

## **Dialogue and Spirituality: Can We Pray Together?** **Dr. S. Wesley Ariarajah**

Chapter 3 of *Not Without My Neighbor: Issues in Interfaith Relations*  
Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1999, pp. 26–58

When I was minister of the Moor Road Methodist church in the southern part of Colombo, I had in my congregation a person by the name of Retnanantham, who had retired as a railway engineer and now spent most of his time promoting interfaith understanding, especially between Christians and Hindus. During my early years in Colombo, he introduced me to a number of Hindu groups. They would invite me during the Christmas and Easter seasons to bring the message of these Christian festivals to hundreds of Hindus who gathered for their weekly worship events. When I asked my friend if the Hindus would not feel "nervous" about asking a Christian minister to speak at their worship events on the basic tenets of the Christian faith, he would simply say: "No, it is no problem because they know that you are a 'dialogue person'!"

I recall those events now, some two decades later, with a measure of surprise. My talk would come in the middle of the *bhajan*, the singing together of devotional songs. On such occasions I would begin with a story from Hindu mythology or with some scriptural references or sayings from Hinduism to create the ambience and not to be too discontinuous with what was going on. I would, however, talk about the significance of Christmas and Easter for Christians, also indicating the universal significance we attach to these events. Even though I always "preached the gospel" (for what else can one do on the themes of Christmas and Easter?), they continued to invite me, also to speak on other occasions -- a courtesy they do not normally extend to Christian ministers.

I wish now, twenty years later, that I had asked for their definition of a "dialogue person". I wonder what Retnanantham had told them a Methodist minister who is also a "dialogue person" would do and not do in a Hindu worship context. I left Colombo in 1978, without ever asking that question. Retnanantham died a few years ago.

But I have always admired the courage and strength of the Hindu worshipping community in its openness to receiving the Christian message. Hinduism is indeed a tolerant and hospitable religion, but here more than hospitality was at work.

As mentioned earlier, at the personal level I had been introduced to hospitality at one another's worship already at KKS, when the next-door children would join us at family prayers, and we from the Christian family were always welcome to be present at the evening Hindu *puja*. But as a minister, I could not return such hospitality to Hindu groups in Colombo and ask their leader to come and give the message of *Deepavali*, *Sivarathiri* or *Krishna Jeyanthi* and other significant Hindu festivals at a Christian worship service or even at a monthly prayer meeting in a Christian home.

I might ask the Hindu Swami from the Ramakrishna mission or the Buddhist monk from the Wellawatte Vihara to speak in the church hall on "national reconciliation" or "world peace". But if I were to ask them to speak on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna or the Lord Buddha, it would provoke strong protests in the congregation. I was aware that some

members of the congregation were not too happy that "their minister" was "present at Hindu worship", even if it was to give the Easter message. They would rather it was done in the market square.

In such a context a Christian worshipping or even praying with a Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim would be considered by many Christians as a "betrayal" of faith or, if they are in a more charitable mood, as a "dilution" of faith.

### **Why such hesitation?**

Why are most Christians hesitant about participating in the worship or an act of prayer that originates from another faith tradition?

Five areas can be lifted up as reasons at the root of much of the objection. I would characterize these as theological, biblical, liturgical, cultural and psychological. The *theological* reasons for the especially Protestant Christian reluctance to engage in worship with a person of another faith stem from a negative evaluation of other religions as human attempts to find God. They are not based on God's self-revelation, and are therefore expressions of human sin and self-centredness. When approached from this theological perspective, the prayer life of these religions, according to some Christians, is "not valid", "not directed to the true God", "superstitious"; and their prayers are "not appropriate for us, because they are not directed through Jesus Christ".

Such a blanket negative evaluation of other faiths creates many problems for our understanding of God, the nature of God and God's providence, and for our belief in the Holy Spirit as the "giver of life". Such an evaluation of other faiths directly questions one of the streams within the Bible that unambiguously affirms the universal communion between God and all of God's creation.

The negative attitude, however, is deep-rooted, and I have noticed that Christians develop ad hoc theological asides to deal with the issue. Some Christians, though deeply committed to monotheism, live with a "functional polytheism", assuming that the Hindu and the Muslim are praying to "other gods". Others insist that while their prayers may be sincere, a "proper understanding of God" is necessary in order for the prayer to be effective, which of course they do not find in other traditions. At the extreme end there are those who even today would claim that prayers not directed through Christ are "misguided" and are "of the devil". To pray with others is, for them, the ultimate theological compromise that destroys all the rationale for the Christian faith, its witness and mission. In relation to Buddhism, where one cannot discern a clear doctrine of God, common prayer would amount to apostasy.

While theology remains the bedrock, the most vocalized objections are, however, *biblical*. Here again the arguments are all too familiar. The injunction "you shall have no other Gods before me" is written into the very first commandment with the warning "you shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God..." (Ex. 20:4ff.).

In responding to the Hindu-Buddhist context, this prohibition is reinforced by the many passages that prohibit the worship of idols and give explicit instructions to tear them down. As part of the process of settling down in the land of the Canaanites, the Israelites were asked to "destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places" (Num. 33:52).

Few Christians take the trouble (because of the theological reason) to understand the meaning and significance of images in Hinduism and Buddhism. Nor do they pay attention to the use of images within the Roman Catholic tradition or to the use of icons in the Orthodox churches as "windows into God". For them the very presence of any image constitutes a turning away from the Lord God to the golden calf. This would be confirmed for them in the New Testament in such statements of Paul as: "... What fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

As often in such use of the Bible, the fact that there are other passages and themes that might help us to have more openness on this issue is ignored.

The biblical reasons, however, also run at a deeper level and relate to such concepts as "covenant", "election", "people of God", "revelation", "the one mediator", "no other name" and so on. The "missionary mandate" is seen as the decisive pointer to the gulf between Christians and others in such matters.

It is not difficult to collect a body of biblical passages and concepts that would militate against any thought of engaging in worship with peoples of other faith traditions.

The *liturgical* reason is perhaps the most immediate problem that a person who wants to participate in worship across religious traditions begins to experience. The word "liturgical" is used here in a special sense to denote the symbol system, rites, rituals, gestures and the structure, shape and form of worship that each religious community has evolved in the course of translating its faith into a sustained worship life, especially in community. Forms of worship in various religious traditions are very different and are not easily understood or entered into by those outside. Even the very concept of worship and the elements that go into it differ widely among religions.

