

## DIALOGUE IN INDIA:

*An analysis of the situation a reflection  
on experience*

### Introduction

1. "Living as we are in close contact with men of other religions, the Church in India must engage in dialogue with them. **Inter-religious dialogue is the response of Christian faith to God's saving presence in the religious traditions of mankind and the expression of the firm hope of the fulfilment of all things in Christ....**"<sup>1</sup> These lines, drawn from the consolidated report of the different workshops of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, are the result of a very serious attempt at reflecting on the dialogue-activity that is being carried on by the Church in India. This Calcutta session had as its main task, to prepare for the Synod in Rome that studied Evangelization, and to draft a letter to the Synod. But the Church in India had to relate its evangelisation to the commitment to dialogue. There was no question of compromising any of the activities: of evangelization, of dialogue, of development. In this C.B.C.I. Session, we see an attempt on the part of the Church at a self-understanding as an open community engaged in one pilgrimage of hope.

2. During the last ten years there has been in India an awakening to the task of dialogue and renewal as called for by the Vatican Council. It has been a painful awakening as can be seen from the following statements of the All-India Seminar of Bangalore in 1969:

We wish to be in contact and communion with the other religions of our country which we value for their great contribution to the spiritual treasury of mankind. If in the past our relations

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1. Cf. Report of the C.B.C.I. Calcutta Session, 1974, p. 147.

have sometimes been strained through our fault, we ask for forgiveness; and we now invite them to a common witness to the transcendent destiny of man, in our present crisis of modernization and secularization. We believe too that fraternal exchange with them can be of immense benefit to the Christian fellowship itself in its renewal in India.<sup>2</sup>

This awakening to the call for dialogue did not happen suddenly in Bangalore. In fact it was a very slow process. Most of it had already been achieved prior to the Church-in-India Seminar, in the many diocesan and regional seminars. For most of the participants "dialogue" was something new. As one directly involved in the dialogue section of two regional seminars, that of Kerala and Karnataka, I was a witness to this slow awakening. To the participants (delegates from the different dioceses), at least to many of them, this topic was a surprise. Dialogue was no more to be the luxury or privilege of a few intellectuals or of a few Ashrams. The Church in India the local Christian Communities—was going through a process of self-education, of a change of attitudes. The very positive attitude of Vatican II, in the call to enter into dialogue (NA 2) was becoming the attitude of ordinary Christians. This demanded from them a re-education and in many cases a de-education.

Already in 1964, religious leaders in India heard the appeal of a pilgrim, of the Holy Father, for inter-religious dialogue. During a multi-religious "Live-Together" held at Bombay last April, we heard a Hindu leader very much involved in organizing the meeting of the religious leaders with the Holy Father recalling those words of the Holy Father:

We must meet not merely as tourists, but as pilgrims who set out to find God, not in buildings of stone but in human hearts. Man must meet man, nation meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God. In this mutual understanding and friendship, in this sacred communion, we must also begin to work together to build the common future of the human race.... Such a union...must be built on a common love that embraces all and has its roots in God who is love.<sup>3</sup>

3. The change of attitude has not been easy. Nor can we say that it is already fully achieved. This means abandoning our self-

2. Cf. *Church in India Today*, Bangalore, 1969, p. 243-4.

3. Cf. Neuner-Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, 1032.

sufficiency complex and with it the idea that we are the "rich-man" who has everything instead of getting used to the language of pilgrimage and Being. This means reconciling in one's own personality the two calls to dialogue and to the proclamation of the good news of salvation. It means working in cooperation with all the Centres, Movements, Ashrams and Persons engaged in dialogue in India. It means that followers of other religions find in their own religious experience the motivation for inter-religious dialogue, that they too come out of their own self-sufficiencies. It means a "risk", a spiritual risk. Hence the task before the Church in India is to help Christians, and the followers of other religions too, to prepare themselves for meeting "as pilgrims who set out to find God."

4. From January 1973 onwards there has been a definite commitment on the part of the Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India to this task of preparing ourselves for dialogue. This is not the moment to evaluate the results of this commitment, or the achievements of the commission. Besides, this is a field where the results cannot be measured. All the same, the C.B.C.I Session of Calcutta has this note of appreciation.

