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## THE MISSION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IN CHINA

### SECTION V. ONE CHURCH BUT DEEPLY WOUNDED.

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Angelo Lazzarotto, pime.

(This is the second extract from Angelo Lazzarotto's paper on the current situation of the Church in China, presented at the Sedos Mission Research Seminar.)

When, on 9 January 1979 a large gathering of "religious figures" were invited to meet in Shanghai to "expose and criticize Lin Biao and the 'gang of four' for their counter-revolutionary crimes", it was stated that "they (the gang) had ruthlessly persecuted religious workers..., forced false charges and slanders (on them)...". It was then promised that such charges would be redressed "and the victims would have their reputation restored" ("Jiefang Ribao", 12/1/'79). Most people are convinced that the Cultural Revolution period was such a nightmare that it could hardly be repeated. As for many other sectors of the Chinese life, for the believers, all of them, it was an ordeal beyond imagination: disgraced, paraded along the streets and beaten up just because of their faith. That was, in a certain sense, a time of truth, as the Red Guards tried often to force Christians to an outright denial of God and of Jesus Christ. In such a trial, previous internal differences within the Christian communities seemed to fade away, as all were forced to witness personally to their faith.

Now, in the wake of the rehabilitation process, priests and pastors as well as lay leaders of different Christian communities have been able to resume some pastoral duties, both in the country side and in the cities. But even where the assistance of pastors and priests was still wanting, many faithful had started gathering in groups for prayer and worship as the situation allowed.

#### PUBLIC SERVICES AND HOME WORSHIP

In this new phase, it seems that the Protestants are faring better than the Catholics in certain provinces. But they also have difficulties. A Western commentator expressed the fear that the "Three-Self Movement" would meet some problems in the effort to unify the Protestant community: "The tension that is the heritage of the accusation meetings, and of the differences between the 'faithful' and the Christians who compromised or left the faith during the Cultural Revolution period has already created a problem reminiscent of the Donatist controversy of the fourth century Church" ("China Notes", XVII, 2, 1979, p.65). Now, with relatively great numbers of faithful flocking to the various churches already opened and many more Christians which are known to continue meeting in private, the question is asked in the following terms: what is the meaning of the house gatherings? Should they be considered in opposition to the services conducted in the official structures?

Conversations with Protestant leaders and members of the "Three-Self Movement" during recent visits to China, showed a consistent effort to minimize this issue. The present situation, they explain, is a natural consequence of the destruction perpetuated by the "gang of four": being deprived of any possibility to go to church and to have regular religious services, many Christians started looking for alternative opportunities, meeting in small groups wherever they could, reading the Bible and praying together. Though a few churches have now been opened again, they are not sufficient. Besides, many Christians live rather far from the churches. As a matter of fact, they add, quite often the leaders of these house meetings invite a pastor from the church to go and help them. Some Christians who like this type of more informal and spontaneous prayer gatherings attend also the Sunday services in the church. All the leaders contacted were adamant in denying that any reason existed for considering the Protestant communities divided into two types of Church - one official and the other often referred to, by foreigners, as an "underground Church".

An official dislike was sometimes expressed for the private family gatherings, as Jiang Wenhan, chairman of the "Three-Self" Committee of Shanghai, told the dean of the Anglican cathedral in Sydney, Rev. L.R. Shilton, in July 1979: "The government and the "Three-Self" are not in favour of encouraging people to gather in homes, because there were unfortunate experiences in the past. Even when the churches were in operation, we had some small groups meeting in homes. But unfortunately it happened that some of them had political discussions. So the government is not in favour of these gatherings. Therefore, not only the government, but the "Three-Self" as well, is not in favour of having people holding house worship" ("China and the Church today", Sept. '79, p.4).

Most Church leaders, on the other hand, seem to be in favour of allowing the faithful the freedom to continue with informal religious gatherings as well. They try to defuse possible areas of tension by underlying the political role of the "Three-Self Movement", in the hope that the new National Christian Council may help towards a better clarification of roles. It is known that some Christians did not agree with the "Three Self Movement" for political reasons. Significantly, as a Protestant leader said, certain of the faithful would consent to go back to church only on condition that politics be kept out of the religious services.

Worship was unified for all denominations in 1958 (at the time of the "great leap forward"). The resumption of common services still poses some problems, they admit, but things are slowly improving. Bishop Ding Guangxu told a delegation of foreign friends in Nanking in July 1980 that it would be wrong to speak of a "united Church" for the Protestants, as there are theological problems not yet solved, for instance regarding the ministry and the sacraments. He would rather speak of a "post-denominational era", in which Church leaders are determined to proceed gradually towards a fuller unity. During the September 1980 meetings of the Political Consultative Conference, Bishop Ding expressed himself clearly in favour of worship in homes. The acceptance of his suggestion, that religious freedom be guaranteed also for worship held in private homes, would be an important step in the right direction of assuring to all believers the right to practice their religion.

