

**THE SUMMONS TO DIALOGUE**

## A NATIONAL SEMINAR ON DIALOGUE AND EVANGELIZATION

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**I. REPORT ON THE SEMINAR**

by Bishop Henry Goonawardene and Father Mervyn Fernando

The Commission for Dialogue of the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka had as a result of experience come to the conclusion that the more urgent and primary need was rather the conscientization of the Catholics themselves of the obligation of dialogue than the actual exercise of dialogue itself with non-Christians. It was the former which proved to be exasperatingly difficult; the reasons are not far to seek. Our Catholics, in a missionary situation surrounded by non-Christians, and molded by traditional theology, could hardly be expected to comprehend this new concept officially "blessed" by the Second Vatican Council. On the contrary, nurtured by the paramount importance of "mission," many of them tended to look upon dialogue as at least a partial betrayal of the missionary message of the Gospel.

Another conviction that the Commission had formed was that the education of the Catholic community to dialogue should begin with its highest leadership, the hierarchy, and then flow into the other levels. Bishops, clergy, religious and lay leadership had all to be fully "exposed" to the message and the demands of dialogue, if the faithful at the grassroots level had to be conscientized.

We realized that this need to conscientize the leadership of the Church in Sri Lanka about dialogue could only be done effectively with the aid of authoritative "experts" from outside. Prophets are not accepted in their own countries. We decided that, besides others, a high ranking official of the Roman Secretariate, recognized both for theology and orthodoxy, would be necessary to have the kind of impact we had in mind.

It was at the First Seminar on Interreligious Affairs of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (SIRA I, Taipei, November, 1980) that our ideas about this crystallized into a more concrete form. There we decided tentatively that we should invite either Father J.B. Shirieda or Msgr. Pietro Rosanno from the Vatican Secretariate for Non-Christians, and either Bishop Joseph Ek Thabping of Thailand or Archbishop Angelo Fernandes of New Delhi, together with Fr. Albert Poulet-Mathis of the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, to conduct a series of conferences as complementary parts of the National Seminar in Sri Lanka on the subject of dialogue and missions.

Arrangements to match dates and speakers proved no easy task. We were keen on having the event in August, 1982, to use the opportunity of the joint meeting of the Bishops' Conference and Major Superiors' Conference scheduled for 19th August, in order to enable all the bishops and major superiors of the country to participate in a conscientization program with the guest speakers. We did manage finally to obtain the services of Msgr. Rosanno (August 17-24), Archbishop Fernandes (August 16-21), and Fr. Poulet-Mathis (August 15-21). All three participated in the event we considered most important — the one full day Seminar on Evangelization and Dialogue for the joint meetings of the bishops and major superiors on the 19th.

At this meeting Msgr. Rosanno explained the rationale of dialogue according to the mind and documents of Vatican II and other papal documents. Archbishop Fernandes concentrated more on the practical aspects of dialogue, basing himself on his practical experience at both national and international levels. Fr. Poulet-Mathis explained the role played by the different commissions of FABC with regard to dialogue. He also said that FABC considered this Sri Lanka seminar to be of very great importance not only for our own country but also for the other countries of Asia. This National Seminar in Sri Lanka, he said, was so far the first in Asia where all the bishops and major superiors of a country personally participated.

One conviction which began to emerge at the end of the seminar was that the Commission for Evangelization and the Commission for Dialogue with Non-Christians (both of the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka) should work hand in hand. This conviction arose as a result of the enlightenment generated by the seminar on the complementarity between evangelization and dialogue. This was a very positive, but unexpected, result.

We made every effort also to present to the leadership at all diocesan levels the thought and vision of our guest speakers within the very short period of their stay. Archbishop Fernandes addressed the clergy of the Chilaw diocese (about 20 in number) on 16th August, at St. Paul's Seminary, Marawila; the clergy and Sisters of the Kandy diocese (about 35 of them) on the 17th at the National Seminary, Ampitiya; and the clergy and the religious and laity of the dioceses of Anuradhapura and Trinco-Batticaloa, about 45 in all, on the 20th of August. Msgr. Rosanno spoke to the clergy of the Jaffna diocese (about 30 in number) on Friday the 20th; to religious and laity of the archdiocese (about 40), on the 22nd, at St. Joseph's College, Colombo; to the clergy of the archdiocese (about 50) at the Tewatta Retreat House; and to the clergy of the Galle Diocese (about 15) on the evening of the same day. The main thrust of all these talks was the role of dialogue in the Church today according to the mind of Vatican II and subsequent Popes. In almost all these conferences the problem of reconciling dialogue with evangelization was brought up by participants. The speakers took great pains to show the complementarity between dialogue and evangelization in the total mission of the Church.

All in all, we could say that the conferences and seminar worked out according to plan, with the speakers taking much trouble to focus attention on the key difficulties and to answer questions. We have every reason to hope that in the future our education-for-dialogue programs in the schools, in parishes and dioceses will be more successful.

We entertain the greatest hopes that all this good will will be abundantly blessed by God to "bear fruit in due season."

## **II. SOME IMPRESSIONS OF THE SEMINAR** by Msgr. Pietro Rossano

The whole church of Sri Lanka was reached by the call to dialogue as the modern form of evangelization made concrete in daily life.

The initiative came from the recently-appointed president of the Commission for Dialogue of Sri Lanka, Bishop Henry Goonewardena of Anuradhapura, and it was favorably received. The co-operation and participation of those involved were noteworthy. The reason can be found in the nature of Sri Lanka, which with its 15 million inhabitants presents an exemplary situation for interreligious dialogue. Buddhism represents approximately 65 percent of the population and is favored by the government. Hindus form about 20 per cent of the population, Christians, 8 percent (the vast majority are Roman Catholics), and Muslims, 7 percent.

From the interreligious point of view alone there are no great tensions, even when one takes note of constant pressure exerted by the Ceylon Buddhist Congress. Chronic, however, are the tensions between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

I would like to record some of the impressions which I received during these meetings. The decolonization of the island from the psychological point of view is complete. Direct evangelization is possible in some areas, but remains very limited. There is some apprehension at the decreasing percentage of Catholics in the population. What seems urgent at present is an active Christian presence, with an evangelization which is global, patient, and conducted through the means and methods of dialogue.

In the six interventions which I was asked to make, I repeated the theme that, as intended by the Council and the documents of the ecclesiastical magisterium, interreligious dialogue in its various forms (the dialogue of daily life, dialogue of specialists, dialogue of religious personnel) is none other than the *aggiornamento* of the evangelizing mission of the Church. Dialogue requires, beyond the classical methods of evangelization, a qualified knowledge of the other, and a clear involvement of the Gospel with daily existence. It can and ought to have as its object all forms and sectors of life, because all people should be illumined by the Gospel. Dialogue includes a respectful manner of listening, a commitment to a common search, and an interchange of probing and sharing with the non-Christian partner.

I received the impression that the attention to issues of dialogue has been sustained since the meetings and that a great impetus was given to realizing the letter and spirit of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The following are the principal points to which particular attention was paid and where further elucidation was requested.

- a) A minority complex could push Catholics either to close in upon themselves and induce a hardened attitude towards non-Christians, or else to dilute its own religious consciousness to the point of relativism and syncretism.
- b) Whether we ought to seek the "conversion" of the non-Christian partner and in what way.
- c) How one should try to practice the great command "Go and teach ..."

- d) The necessity for a true inculturation in order to insert the faith effectively into the marrow of the Sinhalese and Tamil cultures.
- e) Mixed marriages: danger for the faith or opportunity for dialogue?
- f) Necessity to multiply occasions for dialogue with non-Christians.
- g) Urgent necessity to learn to distinguish between faith and culture.
- h) More attention to questions of clergy-formation on the island.
- i) Necessity to rethink catechetical practices in light of the inter-religious situation of the nation.
- j) A deeper understanding of the role of Christology and ecclesiology in interreligious dialogue.
- k) Possibility of creating, in the major dioceses at least, centers for dialogue.

### **III. SUMMONS TO DIALOGUE**

by Archbishop Angelo Fernandes

Thanks to Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, many burning issues facing the Church and its mission have in recent times been brought to the fore and faced up to in the light of the Gospel. One such theme clamoring for urgent attention especially in the pluralistic world of Asia is the role of non-Christian religions in the one divine economy of salvation. The question has a long history and, moreover, has to be studied in the context of one common, maturing humanity on its onward march through the centuries.

#### **The Challenge of Change**

The science and technology that were put to work in two major world wars, and even more so thereafter, have brought together peoples who for centuries were kept fairly apart from each other by geography, religion and culture. Instant communication and ever-increasing mobility were in the main responsible, and perhaps the inherent impact of power politics. Though there was never complete isolation, now for the first time in recent decades, thanks also in some measure to international co-operation and to the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the inhabitants of our global village are coming to see themselves as a single society, with a unitary world history.

However, the inherent tensions in the paradoxical situation continue to operate. The more men and nations have been driven closer together, the more wars of independence have they fought; the more hatred, violence, racial and other forms of discrimination and oppression have they perpetrated. Specifically, it must be noted that the gradual overthrow of colonialism and the concomitant emergence of many new nations have thrown together peoples with divergent ethnic backgrounds, cultures and ideologies with a great variety of religious traditions. This is not without significance for a modern world.

Zakir Hussain has pointed out that "it would be unwise for anyone to ignore religious influences in finding solutions for world problems, because great issues continue to be settled consciously or unconsciously against the background of religious convictions."<sup>1</sup> In fact, the religious factor has been of prime importance in the formation and national consciousness of many states. This is certainly true for Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism, as well as for Shintoism and the traditional African religions. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has rightly emphasized that "the necessities of the historical process are making the world into one,"<sup>2</sup> even if in Teilhard de Chardin's phrase, it is the "tense cohesion"<sup>3</sup> of mankind that is the outcome.