Great appreciation was expressed by the House for the praiseworthy programmes of work of this commission, which broke entirely new ground in meaningful discussions with those of other faiths and beliefs...<sup>4</sup>

We shall dwell at some length on the steps taken by the dialogue Commission in this process of self-education aimed at a new self-understanding as belonging to a community of pilgrimage and at a new understanding of other religions. The Commission set before the religious world three main steps:—

- i. "Get-Togethers" on Dialogue.
- ii. Inter-Religious "Live-Togethers"
- iii. Courses on Islam.

5. "Get-Togethers" on Dialogue. Where participants, delegates from different dioceses of a region, come together for two to three days to study the nature, scope, demands, difficulties, risks, and concrete possibilities of inter-religious dialogue in the particular

4. Cf. Report of the C.B.C.I. Calcutta Session, p. 101.

region. They try to relate the call to proclaim the Gospel to the call to be dialogue-pilgrims on earth. They hear leaders of other religions expound their own ways of life or their own religion as a way of life, share their feelings and hear the opinions of Christians. Already a dialogue begins. Concrete steps are planned.

Since there is only one commission for dialogue both with other religions and with so-called non-believers, in these get-togethers on dialogue, the participants have discussed the subject of dialogue with non-believers as well. There have also been occasions when they have heard an agnostic, an unbeliever talking about his own way of life, and giving the reasons for his unbelief.

6. "Live-Togethers". The Commission set itself to the task by the first 'Hindu-Christian Live-Togethers' at Banaras, in February, 1973. In the Live-Togethers, Christians and the followers of other religions come together in prayer, meditation, and shared reflections. They shared the same life-styles, shared the costs of the occasion. They discuss topics of common concern such as: What my religion means to me; my attitude towards other religions; prayer, religious experience, meditation in my life; my religion and social concern for the suffering neighbour; challenges to my religion—how do I meet these challenges; crisis of values; the hope that is in me; concrete steps to foster mutual unity, communal harmony, collaboration among believers. Much time is spent in prayer, songs and Bhajans, in readings from different religious scriptures and shared thoughts or insights on them. Each session begins and ends by prayer, songs or Bhajans and meditations. The topics are personal and the emphasis is always to keep it at that level.

7. Perhaps it would be interesting to hear one or two specimen sharings. Let us take the very first two shared reflections of the Live-Together of Bangalore of June 14 & 15. The Topic was "What my religion means to me?"

A Hindu says:

Prayer entered my life in my childhood. I was taught that way... but slowly God lost solidity and slowly became a force falling within me and activating me very deeply, not the God as 'love'; it is the God of the Upanishads, the God by means of which my mind can see, hear and not the God out there as an Object, but in me as a Subject...

Prayer continued in my life as a habit, as mechanical... mind does not stick to it. I have not got a concept of a God

above, nor within, but of a force within and without. Still prayer helped me as a fortress, as a cage to withdraw from the distractions... I pray to my own family deity... A Buddhist Lama influenced me, brought me to prayer as such, to pure awareness, to thought as such... My religion means a lot to me... I passed through different stages—through passive mechanical prayer to dynamic self-seeing prayer. Although I carried a force within me...

A Jain's words:

I recall the early days in the Christian institutions... I was influenced by the vision of the Bible; I was influenced particularly by the life of one of my teachers—a Christian. I found similarity between what I learned from my Christian teachers and later on from my religion. I was deeply impressed by the New Testament, by the message of "love God & love men," "to realize the presence of God and to practise the love of men with the same love."

The effective summary of what my religion is: I see God in my garden... in the flowers as supreme beauty—God in the leprosy patient, in his distorted face (this Jain friend is running a leprosy asylum). Idea of God is fundamental to me, basis of everything that I do. I feel I see God everywhere. I try to practise the presence of God in my daily life. To the question "how do you reconcile this with Brahmanism?" my reply is that I am trying to realize the presence of God in my life (*Mahaprajna*—great wisdom) and to practise love. In my meditation the centre is *Karuna*—sympathy or compassion.

