



---

## A NEW SPIRITUALITY OF MISSION

(TOWARDS THE SEDOS ASSEMBLY, DECEMBER 9, 1981)

---

The members of the Sedos Executive Committee dealt with the preparation of the Sedos December Assembly at their September meeting. They now seek the co-operation of members in this work of preparation.

The topic chosen for the Assembly, "A New Spirituality of Mission", was the first priority which emerged from our post Seminar consultation (see Sedos Bulletin No. 81/14). The Committee saw the topic in this way. Each society has a certain understanding of its own "spirituality" based on the charisms of its founder. The Sedos Seminar did not deal with these particular charisms. It was not meant to do so. In fact the strong points in the Seminar dynamic occurred when the participants were not considering their own particular institutional characteristics but rather the demands of the mission as a whole today.

What are your hopes for the Assembly? What is your understanding of a new spirituality of mission? We felt that the title lends itself to misinterpretation. It may suggest to some, a new form of dichotomy between the sacred and profane.

It seems clear to us in the Committee that what is not envisaged by this new spirituality is an updated treatise on ascetical, spiritual or mystical theology and that the Assembly should not be a forum for learned theoretical presentations. Yet we must search for a sound theological basis to new experiences.

In fact, new experiences in mission, are leading to new forms of mission spirituality being lived more and more frequently by women and men who are following the Spirit as Jesus did, allowing themselves to be possessed by the Spirit as he was, living their lives in their particular circumstances under the impulse of the Spirit as he did and this Spirit is leading them into paths that are heretofore unknown and uncharted, into situations of risk and danger, into ways of living that are insecure. Many are led by the Spirit into situations of conflict, involving, for example, justice, poverty, armaments, economics. These conflicts can lead to suffering, isolation, loneliness, persecution and death.

It is evident that "something new" is happening in the lives of many. What have the institutions of Sedos to say to their members who do "something new"? Support them? Marginalize them? Listen to them? Be changed by them?

With this Bulletin we are addressing a letter to you suggesting a program of consultations between small groups of Superiors General or their Sedos delegates here in Rome. We look forward confidently to your whole-hearted collaboration in this important process.

---

## THE NEED FOR POLITICAL SAINTS

### FROM A SPIRITUALITY OF LIBERATION TO THE PRACTICE OF LIBERATION

---

Leonardo Boff

(Une nouvelle spiritualité de la mission doit nécessairement tenir compte des expériences contemporaines vécues par ceux qui cherchent à suivre le Christ dans les circonstances variées du monde d'aujourd'hui. Nous présentons ici une expérience, faite en Amérique Latine, à la suite de "l'irruption des pauvres", dans cette région. C'est spécialement l'engagement pour la justice en faveur des pauvres, qui réalise le but de toute prière: le contact avec Dieu, comme l'écrit Boff. L'une des questions soulevées par cette nouvelle spiritualité, est de rechercher comment unifier dans la vie, la passion pour Dieu - qui caractérise tout croyant - avec la passion pour les pauvres et la justice qui caractérise tout militant politique.Ed).

---

#### The Spiritual Clash

In recent years the Latin American church has been increasingly aware of the responsibility of faith for social changes that would promote greater justice and participation for the masses of the poor. In the light of faith, and in evangelical solidarity with the neediest, numerous and significant church groups, even entire episcopates, are trying more and more to live and teach the Christian faith in a way that would make it a driving force for integral human liberation. Thus, an extensive and well-articulated liberation process is underway in the midst of Christian communities, a process rooted in the unity of faith and life.

In addition, a corresponding critical discourse has been developed, called "*liberation theology*," a theology developed in the interests of integral liberation, particularly of the most oppressed sectors of society. However, what sustains this liberating theory (theology) and practice is *a spiritual encounter with the Lord amidst the poor.* (1)

Behind all innovative practice within the church, at the root of every genuinely new theology, there lies hidden a typical religious experience, which constitutes the word-source; everything else proceeds from that all-encompassing experience, trying to work out a translation within the framework of a historically determined reality. Only by starting from this presupposition can we understand the great syntheses of past theologians such as St. Augustine, St. Anselm, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, and Suarez, or of present day theologians such as Rahner and other spiritual masters.

Encounter with a new face of God: All spiritual experience means an encounter with a new and challenging face of God, that emerges from the great challenges of historical reality. Great socio-historical changes carry within themselves an ultimate meaning, a supreme demand that is identified by religious minds as originating from the mystery of God. God has meaning only when in fact he emerges as that which is radically important within a reality presented in its lights and shadows. In this way, God does not appear as a defined category within a religious framework, but rather as a meaningful event, speaking of hope and an absolute future for the history of men and women. This situation encourages a natural and typical experience of the mystery of God.

What we have emphasized thus far implies the subjective moment of the experience. However, it can also be stated in strictly theological terms: in his desire for self-communication, God reveals himself concretely in history. We perceive a new face of God, because God is revealing himself in this way. He establishes sacramental signs, chooses messengers, fosters the growth of an adequate discourse, and encourages consistent practices. And there will always be attentive spirits capable of identifying the new voice of God and being faithful to his call.

The poor as God's sacrament of self-communication: We believe that in recent years there has been a volcanic eruption of God in our Latin American continent: he has privileged the poor as his sacrament of self-communication. Through the poor, his demands for solidarity, identity, justice and dignity, are being heard. And the churches have been obedient (*ob-audire*: to listen) to God's appeal. Faced with the scandal of poverty, we are urged to act on behalf of the poor, against poverty and for justice for all. This activity has a clear dimension of liberation that emerges as a process of giving historic grounding to a faith that wishes to be united to the Lord who is present in the poor. To struggle with the poor and to embody their desires is to communicate with the poor Christ and to live in his company. This perspective implies being contemplative while working toward liberation--"*contemplativus in liberatione*"--and presupposes a new way of seeking sanctity and mystical union with God.

