
THE CONTEMPLATIVE EXPERIENCE
IN PAKISTAN I.

Chrys McVey, op.

(Ce Bulletin s'occupe, une fois de plus de la prière et de la spiritualité missionnaires. Ces deux brèves contributions du Père McVey et de la Petite Soeur Rehana, ont été présentées au cours d'une Rencontre des Supérieurs Majeurs des Religieux et des Religieuses qui s'est tenue au Pakistan en avril 1981. L'idée de cette Rencontre est venue à la suite de la Réunion de la Fédération des Conférences Episcopales d'Asie (F.A.B.C.) qui s'est tenue à Calcutta, en 1978, avec comme thème: "Prière, Vie de l'Eglise en Asie".

Les deux expériences, relatées ci-dessous, constituent un très beau rappel du sens de la prière, au-delà des limites culturelles. Elles touchent également la question de l'inculturation. "Seuls les sourds peuvent enseigner les sourds, parce que pour entrer dans notre monde, il faut savoir devenir sourd". Lisez-les. Elles peuvent vous inspirer. Ed.)

I have a cousin, a few years older than me, who was born totally deaf. My aunt, a very strong person, was determined that my cousin Eileen was going to make it in a hearing world. And she did. Sent to special schools in the beginning, she learned to lip read and to manufacture speech and then joined hearing students in high school and college, becoming herself a college teacher. I had not seen her for several years and though we had grown up more or less together, we had never talked about, well, about being deaf. When I met her a year or so ago I asked her what it was like: the training, the 'making it' in a hearing world. 'It was all wrong,' she said. 'The deaf live in another world and can't be forced into a hearing world. Only the deaf can teach the deaf because to enter our world you have to become deaf.'

After many years in Pakistan, living in a culture not my own and surrounded by so many situations unintelligible and uncontrollable, I was becoming used to the unjust, the unintelligible and the uncontrollable. While a vague awareness had been growing in me about what I was doing to myself by shutting out the unpleasant, the image of my aunt and my cousin brought the picture into sharper focus. I was just like my aunt! Her way of loving her daughter was to force her into her world. And so was I trying to force the different, the hard to understand, the poor and the miserable into my world. When it didn't work, when I couldn't handle them, or make sense out of them, or fit them into my world, then I shut them out by building a protective wall against their world. Not unlike the British in the days of the Raj with their cantonment barrier against the strange native town. Safe and sound in cantonment town, amid the familiar, the easy to handle, the predictable - where everything fit.

One of my ways of getting away from that other world was by my wall. For me it was protection, built up from fear of what those others might expect me to do for them. It all came tumbling down when I realized I didn't have to do anything for them. It was myself I had to work on. For to enter another's world all one has to do is look, and be still; 'To enter our world you have to become deaf...' Perhaps to enter anyone's world, the world of the deaf or the poor and the oppressed, the world of the student or the young religious, or of the worker and the jobless, or the world of the Muslim - to enter anyone's world it's necessary to become 'deaf'. To hear nothing else. To read lips. And hearts. It is this kind of stillness, this openness, that is the only valid passport to the world of another.

It is this kind of stillness we are talking about when we speak of the contemplative experience. For the common notion of contemplation involves a 'non-shutting-out' and the act of contemplation is one 'of thoughtful observation, of attentive consideration.' 'Experience,' to restate the obvious, refers to 'the process of personally observing, encountering or undergoing something.'

If contemplation is anything it is this worldly. More, it is this here and now worldly. Not a shutting out of anything - for everything is worthy of 'attentive consideration' - but rather an opening out to a process, or better, an opening into, an awareness of a process that one is already undergoing and experiencing. Here and now.

'Here and now' is the setting for the topic given to Little Sister Rehana and me, and it is taken from the Calcutta Paper on Prayer: 'The real encounter between the Church and our ancient religious traditions will take place at a deeper level of contemplative experience.' (FAEC Papers, No.13). Sr.Rehana will speak of the encounter from her experience with Muslims. I would like to consider the conditions necessary for a 'living with' to become a true encounter. And then the motive for the encounter.

