

SECOND PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE

**CHRISTIAN PRAYER AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:
ENRICHMENT OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER****0. Introduction: Scope and Purpose of this Workshop**

0.1. Our reflection on Christian prayer and interreligious dialogue is to be contextualized in the Asian situation marked by an immense cultural, religious and ideological plurality. On one hand, the lives of our peoples since time immemorial have been mostly embedded in a religious atmosphere, and the various cultural traditions still reflect their deeper self-searching for the Divine.¹ On the other, urban areas especially seem to be adrift now on the mighty currents of modernization and technological development, and under the continuous influence of contemporary ideologies the process of restructuring human society is well on its way towards secularization. Thus, our workshop could offer a very valuable contribution to the inculturation of Christian faith in Asia.

0.2. However, we must be constantly aware of the overwhelming complexity of the Asian scene. By oversimplifying our cultural, religious, and ideological situation, by formulating merely general ideas, or by rushing into premature conclusions, our workshop will lose much of its value and fall short of our expectations. Hence, although this guide for discussion is meant only to introduce a few leading ideas and

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."

to give some general outlines, on the other hand it cannot become too confined and simplistic. We have decided, therefore, to give due account to principles found in Vatican II, and to the religious situation of the various countries, so as to stimulate the workshop to elaborate still further our own reflection on Christian prayer and prayer life in Asia. but now based more on your own personal experience.

0.3. Several areas of exchange of experiences and discussion closely related to one another will come up as specifications of our central theme:

- 0.3.1. Religion and Religions in Asia.
- 0.3.2. Worship and prayer life in Asia.
- 0.3.3. Interreligious dialogue.
- 0.3.4. Impact of other faiths on Christian prayer.
- 0.3.5. Impact of dialogue on Christian prayer.
- 0.3.6. Impact of prayer on dialogue.
- 0.3.7. Communion in prayer with people of other faiths.
- 0.3.8. Some implications for the Church's mission in Asia.
- 0.3.9. Some other concrete steps envisaged.

0.4. Since discussions on our theme could serve a variety of purposes, what in particular is this workshop aiming at?

0.4.1. *Exchange* of information: experiences; reflections; from all over Asia, particularly on prayer life among our people?

0.4.2. How to arrive at an ever *fuller realization* of Christian prayer by opening our hearts to the inspiration of other living faiths and religious beliefs?

0.4.3. How to make Christian prayer—and Christian faith in general—truly *relevant*, so that people in their actual life situation find their intimate longing for God genuinely expressed and answered in it?

0.4.4. With regard to communion in prayer with people of other faiths, it certainly is not superficial to ask: "*how far can we go?*" How can we, by worshipping together, positively help each other in realizing ever more personally our common faith in the Lord of salvation?

0.4.5. How can we by communion in worship intensify interreligious *relationships*, and thus attain an ever deepened consciousness of God's saving presence among our people, the more necessary today, considering the growing secularizing tendencies in our developing countries, and let us ask whether traditional religions and beliefs are able to cope with them?

0.4.6. Fundamentally, how do we expect this particular workshop on Christian prayer in the context of interreligious dialogue to contribute to the building of our *local churches* in Asia?

1. Religion and Religions in Asia

1.1. Let us start with the context of prayer life in Asia. In the plurality of living faiths and numerous religious beliefs we find embodied, although imperfectly and somewhat confused by current secularizing trends, God's self-revelation and man's inborn desire for God, for "the Divine,"² for eternal salvation. These religions represent man's deepest aspirations, revealing God's calling, which at times may be more or less veiled under his desire for tranquillity of mind, peace with his fellowmen, harmony within the cosmic order considered as mystery and source of salvation. In religious teachings and beliefs we encounter man's conscience guiding him through earthly life, not seldom in a simple and spontaneous but surprisingly genuine way. Even if in a less articulated mode, since all creation bears the mystery of the Creator Whom we believe to be the Saviour of humanity, man's personal response in self-commitment to Him is already—albeit initially—genuine faith.³

1.2. For any religion, as much as for Christianity, the question of inculturation is of vital importance. A lack of inculturation of Faith and its expressions can easily lead towards a religious syncretism, or towards a dualism (e.g., a Christianity existing alongside persisting original religious beliefs and traditions).⁴

1.3. In Asia we may roughly distinguish between gnostic soteriologies and biblical theism.

1.3.1. The gnostic zone, dominated by the Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist cultures, preserves alive in many monasteries, beneath their animistic and/or Confucianist encrustment, its trend of mysticism. Hinduism permeates India and continues as an underground current into Indonesia, Buddhist Burma, Thailand and Cambodia, as well as into Sri Lanka. Buddhism, the most resistant gnostic trend, is numerically very powerful and has spread extensively into many countries.