### **The Heart of the Matter**

The framework of today's unity, because of the modern mentality from which it originates, in Peter Berger's analysis enshrines a "profound impoverishment of the human spirit."<sup>4</sup> The material progress and superficial unification of mankind are clamoring for a matching solidarity that is personal, social, moral and spiritual. "Everyday experience has within it the dimension of the holy — if we can but perceive it."<sup>5</sup>

Commending "the holy" to contemporary mankind, therefore, becomes a fresh challenge and presents a splendid entry-point for religion's prophetic role in our modern world. It imposes a common task on Christianity and on all religions today, beckoning them to gather together, if not for consensus, at least for conversation and perhaps joint endeavor. If the current crisis in civilization is to be healed, the dialogue of religions is imperative. The cultural unity of mankind can only be achieved by the spirit of charity and the fellowship of faiths.

What has been the reaction of the Church apropos of this challenge to its mission? With its ever-diminishing numbers alongside the phenomenal growth in the ranks of those of other religions, — one

reason perhaps for crisis in mission — the Church fortunately has refused to be separated from the worldwide pluralistic and secular society that exists and continues to be in the making. A renewed faith in God's purpose for the world has been released and with it a deepened awareness of the action of the Spirit among men, born of the conviction that the relevance of the Christian message for our times will appear, not so much in religious discussions, but rather in a Christian approach to the burning questions of the day.

It must not be forgotten in this connection that the true concern of religion is not religion but life. The gift of God in Christ is not for the Church but for all men, and the Church is sent not to itself but to the world. Hence, it is the responsibility of the Church to enter into dialogue with each generation and thus meet the needs of men. The Church's own need for renewal is met, at least in part, by such interaction. And interaction there must be. For the Word of God is best understood when it is spoken in relation to the word of man for whom it is given. Those who proclaim that Word, therefore, have the responsibility to understand the word of man that they may help men to recognize and accept their need of God's Word. The most important thing about this dialogue between the Church and the world is that God acts in and through it to influence both the Church and the world and to judge, purify and transform both. However, since the grave problems affecting mankind today involve the people not only of one but of all religious traditions, since putting the spirit into human affairs is crucially urgent, does this not become a task incumbent on all religions? That naturally raises the question of the Church's attitude towards the religious traditions of mankind and working together with them on present-day ills and for full human development.

The Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian religions reveals an open and positive attitude. The moral and spiritual values of these religions are recognized and the Church is urged to enter into fraternal dialogue and learn from contact with their traditions, contributing in the process to its own self-renewal in the Spirit. That was in 1965. Particularly since then, inter-religious and multireligious dialogue has begun to be accepted as a legitimate activity of the Church. Increasingly, dialogue is being talked about; it is the subject of much writing; it has occasioned many meetings and seminars. In Rome there is a Secretariate devoted solely to the purpose: "for the Kingdom of God without direct intent to make converts to Catholicism."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, many Bishops' Conferences have a commission charged with fostering the movement. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences likewise has such a committee and has so far

organised two institutes for interreligious affairs for some of the bishops of the region.

During the last twenty years or so, there have been some pioneering steps taken which likewise need to be commemorated. So, for instance, the first encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, the Bombay Theological Seminar (1964), the Sedos Theology Symposium (1969); the National Seminar "Church in India Today" (1969), the Nagpur Theological Conference (1971), the FABC Assemblies at Manila, Taipei and Calcutta, and the spate of Asian Bishops' Institutes whether on social action, missionary activity or interreligious affairs. The Synods of Bishops of 1971 and 1974 on "Justice in the World" and on "Evangelization of the Modern World" have done much to give a strong impetus to the new orientation in Church thinking. So too the subsequent Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI.

Equally intensive activity in this field has taken place also within the World Council of Churches and its affiliates. Numerous interreligious consultations have been organized and they have had considerable impact, thanks to the high standards maintained. Deserving of special mention are the Consultation of March 1970 on "Dialogue between men of living faiths" held at Ajaltoun, Lebanon, with its sequel in Zurich, and also the meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches held at Addis Ababa in the following year, and the Chiang Mai Consultation in 1977.

### **Questions Raised and Hopes Stirred by Interreligious Dialogue**

The first question that comes to mind is: Does dialogue in its manifold forms have to continue to be a specialized activity, a pioneering luxury, restricted for the most part to experts and the more interested among pastors, religious and people? Or is dialogue, rightly understood, an integral part of the mission of the Church, part and parcel of a comprehensive understanding of evangelization or the communication of the Good News to all mankind? A similar question was raised shortly after the Council about the relationship between evangelization and development. Recognizing the action of the Spirit in the efforts of men to promote genuinely human values and in their aspiration for universal brotherhood, the Synod of 1971 on "Justice in the World" declared unequivocally that "participation in the transformation of the world and action on behalf of justice" are "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel." Can the same be said of interreligious dialogue or must it remain a peripheral activity of the Church, which is

and will continue to be in tension with its essential task — the proclamation of the Good News? The Church's charter of foundation states its mission very clearly: "Go, therefore, and make all nations my disciples" (Matt 28:18). St. Paul is no less emphatic when he says: "Woe to me if I do not evangelize," a saying which is applicable to the individual Christian as well as to the whole Church. Moreover, since the Gospel has not been adequately preached in the whole world, geographically speaking, nor presented elsewhere in a culturally and socially palatable manner so as to commend acceptance, except perhaps in Europe, would it not be a betrayal of mission to sidestep the urgency of the main task and devote oneself to dialogue? Or, on the contrary, is this precisely a reason for dialogue as the really appropriate method of evangelization?

Besides, since it is God's will that all men be saved (1 Tim 2) and it is generally recognized that salvation is possible outside the Church, and since the Council documents enjoin a positive attitude towards non-Christian religions, what becomes of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the sole Mediator between God and mankind (1 Tim 2:5), in whose name alone salvation is to be found (Acts 4:12)? By the same token, is baptism and membership in the visible Church no longer necessary for entering the Kingdom of heaven (John 3:5)? Or are non-Christian religions to be equated with Christianity, and are they, in effect, alternative channels of grace for their followers — a rapidly increasing majority of the human race? Has not missionary activity become quite unnecessary?

Is interreligious dialogue not likely to confirm people in the wrong notion that one religion is as good as another? May it not lead to syncretism, a sort of amalgam of elements in the religious traditions of East and West, what Radhakrishnan has described as a "featureless unity" of different religions?

Is dialogue just a new gimmick to meet an awkward situation in which conversions are at a discount and the meaning of mission in crisis? In a word, what exactly is the role of non-Christian religions in the one overall economy of salvation which is founded and grounded on Christ, the only source of grace for all mankind?

Going a step further, since Jesus Christ has universal significance, since the Church must at all times be concerned with the building-up of the truly universal community of mankind, how has this "universality" to be understood in practice? Is the mutual giving and taking in interreligious dialogue more likely to lead to a "creative symbiosis between the message of Christ and the total culture of each people of the world,

making the Church perfectly at home in the different cultures of the human race"?<sup>8</sup>

Finally, since the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization, "who impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 75); since the Holy Spirit offers to all men, in a manner known to God alone, the possibility of being associated with the Paschal Mystery (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22); since the Church must bear witness to the universal presence of the mystery of Christ and to the cosmic influence of his Spirit in the religious traditions of the world, is it not fitting that this be given practical application through interreligious dialogue, making of it an integral dimension of mission and, in fact, "a privileged expression of evangelization in so far as both partners evangelize each other; better still, because the Holy Spirit, the main agent of evangelization, is evangelizing each through the other"?<sup>8</sup>

Rightly understood and properly practised, may not interreligious dialogue become the most Christ-like method of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and multireligious efforts on human issues a first step in that direction? May they not bring to their votaries a greater zest and enthusiasm in partnering the Risen Lord in his ongoing work of redemption, in extending God's sovereignty over every human act of men who thirst for freedom, brotherhood and peace as they journey on their common pilgrimage of hope and love to the Father of all mankind?

### **The Church's Attitude to Other Religions**

The questions raised and hopes stirred require that we make a rapid survey of the changing eccesiology and theology of salvation that have been holding sway at different periods of history. In other words, we must review the Church's understanding of itself and its mission and of its resultant attitudes to other religions. There has been a "development in ecclesiology," viz., in our progressive understanding of the true relationship between the Kingdom of God that Christ preached and the Church that he instituted. The theology of salvation has, as a consequence, likewise undergone change. As the Church grew to a better understanding of itself in respect of the Kingdom, it likewise discovered other religions to have saving power, to be channels of grace and salvation, and now acknowledges their role in the establishment of God's Rule on earth. It is not surprising, therefore, that the attitude of the Church to non-Christian religions varied from age according to the image of the Church which prevailed in a particular historical situation.

For the first four centuries, till up to roughly 313 A.D., circumstances dictated a rather defensive outlook. A largely negative attitude towards other religions as not being able to lead to salvation was common and was intended to highlight the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the sole mediator between God and men. During this period, the Church may be said to have been in power. It helped build the civilization of Europe on the ruins of the Roman Empire but identified Christianity so much with the process that Europe and Christianity came to be taken as synonymous — Christendom. Hilaire Belloc's well-known book, *Europe is the Faith*, exemplifies this well. References to non-Christian religions did figure in some Church pronouncements of the period but only when they appeared to be a threat, e.g., from the economic power of the Jews or the military advances of the Saracens. The story of the Crusades and the Inquisition is part of that unseemly heritage. During this medieval era, philosophical thought was being christianized by people like Thomas Aquinas, and the message of Christ was systematically presented as a body of revealed truths demanding intellectual assent. This was the notion of revelation implicit in the Council of Trent as orthodox answers were sought to be given to Protestant objections. It was only with the document on Divine Revelation of Vatican II that the Church clearly differentiated the content from the act of divine revelation and described the latter as an ongoing saving action of God's self-communication to man. The life process of education in the Faith, of accompanying a person towards a full commitment to Jesus Christ, in fidelity to God and to man, was to come much later.