I am not combining the incombatables. Control of breath is central. I pray: may I be calm, may I be happy, may I be full of love, may I be freed from hatred, from jealousy. I try to transmit happiness to all enemies, to send out *Maitry*—love. This *maitry* affects the unconscious and subconscious and thus you become incapable of hating.

We shall not dwell any longer at this stage on the "Live-togethers", but we shall return to this later. It is enough to observe the diversity of God's gifts manifested in this kind of communion. The more personal the sharings are, the more enriching they are.

8. **Courses on Islam.** India is generally considered as the land of Hinduism. But there are over Sixty Million Muslims in India. Engaged in this preparation for dialogue, we realized that a good deal should both be done and undone if any dialogue worth the name is to be carried on between Christians and Muslims. The

All-India Consultation on Evangelization of Patna,<sup>5</sup> of 1973 stressed the urgency of preparation for this task. To meet this demand, joining hands with the Henry Martin Institute of Islamic Studies, we organized three-day courses in different parts of the Country, covering the basic tenets of Islam, areas of misunderstandings, of convergence etc. In these courses panel discussions with Muslim leaders were a regular feature. Wherever possible, participants in the courses visited Mosques during their prayer time.

9. Although this is no time to sit back and assess results, it is still useful—in order to put our situation in perspective—to outline the various steps which the Commission has taken under the three readings:

a) *Get-togethers on Dialogue:*

Venue	Date	No. of participants
1. Alwaye (for Kerala Region)	May 28, 29, 30, 1973	45 from 13 dioceses.
2. Madras (for the Tamilnadu Region)	June 27, 28, 29, 1973	88 from 12 dioceses.
3. Bangalore (for Karnataka Region)	August 3, 4, 5, 1973	participants from all, except one diocese of region.
4. Delhi	September 15 & 16, 1973	45 from Delhi, Meerut, Simla.
5. Bombay	October 26, 27, 28, 1973	80 from Bombay, Poona, Belgaum.

b) *Live-Togethers:*

1. Banares	February 24, 25, 26, 1973	40 (Hindu-Christian)
2. Trivandrum (for Kerala)	May 31, June 1, 2, 1974	40 " "
3. Tiruchirappalli (for Tamilnadu)	January 17, 18, 19, 1974	50 " "

5. A follow-up to the International Theological Conference of Nagpur, 1971.

Venue	Date	No. of participants
4. Poona (organized jointly by Snehasadan and Christa Prema Seva Ashram, on the request of the Commission)	March 2 & 3, 1974	30 (Hindu-Christians)
5. Satna for (M.P.) (one day get-together and second day a live-together)	February 1, 2, 1975	20 Sikhs, Jains, Hindus & Christians.
6. Aligarh	October 25, 26, 27, 1974	34 Hindus, Muslims & Christians.
7. Hyderabad	June 14 & 15, 1975	32 Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Sikh.
8. Bangalore	June 27, 28, 29, 1975	Participants from Bangalore—Sikh, Christian, Hindu, Muslims.
9. Calicut	August 30, 31, 1975. parti. 30	
c) <i>Courses on Islam:</i>		
1. Agra	March 8, 9, 10, 1974	Over 80
2. Delhi	September 16 to 21st, 1974	Over 100.
3. Benares	October 4, 5, 6, 1974	50
4. Calicut	October 31, Nov. 1, 2, 1974	33
5. Hyderabad	November 29, 30, 1974, & December 1,	45
6. Madras	January 23, 24, 25, 1975	Over 50
7. Bombay	February 6, 7, 8, 1975	25
8. Calcutta	February 21, 22, 23	80
9. Allahabad	February 28, March 1, 2, 1975	60
10. Bangalore	June 21, 22, 23, 1975	40

10. Thus, in all, the dialogue commission has organized with the help of the local Christian communities, and through local contact persons, five get-togethers on dialogue, nine Live-Togethers and ten Courses on Islam. For the courses on Islam the Church in India owes a debt of gratitude to the Henry Martin Institute for Islamic Studies. In passing, it is worth mentioning, that this work of dialogue has also been an exercise in ecumenism. For, the Courses on Islam were meant for all the Churches and participants were from various Churches; in the Live-Togethers the Christians and those of other religions were more or less equal in number; among the Christians there were representatives of other Churches. Thus inter-religious dialogue in India provides a forum for sharing among the Christian Churches.