1.3.2. Although by categorizing Islam under biblical theism we place it on the same level with Christianity, Islam in Asia has a far more decisive

role sociologically than does Christianity. Unlike Taoism, Hinduism or Buddhism, which have their centre of gravity in the continent itself, Islam seems to gravitate towards Africa and Asia's Western margin, thus pushing the Muslims of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and the southern Philippines to the borders of the Islamic world.

1.4.5. Shintoism, the native religion of Japan, in its personal aspect implies every faith in the "Kami" (gods), those practices in conformity with the character of the "Kami," and a spiritual life deriving from the worship of the "Kami" and in communion with the "Kami." Shintoism, much more than a religious faith, is a combination of attitudes, ideas and ways of doing things which, for more than 26 centuries, have become an integral part of the life and heritage of the Japanese people.¹¹

1.5. Moreover, those religions never exist in their pure, ideal shape. For instance:

1.5.1. Buddhism was able to adapt itself in such a remarkable way to the people and cultures it encountered so as to become truly indigenous. It became a transforming agent in the different cultural and religious situations, and at the same time was itself transformed. Buddhism, almost everywhere, introduced new philosophical and spiritual dimensions, but meanwhile it absorbed, through accommodation, various beliefs and practices prevalent among the people, which in turn brought about a lasting transformation in Buddhism itself.

1.5.2. Shintoism has amalgamated various ethnic and cultural, native and foreign influences (like Buddhism and Confucianism), and achieved a national unity. It is at once a true expression of Japanese spirituality and at the same time a manifestation of the socio-cultural life of the people.

1.6. Thus we find those religions well blended with and coloured by original local religious beliefs and traditions. These traditional beliefs are often found as a persistent infrastructure underlying the tenets of the "great religions," at times even to the point of polarization with them.¹² However, in many regions these animistic trends mostly wither away when exposed to technocracy and Marxism, and become domesticated by the world religions. Conversion from animism to any of the biblical and gnostic religions is more frequent than from one religion to another. Moreover, when these religions collide with Marxism or technocracy, it is always the animistic substructure in which they have been implanted that gets eroded first.

1.7. Since religion is the human expression of our quest for salvation amid a world affected and disintegrated by man's sinful existence, it is not free from imperfections and even divisions. For example, in quite a number of instances, especially in regions of primitive life, "religious" beliefs may even cease to be properly religious in the Christian sense, when they are intermingled with magical tendencies and practices.

1.8. In the past, the whole complex of religious and cultural traditions have deeply penetrated and decisively moulded the minds of people and their life-patterns. In the last decades particularly, these have come up against the process of modernization and development in all countries. They have been confronted by socialist, marxist-based ideologies in some areas. From the perspective of prayer life in Asia, we may ask: will traditional religions and beliefs be able to cope with these developments, or rather be undermined by secularizing trends? In certain areas, some of these when confronted with these very trends seem to be entering a period of revival and dynamism, thus apparently suggesting that man's heart can never be satisfied by the things of this world. What is the actual situation in the various regions of Asia?

1.9. As a preliminary to our reflection on prayer life in Asia as well, can we spell out more distinctly the main features of the manifold expression of the mystery of salvation as found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and other religions and beliefs, in various regions in particular? Can we draw a more detailed picture of Asian religiosity, pointing out more specifically the characteristics of our peoples' attitudes of mind towards God or "the Divine," his world and his own self, which eventually set the dominant tone for his prayer life?

2. Worship and Prayer Life in Asia

2.1. Prayer in its various forms ought to express more explicitly—although not necessarily verbally—the encounter between God and man. It sustains our vivid awareness of God's all encompassing, all penetrating personal salvific presence. In prayer man recognizes his life to be totally dependent on God. There he takes and symbolizes his self-surrender to the Lord of salvation in the deepest and most human way, since man is most human when consciously he stands before God.

2.2. In the Asian context meditation and contemplation are especially highly appreciated as a raising up of our minds and hearts to attain a

personal dialogue with God, as our spiritual "breathing place," helping us better to commit our lives to God's love and His plan of salvation. Within this perception or religious experience of Reality as a whole, man can be helped to situate the realities of his earthly life in their relation to the Absolute, especially at a time when the autonomy of earthly values within the process of development in our countries is gaining increasingly man's appreciation.

2.3. In certain milieus recollection of mind and contemplation still seem to be recognized as the source of *philosophia* in its original sense, the well head for the "wisdom of life." Men of prayer and meditation are highly esteemed and often called upon to give their advice in difficult situations. In some regions schools of prayer and meditation still make their impact on society. During the last Bishops' Synod in Rome it was even opined that Buddhist monastic life in Thailand could provide a source of inspiration for Christian catechesis, especially of youth. Will these features persist in days to come?