To be sure of my topic I looked up the dictionary definition of 'encounter.' It is 'a sudden, accidental meeting: to meet face to face, suddenly, unexpectedly; to be confronted with; to meet each other unexpectedly.' I'm glad I ran to the dictionary because it clarified two elements of encounter for me. Two elements that are verified in your own experience as well as mine. Encounter is a kind of confrontation, and it is often unexpected and very surprising. Confrontation implies difference - and it is difference alone that makes possible a relationship. If this is so, then we already have several of the conditions necessary for it to become a true encounter:

the first is awareness and acceptance of difference as somehow God's will 'here and now';

the second is to let the differences be. It's significant, I think, that the Calcutta Paper speaks of the encounter with 'our ancient religious traditions.' They are still ours, and still able to influence us.

the third condition is a willingness to be so influenced. In the face of the other, to become deaf and still. To read lips and hearts. To enter the world of the other.

Why speak of encounter at all? Little Brother Michel put it rather simply once when speaking of his experience in Karachi. 'We may never,' he wrote, 'become Baluch among the Baluchi, but they will contribute to our conversion to God's ways.' This surely is motive enough for the encounter. For how else are we, here in Pakistan, to discover God except here among his people? How discover the God who became incarnate for us except here in this our world? How else discover God except by letting him disclose himself, day by day and never once for all, day by day - unexpectedly, surprisingly?

I am supposed to speak of the contemplative experience from a man's perspective. Though I am convinced deep down, to my very bones, of the need to let go, to let others be, to let God be, I am aware that it is still very hard - not so hard as before but still hard - for this man to let go and give up control.

Yet this surely is the key condition: to let be. 'Letting be,' as Matthew Fox writes, 'is reverence; it is respect. It is what all true worship presumes, for it is letting God be God, letting self be self, letting suffering be suffering, letting joy be joy. With this letting be comes a growth into being and into identity with all these important energies of our lives. It is letting mystery be mystery where in we do not reduce mysteries to problems, but simply let mysteries be. Deep listening, acute wakefulness and keen watching are all implied in letting be. For when one lets all things be one finds great wonders...' (A Spirituality Named Compassion, p.90).

'Where does God dwell?' asked the old Rabbi, and replying to his own question said, 'God dwells wherever man lets him in.' In this simple question and answer is found both the motive and the condition for encounter: God is to be found here, where we are, and he is found only when we let him disclose himself. Letting him disclose himself means letting everything in. Letting be means not controlling God's means of entry. Letting be means yielding control. It means not leading but being led. The poet, Yeats, once wrote that 'wisdom is a butterfly and not a gloomy bird of prey.' It's wise advice for us, called to let be. We don't understand anything by going out and diving on it with talons and beak. We just destroy it. We are called to let be, to touch all things gently as a butterfly, taking meaning and nourishment from them, letting the whole of reality disclose itself to us. That is far different from trying to impose order on or trying to control the chaos all about us. We just have to be part of it, letting it find its drift in us before it can assume any order at all. That means forfeiting programmes, going off in all directions and turning our backs on where we thought we had to go. Letting be means 'openness to the larger truths'; those spoken of by the Indian Jesuit, Samuel Rayan:

Mankind, not the church, is the basic community of the People of God... The Church is a sign community witnessing to certain truths, but there may be other sign communities, the higher religions, for example, that have their own and equally valid role in God's total plan. If so, the church is called to sincere dialogue and mutual sharing to realize the larger truths.

I could never have given a paper like this ten - even five years ago - and I am beginning to realize that one of the blessings of the middle years is a growing awareness of the connectedness of all things and of the meaning taken from them and from all those who people my life. It is a growing realization that I am not enough of a meaning all by myself alone. That my life, in some mysterious way, is bound up with the lives of so many others and that the 'larger truths' and their discovery depends on the way I relate to my Muslim neighbours, to college students who wander in just to talk, to the young Muslim I met on the bus from Murree last July, and who wrote me last week. 'What have we learnt from living,' the poet Rilke writes, 'except to find in others what we are.'

I suspect it was some barely conscious thought like this that led me to volunteer for the missions many years ago. Mission has changed; and so have I. From early enthusiasm through the anguish of wondering just what I was doing here to where I am now. Not that I've finally arrived but I have found a certain amount of peace in incompleteness. It is this that has given a new sense of urgency to the prospect of mission and dialogue for me. Incompleteness, because, as Bede Griffiths once said, 'the exact relation of Christ to other religions does not precede dialogue but arises only out of it.' I feel we are on the fringes of something wholly new, discovering the Christ who is coming to be, and being ourselves part of that process.

If there is one image of Jesus that has shaped my vision in the past few years, it is the image of him as 'the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Heb. 12:2). The last word on Jesus has not been said: he's way out ahead. In following him in strange new lands, our faith is perfected. Our territory for exploration and discovery is here, among a people overwhelmingly Muslim. It could well be that the conversion always associated with mission is still there but the change happens not to Muslims but to us, to me. I am the one who is changed on meeting and being confronted by a Jesus who is surprising, challenging, new - and becoming.

