

CHRISTIAN PRESENCE AMONG MUSLIMS IN ASIA

A Consultation of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
Nav Sadhana, Varanasi, India, November 26-December 4, 1983

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I. INTRODUCTION

by Bishop Patrick D'Souza

Varanasi (Banares), the city on the bank of the river Ganges, holy to Hindus and Buddhists and with a sizeable Muslim population, was the venue of the consultation on Christian presence among Muslims in Asia. It was organized by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the Office of Evangelization, both of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The Commission of the Indian Bishops' Conference dealing with evangelization and dialogue offered active support to the consultation.

A cardinal, fifteen archbishops and bishops, 5 sisters, 3 lay persons, a Methodist pastor and twenty-two priests from eleven Asian and two European countries met from November 26 to December 4 in Nav Sadhana, the regional pastoral center of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, India, to reflect on and discuss the nature and purpose of Christian presence and witness among Muslims of Asia. Because of some last minute technical difficulties the delegates from South Korea and the Philippines could not come. All the participants felt deeply the absence of these delegates.

The need for a well-prepared consultation on Christian-Muslim relations had been felt for some time. In fact, the handful of pioneers who worked in this field for decades provided silent but real inspiration

to all. The Plenary Assembly of the FABC at Bangkok, October 1982, and the series of discussions on apostolate among Muslims and on Christian presence among Muslims held under the auspices of FABC in the Second Bishops' Institute on Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA II) and the Second Bishops' Institute on Missionary Apostolate made the participants concerned conscious of the urgency of the problem. The FABC Office of Evangelization and the Office of Interreligious Affairs were charged with the task of organizing the meeting.

Preparatory meetings were held at Bangkok, October 23, 1982, New Delhi, November 21-22, 1982, Varanasi, February 5-6, 1983, and Johor, June 14-15, 1983. In addition to these meetings, some members of the Islamic Studies Association of India and some specially recruited sisters were working very hard to prepare for this consultation, along with the members of FABC Offices and the staff of Nav Sadhana.

The Purpose of the Consultation

The organizers were quite aware of the diversity of the situations in the various countries of Asia, so they tried to enuntiate clearly and in realistic terms the purpose of the consultation.

1. To reflect on questions concerning Christian presence among Muslims in the pluralistic society of Asia, especially those questions arising today from varied and rapidly changing sociocultural situations in Asian countries.

2. To deepen our understanding of Muslims, their religion and culture.

3. To work out, in the light of this reflection, of Vatican II documents and subsequent pronouncements of the Church, a pastoral orientation and offer specific recommendations for a Christian presence among Muslims in Asia today.

The already expressed purpose of the consultation can be viewed from the angles of knowledge and action.

A. Knowledge

1. To understand more clearly the varying life situations of Muslims in Asian countries and the source of their faith and practice.

2. To become more aware of what the Church says about its relationship to other religions, specially Islam.

3. To discern the different influences affecting Christian-Muslim relationships.

4. To study and evaluate Christian presence among Muslims in Asia.

B. Orientation and Action

1. To change attitudes of prejudice, ignorance and lack of interest towards this ministry in the Church.

2. In the light of the experience of all Christians, to suggest steps for a more broadly based ministry for our Muslim brethren, specifying the roles of bishops, priests, religious and laity in this ministry.

3. To promote suitable literature and other means of communication in this ministry.

A Unique Exposure Program

The consultation was preceded by an exposure program meant to give the participants an experience of Muslim life in India. Thirty participants took part in the program, which was organized by the Islamic Studies Association, from November 23rd through the 25th. On the morning of the 23rd, the group visited New Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia, the university where members of the staff and a few senior students of the department of Islamic Studies received them cordially — in spite of that day being a lecture-free holiday. Prof. Ziyaul Hasan Faruqi spoke to the participants in some detail about the origin and spirit of the institution. The talk was followed by a frank exchange of views on the meaning, possible ambiguities and contemporary need for an ongoing Christian-Muslim dialogue and for interreligious encounter, especially in the Asian context. In the concluding remarks he stressed the importance for Muslims today to follow the lead of Christians in studying other religions, trying to understand them, as they understand their own. The participants visited Jamia's mosque and the tomb of the former president of India, the late Dr. Zakir Husain.

The group moved to Hamdardnagar in Tughluqbad, where it visited the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies and the Institute for the Study of the History of Medicine. Prof. Syed Vahiduddin, in a succinct talk, elucidated the essential features of Islam in the context of a discussion on religion as such. He indicated some criteria for distinguishing authentic from inauthentic Islam and genuine religion from mere ideology. The visit to the museum and to the laboratories of the Medical Institute provided for most participants the first opportunity to learn about the

Yunani, that is, the Graeco-Islamic system of medicine practised and promoted by the Muslim Hamdard Foundation.

In the afternoon the group visited Nizammudin, an old quarter around the shrine of Hazrat Nizammudin Aulia. The Banglewali Masjid there is the place of origin and center of the world-wide faith or preaching movement of Maulana Mohammad Ilyas. An elderly member of the movement explained in Urdu to the group its character and work. The talk was translated into English, passage by passage. The participants were allowed to be present at the sunset prayer in the mosque. After this, some of the members of the movement invited the participants in small groups to exchange views with them.

From Tablighi Jamaat, the group went to visit Khwaja Hasan Sani Nizami, the Pir (Spiritual Master) of the Nizami branch of the Chishti order of Sufis. The Pir himself led the group and, together with one of his disciples, guided them to the saint's tomb, where they participated in the short daily liturgy of the lighting of lamps. In the hall near the Khangah (Sufi center) the group was served tea. A member of the order spoke to the participants about the Quranic roots and the essence of the history of Sufism. For the last half hour, the Pir himself answered questions concerning initiation rites and forms of prayer and meditation practised in his order and about the spirit and meaning of his work as a Sufi teacher. The Pir expressed joy at meeting in this way with such a group of Christians.

A panel that evening at Vidyajhoti on the Churches in Indonesia, India and Pakistan and on the work of the Roman Secretariate for Non-Christians brought to a conclusion the first day of the exposure program.

On November 24th the participants visited Agra. Sightseeing was the principal program of the day. The group visited Fatehpur Sikri (the place of the encounters of Akbar with the representatives of all major religions of his empire, including the Jesuits of Goa), the Fort of Agra and Taj Mahal.

On November 25th the group moved to Lucknow. It visited Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, the second most important Islamic seminary in India, which was founded on slightly modernized lines early this century. Since the 25th happened to be a Friday, a lecture-free day, the group could not meet the teachers. But the students of the seminary met the members of the group informally, took them to the hostel and talked to them. It was a good opportunity for the group to see the international composition of the student body and to experience their hospitality and

the simple and disciplined lifestyle. Later, the group was able to visit the library. A junior lecturer gave an improvised talk on the institution, the syllabus of studies and the daily life of the students. Justice Murtaza Husian spoke also on Shiism and its customs and practices. It visited two of the famous "imambaras" of the city. These buildings were built for the regular morning sessions of the Shia community, especially during the month of Muharam. They are a development of Muslim architecture peculiar to India.

The program in Lucknow ended with a meeting of the Sarva Dharma Milan, an interfaith group founded by Fr. Leo D'Souza. It has functioned successfully for more than ten years, bringing together Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Bahais and Ahmadis. The members of this center explained to the group their aims and work. They also spoke about their aspirations and the way in which individual members view the question of interreligious dialogue and encounter. Late in the evening the group left Lucknow for Varanasi.

The exposure program was really a short course in Islam and on Muslim history and architecture. Moreover, they were introduced to different groups of Muslims — Sufi, Sunni, Shia, etc., and they got a chance to experience a living Islam. The consultation became much richer because of this experience. All felt very indebted to ISA members for the hard work they did to make the exposure program a success.

Preparatory Papers

Since the episcopal conferences and the organizers were aware of the importance of Christian-Muslim relations and of the need to prepare the consultation well, eleven scholars working in the field were asked to prepare papers on the various aspects of the general theme. In fact, the papers were ready well ahead of time and were sent to all the participants.

—*Church and Islam. Reflections on Recent Teachings of the Church*, by Rev. Thomas Michel, Secretariat for Non-Christians, Rome.

—*Muslim Revival in Asia*, by Rev. Archie D'Souza, Karachi.

—*Muslim Image of Christians and Christian Image of Muslims*, by Rev. Terence Farias, Lucknow.

—*Islam as a Missionary Religion*, by Rev. Christian Troll, Delhi.

—*History of Christian-Muslim Relationship*, by Rev. Francis Zannini, Bangladesh.

—*Spiritual Dimension of Islam*, by Rev. Paul Jackson, Patna.

- Some Aspects of Popular Islam*, by Rev. M. Geijbels, Rawalpindi.
- Islam and Liberation*, by Bishop B.S. Tuatud, Marawi, Philippines.
- Women in Islam*, by Sr. Leelamma Varkey, India.
- Christian Attitudes towards Muslims*, by Bishop George Dion, Jolo, Philippines.
- Islam and Human Rights*, by Dr. Tahir Mahmood, Delhi.

The booklet, *Introduction to Islam*, edited by the Henry Martyn Institute, Hyderabad, was also sent to every participant. As we can see, some of the papers deal with the theology of Christian-Muslim relations, and others are on the doctrines, practices and history of Islam. A few papers look at Muslim history and Christian-Muslim relations more from a sociological viewpoint. In fact, all the papers touch on the contemporary situation of Islam and on Christian-Muslim contacts in the context of Muslim Asia.

The Inauguration of the Consultation

The consultation began with the celebration of the Eucharist. Cardinal Joseph Cordeiro of Karachi brought home to the participants the reasons why this consultation should be a new beginning in our pastoral efforts to meet Muslims. The time of Advent brings to us hope. With hope, the Church should undertake this difficult task.

Position Papers and Other Talks

Bishop Patrick D'Souza, the principal organizer, explained to the participants the dynamics of the consultation.

The keynote address of the meeting was delivered by Cardinal Cordeiro. He situated Islam in the general context of religions, their origin and development. He touched on the theology of Christian-Muslim relations, and, finally, pointed out the vastly varying situations existing in the different countries of Asia. Once again he sounded the note of hope. The local Churches in Muslim Asia face many problems. But we place our confidence in God.

On November 28th, in the morning plenary session, Fr. Terence Farias read his position paper: "Areas of Convergence between Christianity and Islam." He pointed out the main doctrinal convergences between the two faiths. In the discussion that followed it became clear that in some cases the convergences were only apparent and in other cases the convergences at closer examination manifested divergences too.

In the late afternoon of November 30th Dr. Ahmad of Patna University gave his impressions of Christian presence and activity in his area. He expressed the common appreciation of Christian educational and medical institutions. He also pointed out that the appreciation was not entirely disinterested. Dr. Ahmad was very positive about the collaborative efforts in the field of Islamic studies and he underlined the transforming potentialities of personal friendship. The Muslims as a community are not prepared for dialogue. They need to be educated in this area. He was candid in admitting that sometimes Muslims suspect Christians have ulterior religious motives in their social and charitable undertakings. He suggested also some practical ways by which Christians and Muslims could come together in a more effective way: knowledge of the language used by the religious leaders of the Muslim community, acquaintance with the local or regional Muslim problems, etc. All the participants were very happy with the candid and sincere way in which Dr. Ahmad spoke to them.

Workshops and Recommendations

The bulk of the work of the consultation was done in workshops. The preparatory papers were not read in public. They were studied in private. There were two types of workshops. The first phase of workshop discussion gave the participants a chance to share their own experiences, to provide basic information, to get acquainted with the situation in the different countries, and finally to speak out some of their own basic suppositions regarding Muslim-Christian contacts.

The second phase of workshops formed the heart of the consultation. While the discussions of the previous workshops lasted just three hours, these filled twelve hours. The theme of the consultation was dealt with from various angles.

The subjects shared by all the groups in the first phase were:

1. Personal ideas and feelings about Muslims
2. Religious values seen in the life of a Muslim
3. Forms of dialogue with Muslims.

The next series of workshops discussed the general theme of the consultation under the following aspects. Each group took one or more particular points for study:

- Muslim Prayer and Spirituality; Ways to explain Christian Faith to Muslims
- Present-Day Forms and Movements in Islam

- Living among Muslims, Presuppositions and Requirements; Women in Islam
- Joint Efforts to Promote a More Just Social Order.