2.4. The various religions and beliefs express God's saving presence and man's response in faith, each in its own manner, emphasizing the several aspects of salvation differently. For the enrichment of Christian prayer and the implementation of the Church's mission in Asia we have much to learn, particularly from their ways of worshipping, which reflect even authentic religious attitudes within the cultural setting proper to each region. Can we arrive at an overall, and yet sufficiently detailed, picture of the riches in these various forms of prayer?

2.5. We are to take into consideration to what extent practices of prayer have lost some, or maybe a good deal, of their meaning, and have become mere formalities, without much of a deep personal commitment on the part of those praying. Wherever the accent has shifted from the innermost attitude of faith to the level of external rituals, these practices may even lose their sense as faith expressions. Can the factors be discerned in this process of decline, which may also affect the growth of prayer life in depth among our own faithful?

2.6. In the Asian context especially, we may ask ourselves whether even Christian prayer at times has not lost some of its vitality and its relevance; whether even the rites of the sacraments may not have been affected, e.g., by unnecessary and even inappropriate liturgical regulations, or because "there have crept with the passage of time certain features" into their rites, "which have rendered their nature and purpose

less clear to the people of today.”¹³ According to Vatican II’s Constitution on Liturgy it is to be ensured “that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully.” This theme about awareness and active participation by the faithful is basic to the Constitution.¹⁴ Maybe—as a side effect of post-Vatican II liturgical renewal—the congregation has become overactive in taking part. Have not we at times lost sight of the importance of prayerful silence, so highly appreciated in many traditions of worship in our countries, and strongly recommended by the Constitution itself?¹⁵

2.7. It has been observed that the movement of “rebirth of Hinduism”—to use one example—has not only had the merit of bringing about a return to the Sacred Texts, and of purifying the practice of religion of formalism and ritualism, but also has drawn attention very decidedly to the human and social problems of India. The mystical impulse, traditional to all Hinduism, took on a new dimension of solidarity towards humankind. Many Buddhist monks nowadays also feel many social obligations to serve their community and to render a reasonable service for the benefit of the layman’s society. In certain areas Buddhism even has assumed socialist features.¹⁶ It is equally significant that, since the 1950’s, South East Asia has produced three diverse brands of “Buddhist Socialism.”¹⁷ How will such developments in turn affect prayer life?

2.8. On the other hand, account must be taken also of the proneness of religions and beliefs in certain areas to move away from the harsh realities of life into a somewhat unrealistic mystical “beyond.” How do we assess this rather frequent religious phenomenon? Is this the result of a kind of contempt for the transitory, everchanging earthly “appearances”? Or rather is it simply a flight from reality?

2.9. How in fact is prayer life appreciated in our region? Is prayer considered an important aspect of societal and personal life? Or is it rather a matter of occasional, or maybe routine, prayer practices? To what extent is prayer viewed as a response to man’s needs and innermost desires? On the whole, how far does it really affect a person in the very reality of his daily life? Last but not least: in the various religions and beliefs what attitudes of mind are particularly emphasized? Which aspects of man’s relationship with God are predominant?

3. Interreligious Dialogue

3.1. Vatican II views the religions and beliefs of mankind not as rivals or as historical movements wholly alien to Christianity, but as the possessors of values intimately related to the divine mystery, of which the Church is the depositary.¹⁸ However deficient they may be, for most peoples in Asia it is by them that God to a certain extent reveals the path of salvation. Where there is some revelation of the mystery of God's condescending love, there man's self commitment in response to that calling—imperfect though it may be—is already a genuine faith leading to blissful union with the Lord of all creation. Since, despite deficiencies in those religions and beliefs, many aspects of the mystery of salvation are revealed in various ways, they may be mutually of great help in man's never lessening search for salvation. This is particularly true where they have arrived at some dialogue, which is already taking place in quite a few Asian countries.

3.2. By dialogue we seek to learn how each participant subjectively lives his own faith, within the reality of his daily life and the problems of human society. His personal witness calls for belief, and this may not be disputed. Dialogue aims at mutual understanding and acceptance by each of its members and through them by their coreligionists. Thus, one's own life is enriched through the actual religious experience of others. By personal sharing of these experiences and mutual inspiration we help each other to a more profound and authentic commitment to God within our own religion.

3.3. Moreover, dialogue is a path to an ever-deepening fellowship or communion in life. This very "being together" is in fact the most valuable aspect of the dialogue of life, which is thus fostered and is so important to the lives of our people. Thus, we most intimately meet our brethren at the level of experience and share with them in humanity and in grace, something quite in tune with Vatican II's declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions, which from the very outset stresses as basic the idea of all peoples comprising a single community.¹⁹

3.4. Thus also, when it comes to communion in prayer of adherents of several religious traditions, there is supposed a mutual respect, i.e., a readiness to learn from one another how to live one's faith and to express it in daily life, and accordingly, how also to worship the Lord of all humanity. Such a readiness is based on the sincere acknowledgement that:

3.4.1. faith actually is a never ending search for God's unfathomable mystery in His saving presence amongst us;

3.4.2. and the way we express in prayer this quest for God is also always partial or defective, indeed never adequate or comprehensive.

