

SECOND PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE

PRAYER, COMMUNITY WORSHIP, AND INCULTURATION**I. PERSONAL PRAYER**

There are many different ways of conceiving prayer in the religious traditions of man. For some, prayer is a means for meeting the needs that arise from the finite character and the consequent helplessness of man in the face of certain situations. For others, it is an expression of man's recognition of the excellence of God, the Infinite Being. It has an ontological basis; it is an expression of man's dependence on God.

Although all these concepts are correct, these do not give us the total reality of the praying man. This is given to us by the man *par excellence*, Jesus Christ. For Him, prayer is an expression of His relationship with God, as experienced in His daily life with its concrete manifestations of existential insufficiency, tensions, and problems. It is an act by which His life is seen in terms of the other, God, as His Father, from whom He has received a mission, to be fulfilled through the struggles and toils of this world in order to transform it into the Kingdom of God.

This is very well expressed in the 'Our Father.' It is not a duty to be fulfilled, but an act of relationship in which the whole life of the one who prays is manifested to God with a view to deeper involvement in His plan. In such a prayer, the content cannot be limited to the mere consideration of the ontological nature of man and God, taken in abstract. It is necessary that the prayer, in the style of the Our Father, the Christian prayer *par excellence*, has to be the prayer of one who has entered into the reality of life which he lives under all its aspects, of one who has entered into the world which God wants to transform into His Kingdom.

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."

Questions:

1) What should be the characteristics of the personal prayer of a Christian living in the present socio-politico-economical situation of the Asia of today?

2) Living man is the "the glory of God." In the present situation of Asia how do we understand the phrase 'hallowed be Thy name'?

3) What is the meaning of 'Thy Kingdom come' in the context of the life situation in which the Christian finds himself in Asia today?

II. COMMUNITY WORSHIP

In a community worship, we gather together to share our experience of the world and of the Lord Who is active in the world. We come together to interpret it in the light of the Word of God. We meet together to experience it anew in the light of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The community worship, therefore, has the following elements: the experience of the world to be saved, the experience of the Lord whose Spirit is groaning within (Rom 8:18-27), the Christ-event as handed down through tradition in word and action (1 Cor 11:23), and the community that has a deep sense of belonging to the world, to the Lord, and to one another. The purpose of worship is the transformation of the world. The glory of God is consequent on this. We shall now examine the manner in which each of these elements should be present in our community worship.

a) The World. This has to be the real world, with all its historical and cultural realities. It has to be the concrete world that God created with all its diversity and originality. It has to be the world that is real to the community that is worshipping. It has to be the world with all its past heritage, present tensions and struggles, and future possibilities. It is this world that the worshipping community should bring to the celebration. The bread and wine that are brought to the altar should represent this world. All the signs and symbols should express the reality of this world under its variety of manifestations.

b) The world subjected to the groaning of the Spirit. Man is striving to liberate himself and reach the ideal state to which he feels that he is called from the very depth of his being. This has its manifestations in his religious rituals, political struggles, social tensions, and economic efforts. The worshipping community should embody these realities as they are found in the concrete human community to which they belong.

c) The Christ-event. The world in which we live and the struggles through which it is going have to be interpreted in the light of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. This is the constant element in the celebration, irrespective of the cultural diversity; however, in its interpretation the same Mystery will manifest a new aspect or aspects which perhaps hitherto had remained hidden.

d) The community that celebrates. The celebration is the action of the community; the first and immediate effect of the celebration, is manifested in the community. That means the community acquires a deep sense of belonging to the world and to the Christ-event. Not only this; the community becomes ready to accept the prophetic interpretation of the realities of the world, makes it its own through the renewal of its sense of mission, and implements it for the fulfilment of the plan of God in this world.

In the light of these, the following questions can be posed and discussed.

1) What are the cultural realities of the Asian world that must enter into the celebration of the worship of the community?

2) How do we envisage our fidelity to tradition in the liturgical worship of the Asia of today and tomorrow? In terms of directives from Rome only? In terms of the essential element of the Mystery of Christ? What are these elements of tradition?

3) In the light of the above considerations is inculturation of community worship urgent in our present Asian context? If our answer is "yes," why?

4) Is the Asian Christianity of today ready to work towards inculturation in worship? What are the signs of this readiness? What are the obstacles that are found in its realisation?

5) Do we feel that the world in which our Christians pray and celebrate liturgy is different from the one in which they live and act? Or, in other words, is Asian Christianity suffering from a cultural alienation in its life of worship and prayer? If "yes," what are the effects of this on the rest of the life of the Church in Asia?

6) How do we relate the evangelisation of Asia with the process of inculturation of community worship?

7) Do we see the consequences of inculturation of community worship in Asia on the universal Church from the following points of view: juridical, theological, spiritual, liturgical?

Conclusion

The beginning of the first millennium saw the sprouting forth of the liturgical rites in West Asia and Eastern Europe.

The beginning of the second millennium probably will see the origin of liturgical rites in East Asia and Africa.

All these will contribute ultimately to the unfolding of the riches of the Mystery of Christ and the consequent enrichment of the Church as the Bride of Christ, adorned with many-coloured gems and precious stones gathered together from the riches of the nations.

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