The *cultural* reasons are very similar to the liturgical one. I know Christian friends from the West who would enter a Hindu temple at the height of the *puja*, when all the devotees are in a state of total rapture, and find the whole affair completely "chaotic"; some cannot imagine "worship" when the devotees are not seated in rows of pews listening to a preacher. Similarly there are Hindus who attend Christian services and find them no more than public lectures interspersed with prayers and hymns. Every time I entered a mosque at prayer time, even in Sri Lanka or India where I share with Muslims the general culture of the land, I had felt myself a "stranger" to the place. There is an "attitude of prayer" that is unique to the Islamic community and cannot be duplicated elsewhere or shared by those outside the fold.

The cultural dimension of a religion functions as a culture within a culture. Therefore, not only friends from the West but also Indian Christians have a hard time entering into the spirit of Hindu worship. This is not peculiar to the interfaith situation. I know Protestant friends who have, during ecumenical visits, attended Russian Orthodox or Greek Orthodox

liturgical services and come out of them totally bewildered and even confused by their very richness.

For most Christians in the third world there is also a psychological block about participating in worship with other religious communities. First it has to do with the fact that many of these religious traditions are what they themselves or their ancestors had "left behind" to follow the "true faith" that was presented by the missionary or Christian evangelist. If they had believed that God listened to the prayer of the Hindu they might not have converted to Christianity. Second, one of the fears drilled into Christians, especially in the context of the predominance of other faiths, is the fear of compromise, of syncretism and the dilution of the Christian faith. Interfaith worship appears as a classic example of such compromise. And last, one faces the problem of identity. While Hindus, Muslims and Christians look alike and act in much the same way in their day-to-day life in society, their places of worship and the worship life itself give them particular identities as individuals and communities. There is something distinctive about the way each religious tradition has evolved in its worship life; its adherents see worship as one of the secure sources of identity, one they would like to retain and cherish.

It is interesting, in this context, to observe immigrant communities all over the world attempting to reproduce as much of their worship life as they possibly can in their new situations. The Buddhist population in a city in the United States, for example, may not be large, but still, despite the fact that they all follow Buddhism, the Thai, Vietnamese, Tibetan, Sri Lankan, Korean, Chinese, Cambodian and other versions of it are all reproduced in the city both in visible structures and in worship life. Some wonder why they spend so much of their scarce resources in building separate temples, especially when in new minority contexts an ecumenical expression of Buddhism would be far more desirable and viable. Separate structures, however, come up in city after city. This is not because they are anti-ecumenical; it is simply an issue of identity. Nor is it peculiar to Asians. When I first came to Geneva and wanted to worship in the English language, I had the chance to choose from among the Scottish, English or American cultural types!

### **A changing landscape**

By the time I joined the WCC staff worship across religious barriers had already become an issue in quite a few member churches, especially in the Western hemisphere. Several factors have contributed to this development. The most important among them is the increased contact between Christians in the West and Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and people of other faiths who had come to live among them as immigrants. Many who have had no immediate contact with these communities now had their first experience of them as praying, believing and worshipping communities with long spiritual histories. These religious traditions and some of their contemporary movements also engaged in missionary activities, offering alternatives to Christianity and secular humanism. Gradually all this led to a growing interest on the part of the younger generation of Christian "spiritual seekers" to try out meditation, yoga and the like as supplements to their Christian faith.

Today interfaith encounters, mixed marriages and the common search for peace during times of conflict give rise to situations where prayer or some form of worship is called for as part of the right response. The expectations on such occasions differ vastly, resulting in

rather confused and even conflicting understandings of what is meant by "inter-religious prayer" or "inter-religious worship".

In a recent meeting jointly organized by the Office of Inter-religious Relations of the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Thomas Thangaraj gave what he called "five scenarios" that the phrase "interreligious prayer" would bring to the mind of many Christians.(1)

*First*, some would consider the very presence of Christians in acts of worship of other traditions as a measure of participating in inter-religious prayer. For them presence includes involvement. Those who are opposed to inter-religious prayer are not likely to enter places of worship belonging to other traditions; even if they do, they will not remain there when an act of worship takes place. When the Dialogue Sub-unit held multilateral dialogue meetings, we would announce in advance which of the religious communities would be leading prayers each day. The prayers were held as the first event in the morning so that, while people of other traditions willing to be participants or to be present as observers could do so, others might join the meeting at the end of the prayers. This has nothing to do with over-sensitivity on the part of the organizers of the dialogue. Many would openly complain if they were "trapped" or "forced" into a situation of having to be present at other people's worship. They see this as an act of compromise. Therefore in all such meetings we would announce the options in advance: "To be involved to the extent the community leading the worship is able to invite us to participate", "to be silent observers", or "to be absent". We always had candidates for each of those options. The *second* understanding of inter-religious prayer for many Christians is the use of rituals, gestures, readings and prayers from other religious traditions.

Some years ago I was asked to conduct a workshop on prayer. I gave the participants a few prayers and asked them to identify the authors and if possible the context of those prayers. One of them was the following:

This is my prayer to thee, my Lord -- Strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart. Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows. Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service. Give me the strength never to disown the poor. Or bend my knees before insolent might. Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles. And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love. (2)

Several participants thought that it was a prayer of St Francis of Assisi. Other responses included St Teresa of Avila, "a Christian saint" whose name they could not remember, Martin Luther, and "a verse from a hymn by Charles Wesley". The group was surprised to learn that it was from *Gitanjali* by the celebrated Hindu Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore.

It was interesting that none of them would attribute such a prayer to sources outside the Christian tradition, and of course there was no expectation that a prayer "belonging" to another religious tradition would be used in a Christian workshop on prayer.

If I used a prayer from the *Upanishads*, *Tiruvagasam* or a Sufi saint in the pulpit without identifying the source, there would be no adverse comment; and if there was a reaction it would be appreciative -- "that was a beautiful prayer that you used today". But were I to identify the source of the prayer as Hinduism or Islam, that would provoke strong criticism among many parishioners, who would consider it an "interreligious prayer" !

The *third* scenario is the normal one in inter-religious gatherings, consultations and national events where a multifaith group decides to have moments of prayer or is called upon to pray. The most widely reported instance in recent years was the call for a Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi (1986) by Pope John Paul II. What happened there is along the model that has been in use in many interfaith gatherings, where the integrity of the worship tradition of each faith is respected, but the prayers are offered in the presence of other faith communities.