The contemplative life itself is always a matter of new beginnings. Such a life, as one of the Zen masters says, 'is an invitation and quest to discover more fully the gift of a beginner's mind - a mind that is open and compassionate, with many possibilities rather than a few!'

THE CONTEMPLATIVE EXPERIENCE IN PAKISTAN II,

Little Sister Rehana

Even though I don't find it so easy to do, I shall try to share with you a little about my life of prayer in a Muslim environment.

When I went home last September, I was surprised not to hear anymore the call for prayer in the morning. And I realized that for 20 years I have been starting my day hearing this call. My first prayer has always been: Father, I come to do your will. I believe that our neighbours who get up everyday to pray have also in their heart the wish to do the will of God. I always admire the faithfulness of those who every day get up to pray. As for me, I am quite happy to have a little rest on holidays.

Rubina's father is among them and every day we hear his alarm-clock, even before the call for prayer. He and his family follow very well our life of prayer and sometimes Rubina hums some of our hymns, especially one that Fr. Mukhtar Alam put to music for us, a hymn about love and unity that we usually sing before our night prayers. One day they told us, 'When you sing this hymn, we always keep silent and listen to you.' The way they told this meant that there exists a real communion between us.

That's why we try to be careful about what we sing and we have got used to dropping some hymns or some verses which could hurt the feelings of our neighbours. Sometimes it happened that Punjabi neighbours chose the hymns for us when we went to borrow cups or glasses for our guests. They are very fond of the Psalms in Punjabi. They and the area enjoyed especially the day fathers and seminarians came to our place and the evening we celebrated the Eucharist with the newly ordained Dominicans.

Every day we have one hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. It's often in the evening and sometimes when I am praying in our small chapel I hear again this call for prayer. At that moment I realize better that the first reason of my being in this Muslim area is to take all these prayers said in the mosques and houses and to join them to the unique prayer of Jesus, the Saviour of all, the intercessor in front of the Father.

I spent a few years in Iran, in Mashad, a town of 5 lakh people, but every day thousands of people were coming as pilgrims to the tomb of Imam Reza. Except for a few families all were Muslims. We had the visit of a priest every month coming 600 miles from Teheran. Sometimes people were wondering: 'How can you stay in such conditions?' But myself I know that the faithfulness to prayer of my friends, their faith and their deep sense of worship, sustained my life of prayer and my own faithfulness.

There are special gestures where I find myself near to them, for example, when I make the prostration in front of the Blessed Sacrament or after the consecration. I feel myself then very much one with them. One day, one of our neighbours followed our mass without our noticing it. After mass she just said: 'I like your prayer, because you do the prostration just like us.' I like also the attitude of the hands raised to the sky when I say the 'Our Father' in this way, I often remember my Muslim friends.

I know that our neighbours and friends expect us to pray for them. Often they ask for it and I think that our friendship started and developed first of all because they saw our chapel, observed our life of prayer and noticed that we were going to church every day. A few days ago, as I was going for mass, a big boy and a man told me: 'Pray for us in your church. Don't forget that you are one of us.'

I remember also the time in 1977 when we had lots of curfews and strikes. The men who were following the news better than we used to do, told us: 'Today you can go to the church, 'or 'Today you better pray in your chapel.' I remember especially one morning when I came out of our house and saw quite a big group of men talking. The news was not good. I told them: 'I am fed up with this situation!' They all looked at me as if I had said a very stupid thing and one of them told me: 'What happened to you today? Don't you know that we are all in God's hands? You had better go to your chapel and pray.'

On account of our Muslim neighbours we are careful about the decoration of the house and have removed statues, putting ikons or paintings or anything we feel they are less hurt about. At Christmas, in the room where we receive them as well as our Christian friends, we put a painting of the crib in a somewhat oriental style they appreciate.

Sometimes I am like Jesus filled with wonder before the work of the Spirit in my heart and the heart of my friends. He is the one who has helped us to understand and appreciate one another. With some neighbours it was easy from the very beginning. But with a family from Multan who came after us it wasn't so easy, as the father, a strict Muslim, couldn't accept our way of life, especially the fact that we didn't get married. Recently he had some difficulties and asked us to pray. It was not the first time but he said: 'God will listen to you before me.' I was quite surprised and asked him: 'Why do you say this? You are a man of prayer (during our morning prayer we often hear him chanting his Qur'an) and you try to follow the will of God.' He replied: 'God will listen to you before me as you didn't get married for Him and for us.' I was so surprised to see that through our sharing of life, inspite of weaknesses and sometimes misunderstandings on both sides, the Spirit has been working in his mind and heart.