This task of preparing the Church and the local communities for dialogue is an on-going process. All that the Dialogue Commission does is to help these Christian Communities in this delicate field. In many centres, in many dioceses, there are persons very much committed to dialogue. New dialogue centres and Ashrams are being formed. There are at present at least thirteen Ashrams, fifteen dialogue-centres, and eight dialogue-groups that carry on different forms of inter-religious organized dialogues. To give an example: in Madhya Pradesh, near the town of Narsinghpur, in Dhupghat Village, Medical Mission Sisters—four of them have begun a “lived-dialogue”, in an All-Hindu village, living in a house (perhaps we may call it a hut) in no way different from that of the villagers. They are just “sisters” to that village people. As I visited this new type of Ashram, I found the villagers all happy about these new arrivals. They join the sisters to sing the Bhajans. We shall hear a sister:

“The first week was a real experience for us. We moved to a small house in the village on 3rd October with our possessions in a bullock-cart. On the first day itself we felt the friendliness of the people as they tried to share with us whatever they have—a glass of milk, a *chula* (a small fire place made of mud and ashes) etc. The eucharistic celebration on the first day was beautiful indeed on the front verandah with many villagers sitting around the table of the Lord. All tried to make us feel at home. We had got only the verandah of the house and a room. It was a bit difficult, and we had to look for another house. We moved to the present house after five day's stay in our first place.

The present house belonged to one of the *Chamar* families. Now we are in the midst of the *Chamar* community. (*Chamars*

are right down in the caste system and are considered one of the lowest among the Harijans. Our presence has brought about a great change. Many who had never stepped into this house for the past years of its existence started coming to the house. Now the highest as well as the lowest, whether rich or poor come to our house, without any hesitation, even though there was a bit of difficulty in the beginning. All have accepted us as one of them. We are invited to the feasts and ceremonies of all the different castes. During the last seven months we really experienced the friendliness and hospitality of the people.

Children are our main source of information and contact. They come to us freely and ask all sorts of questions. Through them the whole village has come to know what we are and our way of life. It is hard for the villagers to understand why we are brahmacharinis. Most of their prejudices have vanished by now. We are a part of Dhupghat in the full sense. Dhupghat, the village of sunshine. (Dhup in Hindi means sunshine).<sup>6</sup>

Two kilometers away from the Ashram, there is Swami Premananda O. Prem, with three disciples in the Saccidanand-ashram. Here too the life-style is the same as that of the villagers—an open community living. Thus we are witnessing in India, thanks to the cooperation of all these agencies and persons, a live preparation for the pilgrimage of dialogue. We are still at the beginning of a beginning in this asceticism of Dialogue.

### 11. A Releasing, Enriching Experience

Through the Christian fellowships in India, the other fellowships too are slowly moving on the path of dialogue. Though it is not proper at this stage to take stock of the achievements, it may all the same, be useful to reflect on this very process, to share with other fellowships this bit of our experience with the object of being enriched by similar or different experiments conducted elsewhere.

As one directly involved in this dialogue activity for a period of ten years, at the intellectual level in the Indian Philosophical Congress, then in the Kerala Philosophical Congress, and lately in the works of the Dialogue-Commission, I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that this has been a very enriching and releasing experience. Often, during my life of continual travelling, one question has been repeatedly raised: “What have you

6. Sr. Miriam in News Letter, pp 9 & 10.

achieved?" This is a wrong question. We may have to learn to ask the right question.

## 12. Bridge-building Love

One thing that strikes anyone who is present in a "Live-Together" is growth in love among the believers. It is an experience of the warmth of bridge-building love. To mention one instance: Taken as a group, Muslims were well represented in the Live-Together in Aligarh, a delicate spot of Hindu-muslim rivalries, which is also the centre of the Muslim University. To the Hindus and Muslims, as they openly confessed, this was an experience of unitive love. They had only this much to complain: "Had anyone taken the initiative a few years ago many a conflict could have been avoided." This is not a mere sentimental, emotional, unity. Rather, it is the experience of being one in the one pilgrimage. Again, this does not mean that the participants arrived at any commonly accepted formula or that they returned home having made a contract to forget the differences. Rather, keeping the differences as they are, each one returned to his own religious experience and regained the unitive force of his own religion.