The question of the salvation of non-Christians and the role of their religions came to the fore again very markedly in the 15th century with the discovery of vast continents peopled with millions of human beings with their own ways of life and highly developed philosophies, cultures and religions. The divided Christendom of Catholics and Protestants came to know this world as that of the so-called "heathen." During this great Missionary Era, from within the citadel of Christendom, the Church considered all other religions as *anti-Christian*. They had to be subdued and conquered and brought to the feet of Christ.

Walter Kasper has pointed out that the phrase "outside the Church no salvation" was first used to ward off threats to the unity of the Church. "It was never intended to be a formula applied to people outside the Church."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, "the dictum first enunciated by Pope Boniface VIII in the 12th century became a bone of contention for centuries, was constantly reaffirmed by Church Councils, notably that of Florence, and reaffirmed by the Jansenists." "It had become," writes T. Mathias, "a firm conviction in the hearts of most Christians who looked upon the

non-Christian peoples of Asia, Africa and America as benighted souls sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. There seems little doubt that the first Christian missionaries from the West, men like Francis Xavier and his later Protestant counterparts, were impelled by the dreadful thought that millions of helpless Indians, Chinese and others, followers of "false religions" like Buddhism and Hinduism, were doomed to damnation unless the Gospel was preached to them and they accepted it."<sup>11</sup> This was in perfect accord with what Pope Nicholas V did in 1455 when he gave a Christian King "full and free permission to invade, search out, capture and subjugate the Saracens, the pagans and other enemies of Christ." "The Church," writes Fr. Aloysius Pieris, "felt obliged in conscience to save the pagans by bringing them within the visible fold, i.e., into God's Kingdom." He goes on: "... that was the missiological mood of the time. It was love for Christ and love for the 'poor pagans' dying without Christ that stimulated missionary endeavor; mistaken love, one might say, but guileless love all the same."<sup>12</sup> "The concept of Mission as Conquest for Christ," writes C. Duraisingh, "at times bore a milder expression. The purpose of missionary enterprise was spoken of as 'substitution' or 'systematic replacement' of Indian heathens by the light of the Gospel from the West."<sup>13</sup>

The period, however, was not one of unrelieved gloom! Already in the 17th century there were reactions against the colonialist understanding of mission as a "conquering campaign" by people who respected the social and cultural patterns of the Indians and the Chinese. Such were Robert de Nobili in India and Matteo Ricci in China. They embarked on the *theory of Adaptation* which, though not encouraged by the Church authorities of the day, continues to be very much in vogue in mission lands. It postulated an effort to fall in line with the texture of life as it obtains in a country, presenting the Christian Faith through indigenous forms without any desire to destroy, substitute or absorb. It contended that this was the method used by Christianity in Europe and by Buddhism in Tibet, China and Japan. The crucial need for such a change of front becomes evident if there is more than an element of truth in Abbe Monchanin's contention that "the Gospel has always been preached in Asia in opposition to the Asian religions."<sup>14</sup>

In preparation for the Tambaram World Missionary Conference, Dr. Kraemer, in his massive work *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, presented the concept of mission as proclamation of *radical discontinuity* between the Gospel and all non-Christian faiths and, thereby, a call to judgment on other religions. His new approach was questioned seriously from the very outset by Dr. A.G. Hagg, whose more liberal attitude to non-Christian religions gained general acceptance and even brought Dr. Kraemer round.

By 1902 the concept of mission as substitution gave place to that of *permeation*, giving to native Christians the responsibility for the extension of faithful Christian presence.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, the *Fulfilment Theory* was being advocated in India by Father Johanns and the Belgian Jesuits of Calcutta (*To Christ through the Vedanta*) and by J.M. Farquhar in *The Crown of Hinduism* in 1913. Already in 1909, at a Conference in Oxford, the latter put his position across as follows: "This new movement . . . sets forth every part of Hinduism as springing from some real religious instinct and having a value of its own, and thus gives the religion the full credit for every fragment of moral and religious help it contains: yet it sets Christ supreme over all and proclaims him to be the consummation of religion. The theory thus satisfies the science of religion to the uttermost, while conserving the supremacy of Christ."<sup>16</sup>

Many Protestant scholars, including C.F. Andrews and Bishop Appasamy, M.M. Thomas and S.J. Samartha, wrote in the same strain. Dr. P.D. Devanandan has summed up well: "One cannot resist the impulse of faith that believes in a God who is also the Lord of History and in a creative spirit who is ever at work in the world of man redeeming even its present involvements and directing its course to the ultimate fulfilment of his purpose, that in all religious revival God is somehow at work. If that is indeed the faith of the Christian, it is well that Christians everywhere give serious thought to the resurgence of Hinduism today and reassess the nature of their evangelistic responsibility."<sup>17</sup>

In Europe, the Catholic protagonists of the Fulfilment Theory were Cardinal Danielou speaking of non-Christian religions as *pre-Christian*, and Monsignor Guardini of Buddha as being the "precursor" of Christ. They were joined by other notable theologians like Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Obviously, the attitude adopted towards other religions is positive. What is propounded is that the adherents of these faiths have noble aspirations put there by the grace of God, and that these find their fulfilment in Christianity. It is not intended that this also applies to the religious structures or institutions themselves within which this is happening.

It might be worth pointing out that a clearly positive approach to the spiritual values of world religions was taken for the first time in an official Church document in the decrees of the First Plenary Council of

India in 1950 (decree 11): "We acknowledge indeed that there is truth and goodness outside the Christian religion, for God has not left the nations without a witness to himself, and the human soul is naturally drawn towards the one true God." The Declaration *Nostra Aetate* of Vatican II is the first conciliar document in history to deal specifically with non-Christian religions, referring to them with respect, sympathy and understanding, while not forgetting the centrality of Christ's redemptive work.<sup>18</sup>

The Fulfilment Theory is clearly to be found in the new ecclesiology of Vatican II, wherein the Church is not equated fully with the Kingdom but is presented (in *Lumen Gentium*, 5) as the "initial budding forth of the Kingdom" or "journeying towards the Kingdom" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1). The Kingdom is envisaged as a wider reality than the Church and salvation, through Christ of course, is to be found even outside the Church, in ways mysterious and known only to God (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

In as much as other religions are a "preparation for the Gospel" (*Ad Gentes*, 3) and "need to be enlightened and purified," they have their salvific value. They are a "secret presence of God" which the missionary activity of the Church "restores to Christ its Maker" (*Ad Gentes*, 9). Adherents of such religions, in other words, are oriented to the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 16).<sup>19</sup> A beautiful tribute to non-Christian religions is to be found in the National Seminar "Church in India Today" of 1969 when it says: "The other religions are not fortresses which we must attack and destroy. They are homes of the spirit which we have failed to visit; they are receptacles of the Word of God which we have chosen to ignore."

The Fulfilment Theory does leave unanswered such questions as the pre-Christian character of the Old Testament and that of other religions, and the manner in which the latter are oriented to the Church. Hence, even while it holds sway, theological investigations continue in search of a deeper understanding of the subject. Particularly after the Council's positive stance towards other religions, a new theory, a logical extension of the Fulfilment Theory, has been gaining ground. It has been described as the *Sacramental Theory* or the *Theory of the Presence of Christ* in the world religions.

The way was paved for the "Unknown Christ of Hinduism" by previous thinkers like the Protestant, Dr. Macnicol, who in the Report of the Jerusalem Conference of 1928 declared, "Christ is no stranger to Hinduism," and in the 1940s by Pere Charles of Louvain in his theology of the missions.

Dr. A.J. Boyd introduces this deeper quest, beyond the Fulfilment Theory, from the kind of experience of noble Hindus which many people have had at one time or another. Fr. Hirudayam, in a seminar paper given in Delhi in 1973, quotes him as saying:

What is a Christian to think when he makes the acquaintance of a Hindu, the quality of whose life commands his profound respect, and when it appears that the admirable quality is nourished by some form of Hindu faith? . . . Was it enough to say that a man like this could be what he was only in spite of being a Hindu? . . . It is indeed striking that even under the shadow of the Vedanta, there has been in Hinduism a persisting tradition of theistic faith. . . . Such strains as these in Hinduism and Buddhism reveal longings and aspirations of which God in Christ, we believe, would be the true satisfaction and fulfilment. But, if we say this, Dr. Boyd presses, must we not say more? Must we not say that these upreachings of desire, these gropings after a union with a personal God — are they only evidence of man's pathetic desolate longing, or must we not also recognize in them evidence of God himself working in the soul? 'Comfort thyself thou wouldst not have sought me, hadst thou not found me!' So Pascal conceived of God reassuring the groping soul. Must we not in a like spirit believe that the non-Christian religions bear witness not only to man's quest of God but also to God's quest of man?

"The whole created existence," says Prof. R. Pannikar, "is a Christophany and, if God the creator is also God the redeemer, all creation knowingly or unknowingly participates in this Christophany somehow or other."<sup>20</sup> Dr. Pannikar has stoutly proposed the theory of the *presence of Christ* in the world religions, especially through his well-known book *The Hidden Christ of Hinduism*. Strong supporters of the idea include Karl Rahner and H.R. Schlette. Briefly, their contention is that over and above recognizing that Christ's saving power can, in a personal and hidden way, reach sincere seekers who are open to him whom they do not know, salvific value must be attributed to the religions themselves of which the seekers are adherents. These religions have had saving power in the past and that is true today also for the millions of their followers. Non-Christians may not know it but they are nevertheless saved by Christ who is hiddenly at work in their religions, which become for them channels of Christ's grace and salvation. "The divinely intended means of salvation meet him," says Rahner, "within the concrete religion of his actual existential milieu."<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps it is important to stress at this juncture that no religion as such saves. Hinduism does not save, neither does Christianity. *It is only God in Christ who saves.* Religion serves to inspire its followers to true commitment to God and fellowmen, and thus makes the devotee open to God's saving grace. Non-Christian religions can do this through the lofty and noble elements they enshrine. Fr. Aloysius Pieris contends that in labelling the Church as the "universal sacrament of salvation," the Vatican Council has epitomized in one epithet the nature, the vocation and the missionary role of the Church, and has consequently mapped out the path for developing a "theology of religions." The word "sacrament" means both a sign expressing God's saving activity and an instrument through which salvation is brought about.