A few months ago he got a heart attack during the night and two of us spent the rest of the night with him, sitting on the same charpol with the other members of the family. Sr. Cecile-Jeanne who is a nurse went to the dispensary to get some medicines. A few times he asked us to pray for him as he was feeling he was dying: 'My daughters, please, pray for me.' I proposed that we all join in the same prayer, and I started to pray with all my heart. I was really very much impressed and I tried to use words they too could accept so that our prayer might really come from one mind and one heart. God listened to us, and this is how our 'father' - for that is how he likes us to call Him ever since he asked us to belong to his family - told the story to neighbours and friends: 'You know, God had called me but my trip was cancelled as I have two daughters, one who gives me the medicines I need and the other who prays for me.'

With Rubina's family it has always been easy. But I was very surprised when I went to say good-bye to them a few months ago. Rubina's father told me: 'You cannot go without our praying together.' He got up, lifted his hands up to the sky and started to pray. I did the same. Here too I saw the work of the Spirit who helped him to go beyond the law and the customs which he normally follows very carefully. When I came back afterwards, he told me: 'You see, everything went all right on your trip, because we had prayed together.'

At the same time I always feel the limits of our sharing. All that is so dear to me and is at the very heart of my life, I cannot share with my Muslim friends: the fact that God became man in Jesus who gave his life for me and asks me to give my life to Him and to all my brothers and sisters, this Jesus present in our chapel, in the Eucharist and in the heart of all those I meet.

I remember one Easter morning in Iran, when one of my co-workers happened to come to our fraternity and asked me about the meaning of Easter. I tried to explain it to him as best as I could. Then he looked at me and asked me sadly:

'Are you really believing all these things?' I became sad also as I was unable to speak to him in such a way that he could understand. But I can say that through the experience sometimes of a kind of loneliness, my personal faith in Jesus, Son of God and Redeemer of the world, has grown and that I have come to feel more and more how great these mysteries are to which I had grown used from my childhood. They show God's immense love. Who am I to have been chosen to be introduced into the secret of God's life? God's gifts are really free gifts.

It has been a source of very deep joy and also a challenge for me when I saw Muslims living the values of the Gospel better than me. One day I was coming back from Rawalpindi. I was quite new in the country and I didn't have a reservation for the train. First the ticket collector wanted me to get down; then I heard him telling the people traveling with me: 'Be kind to her. She is a foreigner and doesn't know to manage.' They had been kind to me already as nobody had told me that I was sitting on one of their reserved seats. At night, one lady traveling with her two daughters told me: 'My daughters will sleep together, so you can take the upper berth.' When I was up, a second ticket collector came and said: 'I was searching for you because my colleague had told me before getting down at Lahore that there was a foreigner on the train and that he had not been able to find a place for her for the night.' I was really thankful to all these kind and helpful people. It was already late and before going to sleep I opened my Gospel to have a look at the readings of the following day. It was the feast of Christ the King. I got a kind of shock when I read: 'Come, O blessed of my Father. I was a foreigner and you welcomed me.'

I am very bad at recognizing people, and if I were to meet them again, I am not sure I'd be able to recognize them. But with many others they entered deeply into my life and I am sure that I will recognize them when Jesus will say to them on the last day: 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' (Mt 25:34).

When I was in Iran, a Sufi friend took us one day to a deserted place where a torrent had dug a very deep valley. He said: 'We are like this torrent. We know that we come from God and that we shall find our happiness in God, like this torrent which dug so deeply, knowing that its happiness was to reach the sea and to get lost in it.'

I often think that we are all traveling together. The Spirit is with us, in us, in our joys and difficulties, in our achievements and shortcomings, in our trust in God, till the day we shall all reach our happiness, God.

Reference: FOCUS, Volume 1, No. 3, 1981.

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PERSPECTIVES POUR LA MISSION

Gabriel Marc

(This short text of Gabriel Marc is one of a short selection chosen by Pontifical Mission Union of France for their preparation of World Missionary Day, 1981. Ed).