## 13. From Isolation to Communion

In sharing with others one's attitude to those of other faiths there were many frank confessions. There was the flow of one joy—of shedding one's prejudices, long cherished and kept; these prejudices worked often at the unconscious level. In the Hyderabad Live-Together there was the open confession of a Hindu teacher, working in a Christian school, that he came to this Live-Together with much fear and suspicion: that the Christians had hidden motivations for conversion. Once he was there it was for him a different experience. He brought three other fellow-teachers—all Hindus—for the next day's sharings. Not only that, one of them made similar confession. A Muslim Teacher of one of our schools at Banares, on being invited to share his thoughts on "Islam as my way of life" had this surprise: "For years I worked in this school with fathers and sisters; but, till now I haven't thought even once that religious experience is something to be shared."

These built-in prejudices are the greatest obstacles in the path of dialogue in India. We did not have the experience of

"Hindu-Christian Dialogue Postponed,"<sup>7</sup> because of the suspicion about motives. This doesn't mean that there is no hidden fear among our partners in Dialogue. There is and it is made by history. Christianity is often identified with what it is not, with the accidents of history, e.g. with colonialism. There is no question of first getting rid of these fears and suspicions. Only in the act of sharing can we come out of these fortresses of isolation. Here then is the great challenge before Christianity in India: the danger of being misunderstood by our Hindu friends—that this dialogue is nothing but a subtle way of making converts. There is no use in evading the issue. In dialogue properly held we shall have the joy of getting out the ghettos of isolation and of entering into religious communion. No purpose is served in keeping out persons who may still be living in prejudice. There were, in these live-together experiments, instances of Hindu friends moving from an attitude of doubt, fear and suspicion to all-round support to the dialogue activities. To take part in a sharing, in dialogue, pre-supposes that the partners have a good self-understanding as a Hindu, as a Christian, as a Muslim and so on. Movements of sharing often leads to this realization: "How ignorant I am." At Hyderabad a Hindu lady-teacher, seeing that the Hindu religious experience was not presented as it should be, took the trouble of walking a few kilometers on the second day of the live-together, to bring her Acharya to that dialogue.

## 14. To Joint-Action

It is difficult to predict the end of a "Live-Together". It may remain at the level of sharing one's own reflections or prayer-experience. In all the dialogues resolutions are made during the final session to continue the dialogue in one form or another. Very rarely committees are set up to extend inter-religious dialogue to joint-action. These are the three committees set up during the concluding session of the Live-Together of Hyderabad:

To preserve and foster the spirit of amity, unity and collaboration manifested during the religious-sharing-meet, the members have set up three committees:

A committee to arrange for inter-religious sharing every month; A committee for inter-religious social projects...to work for the uplift of the poor of Hyderabad: An inter-religious Writers'

7. Cf. An exchange between C. Murray Regers and Sivendra Prakash in *Dialogue between men of Living Faiths*, ch. 2.

Committee to be called in Telugu *Sarva Mata Rachayitala Sanghamu*, to counter obscenity in films and in modern writings and to promote spiritual values.<sup>8</sup>

The success of any such dialogue, however, cannot be measured by such resolutions.

### 15. Hindrances to Dialogue

We have already touched on the prejudices and suspicions that we have come across in the early stages of dialogue. But there are more subtle dangers and risks. One of them is the block of a "possessive language". In almost all the dialogues you meet with this block. This may take different forms as: sermonizing on religion, on the sublime content of the scriptures, on the universal aspect of one's own religion, on the humanitarian dimension of this or that religion; ability to quote in Sanskrit is taken as the sign of authenticity! Or, one may withdraw into a "generous attitude" of accommodating all religions in one's own religion; one hears slogans like "all religions are equal". There is this oft-repeated cry that the "uniqueness" of this or that religion is in danger—let us take the allegation that the "uniqueness of Christianity" is betrayed in inter-religious dialogue.