The Message of the Consultation

The “message” sent to all the bishops of Asia is the principal fruit of the work done by the consultation. Four drafts were prepared. The first draft was discussed only by a small group. Taking its suggestions into consideration, the drafting committee prepared a second draft. It was studied by the workshop groups. In the light of their suggestions a revised version was prepared, which was placed before the plenary session. Once again many suggestions were made to improve the contents and formulation of the message. The message published is the final version prepared by the drafting committee after all these discussions. This version was accepted by the house unanimously. As one bishop suggested, the message should not be taken in isolation from the other parts of the consultation. It has to be seen in the context of previous documents on Islam, especially that of BIRA II and of the Secretariat for Non-Christians.

Creative Interaction among the Participants

The gathering of delegates from different countries, from Pakistan to as far as Japan, with varying social, cultural and political backgrounds has been a source of rich experience for all. Some of the participants did not possess deep theoretical or experiential knowledge of Islam and Muslim life and practices. Others were not familiar with the modern approach of dialogue with other religions. The delegates from countries where Muslim majority enjoyed political and economic power and refused equal rights to minorities had their own ideas and attitudes. Still there were others who were quite familiar with Islam and interreligious dialogue. Some of these possessed a rich academic background. So in the workshops and in the plenary sessions divergent ideas and attitudes found expression. Naturally some felt that dialogue would devalue evangelization or that dialogue must be understood as indirect evangelization. Will the dialogical approach and the favorable attitude to Muslims bring about new theological and practical difficulties for Christians? Those participants who were familiar with the spiritual riches of Islam and with the friendliness and openness of some Muslims had other views. The delegates coming from secular, democratic countries expressed very open views.

What is noteworthy is the fact that these difficulties, opposing views and attitudes became through discussion and prayerful reflection the

most fruitful aspect of the consultation. The diversity of attitudes, feelings and ideas originated from varying personal experiences. But when the Churches of Asia reflect on them in the light of the Gospel, the message that comes through is one of hope and courage. The contents of the message and its unanimous acceptance by the assembly show that divergent attitudes and ideas need not divide persons but could be unified into a higher synthesis. Another point that became clear was that Christian-Muslim relations should be viewed from the wider context of interreligious dialogue.

Follow-Up on the Consultation

According to the participants the consultation made them conscious of the Muslim reality in their countries and of the need to approach them in a Christian way. For this a favorable climate has to be created inside and outside the Church. Therefore, the ideas and practical suggestions that emerged from the consultation should be shared with others. This is to be done at various levels. One's own community, one's immediate surroundings, the diocese, region and country are important in this regard. The participants with Muslim friends could communicate the message to them too. The message has to be diffused through the Catholic press and the news media. Translation of the message into the regional languages is another practical step that can be taken.

Commissions and other organs of the national bishops' conferences and of the dioceses are asked to study the results of the consultation and implement the practical suggestions according to the situation existing in the place. Courses and renewal programs can be organized at different levels to which the experts could be invited. National institutions, or even Asian institutions for the study of Islam, can be built by the national bishops' conferences and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

Another possibility that is open to us is to make use of the existing Christian educational institutions to give a new and true awareness of the Muslim reality in each country. For this, first of all, the local Church should organize special seminars and courses for the teachers. In fact, in different countries much is being done in the field of Christian-Muslim relations. But what is most necessary is the communication of information among different countries and groups. Institutions like the Islamic Studies Association of India should send information regarding Christian-Muslim contacts to other Asian countries.

II. CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM. REFLECTIONS ON RECENT TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

by Rev. Thomas Michel, S.J.

A young Muslim couple in Jakarta have for fifteen years been serving the poorest beggars of the city. They have moved to the edge of the garbage dumps to be near those they serve, and have established literacy programs, teach crafts and sewing, conduct Qur'an classes, and find jobs; they support their efforts with a ten-percent tithe from the husband's income. The Algerian shaykh of the Sufi Alawiyya order wants to meet Mother Theresa because "she is a woman of God and therefore they have much in common." Muslim worshipers in mosques from Mindanao to Morocco pray daily to God with a regularity and sincere devotion that Christians might well emulate. Housewives in India and Malaysia put aside a handful of rice each time they cook to provide for the poor of their village or urban neighborhood, thus fulfilling the Islamic pillar of *zakat*. All in the name of God.

Yet we have heard of the son of the Anglican priest in Iran who was murdered by a mob of youths. We read in the newspapers of cutting the hands of thieves and stoning adulterers. Some churches have been burned in Egypt and Indonesia. We regard with concern movements for an Islamic state, possibly in our own country.

How do we as Christians regard these phenomena among our Muslim neighbors? How do we judge the movements of spirits in the religion of Islam that prompt men and women, on the one hand, to the heights of love and worship of God and fraternal service to their neighbors, and on the other, to chauvinism, intolerance, and domination? Is Islam a false religion, a preparation for the Gospel, or a faith which comes from God with its own value and place in God's saving work?

In this paper I would like to address some of these questions, and I must delimit its parameters at the start. I will not be attempting to open any new theological doors or engage in theoretical speculations. I hope to ground my presentation in the teachings of the Roman Catholic tradition, particularly the statements of the Second Vatican Council and those of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II. My intention is pastoral and designed to provide material for reflection and discussion among the pastors of the Churches of Asia. I will by necessity draw from my own experience in many encounters with Muslims in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. I will address the concept of dialogue, used so often in recent magisterial pronouncements, and attempt to relate it to the mission which Christ has given to those he has called to be his disciples.

Past Attitudes Towards Islam

As we know, the prevailing attitude of Christians has not always been one of dialogue. From the first centuries of Islam, there were Christian theologians, exemplified by St. John Damascene, who considered Islam a heresy and that Muhammad was incorrectly taught the rudiments of the Christian faith by an eccentric monk. In Europe after the Crusades Christians thought Muslims worshiped Muhammad and their polemics picture Islam in the worst of terms, often with little regard for the truth. Some of those in the modern missionary movement viewed Muslims as lost souls who could not be saved unless they became Christians.

This is not to say that there were no Christians who saw Islam in a different light. Francis of Assisi, at the height of the Crusades, visited the sultan in Egypt in peace and returned to Italy where he wrote the famous *Canticle of All Creatures* which praises God in phrases reminiscent of the Qur'an. Impressed by the Muslim call to prayer, he encourages the friars to have church bells announce the Christian services. More importantly, in his Rule of 1221, he instructed those friars who were to live among Muslims:

The brothers can conduct themselves among them spiritually in two ways. One way is to avoid quarrels or disputes and be subject to every human creature for God's sake, so bearing witness to the fact that they are Christians. Another way is to proclaim the word of God openly, when they see that it is God's will.

At a recent Franciscan conference on Islam, friars from around the world noted that Francis did not send his brothers "to" Muslims, still less "against" Muslims, but "among" them. Their primary witness that they are Christians is shown in their peaceful avoidance of quarrels and disputes and their rejection of the drive for dominion and power. Then, if and when they see it to be God's will, they proclaim the word openly.

It is not only in the charismatic vision of the saint in which such openness is found, but also in the attitude of the official teachers of the Church. A century and a half before the time of Francis, in 1076, Pope Gregory VII sent a letter to the Andalusian monarch Al-Nasir, who had sent the Pope gifts and freed Christian prisoners. He wrote:

The good God, creator of all things, without whom we can do nothing or even imagine it, inspired this in your heart; he who illuminates every man coming into this world illuminated your mind in this. For almighty God, who wishes that all men should be saved and none lost, approves nothing in us so much as that man

after loving himself should love his fellow, and that what he does not want done to himself he should not do to others. You and we owe this charity to ourselves especially because we believe in and confess one God, admittedly in a different way, and daily praise and venerate him, the creator of the worlds and ruler of this world.

The Holy Father closed his letter by stressing his sincerity and wishing Al-Nasir health and blessings in this life and eternal happiness in the next:

We ask with heart and mouth that after the long space of this life that the same God will lead you into the bosom of blessedness of the most holy patriarch Abraham.

The Second Vatican Council

Thus, it was not something entirely new when the Second Vatican Council proclaimed:

The Church has a high regard for Muslims, who worship God the one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan ... They esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, almsgiving and fasting.¹

The council fathers taught also that Muslims are "included in God's plan of salvation." The document continues:

In the first place are the Muslims, who profess to hold the faith of Abraham. Together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the Last Day.²

In the missionary decree of the Church, Christians are taught that Christ's disciples:

Should know the people among whom they live and should establish contact with them, to learn by sincere and patient *dialogue* what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth.³

The call to dialogue is often reiterated in the council documents,⁴ papal encyclicals, exhortations, and statements in the years since the council, and in the declarations of the FABC and local episcopal conferences. We have, I believe, arrived at a stage where knowledge of such calls can be presumed and need not again be catalogued. Our purpose here is to center our attention on how Christians can and should regard Islam as a religion and Muslims as believers in God. To this end, a brief look at the teaching of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II can serve as our starting point.

Pope Paul VI

In the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), Pope Paul VI referred to Islam in these words:

We refer to the adorers of God according to the conception of monotheism, the Muslim religion especially, deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God . . . Honesty compels us to declare openly our conviction that there is but one true religion, the religion of Christianity . . . But we do, nevertheless, recognize and respect the moral and spiritual values of the various non-Christian religions, and we desire to join with them in promoting common ideals of religious liberty, human brotherhood, good culture, social welfare, and civil order.⁵

In this, Pope Paul took the Council documents a step further, for *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium* spoke only of "Muslims," and made no reference to Islam as a religion. Here it is clearly expressed that the Islamic religion, like other religions, enshrines "moral and spiritual values" which are worthy of recognition and respect and even admiration for all that is true and good in its followers' worship of God. This recognition of what is good in Islam should be honestly accompanied by the expression on the part of Christians of our conviction of the truth of our own faith.

In 1967, Pope Paul repeated many of the same themes in his address to the Grand Mufti of Istanbul. "We must express our esteem for Muslims," and "on this basis of common truths, we are called to promote together social justice, moral values, peace, and liberty." He asked "the abundance of God's blessings upon the Muslim community."

In Uganda in 1969, the same Pope "saluted the great communities of Muslims spread throughout the whole of Africa"; he expressed his profound respect for the faith which they profess," and his hope that

“what we possess in common serves to unite Christians and Muslims in an ever closer way, in an authentic fraternity.” He felt certain that his Muslim hearers “would unite themselves to the prayers which we address to the Almighty that he grant to all African believers the desire for pardon and reconciliation which is so often encouraged in the Gospel and in the Qur’an.”

Finally, in praising the Christian martyrs of Uganda, the Pope paid homage to the Muslims who had died in witness to their faith in that country.

In celebrating the Catholic and Anglican martyrs, we also willingly celebrate the confessors of the Muslim faith who were the first to undergo death, in 1848, because they refused to transgress the precepts of their religion.

He concluded with the hope that his meeting with the Muslim leaders would be a first step in attaining “this unity to which God has demanded that they aspire.”

The points to note which were made in these addresses by Pope Paul VI are that there exist truths held in common by the followers of the two religions, which should lead them to a unity, an authentic fraternity, which is demanded by God. He expressed respect not merely for Muslims as individuals, but also for the faith which they profess. Moreover, it is proper, in a sentiment reminiscent of that of Pope Gregory VII, to beg God’s blessings upon the Islamic community, aware that Muslims and Christians are united in their prayer to God.

Pope John Paul II

When we turn to the teachings of the present Holy Father, it can be asserted without fear of contradiction that no Pope in history has devoted so much attention to the relations between Christians and Muslims as has Pope John Paul II. Both in his addresses to Christians living in the midst of Muslims in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, as well as in his speeches to Muslims in the context of his travels to various Islamic countries, the present Pope has attempted to lay the bases for Christian-Muslim dialogue and the principles for living together among the followers of those two monotheistic faiths.

In order to understand fully John Paul II’s teaching on Islam and relations with Muslims, it is important to appreciate his broader theological position on the other religions of the world. His overriding

attitude is one of respect for the truth which others than Christians also possess. This respect for their valid spiritual experience must lead Christians to approach others, not merely with the expectation of what Christians can say and bring and give, but also of what they can learn from others and how they can be challenged and enriched by them.

In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, the Pope speaks of the belief of the followers of non-Christian religions as being “the effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body,”⁶ and elsewhere he says that the Holy Spirit “is mysteriously present in non-Christian religions and cultures.”⁷ This presupposes a view of other faiths far different from a neo-Barthian position which views non-Christian religions as the domain of Satan which must be brought under the reign of God, a theological stance which had previously dominated so much of Christian thinking towards other faiths.