Isoler le "religieux"?: Après quelques décennies de relative éclipse, on voit revenir en force la tentation d'isoler le "religieux" du réel social pour en faire un catégorie à part, transcendant le profane dans lequel il est immergé, renaissant au dialogue avec lui qui comporte un risque d'impureté. Cela au mépris évidemment des intuitions conciliaires et plus encore du mystère de l'Incarnation: on renvoie au ciel un Dieu qui l'avait pourtant quitté pour vivre parmi les hommes.

Curieux et scandaleux retour qui donne au christianisme un statut exclusivement "spirituel" en faisant abstraction de sa situation concrète dans le monde aujourd'hui. Quoi que les chrétiens en disent (ou n'en disent pas!) ils sont associés à la richesse, à l'exploitation, au surarmement, à la violence. Aucun discours chrétien, aussi élevé soit-il par son contenu ou celui qui le tient, ne prévaut contre une telle évidence qui crève les yeux des milliards d'hommes pauvres qui souffrent des peuples chrétiens. La moitié des chrétiens habitent les pays les plus riches, quelques pour cent seulement les pays misérables et peuplés d'Asie.

La France appartient au groupe des riches. Elle est vue comme chrétienne par les pauvres, et le discours officiel qui la présente comme "la fille aînée de l'Eglise", ne peut que conforter leur sentiment.

Les perspectives missionnaires découlent naturellement de cette situation, qui est également valable, du reste, à l'intérieur de l'hexagone et il n'y a pas à chercher plus loin. Si l'on veut que les pauvres du vaste monde soient évangélisés par priorité selon la prédilection de Dieu, il est urgent que les communautés chrétiennes rivalisent d'imagination et de résolution pour inventer une sagesse évangélique qui rompe avec les fascinations de la société de consommation et de violence et témoigne au regard des païens de la force de l'Esprit de don et d'amour de Dieu. Les perspectives missionnaires s'ordonnent toutes seules autour de la solidarité, de la justice, de la paix, du respect des droits de l'homme.

S'évader spirituellement, de cette responsabilité ou se replier sur les tâches traditionnelles de la communauté serait tragique en ce moment où le monde se fait plus dur. Après deux ou trois décennies de croissance globale, d'expansion continue, de progrès des connaissances, de "détente" militaire, tout paraissait permis.

Et puis les pays riches - et chrétiens à l'exception du Japon - se sont déclarés mutuellement la guerre économique, entraînant le monde entier sur le champ d'une bataille destinée à durer plusieurs années.

Une certaine espérance est morte et désormais ce sont à nouveau les armes de la domination qui parlent fort. Justice et solidarité sont pulvérisées: les nations riches préfèrent lutter pour retrouver un niveau de domination supérieur plutôt que d'accepter un dialogue avec les autres pour un monde de partenaires. Et cela parce que leurs habitants, chacun de nous en l'occurrence, refusent qu'il soit touché aux droits qu'ils s'étaient acquis et à ceux qu'ils espéraient acquérir. Paix et détente refluent: la course aux armements reprend de plus belle et la dissémination nucléaire est en bonne voie. Partout dans le monde, et même dans les "démocraties" occidentales, les droits de l'homme régressent et les peuples se durcissent. Les réglementations françaises sur les immigrés, les étrangers, la sécurité l'illustrent clairement. Le concept de sécurité nationale fait des ravages.

Mouvements de recul: Ces grands mouvements de recul qui enfonce de vastes portions du monde dans la misère et le désespoir, ne sont pas le résultat d'un impérialisme des gouvernants. Ils manifestent très crûment le refus de l'autre et la soif démentielle de tout posséder et de ne rien lui laisser, dont nous nous rendons tous coupables.

Et "nous" cela désigne aussi bien le groupe des chrétiens qui ne se singularise en rien. La seule parole d'espérance qui demeure disponible pourtant, c'est celle qui rompt avec cette rage possessive qui englobe les hommes et les choses, celle de Jésus qui donne sa vie pour un homme nouveau. Ce n'est pas une simple parole, mais un engagement, dont la Croix est la plus haute manifestation. Pouvons-nous, chrétiens de pays riches, nous complaire dans une spiritualité aveugle, alors que le monde des pauvres nous crédite de ses malheurs? Quelle évangélisation est-ce là? Comment les milliards d'hommes qui souffrent de malnutrition, de famine, de misère, de tous les fléaux, se mettraient-ils à croire en un Jésus qui pourtant est mort pour eux mais a engendré de tels disciples? Ne faut-il pas se convertir en vérité et, ensemble, changer la vie? Voilà bien l'urgence réelle.