Let us be clear: No uniqueness is in danger in inter-religious dialogues conducted as a pilgrimage of hope. Where there may be betrayal of one's own religious experience, of the uniqueness of Christianity, is in certain "spurious dialogues," wherein dialogue, liturgical adaptation, Indianization...all get mixed up. We shall return to this.

### 16. From Possession to Being Possessed

Dialogue is easy when it remains at the intellectual level or when it remains limited to a few people who can make clear distinctions it is not so difficult a game for those who have a solid grounding in theology and a sufficient understanding of other religions. But when dialogue is brought to the level of the common man the challenges and risks are many and the danger of misunderstanding and of being misunderstood by one's own people is great. There is no intention of glossing over these difficulties. It is true that dialogue—this new way of Christian presence

8. Cf. *New Leader*, Sunday 27th July, 1975, p. 3.

in the world—has created and continues to create for a few good Christians difficulties and tensions.

Partners in dialogue come into it with their own self-understanding, and this self-understanding is expressed in a language of possession, of having the best, the most perfect, the final truths or doctrines. With this language and self-understanding you cannot feel at home in the dialogue-situation. What is called for is a new self-understanding that is expressive of your pilgrimage, of this communion among religions; this new language will take the form of a conversion from that of having to Being, from that of the rich man counting his possessions to that of being possessed by the *Mysterium Tremendum*. Dialogue is thus an asceticism, a becoming poor, a transition from possessing this or that to being possessed by God, and this is hope. There is no question of any compromise here. We have to go beyond tolerance, beyond syncretism, eclecticism and comparative religion. In the *Live-Togethers* the participants have to go through this change; they have to be constantly reminded that they are in a new experience, in a new experiment. There have been many instances wherein the organizers had this painful task of reminding even very good friends that they have to switch over from discussions, from exposé on doctrines to personal experiences, from comparison to self-examination.

### 17. Purification Shock

The most rewarding sharings have been when the partners touched on deeply personal moments of agony in their life, of exodus and return. In the recent *live-togethers* there were such enriching experiences from quite unexpected persons. There was this similarity in these cases; born of religious parents, living and practising religion—later on finding it difficult to continue the same practices—to give meaning to the rituals and ceremonies, and prayers; in this stage a few carry on a divided life—of continuing to go through these exercises without relishing them, while others put an end to all these. There is then the joy of finding a new meaning to these very same exercises, a new meaning at a deeper level. These sharings were to the participants moments of mutual enrichment, of self-examination and purification. In these dialogues the partners profit to the extent he or she allows himself or herself to be exposed for purification. This 'purification shock' will leave you naked and defenceless before the Mystery which is being unveiled in the moments of communion, of shared religious experience.

There is another purification shock. There may be instances wherein one person or another shares his or her bitter experiences in his own community. There was an instance in the Hyderabad Live-Together, when a Muslim lady expressed her grief and anger at the plight of woman in that community—about divorce, about polygamy, about the right to property, to pray in the mosques. There were similar bitter pills from the Christians and Hindus. This, again, is another redeeming shock, a call to put ones house in order. Reflections on “my religion and the suffering neighbour” led many to say that they are yet very far from finding, from knowing, the neighbour; that they too are partners in an exploitation.

### 18. Healthy Tension

With the commitment to dialogue a Christian must carry on his duty of preaching the good news, of Evangelization. Often the question is raised: Is dialogue slowing down the pace and urgency of Evangelisation? What is the relation between Evangelization and dialogue? These questions were raised and are being raised again and again in the Indian scene. The relation between those two tasks was discussed in the regional Seminars prior to the Church in India Seminar of 1969, then in the Church in India Seminar, later in the International Theological Conference of Nagpur. Here in the workshop on dialogue the participants were divided on the question of whether or not dialogue is a means for Evangelization. The majority, as far as I remember, were against the use of the word “means” to bring out the relation between dialogue and Evangelisation. There is more or less agreement on two points: first, dialogue has its own justification and second that dialogue, far from diminishing the urgency of proclaiming the good news, when rightly conducted is a help to it. The Christian in his life will have to work out the reconciliation of the two duties of preaching the good news and of planting the Church together with the call to be pilgrims on earth, in the eschatological dimension of his own existence. In dialogue the horizon of the beyond, taking possession of us leads us out of isolation and self-sufficiency into communion with others.<sup>9</sup>

Of course there are many theological questions involved, especially about the salvation of these believers, of these his part-

9. Report on Dialogue, WCC, Ades Abeba.

ners in dialogue. C.B.C.I. Session of Calcutta spoke of “God’s saving presence in the religious traditions of mankind.” This is not a formulation that silences all doubts. But it bypasses other formulations which while expressing one aspect keep us in darkness about others. The ordinary Christian will have to reconcile in his person these duties of dialogue and Evangelization. This may create in him a tension—but it is a healthy tension.

