

SECOND PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE

EVANGELIZATION, PRAYER, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Only that search for God in contemplation is authentic which brings into prayer the anguish of men who are not free to be human, free for God and man.

James Douglas

Let us begin with a selection from Fr. Thomas Clark's article "Holiness and Justice," (*The Way*, July, 1973).

One of the crucial developments of the last century or so in the Church's understanding of her mission is the realization that it extends not only to the conversion of persons and the enlightenment of their consciences, but to a creative critique of social processes, structures and institutions: an extension of the searing light of the gospel to the total human environment, which man, precisely as sinful man, shapes for himself.

Fr. Clark, as you well know, is talking about ideas that have become commonplace in recent Church documents: the need to struggle against unjust social structures and to work for justice and the transformation of the world as essential dimensions of evangelization (Bishops' Synod, 1971); the need to become "the Church of the poor" and to work for equality and participation of all in the decision-making processes of society in order to make people masters of their own destiny. (*Octogesima Adveniens; Populorum Progressio; FABC Taipei Statement*).

This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshop sessions of the Second Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held at the Morning Star Regional Seminary, in Barrackpore, India, near Calcutta, 19th-25th November 1978. The theme of the Plenary Assembly was: "Prayer—the Life of the Church of Asia."

This is a new thrust of the Church, as we all know. We only have to recall St. Thomas' statement to see the difference: "Man," he says, "is so situated between God and the world that the closer he draws to the one, the further he is from the other."

Fr. Clark then says:

Two conclusions follow from this understanding of the recent insight of the Church into her mission. The first touches the past, and teaches us that even the saints had their limits, and that we must not harshly judge the spiritualities of the past by the criteria of very recent theological and pastoral insights. The second conclusion is that, today, no adequate spirituality is possible which does not integrate into its viewpoint the insight we have been describing. Whatever the limitations of the past, a contemporary spiritual way which attends not at all to the social and cultural embodiments of sin and grace must be dismissed as inadequate, as not fully Christian. It is no longer possible to look upon the personal struggle for holiness and the social struggle for peace and justice as two struggles. They are inseparably two aspects of the one struggle for the victory of grace, inner and social, over concupiscence, inner and social.

Our concern in this working paper is to ask whether we have an *adequate* spirituality to meet the needs of the times. Our understanding of spirituality and prayer changes slowly. It lags behind the ongoing and growing theological and pastoral insights which are born out of life-processes (praxis). Is our spirituality (and our prayer life) attuned to the new thrust of the living Church?

Commitment to Christ and service of the neighbor are *the* essential elements of the spirituality of the Gospel. This commitment involves risk. For example, the rich young man of the Gospel had done all that a good man should do, kept the commandments from his youth. Jesus asked that he sell *all* his goods and follow Him in His poverty. Jesus asked for a deep and radical personal commitment that is full of risk. The rich young man refused. He was unwilling to risk a life without the safeguards and security of possessions and wealth. He was unwilling to become *totally* free to follow the poor Christ.

Jesus had apparently little or nothing by way of material possessions. He had not much use for them. He put no value, either, on

religious observances done with an eye to gaining merits. Profit was not in His vocabulary. On the other hand, the act of serving another, loving another, being present to another, any act by which one went out of himself to the other was highly valued in Jesus' eyes.¹ Therefore, Jesus would have this man risk, go out of himself, committing himself to walk with Him and away from the support systems he had erected for himself.

It is unfortunate that historically in the Church the emphasis of this story of the rich young man was focussed on *selling* what he had and *giving* it to the poor. Little was said about the reason *why* the Lord wanted him to give up his wealth, namely, that he might give himself to another. Wealth was seen as a symbol of the world. The world was considered evil. Hence, if a person wanted to draw close to God, he gave up his wealth and went off into the desert, or into a monastery where he isolated himself from the world and sought God alone. This was, of course, a reaction against the excessive secularism of the times. And the Church was not exempt. Its growing wealth and power were seen as worldly. Hence in the history of Church there have been reactions against this worldliness. Attempts to return to the spirit of the Gospel as understood at the time meant "fuga mundi": flight from the world, becoming a hermit, entry into a monastery. But no matter how isolated the monastery was, in time the spirit of the world² crept in. This fact was seen in the wealth accumulated, the growing ease, self-complacency and contentment. For this reason, we find reform movements within nearly all the great monastic orders in the Church. But even reforms eventually become institutionalized. They adopt a status quo, develop a sort of spiritual hardening of the arteries and an inability to respond to new and changing conditions.