Où en suis-je? Où en est mon équipe, ma paroisse, ma communauté, l'Eglise de France, l'Eglise universelle, face aux exigences évangéliques de solidarité de justice, de paix, de respect de l'homme? Telles sont à l'évidence les premières questions de perspectives missionnaires pour peu que l'on accepte de voir comment est situé le christianisme en 1981. Elles doivent entraîner très vite des réponses concrètes.

Reference: MISSION DE L'EGLISE, Septembre 1981, No. 53.

CANON LAW REVISED

Ladislav Orsy

(Si le nouveau Code de Droit Canonique devait être publié dans un proche avenir sans avoir subi d'autres changements importants, il pourrait engendrer des effets de longue portée dans les Eglises d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique Latine, en particulier dans les domaines de la structure de l'Eglise, de l'inculturation, etc. Tout dépend de la façon d'interpréter le concept d'Eglise locale. La proposition de Ladislav Orsy, en faveur d'une autre procédure de promulgation pourrait attirer l'attention de tous ceux qui s'intéressent à ce que Rahner appelle l'Eglise Mondiale. (Cf. Sedos Bulletin n.18, 1980).

(The Tablet of 3rd October 1981 reprinted an article of Professor Ladislav Orsy one of the leading canonists in the Church, which had appeared in the Jesuit weekly America the previous week. The essential point made by Orsy is that "the written letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3.6). Preparation of the new proposed code of Canon Law, which will be a milestone in the life of the pilgrim Church, has advanced so far that its promulgation can take place within a year or two.

Professor Orsy first deals with the process of preparation of the new proposed Code. He then reviews the state of the church today and the opportuneness or advisability of the proposed promulgation. In this section he treats shortly of the proposed new "Fundamental Law" about which many reservations have been expressed. Lastly he offers an alternative method of promulgating the new Code of Laws. We reproduce here these last two portions of the article as they have a particular relevance for those engaged in mission across boundaries of culture, nation and race. Ed.)

THE FUNDAMENTAL LAW

Then, there is the problem of the Fundamental Law. Its content has been evaluated many times; I have no desire to go into particulars. The last version is certainly an improvement, perhaps more in form than in substance. Yet, it remains a novelty. In it, theological statements excerpted mainly from the documents of Vatican II intermingle with centuries-old legal principles which have always formed the foundation of canon law. To take dogmatic statements out of their natural context and transform them into numbered canons is a questionable method for both law and theology, and it serves no purpose.

Indeed, the most serious objection against the Fundamental Law is that the theological canons in it are not needed. All that they say has been said before and in a much better context, in the New Testament and in the great conciliar documents. There was no popular demand in the West, still less in the East, for codifying dogma in the form of law.

The legal principles contained in the Fundamental Law are, of course, needed, to the point of being indispensable. They could well be published precisely for what they are: a collection of legal principles.

All in all, the projected new law of the Church is a true fruit of this post-conciliar time. In it different trends meet, at times conflict, and by natural necessity produce a fruit in which there is much good, but which is still far from perfection. That is, it is a compromise.

ANOTHER SOLUTION

The time has come to put forward our proposal: *the new canon law should not be promulgated all at once in the form of a Code, but it should be promulgated step by step in the form of several statutes each handling a different section of the life of the Church.*

In other terms, there should not be one indivisible Code where the canons are numbered in one sequence from beginning to end, intending to cover every aspect of the life of the Church. But there should be different laws, each to regulate an important aspect of the life of the community. To give examples: there could be the "Law of the Roman Curia," the "Law of the Diocese," the "Law of Religious," the "Law of Sacraments," the "Law of Property," the "Law of Procedure." This list is not meant to be complete; it is not. The fundamental idea is important: the time may have come for the Church to break away from the idea of one legal Code and to proceed by way of statutory legislation covering various fields.

Tradition: If such an idea sounds revolutionary it is only because we have become used to a mental approach to canon law that demands a code. But, until 1917, there was no Code of Canon Law. Inspired strongly by the model of legislation in so many European states, which each has its own code, the Church wanted to have one as well. Today, even if so many states have retained a code, they rely much more on a collection of statutes. Single codes proved too restrictive and unmanageable. They are less and less suitable for keeping up with developments.

Liturgy precedent: Someone may well think that such an approach would lead to fragmentation and instability. It is not so. The Church has followed this model of statutory legislation in the matter of liturgy. There is not one liturgical code. There are different documents which were promulgated in response to arising needs. They are all available in collections--and the liturgical life of the Church is not poorer for it.

