

THESES ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**An Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection****INTRODUCTION**

0.1 Dialogue is an integral dimension of human life. The human being alone is capable, not only of reacting to stimuli but also of responding to the other through language and symbol, and in this manner, of building up community. While the increasing facility and rapidity of communications and the growing economic and political interdependence favor mutual relations and fellowship, the symbolic systems that structure human life, like language, culture and religion, combined with the human desire for domination, seem to be causes of conflict and division. But their desire for peace and fellowship urges people to a dialogue based on their common destiny and on mutual acceptance of and respect for each one's dignity and freedom. The religions are called to provide a special role of leadership in the process, oriented as they are to the ultimate, and therefore capable of transcending the limiting and divisive factors in human history.

0.2 Pope John Paul II has emphasized "the importance and the need which interreligious dialogue assumes for all religions and all believers, called today more than ever to collaborate so that every person can reach

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his transcendent goal and realize his authentic growth, and to help cultures preserve their own religious and spiritual values in the presence of rapid social changes." (Address to the Secretariate for Non-Christians, 3 March 1984, 2).

0.3 The community of God, one and triune, and the communion of his Kingdom, to which God calls all peoples and of which the Church is the servant, make dialogue an integral dimension of the mission of the Church. The story of God's People in the Bible is an inspiration as well as a beginning of such dialogue. Israel in the Old Testament, as well as primitive Christianity in the New, were, both in their origins and through most of their historical life, heterogeneous mixtures taken literally from the nations. Encounter and dialogue with other religious and cultural traditions was a frequent phenomenon in the history of Israel and the Church.

0.4 Israel in the land of Palestine had to face new realities, to answer new problems and, therefore, was forced to enter into a cultural and religious dialogue with Canaan. As a result, in all spheres of its existence Israel had to learn and borrow from the Canaanites. This cultural and religious encounter affected in a positive way the faith of Israel, as can be seen from its creed, cult and code of the Covenant. The ultimate result of this encounter for Israel was a new experience of Yahweh and a deeper understanding of earthly realities as integral parts of their faith in Yahweh.

0.5 When Christianity confronted Judaism and Hellenism, it developed a new and inclusive vision of the Christ-event and of the Church, as manifested in the New Testament, especially in Paul and John.

0.6 Paul was fully conscious of becoming a Jew to the Jews to win the Jews, and a Gentile to the Gentiles to win the Gentiles (cf. I Cor 9:19-23). In his speeches at Lystra (Acts 14:25-27) and on the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31) Paul develops the Christian message in such a manner that it forms the logical conclusion of the Gentile history of religion. As the history of Israel leads up to the coming of Jesus Christ, the history of the Gentile world also prepared itself to welcome the Christian message by leaving a place for the unknown God which the Christian proclamation tried to fill up.

0.7 The language of John, using a terminology which awakened echoes in Hellenistic language and thought, was the bridge between the essentially Palestinian Gospel tradition and the vast world which lay within and beyond the Hellenistic world. The dialogical approach of John

is indicated in the Prologue of his Gospel (Jn 1:1-18) in which he describes the Christ-event. If in the first half of the Prologue he describes it in general terms such as "logos," "life," "light," "world," etc., which are understandable by and in common with the surrounding religions, in the second half he describes it in specifically Christian terms, such as "Jesus Christ," "grace," "truth," "only Begotten Son of God," etc. In presenting Christ as the "Word" mediating the mysterious reality of God's presence to the world, John is implicitly admitting the presence of God's self-revelation in other religious traditions. The fact that John presents the Christ-event as an experience which is not reduced to the compass of his individual and ecclesial experience but which transcends any particular form of expression and can be identified in the universal at large, shows that the Johannine Church was prepared to enter into dialogue with the surrounding religious traditions.

0.8 In the course of the last two thousand years the Church has encountered and dialogued with various peoples, cultures and religions, with varying levels of success. Today, however, especially in Asia, in the context of the Great Religions, which are in a process of revival and renewal, the Church is aware of a markedly different situation. We do not ask any longer about the relationship of the Church to other cultures and religions. We are rather searching for the place and role of the Church in a religiously and culturally pluralistic world. This changed situation has given rise to various doubts and questions regarding the identity and mission of the Church in Asia today.

0.9 The following Theses, with their commentaries, do not claim to provide an exhaustive treatment of these questions. We have limited our attention to religions in order to gain greater clarity and focus in discussion, while being open to extend these considerations, *mutatis mutandis*, to humanistic movements. However, the relationship between two religious believers is different from the relationship between a religious believer and one who does not profess any belief in any religion. The Theses seek to offer a new paradigm, a new way of looking at the whole and at the interrelationship of its various elements. We hope that they will facilitate a new insight into the identity of the Church in a religiously pluralistic world, and a renewal of its mission, so that it may be at the service of the Spirit, who is leading the whole world to a unity.

THESIS 1

In the developing, multireligious societies of Asia, struggling towards liberation and wholeness, all religions are called to provide a common and complementary moral and religious foundation for this

struggle, and be forces for growth and communion rather than sources of alienation and conflict. They can do this only through dialogue and collaboration. The religions have a prophetic role in public life. They should not become victims either of those who seek to keep them apolitical and private, or of those who seek to instrumentalize them for political and communal ends.

1. Commentary

1.1 The Asian bishops have spoken of evangelization in Asia as involving a threefold dialogue with the poor, the cultures and the religions of Asia [First FABC Plenary Assembly (FABC I) 25-28]. Of these three aspects of Asian reality religions seem particularly significant because Asia has been the cradle of the Great Religions. These are still very alive and active, and are even in a process of revival and renewal, trying to meet the challenges of a new life in the post-colonial era faced with the double challenge of modern science and technology, on the one hand, and the contact with western culture, on the other. What should be the impact of this religious pluralism on the life of the peoples of Asia?