Salvation, on the other hand, is synonymous with the Kingdom, i.e., God's saving presence operating through Christ everywhere in the cosmos and at all times in history, and in particular in every man's secret yearning for him. For God seeks man's salvation in man's own search for it. Every religion that we know of is a sociocultural embodiment of a genuine search for salvation and hence merits to be called, in the words of the Vatican Council, a "secret presence of God" or, according to Rahner and others, "anonymous Christianity."<sup>22</sup> "The concrete religions must bear in themselves supernatural, gracious moments, and by the practice of these religions the pre-Christian man . . . can attain to God's grace."<sup>23</sup> The Church, "the sign of the Kingdom," has for its task to explicitate in its own life the anonymous Christianity that surrounds it, and as "instrument of the Kingdom" to promulgate these values among the very people who have accepted them on principle.

The preaching of the Gospel does not make a Christian of a man completely abandoned by God and Christ but transforms an anonymous Christian into a man who within the grace-filled depths of his nature is conscious of his Christianity objectively and reflectively, as well as in a socially constituted profession thereof in the Church.<sup>24</sup>

The Asian voice of Dr. Choan Seng Song in his "theological leap from Israel to Asia" also belongs here. It is his contention that "Israel was not to be the nation through which God's redeeming love would be mediated but to be a symbol of how God would also deal redemptively with other nations." In *Asians and Blacks—Theological Challenges* he writes:

The proto-model in the primary culture and history of the Judeo-Christian world finds fulfilment in its sub-models in the secondary cultures and histories outside the Judeo-Christian world. The task of Christian theology in Asia consists, among other things, in perceptive and systematic interpretation of sub-models brought out from hiddenness into visibility as a result of the application of the proto-model.<sup>25</sup>

Mention must also be made of the theory of *Fundamental Option* as saving faith, that is to say, how in the absence of Christian revelation and knowledge of Christ, non-Christians have the salvific faith which is essential for salvation; how their dedication to their own religious beliefs and commitment is anonymous Christian faith. P. De Letter explains this as follows:

A person's stand towards God is not merely an act but the lasting effect of a series of acts — a life attitude. He lives by a fundamental option which is gradually being built up and grows through ups and downs in clarity and sincerity. This choice for God in the present economy is aided by Christic grace. By whomsoever it is done, by Christian or non-Christian, acceptance of the existential situation done through self-dedication implies submission to an Absolute, surrender to God, a commitment which is belief, trust and obedience, a hidden Christian faith. It can be called Christian because in the universal offer of grace, in the present economy, every grace is offered through Christ. By their teachings, rules and sacred rites, religions are instrumental in preparing the right fundamental option which is the last disposition for the grace of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

It may be useful to recall that the theory of anonymous Christianity is not a recent discovery. It was already proposed in the second and third centuries by St. Irenaeus and St. Clement of Alexandria.

### **Jesus Christ the Final and Decisive Revelation of God**

Attractive though it may appear, the theory of Anonymous Christianity has its limitations. Fr. J. Dupuis, S.J., has put his finger on the weaknesses when he asks:

Can it be taken to mean that the process of becoming a Christian entails on the part of the new adherent to Christianity a mere reflexive awakening to a reality of salvation already fully, though

unconsciously, possessed? To reduce the transition from a non-Christian religion to Christianity to a process of self-awakening seems to do less than justice to the "conversion" from the old to the new which it implies. Christian revelation does not merely "unveil" the hidden; it is not just a mere imparting of knowledge, as if a non-Christian is already a Christian though still remaining unaware of his true identity. A conversion to Christianity is a break with the past to embrace the future; a passage from one order in the Christian economy of salvation to another order. Between an anonymous encounter with Christ and his open recognition there is more than a difference in awareness.

Taken in its entirety, the newness of Christianity implies both the full revelation of the mystery and the highest form of its visible mediation and of its presence in the world. The religious life of the non-Christian does not become Christian without an intrinsic transformation, which consists in entering into a new order in the mediation of Christ's grace. Christianity is a full disclosure of the mystery and the perfect mediation of grace; it brings with it the full sacramental realization of God's presence to men.<sup>27</sup>

From all the above it is clear that, while it is not adequate to refer to other religions as non-Christian, as it were, denying them all relationship with Christ, neither is it adequate to refer to them as just "anonymous" or "implicit Christianity" for the reasons stated above.

*Latent Christianity*, the term used by G. Thils for non-Christian religions, may be a less inadequate term in so far as it suggests a reality which is not only hidden or concealed but yet to become fully developed and manifest.<sup>28</sup>

In the light of the above, would it be in order to refer to other religions as the ordinary means of salvation and to Christianity as the extraordinary means? If "ordinary" is taken to mean that these religions represent the highest possible value for their adherents and hence would be normative for them, that would not be true. But it is certainly true in the sense that the majority of non-Christians who are saved are saved by Christ in their non-Christian religions. Moreover, the word "extraordinary" when applied to Christianity is meant to convey that it alone contains the mystery of Christ in complete visibility as the perfect means of salvation, destined for all, even if in reality not granted to all. Christians certainly live in a privileged situation in respect of the mystery of Christ and the ways in which it is mediated for them. Hearing the word of God from intermediaries and receiving the full, final and

decisive revelation of the Father through his own incarnate Son is quite a different matter. God's continued guidance through this explicit and public revelation is vastly superior to that available through lesser, inadequate means. Moreover, it is not intermingled with error and half-truths, but is God's final and decisive disclosure of himself to men, to which nothing can be added. Similarly, there is no comparison between the symbols and rites through which men have been helped in faith and commitment to God in other religions and the sacraments and symbolic actions instituted by Christ himself and entrusted to his Church. Only the Church's sacraments are guaranteed channels through which the mystery of God in Christ is directly and infallibly encountered in signs, even though the actual efficacy depends on man's response in faith to God's gratuitous initiative. Experiencing Christ in an unknown and hidden way is vastly different from having a clear perception and awareness of God's infinite condescension and graciousness in reaching down to us in and through his Son and that too in the humble human condition of Jesus. His human face remains unknown in the encounters through Christ which God has with men outside Christianity. In Christianity God's advance to man becomes fully human. That is why the Christian experience is unique and will always be so. We must always retain an acute awareness of this. "The newness and givenness of the Christian message and of the way that God has opened up for us cut across the customary thought and behavior of all our cultures."<sup>29</sup>

It is as well to remember that it is not just by the number of adherents of a religion or the presence of spiritual and supernatural values that such issues are to be judged. Father Amalorpavadass rightly insists that the criterion is rather "the positive and historical institution of the Church by Christ as the fully adequate means of salvation, as the animator and leader of the spiritual movement launched by Jesus Christ for the renewal and unification of mankind."<sup>30</sup>

### **The Action of the Spirit**

Harking back to the Council, it is interesting to note that in *Lumen Gentium* the Church embraces as "her own" with love and solicitude a group of unbaptized persons, viz., catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, desire with an explicit intention to be incorporated into the Church and are by that very intention joined to her. This shows, as Bishop Butler points out, that lack of material or external incorporation into the Church does not prove that one is not, in the vitally important sense that determines salvation, already "within" it.<sup>31</sup>

What about those who have only an implicit desire of the sacramental means? As is usually argued: "a person who genuinely 'fears God and does what is right' would obviously wish to become a Christian if he recognized this as God's will. Now we know it is God's will, and he wishes to do God's will; hence, he may be said to desire implicitly what he rejects explicitly." He is, says Bishop Butler, like a man who fails, through no fault of his own, to recognize the friend whom he genuinely loves. Since there is no other name by which we may be saved except the name of Christ, the non-Christian, to whom the Gospel has not been really announced but who positively wishes to do God's will, is in effect accepting Christ as the friend whom he loves but fails to recognize. The implication of the Council's positive attitude to all these groups of non-Christians is that in them also Christ is at work and that in them also the Church is transcending its own visible limits.

This raises the still further question of the action of the Spirit by which the salvation won for us by Jesus Christ becomes available today in the here and now and Jesus becomes our Savior in the contemporary world. This action of the Spirit is not limited to the members of the Church since redemption has universal significance and has changed the relationship of man, as man, with God. Hence the Council teaches: "Since Christ died for all and man's ultimate calling is in fact one, viz., a divine calling, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all men, in a manner known to God alone, the possibility of being associated with the Paschal Mystery" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). It is for the Church to be the sign that in his Spirit Jesus Christ is now the Savior of men and of the world. The Church must announce and manifest to the world the universal presence of the Risen Christ and the cosmic influence of his Spirit working also in the religious traditions of mankind. That, in effect, enshrines a call to interreligious dialogue which, if rightly understood, can well become a turning point in the missionary activity of the Church in Asia, as it links up and integrates with the proclamation of the Good News, the celebration of the sacraments and action for justice and peace, to share and move together with a waiting world towards the fulness of the mystery of Christ and his Spirit.

