

To Be a Christian?

QUESTIONING THE PRACTICE OF OUR FAITH

Intent of this event

- ✓ *To help the participants to reflect on what is to be a Christian.*
- ✓ *To jolt ourselves from our complacency and realize the shallowness of our faith and practice.*
- ✓ *To be able re-acceptance and re-affirm our Christian vocation, sort of "grown-up" conversion*

Uses of These Notes

Personal reflection
 Talks and sermons
 Catechism classes
 Faith formation sessions.
 Encounters and recollections
 Confirmation Catechesis

Target Audience

All Christian audiences
 Specially the youth

Introductory note Some Background Ideas Helpful to Conduct this Encounter

After conducting several "encounters" on the topic of "To Be a Christian? What?", specially for younger people, I realized that there are some rather common distorted or lopsided attitudes among Christians about our faith and practice. I describe them here below, in 12 short chapters. They may help you when you to conduct this recollection or deal with akin subjects,

(1) A rather sad and gloomy view our faith:

Christianity is seen as an imposed set of beliefs, practices and ethical obligations. There is little joy in being a Christian. Our faith is not seen as "liberation", but rather as an "imposition".

(2) Lack of religious experience:

Our religious truths have not been personally discovered, experienced, accepted and assimilated. The approach to our faith is "cerebral", conceptual, and philosophical. Our religious beliefs were "introjected" to us in our childhood days through the influence of our parents, teachers and other authority figures.

(3) Our religious practices are, as a whole, a bit too formalistic and ritualistic:

Our stereotyped and mechanical religious practices and rituals have become rather meaningless and irrelevant to many believers.

(4) Beliefs vs. Belief (Faith):

We are people of many "beliefs", yet with little "faith". Our "faith" does not seem to animate our "beliefs". In actual fact, faith - belief in singular - should be the soul of all our beliefs.

(5) Fear of God:

Still in many a Christian heart, there is a lurking fear of God and of his punishments. Very often, sickness, failure, accidents, natural calamities and the like are seen as "punishments" of God!

(6) Compulsive "religiosity" . Sort of an "I have-to-believe" and "I-have-to-practice" attitude, rather than an "I-want- to-believe" and "I -want-to-practice"

(7) Lack of personalized faith and prayer life:

Our relationship with God and with Christ is rather "impersonal". For many, I dare say, God is still an idea, a concept, an object of ratiocination. For many, Christ is not the Living Risen Lord but an ideal, a historical person, the Infant Child, Jesus the Worker, or the Jesus of Nazareth, not the real, living Risen Lord!

(8) Emotionalism and cheap sentimentalism:

One can find a lot of emotions and sentiments in the religiosity of quite many a participant, but unfortunately, they are shallow sentiments; for instance, sweet feelings, tears and empty words. Few of those sentimental outbursts are validated by deep and solid religious sentiments, such as; unselfish love, adoration, self-surrenders, etc. There is a proliferation of "devotions" and a dearth of "devotion".

(9) Superstitious undertones:

Religious practices, sacraments, and devotions – specially confession - are seen, unconsciously of course, I would say, as "insurance policies" against God's wrath. Once we have gone through them, we may feel secure. We have been "insured".

(10) Self-centred spirituality. Novena spirituality:

Religion, prayer to God is meant to get favors! It looks as if God would be there to help us mostly in our material and earthly needs. It's remarkable to see such large crowds of youth attending so many novenas to secure "favors"

(11) Overstress on the power of "prayers" independently from the personal dispositions of the praying subject.

We attribute to some "prayers" a power they do not have in themselves. The disposition and preparedness of the person who prays has been underplayed. They believe more in "Powerful prayers" than in "The power of prayer"

(12) Compulsoriness:

People today, and youth in particular, hate to be forced to do things. Yet, many of our religious practices - the official ones - are compulsory. In some homes too, some religious practices are forced on their children. Thus, they become unpleasant and distasteful. How could we make popular and yet free?

PROCEDURE**Step 1. Introductory Session**

Singing hymns and/or bhajans.

Opening prayer.

Step 2. Personal Work: Filling up the questionnaire

Distribute copies of the questionnaire found below.

Write your answers on the sheets of paper given you

Impress on the participants to do a good job of it. (*The success of today's event depends on the way they reply to the questionnaire*)

Give them time enough to do their work.

A QUESTIONNAIRE**Why I am a Christian**

Write some jottings on the following points

- (1) Why did you become a Christian?
- (2) Why did you remain a Christian till today?
- (3) Do you still want to remain a Christian and why?
- (4) What do you think a Christian is or should be?
- (5) Have you any questions you would like to make about' our faith?
(*Feel free to question any point or aspect of our faith and of our Christian practice*)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5.....

Step 3. Sharing and Discussion**Note for the Moderaor:**

If the number of participants is small say no more than 10, follow the procedure hinted below.

If the group is large, ask for ten volunteers to share their replies to the questionnaire.

Alternatively, if good moderators are available break the larger group into smaller ones and assign a moderator for each group

By turns, group members will share what they wrote under number one of the questionnaire. Members may be asked for clarifications. Discussions and interaction will be entertained only when the sharing of one question is completed. .

They will follow the same method for question (2) and so on and so forth.

After the sharing and discussion on the first 4 questions of the questionnaire is over, give the participants a break

Next, you may hold a question hour to reply to the queries they made under No 5 of the questionnaire.

Step 4 Question Hour and Input

Question Hour.

Take one by one the queries the participants made about their faith, (in question 5 of the questionnaire) and reply to them

Encourage discussion and interaction.

Input

The input could be base on the 12 chapters of the Introductory Note at the start of this notes..

Help the participants to have a brighter and more positive attitude to our faith and practice.

APPENDIX ACTIVITIES

If you have time at your disposal does not skip this step. It is very effective.

Preparation of the Activities

In small groups ask the participants to prepare an activity that exemplifies any of the 12 points mentioned at the introduction note at the start of this file, such as

| | | |
|-----------|------------|----------------------|
| Role-play | Radio-play | Photo-language story |
| Mime | Poster | Etc. |

They may portray in a comic form, in a caricature wise the life and the religious practices of many a Christian.

Presentation of the Activities

When the groups are ready, they will present their activities to the house.

Each presentation will be followed by a discussion, analysis and evaluation.