Service of neighbor as an expression of love is the norm by which we will be judged: "...whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for Me."³ "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?...Take care of my lambs ... my sheep."⁴ "As I have loved you, so you must love one another."⁵

New theological and pastoral insights do not of course alter this Gospel truth. They simply clarify what has been obscured by time. They stress that today commitment to Christ in freedom, and service of the neighbor are to take a particular form. The neighbor is principally the poor masses of people who are deprived and oppressed by the unjust structures of their society. Helping them means joining them in

the struggle to oppose these oppressive, unjust structures and put up more human and more just structures. Helping the neighbor means working *with* them for justice so that the beginnings of the Kingdom can be laid now in a decent, humane, free life for the world's poor, deprived and oppressed.

This new stress is partly due to the social science advances of the last one hundred years. Its adequate actuation requires a new spirituality.

If the spirituality of the Gospel is clear, let us ask ourselves if we have lived up to it in its purity. If not, how must we change to come to grips with the new social demands of the day in the light of the Gospel and of the thinking and feeling of a Living Church that recognizes evangelization as her essential task? How must we understand and live spirituality and prayer today?

Let us try to describe the spirituality of the bulk of our priests, sisters and religiously formed lay people. These are the people who are mostly in the traditional institutional situations of the Church-schools, hospitals, parishes, old people's homes, orphanages.

They have a deep devotion to Jesus. Their spirituality is centered around the sacramental life. Prayer is a very personal activity. It is the source of their motivation. They have trust and confidence in the institutions in which they work. Even if they don't see great progress they are very loyal to the institutions. They have confidence that their superiors know what they are doing and that all will work out with their institutions. They do not worry too much about new directions. Heaven is considered a reward for all the work done. By all means, they say, let us work hard. Isn't their hard work a way of loving Jesus? Isn't the apostolate a way of proving a love that shoots vertically between the individual and Christ?

Their love expressed in their service of the neighbor is styled according to the traditions of the institution. Often, therefore, it is not an interpersonal, I-thou dynamic relationship of giving and receiving, but a formulated "giver-receiver" type. "Love others as I have loved you" becomes "Love others as we are *used to* loving others around here." Loyalty and commitment to the *institution* is seen as inseparable from loyalty and commitment to *Christ* and *neighbor* and, in the real order, equally as important. Their social action is usually halfhearted and palliative.

Thomas Merton gives further insights into this spirituality when he talks of the prayer of these people.

A method of meditation or a form of contemplation that merely produces the illusion of having 'arrived somewhere'; of having achieved security and preserved one's familiar status by playing a part, will eventually have to be unlearned in dread or else we will be confirmed in the arrogance, the impenetrable self-assurance of the Pharisee. We will become impervious to the deepest truths. We will be closed to all who do not participate in our illusion. We will live 'good lives' that are basically inauthentic, 'good' only as long as they permit us to remain established in our respectable and impermeable identities. The 'goodness' of such lives depends on the security afforded by relative wealth, recreation, spiritual comfort, and a solid reputation for piety. Such 'goodness' is preserved by routine and the habitual avoidance of serious risk—indeed of serious challenge. In order to avoid apparent evil, this pseudo-goodness will ignore the summons of genuine good. It will prefer routine duty to courage and creativity. In the end it will be content with established procedures and safe formulas, while turning a blind eye to the greatest enormities of injustice and uncharity.

Such are the routines of piety that sacrifice everything else in order to preserve the comforts of the past, however inadequate and however shameful they may be in the present. Meditation, in such a case, becomes a factory for alibis and instead of struggling with the sense of falsity and inauthenticity in oneself, it battles against the exigencies of the present, armed with platitudes minted in the previous century. If necessary, it also fabricates condemnations and denunciations of those who risk new ideas and new solutions. (*The Climate of Monastic Prayer*)

In short, this tradition-bound group are liable to be like the rich young man of the gospel. Their institution and its tradition are as shackling as his wealth. They are not free. Their prayer does not lead them to freedom or help them to leave all to follow Christ today living in his people. Is this spirituality adequate to the Gospel demands of today?