3.5. Interreligious dialogue, however, may be understood in a broader sense, i.e., "when, however different its object, its partners share a religious concern and attitude of complete respect for one another's convictions and a fraternal openness of mind and heart. Religious dialogue, therefore, does not necessarily mean that two persons speak about their religious experiences, but rather that they speak as religiously committed persons with their ultimate commitments and religious outlook, on subjects of common interest."²⁰ *Nostra Aetate*, no.2. speaks of "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions," and of promoting "the values in their society and culture."²¹

3.6. Interreligious dialogue calls for discernment. Religion itself—and this equally applies to prayer and prayer life—as the human expression of our search for God—however sincerely it may be meant—will not escape the distortions of our imperfections and our sinful existence. Hence we must be critically open to other religions as much as to ourselves. We must not indulge in syncretism or succumb to a false desire for compromise by too easily equating the religious experience, attitudes, and beliefs of others with our own, or by abstaining from witnessing to Christian faith in order not to appear different from others. This form of insincerity vitiates the authenticity of dialogue. Its extreme form is indifferentism; in our heart we put all forms of religious belief on the same level. We should hold to the unique decisive character of Christian revelation, to the ultimate and absolute significance of Jesus Christ as God's Word to mankind.

3.7. What are the most important facts and features of interreligious dialogue in our countries? To what extent are our faithful participating in dialogue, especially at the level where the exchange of faith experience and convictions will influence more directly their attitudes in prayer and daily life? Can we give an analysis of the most determining factors? What is our assessment?

4. Impact of other Faith on Christian Prayer

4.1. What we are to learn from other religions in particular, especial-

ly with regard to Christian prayer, may be drawn largely from whatever is good and true in their respective beliefs and attitudes of faith in God and His mystery of salvation. We sincerely believe that whatever authentic religious value has been expressed comes from the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit we are all called to grow, with the help of our brethren, to the full maturity of Christ. More specifically:

4.2. From Islam, which means "to submit oneself" to God, we may draw the example of courage in the public profession of faith in "the One God, living and enduring, merciful and almighty, Creator of heaven and of earth, who has spoken to men." We may learn a very deep reverence before His majesty and wholehearted submission to His sovereign will.²² From the beginning of Islamic history believers, desirous of penetrating the mystery of God and of living it in their fashion, have sought a rule of life, in no way breaking with the Qur'an, but coming from a deeper study and meditation of its message. Preachers, devotees, penitents, ascetics, more or less influenced by contributions and examples from Christian or Indian mysticism, endeavoured to lead the total Islamic religious experiences to their ultimate. Some were able to set out on a mystical experience, developing a unity of love between God and the believer. Others developed a mystical experience of a monistic type, where the person of the believer becomes reabsorbed in God Himself and disappears.²³

In contemporary Islam the questions of "religion and politics," of modernization, and secularization, seem to give rise to grave problems. It is even a question whether most Muslims are aware and to what extent they are aware of these problems.²⁴ An effort to remedy this may be a reintegration of the mystical dimension.

4.3. From Hinduism, where "men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry,"²⁵ we may learn a deeper consciousness of the absolute reality of God (the Divine), before Whom nothing really is. We may be enriched in our religious symbolism for the expression of our own faith. Man's release "from the anguish of our condition through ascetical practices or deep meditation or a loving, trusting flight toward God,"²⁶ is perfect union with the final Cause of all creation. This presupposes the allowing of full room for His presence and His action. It is to the "Param—Eshvara" (the Supreme Lord) that man must entrust himself.²⁷ Within the limits of a personal conception of God, along the line of the concept of "grace," He bestows upon us His prasâdâ, i.e., His love, kindness, compassion, and actual help.²⁸ Powerful bhakti movements have always given Hinduism life.²⁹

4.4. Buddhism "in its multiple forms acknowledges the radical insufficiency of this shifting world."³⁰ Its teachings can be summarized in the Four Noble Truths.³¹ It may give us light on something that can be really relevant to most Asian countries: the radical meaning of spiritual liberation; liberation into a state of supreme happiness, and perfect inward peace and tranquillity, an experience of bliss which can be attained in this very life on earth. Important in Buddhist life is also the *Sangha*,³² the order of Bhikkhus devoting their life to the peace and happiness of people as spiritual leaders, unhindered by worldly distractions, renouncing all ties (parents, family, spouse, friends and property).

It is interesting, however, to note in passing that, e.g., in Indonesia, some trends, especially in Theravada Buddhism, show agnostic and even almost atheistic inclinations.