1.2 Religion is the deepest element of culture. It seeks to answer the ultimate questions of people. It provides inspiration, clarifies goals and offers strength to persons and communities in their pursuit of fulfillment in life. Referring to their origin and their end, it challenges people to grow towards wholeness in all the areas of their existence. It offers guidance for moral behavior both to persons and to communities. Religion thus has a prophetic role both in private and public life. Contemporary secularizing trends seek to reduce religion to a private affair that has no role in public life. Public life, that is the economic, social and political life of people, is then regulated by secular ideals, like peace, happiness, order, efficiency, etc. Uncontrolled by moral principles that find their ultimate roots in religion, these ideals soon degenerate into individual and collective selfishness, unbridled competition leading to the survival of the fittest, consumerism, pursuit of profit, etc. When religion is no longer relevant to public life in this way, it can soon become meaningless and alienating. In the opposite direction, the emotional force of religion, interpreted in a fundamentalist sense, can be used to forge a group identity that becomes defensive and detrimental to other group identities. Religion thus becomes a tool of politics, communalism, fundamentalism, etc. It becomes a source of conflict. Avoiding these two excesses, religion has to preserve its unique inspirational and prophetic role even in public life [*Gaudium Et Spes* (GS), 42-43].

1.3 In contemporary societies, where there is a desire to respect

human dignity and freedom, every one, both as a person and as a member of a group, has an inalienable right to freedom [*Dignitatis Humanae* (DH) 2; GS 16-17]. The conscience of each person is sacred and is to be respected. In a multireligious society, like the ones in Asia, this mutual respect must show itself not only in tolerance, but also in mutual acceptance and active collaboration. As a group facing a common destiny and linked by common economic, social and political bonds, if they are to avoid privatization, they have to make it relevant to public life. If they respect each other's faith conviction, this can be done only in a dialogue that creates a community which allows each person to root the basic values on which it is founded in his or her own religious faith, but which also seeks to build up a consensus concerning these values as a foundation for public life and its economic, social and political institutions. Such a collective foundation, involving a certain give-and-take, seems both inevitable and necessary, if we wish to build up a multireligious community that takes seriously the positive role of religion in private and public life, without privatizing religion and thus leading, on the one hand, to an areligious, amoral society, and without making, on the other hand, religion the principal factor that holds a society together.

1.4 Pope John Paul II, addressing a group of leaders of other religions in Madras (5 February 1986), said: "The fruit of dialogue is union between people and union of people with God, who is the source and revealer of all truth and whose Spirit guides men in freedom only when they meet one another in all honesty and love. By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst; for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God. We should use the legitimate means of human friendliness, mutual understanding and interior persuasion. We should respect the personal and civic rights of the individual. As followers of different religions we should join together in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood, education, culture, social welfare and civic order."

1.5 Such a perspective supposes that we have a positive view of the role of religion in society which does not reduce it either to an alienating opium or to an oppressive superstructure. Moreover, religions are no longer seen as simply opposed to each other and thus discouraging co-existence, but as having a basic community that makes dialogue and conversation possible, and a complementarity which promotes mutual enrichment and leads to a fulfillment in the future that calls for a commitment, while respecting the absolute demands of the faith of each one. Such community and complementarity are seen as the characteristics of a group of persons, their experience and commitment, and not as a note of their doctrines and structures.

1.6 The context of this dialogue is the struggle of the Asian people towards liberation and wholeness. This provides a dynamic perspective oriented to a future that has to be built up by the people together. Without ignoring the many obstacles and oppressions, both personal and structural, that have to be overcome, the stress is on a common search, a common pilgrimage, a growth in communion towards realization and fullness, variously expressed as *moksha*, *nirvana*, *pleroma*, heaven, etc.

1.7 "Since the religions, as the Church, are at the service of the world, interreligious dialogue cannot be confined to the religious sphere, but must embrace all dimensions of life: economic, socio-political, cultural and religious. It is in their common commitment to the fuller life of the human community that they discover their complementarity and the urgency and relevance of dialogue at all levels" [Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA) III, 7].

THESIS 2

Dialogue with other religions, which are significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation, is an integral dimension of the mission of the Church, which is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. In Asia today, Christians, though they are a "little flock" in many places, animated by the Spirit who is leading all things to unity, are called to play a serving and catalyzing role which facilitates interreligious collaboration. This call challenges all the Churches to common witness as they grow together towards fuller ecumenical communion.

2. Commentary

2.1 The Second Vatican Council not only reaffirms the traditional doctrine that "the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with his paschal mystery" [GS22; cf. *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 16; *Redemptor Hominis* (RH) 14], but has a positive view of these religions because they are ways through which the quest for God is expressed, given especially man's social nature [*Ad Gentes* (AG) 3; DH 3]. The common vocation of all peoples, who have God as their origin and goal is stressed [*Nostra Aetate* (NA) 2]. The Asian bishops "accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation" and "acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to himself through them" (FABC I, 14-15; cf. RH 6 and 12).

2.2 Its experience of the other religions has led the Church in Asia

to this positive appreciation of their role in the divine economy of salvation. This appreciation is based on the fruits of the Spirit perceived in the lives of the other religions' believers: a sense of the sacred, a commitment to the pursuit of fullness, a thirst for self-realization, a taste for prayer and commitment, a desire for renunciation, a struggle for justice, an urge to basic human goodness, an involvement in service, a total surrender of the self to God, and an attachment to the transcendent in their symbols, rituals and life itself, though human weakness and sin are not absent.

2.3 This positive appreciation is further rooted in the conviction of faith that God's plan of salvation for humanity is one and reaches out to all peoples: it is the Kingdom of God through which he seeks to reconcile all things with himself in Jesus Christ. The Church is a sacrament of this mystery — a symbolic realization that is on mission towards its fulfillment (LG 1:5; cf. BIRA IV/2). It is an integral part of this mission to discern the action of God in peoples in order to lead them to fulfillment. Dialogue is the only way in which this can be done, respectful both of God's presence and action and of the freedom of conscience of the believers of other religions [cf. LG 10-12; *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (ES) 41-42; RH 11-12].