An important factor in the present bold stand of the Christians is the fact that during the past political upheavals they endured the same fate as innumerable intellectuals and cadres and even bona fide Party members. These also had then been branded as enemies of the people, but are now being reinstated in their jobs and their honour. This fact confirms the often beaten up Christians in their conviction that they did belong all along to the "mass of the people". Confronted with the new priorities emphasized today by the leadership, they are convinced that the rediscovered possibility to openly express their faith is part of a development of Chinese society in the right direction, a right which the whole people has earned through so much suffering.

This contributed certainly to giving to many believers their zest and determination in resuming a community religious life unjustly shattered. Yet, the Christian communities remain deeply wounded within themselves, with scars difficult to heal, and with a shadow of anxiety left by the memory of an old praxis which could again return. The repeated assurances about official religious policy cannot leave them without misgivings, when the pre-Cultural Revolution pattern is often proposed as a model to follow. The ordeal of most "church workers" dates back, in fact, to the '50's, especially the years '57-60, during the "anti-rightist" campaigns. Progressive "love the country" campaigns had transplanted into the Church the dialectical principle of "one divided into two", engulfing all aspects of Church life in an internal struggle aimed at promoting revolutionary changes.

Through repeated hard-hitting study courses, Christians were compelled to suggest ways and means to "purify the Church" of imperialistic and reactionary elements. The struggle and denunciation of the "bad elements" was not directly challenging their faith but rather the way they lived it. During the hard years of the now disgraced "great leap forward", many Catholics found themselves up against the "progressive" stand of priests and fellow believers who had decided to accept the leadership of the Party also in the running of Church affairs. Although they had no intention of opposing the legitimate authority of the State, they could not help standing up to defend what they considered a legitimate measure of religious freedom or important principles of Church life. While trying to be true to their conscience, they were accused of undermining the socialist revolution and emarginated; often they were neatly eliminated or sent for long years of "re-education through labour". The formal motivation for the sentence was always political.

Fortunately, rehabilitation has gone a long way since January 1979, although it seems that it has not been enforced consistently everywhere: the recent article in "Guangming Ribao" already mentioned (30 Nov. '80), insists: "Cadres at all levels must respect and protect the rights of citizens to fully believe in religion. They should continue to re-examine and put in order the cases which happened during the Cultural Revolution. They should distinguish the circumstances of all the cases where people have been wronged, (in order to) correct, redress or exonerate them".

There are no comprehensive figures available about rehabilitated believers. Some priests are known to be still in their labour camps. Different "provisional measures", issued in the past, specified several instances in which offenders due for release could be "retained" in the

labour-reform institutions even after they completed their sentences. A directive of the Central Security Office published in the "People's Daily" of 28 Jan. 1979 said that inmates of labour camps who are over 60 years of age, have finished their terms, and are sick, invalid, weak or handicapped, are to be released and allowed to return to their places of origin; moreover, if these people are unable to work, they should be supported by the State. Yet according to a recent report published by the Hong Kong weekly "UCA News" Service (14 Jan. 1981), two priests aged 68 and 74 have been sent back to the camps where they had spent over 20 years; no new specific charge was mentioned. They are Fr. Francis Chu and Fr. Francis Tsai, both from Shanghai. In other cases, the "ex-convicts" are not able to obtain back the residence papers, which would entitle them to the ration tickets for food and clothing, in their home town or city. So, to avoid becoming a dead burden to their relatives, some prefer to go back to the labour camps, where they continue to work and get some salary in a state of relative freedom. It must be remembered that often prisoners are not offered full rehabilitation, but rather an act of clemency. Consequently, many have no right to claim a pension or financial compensation for the long years spent in hard and cheap labour.

But it is known that, besides "patriotic religious workers" who had fallen victims of the Cultural Revolution, also a number of priests and lay faithful who had received heavy sentences during the "anti-rightist" campaigns of the late '50s have been released. Consequently, most people seem to appreciate the improvements presently implemented, and look up with confidence to the national leadership, hoping that they may be able to have the more open policy applied by all lower instances.

Perhaps the best example of this new climate is Bishop Dominic Tang (Deng Yiming) of Canton, released from prison on 8 June 1980 after 22 years and four months of prison. Accused of "counter-revolutionary activities", he spent all these years of detention (seven of which in "solitary confinement"), without having been formally sentenced. Yet, he has no words of recrimination for the past: "I have always believed that I would be released and would be forgiven", he said in an interview soon after returning to freedom. Bishop Tang mentioned some of his "crimes", dating back to the first period of the PRC: opposition to the Korean war and to the harsh treatment reserved to "reactionary elements"; support for the outlawed "Legion of Mary"; but, above all, the fact that he "carried out the 1954 Encyclical letter (written) by Pius XII, which was against the three-autonomies movement in China" ("Hong Kong Standard", 28 June 1980).

#### DIFFICULT QUESTIONS FOR THE CATHOLICS

This brings us to the heart of the matter. This issue appears in fact to be at the root of the crisis which shook the Chinese Church already thirty years ago, at the time of the publication of a so-called Guang Yang Catholic declaration of "reform and autonomy" ("Xinhua", 13 Dec. 1950). Even then, the main issue was clearly the relationship of the local Chinese Church with the rest of the Catholic Church and in particular with the Pope.