New things and old: The spiritual encounter with this new manifestation of God has produced certain traits that are inherent to a spirituality lived and practiced by many Christians who are committed to the complete liberation of their brothers and sisters. The shock of that encounter lies at the roots of liberation theology. Before attempting to describe that spirituality, however, it would be useful to situate it within the great spiritual tradition of the church and also to emphasize its originality. The problem we need to clarify is how to be contemplative within the liberation process; how to live out a vivid and concrete encounter with God in our pastoral practices and in contact with the people.

#### THE SPIRITUAL DIFFERENCE

Obviously, the classical formulation of the search for the unity of faith and life was made by the monastic tradition with its motto, "*ora et labora*", *pray and work*. It is not possible here to trace the history of that inspiration, but we can grasp its basic thrust, in which there is a clear predominance of the "pray" over the "work". This spirituality takes

the time of prayer and of contemplation, alternating with that of work, as the organizational axis of spiritual life.

The persistent parallelism: Prayer is the source of all value and is expressed in liturgy, choral office, devotional exercises, and the entire range of religious expression. Work, in itself, is not direct mediation with God, but has value to the extent that it is bathed in the influence of prayer and contemplation. It means the profane and the purely natural; it constitutes the field of ethical expression and is that part of human testimony in which meaning is developed within the context of prayer. In other words, prayer prolongs itself in work, and makes it sacred as well.

The whole conception implies a type of "spiritual monophysitism": the unique nature of prayer redeems the creaturely and natural profaneness of work. For this reason, there is the persistence of a parallelism that is never entirely overcome: on the one hand, prayer; and on the other hand, work. The particle "and" is indicative of this theological bilingualism. In any case, this spirituality fills the work of many Christians with prayer and elevation, and has provided religious signs for every area of life that was considered profane.

Socio-historical developments led to a relative autonomy of the profane and a culture of words. (2) Functionality and efficiency are the axes of the new culture, the ultimate expression of which is found today in the combined scientific-technological enterprise. *The motto is inverted: "labora et ora,"* work and pray.

The dignity of work from its own creative nature: The divine and Christ-like character of work, as a form of human collaboration with divine creation, has been discovered. God did not leave us a finished world as a gift, but wished to associate us with his transforming task. Work possesses its own dignity and sacredness, not because it is baptized by prayer or as a result of supernaturalizing good intentions, but rather because of its own creative nature, inserted into the christological project. What matters is the work done in its own legitimate order, directed to the construction of the earthly city intended by God, in anticipation of the heavenly city.

It is especially the work of justice, committed to the needs of the poor, that achieves what all prayer seeks--contact with God. The prophetic tradition is explicit with regard to this (cf. Is. 1:10-20; Jr. 22:16) and Jesus refers to it directly (Mk 7:6-8). It is not preaching but practice that is our guarantee of salvation (Mt. 25, 31-46). Prayer continues to have its place, but its truthfulness is measured by its expression in genuine and ethically correct practice. In its most radical form, this spirituality of the divine character of matter, and of the work performed on it, leads to an emptiness of prayer and of liturgical and devotional expression.

The objective character of prayer: This perspective emphasizes the objective character of prayer, which pervades all spheres and is not restricted to the field of awareness and explicitness. In other words, the presence of God is not attained automatically nor

exclusively wherever God is spoken of or his memory is worshipped, but always and objectively wherever a correct practice of truth and justice occurs in history, even if an explicit awareness of God does not exist. However, the predominance of work, religiously lived, over prayer, may create a new type of "spiritual monophysitism"; prayer becomes another form of work and of practice, losing its specific character as prayer. We are still speaking of work "and" prayer, and have not yet reached the unity of faith-life, action-prayer.

Vital and concrete synthesis of prayer-work: The synthesis that needs to be made and that is in gestation in Latin America is that of prayer *in* action, *within* action and *with* action. It is not a question of keeping prayer and action in separate compartments, nor of prayer outside of a concrete commitment to the liberation of the oppressed, but rather of prayer inserted in the process of liberation, living out an encounter with God "in" the encounter with our brothers and sisters. We may say that every great saint achieved that vital and concrete synthesis, which always constituted the secret of all authentically Christian life.

In Latin America, however, we are called to live in a somewhat new situation, or at least one with very distinctive tones. The problem does not lie merely in the prayer-action relationship, but in that of prayer-liberation--that is, prayer and political, social, historical, transforming action. In its correct formulation, the matter should be dealt with in terms of mysticism and politics.

How can one be radically committed to the liberation of the oppressed and at the same time committed to the source of all liberation, which is God? How can one combine passion for God, which is characteristic of every truly religious person, with passion for the people and their justice, which is the distinctive trait of all political militants? In order to be complete and consistent, this synthesis should make use of all the richness of "ora et labora", of prayer as a privileged encounter with the Lord; it should also make use of all the truth present in "labora et ora," of the value of work and the commitment to achieve justice and fraternity.

It is not a question of achieving a verbal synthesis or a correct correlation of the terms. It is a question of living out a Christian practice that is simultaneously involved with prayer and commitment, so that commitment is born out of prayer, and prayer emerges from the midst of that commitment. How can this be achieved?

#### PASSION FOR GOD IN PASSION FOR THE POOR

The experience of a genuine and living faith constitutes the unity of prayer-liberation. However, the experience of faith must be correctly understood. To begin with, faith is a way of experiencing all things in God's light. Faith defines the "from where" and the "towards where" of our existence, which is God and his design of love, that is communicated through, and materialized in, all things.