In *Redemptor Hominis*, the Pope applies the statement in *Ad Gentes* (the missionary document of the Second Vatican Council) that “man is constantly worked upon by God’s Spirit” to the belief of non-Christians itself. It is clear from *Redemptor Hominis* that John Paul II considers this action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of non-Christians to be operative not in spite of their religious adherence, but rather at its essence and foundation.

The Pope urges Christians to come into closer harmony with representatives of other religions through:

Dialogue, contacts, prayer in common (and) investigation of the treasures of human spirituality, in which, as we know well, the members of these religions are not lacking.⁸

Christians’ approach to those of other faiths should therefore be multi-faceted, including not only formal and theological dialogue and interchange in the situations of daily life, but also a shared experience of prayer and the effort to become more aware of the values and insights contained in their spiritual traditions. He concluded that “it is a noble thing to have a predisposition for understanding every person, analyzing every system and recognizing what is right.”⁹

He declares that this does not mean that the Christian should “lose certitude about his own faith”; rather, the Christian has much to gain both in the realms of faith and morals, so that through dialogue his faith becomes deeper, richer.

The firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religion ... can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church and so prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissiveness.¹⁰

Pope John Paul II developed this theme further in his discourse to the participants of the plenary meeting of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians in 1979. He stated:

A Christian finds it of the highest interest to observe truly religious people, to read and listen to the testimonies of their wisdom and to have direct proof of their faith to the point of recalling at times the words of Jesus, "Not even in Israel have I found such faith."¹¹

In the same address he added his views on the attitude which Christian should have towards believers of other faiths.

Respect and esteem for the other and for what he has in the depths of his heart is essential to dialogue. To this must be added discernment and a knowledge that is sincere and profound. This last cannot be gained from books alone. It calls for fellow-feeling and identification.

He cites St. Paul's readiness to become all things to all persons "for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings," and stresses that any dialogue can only be constructive and fruitful if there is love for those with whom we converse. "The only truly perfect speech is that spoken in love."

The Primacy of Love

I believe that the practical implications of this papal teaching are far-reaching, because identification demands the efforts to feel and understand concepts, problems, and crises — in fact, all reality — through the eyes of the other. One who tries to identify with another in this way is no longer an outside observer and critic of their worldly and spiritual experience, but is, emotionally, a participant in what happens in their lives and how they view it. This is even more the case when love is at the basis of the relationship. A Christian who has no love for Muslims (or members of other faiths) and their beliefs which lie at the heart of their religious self-understanding is not able to speak with much depth or even validity about their religion, and must undergo a "change of heart" before he is ready to undertake dialogue with them.

John Paul II is aware that many Christians are not prepared to enter into a genuine dialogue with people of other faiths. Ignorance of the real beliefs and practices of others, prejudices, half-truths, and self-interest often stand in the way and prevent some Christians from appreciating the goodness and truth and devotion which others express through their faith. Thus he urges that "education for dialogue with the followers of other creeds should form part of the training of Christians, especially young Christians."¹² Christian parents and catechists often feel that they are not prepared to teach their children the basic teachings of Islam, and it is true that this formal instruction in the religion of another is best left to those who have specialized training in that. However, what the Holy Father is pointing towards seems to be something far simpler; every Christian parent, catechist and parish priest can teach by word and example that God also loves Muslims, intends their salvation, and that there are many good and holy things in the Islamic religion.

Dialogue in the Mission of the Church

An attitude of dialogue in no way diminishes the Christian mission to proclaim the "mighty works of God," of what God has done "for the happiness and salvation of all at a particular time and in a particular man, whom he raised up to be our brother and Lord, Jesus Christ." Proclamation has its place in every situation of dialogue, and is in fact expected. Muslims and others are impelled to bear witness by word and deed to the guidance and hope they find in their faith. Similarly, a Christian "must always be ready to give an answer to those who ask the reason for the hope that is in us."

The Pope is here addressing what is for many of us in Asia the main issue. As Christians, we are called to recognize, respect, value and grow by the truth and deep experience of God we find in the lives of our neighbors, while at the same time, as disciples of the risen Lord, we are called to bear witness to the Good News to which we have been called. How are these two aspects of our mission to be reconciled in the lives of individual believers, of the local Churches?

The key seems to be the respect and esteem which is stressed in each of John Paul II's approaches to people of other faiths. Where there is genuine respect for the other and for his spiritual experiences, proclamation of our own faith commitment is no insult. In my own encounters with Muslims, they have often asked, "Since you obviously respect and love Islam, why don't you become a Muslim?" I answer that I cannot become a Muslim because the deepest convictions which give direction to my life, the reason for all I do, the very basis for my desire to

honor and serve others and to share a life with them is rooted in my faith in what God has done and said and continues to accomplish for mankind through Jesus Christ. When a person's knowledge of Jesus Christ and his relationship to him is his way of approaching God and knowing God's will for him, is the deepest truth which he believes and by which he lived, is what gives him life, direction, hope — that person can only be a Christian.

I do not feel insulted when Muslims seek unity with me by sharing what is deepest and richest in their lives. Neither have I found Muslims angered, insulted, or even surprised in my natural desire to be one with them in the Christian faith which is the moving force and source of joy in my life. The true Christian and the true Muslim submit themselves to God's will, each according to his particular understanding of it.

In a genuine religious encounter marked by respect and love, the Christian and the Muslim normally remain committed to their respective faiths, but neither remains unchanged. God's Spirit is at work to call them anew to himself, to broaden and deepen their awareness of his constant and mysterious presence and movement in their lives. I can testify that I am a better Christian and priest today because of my many contacts with Muslims, and I hope that God has used our encounters to touch their lives as well. Pope John Paul II has asserted in his address to the bishops of North Africa that not infrequently have Christians profited in their own faith commitment by the witness given by their Muslim sisters and brothers.¹³

Using John Paul II's key of respect and love, we see that true sharing of life in dialogue and genuine proclamation are not incompatible alternatives in living the mission of the Church, rather, each element finds its place in the dialogue of life together. The problems arise in a type of evangelization which does not respect the other persons, their convictions, cultural traditions, and religious experience. Muslims are properly and understandably insulted by those who dismiss or negate the validity for them of the faith (*iman*), the religion (*din*), and the law (*shari'a*) of Islam. They consider it an unworthy manipulation and abuse when Christian works of *diakonia* towards the poor, the sick, the young and the displaced are used as tactics designed to separate Muslims from their beliefs. My experience in Asia is that this misuse of *diakonia*, as well as the false understanding of evangelization, is quickly becoming a thing of the past. Our works of *diakonia*, properly understood, are inspired by the example of Christ whose life of concern and service was directed primarily towards the needy, and are a sign and demonstration of God's love for all persons. On the other hand, the Islamic community

should be aware that, with the assumption of greater political and economic power by Muslims in recent decades, Christians in some places are subjected to subtle and explicit pressures to accept Islamic *da'wah* for reasons which have less to do with religious conviction than with economic and social factors.

Spiritual Values in Other Religions

Pope John Paul II, like Pope Paul before him, has taught that Christians must recognize the moral and positive spiritual orientation which other religions offer their adherents. In his radio talk to the peoples of Asia, John Paul II declared that the Church:

Pays homage to the many moral values contained in these religions, as well as to the potential for spiritual living which so deeply marks the traditions and the cultures of whole societies.¹⁴

To an ecumenical gathering of Christians, Muslims and Jews in Lisbon the Pope spoke similarly:

These contacts of ours, dialogue, the appreciation of the undeniable treasures of spirituality in every religion, Christian fellowship and, when it is possible, prayer in common, can bring together the efforts to dispel the illusion of constructing a new world without God and the futility of a purely anthropocentric humanism.¹⁵

It is mankind's acknowledgement of the need for prayer, he states, which brings together and unites Christians and people of other religions. The God who is the object of mankind's prayer is one and the same, and the Spirit who inspires and guides such prayer is one.

Even when for some, he is the great Unknown, he nevertheless remains always in reality the same living God. We trust that wherever the human spirit opens itself in prayer to this Unknown God, an echo will be heard of the same Spirit who, knowing the limits and weakness of the human person, himself prays in us and on our behalf, "expressing our plea in a way that could never be put into words."

Dialogue the Task of All Christians

In his radio talk, the Pope concludes his views on interreligious dialogue by asserting:

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.¹⁶

From these words we can see that dialogue is not the special mission for some Christians, while others act in a way which contradicts it and neutralizes its basic witness. Rather, dialogue is an attitude which must characterize the Christian community as a whole, whereby Christian people “co-operate with other believers in preserving all that is good in their religions and cultures, stressing the things that are held in common, and helping all people to live as brothers and sisters.”¹⁷

To appreciate John Paul II's basic attitude towards other religions, two final points must be noted. Firstly, in their relations with people of other faiths, Roman Catholics must not try to “go it alone.” The ecumenical quest for full unity has interreligious consequences “that Christ may become ever more manifest in the love of his followers.”¹⁸ Secondly, dialogue cannot be limited to those who explicitly identify themselves with one or another religion. Christians must, said John Paul II in his radio talk:

Join hands with all men and women of goodwill who share a belief in the inestimable dignity of each human person. They will work together in order to bring about a more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served.

Christians and Muslims Children of Abraham in Faith

With this general review of John Paul II's approach to other religions, we can turn directly to his views on Islam. His teaching about the faith of Muslims is an explication of what remained ambiguous in the decrees *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium*. The conciliar decrees cautiously declared that Muslims “associate themselves with the faith of Abraham” (NA 3) and “profess to hold the faith of Abraham” (LG 16). Both phrases leave open the possibility for a “restrictive” interpretation which would hold that, although Muslims consider themselves in the line of faith of Abraham, in fact we as Christians do not consider them as such.

In his discourse to the Catholic community in Ankara, the Pope states unequivocally, “They have, like you, the faith of Abraham in the one, almighty, and merciful God.”¹⁹ In his message to the President of Pakistan, the Pope refers to Abraham, “to whose faith Christians,

Muslims and Jews alike eagerly link their own.”²⁰ In Lisbon, he said: “And Abraham, our common forefather, teaches all — Christians, Jews and Muslims — to follow the path of mercy and love.”²¹ In each case a parallel is drawn between the Islamic self-identification as descendents of Abraham and that of Christians.

The soteriological implications of this position in the light of the Pauline theology that “Abraham was saved through his faith” are great, and have not been thoroughly explored by theologians of religions. One might ask whether Muslims are not saved, in a manner analogous to the Jews, as children in faith of Abraham who are inheritors of the promises made to the patriarch. In any theological evaluation of Islam made by Roman Catholics, the relevance of such papal teachings is apparent and must be taken into consideration.

John Paul II seems to point in this direction when — again to the Catholic community of Ankara — he declares:

Faith in God, professed by the spiritual descendants of Abraham — Christians, Muslims and Jews — when it is lived sincerely, when it penetrates life, is a certain foundation of the dignity, brotherhood and freedom of men and a principle of uprightness for moral conduct and life in society.²²

In affirming the societal and moral effects of this faith, the Pope seems to be presuming that such faith is genuine and not a relationship to God which Muslims merely impute to themselves. To the Muslim community in Kaduna, Nigeria, the Holy Father told his audience: “I speak of these issues (of common concern) with you because you are Muslims, and like us Christians, you believe in the one God who is the source of all the rights and values of mankind.”²³

It is precisely this shared faith which is the foundation of dialogue and co-operation between Christians and Muslims. John Paul II urges Christians:

To consider *every day* the deep roots of faith in God in whom also your Muslim fellow citizens believe, in order to draw from this the principle of a collaboration with a view to the progress of man, emulation in good, the extension of peace and brotherhood in free profession of the faith peculiar to each one.²⁴

What the Holy Father is recommending to Christians who live amidst Muslims or in an Islamic environment is a continuous, ongoing

reflection (“every day”) on the shared bases of faith in God between Christians and Muslims. This goes beyond a concept of dialogue which is solely the province of specialists or religious leaders, and thus marginal to the daily life of the Church, to an understanding of Islam which enriches our own appreciation of the sovereign presence of God who is continually deepening our call to be followers of Christ and open to the daily action of his Spirit.

In content, the Muslim’s faith is an unconditional submission (in Arabic *islam*), on the model of Abraham, to the will of God. In Ankara, the Pope paraphrased *Nostra Aetate* in the words: “They (Muslims) strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own.” In the same speech he repeatedly referred to the epistles of Peter where it is written: “Through your faith, the power of God affords you safe conduct till you reach it, this salvation which is waiting to be disclosed at the end of time” (I Peter 1:5). It would seem that the Holy Father has intuited an important point of contact between Christian’s faith in God and that of the Muslim. A comparative study of the Quranic understanding of faith with that expressed in the New Testament, particularly in the Petrine writings, might enrich believers in each religion.