The *fourth* type has been a challenge to many teachers and chaplains of schools (in some parts of the world), hospitals and prisons, who are called to lead prayers at gatherings of people drawn from different faiths. Here a multifaith audience is already in place, or a context of openness may be taken for granted, and the leader's task is to design a mode and content of prayer that is both inclusive of and sensitive to the faiths of those present. Given the diversity of religious traditions and their approaches to worship, this has never been an easy task.

The *fifth* scenario is of more recent origin. Here people seek to go beyond the model of successive prayers in the presence of all to the possibility of "praying together". Several attempts have been made to prepare interfaith prayer services for persons from different religious traditions. The attempt in this area has been along two lines. The first is an attempt to include in one act of worship elements from different traditions. Thus, the invocation might come from Hinduism, a song from the Christian tradition, reading from the Quran, prayers from Sikhism and the blessings from Buddhism. The second involves the difficult task of producing new texts, prayers and songs that would be "acceptable" to all the groups participating in the worship.

The fifth scenario represents both the desired goal of interfaith worship and the intractable problems in attempting it. Those against inter-religious prayer have accused the first method within the fifth scenario as syncretistic and the second as going for the lowest common denominator thus missing out on the central elements peculiar to each of the religions represented.

What then should we say? Is inter-religious worship or prayer a pointless pursuit that will in the end leave everyone dissatisfied? In spite of all the pressures of living, working and struggling together, should we decide that when it comes to praying we must maintain our separate identities and consider our ways and forms of worship as necessary and unchangeable? Will attempts at interfaith prayer eventually lead to the watering down of all our worship experiences?

The reluctance is of course understandable. And because of it many persons, especially in Christian leadership, participate in interfaith worship events with visible uncertainty and hesitation. I have watched Christian leaders participate in interfaith worship events; their body language conveys much more than what is said. Although some have gradually grown into it, many of them participate in interfaith worship with question marks written all over their faces! Some of them go up the stage much the same way children go to school for the first time. Many stand up there, alongside other religious leaders in full regalia, with a "when-will-this-thing-be-over?" expression, desperate to be backstage before any of their own congregation appear at the show. To any discerning person, some of the religious leaders at interfaith worship events appear to be there because of "diplomatic necessity" rather than any sense of conviction. Perhaps that is precisely what they would like to convey to their reluctant congregations, who might be wondering what in the world their bishop is doing up there with a Shinto priest, a Buddhist monk and a Hindu swami.

This is not just being frivolous. I have myself been a participant in many interfaith worship situations in all of the five scenarios described above, and have had the opportunity both to experience and observe first-hand what goes on. Part of the problem has to do with the different understandings within the religious communities on how much participation in another religious ritual is possible. In Japan, for example, it is common for a Buddhist to feel completely at home while participating in a Shinto or Christian worship event. While Christians are unwilling to share the consecrated elements with persons who are not part of their religious community, Hindus would, at the end of the *puja*, bring the *prasad* (food first offered to God during the *puja* ) and offer it to all who are present at worship, and might even be offended if the hospitality is turned down.

When I was minister of the Methodist church in Jaffna, one of the staff of the overseas division of the Methodist Church in Britain came to visit the Jaffna church. One afternoon we decided to tour Jaffna. When we arrived at the Nallur Hindu temple, we noticed that the priest was performing a private *puja* for an extended family of about twenty persons. Our visitor wished to see what was going on, and we watched from a respectable distance. When the *puja* was over the priest offered the *prasad* to the family members, and seeing the European woman and me standing at some distance, began to approach us to offer it to us as well.

I could see my friend was in a state of panic. This was her first visit to a Hindu temple, she had told me, and I had not anticipated that it would lead to such an embarrassing situation. We had only moments to decide how to meet it, and no possibility of engaging in a theological discourse!

"You are free to turn it down," I whispered to her: "He will understand. I am receiving it because the issue here is hospitality, not food offered to idols."

I received in the traditional fashion and she followed, her hand slightly shaking. We had a fascinating discussion later about the range of options available to us and what it might have meant for the person extending hospitality. As she boarded the train to go back to Colombo, she thanked me with a broad smile saying, "In Jaffna, you `kill' people with

your hospitality!" She must have meant the warmth of friendship and the lavish hospitality she was offered in many Jaffna homes. But somehow I could not help connecting it to the Hindu temple. There is hospitality, also in interfaith relations, that can be quite overwhelming.

While withdrawing to the comfort of our own worship world does appear to be the easiest option, even reluctant religious leaders are up there on the stage, even if only for diplomatic reasons, because we do have a new reality today that can no longer be ignored. As communities live in close proximity and face common issues and common problems, and share common visions for a just, reconciled and peaceful world, they come under enormous pressure also to pool their spiritual resources in dealing with them. In any case, in an increasingly multifaith world we constantly face situations that demand new initiatives and new ways of holding our faith in relationship to others. Isolationism, including in the religious and spiritual spheres, can be practised today only if we are prepared to opt out of society, or are willing to participate in it only on our own terms.

### **What then should we do?**

#### **Dimensions of the issue**

In the work of the dialogue programme of the WCC we felt that the first and most important task in this area is to sort out the language and meanings given to words which create part of the confusion that prevails. In my own treatment of the subject so far in this chapter I have used the words "prayer" and "worship" interchangeably, only because they are in fact used in that way in many of the discussions and publications. The way forward lies in having greater clarity on what we mean by such words as "spirituality", "spiritual disciplines", "prayer", "worship", "liturgy" and so on, and on what is in fact called for, and not called for, in interfaith situations.

#### **"Prayer" and "worship"**

Anthropologists say that all human beings in all periods of history have had some practice of prayer. The urge to pray comes from their sense of the mystery that surrounds them in creation and of their own awareness of self-transcendence. It is said that even when more and more scientific explanations are found for the natural processes in creation, the miracle of life, its complexity and its purposefulness continue to fascinate human beings. So does the mystery of life and death, leading to the popular statement that human beings are incurably religious, even when they refuse to give it a label.