A letter issued in February 1951 by the Catholic Central Bureau in the name of the Bishops of China had tried to explain the Catholic position in moderate and understanding terms. But the general situation was complicated by tensions due to the confrontation policy of most Western powers toward the newly born PRC, and by the Chinese participation in the Korean war; things deteriorated quickly, ending with the expulsion of the papal Nuncio, Archbishop A. Riberi (5 Sept. 1951). Three Encyclical Letters by Pius XII (in 1952, '54 and '58), aiming to clarify the position of the Chinese Catholics and to encourage their faith, failed to bridge the gap separating them from the new social reality.

The documents were, in fact, written in firm and uncompromising terms. The third one, which met with great official opposition also on account of the way in which it was distributed in China, was prompted by the momentous decision to go ahead with the first "democratic" episcopal elections and consecrations. The prelates involved in the first ordinations (March 1958) tried to secure a last minute approval by the Holy See. The circumstances of the unfortunate efforts need further investigation. Since then all direct contacts of the Chinese bishops and priests with Rome were frozen. In the climate of the violent political debates marking that period, the Catholic Patriotic Association was pushed to adopt practically a policy of "total independence" from Rome as the only stand compatible with love for the country.

Yet, the first national congress of the PACC had reached a different conclusion, just a year before. Bishop Li Po-yu, of Chowchih (Shaanxi), in his introductory report, explained the program "love the country and love religion" in this way: "The national Patriotic Association is an organization of the Catholic masses determined to love their country and their religion. It is not an organization of the Catholic Church. Since all members of this national patriotic Association are Catholic, we have therefore to preserve, on the religious plane, the spirit of the holy Catholic Church, and to obey the directives of the Pope in the matters touching on the religious doctrines to believe and the ecclesiastical rules to observe. But, in political questions, the Vatican supports the capitalistic systems, follows the American imperialism and continually opposes the Soviet Union, the communist party and socialism..." ("Hsin Ko", Shanghai, 9 August 1957).

The resolution adopted at the closing of the Conference (2 August, 1957), though full of recrimination for the so-called "interferences and unreasonable attacks by the Vatican", repeats: "The Catholic Church of China shall keep with the Vatican strictly religious relations and shall submit to the Pope for the religious doctrines to be believed and the ecclesiastical rules to observe, but on this essential condition that neither the interests nor the independence nor the honour of our country be violated..." Several priests and faithful, who had been convinced to sign the conclusions of this first PACC Congress, withdrew their support from the Association when they discovered to their dismay, in the provincial meetings which followed, that the important distinction had been dropped, and they were asked to give up any link even with the spiritual authority of the Pope.

This unfortunate situation continued over the years. The official propaganda often denounced the Vatican as a tool of the imperialist powers. Following the official stand, Catholic leaders enjoying some sort of recognition by the public authority kept advocating an independent and autonomous conduct and denouncing external "interferences" in the affairs of the Chinese Church. No doubt, this hot question was debated also at the PACC third congress in May 1980. It was reported that on that occasion a high ranking government official underlined that what matters most is that everybody agrees on the common effort for modernization and for the progress of the country; once this is assured, different opinions may continue to exist on other matters. The address of Xiao Xianfa, as it appears in the first issue of "Catholic Church in China", seems less optimistic; but it does give credit to a change of attitude on the part of the Vatican too. Obviously, the situation has changed both on the internal and on the international front. Consequently, the "open letter" to the Chinese faithful issued at the end of the meetings, prudently avoided any direct attack on the person of the Pope or on the Vatican in general.

This does not mean that the difficulties have disappeared. Recent warnings by Party cadres responsible for enforcing the religious policy seem to sound old notes. These are echoed by some statements stemming from the meetings of the Patriotic Associations, like the call (in the same "open letter" to the Catholics) for continued and profound "education in patriotism" to be given to the clergy and the laity, pledging to stop the plots of "a small minority of bad elements and reactionary influences...". People who went through harrowing experiences in the past on the basis of similar "innocent" expressions, can be forgiven for their lack of enthusiasm today.

It is disturbing also to hear that, in some provinces and cities, overzealous "patriotic" elements have resorted again, during recent local meetings, to untrue and disparaging remarks about the Pope and to unveiled threats in order to persuade the faithful to denounce their allegiance to him. For this reason, many Catholics in certain cities are said to frown on being contacted and invited back to the reopened churches. When they hear a certain way of talking about the Church, or they know that certain persons have been placed in control of the official Church structure, they cannot feel at ease.

#### A THEOLOGICAL OR A POLITICAL PROBLEM?

The newly guaranteed religious freedom indicates an effort to rally the three million Chinese Catholics with the other believers around the government modernization drive. But this effort may not evoke much enthusiasm if this equivocal position is allowed to continue. It is equivocal in so far as a theological discussion is overloaded and manipulated with political considerations. When the recent "Open Letter" to the Catholics of China re-emphasizes "the necessity for us to maintain our Church's policy of independence, autonomy and self-direction", it sounds like a Church problem, a theological issue. With somewhat different words we have here the concept of the "Three-Autonomies" (on finances, administration and propagation) which was first proposed among the Protestants. As a purely theological issue, an acceptable measure of this "policy of independence, autonomy and self-direction" is open to discussion. It is not so specific of China alone. In the light of the post-Vatican Council II ecclesiology, which puts new stress on the local Churches and the episcopal "college", the practical claims put forward by these statements might to a very great extent be considered applicable.