### **The Dialogue of Salvation**

Since the concern of religion is life itself and not religion as such, this paper began with a quick look at the world scene and noted the alarming gap that exists between the phenomenal material progress of our times and the drift away from ethical, moral and spiritual values. The dialogue of religions was seen to be essential for healing the present crisis in civilization. We discovered thereafter that since the Council the

Church's attitude towards other religions has become very positive indeed, with Christ the Risen Lord as the point of reference and pivot of the new thrust. He is the sole mediator between God and men, through whom everyone, who is saved, is saved. However, God's plan of salvation for the human race is universal and is older and wider than the Church and includes non-Christian religions.

This refers not only to an individual's subjective approach but to the religions themselves within the social and cultural milieu in which people live and grow. "The non-Christian is saved," says G. van Leeuwen, "by his living faith which expresses itself in acts of self-forgetting love . . . As long as the message of Christ does not reach them through the Church becoming for them a part of their socioreligious environment, the non-Christian religions are for the non-Christians the only means which can help them to come to that self-forgetting love; which is Christ's. Hence they have a very positive meaning in God's plan of salvation."<sup>32</sup>

It is important to remember that in the theology of salvation of today there is a shift of emphasis from the individual to the group. Within this consciousness as a community there is a distinct place for the culture and religion into which one is born. Paul Tillich states quite emphatically: "Christianity can speak to the different peoples of the world only through their respective cultural forms, religious structures, thought patterns and languages."<sup>33</sup> The Nagpur Declaration, after recognizing Christ's active presence in other religions, makes a rather forceful statement as an explication of the Council's affirmation that "these religions often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (*Nostra Aetate*, 2). It reads: "As there is a universal providence leading all men to their ultimate destiny and since salvation cannot be reached by man's effort alone but requires divine intervention, the self-communication of God is not confined to the Judeo-Christian tradition, but extends to the whole of mankind in different ways and degrees within the one divine economy."<sup>34</sup>

### **Celebrating the Presence of the Lord**

What is central to the actual scene, embracing Christian and non-Christian, is the living presence of the Risen Lord, holding a privileged place for the baptized and in the fellowship of Christians, but also actively at work in others in a hidden, mysterious manner.

The missionary challenge inherent in the above is to announce, disclose and release to the world the message and experience of this living, vibrant presence of the Lord of history. Hence, the necessity of

proclamation of the Good News both to ourselves as a community of believers, chiefly through the Eucharistic celebration and the sacraments and their linkage with work and witness, but directly to others also in the measure this can be achieved. The summons of salvation is present in every person's life. Implicit in the proclamation of the Gospel is this recognition that God speaks to all men in their lives. However, our study has shown that through a renewed understanding of the Church and its mission and specifically of the question of salvation for those outside the Church, the community of believers in Christ has been brought so much closer to our brothers and sisters of other faiths both with regard to our common personal pilgrimage of hope towards God and our common concern for a better humanity.

What stands out prominently as a central and unifying factor is Christ the Lord of the Church and the Lord of history. He is gathering to himself in ever-increasing and abundant measure the little privileged flock of the baptized and the vast millions in the world through his bountiful grace which in mysterious ways extends beyond the boundaries of the visible Church. As the first words of Pope John Paul II's first encyclical announce: "The Redeemer of man, Jesus Christ, is the center of the universe and of history and as the Council teaches has, in a certain way, united himself with each man." Consequently, every authentic experience of God, whether of Christians or others, is an encounter with God, in and through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is God turned towards man continuing his work through his Spirit and drawing all things to himself. The glorified Christ continues to be at the heart of life through the outpouring of his Spirit. Hence, when a man responds to God in selfless love, he does so to Christ and his Spirit, even though he may be living under the cosmic covenant of Noah and may not be alive to the sacramental mediation of Christ whose body is the Church. This is what makes Dr. Pannikar say that all creation, knowingly or unknowingly, participates in a Christophany somehow or the other; that the whole history of the world is one vast phenomenon of Christification and that "the universal Church is none other than mankind saved together in Christ." Hence, what gives meaning to past, present or future revelation is Jesus Christ, through whom alone the Father reveals himself and his designs for us.

Abhishiktananda's Christian Theocentrism makes him say that Christ has left the Church as the "sign and the sacrament of his everlasting presence," and that "the genuine mission of the Church is to share with all men the experience of the Spirit that is in Jesus and to make men realize that there is in them something deeper and more essential even

than the interiority discovered by sages and mystics, a 'guha,' a cave more secret than the deepest recess of their own heart — the abyss of the heart of Christ."<sup>35</sup>

### **The Response of Faith**

In as much as non-Christians are no more to be considered anti-Christian or even just pre-Christian but in some hidden, mysterious way are linked to the baptized, the mission to discern and disclose this unifying and enlivening presence drives us to dialogue as if by necessity. Since non-Christians are already in a state of being "towards Christ," as long as they are not yet "in Christ," we have work to do. The apostolate of dialogue beckons as a labor of love. It is a significant and meaningful way of discerning in ourselves and in others the active presence and life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit which extends to the whole universe. If the dialogue is true and authentic, we will be enriched by an experiential knowledge of the ways in which the Holy Spirit works in the personal, social, devotional and liturgical life of religiously committed people, also outside the Church. Dialogue with other religions is essential in order to seek the fulness of Christ. It is possible that certain aspects of the mystery are better experienced by non-Christians than by Christians themselves. This presupposes, of course, faith in the interior action of the Holy Spirit within human hearts!

Everything considered, Pope Paul VI, in his first encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, therefore called upon the Church to take up "the dialogue of salvation" opened by God in Jesus Christ and to extend it to men of goodwill, without waiting to be summoned to it.

### **Some Weighty Church Pronouncements**

It is not surprising therefore that in the spirit of *Ecclesiam Suam* the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences at Taipei, in defining a local church, highlighted the necessity of religious dialogue as being demanded by the inculturation of the Church. "The local Church is a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and living dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions, in brief, with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own." One of the specific recommendations of the gathering was that the FABC in collaboration with the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical

Secretariates “evolve a working concept of evangelization that embraces, *as integral to that concept*, genuine dialogue with the great religions of Asia and other deep-rooted forms of belief, such as animism.”

Cardinal Picachy, speaking on behalf of the Indian hierarchy at the Synod of Bishops, 1974, in Rome, described “dialogue with believers of the major religious traditions as a normal expression of evangelization — indeed inseparable from it,” because “we can testify from experience to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the aspirations and undertakings of these great religious traditions.”<sup>36</sup> Another member of the Indian hierarchy stated that “interreligious dialogue and development work must be considered authentic dimensions of the Church’s work of evangelization. They are integral parts of the Church’s overall mission.” Concerning other religions, he added: “It is from within, not from without, that the members of these religious traditions are being challenged by the mystery of Jesus Christ.”<sup>37</sup>

One of the Secretaries at the same Synod, Father Amalorpavadass, considers other religions as being in a state of vocation to salvation, that they tend towards Christ “and that we have to lead them to death and resurrection.” The service expected of us is to “open Hinduism (religions), its doctrines and rites towards a transcendent and personal God and towards the love and service of fellowmen. Any effort towards this end in our relationship and dealings with the followers of other religions will contribute to their salvation.”<sup>38</sup>

Frequently, in the Synod of 1974, one was reminded that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization. His influence was seen to reach well beyond the frontiers of the Church to all of mankind. The religious life of adherents of other religious traditions was seen, by the Asian bishops particularly, as falling within the cosmic influence of the Spirit. Naturally, therefore, they considered religious dialogue as an integral dimension of evangelization. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* does not seem to have given sufficient weight to their strong current of opinion of the bishops of that continent, where religious dialogue must perforce enter naturally and very deeply into the life and mission of the Church. Fortunately, that has not hampered the quest for deeper understanding, nor weakened the movement for dialogue.

The Chiang Mai Consultation of the World Council of Churches, in 1977, after a long series of previous seminars, reaffirmed: “We see dialogue as a fundamental part of our Christian service within community . . . We endorse dialogue as having a distinctive and rightful place within Christian life, in a manner directly comparable to other

forms of service . . . To the member churches of the WCC, we feel able with integrity to commend the way of dialogue as one in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today.”<sup>39</sup>

The first Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate of FABC held in 1978 emerged with the conviction that “dialogue was the key we sought” . . . that “religious dialogue is not just a substitute for or a mere preliminary to the proclamation of Christ but should be the ideal form of evangelization where, in humility and mutual support, we seek together with our brothers and sisters that fulness of Christ which is God’s plan for the whole of creation, in its entirety and its great and wonderful diversity.” This was repeated by the bishops of the East Asian Region at Tokyo in 1979 where the urgency of dialogue was highlighted to the utmost. At their second meeting in Trivandrum, India, in 1980, BIMA II declared: “Interreligious dialogue is another integral part of evangelization which in the situation of our cultures needs to become a primary concern.”

Quite understandably, the Bishops’ Institutes for Interreligious Affairs of FABC went into the matter in even greater depth. The first meeting considered “dialogue as intrinsic to the very life of the Church and the essential mode of all evangelization.” “Dialogue contributes to a deeper rooting of the Christian faith and to the unfolding of the local Church.” BIRA II stated that the “development of reciprocal understanding, respect and goodwill between religions in Asia is a framework within which the Church’s activity takes place. By sharing what it has with the religions among which it lives, the local Church will surely find its own spirituality enriched by what it receives from other religious traditions and itself become more deeply rooted in the cultural setting of which those religions form a part.”

