

Interreligious dialogue timely for Asia

Need for various religions to communicate should be highlight of 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity'
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The urgent need for interreligious dialogue in Asia should be the highlight of the region's observance of the global "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" taking place Jan. 18 to 25.

Asia is the birthplace of most of the world's mainstream religions, including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Judaism, and even Christianity.

These ancient religions influenced to a great extent the very lives of people in the region. Multiplicity of cultures and diversity of faiths characterize Asia's people.

Unlike the West, which can separate religion from economic, political, and social endeavors, an Asian does not distinguish the dichotomy in his or her life.

An Asian looks at the affairs of life from the perspective of his belief system, and he puts the highest "authority" to the Divine as the giver and provider of life, the director of human destinies, and the ultimate source of law and order, justice and peace in the universe.

The earthly representatives of the Divine — bishops, priests, prophets, monks, imams, lamas — are highly regarded by Asian people as true and legitimate messengers of God's word for humanity and for all creation.

In the context of Asia, these religious leaders do not only have moral authority over people, they also influence and mobilize people to action on behalf of justice and in the transformation of the world.

The late Cardinal Jaime Sin of the Philippines was a classic example when it came to religious authority becoming a player in changing the political landscape of the country.

Asia, however, is also home to the largest human community where the majority live in poverty, hunger, and misery due to the corruption of those running the affairs of state, violent political and social systems, and an economic world order that favors the West.

For these reasons, interreligious encounters have become an urgent need in Asia. It is high time for the various religions to come together and help shape the Asian landscape and turn it into a land "flowing with milk and honey" for its people.

It should be a unity through religious dialogue that builds bridges among peoples of different cultures, ideologies and faiths. It should be a dialogue of life of people who open their hearts in compassion for one another.

It is crucial that Asia's religious men and women take the lead role in facilitating dialogue. This should be the core element for our prayers and actions during the annual celebration of the week of prayer.

The Christian attitude towards the need for inter-religious dialogue in Asia can be modeled on the incarnation, when God from his divine state communed with humanity. Through this mystery, God dialogued with humanity, affirmed the human dignity, and celebrated the divine presence in every human being, irrespective of religion.

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