The Christ of this tradition-bound spirituality is often a vague, docetist sort of Christ (not really human, only appearing as such). It is

a kind of spirituality which, because it is highly structured, gives a certain security and predictability. It appeals to those who are unable or unwilling to venture, to "launch into the deep," to abandon themselves totally to the Christ of the Gospel who manifested a bias for the poor. In the long run it worships an unreal God, a God of one's own making, and not the God who tells us in Jesus of His total inclusion of the human: the human person, his society, his environment, his situations, his history.

In this spirituality risk is brought to a minimum, almost nil. It offers no indication of the fact that the journey of faith begins by stepping out of oneself for/to the other.

This spirituality is self-centered, stale, repetitive, tied to the past, often manipulative in its aggressivity which is a sign of its defensiveness.

Here we find one reason for the crisis that plagues the religious, the priesthood and the Christian laity today. This spirituality can hardly cope with the demands and pressures today on those who wish to call themselves Christians.

Let us look at another group of Christians who may be called "social actionists." Here we have people who try to realize the demands of the age but can hardly cope with them as Christians.

These are Christians who leave the traditional and institution-bound world described above and commit themselves to liberation and political action. They undergo a "transculturization" according to Fr. Galilea of Chile.

This transculturization is due to the nature of the activities followed by these committed Christians—politics with its own strategy and rationale, praxis as a criterion of action, and permanent recourse to the human sciences which control the dynamism of society ... The Christian is plunged into this world, which is often new to him—in the past it belonged to a few 'professional politicians'—and his faith suffers and is called into question.

Generally speaking, the faith of the average Latin American has until now been very clearly defined by his culture. His family, his education, his social environment and the sociological primacy of Catholicism, which gave him a certain image of Christ, ethics and faithful practice all formed part of this 'traditional

faith.' But as soon as the traditional Catholic commits himself to the liberation of the workers or the peasants in tasks of an educational or political nature, he finds himself in a way exiled: The categories of his faith—sin, salvation, charity, prayer, etc.—do not inspire or illuminate sufficiently his commitment. Hence, the crisis (*Concilium*, June, 1974).

It can be added by way of footnote that ideology often replaces the categories of the faith that has lost its symbolic and creative power. And ideology can be even more confining and unfree. People again are not served for themselves as people, but for a theory, or a party. Whose justice is being sought in the struggle, God's or man's?

It would seem that this group senses the demands of social action today. The first group, the "institutional" group, does not sense them, namely, does not see the new cultural milieu that must be entered into to truly love and help people, to bring people to full life.⁶

This second group's acceptance of man is questioned. They are apparently giving themselves to people. The question to this group is: Are they *really* giving themselves to people? They see people as having needs. They see themselves as responding to these needs. People become *objects* of their concern. They want to do things for them, plan for them, mobilize them. These claim they possess love for people but such love often conceals a concomittant intention of withholding self, of refusing the risk and the pain of not satisfying personal needs and drives. They love with half the total reality and demand of commitment. They like the emotional uplift, the recognition, the sense of being where the action is, the euphoria, but they run away from, or refuse to face the pain and the suffering, the misunderstanding and boredom, the hardships and lack of communication, the sinfulness of people. They seem to be seeking some kind of an ideal but in the process they overlook or try to circumvent the limitations of the particular and the continuing demand of the particular to strain towards the total. This group fails to see the extent to which the Paschal Mystery is part of every human endeavor. Their so-called love for people smothers, represses, subtly dominates. It cannot allow people to be themselves, to become and to grow on their own. This spirituality, while it purports to be selfless and creative, is just as self-centered and manipulative as the previous one.

There is a third type of religiously formed person. These persons have had the good fortune or the courage to transcend the limits of both

institution and ideology. They are able to commit themselves fully to the *new* historico-socio-cultural situations and realities, to profound socio-political change operating within the categories of the temporal order (political, praxis, etc.), and yet retain an equilibrium that fosters the growth of the life of the Spirit Who opens up to them a deep meaningful life of prayer.

They are open to future possibilities, respectful and humble before what is not yet in full and clear view on the horizon. They know fully well that the horizon today will yet give way to the horizon that is beyond. They are reverent to the mystery that is in store yonder. They dare nevertheless as they launch into the yet uncharted ocean ahead because they are conscious of the abiding presence of the Spirit of Him Who has assured them: Fear not, 'Tis I: I shall be with you till the dawning of the new heaven and the new earth. They travel not alone but hand-in-hand with fellow travellers who sense their solidarity as a family and a people by the bonds of the deepest aspirations of the heart to be fully human: fully free and fully alive. They know that there lies the glory of the God Who became man to become their fellow. The God Who has shown His power by transforming the depths of nothingness into heights of glory, the abyss of death into an inexhaustible wellspring of full life, and the limitations of humanity into boundless freedom of God.