It is refreshing to find the Sedos Research Seminar held at Rome in March, 1981, stating that “dialogue is not a diminished form of mission, an expedient to be used only because direct proclamation of the Gospel is impossible. It is missionary action and is implied in all genuinely missionary activity. Dialogue is a genuine form of Christian witness. Dialogue transforms persons and through them becomes transformative of society and culture.”<sup>40</sup>

We are left with little option, therefore, except to explore more deeply the implications for Christian missionary endeavor of this fresh summons from the Lord. It is Pastor Visser’t Hooft’s view that there are three stages in the dialogic process, viz.: “discovery, living together, and decision.”<sup>41</sup> If this be so, there would be roughly three principal forms of

dialogue: the first leading to mutual understanding and harmony; the second, the dialogue of life, which jointly seeks to prosper human dignity, social justice, freedom, solidarity and peace; and, thirdly, the dialogue of prayer and religious experience, sharing the riches of our different spiritual heritages. Arnold Toynbee contends that "what is needed always but particularly in the initial stage of dialogue is 'openness' and 'toleration' which does not become perfect until it has been transfigured into love."<sup>42</sup>

Hopefully all participants in interreligious dialogue will be helped towards a greater awareness of God's ways and God's call as, by a deeper submissiveness to the truth, they take part in life together and become mutually incorporated in an experience of growing into closer communion with each other and with him who, whether they know it or not, is directing them to the Kingdom of God.

### **The Experience of Dialogue**

What we have described so far as a result of study, reflection and personal experience is confirmed by the findings of those who have been actively engaged in dialogue of one kind or another. Albert Nambiaparambil, who worked for ten years all over India in the field of dialogue, tells how hours were spent in hammering out for the Indian Bishops' statement to the Roman Synod on Evangelization the following definition of dialogue: "It is the response of Christian faith in God's saving presence in other religious traditions and the expression of the firm hope of their fulfilment in Christ."<sup>43</sup> His colleague, J.B. Chettimattam, considers "dialogue a basic dimension of contemporary human experience as a whole and of theological reflexion in particular. On the religious plane dialogue is not a concession or a luxury. A purely individualistic religious experience imprisons man in his own self-alienation from the world and others."<sup>44</sup>

Cardinal Bea, in an article on "The Church and the Non-Christian Religions," considers it a motive of deep consolation for the faithful to think that mutual respect, the dialogue and collaboration already constitute a testimony rendered to Christ and that this testimony is not without importance for the eternal salvation of those with whom they are dealing, although the way to this salvation so often remains hidden from human eyes."

Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J., another pioneer in this field, says: "Through sincere encounter with others, men are already born into the life of Christ's Resurrection before knowing it. Perhaps it is the best path

towards recognizing Christ when he is revealed to them. Sincere and brotherly dialogue therefore may itself be the sacrament of brotherhood.”<sup>45</sup> Aelred Pereira, S.J., in a paragraph on wider ecumenism, reports: “The concreteness of the dialogue between Christianity and the world religions entails inculturation, a becoming present to others in their culture. But the foundation of all dialogue, deeper than religion and culture, is the encounter with the human person in the fulness of his mystery, the mystery of the ‘anonymous Christ’ rather than of the ‘anonymous Christian’.”<sup>46</sup>

Mathew John and Subhash Anand, reporting on the discussion on dialogue and mission in “Our Common Witness,” have noted: “It was also stated that the tension between dialogue and mission can be avoided if both are founded on an *anubhava* of Jesus. Like the disciples of Emmaus, mission is the joyful sharing of our meeting the Risen Lord. That is dialogue too.”<sup>47</sup> It is not surprising to find Little Brother of Jesus, Carlo Caretto, forecast that: “When the great ecumenism of all the world’s believers comes about, as it shortly will, its focal point will be *prayer*, that is to say, the way of living the act of faith in the presence of the Absolute within themselves.”<sup>48</sup>

Abhishiktananda (Rev. Le Saux, O.S.B.), speaking in the same strain, would have us remember that real religious dialogue can only take place by Christians and other religious people at the very center of themselves. “The only real meeting point between men concerned with the ultimate is in the center of the self, in ‘the cave of the heart,’ as the Upanishads put it. The real meeting point between all religious-minded people can only be the place within themselves where they are on the watch for the Spirit, where their own spirit is so intimately joined with the Holy Spirit that there no longer is any movement within them which does not originate from the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit himself” (cf. Rom 8:14). “Dialogue and ecumenism,” he adds, “are graces offered to us that we may become Christian in a deeper and richer manner.”<sup>49</sup>

Bede Griffiths has a similar view about Christ being the fulfilment of non-Christian religions. He says: “We have to show how Christ is, as it were, ‘hidden’ at the heart of Hinduism, of Buddhism, of Islam, and how it is the one word of God which has enlightened mankind from the beginning of history.”<sup>50</sup>

Dr. S.J. Samartha, then the Director of the Department of Dialogue in the World Council of Churches at Geneva, who has been responsible for the organization of so many interreligious consultations during the

last decade or so, has edited a good volume on *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement*," to which I am indebted for what follows in the next paragraphs. "Dialogue," he states, "is clearly part of mission and is to be undertaken within the context of God's mission. . . . Such dialogue, understood within the context of God's mission to all men, stems from love and is seeking the fruit of love. . . . It cannot be conducted without struggle. Nor will dialogue ever be automatically 'successful.' Whatever the costliness, however, there can be no valid approach to mission which ignores the need to be in truly loving and human communication with our fellows who do not share our Christian faith."<sup>51</sup>

Dr. Sivaraman of Benares Hindu University, a theist of the Saiva Siddhanta School, after participating in a number of dialogues, says: "Interfaith dialogue is not a mere encounter of commitments and beliefs . . . it is certainly more than a meeting of faiths. It is 'sharing'." He also refers to a "felt sense of incompleteness" which "speaks for the recognition of a new source of strength, hitherto undetected."

Dr. Askari, a Muslim sociologist from Hyderabad, points out that "what is paramount is that real and authentic dialogue is always more than the intentions of the people who come together."

Prof. Masao Abe, a Buddhist scholar from Kyoto, emphasizes the need for personal participation in prayer or meditation for real dialogue in depth. He remarks: "I would recommend that in this type of dialogue we spend, for example, the whole evening session in worship in which members of each tradition explain the meaning of prayer or meditation as well as its religious background. This kind of practice, combined with the study of religious traditions on the personal level, is perhaps most useful for understanding other faiths."

Dr. Samartha's conclusion is that "there is a clear demand for a new ecclesiology to support a fresh understanding and a more humble practice of mission. The two are interrelated; without the one, the other will not emerge. Christians must acknowledge their interdependence and interinvolvement with men of other living faiths in the processes of contemporary history and must enter into the uncharted area of the 'more' with courage and expectation."

Dr. K.L. Seshagiri Rao, in his article in *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World* (Orbis Books, New York, 1978, 58), concludes by stating: "Our purpose in dialogue should not be to eliminate differences but to appreciate each other's faith and co-operate with one

another in overcoming violence, war, injustice and irreligion in the world." Significantly he adds: "In this regard the following verses of the New Testament are very instructive: 'And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not; for he that is not against us is for us' (Lk 9:45-50)."<sup>52</sup> There are many devils to be cast out. World religions should come together to vanquish them before they destroy human community completely.

### Forms of Dialogue

The lengthy exposition contained in the earlier parts of this study applies in large measure to interreligious dialogue in the strict sense, viz., the sharing out of an awakened knowledge of God's concern for all humanity and calling them to a *metanoia* (conversion) from an unknown depth. In such dialogue "each partner listens to God speaking in the self-communication and questioning of his fellow believers."<sup>53</sup> But, there are other forms of religious dialogue equally valid to which we must now turn our attention.

The study of belief systems undertaken by scholars at centers of learning and research is not strictly dialogue and need not lead to a religious encounter. However, such comparative study of religions is useful and should continue. Among other things, it could be a distinct help to those wanting to enter into living dialogue, if it provides at least basic information about the religious traditions concerned, their interaction in past history and their awareness or otherwise of the new search to express the faith in terms meaningful both to their own adherents and to others in the modern world.

Does it sound naive to suggest that the best place to begin dialogue seems to be the family? The National Seminar "Church in India Today" recommended that "our homes should be open to dialogue and friendly exchange with those of other religions, especially in the sharing of family celebrations and accepting invitations to festivals."<sup>54</sup>

A particularly significant statement of the Nagpur Theological Conference of 1971 says very well that "religious dialogue not only means that two persons speak about their religious experiences, but also that they speak as religiously committed persons, with their ultimate commitments and religious outlook on subjects of common interest. . . . In other words, religious dialogue consists in sharing with men of other faiths our common dedication to ultimate values and our concern for a religious solution to the most vital problems of men."<sup>55</sup>

*Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue*, published by the Commission on Dialogue of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, lists quite a few suggestions on pastoral ways of engaging in religious dialogue, understood in a rather broad sense. The booklet contains a wealth of detail well worth studying; even though the suggestions offered may not be universally feasible.

*Sharing in common enterprises* is one such way and could include the common tasks of nation building at the economic, social, cultural and political levels in so far as they are inspired by the beliefs of those who take part in them (*Ad Gentes*, 19; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7; *Gaudium et Spes*). In particular, Christian lay people are called upon to seek and accept civic and political responsibilities in partnership with members of other religions so as to be in that field the "salt of the earth." This dialogue in action should also find a place in common affairs of day-to-day living, as well as with regard to a country's peculiar problems like, e.g., caste in India.

A second method is *sharing in common study and reflection* on religious values and experiences or to discuss the problems of man in the light of their own religious commitment. The subject is fixed beforehand and may concern a religious reality like prayer, religious experience, authority in religion, methods of spiritual growth, or basic beliefs, like truthfulness, fellowship, morality, or a topic of common interest, like justice, human rights, development, disarmament, peace. While requiring a certain measure of education, dialogue at popular level should not be turned into an experts' club and be required to produce new insights and greater depth, and so on. It should be seen for what it is, an experience where we most intimately meet our brothers and sisters in humanity and grace. Experience in the World Conference of Religion for Peace has shown this can be done and put to good effect if the work behind the scenes is conscientiously carried out, especially at the level of the secretariate, however loosely knit the structure be.