To the person of faith, reality is not profane and sacred in origin, but simply sacramental: it reveals God, it evokes God, it is imbued with the divine reality. For this reason, the faith experience confers unity on life, because it contemplates the reality consolidated by God as the origin and the destiny of all things. As a way of life, the living faith implies a contemplative stance towards the world; it finds the touch of God everywhere.

It is not enough, however, for faith to be alive; it is important that it be real. But only a faith transformed into love, truth and justice is real. Those who please God are not those who merely "accept" him, but rather those who build his Kingdom of truth, love and justice. Only such a committed faith is redeeming, and thus real faith. "Faith without deeds is useless" (Jm. 2:21). Demons, too, have pure faith but without deeds. (Jm. 2:20).

To identify with the passion of the poor: Christian faith knows that Christ has a sacramental density among the poor. They not only have needs that should be assisted; they possess a unique and intrinsic richness: privileged carriers of the Lord, principal heirs of the Kingdom, with the potential for evangelizing all nations and the church as a whole (Puebla 1147). The faithful do not simply have a socio-analytical conception of the poor, but identify with their passion and the causes of their impoverishment. Assuming all this, (3) the Christian watches the class of the impoverished with eyes of faith and discovers in them the suffering face of Yahweh's servant. Such an observation is not limited to contemplation, as if one were "*using*" the poor in order to be united with the Lord. Christ identifies himself with the poor and wishes to be served and received there.

This miserable situation produces a fundamental change of heart: "*I was hungry...*" (Mt. 23:25). One is truly with the Lord when among the poor, when committed to struggle against poverty, since it humiliates people, contradicts the will of God, and is the fruit of exploitative and sinful relations. Faith itself implies and demands a liberating commitment: "*and you fed me*" (Mt. 25:36). If you do not engage in liberating action, not only do you not love your neighbor, but you do not love God (1 Jo. 3:17). Love must not be merely "*of words and talk, but something real and active*" (1 Jo. 3:18).

A vision both contemplative and liberating? Such a spiritual experience confers unity on the faith-life (or mysticism-politics) relationship. But how can we maintain that unity? How can we nurture it in the face of so many segregating forces? A vision that is both contemplative and liberating does not emerge spontaneously; although it is the most meaningful expression of living faith. But how can one make this faith consistent?

Here two poles emerge: prayer and practice. However, we must avoid remaining within this polarization, for we would then once again fall into one of the "monophysitisms" that we criticized earlier. It is necessary to articulate the two poles dialectically, treating them as two spaces that are open to one another and imply each other. However, one of the two poles of the relationship must be privileged--prayer.

God discovered as the Holy in prayer: Through prayer, we express the most noble and profound aspect of our existence. We can transcend ourselves and all the greatness of creation and history; we enter an ecstatic condition and in dialogue with the Supreme mystery cry out, "Father!" With this, we do not leave the Universe but transform it as an offering to God; we free ourselves from all chains, denounce all historical absolutes, and alone and nude, confront the Absolute in order to make history with Him. There God is discovered as the Holy; we are in the face of the most high and the most solemn.

Holy and committed: Nevertheless, this God, holy as he is, reveals himself as a committed God, who is sensitive to the sorrows of the oppressed. He can say: "*I saw the oppression of my people ...I heard their complaints against the oppressors, I stopped to see their sufferings and I descended to liberate them...*" (Ex, 3:7-8). Hence, the God who through prayer says to us, "Come!", in that same prayer also says "Go!" The God who calls upon us is the same God who drives us on in a commitment to liberation. He commands us to unite the *passion for God with the passion for the oppressed*. Better yet, he demands that the passion of God in Jesus Christ be lived out in the passion of our suffering and needy brothers and sisters.

Action in the service of our brothers and sisters and in solidarity with their struggles for liberation grows from within the very midst of the prayer which reaches God's heart. Prayer aids the believer to see the sacramental presence of the Lord in the poor and in every variety of exploited people. Without prayer, rooted in faith, our sight becomes blurred and superficial; it cannot penetrate into that depth of theological mysticism in which it enters in communion with the Lord, who is present among the condemned, humiliated and offended peoples of history.

Prayer the source: On the other hand, the pole of liberating practice sends us back to the pole of prayer as the source which sustains our strength in the struggle and guarantees Christian identity in the process of liberation. Christians are concerned that it be a genuine liberation, an anticipation of the Kingdom and the concretization of Jesus' redemption in history. Faith and prayer allow them to consider their efforts (which are often of little relevance) as an historical construction of the Kingdom. Social practice has its concrete and intramundane density, but its significance does not end there; faith unveils its transcendental meaning and its redeeming importance. For someone who understands this perspective, the liberating service to our brothers and sisters constitutes a true diaconry to the Lord, an act of association to his redeeming and liberating task, and a true liturgy to the spirit.

This is what it means to be "*contemplativus in liberatione*." Contemplation is not carried out only within the sacred space of prayer, nor in the sacred precinct of the church; purified, sustained and nurtured by living faith, it also finds its place in political and social practice.

The fact that those bishops, priests, religious and laity who are most committed to the cause of the poor (their justice, rights, and dignity) are also the most committed to prayer is a noble characteristic of our Latin American Church; they unite God and the neediest neighbor into one movement of love and dedication.



MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES

How might we identify some of the most meaningful traits of this contemplation that is lived out in the context of liberation? (4)

- a) Prayer materialized in action: Liberating prayer gathers together all the material of a committed life: the struggles, collective efforts, the errors, and the victories; thanks are given for the steps that have been taken; one asks, not individualistically but in terms of a long-range effort, for those who suffer and for those who cause suffering; in prayer, the strife-torn nature of the liberation process is echoed; the confession of sins is spontaneously collective; no one hides behind ethereal words but rather opens one's heart to the most intimate matters. It is a prayer that reflects the liberation of the heart; one is forced to confront the incongruity between what is professed and what is practiced, especially the lack of solidarity and of commitment.
- b) Prayer, an expression of the liberating community: Although prayer has its permanent and guaranteed value, among committed Christians prayer is essentially a sharing of experiences and practices, illuminated and criticized in the light of faith and of the Gospel. The experience is not limited to a splendid privacy of the soul with God, but opens itself through listening and communication. One comforts the other; comments on the problems of the other; people help each other deal with the problems that are presented; there is no sacred "shame" that hides divine visits and illuminations. The great majority present their souls as an open book, which already reveals the process of liberation in the midst of the community.
- c) Liturgy as a celebration of life: A canonical liturgy maintains its bonding character and expresses the catholicity of the expression of our faith. But to the extent that communities unite life and faith, mysticism and politics, they increasingly insert the celebration of life shared by all into the liturgy. A rich creativity grows out of this field, possessing a dignity and sacredness that are guaranteed by the refined idea that the people possess within themselves what is sacred and noble. Meaningful group symbols are utilized, and sometimes genuinely religious dances and plays are produced as expressions of the people themselves.
- d) Hetero-critical prayer: Liberating prayer frequently serves a critical examination of the practices and attitudes of a community's participants. They are able to criticize each other without embarrassment and without wounding each other. What matters are the objective criteria: the Kingdom, liberation, respect for the progress of the people. On the basis of such realities, the practices of pastoral agents are confronted. Genuine assistance is given and true conversions occur because of this sincerity and loyalty.
- e) Political sanctity: Christian tradition knows the ascetic saint, master of his or her passions and faithful observer of the laws of God and of the Church. But there are hardly any political and militant saints. In the process of liberation, the conditions were created for another type of sanctity: in addition to struggling against one's

passions (a permanent task), one struggles against the mechanisms of exploitation and the forces that tend to destroy the community.

Here, more real and difficult virtues emerge: solidarity with one's class, participation in community decisions, loyalty to the solutions that are defined, the overcoming of hatred against those who are agents of the mechanisms of impoverishment, the capacity to see beyond the immediate present and to work for a society that is not yet visible and will perhaps never be enjoyed. This new type of asceticism, if it is to keep the hearts pure and be led by the spirit of the beatitudes, has demands and renunciations of its own.

f) Prophetic courage and historical patience: Many committed Christians have the courage, *sustained by faith and prayer*, to confront the powers of the world by struggling for the causes of the people and their trampled dignity. With this they show the apostolical *aphesia* of risking themselves to the point of suffering persecution, imprisonment, job dismissals, tortures and even physical elimination. In spite of this evangelical courage, they have historical patience for the slow advance of the people; accustomed to repression, militants are sensitive to often hesitant rhythm. However, Christians have faith in the people, in their courage and capacity to struggle, in spite of their limitations, mistakes and intellectual backwardness.

Men and women who are committed fervently believe in the strength of the Spirit who acts through the poor and suffering, and in the triumph of their cause and in their right to struggle. This attitude is rooted in a contemplative view of history, of which only God is the Lord.

g) Paschal attitude: Every liberation pays a price; death and resurrection must be accepted with evangelical joy and serenity. Sacrifices, threats, and even martyrdom are not feared, but are simply part of following Jesus. There is a strong sense of the cross as a necessary step toward victory. Resurrection is lived as the moment in which justice triumphs, in which the people win the struggle and make life more worthy of being lived. It is the resurrection of Jesus advancing as an immense liberation process that moves through history. This is celebrated and lived as the strength of the Spirit's presence in history.

We could list more characteristics of this type of prayer, which becomes more and more real within communities that are committed to the liberation of the neediest. The unity of prayer-action, faith-liberation, and the passion for God expressed in passion for the people, always reappears. Each time further new objective possibilities are created that favor the emergence of a new kind of Christian, deeply committed to the earthly city and at the same time to the celestial city, convinced that this depends on the way we insert ourselves in the creation of the former. Heaven is not an enemy of earth; it already begins here on earth; both draw their life from the liberating action of God, in Jesus Christ.

All this is not academic theology, but the life and mysticism of many Christians today.

FOOTNOTES OF BOFF ARTICLE

- (1) Some important titles: Frei Betto, *Prayer in Action*, Civilizacao Brasileira, Rio 1977; S. Galilea, *Spirituality of Liberation*, Vozes, Petropolis 1976; Theologians at Puebla, "Spirituality and Evangelization: Towards a Spirituality of Liberation," in SEDOC July/August 1979, pp. 72-79; L. Boff, *Witnesses of God in the Heart of the World* (Instituto Teologico de Vida Religiosa, Madrid 1977.)
- (2) With the culture of work something unprecedented in the history of humankind was created; there was a total activation of productive forces, modifying humanity and its world. It is no longer simply a matter of working, but rather of producing the maximum with the minimum amount of investment. Today, this has a world-wide dimension. The Church has not yet adequately assimilated this revolution. Ethics, spirituality, and theology are still too marked by the world of natural rhythms and by the harmony of the old world. It was an uncontested achievement of the capitalist system--and its great contradiction--to have introduced this qualitative change in history.
- (3) The Christian militant, accustomed to the complexity of the social reality, which today is extremely sophisticated and can only be understood with the help of scientific tools, must strengthen his faith vision to the maximum in order to grasp the presence or absence of God and his grace in socio-historical mechanisms. Today, more than at any other time in history, there is a need for prayer united with political sagacity, for mystical theology articulated with a critical analysis of reality.
- (4) One great difficulty of this spirituality of liberation lies in the fact that the history of the church presents few or almost no saints who achieved the synthesis between the mystical and the political as they are understood today. St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bernard of Siena, St. Vincent, and a few others had an attitude which in our judgement was more one of offering help than of liberating. They did not move, nor did they have the theoretical and practical conditions to do so, within a political framework in which alternatives, at times radical ones, are imposed in the name of faith and/or justice. This is the great challenge of our times: to create militants with a truly political holiness. It is important that we be both holy and political, in the full sense of the word.