What follows is an attempt to formulate this new spirituality.

1. Prayer is to *know Jesus* as the Gospels portray Him—the Living God Who got involved and, through His Spirit, is still involved in human history, so that knowing Him we can recognize Him as Emmanuel, alive and present among His people, especially the poor.

Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., from "Genuine Integration of the Spiritual Life and Apostolate" (a letter to the Society of Jesus):

To live today, at every moment and in every mission, the life of a 'contemplative in action' supposes a *gift and a pedagogy of prayer* that will give us the capacity for renewed 'reading' of reality (of all reality) from the point of view of the Gospel and for continual confrontation of that reality *with* the Gospel.

Fr. Segundo Galilea, from "Liberation as an Encounter with Politics and Contemplation" (*Concilium*, June, 1974):

We must recover today the authentic biblical dimension of

contemplation which we call historical or the contemplation of commitments in all its fullness, in favour of a renewal of spirituality which will reconcile the contemplative and the political elements in our continent. What is interesting at this moment in Latin America is that this recovery is beginning to be encountered in the experience of many Christians and Christian groups, including those who are committed to various tasks oriented towards liberation.

These Christians react against an a-historical salvation. They see salvation rather as tied to temporal and political commitments, although they do not reduce to temporal liberation. They give great importance to the praxis of liberation and discover in prayer the guarantee that evangelical values preside over that praxis. Their commitment itself, at times a very radical one, has led them in many cases to bring their faith to a high degree of Christian mysticism. (In this respect a well-known case is that of Nestor Paz, the Christian guerillero who died four years ago in guerilla conflicts in Bolivia.)

The experience of Jesus in service to our brother gives the Christian consciousness its social dimension and frees it of any tendency to be purely individual, private or platonic. It gives brotherly love a social, collective dimension to the extent that the 'last' are not only individual persons in Latin America, but human groups—marginal subcultures, social classes or sectors. There is in them a collective presence of Jesus, the experience of which constitutes a true contemplative act.

Contemplation conceived in this way gives a socio-political content to faith and itself acquires an historico-social dimension, without being reduced to this alone. Christ encountered and contemplated in prayer is prolonged in the encounter with our brother and, if we are capable of experiencing Christ in our service of the 'least', it is because we have already encountered him in contemplative prayer. Contemplation is not only the discovery of the presence of Jesus in the brother ('you did it to me') but also a call to action in his favour, to the liberating commitment ('as you did it....'). The contemplation of Christ in the suffering, oppressed brother is a call to commitment. It is the historical content of Christian contemplation in the Latin American Church.

This encounter with Christ in others is not improvised. It assumes that he has been contemplated in prayer and this experience

is reactivated in the service of others and so acquires a social, historical content and purifies our orientation towards others.

Dedication to our brother and his liberation, considered as a contemplative experience, implies an accompanying and intuitively illuminating presence of that same Christ encountered in prayer. This consciousness of Christ is the point where prayer and commitment unite, and it prevents the later from becoming hollow and empty, by including them both in the same contemplative experience. Christian mysticism is a mysticism of commitment.

2. Prayer opens up to a reflection on what is going on in the world especially among *the poor*. What is happening to them? What structures overwhelm them? How are they affected? Who is Christ, the Savior, in this historico-socio-politico-cultural reality?

3. Prayer leads to reflection on *ourselves* to see how unfree we are, how fettered we are by the structures in our lives: sterile tradition, fossilized institution, canonized culture, absolutized ideology. It is a reflection on our relationship and action with the poor to see how we can serve them better. It is a continuing attempt to liberate ourselves from our nest of support and security systems to be able to take the risk to go beyond as an expression of total commitment to Christ.

4. Prayer is complete *openness* to the Spirit of Jesus alone personally and personally in community.

5. Prayer is *personal relationship* with the Spirit of Jesus. This personal relationship is in the context of the Covenant: "I will be your God and you shall be my people."⁷

6. Prayer is being *on frequency* with the Spirit of Jesus, Who comes through to us with His power to instrumentalize us (our humanity) towards the realization of the Covenanted Community (the people of God) in the historico-socio-politico-cultural processes of human history.