But we cannot forget that in China this issue was concretely born out of a political problem, that is the incompatibility of a totalitarian regime with any external authority which might interfere with matters considered as its exclusive right. As mentioned, submission of religion to and control by the political power is not a new phenomenon in the long history of China. To this, we should add the weight of more recent events. The Chinese marxists inherited from large sectors of the Chinese intellectuals a deep resentment for the his-countries, claiming the right of religious freedom and playing the role of protectors of Christianity. Chinese marxist historians can hardly understand that the Vatican or the Holy See was not itself part of this scheme of aggression, but rather a victim in its own way of the same imperialism.

The whole question is further complicated by a deep and quite understandable feeling of national pride, which is shared also by people who do not adhere to the ideology of the CCP. One of the cadres working in a provincial office of the RAB, explaining the Chinese position to an overseas "compatriot", said: "We could not tolerate being guided by foreigners even in marxist ideology. How can you expect that we will ever allow foreign interference in the religious field?" On the other hand, the present opening of China to exchanges with foreign countries involves necessarily also a certain measure of acceptance of internationally recognized values and interpretations which run contrary to previous tenets of the ruling Party. It may well be assumed that the most generous efforts to solve the dramatic Church confrontation on a purely theological basis will continue to be frustrated, as long as it will not be possible to tackle it also on the political level.

For all the public declarations of independence by "patriotic" spokesmen, there is ground to believe that many priests and bishops now enjoying some measure of public recognition and indicated as members or officers of the PACC would welcome a solution allowing the Church to re-establish some external links with the Holy See, as this is the normal way of Catholic life. In fact, when confronted with the inconsistency of a position which claims to be Catholic and yet rejects in principle any relation with the Pope, most "patriotic" leaders (who can hardly be contacted individually or on a personal basis) would not argue, limiting themselves to repeat their determination to hold on, any how, to the one Catholic faith ("unus Dominus, una fides, unum baptisma..." Eph. 4,5).

The Chinese Catholic community appears to be strained and suffering from deep internal differences, coupled with unrelenting outside pressures. Considering this concrete situation, I think it would be unfair to speak of "two Churches", when referring to the Catholic communities in China. Before passing any harsh judgement on the Church in China, as such, we should perhaps have a look at our Western Catholic communities: don't we also experience, unfortunately, some very serious problems? Certain theologians contest basic beliefs and traditions, and yet repeat their determination to continue belonging to the Catholic Church. On the other hand, perfect unity is challenged also from the right in the very heart of the Church by statements and facts defying the authority of the Holy Father. We don't know how long this abnormal situation can continue, but the prevailing sentiment seems to be longanimity, in the hope of reaching a point of mutual understanding.

(The third and final extract from Fr. Lazzarotto's paper on China will appear in the next issue of Sedos Bulletin, on 15 July, 1981).

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## POURQUOI ET COMMENT JE FAIS DU ZEN

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Paul Renaud

("It is a fact that I have never prayed so profoundly, never experienced so intensely the flavour of the Bible, never felt so strongly the presence of the Saviour in the Eucharist, as I did in this Zen temple." So writes Paul Renaud in this short contribution on why and how he practices Zen).

Pourquoi je fus amené à faire du Zen? Voici plusieurs raisons que je livre sans ordre. Le désir de connaître, non pas le Bouddhisme, mais de vrais bouddhistes, en chair et en os, voir quelle est leur foi et, si possible, faire un bout de chemin avec eux...Le Concile, dans sa déclaration sur les relations de l'Eglise avec les religions non chrétiennes, tout en rappelant que nous devons annoncer sans cesse que le Christ est "la Voie, la Vérité et la Vie", reconnaît tout ce qu'il y a de "vrai et de saint" dans les religions et nous exhorte dans le dialogue, à faire connaissance avec les valeurs spirituelles, morales, et socio-culturelles qui se trouvent en elles et conseille même de les "préserver et les faire progresser".

Jusqu'ici, l'Eglise missionnaire a trop souvent annoncé l'Evangile à sens unique. "Nous avons la vérité, vous êtes dans les ténèbres, écoutez-nous et convertissez-vous à notre vérité." Comme missionnaires, il me semble impératif de me mettre d'abord à l'écoute de la foi des autres, en quelque sorte: "Croire en eux, en-espérant être cru un jour par eux" (sur ce sujet, je vous conseille la lecture d'un article très intéressant du P. Juguet dans le n° 76 de Spiritus)... Par ailleurs, je savais la grande influence du Zen sur la mentalité japonaise: je désirais donc connaître le Zen pour mieux comprendre le coeur des Japonais et mieux adapter l'activité missionnaire à leur mentalité.