Reference: CROSS CURRENTS, Vol. XXX, No. 4--Winter 1980-1981.

THE CHURCH IN AFRICA TODAY  
AND THE EXPATRIATE MISSIONARIES' ATTITUDE

Fr. V. Mertens, sj.

*(Voici un texte enregistré d'une conférence donnée par le P. Mertens, S.J. en juin 1980, au Collège Combonien de Khartoum, à l'occasion des célébrations du centenaire de la mort du P. Comboni. Le P. Mertens fut missionnaire au Zaïre pendant 30 ans, puis fut assistant pour l'Afrique du P. Arrupe pendant 13 ans. Il réfléchit ici sur la croissance de l'Eglise en Afrique et sur les services que les Missionnaires peuvent rendre aujourd'hui. Ed.)*

INTRODUCTION

I am very happy to be with you this evening and to share with you some ideas about the situation of the Church in Africa today. But before I start speaking of my topic I would like to make a few preliminary remarks, and to answer a preliminary question.

FOUR PRELIMINARY REMARKS AND A QUESTION

1. First of all, I think we should be convinced of the *growing importance of Africa* in the world today. The economical importance of Africa is obvious. Africa is very rich in raw materials; hence, as soon as any event of any importance occurs in Africa, Russia and U.S.A. intervene, because they know how rich the continent is. Africa also controls the petrol routes in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. I am also of the opinion that the future of the world, as regards political equilibrium lies partly in Africa, to be more exact, on the axis Africa-Europe.

2. Another aspect of the growing importance of Africa today is the *rate of population growth*. According to the UNESCO statistics of 1976, the rate of growth of the population in Africa between 1975 and 2000, will be 103%. Hence, in 25 years' time, the population of Africa will be twice as much as in 1975. In 1975 it was more or less 425 million people. According to the statistics given above, in the year 2000, it will be 850 million people. During the same period of time, the growth of population in Europe will only be 14%. Europe,

which is now 480 million people, will be only 540 million in 2000. In Africa there will be 300 million people more than in Europe. These are quite interesting facts.

3. Let us now turn our attention to *the importance of the Church in Africa*. The African church is growing, too. Let us have another look at statistics. At the beginning of this century Christians, (I am speaking of Christians, not of Catholics only) in Africa were only 1% of Christians in the world. In 1960, the proportion was already 7.5%, and in the year 2000 the proportion will be 18%. There will be, proportionately, more Christians in African than in North America. The importance of the Church in Africa did not clearly appear at the Second Vatican Council, where the impact of the African Bishops was not much. But during the last two Synods the impact of the African Bishops and their importance kept steadily growing. As regards their nationality, at the moment more than 75% of the bishops in Africa are African-born or black. That shows the importance of Africa for the future of the Church.

A question has to be answered before proceeding to my fourth remark: is it possible to speak about the Church in Africa, seeing that each Christian community is so different from the other? On the religious level we may divide Africa into four belts or areas:

The north of Africa from Egypt to Morocco, including the Sahara: this is mostly Islamic.

A belt extending south of the Sahara as far as the 10th parallel North, from east to west. Here we have countries in which Islam and Animism coexist. This belt includes the Sudan in the east and Senegal in the west.

The third belt lies south of the 10th parallel north: it is mostly Animist or Christian. Madagascar can be put in this belt.

There is, however, one country, Ethiopia, which cannot be placed in any of the above mentioned belts. It has such characteristics that it is impossible to include it with the other areas.

This evening I will speak mostly of the third belt, the belt of black Africa where Christianity is already well-developed, and Islam is not predominant.

4. The fourth and last remark I will make, before commencing my main topic, is that nowadays *it becomes more and more difficult for expatriates to work in Africa*.

It is difficult first of all on the psychological level. Often, in many countries, expatriates feel that they are more tolerated than wanted, that they are accepted because their presence is necessary, that local authorities would prefer not to have them. I think this is as it should be.

A second difficulty is rather on the spiritual and pastoral level. It is due to the fact that expatriates have to be and to behave more and more as auxiliaries, and less and less as leaders in the local church. I will come back to this point later.

A third difficulty for expatriates in Africa, and this too is of a psychological nature, is that the situation in many African countries is full of insecurity. One doesn't know what will happen tomorrow. Are you going to be there next year? or in two years' time? No one can assure you. This state of insecurity is nowadays part of the missionary vocation of expatriates in Africa. Superiors have to ask young people whom they wish to send to Africa, "Do you accept insecurity as part of your missionary vocation?" If the answer is 'yes', then, and only then, they may be sent to Africa. In my opinion, this insecurity is a great thing, because it develops in you a great spirit of faith.

Finally, to be an expatriate missionary in Africa today is very demanding from the intellectual point of view because one has to engage more and more in training leaders, in training trainers, in giving lay people a good solid formation; but to reach those goals you have to be yourself well aware of the problems they entail, and intellectually well-prepared and up-to-date. It is also quite demanding on the apostolic side, because Africa is changing quite rapidly, so rapidly that if you do not keep yourself abreast of developments by what I would call on-going formation, you very quickly lose contact with reality, politically, culturally and economically. Even religiously things are changing and evolving very rapidly, so rapidly that if you do not possess that awareness that only comes from on-going formation, you will no longer be in touch with the realities of the situation, and you may no longer be doing as well as you might think you are doing.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

My first point will be a description of the characteristics of the African church today in that part of Africa to which I am referring.