2.4 Pope John Paul II has emphasized the unity of God's plan for humanity and the Church's mission with reference to it: "If it is the order of unity that goes back to creation and redemption and is therefore, in this sense, "divine," such differences — and even religious divergences — go back rather to a "human fact," and must be overcome in progress towards the realization of the mighty plan of unity which dominates the creation. There are undeniably differences that reflect the genius and the spiritual 'riches' which God has given to the peoples (cf. AG II). I am not referring to these divergences; I intend here to speak of the differences in which are revealed the limitations, the evolutions and the falls of the human spirit which is undermined by the spirit of evil in history (LG 16)... The Church is called to work with all her energies (evangelization, prayer, dialogue) so that the wounds and divisions of men — which separate them from their Origin and Goal, and make them hostile to one another — may be healed; it means also that the entire human race, in the infinite complexity of its history, with its different cultures, is "called to form the new People of God" (LG 13) in which the blessed union of God with man and the unity of the human family are healed, consolidated, and raised up" (Talk to the Roman Curia, Dec. 22, 1986, No. 6).

2.5 In Asia today the Christians are a "little flock." This could lead them to be self-defensive. Only an experience of the mystery in their own lives, in sacrament and community, a living contact with other believers in

an atmosphere of openness and trust, an awareness of the universal dimensions of God's plan and the realization of one's very life as mission can help them to discover their obligation to dialogue. This obligation is in no way reduced because the other religious believers do not show an equal interest in dialogue, because dialogue is not simply an attempt at coexistence among religions, but a demand on the Church of its very life as mission. The interest and strength that come from such an awareness enable the Church not only to dialogue individually with each religion, but to render the service of unity by facilitating the encounter and collaboration among religions. Such a service of unity would certainly raise the question of the existing divisions among the Churches themselves in Asia and challenge them to move towards an ecumenical communion. But this journey towards communion need not prevent, but rather encourage, the Churches in giving a common witness to their faith in Jesus and the Kingdom.

THESIS 3

Interreligious dialogue is a demand of our Christian faith in the Trinity, which is a mystery of communion in interpersonal dialogue. The unique and definitive action of the Father to save all peoples who have him as their origin and goal is leading all of us to a unity. Christ in whom God is reconciling all things to himself is urging the Church to be the servant of this communion. The universal presence and action of the Spirit is calling everyone to the realization of the oneness of the Kingdom. As a response to this mystery, dialogue is a process of growing into the fullness of divine life. It is a participation in the quest of all peoples for the full realization of the Truth. It is LOVE for people which seeks communion in the Trinity.

3. Commentary

3.1 The basis of interreligious dialogue for us is our faith in the universal salvific will of God which is somehow leading all peoples to a unity, and our efforts to draw out the implications of that faith affirmation in our understanding of history and of our own role in it. It is more than the practical necessity of coexistence in one society of believers of different religions. Neither is it a consequence of the phenomenological notion that all religions are the same, at least, functionally.

3.2 One traditional view of salvation history conceived it as a narrowing of the plan and action of God progressively from the nations to the Jews and then to Jesus; to open out again to the world through the Church and its mission. The appreciation of other religions as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation has

introduced a new paradigm that is Kingdom-centered, oriented to the future, and trinitarian. God's plan for the salvation of all peoples is one and unique. The Father, the Word and the Spirit never cease to be active in this world. God the Father has set his plan of universal salvation before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3-6); and he made known to us this mystery of his will that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ (Eph 1:9-10). Christ, the Word by whom were all things created, became flesh and incarnated the saving mystery of God in his passion and resurrection (Col 1:14-16). It pleased the Father that in Christ all fullness should dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, God is reconciling all things to himself (Col, 1:19-20). This reconciliation and peace is for all and reaches out to all peoples who are far and near through the presence and action of the one Spirit (Eph, 2:17-18) in ways unknown to us. Though all religions have a role in this mystery of God's plan, the Church is aware of being the continuation of the mystery of Jesus in the world and the sacrament of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God will reach final fulfillment only on the last day. In the meantime, through various mediations, God is constantly challenging the freedom of peoples to obedience to his will, and people are responding in faith and good works. We should be careful not to separate the faith commitment from the creeds, symbols, rituals and actions through which this faith is mediated, expressed, celebrated and lived. There is no religionless faith in the incarnational economy that is ours, not only because the Word became flesh, but also because we are spirits-in-bodies.

3.3 The basis of dialogue then is divine and trinitarian: the creative and salvific will of the Father, the cosmic outreach of the redemptive action of Jesus who is the Christ, and the recreative and fulfilling mystery of the Spirit. Dialogue is historical: it is the progressive unification of all things, that is at once the action of God in history and the free cooperation of peoples in building their own future. Dialogue is human: it is the expression in community of the common pilgrimage of peoples towards fulfillment. Dialogue is ecclesial: it is the very being and life of the Church as mission.

3.4 Truth and love are universal and absolute values which urge us on in the way of dialogue, because their partial realization always cries out for fullness. Jesus, in whom the mystery of God's salvific plan is revealed and moves towards full realization, is the One who was born to bear witness to the Truth (Jn 18:37) and is himself the "Truth" (Jn 14:6). In Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, the Apostles and the early Church beheld the glory of the only Begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth. Our faith in Christ is engendered, nourished and fortified by the Holy

Spirit who is the Spirit of Truth, who will guide us into all Truth (Jn 16:13). Hence, our faith in Jesus Christ urges us to enter into dialogue with other religions and through a common search to reach out to the fullness of Truth. Pope Paul VI has said. "Before speaking, it is necessary to listen, not only to a man's voice but to his heart... The Spirit of dialogue is friendship and, even more, is service" (ES 87). Dialogue proceeds from the "internal drive of charity" (ES 64). Pope John Paul II speaks of dialogue as a quest for truth: "Dialogue is a means of seeking after truth and of sharing it with others. For truth is light, newness and strength" (Talk to Other Religious Leaders in Madras, February 5, 1986, No.4).

THESIS 4

Interreligious dialogue is a communication and sharing of life, experience, vision and reflection by believers of different religions searching together to discover the work of the Spirit among them. Removing prejudices, it grows towards mutual understanding and enrichment, towards a discerning and common witness and towards commitment to promote and defend human and spiritual values leading to deeper levels of spiritual experience. It is a journeying together in a communion of minds and hearts towards the Kingdom to which God calls all peoples.