Après plus de dix ans de vie missionnaire, notre vie est très polarisée par de nombreuses activités et il est de plus en plus difficile de trouver la paix intérieure pourtant si nécessaire, et je cherchais donc un nouveau stimulant à la foi et une méthode de libération intérieure.

Enfin, au fur et à mesure que je prodiguais un "enseignement" aux catéchistes, il me semblait nécessaire aussi, de leur indiquer une méthode, une "voie" pour commencer à réaliser le message de l'Evangile. La grâce n'apporte pas une solution à tout, et l'adage "Aide-toi et le ciel t'aidera" a sa valeur aussi dans notre vie de foi. C'est très facile de dire aux gens: "Priez, dialoguez avec Dieu, renoncez à ceci ou à cela". Si concrètement on ne peut pas leur indiquer une "voie" pour trouver la paix du coeur et un minimum de "liberté intérieure", leur foi risque de rester très cérébrale.

### Comment je fais du Zen

Il y a huit ans, je me suis présenté un jour à la bonzerie Ryutakuji de Mishima pour une session zen de huit jours. Après deux jours, j'en ressortais complètement épuisé, avec des courbatures dans tout le corps, et je me promettais de ne jamais y remettre les pieds. Quelques jours passèrent et les courbatures aussi. Dans mon for intérieur je ne pouvais cacher mon admiration pour les jeunes bonzes que j'avais vus. Je devais reconnaître aussi que ces deux jours de calvaire m'avaient fait grand bien et que le Zen n'était pas un enseignement mais une pratique, une voie, et que pour bénéficier de ses "grâces", il fallait tout simplement en faire. Je me suis mis à m'asseoir un peu tous les jours. Il y a trois ans un prêtre japonais est venu m'aider à la paroisse et cela m'a permis de m'absenter de temps en temps. Je me suis représenté à la bonzerie de Mishima. Nouveau calvaire, mais cette fois, j'ai pu tenir jusqu'à la fin de la session de 8 jours. J'ai déjà fait cinq sessions à Mishima. Cette année, du 18 au 25 janvier, je me suis hasardé à faire la grande session: "Rôhatsu" la plus sévère de l'année: le matin, lever à 3 h 30 et le soir l'heure du coucher est retardée tous les jours. Les deux derniers jours, on fait zazen jusqu'à minuit et demi... Un grand principe du Zen est que le corps et le coeur ne font qu'un, et que la rectitude du corps appelle celle du coeur. Le fait de rester assis dans le plus grand silence sans bouger ni penser à rien, pendant des journées entières, ne peut pas ne pas avoir d'effets. Quels sont-ils?

Dès la première session, le Rôshi (maître Zen) m'a conseillé très fortement de faire chaque jour mes "tautome" de prêtre catholique: c'est ainsi que pendant la pause d'une heure que nous avons après le repas de midi, je peux me retirer dans un petit "pagodon" au fond du jardin, pour réciter une heure de bréviaire et célébrer la messe. C'est un fait que je n'ai jamais prié avec autant de profondeur que dans ce temple Zen. Jamais je n'ai goûté avec autant de saveur les paroles de la Bible, jamais je n'ai senti aussi fortement la présence du Seigneur dans l'Eucharistie. La raison, c'est qu'après quelques jours de session Zen, le vide complet de la conscience s'établit, l'esprit est totalement libéré de multiples "attaches": c'est la véritable paix intérieure. On peut alors se concentrer facilement et totalement sur une parole d'Évangile, sur l'Hostie que l'on contemple ou la fleur qu'on admire. On ressent aussi un sentiment de communion intense avec tout ce qui nous entoure, les êtres et les choses.

Reste un problème pour moi: comment maintenir ce "tonus" des sessions Zen en temps ordinaire, et comment introduire ce qu'il y a de bon et de vrai dans le Zen, dans l'enseignement de l'Évangile?

Pour terminer, je voudrais dire qu'en tant que prêtre catholique, j'ai toujours été accueilli très fraternellement à Ryutakuji. Le précédent Rôshi, Nakagama Sôen, est un des promoteurs du Zen en Amérique où il se rendait presque tous les ans. Il a également fondé un "dôjo" Zen sur le Mont des Oliviers car il est convaincu que Jérusalem est le "toit" de toutes les religions du monde. Il a eu comme disciple le Père Okumura, carme, actuellement à Kyôto.

Le Rôshi actuel, Suzuki Sôchû, se rend tous les ans en Angleterre et en Allemagne pour diriger des sessions. Il rencontre toujours des prêtres ou religieuses et des chrétiens éloignés de l'Eglise, que le Zen "remet en selle". Dernièrement il me disait que les chrétiens étaient devenus les grands missionnaires du Zen dans le monde. Si le Zen peut aider des chrétiens à survivre dans le monde actuel, pourquoi des chrétiens ne pourraient-ils pas aider le Zen aussi à survivre?... En partageant la foi de quelques vrais Bouddhistes Zen j'espère que certains, un jour, désireront aussi partager la mienne. Saint Augustin confessait déjà: "Seigneur, tu étais au-dedans de moi, et moi, j'étais en dehors de moi-même..." Eveil à soi pour un éveil à Dieu, le Zen peut nous y aider!