Christian-Muslim Fellowship Based on Shared Faith in God and Worship

Muslims’ obedience to God, he states, their *islam*, and their commitment to be servant of God, link Christians with another passage from the First Epistle of Peter (I Peter 2:16), and offer possibilities for the exploration of still further aspects of the faith shared by Christians and Muslims. The Pope elaborated on this theme in his address to the representatives of the Muslim community in Davao, Philippines:

I deliberately address you as “brothers!” whose efforts, whether people realize it or not, tend towards God and the truth that comes from him. But we are especially brothers in God, who created us and whom we are trying to reach, in our own ways, through faith, prayer, and worship, through the keeping of his law and through submission to his designs.²⁵

Even though we are often unaware of it, Christians and Muslims are drawn into a brotherhood whose basis is our common effort, each in our distinctive ways, to respond to God’s action and message for us. Whether or not we want to admit it, we are brothers and sisters in God’s

design, a brotherhood grounded in our faith, worship, obedience and submission to God.

If the ultimate basis for dialogue and respect between Christian and Muslim is the shared elements of faith in the one and same God, the ongoing impetus which makes possible such activity is the worship that each gives to God. In Kenya, the Holy Father said:

The Catholic Church realizes that the element of worship given to the one, living, subsistent, merciful, and almighty Creator of heaven and earth is common to Islam and herself, and that it is a great link uniting all Christians and Muslims.²⁶

Muslim worship of our God and theirs is to be revered and admired. Whether we are speaking about the daily prayer in which Muslims at five critical times of the day recommit and surrender themselves to accepting and carrying out God's will, the month-long fast with its elements of commemoration, personal and communal renewal, brotherhood and forgiveness, or the poor tax paid by all faithful Muslims for the care of the disadvantaged in their midst, these acts of worship cannot leave Christians unaffected, for we believe that it is the God whom we love and who loves all mankind, who is honored and obeyed in their actions.

Shared Values Demand Collaboration

Common concerns and common values create spiritual bonds between Muslims and Christians.²⁷ Both are concerned to dedicate their lives to the service of God, worshipping him also through their daily actions and striving to make his will done on earth. The Pope affirms:

When I think of this (Islamic) spiritual heritage and the value it has for man and for society, its capacity of offering, particularly to the young, guidance for life, filling the gap left by materialism, and giving a reliable foundation to social and juridical organization, I wonder if it is not urgent for Christians and Muslims to recognize and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us, in order to preserve and promote together for the benefit of all "peace, liberty, social justice and moral values."²⁸

Muslims and Christians are called to an "authentic service to humanity." Together they should:

Promote more honesty and discipline in private and public life, greater courage and wisdom in politics, the elimination of political

antagonism, and the removal of discrimination because of a person's race, color, ethnic origin, religion, or sex."²⁹

In this regard, the Pope expressed his admiration for the humanitarian efforts of the government and people of Pakistan to care for the great number of refugees in that country and pledged the co-operation of Christians in these efforts to make God's will done on earth.³⁰

It is at the level of cultural and human issues where forms of collaboration are most apt and most needed. The Pope says that in the course of his travels he has "come to appreciate the rich cultural heritage"³¹ of Islam, and that the culture of Islam is something that "merits attention and respect"³² from Christians. For his part, he pledges to do everything possible to develop the bonds between Christians and Muslims, building a relationship of reciprocal esteem that results in a common witness to the world which is confronted by the dangers of materialism.³³

Dialogue

All this requires dialogue, which the Pope constantly recommends in each of his teachings about Islam. But what does he mean by dialogue? The concept of dialogue has fallen into disrepute among many Christians, Muslims and others, because they identify it with sterile discussions on points of theology or social gatherings among religious leaders. A serious investigation of the points of convergence and divergence between the two religions has its own value in attempting to formulate precisely the beliefs of each vis-a-vis the other, just as simple social contacts have their place in counteracting negative prejudices which people form about "the unknown other" and in opening the door to deeper levels of sharing. But in these statements the Holy Father is saying that dialogue must go deeper than this. He is speaking about a daily effort of the whole Christian and Muslim communities to bear witness, 'in peace and mutual respect, to that which is finest in their respective religious commitments. This dialogue is the ideal, the goal, which must be slowly and painfully built up. A level of trust does not appear overnight.

Such a dialogue is in the first place a question of friendship. One must know how to give dialogue time for progress and discernment. That is why it is surrounded by discretion out of a concern to be considerate with regard to the slowness of the evolution of mentalities. The seriousness of commitment in this dialogue is measured by that of the witness lived and borne to the values in which one believes.³⁴

Elsewhere he refers to "Muslims and Christians living together as neighbors, with mutual respect constantly present in social life, with common action to promote the acceptance and defence of man's fundamental rights."³⁵

In this connection, we can remember the similarity of approach to the question of dialogue between the teaching of the Holy Father and that which was stated by the Asian bishops at the FABC institute held in Kuala Lumpur in 1979.

Christians living among Muslims should recognize the importance of dialogue with their Muslim brethren. For most Christians, this means what can be called a dialogue of life. This is the most essential aspect of dialogue, and it is accomplished by Christians and Muslims living together in peace. Each gives witness to the other concerning the values he has found in his faith, and through the daily practice brotherhood, helpfulness, open-heartedness and hospitality, each shows himself to be a God-fearing neighbor. The true Christian and Muslim offer to a busy world values arising from God's message when they revere the elderly, conscientiously rear the young, care for the sick and the poor in their midst, and work together for social justice, welfare and human rights. We encourage Christians to be ever more deeply involved in this dialogue of life.³⁶

The possibility of freely-chosen conversion should not be eliminated from such encounters, as the Holy Father reminds us,³⁷ while at the same time Christians and Muslims are exhorted to "fully live" and "hold fast" to their convictions.³⁸

In all of this, the sound guideline is love.

In dialogue, speech does not become constructive and fruitful without love. Speech and love are the true vehicle of communication. The only truly perfect speech is that spoken in love.³⁹

Statements of Christians about Islam, and those of Muslims about Christianity, which are not formed, guided, and directed by love for the other do not attain the depths of truth to which the one God has called us.

Mutual Dependence of Christians and Muslims

Christians and Muslims, according to John Paul II, cannot consider themselves exclusive and totally self-sufficient communities. They have a

need for each other, on a human and societal level, and the world itself needs to see reconciliation and *salam* between these two monotheistic communities. To the Muslims of the Philippines the Pope said:

I wish you to be convinced of the fact that your Christian brothers and sisters need you and they need your love. And the whole world, with its longing for greater peace, brotherhood and harmony, needs to see fraternal coexistence between Christians and Muslims.⁴⁰

Divinely Guided Humanism

The Pope's sympathetic attitude and his eagerness to establish and develop close relations with Muslims derives from his awareness of a true humanism taught by both religions, one based on the dignity of mankind as the beloved creature of God and who reflects God's glory. For both Muslims and Christians, humankind is not an automaton, the product of an economic or psychological determinism, nor is he a plaything of the gods cast adrift in an absurd universe. Rather, he is the masterpiece of God's creative activity with innate dignity and purpose.

For the Muslim, the universe is destined to be subject to man as the representative of God. The Bible affirms that God ordered man to subdue the earth, but also to "till it and keep it!" (Gen 1:27). As God's creature, man has rights which cannot be violated, but he is equally bound by the law of good and evil which is based on the order established by God. Thanks to this law, man will never submit to any idol. The Christian keeps to the solemn commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 30:3). On his side, the Muslim will always say "God is greatest."⁴¹

Challenges Facing Christians and Muslims

In this brief survey of the recent teaching of the Church on how Christians should regard the followers of Islam, local and national problems and tensions cannot be treated. Situations are too diverse to formulate concrete solutions. In Asia the relations between Christians and Muslims vary greatly, from those of deep mutual enrichment and numerous examples of collaboration to those of competition, suspicion, distrust and open enmity. In some countries, Muslims are a small minority struggling to maintain their religious and cultural identity in the midst of a predominantly Christian population. Elsewhere, perhaps more often, Christians find themselves as tiny communities in nations where social and political life is dominated by Islamic ideals. In other places, both Christians and Muslims are minorities struggling to pursue

their convictions and ideals amidst still other religious traditions. Everywhere, there are the new challenges brought by modern international culture, which in both its capitalist and socialist forms raises issues and problems that neither the Christian nor the Islamic religion can ignore. Both must confront the pressing issues of war — particularly the specter of nuclear holocaust — poverty, social and personal morality, and the liberation of peoples from structures of oppression.

We live, as we know, in an age of polarization, and people do not want to hear about dialogue. After a brief period of enthusiasm in the late 60s and the early 70s, difficulties which appeared insurmountable arose, while tangible results seemed both ephemeral and superficial. People discovered that old resentments, enmities, and suspicions died hard. Moreover, religious sentiments tend to follow the mood of the times. As a Methodist minister from Ghana put it, "These are mean times; a hard spirit is afoot in the world." The north-south dialogue is silent, east-west detente is in shambles. Militarization is everywhere on the increase, and the principles of national security are taking precedence over those of human dignity and human rights. Ethnic, linguistic, racial and religious distinctions have brought one nation after another to civil unrest and violence, as peoples become more and more convinced that they cannot live with their neighbors in peace. I have heard Christians say, "How can we dialogue with Muslims when they are not sincere about it?", and have heard Muslims ask the same about Christians. I have heard both deny the possibility of dialogue with Hindus and heard Hindus claim the same about Buddhists. Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle East, and the relations of both with Jews in Israel, are at a new low and do not offer grounds for optimism. One religious and ethnic and national group after another is opting to press its own interests and let others worry about themselves.

The problem is that there are always grounds for the criticism of others. Both Christians and Muslims often betray their religious values and ideals. Christians aware of their own sinful history, both personal and communal, will not be surprised to see that there are Muslims who hate, who are intolerant, who are chauvinistic, who are hypocritical, and who act without regard for their neighbors of other faiths. This is not something characteristic of Islam or unique to them, but rather reflects the universal human condition.

Nevertheless, neither community can await an idealized partner for dialogue to begin. As Catholics, we cannot postpone our taking up the challenges of Church teaching until the times change, for history shows us that the times will not change until we change them. We must creatively

yet realistically find the doors which can be opened now, while waiting patiently and in hope for results to appear.

Pope John Paul II is moving against the spirit of the times by continuing to stress the urgency of respect, brotherhood, dialogue and co-operation. His appeals to Christians and Muslims are all the more prophetic because an increasingly polarized world is preaching the folly of the Islamic and Christian values to which he points. His calls to mutual esteem will be consigned to the realm of platitudes or public relations unless, despite misgivings and much evidence to the contrary, Christians and Muslims pursue their efforts to build a level of trust and regard the others basically as persons of goodwill devoted to carrying out God's will, but who, nevertheless, still display weakness, arrogance and selfishness.

However, the secret which God has hidden from the great and powerful he has revealed to the small and the weak. Throughout Asia, in every country, some Christians and some Muslims, as well as people of other faiths, have begun to cross the divisions which separate us, have begun honest and deep communication, and have begun to work together for the good of all. It is incumbent on us to search out and support such efforts and hold them up as examples to others. Our roles of leadership must be at the service of our communities to broaden perspectives and explore new possibilities for peace, coexistence, and mutual help and enrichment. In all this, it is essential that Christians and Muslims maintain and deepen their spiritual union with God through prayer and worship. A Lebanese Muslim told me recently, "I am convinced that the only thing which will save this world is Muslims, Christians and others who keep praying."

Christian Attitude Towards Muslims

The magisterium does not give specific answers to questions of a local nature. Its purpose, rather, is to guide our thinking, to form our attitudes as we reflect on our responses to the needs of our time and place. The daily crises and tensions we face are not resolved by the teaching of the Church; rather, through the statements of the councils and the Popes Catholics can learn how to shape our views and our actions so that we are "thinking with the Church." Our reflections and discussions here must revolve around the question: "Do our attitudes and those of our people towards Muslims reflect the thinking contained in these recent teachings?" "Do Catholics at the parish level know their own tradition concerning how they should regard and live among Muslims?" "Have our local church bodies set up effective, functioning

structures for preparing and educating our Catholics for dialogue, esteem, and co-operation with Muslims?" "What are the concrete problems which we face as we try to guide our people in opening themselves to Muslims?"

