

This approach is particularly evident in the debate about Turkey's accession to the EU. The very fact, though, that there are Muslims defining themselves as Europeans does call into question the identity issues, because it has an impact on both the European identity and the Muslim one.

Limiting our vision of Islam to a human rights-violating and aggressive religion would mean to disregard a plural and diversified European Islam and its hopefully positive relationship with mainstream Arabic Islam.

CITIZENSHIP VS. IDENTITY

Summing up, a multireligious perspective and interreligious dialogue can have a crucial impact on European identity issues, but religious discrimination can find a real solution only in equal rights.

It is therefore useful to consider the concept of *citizenship* as juridical and political recognition of civil rights, whose main contradiction concerning European citizenship is that it is not connected with European people, while national citizenships are.

What is, then, the meaning and the use of European citizenship? How can a single person be a European citizen and a national citizen without being a citizen of the other member-States? One possible solution lies in the separa-

tion and distinction between the concepts of citizenship and identity.

This means that citizenship rights should not only be allocated to those who were born in a certain place and share its majority language, traditions and religion. Europe could become a place where citizenship will be flexible and based upon participation in society rather than on identity.

We could imagine European identity as a dynamic and open process of identification, and we could dream of Europe as an inclusive place whose inner contradictions can turn into spaces for critical reflection and dialogue among diversities.

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Liturgical Revolution of Interreligious Encounters

The question of interreligious dialogue and relations came into the focus of Christianity mainly in the XXth century. Interreligious wars as modes of relations started to play a less and less important role.

Immigration urged us to take seriously the questions of coexistence in every part of the world, as religiously mixed and pluralistic territories started to spread. For the Church, dialogue, and in it the cooperation in social service and sharing of spirituality in prayer services, posed the greatest challenges.

CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Realizing that the situation was getting more acute, the churches from Asia – especially from India and Sri Lanka – put a lot of effort into the re-evaluation of their previous statements, as well as their theological doctrines.

They led the thinking and research in the theological domain, both in the systematic and practical fields. First, they acknowledged the failure of Western missionary behaviour that failed to spread the Good News and created a hostile atmosphere with its intolerant and ignorant attitude towards other religions in the region.

Then, using the Trinitarian formula, they rearranged the Christian dogmatic emphases by taking into account their own contexts. They were faced with the fact that the meaningfulness of every interreligious encounter, and especially of prayer, depends on the recognition of the reality of the presence and experience of God among all the participants.

The *Father* was identified as Creator of all humanity and the whole universe. *Human beings* were seen as ones created in God's own image, which means a common task, the responsibility of every person given from God; and also a common desire to seek, serve, and praise the Creator of all. This essential recognition provided the basis for every spiritual encounter between religions.

Nevertheless, they could not stop at this stage, since the specialism of Christian theology claimed its own precious place, and answers had to be formulated to questions concerning the basics of Christian identity. Indian theology did not see *Christ* only as the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but also as the Cosmic Christ, who got special attention in the Bible by John the Apostle.

The recognition of the whole world as being created through Christ and being redeemed by His death and resurrection implied hope for the salvation of non-Christians, but also challenge for the role of Christianity in the world.

The *Holy Spirit* was seen as the One Who is present everywhere, being uncontrollable by humanity or by the Church in Her work. Her inspirational attitude for leading creation into a closer and more mature relationship with God gives hope that every person and religion have glimpses of God, although maybe not to the same degree.

The purpose of this dogmatic work was to recognize Christianity on its pilgrimage towards God, together with all other religions, though clearly recognizing that Christianity has its own special gifts, vocation and responsibility given by God.

The encounter of Christianity with other religions even in the field of sharing spirituality was encouraged, realizing that nothing can separate us from God, because God is our beginning, end, foundation and hope.

The prayer of the world religions is the richest testimony one can find to the omnipresence of that human intuition which can sense God's presence. This spiritual acknowledgement even in India, but especially in other parts of the world, was revolutionary. The Christian identity and the meaning of prayer and worship service were constantly questioned.