There is no reason why those better placed in seminaries, scholasticates, houses of formation and colleges should not initiate such working groups. It would provide practical training for an important ministry of the Church of the future.

*Sharing in common prayer.* This goes to the deepest levels of religious life and consists in sharing in prayer and contemplation. It brings us together before our common Father. Gandhiji often spoke and wrote about prayer as the greatest binding force making for the solidarity and oneness of the human family. Pope John Paul II points out in his

message to the peoples of Asia: "What seems to bring together and unite, in a particular way, Christians and the believers of other religions, is an acknowledgement of the need for prayer as an expression of man's spirituality directed towards the Absolute. Even when for some he is the Great Unknown, he nevertheless remains always in reality the same living God." Such prayer meetings are organized to include *silence*, a privileged means of deep communion with the Absolute; readings from the scriptures of various religions; hymns and bhajans; and, after due discernment, vocal prayer, structured or spontaneous.

The organization of such sessions calls for delicacy and sensitivity to the feelings of others, even in such matters as the choice of symbols and gestures. Any domination, however tenuous, of the majority or apparently stronger group should be sedulously avoided. And yet no syncretism or indifferentism should creep in. Experience and charity are our best guides in such situations.

The many "*Live-Together Sessions*" organized in India during the last decade, especially on "values in a fast-changing world" are a fourth type of meeting. What has been significant is the genuine interest at university level in such places as the Benares Hindu University and the Aligarh Muslim University. This form of dialogue includes common prayer, a doctrinal study and a communication in the religious life of the participants. These sessions are days of brotherhood and common sharing and can be very beneficial, if well planned. For one thing, the personal sense of commitment to God is greatly enhanced and religion comes to be appreciated as a uniting force.

It is important that the atmosphere of prayer and meditation be maintained throughout the sojourn with the Lord. Topics chosen for reflection and prayer should be such as elicit a deep personal response: e.g., What does my religion mean to me? What is my attitude to other religions? What is the place of prayer, religious experience, or meditation in my life? How do I see my religion as related to my suffering neighbor and demanding my compassion and concern? A moderator might discreetly seek to ensure that the interventions are not doctrinal expositions but a personal sharing born of experience.

The report of the 23rd such Bombay Live-in of Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians and Christians carries some useful insights: "We meet God not only in prayer but also in the poor and suffering around us. True worship of God includes service of man. If our worship of God is not authentic, if we do not witness to him rightly, then we can be the cause why some people are turned away from belief in him . . . The meeting

was a good example of emotional integration of people belonging to various faiths who believed in 'unity in diversity' and peace through love and universal brotherhood."<sup>56</sup>

### **Journeying Towards Peace**

The C.B.C.I. Guidelines indicate a *fifth way* as being *Participation in Interreligious Associations*, and mention is made in this connection of the "World Conference of Religion for Peace (WCRP)." "From its inception in 1970, this organization, while avoiding theological debate and repudiating any form of syncretism, has been sensitizing people of various religious backgrounds to each other and through this to the common concerns of mankind. It continues to be an exercise in applied religion, seeking to relate ethical and spiritual insights to man's crucial problems today, and through a unity of conscience, to create a kind of relationships that would make for a healthy community at all levels."<sup>57</sup> Its main focus is on peace through study, reflection and action on the obstacles to peace at various levels of life.

Faithful to *conscience* in fulfilling their universal mission, Christians in dialogue will find themselves linked with the rest of men in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16). It is on this ground of conscience that Pope John XXIII in his two great encyclicals sought to build universal co-operation for peace on earth, and that the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* addresses itself to all men. This is the foundation of dialogue in its widest sense, among all, namely, who are willing to accept the conditions of dialogue which are sincerity, mutual respect and a genuine desire for the common good. The experience of WCRP and the content of its various declarations, statements and published proceedings amply bear this out.

Dr. Alfred D'Souza rightly points out that it would be naive to believe that the "openness" required for religious dialogue may be easily assumed. But he makes sure to add, even though in the context of Christian denominations in the West, that "traditional animosities and misunderstandings tend to dissolve in an atmosphere of common concern for the religious, moral, social and economic development of all men."<sup>58</sup>

Working along such lines with our alumni in WCRP from all the major religious traditions of mankind at national, regional and international levels for the last fourteen years, I can vouch for the validity of the approach — the deepening of the sense of God, the fellowship it has

engendered, the increased measure of joint social consciousness that it has generated and the hope it has fostered among followers of all religions. Undergirding the spiritual foundations of the movement, in response to the felt needs, aspirations and concerns of contemporary man, is a current preoccupation. As the U.N.'s "prophet of hope" says so well: "We cannot have the illusion that we are going to have a happy and a non-violent world if it doesn't start with the individual. I cannot change four and a half billion people, but I can change myself. If many people begin to be less violent, to speak better about other people, to tell the truth, to be more understanding, then we will have a better world."<sup>59</sup> It is here that the religious ethos, the prayerful "contemplative" spirit of the East, is gradually making a welcome contribution. Because of the effort to combine "meditation and integral humanism," the movement has sometimes been characterized as *communionism*, the twin gift of God's love and peace freely accepted. This joint communion-building is a participation in God's self-understanding and self-communication which is the dynamic principle for unity in plurality.<sup>60</sup> It will be noticed that this understanding of peace as a gift of God entrusted to us stresses both the vertical dimension of God's benevolence and the horizontal dimension of our own responsibility. Dialogue deepens our grasp of that twofold reality. The Guidelines referred to above describe this form of activity as "witnessing to the Kingdom of God."

I would like to endorse at this point the contention of J. Masson that "perhaps the most favorable common ground at present for a coming-together, leading later to dialogue, is reflection and effort towards *peace*. Anything that a Christian may do in this field will put him straightaway in union with the whole non-Christian world."<sup>61</sup> This is not surprising, since peace is the imperative that best embraces the concerns of the Kingdom. Hence too, the title for this section. The concluding paragraph of the Final Report of the Christian-Muslim dialogue held in Colombo March 30 — April 1, 1982, provides practical confirmation. "The experience of the Christian—Muslim dialogue in Colombo, with its frank and open discussion, has fostered a clear understanding of each other and the determination to work together in the interests of peace, justice and humanity, thus exemplifying Muslims' and Christians' united commitment to achieve God's purposes for humanity."<sup>62</sup> As the Constitution on "The Church in the Modern World" notes so well — the mysterious sign which should radiate from Christians and thus initiate dialogue is that of *fraternity*. "It is fraternity which renders possible sincere dialogue and strengthens it" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 92.)

In the Holy Father's choice of the theme for the World Day of Peace for 1983, viz., "*The Dialogue of Peace: A Challenge for Our Time*," it is indicated that the most immediate aspect of the matter is its necessity in the world we live in today. The release states:

So many tragic events, wars, hostilities and so many missed opportunities, fruitless negotiations or inconclusive international conferences — all of these point to the urgency of true dialogue as an instrument for peace in our day. Only true dialogue, seen and willed as the mechanism for honest, sincere, frank and clear exchange in order to resolve differences through negotiations, will give peace a chance in our day. Only true dialogue can produce just and lasting solutions and secure peace.

### **Preparation for Dialogue**

God is calling us to dialogue in at least some of the various ways described above. But are we ready? The first step in our response should be to prepare ourselves for the encounters ahead. Some instruction concerning the religious values and categories of Buddhists and other religionists, their founders, scriptures, feasts, rituals, moral and social attitudes, etc., is essential, since it is only through "knowledge" that the Spirit can lead us to authentic fraternal "love." Secondly, we need to familiarize ourselves with and assimilate their ascetic and contemplative traditions, since religion is not only a creed to be learned by information but an experience to be acquired through personal reflection and prayer. Much of this can also come through the process of dialogue itself.

Perhaps even more important are the attitudes we should seek to develop in ourselves for this important activity for the building of the Kingdom of God. Interreligious dialogue is a work of the Spirit and, hence, demands in the participants a great openness both to the Spirit and to others, and a deep spirit of authentic prayer. This makes the partners keenly aware of the immanence of God in themselves and in all things. It brings them face to face with truth in a relationship of love. Hence, the practice of prayer is an essential prerequisite for fruitful dialogue.

Next must be listed a sincere and deep commitment to one's own faith. Otherwise the very purpose of dialogue would be defeated. This in no way conflicts with true openness. A great sense of honesty and truthfulness is likewise necessary if one hopes to get nearer to God and to communicate in the Spirit. A fourth requisite is an acceptance of religious pluralism, a great respect, nay, a deep love for God and for the

partners to the dialogue if the exercise itself is to become a religious experience of genuine love. It is imperative of course to remember the "right of all citizens and religious communities to religious freedom." This should be recognized and made effective in practice, perhaps through common interreligious action. Fifthly, a spirit of humility, because of our incomplete knowledge, our partial union with God, the inadequate manifestation of the Good News in our lives and because we can learn from the Lord speaking to us through a brother or sister of another religion. Religious dialogue is a pilgrimage of hope which demands a growth in courage through a deepening of our faith and trust as we search together for the promise God offers for the future of us all.

From a slightly different perspective, Dr. Samartha lists six *conditions for a fruitful dialogue*. They add some very pertinent emphases.