Consequences: Assuming that such an innovative--or traditional--proposal were adopted, what would happen in fact? There would be no need to hold up for long the promulgation of parts of the new law. By way of example, if it is found that the "Law of Sacraments" is ready to be promulgated, it could indeed be enacted in the form of an apostolic constitution with a good theological introduction followed by the canons - not theology made into canons. The same could be done with, let us say, the "Law of the Roman Curia" or the "Law of Educational Institutions," and so forth. The theological introduction could do much to help towards understanding the law.

Stability and flexibility: Such laws should not be *ad experimentum*. They should be definite pieces of legislation, each a part of the great collection of the laws of the Church. Thus, stability can be expected. At the same time, there would be flexibility. Let us suppose that theological developments make it necessary to rewrite the canons on the marriage of baptised unbelievers (a most likely development in the future), or new discoveries in psychology make it imperative to amend the norms on psychosomatic illnesses or psychological disturbances. There would be no need to touch a code - a forbidding task - it would be enough to amend a statute.

Our experience with the first code should serve as a warning. That code has lasted over 60 years. But pressures for change were building up so rapidly that, some 40 years after its promulgation, a radical revision of it had to be initiated. How long will a new code last, especially if it has been conceived and drafted in such transitory times as ours, and taking into account the accelerated rhythm of change in our times? Estimates may well vary. To give it an effective life span of 20 or 30 years is a reasonable prediction. By that time, pressures for substantial revision will be too strong to resist, in particular if they come from robust young churches in Asia and Africa.

What will happen then? Must the community go through the experience of writing a new undivided code again? Or, should they simply resist any change for the sake of stability? Further, should the Church be prepared to write a new code say, every 50 years? A code published today because of "urgency" may well contribute to legal instability in the future.

The "Fundamental Law": There remains one issue--that of the Fundamental Law. Our suggestion is that the legal principles contained in it should be gathered together and promulgated in the form of a statute under the very name of "Principles." The dogmatic part should be left where it is best, according to our traditions, in the scriptures and in conciliar "determinations". There is no theological statement in the Fundamental Law which cannot be found in a more authentic source; hence, nothing will be lost.

Ecumenical impact: The ecumenical impact of such a decision is likely to be favourable. At any rate, on that fragile road towards union with other Christians, we shall have just one less obstacle to overcome. Moreover, would it not be a courteous and beautiful gesture if the Roman Church told the other Christian churches: "While this struggle for unity is in progress, we do not want to legislate unilaterally for the future of a reunited Christian community. If God grants the grace that we shall be one again, then we can all get together and raise the issue if such a Fundamental Law is needed for peace and harmony among God's people."

CONCLUSION

If our proposal is accepted, the whole Church would be relieved of the strain and tension of having to wait for a code and then receive and digest it all at once. By measured steps, the new law could be introduced, each of its sections with proper explanation so that people could understand its content and implement it responsibly with the freedom of God's children.

Nor would the implementation of the proposal require much additional work. The particular statutes could do good service and remain in force as long as the needs of the community so postulate. When the forces of life in some particular field demand new laws, the Church will not be faced with the awkward choice of upholding the integrity of the Code or looking for a radical revision of all the laws. There will be a new statute touching a particular section of the community. Thus, law will follow the rhythm of life.

Reference: THE TABLET, 3 October 1981.

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THE NEW OBLATE CONSTITUTIONS MIRROR OF A CONGREGATION

Francis George, omi.

(The Oblates finalized their Constitutions and Rules during their 1981 Chapter. Here Francis George, their Vicar-General speaks about the new Constitutions in his address to the Natal Provincial Congress of their Congregation in May 1981).

The context of this talk is not just South Africa but also the whole Congregation at the moment of receiving our new Constitutions and Rules.

The Call to Mission

The first article of the Constitutions reminds us that "The call of Jesus Christ...brings us together in the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate." This call of Christ brings us into a triple identity or, perhaps better, into a vocation with a three-fold dimension: to be priest or minister, to be religious, to be missionary. These three realities which define our lives run like interlacing threads throughout the new Constitutions and Rules.

To be priest is to be called to a mission in the Church. One who gathers the baptized and presides at the Eucharistic assembly, who breaks the bread of God's Word for those who come together in Jesus' name, who offers not only sympathy and understanding to all who come but also, and far more importantly, the word of real forgiveness--a priest is a pastor in the Church.

Secondly, to be religious is to be called to a mission to the Church. Consecrated to God by vow, we are able to be signs to His people of a kingdom yet to be realized. A religious is called to be a reminder, even to the Church, of a way of life and of love that is now the object of our faith and of our hope.