The pressure of secularization and this theological revolution led to a common search for partnership among religions. The beginning of modern encounters in the field of spirituality goes back to the meeting of the World's Parliament of Religions (WPR) that was held in Chicago in 1893, where the first recorded act of common worship took place. After this meeting several organizations prepared studies and created resources and guidebooks for interreligious encounters.

WHAT IS INTERRELIGIOUS PRAYER?

Thinking about prayers, we can recognize a huge variety of styles and forms. In this article we reduce the basic definition of prayer to the most intimate and personal acts of the religions with God. It is in agreement with Ronnie PRABHU's saying, that prayer is the outpouring of the human heart and transcends all religious differences.

We can state with Kenneth CRAGG that humankind cannot be *answerable to God* only in division, or answerable to itself in closed circuits of devotion. The need for interreligious prayer is a common human necessity.

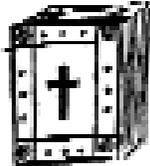
Prayer is not a simple "phone call to God," but an event and a speech (even if it is a silent prayer) at the same time. Prayer is an everyday lifestyle and a particular act in time and space.

Having the universal experience of common human frailty and transcendent reality, and of moral commandments for the sake of humanity's life, most religions have achieved a certain unity in prayer with each other in the most basic sense of prayer, praying by life.

Hasan ASKARI wrote about the Muslim and Christian faithful that they are already praying together when they are united not only in their friendship of God, but also in their common commitment against the false absolutes of our age and against the injustices these engender in the lives of people. If there is no commitment on this, even praying together in its literal sense will not be of any use.

Common engagement for social issues normally leads the participating religions to joint work on various diaconal and other social projects. This experience naturally creates the desire for praying together. As Pierre F. DE BETHUNE says, common prayer is not the result of an approach; it is the *starting point* of true encounter.

Although prayer is universal, all the actual prayers are particular both in content and form. Praying together, however, embraces and follows three main forms on the basis of their elements and on the level of the participants' engagement in prayer.



FORMS OF PRAYER

The first form is gathering in the same place and presenting prayers by different religions one after the other. This was the case in 1986 in Assisi when the Pope invited the representatives of religious traditions not to pray together, but to come together to pray.

The prayers in this case are usually focusing on one theme or on the purpose of the occasion without being coordinated beforehand. The prayers offered there allow the possibility to join into each other's prayers without having this action as a purpose. This form is called a *multi-religious act* rather than an interreligious one.

The second form is when the main aim of the occasion is to become a *united prayer-act*. In this case the prayer meeting is organized in a way to make it acceptable and agreeable for every participant. As we see, it can be worked out by using only the lowest common denominator.

The challenge of this form of prayer is that it can be minimized to a large extent in content and form. That is why it has been severely criticized in various forums for creating a liturgical orphan or spiritual hybrid.

The third form can be called *coherent interreligious prayer*. It respects and upholds the essence and self-identity of the religious traditions without wanting them to make compromises or become united.

Here the prayers are thematically and critically coordinated with a sense of mutuality, sensitivity and reciprocity. In our opinion the realization of this option needs the most effort, strength in faith and love. This offers, however, the highest spiritual experience with the realization of the deepest religious freedom, respect, and gratitude towards each other.

We can mention another special kind of prayer as the potential fourth option. It is when one religion *uses the prayers and devotional scriptures* of another religion. Here very careful preparation is necessary in the field of sacred texts and a sensitive consideration of their value and importance in their own traditions.

PRAYING PARTICIPANTS

Douglas PRATT defined four modes of interreligious prayer on the basis of the encounter and the engagement of the participants. The first two belong to the *responsive type of prayers*, facing different issues raised from the "outside" world which are waiting for response and reaction on a spiritual level.

The first prayer is provoked by occasions of *communal crisis* or natural catastrophes, which specially call for a religious response. The second is an opportunity for offering a religious contribution and witness that used to happen in the case of *civil celebrations*.

The last two modes belong to the *hospitality type of prayers*. They are concentrating on the encounter of religions within a framework of hospitality. Here two modes are possible: the *hosting one* and the *guest's one*.

Both of them have their own firm characteristics and responsibilities that can create comfort for the participants by knowing what is expected from them. These modes include the efforts of both sides to create an atmosphere of reassurance, acceptance, situational security and interaction.