We might conclude with the exhortation of the Asian bishops who participated in BIRA II, which studied the relations between Christians and Muslims in Asia:

What the participants of BIRA II are calling for is dialogue. This means a change of attitude towards Islam. In the past, the attitude of Christians towards Muslims has not always followed the example of love given by their teacher and savior, Jesus Christ. We exhort Catholics in Asia to let their lives be guided by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council: "Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom."

Footnotes:

- 1 *Nostra Aetate*, 3.
- 2 *Lumen Gentium*, 16.
- 3 *Ad Gentes*, 11.
- 4 *Nostra Aetate*, 2; *Ad Gentes*, 16, 41; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 14, 27, 29, 31; *Gaudium et Spes*, 92; *Christus Dominus*, 13.
- 5 *Ecclesiam Suam*, Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1964, pp. 69-70.
- 6 *Redemptor Hominis*, Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1979, p. 18.
- 7 Discourse to the Participants of the International Theological Congress of Pneumatology, *OR*, 26-3-82.
- 8 *Redemptor Hominis*, p. 17.
- 9 *Redemptor Hominis*, p. 18.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Discourse of the Pope to the Participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28-4-79.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Address to the Bishops of North Africa on their "Ad Limina" Visit, *OR*, 14-12-81.
- 14 Radio Talk to the Peoples of Asia, 4, *OR*, 2-3-81.
- 15 Discourse to Interreligious Gathering in Lisbon, *OR*, 14-5-82.
- 16 Radio Talk, 5.
- 17 Radio Talk, 3.
- 18 Discourse to the Participants in the Plenary Meeting of Secretariat for Non-Christians.
- 19 Discourse of Pope John Paul II to the Catholic Community in the Chapel of the Italian Embassy in Ankara, *OR*, 3-12-79.
- 20 Message to the President of Pakistan, *OR*, 23-2-81.
- 21 Discourse to Interreligious Gathering in Lisbon.

- 22 Discourse to Catholic Community in Ankara.
- 23 Speech to the Community of the State of Kaduna and in a particular way to the Muslim Community, *OR*, 22-2-82. Cf. Also, Message to Representatives of the Muslim Community in France, Paris, *OR*, 2/3-6-80.
- 24 Discourse to Catholic Community in Ankara.
- 25 Discourse to the Representatives of the Muslim Community, Davao, *OR*, 2-3-81.
- 26 Greeting to the Leaders of the Muslim Community in Kenya, 2, *OR*, 9-5-80.
- 27 Address to the President and the Civil and Religious Authorities Present at the Airport before Leaving Pakistan, *OR*, 23-2-81. Cf. also, Discours à l'Episcopat de Haute Volta, *OR*, 11-5-80.
- 28 Discourse to Catholic Community in Ankara.
- 29 Speech to the Community of the State of Kaduna.
- 30 Message to the President of Pakistan.
- 31 Address to the President and the Civil and Religious Authorities, Pakistan.
- 32 Discourse to Representatives of Muslim Community, 3, Davao.
- 33 Greeting to Leaders of Muslim Community, 3, Kenya.
- 34 Address to Bishops of North Africa. Cf. also, Discorso alla presentazione al Santo Padre delle credenziali del nuovo Ambasciatore della Repubblica di Algeria, *OR*, 28/29-3-83.
- 35 Greeting to Leaders of the Muslim Community in Ghana, *OR*, 10-5-80.
- 36 Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, Kuala Lumpur, 21 November 1979.
- 37 Address to Bishops of Mali, *OR*, 14-21-81.
- 38 Gruss des Papstes an die Muslime in Deutschland, *OR*, 17/18-11-80.
- 39 Discourse to the Participants in Plenary Meeting of Secretariat for Non-Christians.
- 40 Discourse to Representatives of Muslim Community, 5, Davao.
- 41 Discourse to Catholic Community, Ankara.

III. REPORTS OF THE WORKSHOPS

Workshop: Muslim Prayer and Spirituality; Ways of Explaining Christian Faith to Muslims

I. Introduction

Inspired by the love and teaching of Jesus, and moved by the exhortations of the Second Vatican Council, we feel a strong inner urge to reach out to peoples of other faiths. In this particular consultation we have paid special attention to our Muslim brothers and sisters. All of us, joined together in our common faith in one and the same God, cannot but feel the desire to share our lives with them. Through this mutual sharing we hope to be enriched and enlightened in our respective faiths, thus sharing in the infinite love of God for all men and women, to whom he has generously offered his very own Spirit.

II. Approaches to Muslims

In this spirit of openness, we looked into past history, especially that of the Jesuits called to Akbar's court and the work of Henry Martyn, in

order to learn from their failures, as well as from their successes. Thus we hoped to find indications of more fruitful ways of approaching Muslims.

We are convinced that we must approach Muslims with the right attitude of respect and love for them in Christ. In other words, we should have an attitude of unconditional positive regard for them. This would lead us to a spirit of humility which would enable us to admit our ignorance of them, their religion and culture. Unfortunately, we often approach them with our own prejudices which make real dialogue very difficult.

III. Prejudices

Our prejudices spring from a history which includes polemical confrontation and even actual warfare (e.g., the Crusades), from our family and societal milieu, and from textbooks and other forms of reading material colored by religious bias. In order to become aware of our prejudices we should read critically the material on this subject and also be critical of our own presuppositions.

IV. Muslims and Their Cultures

The best way, however, to root out prejudices concerning our Muslim brethren is that we should take positive steps to come to understand the situations in which we encounter them, to listen to them attentively, to be sensitive to their feelings, to study their languages, their religion and their varying cultures, with a view to respect them for what they are. At the same time, we should also establish a credibility among them through unconditional service and concern, both individually and communally. It is in this way that true Christian witness can result in lasting friendships in our day-to-day living.

Once a mutual rapport is built up, we can then move towards collaboration in different enterprises, e.g., in the struggle for justice, in maintaining peace, or in any kind of fruitful developmental work. When opportune, we could share our respective faiths by praying together and discussing our beliefs in a spirit of genuine brotherhood. Although there will always be disagreement on certain doctrinal issues, this should not prevent us from maintaining a spirit of brotherliness.

Nevertheless, in all these endeavors we should not gloss over unpleasant realities of actual difficulties, conflicts and injustices committed by both parties: e.g., rights of people being trampled upon;

freedom of religion, even though enshrined in the constitutions of some countries, being curtailed in practice. However, on our part we should try to surmount such difficulties with the aid of Christ's unconditional love.

We sincerely hope that through efforts made by both parties the principle of mutuality — a necessary condition for genuine dialogue — will be established. By the principle of mutuality we do not mean equality of power but of dignity as human persons before the one God.

V. Spirituality

One area of convergence where we could find a resonance in each other's faith is in the search for God (spirituality). In recent times spirituality has taken on a much broader meaning than the usual prayer life, spiritual reading and other spiritual exercises, such as retreats and frequenting the sacraments. For example, people speak of the spirituality of involvement in the sociopolitical arena. In fact, in its broadest sense, spirituality can mean the religious basis that sustains one's whole way of life.

Islamic spirituality as such is mainly founded on the Qur'an, the Traditions and the prescribed religious practices. God-centeredness is at the very heart of Islamic spirituality, inspiring a total submission to and reliance on God, resulting in a surrender to the divine will in all the vicissitudes of life. This leads to an attitude of great reverence towards God and a consciousness of their responsibility to worship him and to be of service to their fellow Muslims. The Qur'an plays a central role in fostering a spiritual outlook in all the important events of life, from birth to death itself.

The five prayers, the recital of the phrase "in the name of God" before starting any action, devotion to saints and spiritual guides, the religious and communal celebration of festivals, the ceremonial of a well-disciplined prayer ritual strike even a casual observer. The impact of the Ramadan fast, as a form of submission to God, self-denial and communal purification, is an example of how seriously Muslims take their religion.

The Islamic mystical dimension is known as "Sufism," and has much in common with traditional Christian mysticism. Sufism, as expounded by Sharafuddin Maneri, for example, can be expressed thus: God calls some people to follow the Sufi path to union with him in this life and his immediate vision for all eternity. The disciple has to live a life

of prayer, spiritual training and service under a spiritual guide, but actual union and vision are the crowning of God's grace, not the result of a person's own efforts.

Through a mutual sharing both Christians and Muslims can discover in their respective mystical traditions the basic trend of the love-relationship which exists between God and man.

VI. Prayer

Although it is very difficult and often impractical to take part in formal Islamic prayer (*salat*), it is possible to be present at it.

In many places, however, Christians could possibly have joint worship, incorporating the following forms of prayer:

- a) *Du'a* (prayer of petition)
- b) *Tafakkur* (meditation)
- c) *Munajat* (intimate conversation with God)
- d) *Zikr* ("remembering God," resembling the "Jesus Prayer")
- e) *Wird* (litanies)
- f) *Tasbih* (recitation of the beautiful names of God, similar to the recitation of the rosary)

When joint worship is conducted along these lines, it is important that we take into account the sensitivities of all, and that there be a proper preparation of the participants. It is this sharing of each other's spiritual life, a real entering into the faith experience of the other, which will help us enormously to create a climate in which the explanation of our faith becomes a real possibility.

VII. Explaining Our Faith to Muslims

The greater difficulty that we have to face is the manner in which we explain our beliefs to Muslims so that they can understand what we are saying. Hence, it is suggested that we should not only study seriously the languages used by Muslims, their religion and their mentality, but also employ their languages and mentality in explaining our faith to them.

Topics that need to be treated include:

- The prophethood of Muhammad, as seen by Christians
- The consecrated celibacy of priests and sisters
- God, believed in by Christians in his unique and threefold aspects

- Reasons for our presence as Christians among Muslims
- The Eucharist
- Divinity of Christ and the Incarnation
- Original Sin, the Cross and Redemption
- Scriptures as the Word of God
- Spiritual and temporal realities.

These subjects have already been taken up by the "Tunis Study Group." The results of this work can be found in FABC PAPERS, No. 23. There are other topics besides these that need to be looked into. We are also aware that there is other work being done in addition to that of the "Tunis Study Group." Nevertheless, much work has still to be done. It is suggested that continual, progressive study be carried out.

It is also noted that the Bible makes its own impact on all. Hence, translations of the Bible, and also of other well-chosen Christian literature, into the languages used by Muslims would help them understand us better, thus preparing the ground for dialogue.

VIII. Recommendations

In the light of what has been said, we make the following recommendations:

1. Christians are called to be people of prayer, and to pray for their Muslim brethren. Experimentation with Islamic forms of prayer and the sharing of prayers with Muslims, as suggested in this report, are to be confined in the earlier stages to groups which are knowledgeable and already engaged in dialogue. It is suggested that our people be prepared gradually for this sharing in ways appropriate to the local situations.

2. The dialogue of life is encouraged and, where possible, formal dialogue as well.

3. Christians are encouraged to take the initiative to participate in the festivities of their Muslim friends and to invite the latter to share in their own celebrations.

4. Joint seminars on suitable topics could be profitably organized.

5. Christians can be encouraged to read suitable works of Islamic spirituality.

6. Specialists in Islam and Christianity are urged to pay special attention to the need of continual search for a better and deeper explanation of Christian beliefs, presenting them in ways intelligible to Muslims.

7. Bishops are requested to encourage the initiatives of those capable of attempting to incarnate Christian spirituality in a Muslim (i.e., *khangah*) setting on ashram lines.

Workshop: Present-Day Forms and Movements in Islam

I. Historical Introduction

The relationship between religion and political power developed differently in the respective histories of Christianity and Islam. Whereas Jesus and the early Church refused to create a religio-political system, Muhammad appeared communicating a divine message and, in order to implement it, ventured to form a political community and raise up a leadership. Thus from the beginning Islam is couched in a sociopolitical religious system, while Christianity in essence is not.

While not determining or controlling the bases of political power, Christianity always hopes to influence and effect the social and political situation according to the values and vision which Christians find in the Gospel. On the other hand, Islam knows Muhammad not only as the prophet-statesman of Medina, who was building a religio-political community, but also the preacher and "inviter" of Mecca, who confronted his opponents and taught his followers, who were a harried and politically powerless minority.

An essential difference in the nature of Islam from what is found in Christianity is that Islam prides itself upon a comprehensive system of law. Muslims believe that the *shari'a* is founded upon the divinely commanded prescriptions of the Qur'an and upon the imitation of Muhammad in the *sunna*. They believe that it is received and developed through the consensus of the Islamic community and implemented through the creative efforts of the legal scholar. In this way Islam attempts to offer its adherents a complete directive for life, which covers all manner of individual and societal behavior. This has political implications because Muslim scholars have felt an obligation to challenge established authorities for their failure to apply fully the prescriptions of the law.