4.5. Values are found also in Confucianism, with a theology pursuing two lines of thought:

4.5.1. the metaphysical line, based on a idea of God inspired by the contemplation of the firmament (T'ien), striking to man by reason of the regularity of its movement, and dreadful in some of its meteorological phenomena. Faced by this two-fold revelation, man becomes aware, on one hand, of the infallibility of the divine decrees (ming); and on the other, he becomes apprehensive of the supernatural sanctions inflicted by God because of the aberrations of man.

4.5.2. the ethical line, in facing the problem of the just man who suffers. While the ordinary man acts according to the interest he may derive from everything (li), a noble man reveals himself by acting in everything according to duty or virtue (i).

4.6. In Taoism, both the Taoist School (Lao-Tzu) and the Taoist "church" (a near-religious organization, probably through the influence of Buddhism) are inspired by the religious traditions of Ancient China. The former has demythologised the ancient mythological beliefs and magical practices; the latter has preserved them. The Taoist moral system, not comparable to the Confucianist one, and taking its inspiration from Buddhism, holds to a kind of anthropology, teaching a human existence beyond the present life.

4.6.1. Lao-Tzu's religious message teaches tranquillity comes from the return of all things to their root or destiny, to the eternal (*Tao*), to know which is called enlightenment.

4.6.2. The Taoist "church," in the reform of the 12th century, still based itself on Taoist tradition, but included elements of Confucianism and Buddhism, and called itself the Religion of Integral Truth. The traditional "church" was called the Religion of Orthodox Unity.

4.7. According to Shintoism, man in his innermost being possesses the divine heart, which is clear, pure and sincere, even if he himself is existentially "in the dark." The whole of Shinto asceticism tends towards the restoring the heart of "Kami" in us. Worship and divine service have no other purpose than that of recovering the original likeness of man through the discovery and the practice of that divine heart which is within each one of us.

4.8. In our reflection on how to allow other faiths to inspire, and thus perfect, our Christian prayer life, we may first mention that we should not use the writings and prayers of other religions simply as literature. In our contemplation we should allow ourselves to be taken by the Spirit of God into the deepest religious experiences of our brethren, which we believe are moving towards a final consummation of a conscious profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Due preparatory work, of course, is called for—as with all interreligious dialogue—especially where the "ordinary" faithful are involved.

4.9. The use of methods of prayer, such as those popularized by Yoga,³³ Zen, and Satti Patthana, and of traditional religious symbols, may lead religious-minded people to very deep levels of prayer. The values of *bhakti*, of interiority, of the sovereignty of the Lord, His transcendence and immanence, man's obedience, service, etc., should be fully interiorized and allowed to shape our own religious attitudes.³⁴ Beyond doubt, discernment is called for also in the choice of methods, readings, etc., since not everything is conducive to growth in the Spirit.

4.10. What are your comments: e.g., your own experiences, problems, suggestions?

5. Impact of Dialogue on Christian Prayer

5.1. When Vatican II enjoins on us "in witness to Christian faith and life, to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among adherents of various religions, as well as the values of their

society and culture,"³⁵ it demands that, according to our capabilities, we make our own this religious experience through personal reflection and prayer. We must assimilate these religious values into our prayer life.³⁶

5.2. In dialogue we must learn to go beyond a simple external acceptance to the deeper meanings and intentions of the participants adhering to other faiths and beliefs. We are to recognize in them, even when expressed in religious forms alien to our own, the voice of the Spirit bearing witness to the marvellous variety of God's self-revelation to man.

5.3. We may catch glimpses of other authentic religious experiences, which can be an abundant source of inspiration enriching our Christian prayer. The views of other religions coming from faith, about God, man's relationship with God and God's dealing with man, and the meaning of life on earth, as we have seen, influence the way we lift up our hearts to the Lord.

5.4. This enrichment is a process of assimilation, implying an increasing consciousness of the many facets of the mystery of man as he is saved by God, and a continuing effort to interiorize and integrate the richness of this mystery into our Christian prayer life.

5.5. Thus, interreligious dialogue is a help towards a discovery of self before God. It contributes also to a more genuine way of praying, to be more ourselves before God, and to the reinforcing of our faith in Him.

5.6. What are your comments: e.g., your experiences, problems, suggestions?

6. Impact of Prayer on Dialogue

6.1. Speaking of dialogue with other living faiths and religious traditions, we may start by referring to its analogue, namely, ecumenism. Says the Decree on Ecumenism: "This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can rightly be called 'spiritual ecumenism'."³⁷

6.2. Says Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), known throughout the world as a politician, but in India venerated above all as a spiritual teacher:³⁸ "Congregational prayer is a means for establishing the essential unity through common worship.....Prayer is the greatest binding

force, making for the solidarity and oneness of the human family. If a person realizes his unity with God through prayer, he will look upon everybody as himself.”³⁹

6.3. The attitude of authentic prayer is necessary for interreligious dialogue. The sense of interiority and recollection will make us keenly aware of the immanence of God in ourselves and in all things, especially in our neighbours. This awareness will draw us even closer together. It will make us approach others from a deep religious motivation. Prayer is the very soul of interreligious dialogue, where we meet at the level of the heart. This will deepen our empathy, i.e., our ability to enter the spirit and mind of others, to feel with them, and to allow the full impact of their spirituality to reach us.