"Prayer" in this context is the attempt by human beings to be in communion or communication with the sacred, the holy, the Other, in common parlance, with God. In this respect "prayer", in the strict sense of the word, is the universal aspect of religion. "Prayer to religion", it is said, "is what rational thought is to philosophy." It is the language of the heart, the response to the miracle of life. Even though not all people necessarily engage in an active and conscious prayer life, it is an inalienable part of being human to have an "attitude" of prayer, especially when the human heart is elevated by the sense of the mystery of life or confronted with the reality of the finitude of life.

Human beings thus are "praying animals". When the very last bit of that true sense of prayer dies in them they turn into brutes, unleashing unimaginable suffering on other humans. It is not without significance that such acts are characterized as "brutal". Animal lovers today, however, are critical of our use of the word "brutal". They point out that in so far as animals generally follow the laws of nature, there are fewer "irrational killings" in the animal world. They would rather use the word "monstrous" to describe the acts of people who cannot or do not any longer pray. In other words, prayer is a "human" activity; the urge to pray is so universal that it transcends national, cultural and religious barriers.

"Worship", on the other hand, normally does not refer to a general quest, but to an ordered response to a realized experience of the Sacred within a specific religious community. It is significant that the word "worship" is generally used to refer not to acts of individuals but of communities. Here the emphasis is not on "search", "quest", "exploration" and so on, but on "praise", "thanksgiving", "adoration" and the "confession of faith". Every worshipping community has a "story" to tell. In worship, therefore, a community celebrates the central event that had been their "window" into the Divine. For the Jewish community it is the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai, to the Muslims the revelation of the Quran, to the Christians the revelation in Jesus Christ, to the Hindu what the seers "saw" in the Vedas, and so on. Thus, worship is not an open-ended activity; it has points of reference; it is built on a story which is celebrated in myths, symbols, rites and rituals. Much of what happens in worship is meaningful only to those who share the "story".

A powerful illustration of this truth is recorded by David Brown, the late bishop of Guildford, England, when he writes about his relationship with Muslims:

My distance from Islam came home to me in a sad but profound way one evening in Khartoum, when I went to the home of a Muslim leader. There were some thirty men sitting at ease in the courtyard and for an hour or more we enjoyed an open discussion about religious matters. Then the time came for the night prayer, and they formed ranks to say it together. I asked if I might stand with them, but the *Shaikh* told me I could not do so, since I did not have the right "Intention" (*niyya*). I had to remain standing at the edge of the courtyard. Even though I have walked on the approaches of Islam for over 30 years I can only speak of it as a stranger. (3)

The story is as moving as it is revealing. The Muslims are aware that the bishop has a full grasp of Islam and knows how to engage in Islamic prayer. They also know him as a person who had sympathetically accompanied Islam and Muslims for more than thirty years. Here they were not dealing with a "stranger" to them or to Islam. And still the bishop, in so far as he subscribes to the Christian "story", does not have the *niyya*, the right "intention", to be able to join the prayer line. To join that line, he has to be part of "their" story.

Thus even though the word "prayer" is used, the bishop was encountering Muslims at "worship". It is the "private space" of that religion where others would be out of place. I have also been in situations where Christian priests had to explain to Hindus attending Christian worship why they could not be invited to come forward and receive the eucharist.

Unfortunately, since much "prayer" takes place within the context of "worship" and some communities use the word "prayer" to indicate their "worship life", it is difficult to draw a hard and fast line between the two. There is, however, a growing awareness of the need to make the distinctions between what is "internal" to the life of a religious community and where the community can be open to others both in the extending and accepting of invitations to pray together. Many Christians today are looking for clear guidance on this issue.

### **Pastoral dimension**

The issue of inter-religious prayer thus is no longer a privileged question engaging the attention of specialized groups engaged in interfaith explorations. The pastoral dimension of the issue is what has concerned the WCC's Office on Inter-religious Relations and the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue.

Together they started in 1994 a four-year joint reflection and study of the issue, beginning first to document what has been happening in the churches, collecting worship materials and guidelines that were being used, and calling on those engaged in interfaith prayer to recount their experiences.

This was followed by two events in Bangalore, India, and Bose, Italy, where practitioners of interfaith prayer, biblical scholars and theologians sought to open up the issues involved and to show directions in which they might be followed up in the future.<sup>(4)</sup>

The Bangalore statement puts forward the pastoral dimension as the key issue:

Participation in inter-religious prayer is not an optional activity restricted to an elite group, but an urgent call for a growing number of Christians today, and should be a matter of concern for all Christians. In the pluralistic world in which we live, concrete situations of everyday life provide opportunities for encounters with people of living faiths. These include interfaith marriages, personal friendship, praying together for common causes (in the context of war, racism, human rights violations, AIDS, etc.), national holidays, religious festivals, school assemblies, meetings between monastic communities of different faiths and gatherings at interfaith dialogue centres. Sometimes, it is prayer for a common purpose, perhaps in a crisis situation, which draws people of different faiths to pray together. Often, the experience of working together on a social project leads to a desire to pray together. In all these contexts, respect, honesty, transparency and openness nurture inter-religious prayer and make it possible. <sup>(5)</sup>

I have quoted the above to emphasize that the question "Can we pray together?" is not an academic one; it will become more and more important in the future to all who believe in prayer. In Bangalore, the searching of the scriptures showed that in the Bible there are passages that appear to be against such prayer, and yet others that present God as the compassionate one who listens to the cry of every human heart. The Bible affirms the

particularity of the call of a people to a specific faith and discipleship; yet, it stresses God's intention to bring all things to fulfilment.

Having weighed the context of the churches and the witness of the scriptures, the Bangalore statement had this to say in conclusion:

While recognizing that the development of inter-religious prayer will be related to particular situations, we see a great value in the World Council of Churches Office on Inter-religious Relations and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue continuing to provide opportunities to share and reflect on this experience, so that churches together joyfully respond to the new opportunities of not only meeting and working with members of other religions, but also, where appropriate, praying with them. Such prayer, we believe, is a symbol of hope, which both reminds us of God's purpose and promise for justice and peace for all people and calls us to offer ourselves to be used in this work. (6)

The meeting at Bose, a year later, went deeper into the theological issue and of the different kinds of situations of prayer that call for different approaches. The Bose statement too affirmed the importance of the issue to churches and other religious communities:

As prayer transforms our life, so inter-religious prayer should have a positive impact on the life and relationship of our communities. As we move into deeper encounters in inter-religious prayer, we might experience it as a journey, realizing that prayer in itself is open-ended, a sign into the mystery of God. (7)

### **Spirituality and spiritual disciplines**

My own exploration of this subject within the WCC, however, did not begin with the question of inter-religious prayer, but with the issue of "spirituality". Following the Vancouver assembly of the WCC (1983), the WCC's programme on Renewal and Congregational Life began exploring the concern for "a spirituality for our times". The word "spirituality" was a rather vague notion, and soon there was awareness among those dealing with the issue of the widespread use of the word among people of other religious traditions. Of even more interest was the realization that in recent times many of the persons within the church who had chosen to undertake a "spiritual journey" or wanted to explore the "spiritual dimension of life" had opted for "spiritual disciplines" or "spiritual practices" that they had discovered from within other religious traditions. It was interesting to discover, for example, that even though meditation had been part of the church's tradition, many Christians were looking to Buddhist or Hindu meditation techniques to centre their life in God.

