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“Do Not Bathe Outside the Bath”

Bill Headley, CSSp

Lucky for me that none of my Indonesian colleagues were around when I first saw this notice attached to the bathtub faucet in my hotel room in Jakarta, Indonesia: “Do Not Bathe Outside the Bath.” They might have been offended when I began to laugh aloud. Or, they might have been shocked at my cultural insensitivity. Based on the conventional ways of how things are done in my Baltimore-style American culture, the notice seemed at least puzzling and at most nonsensical.

One needs, to take only one “African/Asian” bath however, for the notice’s admonition to make perfect sense. In case you are not one of these privileged ones who has taken such a bath, allow a brief instruction. First, you need some space about the size of a bathroom in one of our typical suburban homes. Squat down. Take a pail or bucket of water and pour it over yourself. Soap up. Repeat the dousing until the soap is off. Simple, isn’t it? But to take such a bath in a modern hotel would have disastrous consequences for the people in the suite below.

The greatest adaptation a visitor to Indonesia must make is to the fact that the country is profoundly Islamic and the people devout believers. It is interesting to see how they live out their faith in Allah.

Call to prayer

In the mornings, for example, I was roused by the pre-dawn call to prayer carried over outdoor loud speakers rather than by a clattering alarm clock on my bed stand. Even in the busiest of bustling cities, one hears the “call” at different times throughout the day, reminiscent of the thrice-daily *Angelus* bells of my seminary

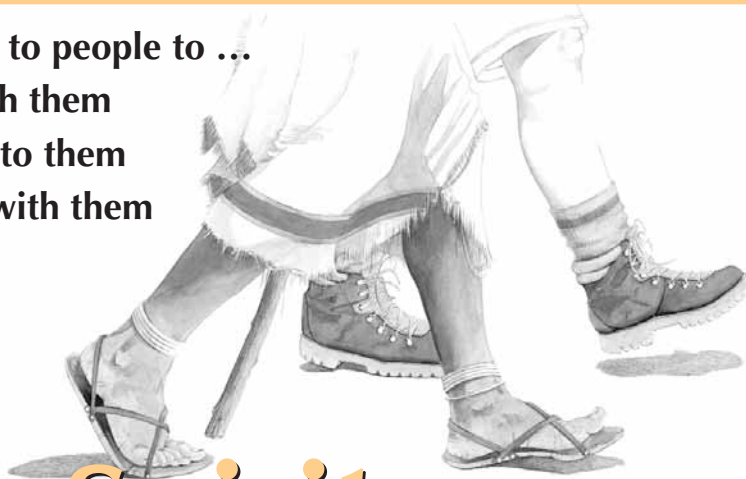
days. It is not uncommon for quite secular business establishments to have prayer rooms for their employees.

Searching out a quiet place to pray in an Indonesian airport one day, I ended up in a prayer room. In itself, the prayer room’s presence in an airport was not unusual, except that this one was totally void of even the starkly non-denominational fixtures of an American airport’s prayer room. I was frustrated in my search for a chair on which to sit in this relaxingly quiet place, though the floor was covered with richly decorated carpets. Upon entering, I was tactfully reminded by an attendant to take off my shoes. I was in a holy place.

I was in Indonesia when the London underground was bombed by terrorists. The Muslim leaders there were very upset at the manner in which the American press associated the atrocities with their Islamic faith. They called a meeting of the leaders of Islamic religious groups with those of other religions in Bali. Thirty nine countries and nearly every major faith were represented. The group was unanimous that true believers in all religions wanted peace on earth.

The desire for reconciliation, forgiveness and peace is the core of all world religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.■

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