6.4. What are your comments: e.g., your own experiences, problems, suggestions?

7. Communion in Prayer with People of other Faiths

7.1. In describing our relationships with our so-called “separated brethren” in Christianity, Vatican II—while still pointing out, though not strongly enough, how we are one indeed with our brethren in Christ, in whom all of us have been baptized!—is rather reserved on the matter of common worship (*communicatio in sacris*). This “may not be regarded as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians.”⁴⁰

7.2. With regard to all our brothers and sisters who profess other faiths and adhere to their religious traditions, we know that God “has willed that all men should constitute one family.” Created in the image of God, “all men are called to one and the same goal, namely, God Himself.” The Lord Jesus praying “that all may be one....” (Jn 17:21-22), even “implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the union of God’s sons in truth and charity.”⁴¹ By reason of this fundamental union within God’s salvific plan, revealed in Christ the Redeemer of all humanity and realized in all men by the Holy Spirit, Who guides all eventually to the full maturity of our belief in God, communion in worship should not at all be out of the question. On the contrary, if we consider how important life in community still is in Asian societies, communion in prayer—as much as the dialogue of life itself—may even pave the way towards an ever closer fellowship with

one another, and an ever deeper realization of the one community of believers in the Saviour of all mankind.

7.3. In our countries, is communion in prayer with adherents of other faiths and beliefs in fact feasible? It seems to be so, whenever inter-religious dialogues are held. Yet we are aware that we still have to overcome many difficulties. In any case, those participating in common worship should be properly prepared, so that, while keeping alive the spirit of discernment, they may truly profit for themselves, and draw others as well to a closer union with God.

7.4. Being together in prayer can be the deepest instance of encounter between people of different beliefs. It can be the event in which they meet at the innermost core of faith, as distinct from religion viewed as expression of faith. We may expect a greater sense of fellowship, the easing of frictions and tensions, and better mutual relationships. Consequently there results a better mutual understanding in explicit inter-religious dialogue. We share in a spirit of sincerely disinterested brotherly love the treasures of our faith, are enriched by the religious values found in others, and thus give witness to what God's grace is working in all and each of us.

7.5. The organization of such prayer meetings will take into consideration who are the participants in this worship. This demands a great sensitivity to each other's feelings. Any expression of superiority in the structure of the meeting or in the prayer itself should be avoided, as should anything that would be likely to hurt or to be misunderstood by others. In other words: it is of primary importance to be together, to experience each other as deeply as possible.

7.6. What are your comments: e.g., your own experiences, problems, suggestions?

8. Some Implications for the Church's Mission in Asia

8.1. While prayer apparently is of paramount importance in the lives of our people, we must show that in Christian prayer they can fully find the answer to their deepest longings for salvation through union with the Lord of all creation.

8.2. It seems important in the Asian context to show that even in prayer we take our stand within the reality of earthly life: simply to start with accepting this earthly life as reality; to acknowledge this life of

ours as the one way towards personal fulfilment in God; to place ourselves in God's saving presence, and to pray that we be able to face this reality; and even to recognize in it God's personal fatherly guidance. For Christian prayer is in no way an abdication of this life but a personal commitment to God's salvation, which embraces man's life on earth.

8.3. There are some milieus where "religious" beliefs are obscured by magical tendencies. Hence, we are ultimately dealing with the opposite of the authentically religious attitude. It should be made clear that prayer never may be considered a means of putting the power of God at man's disposal.

8.4. Experience of methods of praying other than those of the "Western" churches may help us to the ever deeper inculturation of Christian prayer, and ultimately of Christian faith itself.

Vatican II spells out the norms "for adapting the Liturgy to the genius and traditions of peoples,"⁴² acknowledging that "in some places and circumstances an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy" (than that which concerns liturgical books) "is needed."⁴³ In fact, the Church admits local "spiritual adornments and gifts" of the peoples into the liturgy, "as long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit."⁴⁴

8.5. In the young Churches ("mission countries"), it seems appropriate that Christian contemplatives live in a way adapted to the genuine religious traditions of the people. "They can bear splendid witness there among non-Christians to the majesty and love of God, as well as to man's brotherhood in Christ."⁴⁵ Thus, speaking of a particular setting also for prayer life, Vatican II's decree on the Church's missionary activity exhorts religious to "reflect attentively on how Christian religious life may be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions, whose seeds were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the Gospel."⁴⁶

8.6. One may see dialogue as a way to communion in prayer, as much as communion in prayer being a way of facilitating dialogue. As a matter of fact, there will be a dialectical relationship between both. Would it be true that for most of our people in Asia the latter could (should) be given priority over the former?