A young church: First of all, the church in Africa today is a young church. Being young she is still able to change, she is able to make new options. Our churches in Europe

are old; hence, for them it is difficult to make new choices. In Africa the church is open to new ways.

Responsible: Another characteristic of the church in Africa today is that she wants to handle her own responsibilities. The church is living in a continent where each nation, and each person in some way, wishes to be authentically African, has a very strong desire for authenticity. Hence, the church cannot help wishing to be authentically African and to take responsibility into her own hands.

New problems: Yet another characteristic of the church in Africa nowadays is that she has to face very many new problems and new needs. Let me mention a few of them.

Growth: Every year two more million people enter the church, but the number of priests, of religious and even of Sisters is proportionately decreasing.

Urbanization is another big problem, According to some UNESCO statistics, by the year 2000 more than 35% of the African population will be living in cities. The population will increase in the rural areas too, but it will increase much faster in the cities. I think that in that part of Africa we are speaking of now, the church is still doing a good job in rural areas, but she is losing ground in urban centres where she is no longer in touch with the élite, with people occupying leading positions in the political and economical life of the nations.

Youth poses another big problem for the church, Up to 10 years ago, youth received catholic education in schools run by the catholic church, but since then most of the schools have been nationalized some way or other; hence no catholic education is any longer given in primary or secondary schools. In many countries the church is thought to be doing well since a lot of adults are seen going to church regularly, but one should not forget that in 30 years' time there may be a big change, because young people are no longer receiving a good Christian formation nowadays.

I am not going to say anything about marxism and materialism though they, too, are among the problems of Africa and of the church in Africa.

New needs: A further characteristic of the church in Africa today is due to the fact that evangelization in many parts of the continent began 80 years ago, or some 100 years ago. This gives rise to new needs. In the past the first

need was first evangelization. But now it is no longer so, at least in many places. There are now new needs, like the formation of the élite, presence in the universities, the use of mass-media, the deepening of the people's faith, the training of religious, etc. But we do not have enough people to meet all these new needs. I am thinking first of all of mass-media and Christian presence in the universities. Not enough is being done in these fields. For instance, there is no Catholic University in the whole of Africa, and university students do not have regular contact with the church.

The church has also to adapt herself continually to *new ideologies and new political situations*. Since the beginning of independence in Africa, there have been exactly sixty coups d'état. Whenever and wherever such events happen, the church has to adapt herself to the new situations: a big problem indeed, particularly in some cases.

#### WHAT MUST WE DO? FOUR IMPORTANT POINTS

What must we do, faced as we are with so many problems? In a continent where the church shows much vitality, in a continent which is changing so rapidly, what must we do to make the best of this situation? In my opinion, there are four main points on which we should reflect. First, inculturation. Second, the training of trainers. Third, work through basic communities. Fourth, deepening the people's faith. I believe that it is along these lines that we have to look for an answer to our question.

#### 1. INCULTURATION

A lot is said today about inculturation. First, we have to make a clear distinction between *acculturation* and *inculturation*. The word *acculturation* comes from the Latin expression 'ad culturam', and it refers to two cultures coming together in one person or community, or society. Imagine a Sicilian migrating to Milan to live and work there. This is going to produce a shock of acculturation. Or imagine a man from Sicily migrating to New York; acculturation with vengeance! The two utterly different cultures of Sicily and New York, coming together in him or her produce a violent shock. This process of acculturation is going on all over the world and it can be either an enriching experience or a frustrating one. It is enriching when you, while keeping your culture, assimilate the good elements of the other. It is frustrating when one culture tends to suppress the other. Acculturation in Africa has very often caused frustration.



An example: in black Africa's English or French-speaking countries, secondary schools are modeled on the metropolitan pattern, that is either on the French or on the English system. A student joining one of these schools has to try to assimilate as much as possible of the history, literature, and other subjects that his school offers, and in his endeavour to do so he/she may well try to forget his/or her own African values.

At the end of the secondary school curriculum, and I am speaking out of my own experience, the student will have forgotten his or her own culture and not have assimilated the Western culture; he or she, will be neither a black nor a white. Many books of fiction are being written dealing with this problem. One of the last, written in French, bears the title "Je suis mal dans ma peau", (I am not at ease in my own skin). Africans, 'educated' along these lines fall between two stools while trying to sit on both. The danger is that they are no longer Africans and they have not become Europeans. It is a dramatic situation which occurs in the field of religious education too. Much too often religious education was like a dress put on without being assimilated into the local culture.

Now we come to *inculturation*. While acculturation is the coming together of two cultures with the effect that ensues, from this coming together, inculturation, with reference to the Christian message, means putting the message into a given culture, enabling it to penetrate that culture. Christ did that in his time, when he preached his message. He brought into this world the Father's message and inculturated it into the culture of his Jewish people. Then that message went from Jerusalem to Rome where it became inculturated into the Roman culture. From Rome it spread among the 'barbari' of northern Europe and was inculturated there with new cultural elements, becoming the Western type of Christianity. When European missionaries came to Africa they brought a Christian life to Africa as it had become inculturated in Europe over the previous 2000 years, with many western elements in the way of praying, the way of thinking, celebrating liturgy, etc. What should be done in Africa now is to inculturate the Christian message into the African culture.