The more we probed, the more we discovered that there had been an inter-religious "dialogue of spirituality" that had not received the attention of the church or even of those concerned with dialogue.

Ann E. Chester, in an essay on "Zen and Me", says that she had to turn to Buddhism for help because of the overemphasis within Christianity on the spoken word, which in her view tends to limit God to the meaning of the words spoken.

But "centring down", as the Quakers put it, remaining at the "still point" within, completely open to the all-pervading energy of God, was to be in touch with myself, with who I really am; it is also to give God full freedom to help me become what I am capable of being... Zazen has helped me to seek that depth, to be at home there, to deepen it, to act out of it. (8)

What has been the story within the church of spiritual journeys that had been helped by spiritual practices originating from other religious traditions? What has been the experience of those who have undertaken that journey for long periods of time?

In December 1987 the Dialogue programme, in collaboration with the programme on Renewal and Congregational Life, brought together about twenty persons (in Kyoto, Japan) from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions who had spent at least ten years of their lives engaged in spiritual practices from other religious traditions. The group also included persons who, while practising such disciplines, were engaged with others in the struggles for justice and peace.

The stories they shared were fascinating. Some have been drawn to use other spiritual disciplines because, living in proximity to others (as in Asia), they were impressed by the visible manifestation of authentic spiritual life in them. Others were attracted by the cultural affinity and roots of the spiritual practices of other traditions, such as the kind of music, art, gestures, rites and meditative practices that constituted their spiritual discipline. Many from the West were motivated in their spiritual journey "by a sense that there was 'something missing' in the spiritual life of our churches, a shallowness or emptiness, or a lack of deepening guidance". They said that especially in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions they found "forms of practice and prayer that have been both challenging and enriching". (9)

As the result of intense sharing of such experiences of benefits, problems, risks and possibilities of venturing into the spiritual practices of other traditions, the group was able to make these three affirmations in its final statement:

First, we affirm the great value of dialogue at the level of spirituality in coming to know and understand people of other faiths as people of prayer and spiritual practice, as seekers and pilgrims with us, and as partners with us in working for peace and justice.

Second, we affirm the deepening of our own Christian faith in the journeys that have taken us into the spiritual life and practice of other faiths. In walking along with the other, with the stranger, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have had, in our sharing, the experience of recognition. We have seen the unexpected Christ and have been renewed.

Third, we affirm the work of the Spirit in ways that move beyond the Christian compound and across the frontiers of religion and take us into creative involvement with people of other faiths in the struggles of the world.(10)

Even though this meeting brought together persons who have had long experience in this field and have become experts in the art of integrating, practising and expressing deep Christian convictions through spiritual practices from other faiths, the issue itself is of immediate interest to many Christians in their day-to-day life.

Is it all right to meditate using Buddhist guidance on meditation? Can I practice yoga and still be a Christian? Is it permissible to read other scriptures and spiritual writings, and will they contribute to my spiritual development?

Ultimately such questions are about the self-sufficiency of our own traditions. They raise the question whether there are areas in which the spiritual life and practices of our own traditions can be corrected, enriched and enhanced by interaction with others.

When I was a student and was used only to Methodist worship, I was under the impression that this was the most adequate form of Christian worship. At college, out of necessity, I worshipped according to the Anglican tradition and came to a new understanding of liturgy, and to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of both forms of worship. In the ecumenical movement I have encountered many other forms, ranging from Quaker meetings to the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox liturgies, which opened even more windows into the manifold ways in which a community might celebrate its faith.

In 1983 I was secretary for worship at the WCC Vancouver assembly. The most important issue we raised at the first meeting of the assembly worship committee was this: The people who come together for worship, around three thousand of them, are from different cultures, speak different languages, sing different songs and come from different confessions with different styles of worship. Should we see this as a problem or as an opportunity? Should we try to overcome the diversity or use it creatively?

That one consideration made all the difference to the assembly's worship life, and the worship at Vancouver became a landmark in ecumenical worship, which has been one of the most memorable dimensions of ecumenical life in recent decades.

Why did the Vancouver worship experience become so meaningful and exciting to so many of the participants?

The reasons are many, the most obvious among them being the simple fact that every confession represented at the assembly experienced its own tradition enriched and enhanced by the way the riches of different traditions and cultures were forged together into acts of worship. People were able to enter into a "fuller" dimension of worship than they had experienced within their own tradition. They also became convinced that they had much more to learn about worship itself.

### **A personal experience**

This truth had already come home to me, at the level of an interfaith encounter, through an interesting episode to which I have returned often, mainly to illustrate the meaning of dialogue.

It too happened in Colombo.

Once while I was walking along the main street (Galle Road) I met one of the Hindu friends that Retnanantham had introduced to me. It was late on a Friday afternoon and we were passing the Hindu temple at Bambalapitiya.

The Hindu friend asked me if I could wait for five minutes while he went into the temple to worship. I agreed, and stayed outside looking at the magazines displayed at the tobacconist near the entrance to the temple. My friend was back in five minutes to continue the conversation we had begun.

Some time later I had to write a paper on Hindu worship and decided to look more closely at what happened in the Hindu temple. Several things struck me that I had not noticed before.

