinet, with a neighbourhood chief minister and ministers for various concerns like health, hygiene, environment, income generation, children's welfare, adolescents guidance -and what not -that are relevant at its level.

Each neighbourhood parliament chooses its delegates to represent them at the village parliament. It too has its cabinet with a village chief -minister and village ministers for concerns that pertain at village level.

Next come the third level parliaments, panchayat parliaments and their cabinets.

Thus come about respectively block parliaments, district parliaments, state parliaments, national parliaments, international regional parliaments and finally the world parliament (mind you not United Nations but a world parliament) -each with its cabinet.

The whole process is guided by certain principles :

Principle One: Principle of Numerical Uniformity

Once you have a certain number of neighbourhood parliaments you can automatically have a "village" parliament; and once you have a certain number of "village parliaments, you can have a "panchayat" parliament; and so on.

Hence no big "villages" and small "villages" and big "districts" and small "districts" and so on.

Actually the present territorial designations like that of block, district, state, nation and world are not in vogue any more. What we would have rather are various "tiers" or "levels" of parliaments. Like first level parliament (meaning neighbourhood parliament), second level parliament, and the like.

Principle Two : Principle of Smallness of Size

No more are parliaments with 500 and more members. It is a small, discerning community at every level.

(The ideal number of members here? Said Mr. M. P. Parameswaran of Kerla : "Not more than eighty five". Observes Guruji Rishi Prabhakar; "Eighty five would be too much. It will still give a lot of scope for majority-minority confrontations. Why not the scout number, that is, 36?" The neighbourhood parliaments alone, in that case, can have a bigger number i.e. 30 families and not 30 individuals)

The advantage here : Everyone knows everyone face-to-face. And everyone's weaknesses and strengths. One cannot go on fooling, as Gandhiji observed, a face-to-face community for long.

Principle Three : Principle of Recall

You don't need to wait for five years to call back a candidate whom you "elected" from one level of the parliament to the next. As you are a small community at each level of the parliament, you can convene your parliament any time you want and decide together to send someone else who would explain and represent your concerns better.

Principle Four : Principle of Subsidiarity

Subsidiary units get the focus here. Vitality, dynamism and power are concentrated more at the lowest levels possible. No business that could be handled at a lower level is taken to any level above it. Higher levels deal only with those matters that the lower levels cannot handle.

Principle Five : Principle of Convergence

This means once you have such a network everything converges at this network. Everything is done through it. This reinforces the structures further and further. Thus whether children's programmes, adolescents programmes, self-help groups or what not, everything is referred to neighbourhoods and their representative networks.

Once I present this dream, normally I ask three questions:

First, suppose this dream is realized, what evils will not be there?

Secondly, suppose this dream is realized, what good things will be there?

Thirdly, suppose this dream is realized, what would the world be like?

And when I ask these questions, they say: corruption will not be there; communalism will not be there; Oppression will not be there; injustice will not be there; inequality will not be there...

And when I ask for the good things, they say: equality will be there; fraternity will be there, justice will be there...

And when I ask what the world will be like, they say: it will be a heaven on earth.

And so, I tell them: Do something for the dream. So you can keep thinking about that dream. So we wanted to start working towards this dream. So we wanted to start in our district, Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu, the southernmost district of India. We started organizing people on the neighborhood parliaments – about 30 families. These people came together and elected people on all levels, up to the district level. From our experience, so far, the best response has been from children. We have neighborhood parliaments of children and also neighborhood parliaments of adolescents. Children's parliaments with 6 – 11 years; adolescents' parliaments: 12 – 18 years. These children meet at the level of the neighborhoods, then the level of the village, then the level of the Panchayat block, and then the district. There are various techniques taught to them with which they try to analyze the situation, take stock of the problems, prioritize the problems and then evolve time bound action goals. They make their own budgets and then try to implement. They have community monitoring procedures. And whatever they can do themselves, they do themselves; whatever they cannot do themselves, they take to the forums of the grown-ups. Children and adolescents have their own winning ways; they have their own ability to exert gentle pressure on the grown-ups. And what has happened? These children achieve a lot. Many problems that remained unsolved in many places, for years unsolved by grown-ups, were solved by children. And along the process, they became a dialoguing community. Dialogue means not only of ideas but of heart, a dialogue of love and action. People come to the various levels just because of their neighborhood and territorial affinity, at every level, without bothering about whether this fellow belongs to this or that religion... they try to evolve their own goals, they make their own response to the problems around, based on their awareness of the Ultimate, the awareness that they are all children of one divine reality.