This problem was discussed at three important seminars in the last two years. One was held in Abidjan organized by 'Presence Africain' of Paris. Its main topic was 'Civilization Noire et Eglise Catholique'. A second was held at Accra organized by 60-80 African theologians to discuss African theology and its meaning. We should not be surprised at the expression 'African theology'. There is only one theology, one science of God, African theology is not a "new" theology, but the theology common to all Christians who are trying to answer the questions Africa is asking, to provide for the needs of Africa.

Let us give an example, Our European theology has nothing to tell us about spirits while for Africans, spirits play a very large role in their lives. And what about dreams? In the Old Testament many things are said about dreams, but our "Western" theology has nothing to say about them. An African theology might have something to tell us about dreams. The same could be said about many other topics.

As regards moral matters, I will just mention one, When studying moral theology, we are told that 'matrimonium ratum et non consummatum' may be dissolved. We know what consummatum means for Europeans. But an African high-ranking prelate said very recently in Rome: for us Africans 'consummatum' is not just the first night together, it is the first child. This caused a shock in Rome, but it gives us food for thought. I do not say that the high-ranking African prelate was right, but I do say that there is a problem.

There are also many liturgical problems, problems regarding the religious life which must be inculturated into the African environment. For example, I believe that the most difficult religious vow for an African is the vow of poverty as traditionally taught and lived in a non-African context. What we are generally teaching here in Africa about poverty may be alright for, let us say, Europe, but it cannot be transferred to an African environment. The relationship of people to their families in Africa is different. The idea and practice of hospitality is different. The same can be repeated about many other points. Religious life is to be adapted to Africa.

Inculturation in Africa applies to theology, morals, liturgy. It applies also to Scriptures. An Institute will soon be opened in Jerusalem for black priests for an African exegesis of the Bible. Inculturation was very much stressed in Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. "To evangelize...means to take the Gospel to all strata of mankind and by its power to transform and renew mankind from inside". In another place he writes: "One could express this point as follows: one has to evangelize not in a decorative manner, by a kind of varnishing the different cultures with a kind of veneer, but vitally, in depth, so as to 'reach the very roots of the various cultures and of human culture in general.' Elsewhere, he speaks even more clearly: "Evangelization loses much of its power and of its efficacy, if it does not take into consideration the concrete people to whom it addresses itself, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer their problems, and does not concern itself with their real life",

I believe that Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* has clearly described the essence of inculturation, and I believe that

inculturation will be one of the main problems for the church in Africa. While in Latin America one of the main problems for the church is the relationship between faith and marxism, and for the church in Europe the relationship between science and faith, the relationship between culture and faith will be one of the main problems for the church in Africa. That is one reason why I believe that the Theology of Liberation is not the one in which the church in Africa is at present most interested. Inculturation is so essential to the announcement of the message that it is not an option. It is a necessity. It is necessary to know the people, their mentality, their language, in a word everything that enables us to understand them better. This is one way by which we can answer the African Church's expectation today.

#### TRAINING OF TRAINERS

This is also a priority. We keep saying: 'There is so much to be done!' Perfectly true, but it must be added that we can no longer go visiting villages as in the past, preaching the gospel, etc. These activities, and others too, have still to be done, but less and less by priests. Instead, they should be done more and more by lay people trained by priests and Sisters. We have to concentrate on training these lay trainers, not only because we are so few but also because it is the way pointed out by Vatican II. More and more responsibility must be given to lay people. This is already done in some places, among others, in Kinshasa where the Pope is today. In that city many parishes are in the hands of lay people, who are, I would say, the pastors of those parishes. They are not paid for their pastoral work, because they gain their salaries through their professional work. On Saturdays and Sundays they give their time to the parish. A priest comes for Mass and for confessions when possible, nothing else. It is laymen who run those parishes. This is being done on an increasing scale in several countries either by laymen or by Sisters. I know of many missions in rural Africa where there are Sisters on their own, doing all the parish work, with a priest coming once a week, two weeks or a month.

#### BASIC COMMUNITIES

We must work through basic ecclesial communities. That was the option of nearly all episcopal conferences in Africa, an option that came from the 'base', and then was taken up and made their own by the bishops as their policy. It was not a policy imposed by them arbitrarily. Observing the signs of the times, they became convinced that in their own countries basic communities were a real need. I am not going to explain, since it would take too long, what a basic community is, but I will

point out once more that in the basic communities the main role is given to lay people. I will add that it may be very difficult for us expatriates to give lay people their own responsibility.

The older among us say: "We never did that, and everything was so good in the past; why do so now?" The young ones come from Europe with new ideas and say: "why should what is good in Europe not be good for Africa?" The answer is that we should allow the local church, the bishops, the priests and the lay people to make the choices it thinks should be made. It is they who have to make the choices, Of course, for us it can be difficult because it may seem to be less efficient, but considering that basic communities were the quite spontaneous choice of the church all over Africa we believe that it is the Spirit who is at work in this. We have to go that way and do all we can to develop basic communities.

#### DEEPENING THE FAITH

The church in Africa is still young and growing and we must help the people to deepen their faith. How can we do this? In the above ways, but also by opening centres for the fostering of the spiritual life, centres for the training of catechists, centres for the training of lay people and groups of lay people to reflect together on different aspects of Christian life. Everything that helps to develop faith is very important.

These are the four points that are, in my opinion, the greatest priorities in the African church today. They are close to the points submitted, two years ago by the African bishops to the Superiors General of the religious societies working in Africa. I attended the meeting in Accra where there were five bishops together with the members of the executive committee of SECAM, and five representatives of the Superiors General, three of whom were priests, one a Brother and one a Mother General. The Superiors General had asked the Bishops: "What are in your opinion, the priorities for the church in Africa today?" The bishops answered more or less along the above lines. They said that the first priority was the training of priests, Sisters and Brothers, i.e. the training of leaders. The second priority was the training of trainers; the third was the formation of youth; the fourth was the deepening of faith.