4. Commentary

4.1 Interreligious dialogue is not primarily a relationship between two religions as social institutions, nor a comparison of two creeds or theologies, nor a tactical alliance for political action. It is a relationship between believers, who are committed to and rooted in their own faith, but open to the other believer and the Spirit in the context of the common origin and end of all human beings. Hence, sharing of convictions and experiences are more important than discussion of ideas.

4.2 Such dialogue is not only for the experts but for every one, the "simple" faithful, the theologians, the monks. It can take place at all levels: common life in its economic, social and political expressions as animated and challenged by religion; sharing of religious experience, sometimes even leading to actions like common prayer; elaborating a common vision for a new society in art, symbol and celebration; shared theological reflection in the light of faith on experiences and challenges undergone both by each one and by the community.

4.3 The goals of dialogue can be placed in an ascending order: mutual understanding, that dispels prejudices and promotes mutual

knowledge and appreciation; mutual enrichment, that seeks to integrate into oneself values and experiences that are characteristic of and better developed by other believers for cultural, historical or providential reasons; common commitment to witness to and to promote human and spiritual values, like peace, respect for human life, human dignity, equality and freedom, justice, community and religious liberty, through awareness raising, prayer and action programs; shared religious experience, that constantly reaches out, in a deeper way, to the ultimate.

4.4 Religious belonging in a multireligious situation is a complex one. The primary religious community is, of course, the community of those who share the same faith. For the Christians it will obviously be the eucharistic community. but at the same time, the human community to which a person belongs in a multireligious situation, is not limited to the economic, cultural, social and political levels. There is also a community at a religious level underlying differences, which is to be explored and experienced in dialogue. Hence, the normal living and viable unit in a multireligious situation would seem to be a basic human community in which religions are not sources of differentiation and division, but help, through dialogue, a common human pursuit for liberation and wholeness. In a multireligious situation, for a Christian who is aware of being in mission, belonging to such a human community would seem obvious. Such a community would be in its own way a symbol of the Kingdom.

THESIS 5

Interreligious dialogue takes place at various levels, and involves both individuals and communities. Moved by the Spirit and proceeding from exterior to more interior aspects of life, it leads to more profound levels of communion in the Spirit, without detriment to but deepening each community's specific religious experience. Such communion finds expression through common prayer, reading of the Scriptures and Holy Books, celebration of festivals and common liberative action in a common animation and transformation of culture and society. Religions may feel closer to some than to others because of a shared history and other reasons. Owing to human imperfection and sinfulness, all religions are called to an ongoing renewal under the judgment of the Spirit and their own mutual critical challenge. This renewal will involve mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.

5. Commentary

5.1 Interreligious dialogue is easy between individuals and small groups. At the level of larger communities it is more difficult. First of all,

communities can engage in interreligious dialogue only around some common action or project. It may be common prayer, common celebration or common action in the promotion or defense of human and spiritual values. Even then the community will have to be prepared, especially through removal of past prejudices based on ignorance, and through initiation to a new theological and spiritual perspective that enables them to see the other believers non-judgmentally, without their own sense of identity being threatened. People have also to be taught to place the common good above the benefits accruing to one's own group. They should be also prepared to withstand pressures from communalists and fundamentalists, as well as from secularists.

5.2 Dialogue is not the search for the least common denominator, accompanied by an attempt to ignore whatever may provoke disagreement. Dialogue will be useless if one is not totally loyal to one's own faith experience. As a matter of fact, exposure to the experience of others has a way of clarifying one's own experience and of deepening it. Trying to explain to another believer one's own belief is also one good way of clarifying to oneself what one believes. In this way, dialogue would lead to mutual enrichment rather than mutual impoverishment.

5.3 Dialogue is a process. It will normally start with tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Then it will move on to a dialogue of life, promoting mutual acceptance and even admiration. Collaboration in common projects at social and cultural levels can be the next step: like different political parties agreeing on a common program. A sharing in depth of spiritual experiences will also be easy, especially for people competent to do so, like monks, for example (DM 29-35). The real test of dialogue will come when one has to disagree with another in what one considers to be a basic value, and yet live and work together. Clash of absolutes is always a difficult area. At the level of beliefs, at least in practice, one could refrain from focussing on them and concentrate on what is common and what permits practical collaboration. But when an absolute value leads to a concrete moral choice that one cannot accept in conscience, dialogue becomes difficult. Ideally, one should be able to maintain mutual respect — respect for conscience — even then. But at that level, tolerance or coexistence may be a more realistic attitude, even though the efforts at dialogue should be continued.

5.4 The focus for authentic dialogue will be the common building up of a new human community. This involves necessarily the process of inculturation in which religions become incarnate in a culture and transform it from within by challenging it with a new value system. In a

situation of dialogue, the religions should be able to do this jointly with reference to the culture of a people. Otherwise, we have a situation where either one particular religion dominates and effectively fulfills the role of animating the national culture, or a civil religion develops in support of civil society, the religions as such being confined to the private sphere.

5.5 Can religions fulfill such a role without becoming somehow part of the public domain? The State as such — i.e. the political apparatus — should not be partisan. But the community need not adopt an areligious or an anti-religious attitude. In such a situation, communion among religions — besides showing itself in common political activity — will have to find other public expressions. Common prayer, common reading of Scriptures and common celebration of festivals are possibilities of such common public expression. Even the mention of these must raise fears of syncretism in the minds of some. If we have gone beyond facile dichotomies of right/wrong in the field of religions, then we cannot exclude all possibility of common activity. If we consider other religions positive elements in God's plan of salvation, then we can envisage common praying in areas where our beliefs converge. These areas will have to be carefully discerned precisely through interreligious dialogue. Symbols that can be given a common meaning by the participants could be used. While natural symbols, like light, fire and water, and social symbols, like forms of greeting, sharing of food, etc., are susceptible to such common interpretation, each religion has particular symbols that are specific to it because of history or myth or tradition, which cannot be employed in a common celebration.

5.6 We are not talking here about the use or integration or reinterpretation of the symbols of one religious group by another in a similar faith context. Symbols that are polyvalent and have a basic natural or human or social meaning prior to a particular religious specification are susceptible of such reinterpretation in a different religious context.