However, in the course of its history Islamic law solidified into a closed, unyielding legal system no longer responsive to the needs of Islamic society. In colonial times, some Muslim thinkers in Asia called for a reform of Islam, indicating that the weakness of Muslims vis-à-vis the colonial powers was the result of the creative impulse having been

stifled over the centuries, often leading to a flight from social and political responsibilities into a search for mystical union with God, and the accommodation to non-Islamic practices and beliefs. The reformers want to return to Islam's original inspiration, to purge it of external accretions, and to apply the *shari'a*. In doing so they feel that a purified Islam will emerge as a modern religion able to offer a constructive program for society today.

II. Contemporary Movements of Reform and Revival in Islam

This revival of Islam is connected in many countries with a rising consciousness of national and cultural identity. This makes contemporary Muslim reformers aware of infiltration of elements (Islamic and non-Islamic) foreign to their cultures and of the necessity to purify their cultures of alien influences. Following this trend many Muslim institutes, organizations and individuals are stressing the importance of national values and attempting a type of inculturation of Islamic practices in the context of the traditional life of the country.

Other Muslim movements tend to see Pan-Islamism as the unifying force of the rise of the Third World peoples (a third way) and as a defence against the infiltration of the evils of the Western society. Militant forms based on political ideologies have also emerged. Some others take on a secular view of life geared to social questions. Thus we can notice a variety of contemporary types of Islam in their traditionalist, modernistic and leftist forms.

Concerted social and missionary programs are carried out for illiterate and backward Muslims and non-Muslims. In this context the suspicion, and sometimes the antagonism, which Muslims show towards Christianity is not because of the actual contents of the religion but because of their fear that Christianity might be a vehicle for the insinuation of the modern Western way of life, thus endangering their efforts to preserve Islamic identity and national character.

III. Challenges and Discernment

What is going on in the processes of Islamic revival impinges upon the Christians, individually and communities as well, in Asia, whether they be in the majority or minority. These challenges affect them both negatively and positively. Negatively, in the sense that it threatens them with insecurity and incapability to cope with the oncoming situation; positively, in the opportunities which they provide for a strengthening of faith, Christian practice, witness and solidarity.

A. Negative Challenges

Local Churches still marked by the legacy of the colonial era do not feel comfortable in their life and process of growth. Muslims look upon them often as linked with strategies of neocolonialism. The desire of the Muslims to rebuild Islam integrally, and in countries with a Muslim majority, even to work towards complete Islamization leading to an Islamic state, appears to Christians to bear aggressive and polemical overtones. Hence Christians feel:

1. That they may lose their status as citizens who should possess equal rights.
2. That they may be subjected to revived details of Muslim law, for example, in the sphere of marriage and penal law.
3. Or, that in education, subjects such as history, literature and ethics, may be used to overemphasize and propagate Islamic beliefs and values.
4. Finally, that as a result of developments, the freedom of the Christian community to express itself in public may be curtailed.

In other countries where Muslims are a minority, the movement for reform and revival of Islam affects the Christians in a different way. For example, revised Muslim missionary activity has led and may even lead in the future to the conversion of marginalized Christian groups to Islam.

B. Positive Challenges

1. The experience of Islamic revival challenges Christians on the religious level. The practice of prayer and fasting, above all in their *communitarian* aspects, is one such. The aggressive character of revival challenges them to a stronger faith and to a clear awareness of their rights as Christian co-citizens of a given nation.

2. Some aspects of the lifestyle promoted by some reform movements are characterized by a return to simplicity and respect for traditional cultural values.

3. Some of the reform movements take up areas of social and cultural concern which coincide with those of the Christian community. Thus opportunities for fruitful co-operation emerge.

4. The lay character, the philosophy of self-support, spontaneous

spirit of action and tremendous zeal — which are marked features of some Muslim reform movements — call us to rethink some of the ways the Christians have been accustomed to act, both as individuals and Churches.

Reflection

Living out the mind of the Second Vatican Council in being open to the signs of the times, and discerning all the while the movement of grace, the Christian Churches in Asia are called by the Lord of history to discover in the above forms and movements of Islamic revival, together with the corporate aspirations of Muslims, the Spirit of God at work. This discernment will enable them to respond adequately to these challenges and to evolve an appropriate and concerted pastoral action.

IV. Pastoral Recommendations

In the light of the above observations, we recommend a twofold program which hopefully will answer the pastoral needs arising from the situation.

1. Preparation of the Christian people for dialogue and collaboration.
2. Definite areas and action for such collaboration.

1. Preparation for Dialogue and Collaboration

a) To strengthen and deepen in the faithful the experience and understanding of the Christian faith, thus enabling them to be truly openminded and sympathetic regarding the faith and religious practice of Muslims. With this objective in mind, revise also the catechetical teaching and training of catechists. Moreover, Muslims expect a high standard of religious and moral life from Christians.

b) To teach people to pray regularly for their Muslim neighbors. We can, for example, review and revive the significance and practice of the Angelus Prayer which is done three times a day, at the time of the Islamic *salat*.

c) To work more for the unity among Christians, aware of the fact that disunity among them is a great obstacle to a proper Muslim understanding of the Christian message.

d) To train personnel (lay, religious and clergy) in diverse fields of

Islamic studies, thereby to facilitate dialogue; and to plan for courses, exposure programs and seminars on the study of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations.

e) To enable Christians to familiarize themselves with the knowledge of Islamic culture, and to experience it in its various expressions.

f) To indigenize the Church in the spirit of the *Ad Gentes* decree of the Vatican Council, thus making its ethos, worship and lifestyle fit into the sociocultural patterns of the people. This should not, however, obliterate the universal character of the Church.

g) Given the importance of the mass media in forming and transforming thinking patterns, the Christians engaged in mass media must be made to involve themselves more in communicating the Christian message and Gospel values. The media serve as an effective tool to bring the image of the Church to the public.

2. Areas and Action for Collaboration

a) The dialogue of life

—living out of neighborliness with the Muslims

—coming together for collaborating in projects for social services and social justice

—co-operating with Muslim organizations for humanitarian services

b) Building human relationships with Muslims at all levels, thus living out the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

c) Making our schools places of religious cultural encounter and common social training for Christians and Muslims, especially on the occasions of religious festivals and functions.

d) Where the local situation is appropriate, co-operating with qualified Muslim personnel in our hospitals and health-care institutions at the level of board and management.

e) Participating in a Christian way in the celebration of Ramadan, for example, by observing some common days of fast and arranging ceremonies for the breaking of the fast together and greeting the Muslim brethren on the occasion of *Id-ul-Fitr*.

Workshop: Living Among Muslims

In, Asia, Christians have for centuries lived alongside their Muslim fellow citizens. They have witnessed to their faith. The bishops of Asia wish to consider ways by which Christians can perfect that witness among Muslims.

Our experiences from all over Asia convince us that we can contribute to a more Gospel-inspired dialogue of life by addressing ourselves to three areas, namely, the attitude of Christians towards Muslims, our knowledge of Islam, and our witness to Muslims.

I. Our Attitude Towards Muslims

Our attitude towards Muslims is changing for the better. We realize more and more that the Church is essentially missionary. But the missionary mandate is not simply a duty; it is a privilege as well. It is the role of Christians to take the initiative by telling Muslims that we believe that God has a special plan for them, just as he has for us. This awareness had dawned on us not only because of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, but also because of the positive experiences of Christians who are living in creative ways among Muslims.

Recommendations

1. Those Christians, lay or religious or clergy, having an aptitude for interacting with Muslims, or who are already living or working among them, will be strengthened by the encouragement of bishops. Bishops who actively promote and support such Christians will fittingly assist them and enhance the witness of the Church.

2. Every local Church, when formulating its pastoral program, is urged to give suitable priority to the apostolate of the laity, religious and clergy among Muslims.

3. Whatever helps to bring about a more positive attitude of the laity towards Muslims will benefit the local Church. For instance, when religious or clergy are designated for work among Muslims, the attitude of the laity towards Muslims undergoes a positive change.

II. Knowledge of Islam

We want to know more about Islam in order to understand Muslims better. Thus will we appreciate them, and our love and service to them will grow. Also, if we understand them better, we can collaborate with

them more effectively, for example, in the promotion of peace and justice. It is a joy for Muslims to see evidence that we are interested in them and in their culture. At the same time it is personally enriching for the Christian and beneficial for the Christian community.

Recommendations

For Christians, i.e., lay, religious and clergy

1. Knowledge of the language of the majority of Muslims in a particular locality is essential.

2. Personal contact with Muslims in order to learn more about their beliefs, culture, customs and traditions is the best way to deepen one's appreciation of the Muslims' faith.

3. Christians are urged to seek other ways by which a fuller knowledge of the Muslims of their place are known and understood, for example, by participating in their festivals and celebrations, by reading newspapers and magazines, etc.

For the Christian Community

1. It would be well for the local Church to make available the basic knowledge of Islam for all Christians in their respective areas.

2. In formation houses of all varieties Islamic studies should be a part of the curriculum.

3. For those who cannot attend formal studies, other learning opportunities can be made available. For example, priests already in the ministry would benefit from the opportunity to study Islam by means of seminars, exposure programs, directed-reading programs, audio-visual presentations, etc.

III. Christian Witness

A. Our primary Christian witness is love. We must constantly remind Christians:

1. To take seriously the model of the early Church, about which non-Christians observed: "See how the Christians love one another";

2. To be present among Muslims as people who are personally concerned for them;

3. To be open to our Muslim neighbors, even when they do not reciprocate;

4. To relate to them respectfully, and serve them humbly;
5. To rejoice with them in the simple joys of their lives.

B. The Gospel encourages each one of us to maintain a simple lifestyle.

For that reason, Christians must constantly evaluate how closely their lives show forth Gospel simplicity.

There is need, also, for the Church as a community to make itself more humble in order to minimize the impression that we are satisfied to be a powerful and privileged structure.

C. Prayer is an essential element of life for Muslims and is highly valued by them. There are various possibilities when and how we can pray with them. We recommend that:

1. We be persons of prayer;
2. Bishops, priests, sisters, catechists and lay leaders encourage Christians to pray with Muslims on suitable occasions, i.e., when it would be acceptable to them, e.g., in moments of trouble.

D. The witness of a celibate life has great impact on Muslims. Muslim men, especially, are impressed with the truly celibate man. The life of celibacy invites their inquiry and gives Christian missionaries an opportunity to explain the faith that is in them. We recommend therefore, that:

1. Religious gladly and patiently explain to Muslims celibacy embraced for the love of God.
2. Male and female religious, while retaining the freedom to love one another celibately, as Jesus loved, must also be sensitive to the different perception which Muslims have of persons who freely associate with members of the opposite sex.

Conclusion

We recommend that the bishops of Asia, in their respective dioceses, take the steps needed to deepen the commitment of the local Church to this particular apostolate.

IV. Women in Islam

Women throughout Asia are deprived of many of the cultural and social opportunities that make life more human. This is especially true

for Muslim women who must also endure the insecurities of *pardah* and polygamy.

Christian women, especially religious, can play an important part in reaching out to Muslim women. Care must be taken to relate as Christians to Muslims and not as bearers of Western cultural values.

We offer these suggestions to bishops and to congregations of religious women.

1. Set aside more personnel from among the congregations of women religious to promote the apostolate to Muslim women.

2. Congregations that do not have the apostolate to Muslim women as a priority of their congregation can show their co-operation and collaboration in other ways. For example, they can provide one or two sisters to form an intercongregational core group which has its main thrust towards the Muslims. Whatever are the financial needs of the core group may be looked after by the sponsoring bishop.

3. Wherever possible, religious women should be encouraged to take the initiative to visit Muslim women in their homes.

Workshop: Joint Efforts to Promote a More Just Social Order

I. The Present Asian Reality

The present situation of material poverty and sociopolitical oppression, side by side with rapid industrial growth and a massive population growth, found in many parts of Asia, is a challenge to all religious people. The structures of injustice that perpetuate this situation are threatening all that is held sacred by the religious traditions of Asia. In particular, both Christianity and Islam profess a sacredness of life, a dignity of the human person and a freedom that is in contrast to the conditions in which most people of Asia are now being forced to live.