Reference: ECHOS DE LA RUE DU BAC, No. 152, Juin 1981.

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ARCHBISHOP ROMERO: MARTYR OF SALVADOR

.....Of course, he was mortified by the continuing violence of the government's armed forces and the government's unwillingness or incapacity to control the equally brutal violence coming from the extreme right and its paramilitary groups. Also, he agonised over the division in the episcopate. Only Bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas shared his views. The other four (together we nicknamed them the "angelicals") were openly antagonistic.

But there was more. I learned from many of his friends that the threats on his life were frequent and ominous. As we were leaving a group of leaders of comunidades de base, an elderly woman pleaded with him to take care of himself. I had observed others making the same plea repeatedly. In a moment of privacy, I asked him if he thought of protecting himself. He said he would not. How could he do it when his own people had no such security? How could he, when his very spiritual life derived from that open, daily replenishment with his brothers and sisters?

Besides, the very vulnerability of his flock was a direct result of their believing and acting what he preached. He told me he had never loved life more.

It was a springtime of faith and courage for the church in El Salvador. It had never been more alive. It was as if with each new torture, exile, or assassination, the community's resolve to be more faithful multiplied.

No, he had no appetite to be a martyr, but if he were to become one, he prayed that the circumstances would leave no doubt as to his vocation: to be a servant of God and a pastor to his flock.

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Forward to Archbishop Romero, Martyr of Salvador, Orbis Books, New York, 10545, 1981.

## RELIGIOUS ORDERS TODAY

Fr. Michel de Verteuil

(Il n'est pas dans nos habitudes de publier des articles sur la vie religieuse proprement dite, mais l'étude de Michel de Verteuil sur les ordres et congrégations dans les Caraïbes, peut s'appliquer en grande partie à tous les instituts religieux et missionnaires et offre un intérêt particulier aux nouveaux mouvements religieux d'aujourd'hui.

Il écrit: "Depuis que la dynamique de la vie religieuse libère les gens pour leur permettre de reconnaître les fausses valeurs de la société, nous trouvons fréquemment ces gens parmi les groupes visant à un changement radical, dans les groupes pour les droits de l'homme, en Guyana par exemple, pour la défense des droits des Indiens en Amérique Latine, le mouvement féministes aux Etats-Unis, les syndicats en Trinidad...L'attente de certains de voir la vie religieuse "s'assagir" bientôt et se remettre au service de l'ordre établi, ne semble pas être une espérance bien fondée).

What are religious orders? It could be just a curious person asking. There are many who know little about religious orders beyond the fact that their members don't marry (always something that stirs curiosity), wear strange clothes and manage some of the top schools of a region.

But others too need to ask the question. Religious orders have changed very much recently and many people who once thought they knew all about them are being surprised and even shocked. "What are nuns coming to?" is a question you often hear today.

Perhaps we ourselves, members of religious orders, need to ask the question most of all. Religious orders are like all institutions; they tend to rest on their laurels, to coast along and continue doing what they have always done. They too must ask themselves what they really are.

To understand religious orders you have to start with the teaching of Jesus and in particular with the fact that it is so impractical. I mean that turning the other cheek doesn't work in daily life, no more than selling all that you have and giving it to the poor. Then there is that hopelessly impractical ideal of the Christian community that you find in the Acts of the Apostles.

"No one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common".

It just cannot work.

The problem is that we have two seemingly opposed processes. There is the teaching of Jesus that we cannot be fully human (the same thing as being fully Christian) unless we attack, at the roots, our tendency to put

self first; on the otherhand there is our experience that a certain protection of self-interest is necessary for human living. What most of us Christians do is to work out some sort of compromise. We keep the ideal Jesus gave us, knowing that it won't work out quite as described in the New Testament. The only problem of course is where to draw the line. Sooner or later most people end up by compromising too much. The message of Jesus gets watered down, the gate ends up not being narrow, the way not too hard, those who find it not so few.

#### ORDERS ARISE

Then, (since the Spirit of Jesus is alive in the Church), something always happens. Some members say no. They have such an intense experience of Jesus' message that they decide to draw the line further back, to "try something" as we say in Trinidad. Benedict forms a community where members actually have everything in common, Francis of Assisi throws away all his possessions, Mother Teresa sets up a house in the slums of Calcutta.

Now at this point you have a heroic impulse; you are still a long way off having a religious order. Founders of orders, (I use the plural because it has often been the work of several individuals together), are always practical down-to-earth people who convert an impulse into a stable and lasting institution. To achieve this they set about making rules, rules that will allow for members getting old and sick, for new ones being trained, for weeding out undesirables and coping with those who still manage to stay. A religious order is therefore a delicate blend of New Testament idealism and, (what we often forget is also a New Testament quality), common sense.