5.7 Participation in the ceremonies of another religious group is a similar problem. Given the fact that religious rituals are the symbolic actions of a community, a member who does not belong to that community cannot take full and active part in it. A respectful presence of course is possible. In the context of a certain level of real communion between the believers, a certain participation, to be determined in a concrete situation, also seems possible. One should avoid, however, a lighthearted treatment of religious symbols as "only symbols," and claim to bypass them and reach beyond to the reality of faith that they symbolize. Symbols are relative to the reality they symbolize. But they could have an absolute significance to the symbolizer, especially in the rites of passage.

5.8 The common bond that one experiences may vary in closeness according to the various religions one relates to. Christianity feels a special sense of closeness to Judaism and even to Islam. Hinduism and Buddhism have common roots and feel a special sense of fraternity. Buddhism has long coexisted with Confucianism and Shintoism.

5.9 Based on a sense of community in the presence of the ultimate, common praying for peace, for example, is possible. Scriptures, as privileged foundational documents of a religion, share in the positive appreciation we have for other religions. If God has spoken to a people in some way through them, they have a message for all peoples. Every believer, while interpreting it in the context of his faith experience, may feel challenged by it, or at least be aware of a sense of communion, discovering a similar experience. Celebration of seasonal and social festivals like Spring, harvest, thanksgiving, etc., in a common religious or even interreligious context strengthens the feeling of a common life and destiny.

5.10 Speaking of the Asian religious traditions, the bishops of Asia have said: "Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer (as shall be found possible, helpful and wise in different situations) will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvellous variety of ways. These are different perhaps from our own, but through them we too may hear his voice, calling us to lift our hearts to the Father" (FABC II, 35). Commenting on the day of prayer for peace at Assisi, where leaders of various religions were present, Pope John Paul II said: "It is impossible to have peace without prayer, the prayer of all, each one in his own identity and in search of the truth... we can indeed maintain that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person. This too was seen at Assisi: the unity that comes from the fact that every man and woman is capable of praying, that is, of submitting oneself totally to God and of recognizing oneself to be poor in front of him. Prayer is one of the means to realize the plan of God among men (cf. AG 3)" (December 22, 1986, No.11).

5.11 Complementarity among religions is not affirmed with regard to the Absolute to which each one feels committed, but to the historically and culturally conditioned ways in which people in a pilgrim state have experienced and expressed their relation to and the significance-to-life of the Absolute.

5.12 The term "religion" is a broad term that may be usurped by all sorts of communal or fundamentalist groups. There may be such groups

within the Great Religions themselves, not excluding Christianity. While our mission leads us to relate to every human being, and while we have to respect the dignity and freedom of every one, our relationship to these groups may not and need not be limited to that of dialogue as described in these pages. There is a need therefore to discern, while being open, guided always by our commitment to proclaim and build up the Kingdom that is God's gift to all peoples.

5.13 The Spirit of dialogue does not always characterize relations between religions. They have often been causes of conflict among peoples. Therefore, reconciliation and forgiveness for injuries inflicted through ignorance, prejudice or even ill will is an essential dimension of dialogue.

THESIS 6

Dialogue and proclamation are integral but dialectical and complementary dimensions of the Church's mission of evangelization. Authentic dialogue includes a witness to one's total Christian faith, which is open to a similar witness of the other religious believers. Proclamation is a call to Christian discipleship and mission. As a service to the mystery of the Spirit who freely calls to conversion, and of the person who freely responds to the call, proclamation is dialogical.

6. Commentary

6.1 The aim of this thesis, and the following commentary, is limited to the articulation of the mutual relationship of dialogue and proclamation as dimensions of the Church's mission of evangelization. Hence, we do not go into the many complex and difficult problems raised by questions like the uniqueness of Christ and the plurality of religions, dialogue and the absoluteness of faith commitments, the epistemology of the Absolute and the relative with regard to truth, the normativity of the Christian revelation in the context of religious pluralism, etc.

6.2 The relation between dialogue and proclamation is a complex one. In making an effort to understand this relationship, we must avoid from the beginning any attempt to reduce one to the other. Some would tend to say that dialogue itself is the only authentic form of proclamation since the Church is only one among the many ways to salvation; others would tend to say that dialogue is only a step, though with an identity of its own, in the total process that culminates in proclamation. While the former approach robs proclamation of any specific meaning, the latter instrumentalizes dialogue.

6.3 The focus of the Church's mission of evangelization is building up the Kingdom of God and building up the Church to be at the service of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is therefore wider than the Church. The Church is the sacrament of the Kingdom, visibilizing it, ordained to it, promoting it, but not equating itself with it.

6.4 The Asian bishops have understood evangelization as the building up of the local church through a threefold dialogue with the cultures, the religions and the poor of Asia. Inculturation, interreligious dialogue and liberation are the three dimensions of evangelization. Proclamation is not a fourth dimension added to these three, but is the aspect of witness that is an integral element of all the three dimensions of evangelization. Therefore, when we explore the relationship between dialogue and proclamation, we are limiting ourselves to the internal articulation of the dialectical aspects of one dimension of evangelization, namely interreligious dialogue.

6.5 The one divine plan of salvation for all peoples embraces the whole universe. The mission of the Church has to be understood within the context of this plan. The Church does not monopolize God's action in the universe. While it is aware of a special mission from God in the world, it has to be attentive to God's action in the world, as manifested also in the other religions. This twofold awareness constitutes the two poles of the Church's evangelizing action in relation to other religions. While proclamation is the expression of its awareness of being in mission, dialogue is the expression of its awareness of God's presence and action outside its boundaries. The action of the Church finds itself in a field of forces controlled by these two poles of divine activity. Proclamation is the affirmation of and witness to God's action in oneself. Dialogue is the openness and attention to the mystery of God's action in the other believer. It is a perspective of faith that we cannot speak of the one without the other.