Bishop Julio Xavier Labayen, O.C.D., from "Filipino—Christian Spirituality and Social Action Today"—A Lenten Lecture, 1978:

The Spiritual Life is living one's human life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is the abiding fruit of the Father's saving work in and through Jesus Christ. To have Spirituality is to be

constantly tuned in to the 'lead of the Befriending Spirit' as Jesus was. To be a Spiritual Person is to be like Christ, a person imbued with the Spirit, sensitive to His suggestion, responsive to His call, obedient to His biddings and generous to His demands.

Both Spirituality and Social Action need to be rooted in the recognition of the intimate bond between the followers of Christ and mankind and its history, if they are to move towards authentic integration.

Social Action, therefore, has for its task to carry forward the saving work of Christ in its social dimension under the lead of the Befriending Spirit. Social action seeks to realize the social dimension of the Gospel within the context of man's environment and human processes. It listens to what the Spirit awakens in, and surfaces through, man who experiences his concrete situation which is torn between good and evil. Social action attempts then to give a response in terms of the social dimension of the Good News.

Prayer must be understood in the light of God's self-revelation and self-gift in Scriptures. God is love. He is God creator because He is love. He shares generously. He is God who saves because He is love. He exercises His power to love by bringing the prodigal son back to his senses, to a realization of an untold fidelity of a Father's love despite the son's squandering of His gifts of love. In short, prayer in the Bible is understood in the light of a relationship of love between God and man, within the context of a *covenant of love*. Prayer thus lived is the growing realization of a love-relationship, the waxing strong of a covenant: the mutual self-giving of God and man. God's interests become man's. Man's interests become God's. Man is fired with zeal for the reign of his God. God shows Himself faithful in loving man.

The life of prayer presupposes acceptance of, and trust in, Jesus and His Spirit. At the same time, it strengthens that trust and confidence, which results in a commonly shared vision of the New Man, the new heaven and the new earth, and what it takes to bring them about. Prayer-life is living the covenant of love between God and man, and engages both in a partnership towards carrying forward the work of Christ in its entirety under the lead of His Befriending Spirit.

7. Prayer *fortifies* this covenanted community that she, like Jesus, may seek to lay down her life for humankind in the same manner

that the Gospel symbols portray: Light, Salt, Leaven, the seed that must die. "Ecclesia ... pro sus vita aut pro mundi vita?" (Card. Kim, Bishops' Synod, 1974)

Conclusion

Asia of course has own indigenous traditions of prayer, especially in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The Indian journal *Vidyajyoti* has carried numerous articles studying these traditions and their relevance to Christian prayer. It is not possible even to summarize here the wealth of insight found in those articles. Still a paper that is expected to fit into our theme "Prayer in Asia" should not end without some reference to non-Christian religions and their forms of prayer, since the FABC at its 1974 Taipei meeting pledged itself to dialogue with the great religious traditions of our people."

The form of spirituality and prayer advocated in this paper stresses the importance of studying or considering the way God is operating in the world, especially among the oppressed groups. Can this form of prayer help us to see how other religions are "significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation" (FABC Statement, Taipei, 1974). This form of prayer which seeks to know Jesus "Who is still involved in human affairs" helps us to see how He operates in and through the traditional Asian religions, how "He has drawn our peoples to Himself through them."

The dialogue we proposed at the Taipei meeting sought to enable us "to receive from these (non-Christian) religious traditions what our faith in Christ leads us to receive, and what must be purified, healed and made whole in the light of God's Word." Hopefully, a form of prayer that is essentially open to the action of the Spirit, as was proposed in this paper, will help us to receive from the other religions where the Spirit also works.

Questions for Discussion

1. What role do prayer and spirituality play in the task of total human development?
2. Is our present outlook and style of prayer adequate? Does it harmonize and integrate prayer and action, evangelization, justice and human development?

3. What can be done to inculcate in all Christians a true prayer life that will provide the vision, the motivation, the fortitude, the sustaining hope for an involvement in the historico-socio-politico-cultural realities of the temporal order as an expression of our being instrumentalized by the Spirit of Jesus to progressively bring about the Kingdom of the Father?

Footnotes:

- 1 John 3:16; John 10:14-15.
- 2 Gaudium et Spes (Church in the Modern World), No. 37.
- 3 Mt 25:40.
- 4 John 21:15-17.
- 5 John 13:34.
- 6 John 10:10.
- 7 Ez 36:26-28; Jer 11:14; Hos 2:23;