Every religious order has structures that foster creativity and other structures that protect the community from rash adventures, structures that enforce discipline and other structures that curb the authoritarianism of superiors, structures that make for common living and structures that protect privacy, all with the purpose of enabling the members to free themselves in a stable way from the evils of self-interest, letting loose as it were the dynamic of Jesus' teaching.

The history of Christianity is that the process works. Well of course it does; Jesus said it would and he ought to know. Through the centuries, in every region (the Caribbean included) orders have arisen, always following with minor variations the process of visionary impulse, protecting against compromise, followed by common sense organization. Out of this process have arisen, healthy, loving people. They have often been extremely competent as well, and that, in every field of human activity, art, science, agriculture, business and government. Most important, they have been free people, free enough to see through the false assumptions of their society, especially its assumptions of what is necessary for a good and successful life. One of the modern world's most illustrious religious, Thomas Merton, said,

"The religious is somebody who says, in one way or another, that the claims of the world are fraudulent".

POSSIBLE FAILURES

Naturally, as with every delicate instrument, there are many things that can go wrong with such a life. Many individual religious have not made a success of their lives. Sometimes too the order as a whole has taken a wrong turning. In fact quite a few have just dropped out of existence, a sign that they were no longer achieving their purpose. The experience of the centuries has taught us why and how such failures occur.

One of the most important ways in which religious orders can go wrong is that people, (and this often includes members of the orders themselves), understand the order from its work alone. This is obviously very common today. Why do people invite a group of nuns or brothers into a village today? Certainly to run a school or hospital or some such work of service. After all, is that not what orders are for? This is however, a grave error and if it exists within the order it can be mortal. It is like defining a calculator by the little figures that light up when you press the buttons and ignoring the mechanism behind. The essential thing in a religious order (its mechanism) is that the members are committed to living in a stable way the ideal of the Acts of the Apostles, the mutual commitment, the prayer, "having everything in common". Everything else is fruits, results, not the essence.

In fact once religious orders let themselves become identified with their work, they lose their creativity and end up upholding the values of society rather than challenging them. They become institutions that are more reliable but otherwise not very different from those run by the government. On the other hand let religious renew their internal mechanism, their close reading of the gospels and their community life and the next thing you know all kinds of creative things are happening, useless land is being farmed, abandoned children are learning at school, the "unemployable" are working hard.

There is a lesson here for the Church as well as for secular society. In the eyes of most people, religious are "church workers". We bracket "priests and religious" on earth much as we do the angels and saints in heaven (a bracketing that is expressed in the vernacular as "the priests and dem"). But here too we have a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of religious life. That you belong to a religious order says nothing about the work you do, no more than to say that you are married or single.

Religious life is a way of life, not a job, a way of life moreover that can exist in any human situation. The Vatican Council made this clear when it said,

"The religious state of life is not an intermediate one between the clerical and lay states. Rather the faithful of Christ are called from both".

Of course the religious order lives within the wider Church community; it differs in this way from the various Church groups that have arisen in somewhat the same way but broke away to form new churches or sects. Religious orders refuse this option, they remain within the Church (not

always very peacefully if the truth must be told). But the order has its own inner dynamism from the visionary impulse and the rules of its founders.

It is just a fact of history that you cannot control religious life from above. You cannot stage manage the process any more than you can dictate to your children what questions they are to ask or to teenagers who they are to fall in love with. The Spirit will continue to make his presence felt, often in the most unlikely places and with the most unlikely results.

#### NEW TRENDS

This is exactly what is happening today. As we look around the world today we can discern some interesting new trends in religious life. New orders are arising which show these trends very clearly and they are affecting the old orders as well.

First of all there is a new understanding of community life. For quite some time now a religious order was composed of members all doing the same work. Today members of a community go out to involve themselves in a wider variety of work, one in a school, one in a social work project, one in a factory. They are members of one community only in that they have committed themselves to share everything in common. Whatever the advantages or disadvantages of this system, one thing is certain, it is making clear that the essence of religious life is not work but the common life according to the New Testament.

Another trend is that religious are involving themselves in new areas of work. At one time religious worked in hospitals and schools and that was it. Today you find them in all areas of life in the public as well as the private sector of society. In the United States a nun was recently elected mayor of her city. Often they are working outside of Church institutions, side by side with people of other faiths, with atheists or with marxists of varying hues. Furthermore, since, as I have said, the dynamic of Religious Life frees people to recognize the false values of society, they are frequently to be found in groups working for systematic change, human rights groups in Guyana for example, defending the rights of Indians in Latin America, the women's movement in the United States, trade unions in Trinidad.

For those who hope that religious will soon "settle down" and once more humbly serve the established order, the future does not look promising. On the contrary all the indications are that the message of Jesus will continue to have the unpleasant consequences of bringing not peace but the sword, of setting a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's foes being those of his own household.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON JUSTICE AND PEACE ISSUES TODAY**

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1. Issues of economic justice are obviously going to dominate the 1980s. Very important global negotiations are getting underway with many international meetings of influence taking place this year. To keep yourself briefed on all this, we would recommend:

GLOBAL NEGOTIATIONS ACTION NOTES, an information project that will run through 23 issues this year. It costs \$15.00 and is available from Church Center, 11th Floor, 777 U.N. Plaza, N.Y. 10017.