6.6 The Spirit calls all peoples to conversion which is primarily a free turning of the heart to God and his Kingdom in obedience to his word. Dialogue as a mutual challenge to growth towards fullness involves such a call to conversion. Dialogue however does not aim at conversion, understood as a change of religion. But proclamation includes a further call to discipleship to Jesus Christ in the Church. It is not proselytism but a mystery of the call of the Spirit and the free response of the person. Because of this double movement of freedom in the Spirit, proclamation itself is a dialogical [*Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) 75; RH 14].

6.7 The affirmation of faith always terminates in the Absolute.

One must not forget however that the other believer too has a similar perspective. Authentic dialogue will not bracket or ignore these absolute perspectives, but operate in a "space" created between them by the respect we have for each other's freedom and conscience in the context of the sovereign freedom of the Spirit who "blows where he wills." This means that while we are sure of the universal salvific will of God and how God's salvation is mediated to us, we are not equally sure of how the same salvation is reaching out to the other believers with whom we are in dialogue. Here, we are faced with the mysterious interplay of the freedom of the Spirit and the freedom of the other believers. Our witness has to take account of this mystery. Could we not then say that dialogue is the meeting point of two proclamations, because the mystery which faces us is the one that is being witnessed to by the other believers?

6.8 As Pope John Paul II has said: "Authentic dialogue becomes witness and true evangelization is accomplished by respecting and listening to one another" (RH 12) (Talk to the Secretariat for Non-Christians, March 3, 1984). The International Congress on Mission of Manila (December 1979) indicated "the continued building up of the local church is the focus of the task of evangelization today, with dialogue as its essential mode" (Statement 19).

6.9 Dialogue that moves beyond mutual understanding and collaboration to mutual challenge and enrichment leading to a common animation of life and culture cannot exist apart from this tension of mutual proclamation. It is in this sense that interreligious dialogue and proclamation are dialectical dimensions or aspects of one process.

6.10 We have not said anything so far about the mystery of Jesus Christ and his unique and universal mediatorship. However we might conceive the relationship of this mystery to the historical death and resurrection of Jesus, its uniqueness and universality make it part of the dialectic between the Church and the Kingdom. Any attempt to appropriate it exclusively to the pole of the Church can only relativize it and rob it of its universality. We may not be able to probe fully the depths of this mystery that is at the crossroads of the cosmic and the historical, of the eternal and the temporal, of the divine and the human. We need not reduce it to the limitations of the pilgrim Church which is called to be at the service of the mystery, not to make it its exclusive possession.

6.11 Pope John Paul II has said: "man — every man without any exception whatever — has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man — with each man without any exception whatever — Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it. 'Christ who died and was

raised up for all, provides man — each man and every man' — 'with the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme calling'" (RH 14). The Spirit also works "outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body" (RH 6).

6.12 The pilgrim Church witnesses not to itself but to the mystery; and calls to conversion and discipleship refer primarily to the relationship between God who calls and the person who responds. Only secondarily do they refer to the Church-community. The identity of the Church does not lie in being the exclusive "ark of salvation" but in being in mission to transform the world from within as leaven, without being fully aware of the forms that such transformation may lead to.

THESES 7

An authentic dialogue with other religious traditions is the task of a local Church, fully involved in the life and struggles of the people, especially the poor. It is also an integral element in the process of building up authentic local Churches in Asia.

7. Commentary

7.1 We have recalled more than once that the bishops of Asia see evangelization as a building up of the local Church involving a threefold dialogue with the culture, the religions and the poor of Asia. One might tend to see inculturation, interreligious dialogue and liberation as independent activities. As a matter of fact, one could say that interreligious dialogue often takes place today among "religious" persons at a private, personal level. But it is in the context of meeting together the challenges of inculturation and liberation that interreligious dialogue becomes real and relevant. It must therefore be seen in this holistic perspective. Otherwise, interreligious dialogue, as religion itself, will be alienating.

7.2 As we have recalled at the very beginning, one of the main characteristics of Asia is its multireligious situation. We cannot therefore build authentic local Churches in Asia with a spirituality, theology, liturgy, church organization and ways of liberation appropriate to their life and mission without taking seriously the challenge of the other religions and entering into dialogue with them. This can happen only if the Asian local Churches feel responsible for themselves and their mission, with freedom to dare and to experiment, to create and to learn from mistakes.

7.3 It is through the growth of such local Churches that the Church

will become truly Catholic or universal. For the Universal Church is a communion of local Churches, each rooted in a particular place, culture and tradition, but open to all the others, united to them in the faith and contributing to the whole its special gifts. It is in this way that "the Catholic Church strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity with all its riches back to Christ its Head in the unity of his Spirit" (LG 13; cf. Eph 1, 3-13).

PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

Religious, cultural and socio-political situations in Asia are so different from country to country that it is very difficult to present concrete and adequate pastoral recommendations which could apply equally well to all our countries. If our Churches, however, are to become truly local Churches, then, interreligious dialogue is indispensable and imperative. Hence, in each country, careful analysis and reflection on its situations are called for in order to decide on concrete steps to be taken.

In the light of the foregoing considerations we submit here some suggestions as pastoral recommendations.

1. Spiritual Renewal Through Common Prayer

1.1 A sincere and authentic renewal of our mind and heart is called for with regard to our mission of witnessing to the Gospel by showing the face of Christ in our multireligious situation. We should seek for opportunities to come together to pray with people of other religions.

1.2 A week of prayer and fellowship with people of other religions could be organized at the diocesan and parochial level. Could we make this an annual practice throughout the FABC region, perhaps in relation with the CCA Asia Sunday?

2. Conscientizing Toward a New Catechesis

2.1 There is a need for a renewed Trinitarian theology in catechesis:

- a) on Revelation and the universal salvific plan of God;
- b) on the nature and mission of the Church as servant of God's Kingdom;
- c) on the uniqueness of Christ;

- d) on the all-penetrating action of the Spirit in and beyond our Churches;
- e) on the meaning of proclamation, dialogue and conversion as understood by the Church today.

2.2 We need to be conscientized and helped to free ourselves from prejudices, attitudes of self-defense, and of seeking merely our own benefit by becoming open to the positive values in other religions, and ready to learn from them.

2.3 With regard to interreligious dialogue an updated theology and catechesis must be incorporated in the programs for seminaries, houses of formation and pastoral centers. Study and feedback on this document by agencies and people are desired.