### 19. Areas of Confusion and Deviations

For many Christians dialogue has come as something new in their life; so too were the liturgical and para-liturgical experiments. We are in no way competent to pass judgement on the need and timeliness of these adaptations. We must not expect unanimity in this. But a situation of confusion does exist because of the failure to separate these two areas. A few persons and centres that carry on dialogue are also centres of experiment in adaptation. Here arises the tension. Those who are opposed to these experiments, either because of their prejudices or for good reasons, raise their objections against dialogue as well. They fail to differentiate these two; perhaps a separation should come from these persons and centres in their writings and reports. Till then, this confusion is likely to continue.

In this connection let us observe that a dialogue that doesn’t carry along with it the ordinary Christian Communities, the ordinary Christians with all their prejudices, likes and dislikes, is also a luxury. Hence the need of a slow education in and through the dialogue.

### 20. Non-Biblical Scriptures and Dialogue

Different scriptures are used in the prayers and meditations of our inter-religious dialogues. This has created no problems. But, recently, especially following the publication of the reports, of the papers of the “Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures” a discussion is going on in the Catholic press on the propriety of using these Scriptures in the Liturgical functions. Here too, persons who are very much committed to dialogue have taken their stand. In this Research Seminar, in which the writer was a participant, a very balanced formulation was arrived at and the conclusions are published. The whole tone is very cautious: “It is clear that Christian reflection on this topic in the new context

of ecclesial dialogue with other religions is just beginning, and hence we propose these following reflections **only tentatively**".<sup>10</sup> It is worth observing that at one stage of the meeting the whole question of "inspiration" of these scriptures was de-linked from the one of the liturgical use of the same—on the majority (almost unanimous) opinion of the participants.

All that we want to observe here is that these two issues are much confused in the minds of ordinary Christians. If one takes a stand that dialogue demands the use of those scriptures in the liturgy, this will give a very wrong impression and may do harm to the cause of dialogue. The reasons for their use should be sought elsewhere, taking into account the functions of these scriptures.<sup>11</sup>

## 21. Directory on Dialogue

The dialogue situation in India has thus raised many issues. In the get-togethers on dialogue requests have been made for a directory or guide-lines on dialogue, giving pastoral and doctrinal reflections. This may contain information on the Ashrams, centres and movements of dialogue in India. The first draft of such a guide-line or directory (the name is yet to be finalized) has already been sent to those who are working in the field of dialogue, to experts and consultants for their suggestions and comments. These guidelines from the Commission may be of help in the cause of dialogue.

## 22. Conclusion

As I conclude this report I would like to express my gratitude to all my co-workers in this very delicate field; to this Secretariate, to His Eminence Cardinal Pignedoli and to Msgr. Rossano in particular, for their help, advice, and directives. To me, this dialogue—pilgrimage has been a most rewarding experience. There have been so many rich moments, especially in the live-togethers, in the sharings on the topic "religious experience in my life". There have been times when in the very act of communion, we witnessed the work of God in others. Sometimes the sharing could

10. No. 56 of the Declaration.

11. Cf. Report of the Workshop on "Philosophy of Language," in *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures* (Bangalore: N.B.C.L.C., 1975), p. 616.

not proceed further because, these moments being so rich, silence became the most eloquent language and the best way of sharing. From such moments many a participant returns as from a shock, the shock of redeeming hope at the price of securities. You are not that secure as to the formulations of your own self-understanding. You see that the possessive language to which you are at home is to be abandoned; you feel the warmth of deep religious experience in the so-called non-Christians. To a Christian this may be a shock. This shock is one of growth and maturity.