As religious people, Christians and Muslims alike are seriously questioning the presently accepted notion of a development oriented to profit rather than to the person, and providing little opportunity for real participation by the majority of the people. This questioning is forcing us to look to our respective religious traditions for new formulations more expressive of the most treasured ideals about the human family found in those religions.

Too frequently religion is abused by government planners who

relegate its function to pacifying, encouraging hope in another-world reward, and providing relief. More than ever, members of Muslim and Christian communities feel that they have a role to play in transforming the present reality, and prophetically announce their desire to collaborate in efforts to promote a more just social order.

II. The Need and Relevance of Collaboration

In the face of these challenges, collaboration with our Muslim brothers and sisters, in spite of all obvious difficulties, is not only desirable but absolutely necessary.

One expression of the Christian Church's overall desire for dialogue with Muslims, this particular type of collaboration is part of what is referred to as a dialogue of life. In a dialogue of life Muslims and Christians will "offer to a busy world values arising from God's message when they revere the elderly, conscientiously rear the young, care for the sick and the poor in their midst, and work together for social justice, welfare and human rights" (BIRA II, 1979).

Such collaboration is already taking place, especially in the areas of relief and development throughout South and Southeast Asia, mostly in small local projects. Examples of this can be found in the position papers of this consultation.

However, this workshop noticed that there are not many examples of collaboration in common attempts to understand and reflect upon the present social reality of Asia, nor of programs directed towards a thorough and radical change in that reality.

III. Theological Foundations

Although both Christianity and Islam have their own specific expression of revealed truth, there are certain theological foundations that are common to both. These may be used as the basis for theological reflection leading to joint efforts to promote a more just social order. Among those considered by this workshop are:

1. Both Christians and Muslims believe in the oneness of God. In this affirmation of monotheism God is proclaimed as Lord of the world, and hence of all people. All people stand in equality of creatureliness before the same Almighty and Merciful God.

2. Both religions find a common origin of the whole human family in Adam and Eve.

3. Both Muslims and Christians are referred to as people of the Book. The Christians, according to the Qur'an (5:82), are the nearest to the believers.

4. The human person is considered in both religious traditions to be a steward or custodian of the world. The world belongs to God and not to particular groups or individuals in it.

5. In this time of crisis Christians join with Muslims as religious men and women who hold all life sacred, and deplore wanton killing and the destruction of natural resources.

6. Muslims have a strong sense of solidarity among themselves. This sense of community is shared by Christians who emphasize that they are a people of God.

7. In both Islam and Christianity the widow and the orphan are symbols of oppression and deserving of special concern.

8. In both Islam and Christianity there is a distrust of the accumulation of wealth for its own sake and of a focus on material benefits as an end in itself.

9. Denouncing evil and announcing the good in a prophetic fashion have a place in both traditions.

10. A keen sense of justice can be found both in the Bible and the Qur'an.

IV. Christian and Muslim Preparedness for Collaboration

The workshop noted that both Christians and Muslims are not always prepared for dialogue and collaboration.

On the part of Christians it was noted that:

1. Many Christians are not yet ready to commit themselves to the promotion of justice as an integral part of their practice of faith, because they fail to see the need for social involvement and the urgency to be committed to a better social order. There is also a strong fear of loss of existing privileges if the Christian attempts to denounce prophetically the social injustices around them.

2. Divisions among Christians themselves also militate against an atmosphere of dialogue.

3. Many Christians feel that their Muslim brothers and sisters have been the cause of a loss of social status and economic opportunity. This has given rise to entrenched prejudices against Muslims. This sort of

prejudice is sometimes found and perpetuated in seminaries and other institutes of learning.

4. Among those who are already committed to efforts to promote a more just social order not infrequently a lack of understanding of the Muslim mind can cause tension and the failure of efforts to collaborate with Muslims.

On the part of the Muslims it was noted that:

1. Many Muslims also often have longstanding prejudices against their Christian brothers and sisters. A mere appeal to collaboration in improving the social order may not be enough to overcome these prejudices.

2. Many Muslims fail to understand the Christians' basic motivation of universal love and they fear hidden motives in the Christian's request for collaboration. Likewise, due to misunderstandings some Muslims hold the belief that Christians are closely identified with a Western, non-Asian culture and that large amounts of money are brought into the country for proselytization.

The difficulties outlined above make us aware of the following concerns:

1. Christians who desire to work with Muslims in the promotion of a more just social order must make serious efforts to understand the cultural and religious traditions of the Muslims. These efforts must be not only prior to but also concomitant with and consequent upon collaboration.

2. Muslims should be given the opportunity to be co-planners and co-owners of collaborative efforts at social justice, and in the active search for a lived truth.

3. Often, women find a common bond across religious affiliations that makes it particularly easy for them to initiate joint efforts in mutual understanding and collaboration in the recognition of their just rights.

4. Owing to the presence of negative attitudes and fears among Muslims, paramount importance must be given to continuing personal contacts designed to promote goodwill and mutual trust..

5. Extreme sensitivity should also be shown in appreciating the social structure and the hierarchical order of power in the Muslim community. Time has to be taken to discuss thoroughly with the Muslim leaders why collaboration for change is necessary, as well as to indicate the sources of inspiration for change from each one's faiths.

Identification of Areas for Collaboration

The workshop considered many areas where Muslim-Christian collaboration could take place. Aware that each may not be applicable to all circumstances, some examples of what is being tried in some places are presented here:

1. Witnessing together for the promotion of religious and moral perspectives that respect the dignity and worth of all human beings.
2. Protect the sacredness of life whenever it is threatened with programs that affect either individuals or whole nations.
3. Denounce all forms of discrimination based on color, sex, race or religious affiliation.
4. Promote the education of interreligious harmony and programs planned to resolve social and religious riots.
5. Affirming aspects of nation building which operate for the common good, while calling attention to those aspects which are harmful and oppressive.
6. Foster a sense of national and international solidarity.

V. Pastoral Recommendations

In the light of what we have considered above, and aware of the enormous diversity of situations in different countries, we make the following recommendations drawn from the experience of what is needed and what has been tried by the participants:

1. That thorough education programs be conducted at all levels. For an understanding of dialogue, especially the dialogue of life, as well as of Muslim culture.
2. In order to implement this, we encourage the selection and formation of leaders and animators. Women are especially suited at this stage to engage in this form of dialogue of life and should be encouraged to do so wherever the opportunity arises.
3. More concretely, we recommend that:
 - a) the FABC, through the appropriate channels, make a specific request to national bodies currently helping Christian-Muslim dialogue that they assist local Churches in the follow-up of this consultation.
 - b) the FABC approach the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India to consider the possibility of an institute for Islamic Studies in an Asian context to be set up somewhere in Asia and commissioned to serve the

needs of the Church throughout Asia, in places where Muslims and Christians live together.

c) where applicable, and not yet practiced, ensure that seminary training and religious formation contain a study of Muslims and matters related to dialogue.

d) bishops initiate special seminar programs at a suitable time for the priests, religious and laity of their dioceses. These seminars would study:

—the social reality and the need for interreligious collaboration to face critically the challenges of that reality

—the meaning of dialogue in all its forms

—the Muslim culture and background

In these seminars, it is important that Muslims be given the opportunity to provide an input and partake in the interaction of these seminars.

e) Justice and Peace commissions or similar bodies are advised to collaborate with Muslim counterpart organizations in their combined efforts to understand the challenges, and co-operate in concrete instances of action for justice whenever it is possible.

f) In places where Muslims are a majority, our schools and hospitals provide an essential opportunity for dialogue of life. This opportunity could be utilized, for example, by special efforts to respect important Islamic celebrations. Our schools should also be helped to teach the way Christians and Muslims can draw on their respective traditions, reflecting on the present social reality of that place.

g) At the parish level, opportunities could be provided for programs of conscientization involving both Christian and Muslim participants.

4. Apart from formal education programs that assist in the Christian understanding of dialogue and the Muslim mind, informal and personal contact is emphasized as the best means to promoting goodwill and mutual trust. Examples of this type of contact are as follows:

a) The annual greeting to all Muslim brethren sent by the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians on the occasion of the celebration of Ramadan could be conveyed personally to the Muslim community in one's respective area.

b) Individual bishops could send personal greetings to the Muslim leaders of their region.

c) Occasional visits to Muslim leaders or members of the Muslim community partaking of the joys and sorrows of Muslim families.

d) Encouraging multireligious co-operation in providing relief in times of natural disaster or communal riots.

IV. THE MESSAGE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

Varanasi (Banares), the city on the bank of the river Ganges, holy to Hindus and to Buddhists, and with a sizeable Muslim population, was the venue of the Consultation on Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia. It was organized by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the Office of Evangelization of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC). Sixteen archbishops and bishops, five sisters, three lay persons, a Methodist pastor and twenty-two priests from eleven Asian countries met from November 26th to December 4th, 1983, in Nav Sadhana, the Regional Pastoral Center of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, India, to reflect on and discuss the nature and purpose of Christian presence and witness among Muslims.

The need for a well-prepared consultation on Christian-Muslim relations had been felt for some time. The consultation had the following purposes:

- to ponder deeply the varying life situations of Muslims in the various countries of Asia;
- to discern the different influences affecting Christian-Muslim relationships; and
- to suggest orientations and action.

Also, the liturgy celebrated by the delegates from various countries, as well as the prayer services, brought home to the participants the truth that the Christian-Muslim meetingpoint lies in the depth of our respective religious experiences.

1. The Reasons for Christians Approaching Muslims

It is often asked why Christians should approach Muslims. Because they are our neighbors! In all people there is an urge to share with

others what they treasure most and to receive good things from them, through the dialogue of daily life. Our mission as disciples of Jesus is to witness to our Christian faith and values. Without interpersonal and intergroup contacts we cannot share mutually the riches God has gifted to each individual and group.

Muslims and Christians have many things in common. Our religious heritage as children of Abraham and our common human concerns force us to establish ever closer ties. It can be said that no religious experience of any individual or community is complete unless it be open to complementary elements in the faith experience of others.

2. Elements of a Theology for Christian-Muslim Relations

In view of the pastoral purpose of the consultation, it could not delve deeply into the problem of the theology of other religions.

Christian reflection reveals that the source and support of our lived faith is the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ and whom Jesus manifests as the Father who is love, mercy, salvation and the ultimate meaning of human life and destiny. The Risen Lord, who lives and works through the Holy Spirit in history, continues to reveal the love of his Father and to establish his rule on earth. The Church is the community of those who in Jesus Christ have found God and committed themselves to him. Through this commitment we proclaim the total liberation of all peoples.

In the mysterious and providential plan of God Islam possesses a salvific and liberating purpose. Human aspirations, the quest for meaning in life, and even human weakness and the forces of evil, are to be found in the histories of all religions from their beginnings until today. Yet, as the Second Vatican Council has affirmed, the Spirit of God is also active outside the visible Church. Our belief in the universal salvific will of God leads us to affirm the initiative of God active in other living faiths. Thus the genuine beliefs and practices of Muslims form the vehicles of God's favor to them and constitute the basis of their human communion and action. The dynamic impact of the character of Muhammad and of the Qur'an on Muslims throughout their history is something which a Christian cannot overlook. The Church believes that salvation is a gift from God offered to all in Jesus Christ. Therefore, through contact with people of other faiths we become more aware of the fullness of Christ's salvific work. As a man Jesus grew in wisdom and grace through his contacts with his own people and others.

Christians and Muslims can help one another attain deeper experience of communion in God by means of an outgoing and generous life. We can show Muslims by our example that one can really accept, appreciate and collaborate with people of other faiths without compromising one's own. Irreconcilable theological or doctrinal differences can co-exist with sincere human and religious encounter.

3. The Meeting Point

In any personal or community contact between Muslims and Christians the partners should not hide their religious identity. Whether the first contact should be on a religious basis or as persons facing social, economic and political problems will depend on circumstances.

Asia is marked by a strange paradox of appalling poverty and deep religiosity. Poverty of certain sections of Asian peoples could well be a result of economic and social exploitation by unjust structures that perpetuate injustice and inequality. On the other hand, the ruthless search for material well-being leads to greed for wealth which vitiates the movement for integral development. Muslim-Christian dialogue could orientate itself in the direction of guiding the political option of the governments so that they be geared to the well-being of all. In such a way the two religions will serve the human needs of the Asian people.

4. Dialogue and Evangelization

Many previous statements of the FABC based on those of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent pronouncements of the universal Church have addressed the relationship between dialogue and evangelization. Here we reaffirm that dialogue and evangelization are by no means incompatible, but at the same time dialogue must never be made a strategy to elicit conversions. Bearing witness to our faith in Christ, by life, deed and word is what we mean by evangelization or proclamation, and this should inspire and direct all our individual and communitarian activities, including our relations with people of other faiths or of no faith at all.