2.4 Because people of other religions are our fellow travellers in a common search for truth and on a common pilgrimage to the Kingdom, the interreligious dialogue should be seen as mutually enriching, and a new pastoral approach is called for. Implications of this paradigm shift need to be discussed.

3. Interreligious Dialogue Through Common Witness and Action

3.1 Our Churches are to be encouraged to come together as often as possible with other religions to share life experiences and to promote and to defend human and spiritual values, such as solidarity with the poor, justice and peace.

3.2 We are to develop our sense of coresponsibility to participate actively with all men and women of good will in responding to the socio-cultural and political needs of our people.

3.3 Steps should be taken to build mutual confidence among Christian Churches so as to promote common witness and collaboration for human welfare.

4. Structures in Service of Interreligious Dialogue

4.1 Symposia, colloquia, seminars and exchanges on the problems of religions and interreligious dialogue should be encouraged at the diocesan and parochial levels.

4.2 Research centers are needed to study the various aspects (socio-cultural) of life in our societies. The actual role of religions, the meaning

of religious symbols, the conditions favorable to religious dialogue, the obstacles facing such dialogue, and other questions, are issues for further research at national levels.

4.3 The question of the membership and participation of the Catholic Church in the National Councils of Churches and in action-oriented associations of other religions is to be seriously considered.

4.4 New structures that facilitate contact and cooperation with other religious groups in specific areas of common concern should be set up at diocesan and national levels.

5. Questions for Further Animation

5.1 What has been and should be the place and role of our Church in the multireligious context of our country?

5.2 Are we identifying ourselves adequately and meaningfully with the religio-cultural traditions of our people? How do we approach people of other religions within those traditions?

5.3 As a minority Church, are we playing a role of mediation among diverse groups and exercising a prophetic role of reconciliation? Or do we privatize religion and fail to play a prophetic role expected of us? Do we get instrumentalized as a means for the powers that be?

5.4 What is our present understanding of mission, proclamation, evangelization, conversion, etc., in view of the growing imperative of the Church for interreligious dialogue.

5.5 What can be done? What can we do as a group?

PARTICIPANTS IN THE SECOND COLLOQUIUM, SINGAPORE, APRIL 1987

Members of the Theological Advisory Commission

Bangladesh

Bishop Theotonius Gomes, C.S.C.

India

Rev. Matthew Vellanickal

Rev. Felix Wilfred

Indonesia

Rev. Robert Hardawiryana

Japan

Rev. Peter J. Yamamoto

Pakistan

Rev. Evarist Pinto

Philippines

Rev. Catalino Arevalo
Bishop Teodoro Bacani

Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei

Rev. Robert Balhetchet

Sri Lanka

Rev. S.J. Emmanuel

Thailand

Bishop John B. Manat Chuabsumai

* Rev. Florian Cheong, Korea, and Rev. Aloysius B. Chang, R.O.C.,
were absent.

Invited Experts**Rome**

Rev. Michael Amaladoss

Germany

Dr. Georg Evers

FABC

Rev. Edward F. Malone
Rev. Albert Poulet-Mathis

APPENDIX

Statutes of the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

Preamble

Since 1970, at their very first meeting, the Asian bishops have shown much interest in the work of "fostering Asian theological reflection." Practically every plenary assembly of FABC has said something about this task.

However, at Bangkok, at FABC III (Sampran, October 1982), the bishops assembled made the explicit decision to convene a meeting of theologians under the "official auspices" of FABC.

At the meeting of the Standing Committee of FABC in 1986 (held in Hongkong), a decision was made to constitute a Theological Advisory Commission for FABC, and the Office of the Secretary General scheduled it for Easter Week of 1986.

Objectives

- 1) In line with what is laid down in *Ad Gentes* 22, to undertake and foster Asian theological reflection on issues and questions which are of special relevance to the Church and the local Churches in "the FABC part of the world."
- 2) To be of assistance to FABC, its administrative boards, its assemblies, institutes and colloquia, for the thinking, policy-making, missionary and pastoral action of the episcopal conferences and bishops of the area.
- 3) To bring relevant contemporary theological work to theological reflection of FABC and its agencies, and also to help to mediate theological thought here in Asia to "the wider Church."

Membership

- 4) The Commission itself (TAC) will be made up of theologians named by the member episcopal conferences. Each episcopal conference has the right to name one theologian.

4.1 Theologians outside the conference can be nominated (if the conference cannot find its own) to the TAC.

4.2 Episcopal conferences with a large number (i.e. more than 50 bishops) can name one or more additional members. (Ratio: 1 member of TAC per 50 bishops in the episcopal conference.)

4.3 No episcopal conference shall name more than three members to the Commission.

5) Theologians named to the TAC should be distinguished for their recognized competence in theological science, good judgment in doctrinal and theological matters, and their fidelity to an authentic *sensus ecclesiae* and to the Church's magisterium. The episcopal conference shall submit the names of the theologians for membership to the FABC Standing Committee after suitable prior consultation.

Terms of Membership

6) Membership to the TAC shall be for term of five (5) years. Members may be renominated, but, except for very serious reasons, will not serve on the Commission beyond two terms, or a total of ten years.

7) At the end of each five-year period, at least half of the Commission will be retained, for purposes of continuity. As it is, the FABC Standing Committee names the members of the TAC, so that composition of the TAC for each new quinquennium will be its responsibility, after suitable prior consultation.

8) If any member of the Commission does not complete the term of office for any valid reason, e.g., resignation, illness or other incapacitation, death, the episcopal conference concerned will nominate a successor to fill out the unexpired term. He could be reconfirmed for a new term. This successor may of course be confirmed for the following term of five years.

Office Bearers

9) The Commission itself shall elect its own executive secretary and associate secretary from its own membership. Terms of office for these officials will be for five years, renewable only once (for a total of ten consecutive years). If one of these officials is not reappointed to the TAC, even if his term of office has not been completed, he ceases to hold office ipso facto.

10) The finances, technical affairs, logistics, and like matters will be handled by the executive secretary, in liaison with the Office of the Secretary General of FABC.