As one enters the temple at the time of the *puja*, the first thing one experiences is the special aroma from the camphor and incense that are being burned in front of the deity. Then, one's eyes are filled with religious sculpture and paintings, the image beautifully clothed and garlanded, and the *arathi*, the lamp that is raised in front of the image several times in circular motions, both as a mark of respect and as the prayer of invocation. The ears are filled with the sounds of the chanting of the *mantra*, the ringing of the bells and the beating of the drums. Now the priest brings to those gathered the *prasad* from the altar (a mixture of milk, water and fruit), and having received it, and having "seen" and "been seen" by the deity (*darshan*), one prostrates oneself on the ground and rises again, invoking the name of the deity representing God at that temple: "*Siva, Siva!*", "*Om Muruga*", "*Om Sakthi*", "*Govinda*" and so on. Once this brief act of worship is over, the devotee is free to leave. I realized that through three thousand years of experimentation Hindus have developed a special "strategy" of catering to all the senses in an act of worship - of smell, sight, hearing, taste and touch - all at once and with much intensity, to help the devotee "to rise to the awareness of standing in the presence of God". If worship has to do primarily with standing in the presence of God, of *dharsana* or seeing and being seen by God, there was no need to tarry much longer. Little wonder that my Hindu friend was able to complete the worship in five minutes.

A surprise awaited me when I shared this with the Hindu friend. Impressed with what I had to say about Hindu worship, he asked if he could come to one of my Sunday services. His contact with Christian worship had not gone beyond school assemblies.

Of course I had to extend to him an invitation to my church at Moor Road at 6:00 the following Sunday where I was to lead the worship and preach. But I was nervous, especially after my "discovery" of the multifaceted nature of Hindu worship catering to all the senses all at once.

At Moor Road church we had a little wooden cross standing on the bare altar table and a vase of flowers. Then there were of course rows and rows of pews. Apart from that, there was nothing to "see", to "smell", to "taste" or to "touch".

I suddenly realized that we Methodists have put all our eggs in the one basket of "hearing". Prayers, hymns, readings, sermons - all cater to the one sense of "hearing". Little wonder, I told myself, that while the Hindu can worship in five minutes, we must take an hour or more, and that on each occasion the sermon must make up for all that is lacking, in order to enable those present to "rise to the awareness of standing in the presence of God".

Well, we may have got used to the "hymn sandwich" (hymn - prayer - hymn - readings - hymn - sermon - hymn), but will a Hindu be satisfied with "one-sense" worship? On Sunday I stuck to the traditional pattern with the usual "stirring" sermon. I saw my Hindu friend seated in the last row. At the end of the service I went around greeting the people, and when I came to my Hindu friend, to my surprise he was deeply excited. It had been a wonderful experience for him. We decided to meet to talk about it. "So what was so wonderful about the worship?", I asked him the next day, wondering if he was being "nice" to me, as we say in Sri Lanka.

No, he was not being "nice" to me. "You have been to our temple," he said, "and you have seen how we come and go during the *puja*. There is no common intention; we all stand there as individuals. But in the church there were some three hundred people all seated quietly with the same intention to pray. And then," he continued, "in the temple we do not read the scripture, the priest does not explain the scripture and apply it to life."

I remembered that in the Hindu tradition teaching and priestly ministries are usually separated. The priest does not teach; he performs the rituals. There is no teaching done with the *puja*. Teaching, when it happens, takes place outside the worship context. He was also impressed with the intercession, how we remembered members in need by name, how we prayed for peace, justice and so on. It had altogether been a spiritually enriching, experience for him. Obviously his other senses had not been complaining! But this was a revealing experience for me. Here was I, a Methodist minister, going into a Hindu temple and discovering dimensions of worship long lost to the Methodist tradition. And here is a Hindu, coming into a Methodist worship to discover dimensions of worship missing in his worship experience.

I often recall this experience when we talk about dialogue in general to illustrate how dialogue leads to mutual correction, mutual enrichment and mutually helpful self-criticism. I also use it to stress the point that Diana Eck, moderator of the WCC Sub-unit on Dialogue, used to make: "We not only need to know the others; we also need the others to know ourselves."

It is no wonder that most people who have ventured into other spiritual traditions have found their own faith enriched, and those who are involved with other faiths see interfaith

worship as something that the churches should take with greater seriousness as they look towards the future.

### **Looking to the future**

For reasons given in the earlier part of this chapter, interfaith worship will continue to be a difficult and controversial issue in the life of the churches. As with the issue of mission, so also with the question of interfaith worship, real change can come only with a more radical reassessment and restatement of the Christian faith for a pluralistic world.

In the meantime, it appears to me that the developments on the ground demand a new approach to worship within all religious traditions. What might be possible and necessary can be represented in three concentric circles, as P.D. Devanandan did when he spoke of creed, cultus and culture, when dealing with the indigenization of the faith.

The inner circle represents the core of liturgical life in which each community celebrates its "story". This in Christian tradition, for example, is the celebration of the eucharist, in which meaningful participation is linked to what Christians believe God to have done through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the religious community's "private space", providing it with distinctive identity and cohesion as a community gathered in celebration. A community may decide to be "hospitable", to allow others to be observers in this space, to maintain an unobtrusive presence, to participate to the extent that the community is able to invite them, and to be open to the witness that the community gives to their faith through the celebration of the "story" that is formative.

Beyond this, and sharing the same centre, should be a second circle, which might be called the community's participation in a "common wealth of spirituality". It is indeed unfortunate that most religious communities, especially at the official level, are reluctant even to "touch" the best spiritual resources and practices available, if they are known to have originated outside their own tradition. Much of this attitude is due to prejudice rather than considered theological reflection. As mentioned earlier, as a pastor I was able to use any number of resources from other religious traditions in a Christian service provided I did not in any way reveal their source. If, however, I were to mention where they are from, all the defences would be up.

The group that met in Kyoto to discuss spirituality in interfaith dialogue witnessed to the fact that it is indeed possible to use other spiritual practices, scriptures, written and symbolic resources to enlarge one's spiritual vistas and to deepen one's religious life. It was significant that they did not feel they were being syncretistic, because all the resources they had acquired from Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and so on, in their experience, enabled them to deepen their own core faith, and also helped them to discover new dimensions of spiritual life and practice.

This has relevance also to the gospel and culture debate. The Kyoto group did not begin with a clear distinction between gospel and culture, and then present the issue as a "problematic" and ask, "And how are we going to relate these two?" That kind of approach has plagued ecumenical discussions from the beginning. It makes the assumption that there is a "gospel" that is culture-free, and "culture" that can be extricated from what it

expresses. Since the gospel is about incarnation it can only exist as expressed within a culture, and any encounter of its challenge can only happen from within some culture. The question then is, "Now that I have responded to the challenge of the gospel, how can that find expression in my life? How can I 'be rooted and grounded in love' and have 'the power to comprehend the breadth and the length and the height and the depth' and 'to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge' and so 'be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19)?