#### THE EXPATRIATE ATTITUDE - THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE SPARE WHEEL

In the situation I have described, what must we expatriates do? Our first duty in the African church today is not to be leaders, but auxiliaries in the Church. We have been for eighty or more years the leaders of the church, making all the main

options, taking the main decisions. Decision-making is now to be the responsibility of the African bishops, of the African priests, of the African community. We have to be there to help, to give a certain sense of security. Ours should be the spirituality of the spare wheel, something on which you can depend in case of need. We are to see ourselves as spare wheels in the local church today. Our role is to be there, to give help if help is needed. This does not mean that our service should be purely passive; we should show our initiative. The problem lies precisely in this, combining the spirit of service with initiative.

How far should our initiative go? In what should it consist? I believe that our initiative should consist rather in giving suggestions than in imposing our views which may cause negative reactions. We should do what we can to be as much as possible auxiliaries. In my opinion, that is the most important attitude for expatriates to have in the African church today. That first, and then to be convinced that we are still needed. This is the official view of the Bishops. Of course they will join the two realities together and say: "You are needed, come along, but change your mentality, Do not come any more as leaders but as auxiliaries". Sometimes you may even hear a local bishop or a local priest saying "you may go!", but then the criterion by which to know whether you are still needed may not be so much that bishop or priest, but the local church, made up of the local Christians with the bishop and the local clergy. Of course, if they say: "You may go", then you go! But I do not believe it will happen very often.

#### CONCLUSION: SIGNS OF HOPE

To conclude I will give you a few signs of hope in the church of Africa today.

1. One sign of hope is that the church is still young and full of possibilities for the future.
2. Another is that vocations in the major seminaries are increasing. The number in major seminaries is increasing all over black Africa. Ordinations increase each year. There is also an increase of vocations among Sisters. Sisterhood is flourishing nowadays in Africa.
3. African lay people and bishops have written very courageous letters on justice. The symposium held at Nairobi in July 1977 issued a declaration on justice: some bishops were helped to be more courageous by the others' example.

4. In all countries where the church was persecuted and expatriates were in difficulties, expatriates stayed as long as they were allowed. They stayed as a group. I do not say that everybody stayed on, or should have stayed on, but as a group they stayed on.

Another great sign of hope is the faith of the ordinary Christian people.

5. Finally the greatest sign is that where the church has been persecuted, e.g. (Zaire, Uganda, Mozambique) she has a new vitality, a grace of God.

Our role as expatriates, should be to see these signs and in the milieux where we live to be ourselves, signs of hope for Christians, and for the people as a whole, helping church and nation to co-operate wherever we live.

- end -

#### RECENT PUBLICATIONS RECOMMENDED

1. The Institutional Church in the Future: Facts and Interpretations. Gabriel Marc. Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin, No.82, July 1980, pp.26.
2. Participation in the Catholic Church. Pierre Delooz. Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin No. 84, pp.37.

These two concise bulletins have a special value for all those engaged in mission today. Highly recommended.

- 
3. The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities. Eds. Sergio Torres and John Eagleston. Orbis Books, 1981, pp.283.
  4. New Mission in a New World: A Missionary Order Questions its Future. Walbert Bühlmann, ofm-cap. Sharada Press, Mangalore, 1981, pp.165. This is a reflective account of the Third Plenary Council meeting of the Capuchin Order held in 1978. While the book has a special interest for Capuchins it is of value to all missionary societies involved in a re-definition of their mission goals.

- end -

---

**"CEASE THIS MAD ARMS RACE"**

---

George F. Kennan, a U.S. award-winning writer and historian, recently studied the public moods and actions which led to World War I, a catastrophe whose early dynamics paralleled that of the current nuclear arms race. "Once people begin to accept that a given war is inevitable, they behave in ways that make it inevitable, whether they were right in their initial assumption or not," he wrote.

Kennan further called upon the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. to immediately reduce their nuclear arsenals by 50 percent. He noted that each of the two countries contain more than one million times the total destructive power of the U.S. bomb that crushed Hiroshima. He also remarked that the two nations are on a "collision course" toward nuclear war, and that their stockpiles have reached "such grotesque dimensions as to defy any human logic".

Rejecting the use of nuclear weapons, Kennan wrote, "It is something with which, in a moment of petulance or panic, you commit such fearful acts of destruction as no sane person would ever wish to have on his conscience." In making his disarmament proposal public last May, Kennan said that he felt a "greater sense of urgency than before to try to sever the arms race from its vicious circle, its inner momentum and the compulsions which arise and blind the mind of the great powers."

The veteran diplomat urged that people raise a "powerful chorus of voices, from within and from the outside of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R." He ended one of his public speeches with the following appeal: "For the love of God, for the love of your children and the civilization of which you are part, cease this madness. You are mortal men. You are capable of error. You have no right to hold in your hands - there is no one wise enough and strong enough to hold in his hands - destructive powers sufficient to put an end to civilized life on a portion of our planet."

While agreeing that the Soviets should shoulder their share of the blame, Kennan declared that "we must remember that it has been we Americans who, at almost every step of the road, have taken the lead in the development of this sort of (nuclear) weaponry. It was we who first produced and tested such a device; we who were the first to raise its destructiveness to a new level with the hydrogen bomb; we who introduced the multiple warhead; we who have declined every proposal for the renunciation of the principle of 'first use'; and we alone, so help us God, who have used the weapon in anger against others, and against tens of thousands of helpless noncombatants at that."

Reference: FOCUS, International Bulletin, Volume II, Number 10, October 1981.