One, an attitude of commitment to one's own faith, but an openness to others should be fostered. Two, it is necessary to avoid superficial consensus. Third, dialogues should attempt to move beyond the level of academic discussion and to build mutual trust among the participants. Fourth, attention should be given to worship and the devotional aspects of religion. Fifth, members should work to establish common human concerns, promote action on those concerns and work for peace in specific situations. And, sixth, dialogues should study fundamental questions in the religious dimension of life.<sup>63</sup>

It may not be out of place here to refer to seminaries, theologates and missionary institutes, and ask whether education for the task of dialogue is receiving adequate attention in the years of formation, in a general way for all future missionaries, but also as a more specialized feature for some particularly gifted and so inclined?<sup>64</sup> Since dialogue is a lifestyle, this means getting beyond the necessary academic courses. It is the spirit of dialogue that should permeate the entire educational process. Attention to this area of life could make a world of difference to the "elan" of mission activity in the future. The following recommendation of the Consultation on Priestly Formation in North India, held in February, 1982, may serve as a suitable guideline:

The fact of religious pluralism, the growing self-awareness of the men of other faiths, their attitudes and their readiness to work with us on the one hand, and the seminarians' deeper understanding of Christianity and its mission on the other, continuously invite us to rethink the role of religion in general and of the Christian mission in North India in particular.

Moreover, specially in today's emerging consciousness there can be no religion without a commitment to justice for all . . .

We have to come to grips with these basic problems if seminary formation is to be meaningful in our context.

The Consultation has brought to the fore a deeper awareness of the need to study the scope and method of evangelization in the context of North India.<sup>65</sup>

Missionaries in the field also need to be convinced that dialogue has a solid spiritual basis, that it has a marked "self-emptying" content and can become for many their first entry into the *mysterium tremendum* of God and into the fundamental experience of all faith. "He who loses his life for my sake and the Gospel shall find it."

Since the Gospel was never intended to be a patronizing and imperious monologue, since the function of the Church is to serve people, not dominate them, is not a really human meeting, a truly human dialogue more likely to lead people gently and graciously to turn their lives to Christ? Is not leading people to follow the person of Christ the real intent of the phrase: "making disciples" of all nations?

### **Christ's Example of Dialogue**

Did not Christ himself engage in a midnight dialogue with Nicodemus? Did he not present evidence, discuss patiently, listen to questions and objections in his ready availability to people? Witness how he dealt with the woman with a haemorrhage and with the people in the official's house when he raised to life the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:21-43). Perhaps the best example is in the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel, the story, namely, of Christ's way of dealing with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob in Sichar. Quiet, meditative reading of the chapter would be both convincing and rewarding. Christ opens the dialogue, not by preaching to the woman but by asking for help — just a drink of cold water, the little she can offer! He received before he gave, thus initiating the dialogue with an act of humility.

### **The Call of the Kingdom**

It is not without significance that the Christmas message of peace on earth is linked up with men of goodwill. It is by subjective goodwill that men, even if they are strangers to the message of the Gospel, are opened up to the inflow of grace and to union with God through an unrecognized Christ. This positive goodwill is man's greatest asset in the

matter of his eternal salvation. Dialogue of Christians with such seekers after God and his truth and unselfish love for others, which is a sharing of Christic love, becomes in this context for Christians themselves a duty and privilege of love, and part and parcel of their personal and social response to the Risen Lord. For wherever men respond with conscientious seriousness to the experience of their search, there is a kind of implicit virtual tendency towards the fulness of Christian truth and towards complete Christian communion. Thus does Bishop Butler conclude his study on objective and subjective Christian truth. He goes on to add: "The depth of man's responsible subjectivity on the one hand and the Christian Gospel and Church on the other may thus be said to be on converging courses; and as they tend to meet so they tend to embrace each other in a communion of which the expression is *dialogue*."66

### The Urgency of Dialogue

Dialogue, then, can no longer be looked upon as a luxury in which we may or may not engage. It seems to be postulated by the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit working in us but also in our brothers and sisters of other faiths. Dialogue is the call of the Kingdom by which the Church can rediscover itself in its fulness as it stretches out towards the universal Kingdom of God beyond its own visible boundaries, extending God's sovereignty over every human act of men of goodwill who thirst for freedom, peace, fraternity and love. Working together with persons of other faiths on the essential values of the Kingdom, the Church and Christians are more likely to appear "to outsiders as a sign raised above the nations . . . under which the scattered sons of God are being gathered into one" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2). Implicit in the approach of dialogue is the acceptance of God's sovereignty and, if fidelity to conscience and the building up of a unity of conscience, especially in respect of self-forgetting love of others, receives marked attention in the dialogue of action, we will be already in the reality of the Kingdom. Such activity is bound to be a spur to a more intense union with God and to a greater compassion and concern for our fellowmen, for there would be little to share in dialogue if the reality is not being lived and experienced. For many living within Asia, the concept of the Kingdom of God may not always be an appropriate formula. There is no reason, therefore, why we should not speak instead of a better, more honest, more just and more fraternal world — "that renewed humanity, penetrated with brotherly love, sincerity and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire" (*Ad Gentes*, 8).

With Pope John XXIII's vision in convoking the Council, Pope Paul VI therefore proclaimed in *Ecclesiam Suam* that the great road to renewal is *dialogue* — within and without, dialogue in every direction, collaboration in the search for truth in an atmosphere of love, valuing other people's gifts to the full.

Pope John Paul II, in his message to the people of Asia, is equally emphatic:

All Christians must be committed to dialogue with the believers of all religions so that mutual understanding and collaboration may grow; so that moral values may be strengthened; so that God may be praised in all creation. Ways must be developed to make this dialogue become a reality everywhere but especially in Asia, the continent that is the cradle of ancient cultures and religions. The Church of Jesus Christ in this age experiences a profound need to enter into contact and dialogue with all those religions.

“This is the gymnasium,” says Ricardo Lombardi, “where we experience all virtues and our dialogue is indispensable for the renewed Church to function and expand into a universal Kingdom.”<sup>67</sup>

This theology of the Kingdom coincides very well with the service-oriented lay spirituality stressed by Vatican II: “The laity, by their very vocation, seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (*Lumen Gentium*, 31; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4). Since it is an irrevocable divine decision that the Church has the main responsibility for forwarding the Kingdom, since the number of Christians is proportionately decreasing in the world, since the universal plan of salvation remains valid and intact, since the Church's mission is to serve the world and witness to Christ and spread the values of his Kingdom and specifically the Savior Love of the Redeemer, the Church must insert itself as a ferment in a humanity on its way to universal salvation through love. It is for the sake of his presence in the entire human community that we have his privileged presence in the Church, the Eucharist and the Word. The very *raison d'être* of the Church is to be and to become ever more a credible sign of the Kingdom and a source of genuine hope for the future of man.

### **Partnering the Risen Lord**

The risen Christ is already the glorified heart of the world and through the power of his Spirit is gathering all unto himself — individuals, groups, cultures, religions and all human history. This is so

even though it be hidden from the beneficiaries of his saving love, presence and power.

We are being invited to associate ourselves actively with this living Presence and saving Love, and to announce, disclose and release to a waiting world and to spread with others, especially through common works of unselfish love and fraternity, of greater justice, wider brotherhood, and a more humane social environment (*Gaudium et Spes*, 35). Thanks to him, it can be done and through the practical questions of life. An individualistic morality concerned only with one's own perfection would be a monstrosity and, in fact, self-contradictory. Human fulfilment is an interpersonal affair. "If there is to be an ultimate human happiness, it must both be a community happiness and free from the limitations produced by moral and physical evil. The fulfilment that is revealed to us in the Risen Lord is a community destiny."<sup>68</sup>

We ourselves have been set free to be able to enter into respectful and cordial relations with all human beings, and it is the same grace of God that is actually bringing us together in dialogue. It is by associating ourselves with the Risen Christ in this fashion that we are saved, sanctified and perfected. Dialogue then, properly understood, is an expression of the love we have experienced in Christ and to which we desire to testify. "It is," says *Guidelines for Dialogue* of the World Council of Churches, "a joyful affirmation of life against chaos and a participation with all who are allies of life in seeking the provisional goals of a better human community."<sup>69</sup>

The positive stance of Vatican II sees the influence of the Spirit not only within the religious undertakings of men but also in the various spheres of human activity directed towards a universal community of love. The Sedos Seminar of 1981 recommends in this connection that "as a positive response to China's opening to the world, Christians should foster and participate in dialogue and exchanges in economic, scientific, educational, cultural, religious and other fields."<sup>70</sup> In May, 1982, WCRP did just that with the Chinese Government on the matter of nuclear arms.

It is within the ongoing, dynamic, historical process of humanization that the dialogue of religions must take place. Such a context is not a stranger to the promise of Jesus Christ — that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. The Spirit does not work in a vacuum. Human relationships at their best are dialogical and it is in the context of human relationships that the fruits of the Spirit are to be achieved. They are the signs of a full Christian life, a life lived in responsible, reciprocal

relationship. The gifts of the Spirit of truth are given along with and in answer to our willingness to submit ourselves to the responsibility and discipline of dialogue.<sup>71</sup>

Our hope lies precisely in the Holy Spirit and his continued work in us Christians and in persons of other faiths as together, messengers of the Good News of God's love, we search and struggle together for a truly universal community of freedom, justice and fellowship. Thus will have been brought together for all mankind God's dialogue of salvation in Christ and our manifold ways of authentic human striving. God calls to all men from his future in his dialogue with the one world. The concrete goals of his plans in history are beyond our grasp; we only know that in the final reckoning the elect will be united in the Holy City, ablaze with the splendor of God where the nations walk in his light. The voice of God's wisdom is addressed to all human beings through the whole of creation and history.

We must therefore be faithful to history, which means that, while accepting the heritage of the past, we bring it into dialogical tension with the vitality and needs of the present, even while our eyes are set on the future. In so doing, we shall be true both to ourselves and to God, as we respond to the call in faith, with submission, docility and with the utmost confidence, as the Spirit invades and pervades the whole of human history and makes of it the Kingdom of God — a new People with a new Song to their Lord. It is our hope that in true and authentic dialogue in community we shall assuredly move towards this final common destiny when the Lord will come again to make all things new and God will be all in all (Rev 21, 22; 1 Cor 15:38).

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