No spiritual resource or practice needs to be "out of bounds" in the exploration and expression of that love simply because it originated outside one's own tradition. I have myself been deeply moved by the depth of devotion and the enormous sense of the overwhelming grace of God that is witnessed to in the Hindu scriptures like *Tevaram*, *Tiruvagasam*, and the penetrating ethical-moral analysis and guidance given in the *Tirukkural*. I have had no difficulty turning to them often, as I turn to the Bible. The fact that these Hindu scriptures name the One beyond all names as "Sivan" has never bothered me. Syncretism is not innately present in other resources, as many seem to imply. Syncretism has to do with what one does with these resources and what one does with one's own faith in embracing them. Religions are not fortresses to be defended; they are springs for the nourishment of human life.

While most religious communities, certainly at the official level, are still very nervous about moving in that direction, the barriers to such spiritual practices are constantly being breached by the younger generation in its search for an authentic spirituality. There is a need to lower all barriers so that the spiritual resources of all religious traditions will become the common property of all.

Some would have great difficulty with this suggestion because they believe that what happens in the second circle would be truly authentic for any religious community only when it flows out of and is an expression of the faith at the core. Otherwise, they would argue, the result is eclecticism, a curious, confused and unproductive amalgam of "practices" rooted in nothing except the practice itself. Then there are also practices in all religions that are considered to be superstitious, or contrary to fundamental values upheld by one or another of the religious traditions. In KKS, while I used to be deeply impressed by the *thevarams* sung at our neighbour's house, I was put off by the animal sacrifices offered at the *Mariamman* temple some distance from home - another dimension of religious expression that passes as Hinduism. Not all practices are "spiritual" simply because they are "religious".

These considerations have been at the heart of the traditional objection to openness to the spiritual practices of other religions. The Kyoto group, however, felt that this is a theoretical issue, raised mainly by those who have not undertaken such spiritual journeys. As in everything else, in spiritual practices too there is need for discernment, discrimination and rejection. What we are faced with, in the traditional approach, is an indiscriminate fear of anything that is not "ours".

For the Kyoto group, such fear appeared empty because they found that the practices they had adopted only deepened their awareness, commitment and rootedness to the centre. They also found that, without that freedom to explore, they were confined to a narrow understanding of the centre, defined within some culture in some period of history. In fact genuinely indigenous and contextual theologies can arise only within that space of freedom and exploration. Otherwise indigenous theologies may continue to look like vases of flowers plucked from the neighbours' gardens, rather than the flowering plants that draw nourishment from the different soils in which the gospel is planted.

There will of course be eclecticism, the irresponsible and unproductive amalgam of practices merely to satisfy one's curiosity. There could be expressions of religious life that not only stray from but even betray the core faith. But these do not happen only when one moves beyond one's tradition to explore spirituality. False religion, ceremonial religion, betrayal, syncretism and apostasy are prevalent internally in all religions. Most often it is not what goes in from the outside but what comes from the inside that defiles us. Otherwise why would we need prophets? And "heresies" are important for the life of the church. They arise only in periods in the history of a religion when there is genuine, but bold and daring, reflection on the meaning of the faith, and when concerted attempts are made to enter into a critical dialogic with the culture and the context in which the faith community lives. Genuine "orthodoxy" can only emerge out of genuine "heresies".

We cannot refrain from venturing for the kingdom out of our fear to take risks. We cannot say to the Householder when he returns, "Master, we (I) knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so we (I) were afraid, and went and hid the talent in the ground. Here is what is yours" (Matt. 25:24-25).

The kingdom of God is more daring than that. It is based on the belief that while some seeds will inevitably fall along the path where birds eat them up, on rocky ground where they cannot grow, and among thorns that choke them, there will indeed be a harvest - thirty, sixty and a hundred fold! The birds, rocks and thorns are no reason to stop sowing. Sowing must continue. Without sowing there can be no reaping.

Then comes the third concentric circle, worship in the interfaith context. As we have seen, it has become impossible for religious communities to live in isolation from one another. More importantly, there is a gathering recognition that if religion is to make any impact on the world we live in, religions must cooperate among themselves and bring their efforts and voices together in addressing issues. It is this realization that has resulted in the proliferation of interfaith organizations nationally and globally, and in the emergence of issue-oriented interfaith groups. The strengthening of the interfaith movement is also seen in the intention to hold the Parliament of World's Religions on a more regular basis, in the attempt to set up United Religions to accompany the United Nations, and in such efforts as the drawing up of a global ethic and religious charter to fight discrimination, intolerance and all that leads to genocide. All these developments have brought even more pressure on the issue of interfaith worship and prayer. But religious communities, while acting together on a good many issues, are unable to pray together because their "stories" do not match.

The third circle should address this problem.

Each community has its own "narrative" that defines it. That narrative, as seen earlier, is important to its life, identity and worship. It is the defining narrative of that specific community. And it is only natural that we have such independent narratives as individual religious communities, for all religions evolved either in isolation from others or as reform movements within existing religions needing to have identity in difference. Many of the interfaith efforts over the past decades were meant to promote conversation among these separate narratives and to enable them to respect and give space to each other.

But as communities grow even closer together, there is also the need to create "meta"-narratives that serve the "human story" and the common destiny that is ours as a global community. To go back to KKS, I had no narrative within the religious sphere to make sense of my neighbours as religious persons except, of course, as objects of conversation. At that time I did not know what the problem was. Now I realize that my narrative was too narrow to make sense of the outside world (except in mission) because in it there was no place for any other narratives.

I have studied the great Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. What is fascinating about them, among other things, is that there are numerous stories within the one Story. Any one of those "stories within the Story" would stand on its own, and convey a penetrating insight into human nature or provide an important ethical insight. At the same time they are within the one Story and are essential both to the development of the plot and to the total impact the epic is meant to make on the hearers or readers. Each religion of course has a kind of meta-narrative of its own (like creation - fall - consummation) to situate its core narrative. The problem is that there is no place in them for other stories. The Human Story is of epic proportions. A single story, in which there is no room for any other, cannot do justice to it. If the story is of epic proportions, we need nothing less than an epic on it.