2. A mine of information for anyone beginning to animate people for justice is:

ACTION FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE & PEACE: A HANDBOOK FOR GROUPS (Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1 Cambridge Terrace, London NW1 4JL), and costs only 50p. It tells you how to start a Justice and Peace Group; gives ideas for a parish justice and peace programme; gives information on films, posters, periodicals and organizations in the field of justice and peace, and tells where to look further for help.

3. For analyzing your own social situation from the point of view of justice and peace, there are two useful publications:

SOCIAL ANALYSIS: LINKING FAITH AND JUSTICE, written by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, and available from the Center of Concern, 3700 13th St., N.E., Washington D.C. 20017, at \$2.50.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO GOSPEL VALUES: A RESOURCE MANUAL FOR PLANNERS, available from the Maryknoll Mission Research and Planning Department, Maryknoll, New York 10545.

4. If you wish to understand better what is going on in Latin America and tell others about it, there is:

LATIN AMERICA: A STUDY COURSE FOR SMALL GROUPS, also available from the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), \$1.00.

5. For information about two typical situations of social injustice there are two other booklets published by the Catholic Institute for International Relations: SAO PAULO GROWTH AND POVERTY: A REPORT FROM THE SAO PAULO JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION, 1978 (\$3.40); SOUTH AFRICA IN THE 1980s: A CIIR POSITION PAPER (75p.)
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## EVALUATION OF THE POPE'S VISIT TO AFRICA

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The Pope was only able to visit six countries, but he said to President Mobutu and he repeated it in Nairobi, "My message is for the whole of Africa".

In a period more or less dark for Africa from the political and economic viewpoints, the Pope succeeded in creating a wave of enthusiasm, of joy and hope. He helped Africans, so often humiliated in the course of history, to find their identity. He expressed his total confidence in them and gave them, as it were, an injection of morale, as he said on his departure from Rome, "I am going to express to these local churches - so full of youth and dynamic enthusiasm - the admiration and satisfaction that the whole church has for them."

On the other hand, Africa is made up of 54 states, a third of the votes in the United Nations. It is rich in natural resources and holds a strategic place in the world. The Pope affirmed that Africa "has an original role to play in contemporary international life". To the President of Ghana he said, "Africa has, to the world community, much more to offer than simply a share of their natural resources or being a market for the products of the industrialized nations... Africa has something distinctive to offer to the world... It is called to bring fresh ideals and insights to a world that shows signs of fatigue and selfishness. I am convinced that you Africans can do this."

Overall the Pope's discourses displayed clarity and richness and showed that he had been well informed by those who had experience of the ordinary life of Africa.

The teaching contained in them does not add anything new to that already found in the texts of the Council or other Popes. But in the concrete context of Africa new accents are added here and there. The Pope always sees man in two dimensions: the transcendent, eschatological and spiritual dimension and the immanent, historical and political one. Together, they constitute a single vision of man taken in his entirety. (To the President of Upper Volta).

The Pope did not only teach. He admitted that he learned much. According to the press he said to the Polish priests in Kinshasa, "I've learned more in two days in Africa than in two years in Rome." He did not however, as in Fortalezza, improvise a talk on his new impressions of the country. In Kinshasa he had nothing to say on the bakambi (lay pastors), or on the Zairian liturgical rites. Also he always gave Holy Communion in the mouth, even in countries where it is usually given in the hand.

Undoubtedly the Pope gave the western Church a new outlook on its so called "missions". They are no longer territories where the missionaries have full responsibility for building a local church, but are established local churches with their own Christian communities, their own clergy and bishops and where the missionaries are at their service.

Reference: SMA, No. 47, February 1981.

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A SELECTION OF ORBIS BOOKS

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(Published by Maryknoll, New York, 10545, these books were received at our Documentation Centre during the past year. They deal with topics of interest to today's missionaries. They are available at the Centre, open 8.30 - 1.30 p.m. Monday through Friday).

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#### BUILDING SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Basic ecclesial communities are gaining increasing importance in mission not only in Latin America.

The Lumko Institute in South Africa is publishing a series of working kits for trainers and participants in small Christian communities. They are available in English as well as in six other languages of South Africa. The series is called:

#### TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

and the objectives are set out as follows:

The building of small christian communities is our priority. This involves a twofold task for the pastoral workers: creating community awareness and training many members of these communities for the exercise of various tasks.

Our series wants to assist the pastoral workers, and the leaders who emerge from the communities. The series contains both awareness training kits and skill-training manuals for the training of leaders.

The skill-training manuals are not self-instruction books, but work-books for groups of leaders who meet regularly with their trainers.

Systematic training in groups is the best way of learning for adult leaders. Such training should take place within the community, not at some distant place, nor removed from the living contact with the community.

Edited by F. Lobinger and O. Hirmer. The series is available at: Lumko Institute, P.O. Box 11, 5410 Lady Frere, South Africa.

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