8.7. In a genuine spirit of dialogue we may help—if possible—those entrusted to our care (e.g., students) to deepen their understanding of

their own religious traditions and scriptures, to acquire habits of prayer and meditation, and to reflect upon the problems arising from the changing environment in which they live out their religious life.

8.8. What are your comments: e.g., your own experiences, problems, suggestions?

9. Some other Concrete Steps to be Envisaged

9.1. To start with, we consider the broader context of the people at prayer. Dialogue is not meant exclusively for the elite. Ultimately, it should be the encounter of people of various faiths and beliefs at all levels, in what is a common search flowing out of the deepest reality of man, and which hopefully one day culminates in communion in prayer. Hence, we should duly prepare our faithful, in order not to create confusion, or to give rise to future misgivings and/or indifference. We must bring them eventually to the personal experience that we are already one—although not perfectly so—with the many millions of other faiths and beliefs in Asia, for all of us are in search of the one God Who saves us.

What steps can we suggest to help along this process of preparation, and later on, to guide our faithful in matters of interreligious dialogue? Can we here give at least some general directions? How concretely to build up a mentality of dialogue now in our own faithful, which directions will differ from person to person depending on his or her particular life situations?

9.2. Since the term dialogue is understood differently by adherents of other faiths, and efforts on our part are not seldom met with suspicion, and even with some hostility, how are we to help non-Christians to leave behind their prejudices and to understand better the meaning and purpose of interreligious dialogue in general? And, in our present discussion, the meaning of communion in prayer?

9.3. We should not overlook the important role religious communities can play in the whole process of assimilating into Christian prayer elements of authentic prayer found in the local religious traditions of our peoples, and thus of inculturating Christian prayer life. This requires that the entire spiritual and religious life be inculturated itself into life situations,⁴⁷ and that centers of Christian prayer or Christian spirituality be fostered for the faithful. What possibilities exist in this field?

9.4. In the context of inculturation how can we open still broader avenues for the development of prayer life? By using religious symbolism appropriate to the country, while purifying it of erroneous elements? By purging the already existing popular religiosity, and by developing its positive elements in a truly Christian sense? Thus, we may be able to touch the very hearts of our own people. (We are not helped very much in this concern merely by translating Latin texts into the vernacular.)

9.5. What about our participating in the worship of other religions, either directly, by active participation, or indirectly, by mere presence? (If you wish: "how far can we go? and for what reasons?") Here we must distinguish between the symbols they use, and, on the other hand, the Lord Whom they experience, and their self-surrender to Him expressed in and through these symbols. We must by all means respect their sincerity and authenticity, and meet them with a sympathetic understanding, something more than a mere physical presence.

9.6. What are your comments: e.g., your own experiences, problems, suggestions?

Footnotes:

1 *Nostra Aetate (NA)*, no.2, speaks of "the restless searchings of the human heart," alluding to St. Augustine's famous sentence in his Confessions: "Our hearts are restless and they will not rest until they rest in Thee."

2 *Lumen Gentium (LG)*, no.16: God is not "far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all man life and breath and every other gift (cf. Acts 17:25-28), and who as Saviour wills that all men be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2,4)." E.g., according to Shankara (780-820), the Brāhman-Ātman of the Upanishads shows an image of God as an impersonal Absolute, whereas the Bhagavad-Gītā introduces a personal conception of God, Purushottama (the "Supreme Person." Gītā XV, 17-19). Although in Shintoism the "Kami" concept remains very vague, the Japanese people grasp it intuitively in the depths of their hearts and communicate with it without ever having formed a theological idea of "Kami."

3 See *LG*, no.16, quoted above. *NA*, no.2, speaks in general terms of "a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human life," instilling the lives of people with a profound religious sense.