This is not a plea to work towards a universal religion of humankind, or a "call to unite all religions" under some vague ethical or religious notions. One of my tasks at the WCC dialogue desk has been to respond to documents sent to the WCC by people who have found the "Solution to Unite Mankind [sic] under One Religion", "Proposals for Uniting the Abrahamic Faiths", "Proposals for the Spiritual Unity of Humanity" and so on. When these arrived, addressed to the WCC, colleagues in the General Secretariat simply put the stamp "For suitable action" or "Please reply" and sent them to the Dialogue sub-unit. Many of them are the result of reflection and hard work that individuals have put in over several years. Most of them also reveal painstaking research, documentation and sifting of facts and figures on what is happening to religion and religious communities around the world. Often they also show an awareness of the contents of the different faith traditions. Though some of the suggestions are frivolous and naive, a number of them are sincere and serious proposals made by persons who are deeply convinced that the divided and at times conflictual relationship among religious communities do much harm to human life. They often reveal real spiritual concern over the divisions based on religion, and a conviction of

the enormous potential religions have for the healing of the world, if only we could harness their spiritual energies.

The WCC of course is committed to promoting unity among people of a single religious tradition. It was formed as an expression of the unity of the churches and "to prepare the way for a much fuller and much deeper expression of that unity". That process of preparation has gone on for many years. If realism is any virtue, we had it in good measure! Interfaith organizations such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and United Religions Initiatives and all interfaith dialogue programmes seek to bring religious traditions closer together in order to promote understanding and cooperation among them. These are important initiatives and have borne much fruit. But proposals to establish a "common religion for humankind", or to bring "all religions together into unity" are far more problematic. There is at present no mechanism to implement such proposals. They also fail to take serious account of the non-theological and non-spiritual factors that are at the centre of much of our divisions.

Meta-narrative evolves out of the life of the community. The systematization should follow, not precede, experience. Therefore, one can only say that the Story that includes the stories is in its initial stage of evolution. The "proposals" that we receive are not products but the signs that this meta-narrative is "in the making", and that we are in a process where all our independent narratives are being brought together into an epic.

It is little wonder, then, that despite all the difficulties we face in reconciling our stories and our symbol systems, we do have interfaith worship occasions, and interfaith prayer materials and multifaith service orders are being produced. Such prayer/worship is no longer held in secret, hidden from the eyes of officialdom, but in cathedrals, on highly visible national occasions, on TV - and in Assisi. Some of them are led by the heads of religious communities who would, in a theological context, have few or no tools to explain what they are doing! Without a meta-narrative, what they do makes no sense. Inadequate as such acts are, they nevertheless contribute to the evolution of that narrative. In the third concentric circle, then, we are in the unfamiliar territory of interfaith prayer and worship. On many occasions we are called upon to pray, and especially when a calamity befalls a community we dare not refuse to pray together. It will be ambiguous; it will appear to be compromising- it may not fully satisfy any of us in the group; but as praying people, we dare not refuse to pray.

Our need to learn to pray together, however, is not just a matter of expediency, resulting from religious communities increasingly being thrown together because of population movements. Those studying the development of the religious life of humankind are convinced that as a human community we are on the threshold of a new "critical corporate consciousness" of being a global community. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, for example, is convinced that the gradual convergence of different religious communities has now reached the period of "a common religious history" of humankind. There was a time, Smith says, when we could speak of a Christian, Islamic or Hindu religious history, but now they are all becoming "strands" in a total human religious history, for now we are being pushed

to a stage in which every religious person has been opened to the possibility of learning from all the religious traditions. (11)

As the boundaries that strictly and radically separate religious communities begin to weaken gradually, as did denominational boundaries during recent decades, we are entering, even as we enter a new century and a new millennium, a new religious reality of an uncharted territory. In the third concentric circle of our prayer life, then, we are in the wilderness, looking for a new formation, a new sense of who God is, and a new discovery of who we are all together as God's people. For, as St Paul says, we know "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" and that "the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now", even as "we ourselves, who have the first fruit of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redeeming of our bodies".

It is in this context of attempting to link the narrative of the redemption of the Christians in Rome (to whom Paul was writing the letter) to the meta-narrative of cosmic redemption that Paul also confesses that "we do not know how to pray as we ought". Then come the words of encouragement: that the Spirit intercedes "with sighs too deep for words", and that "God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:18-27).

We are where the first disciples were when they were faced with a new reality. Although they were of a community that had prayed for centuries, they went to Jesus and asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." The challenge of praying with others can be no less demanding. The three concentric circles, in the spiritual experience of believers, will be closely inter-related. Believers will also find that they influence one another in all directions.

"Can we pray together?" we asked. It appears that we need to pray our way through to find an answer. This might have been what the group that met on inter-religious prayer in Bose meant in the words that we have quoted above:

As we move into deeper encounters in inter-religious prayer, we might experience it as a journey, realizing that prayer itself is open-ended, a sign into the mystery of God. (12)

#### NOTES:

- 1 M. Thomas Thangaraj, "A Theological Reflection on the Experience of Inter-religious Prayer", in the report of a consultation on inter-religious prayer, *Pro Dialogo/Current Dialogue*, bulletin 98, 1998, 2, pp. 186-88.
- 2 Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (song offerings), London, Macmillan & Co., 1996, song 36, p. 28.
- 3 David Brown, "Meeting Muslims", in *The Churches and Islam in Europe (II)*, Geneva, 1982, pp. 47-48. Quoted in *Can We Pray Together? Guidelines on Worship in a Multi-Faith Society*, London, British Council for Churches/Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths, London, 1983, p. 1.

- 4 Inter-religious Prayer, *Pro Dialogue/Current Dialogue* (joint number), bulletin 98, 1998, 2. This give sthe history of the project, the key presentations made and three evaluations from Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant perspectives. For the statements from Bangalore and Bose meetings see pp. 231-43.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- 8 Ann E. Chester, "Zen and Me", *Spring Wind*, IV, no. 4, winter 1984-85, pp. 25-26.
- 9 Tosh Arai and Wesley Ariarajah, eds, *Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue*, Geneva, WCC, 1989, p. 1.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.
- 11 W.C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, London, Macmillan, 1981. See esp. his chapters on "A History of Religions in teh Singular" and "Religious Life as Participation in a Process".
- 12 *Op. cit.*, p. 243.