

Inter-Faith Dialogue

By Raymond Panikkar*

A. A terminological clarification

- (1) There is only one faith but there are many beliefs. Beliefs are precisely the different expressions of faith.
- (2) Faith saves and cannot be put into words. It belongs to orthopraxy not to orthodoxy. It is more on the side of myth than of logos, though it participates in the two being the work of the spirit.
- (3) Beliefs are culturally bounded. They are dependent on particular cultures and yet have a constitutive claim to transcend them.
- (4) Every belief claims to be the right and true expression of faith so that from the point of view of belief, statement (1) is only acceptable under the assumption that the particular conception of faith given in a particular belief is the true one. This co-optation of faith into belief is a kind of transcendental character of every belief, because the concept of faith is no longer faith but already belief.
- (5) Religions are ways toward salvation. Ways imply a practical side requiring a certain commitment and rely on cer-

* Dr. K. Panikkar had been invited to give comments on Prof. Abe's paper. However, he suddenly became ill in Tokyo and consequently was unable to attend the Consultation. He very kindly gave this paper to the editor following the Consultation, and we are forthwith including it in the Report of the Consultation. Dr. Panikkar is professor of religious science at Hindu University, Benares, India.

tain assumptions of an intellectual nature. Salvation is here understood as that which is considered to be the end, goal, destination or destiny of man, in whatever form it may be conceptualized. A man follows a particular religion because in it he believes he will find the ultimate fulfilment of his life. In that last analysis, there are as many religions as there are human beings. We could call religiousness this personal character of religion.

(6) Religions are sociological units grouping together a considerable number of religiousnesses according to a more or less homogeneous cultural pattern. In other words, religions are sociological units of beliefs, which amounts to saying that they are sociological groups of believers. It all depends where one puts the dividing line. Christianity can be considered as one religion, but equally so can Methodism or, for that matter, a single congregation of a particular Pentecostal sect.

(7) Religious dialogue means an exchange of views and insights by means of concepts expressed in words. It is based on the previous agreement of a certain common ground and tries to widen and deepen such a common ground so as to pinpoint the divergencies and find the locus where possible mutual influences or fecundations may take place.

(8) Any dialogue, the religious not excluded, is dependent on the cultural setting from which the partner speaks. To overlook the different cultures giving expression to the different religious beliefs is to face unavoidable misunderstandings. The first function of the dialogue is to prepare a solid ground where the proper dialogue may take place. The original common ground for the dialogue is what both sides take for granted and finds in

the myth its appropriate expression. Another name for this is the rules of the game.

(9) No inter-religious dialogue can yield any fruit unless it is (at least logically and anthropologically) themselves. This intra-religious dialogue implies the critical awareness that my belief, though for me ultimate and even intentionally exhaustive, does not preclude a free interval or an intellectual perspective (thus a step back) from which my own belief may be seen, judged and even criticized. Furthermore, it implies that, though I do consider it the most complete expression of faith, it may well be the case that it allows for other relatively valid expressions and even that it makes room for an improvement within itself. In other words, only those are ready for a religious dialogue who can critically undergo an internal dialogue within themselves.

B. Some Christian axioms

- (1) Christ is the Lord, but the Lord is not only Jesus.
- (2) The Church is the organism of salvation (by definition), but the Church is not synonymous with the visible Christian Church.
- (3) Christendom is the socio-religious structure of Christianity and as such is a religion like any other religion which has to be judged on its own merits or demerits without any special privilege.
- (4) God wills that all men should reach salvation.
- (5) The means of salvation are provided by the religiousness of the person generally to be found in the religions of the world (old or new).
- (6) There is no salvation without faith, but this is not the privi-

lege of Christians nor of any other special group.

(7) Christ is the only mediator, but He is not the monopoly of Christians; and, in fact, he is efficient and present in any authentic religion under whatever form or name.