11) Ordinarily, an "officer-in-charge" shall be appointed in the place (city, etc.) where a forthcoming meeting has been scheduled.

12) If any official (executive secretary or associate secretary) shall be unable to complete his term of office for any valid reason (as above), the Commission itself shall elect a successor to complete the unexpired term of office.

Organization

13) The TAC shall meet in plenary assembly every year. At the request of the FABC Standing Committee, for urgent reasons, it may meet in extraordinary session.

14) Plenary meetings will usually be held in the Easter season, beginning during the second week of Easter, and lasting for a total of seven full days. If meetings are to last longer, members should ordinarily be informed some three months ahead of time, so that they can make necessary adjustments.

15) The matters for discussion in the meetings of the TAC shall be chosen:

15.1 by the Plenary Assembly of the FABC, in formal session, or through its Standing Committee. [The various Offices of the FABC (OEIA, OHD, etc.) are encouraged to submit themes and questions for study and discussion by the TAC.]

15.2 or by the Commission itself, in its own deliberations.

16) Procedures of the TAC in its various meetings shall be determined by the Commission itself. These may be committed to by-laws, if the TAC so desires. These procedures may be changed or modified by the TAC itself according to norms it shall itself set up.

17) Ordinarily, a sub-commission of not less than three members, chosen for their special competence in the area of theology to be studied, is charged:

17.1 to prepare the program/agenda and to commission the principal papers for study and discussion in the following meetings of the TAC; and

17.2 to be responsible for the final redaction of texts which may be issued from the meeting itself.

17.3 All other members of the Commission, however, are urged to contribute at least brief comments or notes on the theme to be discussed.

18) Periti, or experts, in theology or other fields, may be invited to participate *per modum actus* in a given meeting (plenary or sub-commission) of the TAC, because of special competence in the areas to be taken up for study. Such a peritus or invited expert does not thereby become a member of the Commission, and will not be given voting rights in the meeting to which he is invited.

19) The Commission shall be responsible to the Standing Committee of the FABC to which it will give an annual report of its activities and deliberations. The executive secretary, or someone designated by him, will represent the Commission at the meetings of the Standing Committee.

Secrecy

20) At the explicit request of the FABC Standing Committee or by decision of the TAC itself by 2/3 vote of those present, the discussions and voting concerning a given topic or question may be held *sub secreto*. Regarding other discussions and votes, professional ethical standards, especially in what regards confidentiality, Christian charity and prudence, shall of course guide the members.

Publications

21) Texts which are specifically commissioned by FABC to be published officially in the name of the TAC:

21.1 shall be approved for publication by two-thirds of the Commission members present,

21.2 and by consent of the FABC Standing Committee.

22) The TAC may be asked, or it may itself decide, to write texts or opinions purely for the use of FABC or any (or several) of its member conferences. For such texts, publication shall not be made except by the consent of two-thirds of the Commission.

23) Other publications, "personal" or "unofficial" shall be published under the names of the members who have written them, who shall assume responsibility for the texts (once again, in their own name, and not in their capacity as members of the TAC).

FABC Papers:

- No. 33. Third Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides
 - a. Church Organization in Asia Today
 - b. Forms of Christian Community Living in Asia
 - c. The Diocese and Parish as Communities of Faith
 - d. Total Human Development and the Church as a Community of Faith in Asia
 - e. The Dialogue of Communities of Faith in Asia
 - f. Is the Laity the "Marginalized Majority" in the Church?
 - g. The Role of Women in the Church as a Community of Faith in Asia
 - h. Seminaries and Religious Houses as Centers of Formation of Church as Community of Faith in Asia
 - i. Consecrated Religious Life in Asia as Witness of Church as Community of Faith
 - j. The Roman Catholic Church in Asia and the Media of Mass Communication — Press, Film, Radio and Television
 - k. Laity in the Church of Asia
34. Summons to Dialogue, by Archbishop Angelo Fernandes. A National Seminar on Dialogue and Evangelization, 1983
35. Challenges to Human Development in the 1980s: Response of the Church in Asia. The Sixth Bishops' Institute for Social Action, 1983
36. Lead Me to the Real: The Hindu-Christian Dialogue. The Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, 1984
37. Our Quest for Justice. The Second Consultation on Justice and Peace, 1984
38. Christian Presence among Muslims in Asia. A Consultation on Inter-Religious Dialogue, 1985
39. Social Action Groups: Harbingers of Hope in Asia, by Felix Wilfred, 1985
40. Trusting, Entrusting the Laity. The First Bishops' Institute for Lay Apostolate, 1985.
41. Building the Church of Christ in a Pluricultural Situation, by Robert Hardawirana, 1985.
42. Towards a Theology of Local Church, by Joseph Komonchak. The First Colloquium of the FABC Theological Advisory Commission, 1986.
43. The "Abba Experience" of Jesus: the Model and Motive for Mission Today. A Project in Formation for Mission, 1986.
44. Contemporary Catholic Thought on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World. A Position Paper for the Fourth Plenary Assembly, by S.J. Emmanuel, 1986
45. Sunset in the East? The Asian Reality Challenging the Church and its Laity Today. A Position Paper for the Fourth Plenary Assembly, by Felix Wilfred, 1986
46. Fourth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guides
 - a. The Role and Relationship of the Laity in the Church
 - b. Lay Spirituality
 - c. Towards a New Understanding of Women's Role
 - d. Laity and Ministry to Youth

- e. The Laity in the World of Education
 - f. The Asian Laity in the World of Health Services
 - g. The Laity in Mission
 - h. The Laity in Politics and Public Service
 - i. The Laity and the Family
 - j. The Laity in the World of Work
 - k. Trusting, Entrusting the Laity in Media
 - l. The Laity in the World of Business
47. The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia. A Report of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1987.

FABC PAPERS is a project of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), designed to bring the thinking of Asian experts to a wider audience and to develop critical analysis of the problems facing the Church in Asia from people on the scene. The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent the official policies of the FABC or its member Episcopal Conferences. Manuscripts are always welcome and may be sent to: FABC, G.P.O. Box 2984, Hong Kong.