Dialogue is an encounter with others which demands an attitude of humility, acceptance, honesty and respect. When values and attitudes of Christ direct and transform our behavior, this is already a form of "silent proclamation" of the Gospel. Subsequently, in those moments of true sharing among people of different faiths, each speaks of those things which are deepest and most meaningful. For us Christians this means proclaiming the reasons for the hope we have and him who is the model

of our love. When this is done in sincerity and respect, Muslims are not offended by this witness. As people who hold their own faith as a treasure to be disclosed and an invitation (*da'wah*) to others, they may be expecting such announcement from their Christian friend.

We want to point out that the terms "mission" and evangelization," both of which, when properly understood, point to profound and essential realities in the Church's life, are terms which unfortunately bear negative overtones. In Asia, both terms often connote a sense of cultural superiority, disrespect for the beliefs of others, and colonial chauvinism. We are still paying for the failures of the past, and we must not be surprised if our neighbors of other faiths react negatively to the concepts of "mission" and "evangelization," although we ourselves may understand them according to a theology which acknowledges the universal activity of God's Spirit.

5. Partners in Dialogue

Dialogue is essentially between persons, not systems. No individual fully incarnates his entire religious tradition but is influenced by and gives a personal coloring to that tradition. This means that we encounter each Muslim as a fellow pilgrim on the path to God, rather than as a representative of a system of religious ideas. For our part, we share our individual insights and experiences, our personal "stories," of God's love for us. Through humble and respectful human encounters the Spirit of God works to call each partner into a deeper awareness of God's providence and will.

The goal of this interpersonal dialogue is an enrichment which enables both participants to purify and deepen their respective faith commitments and thus become open to ever more abundant movements of God's grace.

6. Convergences and Divergences

In their relations with Muslims, it is natural for Christians to seek those areas of convergence which exist between the two religions. Examples of this would be belief in the one God, the dignity of the human person, and a strong sense of social justice. In fact, Pope John Paul II, in Ankara, urged Christians to "consider every day the deep roots of faith in God in whom your Muslim fellow citizens believe, in order to draw from this the principle of a collaboration with a view to the progress of man, emulation in good, the extension of peace and brotherhood in free profession of the faith peculiar to each."

We must be aware, however, that apparent convergences, based sometimes on different understandings of the same term (e.g., *nabi*: “prophet”), can in reality conceal divergent concepts. On the other hand, apparent incompatibilities between the two religions sometimes reveal, upon close investigation, new and unexpected points of contact. The true convergences and divergences between Christianity and Islam can only be discovered through arduous and patient collaboration between scholars of the two religions who are soundly grounded in the theological understanding of their own faith as well as in the study of each other’s world views.

7. Difficulties of Living Together

In Asia, Christians in some countries live as minority communities which are politically and socially governed by Muslims. It is natural for Christians in such situations to feel apprehension lest their rights to self-expression of their beliefs and guarantees of human rights and religious liberties be compromised or suspended. It is essential in these situations that lines of communication always be kept open. We must present ourselves as a community ready to live as fellow citizens with Muslims and others, while at the same time stressing legitimate claims for the protection of the human rights of all. Our commitment to dialogue is one which must transcend historical difficulties and vicissitudes.

At times Christians are aware, and may themselves even be victims, of Muslims living in a way which does not reflect God’s loving will for all people. Desire for privileges, ill-treatment of women and non-Muslims, and severe punishments for lawbreakers are examples of this.

In such situations it is essential that Christians realize that God in his providence has given them a special call to live in circumstances which require great faith and dependence on him.

However, lest we Christians be guilty of unfair judgement, we should remember the history of the Church with its injustice, intolerance and greed. We must be conscious also that in places governed by Christians similar wrongs still occur today, and in some places it is Muslims who are the victims.

It would be an error to view Muslim behavior and say: “A true Christian would not have acted like this; Jesus taught us to live in a better way than this.” Muslim realities must not be compared with Christian ideals, or vice versa. We are all sinful, and must humbly confess how far short of our calling our actual behavior falls.

8. Challenges

Christians and Muslims who live together can challenge one another to live their respective faiths more fully. Both will realize the need for growing stronger in their faith and convictions.

Christians find their strength in being "of one mind and heart," united in the presence of the living Christ. Those who are only "nominally" or "culturally" Christian may not be able to withstand external pressures which challenge their faith.

The daily commitment of Muslims to prayer, and their intensity of devotion and concentration in prayer, can challenge us Christians to question ourselves concerning our own prayer life. When Muslims undertake the difficult Ramadan fast out of obedience to God's command, we are led to ask whether we do not often approach our own fasting season in an indifferent and casual manner. The Islamic practice of generosity to the poor and the responsibility of the Muslim community to its needy can raise the question to Christians whether we can go beyond what we are now doing for the poor, both within our community and outside it. The Islamic stress on moral rectitude causes us Christians to reflect on our own call to pursue goodness and moderation in the freedom of the Spirit.

Christians living among Muslims have a responsibility to challenge their neighbors by living the Gospel teachings. Christ's command to universal love, when truly lived, shows Muslims and peoples of other faiths that God's love is not limited by communal or national bonds. When we strive to imitate Jesus who "went about doing good," we are in effect meeting the Quranic challenge to compete with one another in good deeds.

9. Revival of Islam

A particular set of problems arises for the Christian because of the Islamic revival and reform movements in Islam. Catholics who are committed to the new impetus of the Spirit which the renewal of the Second Vatican Council has brought to our Christian community can readily understand the desire of Muslim reformers to purify Islamic society by a return to its original inspiration and fervor. However, we confess apprehension concerning the direction which Islamic reform can take and the possible consequences which it might have on our own Christian communities. In particular, we note concern about the status of Christians when Islamic states are created.

Only through continual frank and open interchange with those actively involved in Islamic reform will we be able to express our concerns and come to a greater understanding of these movements. Muslim reformers can be invited to outline their goals and programs so that Christians may obtain a clearer view of the means and ideals of Islamic reform, rather than having to rely on the often superficial and distorted impression given through the media.

However, Christians cannot limit their contacts to particular segments within the Islamic community. Christians must realize that reformist, traditionalist, mystical, militant, quietist, and still other tendencies, are to be found among Muslims. It is not necessary to determine which of these represents the "true Islam." We must be open to a sharing of life, discussion and collaboration on projects for the common good of humanity, with all these groups.

10. Inculturation

Inculturation, like dialogue, is not a tactic to convert people to one's faith. It lies at the very core of Christian incarnational faith, life and witness. It is the existential way a Christian lives and witnesses to his faith in the concrete religious, social and cultural milieu in which providence places him. Genuine inculturation takes place when Christians live out as individuals and as a community their double heritage of faith and country. This can come about only through intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

In a predominantly Muslim cultural situation the Church tries to live, think, feel, speak and worship in ways which spring from faith and the religio-cultural heritage of the people. Only in such a community can those Muslims who come to visit or to join us feel at home. In our attempts at inculturation we should always keep in mind the legitimate sensibilities and religious feelings of the Muslims.

Pastoral Recommendations

The actual situations of local Christian communities living among Muslims vary greatly from place to place. It is our purpose to give general directions upon which each episcopal conference can reflect and apply according to local conditions.

1. The first and necessary step in the building of better Christian-Muslim relations is the formation of a Christian community which knows well the principles of its own faith as well as the basic teachings of

Islam. In most seminaries and catechetical centers there are already courses on the theology of religions and on Islam. However, at the level of parishes, among university students, and among women and men religious, much has yet to be done.

Workshops can be organized to study conciliar and papal documents which deal with Christian-Muslim relations and with dialogue in general, as well as previous statements of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), such as that of the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA II, 1979). It should be a priority among us to send lay persons, sisters and priests to be prepared to animate such study sessions. Only through more accurate factual information about the beliefs and practices of Muslims and experiential knowledge of Muslim life through exposure programs can prejudices and fears be overcome. In all of these efforts, co-operation with Christians of other Churches should be fostered, and joint programs, where possible, be initiated.

2. Study and collaboration between Christians and Muslims on social issues are highly desirable and necessary in many countries of Asia. Human rights are very often downgraded, justice rejected, discrimination based on color, sex, race and creed is widespread, human life — sacred to both traditions — is held in low esteem, and exploitative structures and systems are flourishing. This demands an ever-increasing and closer collaboration.

For this purpose, ongoing reflection-action programs and serious social analysis are strongly recommended to help a form of dialogue through which Muslims and Christians come to know one another better and initiate common projects towards the building of a just social order.

Study sessions on dialogue and Christian-Muslim relations should include a study of the social reality and the need for interreligious collaboration to face critically the challenge of that reality.

3. In many parts of Asia, the majority of Muslim women is isolated from public life and frequently ignorant of their rights. Many Muslim writers hold that the seclusion of women is contrary to the spirit of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, in actual practice women suffer deprivation in a variety of ways.

We recommend that the local Churches study the existing problems of women in general, especially those of Muslim women, so that

Christian women may learn to be more sensitive to them and constructive in their ways of approaching them. Men must be educated to recognize the dignity of women and all the gifts and talents with which they are endowed. Women in Asia, Muslims as well as Christians, hope for support from religious believers in their striving to become ever more aware of their inherent potentialities as women, and in the struggle for their rights.

Christian women, particularly women religious, play an important role in reaching out to Muslim women, by whom they are warmly welcomed. Since the promotion of Asian society and family life depends greatly on the improved status of women, we urge that Christian women be formed for this important task. Collaboration between Christian and Muslim women in improving their place in society should receive warm support from the whole Church. Informal education of men, women and children concerning the status of women in Asia today could be encouraged. Programs designed to meet the immediate needs of women, such as medical treatment and technical education, need to be undertaken. Christian women are encouraged to take part in national and private organizations which defend and promote the rights and status of women.

4. Isolated Christians living in Muslim environments have a need for contact with the wider Christian community. Special pastoral attention is required for those Christians who do not enjoy the daily support of fellow believers. Christian women married into Muslim families, priests and sisters who live in Muslim areas, and Christian school teachers or civil servants in largely Muslim environments, should be encouraged to make the effort to maintain frequent contact with the parish community. Special programs, workshops and days of recollection which are directed at strengthening and deepening their closeness to Christ in the family of the Church and adapted to local possibilities can assist Christians in isolated situations to discern the love and presence of God in their daily surroundings.

5. St. Paul teaches us to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." Christians must come to the aid of Muslims who suffer because of natural calamities, social or economic oppression, or the simple daily sorrows of death, sickness and loneliness. When Christians or Muslims show concern for those who suffer, they are a sign of God's love for those who mourn. Christians can also accompany Muslims in their joy. It is praiseworthy for Christians to send greetings to Muslims on the occasion of *Id-ul-Fitr* and to accompany Muslims in their

celebration of births, circumcisions, marriages, etc. We believe that Christians and Muslims are children of one and the same God who desires us to live like brothers and sisters of each other.

6. The local Church is encouraged to explore appropriate expressions of Christian faith and worship in predominantly Islamic environments. The decoration of churches with Scriptural verses; liturgies which celebrate the great biblical figures like Noah, Abraham, and Moses, whom Christians revere with Muslims; construction of churches less "European" and more local in architecture, are possibilities which could be encouraged. Mary, whom Christians consider mother and model, and about whom the Qur'an says: "God has chosen you above all women," could be promoted as the patroness of the unity and fellowship which should exist between Christians and Muslims.

7. Christians should pray daily for love and understanding and mutual enrichment between Christians and Muslims. For example, the Angelus, thrice a day at times of Islamic *salat*, could be offered as such a prayer. On Fridays, Christians can be encouraged to pray during the Eucharistic celebration for Christian-Muslim fellowship. Where local conditions are favorable, praying together can bring believers in the two religions to a deep spiritual awareness of their unity before the one God. Episcopal conferences might consider the possibility of sponsoring a fellowship of prayer, with the intention that Christians and Muslims may live together in that mutual respect and co-operation willed by God.

Conclusion

The consultation brought home to us participants the importance of fostering Christian-Muslim relations. At the same time we became acutely aware of the diversity of the social, political and religious situations in different countries, and of the difficulties involved in reaching out to Muslims and collaborating with them. We have also been encouraged to learn of the many steps that have already been taken in this field, a fact which augurs well for the fruitful implementation of the recommendations of this consultation.

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