They are able to provide a moment of grace and deep spiritual experience if their own rules are respected, because neither hosts nor guests are required to deny themselves; each takes risks and allows vulnerability. There are expected and accepted limits.

Taking into consideration all these possibilities, we can ask ourselves finally which form is the best, the *ideal one*, the one we should choose or work for. We suggest the answer which was given for a questionnaire in 1994 from the United States: "The most appropriate form of prayer is the one that leads people beyond themselves and touches on the mystery, our oneness in humanity and the mutuality of our longings."

PRECONDITIONS FOR PRAYING TOGETHER

Interreligious prayers at first shook Christianity. They created a revolutionary atmosphere among Christians; some were enthusiastic, some were shocked by the given results.

This experience has taught the ecumenical movement that issues and teachings in religious encounters are not so much about being good or bad, true or false; but that all these depend on their preconditions.

The first lesson of interreligious prayer services is that they can have a deep spiritual significance only if the given event comes out of a real and existing community, where the people are in *close contact* with each other.

"Common" worship should presuppose a degree of unanimity, or at least a broadly overlapping framework or worldview; otherwise common experience might make not much sense for the participants. Services organized officially from a higher level lack this *commonality* and they easily provide only an experience of shock, misunderstanding, pretence or manipulation, because the shared daily life which should be the key to understanding this experience of interreligious relationship is missing.

The theological work which was done mainly in India and Sri Lanka provided a big help to rethinking and re-systematizing Christian theology and to creating a *common Christian basis and understanding* of interreligious prayer events.

This theological work was great in providing a sense of humanity, in focusing on prayer as an essential part of every human being's life. It could create the needed precondition of a common understanding of oneself and one's prayer on the universal level. This theological work inspired various denominations to rethink and develop their own doctrines and practices.

The third important precondition is *engagement in interreligious dialogue*. There are two great challenges concerning this issue: entering into interreligious worship with-

out entering into dialogue, or entering into dialogue without wishing to participate in common prayer or worship.

The first is based on an expression of fellowship and harmony without making a conscious decision about it. It risks losing one's own identity and one's unique values. The second one is based on recognizing the importance of discussions on theological and practical levels, but saving the field of spirituality as an intimate and unique place.

In this case spirituality cannot be reached but by members from a particular community. It forgets that interreligious prayer is the culminating point of interreligious dialogue. This mentality risks creating a gap between ideas and acts, and entering dialogue without entering totally and trustfully.

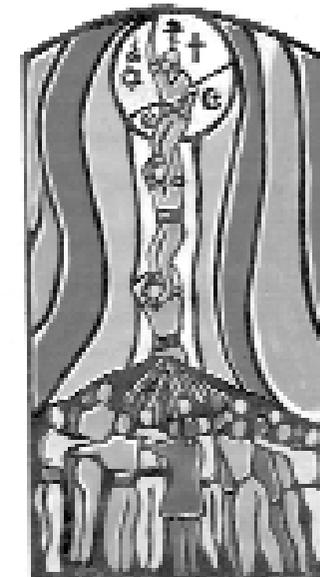
Both of these mentalities, however, very much humiliate the other partners, because they do not take them seriously enough. On the other hand, it is a big humiliation of one's own self as well, and it can call into question one's honest attitude.

Interreligious dialogue and prayer at the same time create new ways of looking at the depth of the *message of Jesus*. This revolution of theology and identity can transform our images about the *journey* and about the *ways of our witnessing*.

Yves RAGUIN, SI, wrote that he realized, after some years, that the last step of the gospel is not to follow Christ or to imitate him. These are necessary steps, but the last step of the gospel is taken when Christ says: "It is good for you that I go. You will not see me any more before you, but I will be in you." (John 16,7; 16,16; 17,25)

Contrary to the fears of Christians from the side of doctrine and missiological attitudes, well-prepared prayer occasions, where these preconditions were present, provided an enriching and *unique God-experience and spiritual growth* for the participants.

As Jose KUTTIANIMATTATHIL states, "The actual experience shows that dialogue, sharing worship and reading from the scriptures of other religions, rather than weakening people's faith, help those with mature faith to grow and become more rooted in their own faith."



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