4 Thus, e.g., in the Philippines, there seem to be symptoms of so-called "split-level Christianity."

5 Cf. Chāndogya Upanishad, III, 14,1.

6 Cf. *ibid.*, III, 14, 3-4.

7 I.e., reinterpretation along the lines of monotheism within the Indonesian State ideology Panca-Sila.

- 8 This school includes Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.
- 9 This school covers Tibet, South Mongolia, China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.
- 10 Confucius however considered and interpreted it in the light of the so-called *Tsung* system, representing the *Tao*. i.e., the perfect ordering of the world. Confucianism, as Confucius understood it, believed in a certain harmony between the political, moral and religious orders, a harmony called *Tao*.
- 11 Ichiro Kawasaki, however, formerly a diplomat and now a famous author, writes less favourably: "Generally, the Japanese has not been deeply religious, but during the Meiji era (1868-1926) the people have become more indifferent to the specific value of religion.....Shintoism also has been transformed from a religion into a nationalistic ideology," in *Japan unmasked*, p.163. "There is little danger that Japan will go communist, but she wants to coexist with China...." *ibid.*, p.223.
- 12 Such, e.g., is the case with Islam in Indonesia. Cf. H.Bousquet, *Introduction à l'Islam indonésien* (Paris 1938); CL.Geertz, *Islam observed*, (Yale 1968); F.Rahman, *Islam* (London 1968), p.8.
- 13 Cf. *Sacrosanctum Consilium (SC)*, no.62.
- 14 Cf. *SC*, no.11. See also *SC*, no.19, on active participation in the liturgy "both internally and externally." *SC*, no.30: "by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes."
- 15 *SC*, no.30: ".....at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence."
- 16 This is not, however, an accommodation of Buddhism to the demands of rapidly changing world, but rather a concern of the monks for the relevance of Buddhism in a world everywhere in an Asia in a state of transition.
- 17 Namely: that of Bandaranaik of Sri Lanka, U Nu of Burma, and the earlier Sihanouk of Cambodia.
- 18 Cf. *LG*, no.16; *NA*, no.2.
- 19 Cf. *NA*, no.1. See also *Gaudium et Spes (GS)*, no.24, on God's plan giving man's vocation a communitarian nature.
- 20 Cf. Declaration of Nagpur Conference, *Service and Salvation*, by J.Pathrapankal, (Bangalore 1973), p.7.
- 21 Cf. *NA*, no.3: Christians and Muslims should "make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom."
- 22 Cf. *LG*, no.16; *NA*, no.3.
- 23 This actually does not seem very easy to reconcile with the Islam belief in the absolute transcendence of God.
- 24 Moreover, e.g., in Indonesia, current Islam in many instances has become too formalistic and legalistic, and is lacking in properly religious depth.
- 25 Cf. *NA*, no.2.
- 26 Cf. *ibid.*

- 27 Cf. Bhagavad Gîtâ, Krishna to Arjuna, XVIII, 66.
- 28 In Vishnuism *pushti* means "grace of election." In Shivaism the term *Anugraha* occurs, culminating in the *Shakti-nipata* (descent of the divine Power). Even in the idea of *Shakti* we find explicit elements of the "inhabiting" of divine "grace" in man.
- 29 Every other movement represents an aspect, an approach, an addition, a complement, but the true soul of Hinduism always will be *bhakti*.
- 30 Cf. NA, no.2.
- 31 Namely: a) the ascertainment of suffering (*dukkha*), the "diagnosis"; b) the origin of the suffering, the "etiology"; c) the cessation of the suffering, the "healing"; d) the path leading to the cessations of suffering, the "therapy."
- 32 Found in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.
- 33 *Yoga* means "union," and connotes both the means and the instruments for achieving that union. E.g., Bhagavad Gîtâ establishes the triple way (*trimârnga*), accepted almost unanimously in the whole of Hinduism: *Karma-yoga* (the way of action), *Jnâna-yoga* (the way of knowledge), and *Bhakti-yoga* (the way of devotion).
- 34 Cf. CBCI Commission on Dialogue, *Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, (Varanasi, 1977), no.46, p.25.
- 35 Cf. NA, no.2.
- 36 E.g., by using the Ourân, the Bhagavad Gîtâ, the Upanishads, etc., for meditative prayer and "scripture" reading.
- 37 Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio (UR)*, no.8.
- 38 The principle of the Isha Upanishad, I, dear to Gandhi is: "Everthing that we see in this great universe is permeated by God. Let us give it up and let us enjoy it."
- 39 Cf. *Harijan*, March 3rd, 1946, pp.26,29; quoted by Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi, the Last Phase*, I, (Ahmedabad, 1956), pp.162-163. Cf. *Guidelines* no.58, p.32.
- 40 Cf. UR, no.8.
- 41 Cf. GS, no.24.
- 42 Cf. SC, no.37-40. Particularly on the admission of initiation rites in mission lands according to these norms, cf. SC, no.65.
- 43 Cf. SC, no.40. Conditions to be implemented: a) it concerns traditions "not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error" (SC, no.37); b) the substantial unity of the Roman rite is to be maintained (SC, no.38).
- 44 Cf. SC, 37.
- 45 Cf. *Ad Gentes (AG)*, no.40. See also J.Neuner-J.Dupuis (eds.), *The Christian Faith* (Bangalore 1973), nos.1016-1017, pp.272-275.
- 46 Cf. AG, no.18. See also *Perfectae Caritatis*, no.3.
- 47 See the aforesaid in sections no.8.5.

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