

THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE**THE DIALOGUE OF COMMUNITIES OF FAITH IN ASIA****I. The Aim: A Dialogue of Communities of Faith**

A dialogue, not only between individuals but between communities.

In fact the dialogue until now, as we may know from reports, is happening between individuals, and most of the time between intellectuals. Those engaged in such activities are often suspected.

In most of the cases, the religious groups have to protect themselves against the propaganda made by other groups. An individual may have more freedom of interpretation of some doctrines of the Church, but the larger the group the less freedom it has in the matter of expression of faith.

In many countries, the religious groups tend to live apart and to create their own social and cultural traditions and customs. For this reason the dialogue of the communities of faith becomes difficult.

The larger the community, the more simplified is the corpus of doctrine. This makes any discussion and distinction more difficult. The faithful have to stick to doctrines or elements of faith which mark clearly the individuality of the doctrine.

Still we have to move ahead and make the Christian communities sensitive to this great problem of modern times, the encounter of living faith. This could lead either to more sectarian divisions or to real open attitudes of ecumenism.

This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshop sessions of the Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held at Lux Mundi Seminary, in Sampran, Thailand, near Bangkok, 20th-27th October, 1982. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "The Church — A Community of Faith in Asia."

II. The Basis of Dialogue Between the Church as Community (Revelation and Faith) and the Other Communities

The basis of dialogue between Churches as communities includes many elements:

1. A very clear knowledge and awareness on the part of every Church of its characteristics in matters of faith, doctrine, cult, and so on. Without such a solid foundation, there is no dialogue possible.

2. A sincere recognition of the specific characteristics of the doctrine of the other religions. This attitude will eliminate any polemic attitude in dialogue. The aim is not to compete, but to understand each other.

3. A theology of salvation which can make possible such an understanding. (See below)

4. A concrete training in the ways of dialogue on different levels: theological, liturgical, pastoral, etc.

III. A Theology of Salvation (which can enhance such a dialogue)

There are certain theological attitudes which make any dialogue totally impossible. For example, the conviction that salvation is possible only by belonging to a definite Church.

Thus we have to distinguish:

1. a) The origin and author of salvation, which is God Himself. Man is not the agent of his own salvation . . . and

b) The ultimate aim of salvation which is reconciliation and union with God. On this all have to agree.

2. The ways. These ways may be different in the concrete, although the origin and the aim are one. In fact, believers are saved in their own faith, and in a way, "by" their faiths. This does not mean that all the ways have the same value, but in fact they are the ways which lead people to salvation.

3. a) Christ the Way as he appears in his Church, and b) Christ the Word of God who is the author of salvation for every human being, although he does not know him in his historical incarnation.

4. a) Christ the Savior as known and recognized in Christian Churches, and b) Christ the ultimate Savior of mankind, although he is not recognized as such.

IV. The Great Religions as Communities which are Agents of Salvation in God's Salvific Plan

Salvation happens in history, and God accepted this historical, temporal and, we may say, imperfect condition of salvation.

The fact that the Word of God became man in a certain place, at a certain time in history, in such a way that He could not be known by every human being, means that the explicit acceptance of Christ is not necessary to salvation.

Men have been searching for ways to know and to meet God. This search was the result of the action of the Word of God and His Spirit working at the depth of human nature.

All religions, the so-called great ones and the others, have been in fact recognized by God as concrete ways of salvation, imperfect as they may be.

These faiths are not individual but communitarian. Faith comes from God through the action of communities of faith, whose basic element is the family. In fact, the fundamental beliefs and attitudes are taught by the parents, and first by the mother.

To put the transmission of faith on the shoulder of the Churches is to put aside the basic role of the fundamental human community, the family, in the transmission.

To recognize this point is to reconcile the "natural" source of religion and its "supernatural" source through objective revelation.

Not to recognize the fact that all the religions are agents of salvation is to deny the whole plan of God.

As was said above, to recognize that religions are historical agents of salvation has to go along with the recognition that Christ as Word of God and His Spirit are the ultimate agents of this salvation provided in history through and by many different religions.

V. Partners in Mission to the World — Pastoral Consequences of Such Partnership

In encouraging other faith communities in their mission to the world, we work finally toward the same aim: the recognition of God the Father as the God of every human being. Christ does not attract to himself as the final goal or the ultimate center. He attracts to himself to open and to lead to the Father.

We may be partners in mission to the world while thinking that our own Church is the “best” way. But in history the question of “the best” is very relative. Normally everyone feels that the best religion for him is the one in which he has been educated. The “best” in theory may be far from being the best for people in concrete cultural situations.

Concretely, Churches should not attack each other but show mutual understanding, because the final judge of our religious attitude is not men but God himself.

VI. What does the Community Existence of the Great Religions Say to the Catholic Community in Terms of Community Relevance of the Church in Asia? Of Leading the Church to Probe the Gospel Regarding Community Existence? Of its Corporate Conduct? Of Individual Conversion?

The existence of the great religions in Asia should make the Christian Churches reflect on the relations between the Gospel, the Churches and the different cultures. Here are some aspects of the problem:

1. These religions are facts; they exist. But they should not be taken as the only religions possible for Asia. There was a time when there was no Buddhism in China, and at a certain time, the whole of China was almost Buddhist.

2. They are not linked with local culture in an absolute and definitive way. This means that there could be “a Christian China.” But for this, Christianity has to accept the double fact that its has to be “sinicized” ... and it has also to transform the Chinese mentality.

3. It is as legitimate for Christianity to try to convert China as it was for Buddhism. This is the way mankind is moving toward the fulfilment of its destiny. We should not be afraid to propose the Gospel if we believe in it.

4. The problem is that it is impossible to “see” what a Christian China will be, because we should not project on this future China the images and schemes of a Western Christianity. Christian communities, as they are now in China, should be turned toward a future which cannot be imagined.

5. In this moving forward, individual conversions are very important, because in a modern society we cannot expect mass conversions, which are usually sociological. The converts should be those who pull the Church ahead towards its future.

VII. What does the Church as Community Say to the Great Religions as Communities? Of Conditions for Corporate Belonging? Of Relationship to State? Of Social Action?

I think that most of the great religions are afraid of Christianity because they see in it a rival, which is working to convert people and take them away from their original communities.

One of the concrete way of overcoming this fear is to strive for mutual understanding, by working on some common projects at other levels, like social or moral development.

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4. The problem is that it is impossible to "begin" with a Christian E.L.C. because we should not restrict our focus on the topic E from the unique and vibrant of a Western Christianity & culture communities. It that we look at China, should be treated broadly & focus which cannot be captured.

5. In the meeting towards individual communities are very important because in a modern society we cannot expect that (re)conversion about its socially technological. The country should be that who pull the China) ahead towards the future.

6. It is clear that the E Church as Community say in the first dialogue as a community? Or E conditions for E appears? belonging?
Or Relationship to start? Or Social Action?

I think that most of the great religions are ahead of E humanity because they see to it a trend, which is working to convert people and take them away from their original communities.

One of the concrete way to accelerating this task is to strive for mutual understanding, by working on some common projects in other fields: like social or moral development.

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