Thirdly and lastly, to be missionary is to be called to a mission for the Church, to go to places and peoples where the Church is hardly or not at all present.

Priest, religious, missionary-- each of these three realities is seen by us in relation to mission. We are most fundamentally an apostolic group, a corps of men with a mission: in the Church, to the Church and for the Church.

The temptation is always to choose one of these identities and make it the exclusive definition of Oblate life. It is hard to keep them all in balance. Some might rightly point out that we traditionally describe ourselves as "Bishops' men," and so conclude that Oblates simply do the pastoral work that the bishops assign to us. This would collapse our identity into that of being ministers in the Church.

Today, perhaps, the stronger temptation might be to insist that we be first of all religious witnesses to the Church. Someone who is not much of a prophet would then in some sense not be fully an Oblate. Or the temptation might be to say that the real Oblate is out there where no one else is, making the Church present, on a mission for the Church; and everyone else is a second-class member of the Congregation.

Each of us has an Oblate vocation in the fullest sense; but what each can actually do depends on many external circumstances and different internal abilities. Even the period of life in which a man finds himself might determine which of these three dimensions of the Oblate vocation can be emphasized at any one time by an individual Oblate priest or Brother. Some can do justice to the three dimensions and all at once, at least for short periods of time.

I would suggest we look at an Oblate group, and particularly at a Province, to see whether or not these three dimensions are clearly present. If we look around and can't see the ways in which, at least collectively, we are pastors, prophets, and missionaries, then there is something wrong. But within that collective charism there is room for different emphases. The Oblate vocation is multi-dimensional; each dimension, however, is lived by us in relation to mission: in the Church, to the Church, for the Church. We are men with a mission.

Words that shape our mission

In Scripture, the call to mission is nowhere better expressed than at the end of the Gospel according to St. Matthew: "Go, then, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In listening to these words, this call, we discover three things that we are to do.

First of all, we are to go. We are to be present to some group or to a people, we are to be among them as someone searching for his hidden Word of God, considering, as we say since the Council, the signs of the times, reading the reality of the people through dialogue with them. We go to listen to the hidden Word of God.

We go with openness of heart, to learn what God has done among His people before our being sent to them; but we do not go empty-handed. We bring with us the formed Word of God, the Gospel. We read this people and these signs in the light of the Gospel, which we have been sent to proclaim. This is the second word which shapes our mission--God's Word as already expressed in Scripture.

As a result of our presence and our proclamation, the Lord will call some to become disciples. From among these new followers of the Lord, some will ask for baptism and will come together in Eucharistic community to create a new Word of the Lord for this time and place. The new Christian community will search for appropriate symbols and will eventually express its faith in forms proper to its own culture and history. This is the third Word that shapes our mission, the new Word of God.

To be sent, to be called to mission, is to listen to the hidden Word of God, to proclaim the formed Word of God and, with the new believers, to create a new Word of God.

This process is not just a missiological theory behind the Constitution & Rules; it is the process that was actually used in writing our new fundamental charter. The revision commission first went to Oblate experience and, through questionnaires and meetings, tried to read Oblate life. They wanted to discover what it is that God was saying in our own experience.

Secondly, they immersed themselves in the formed Oblate tradition, in the works and words of the Founder, especially as expressed in the various editions of our Constitutions.

Lastly, they reformulated this tradition in the light of new demands and gave to the Chapter a draft which was tested against the ideas and feelings, the sense of calling, of 111 members of the Chapter. This new word for Oblates around the world is now awaiting approval from the Congregation for Religious.

Diverse words but a common response

What is our response to this process and its result, this freshly inculturated expression of our deepest aspirations as Oblates?

The sociological survey taken in preparation for the 1972 Chapter reported that 86% of the Congregation had read the CC. & RR. of 1966. I am sure that, when we have the final text, at least as many Oblates today will read the Constitutions of 1980. That is one level of response, and a necessary one.

The General Council began speaking during its Plenary session in February (1981) of ways to help Oblates "interiorize" the text. This deeper level of response will entail what Father Jetté has called "a second conversion." During the homily last February 17 in the General House, he said:

"A second conversion is often more painful than the first because it penetrates to greater depths, it draws us out of attitudes and habits that are more firmly rooted, and it reveals to us an attachment to our own self and will that we may never have suspected. If we want to put the CC. and RR. into serious practice, we will be called to make choices, difficult choices not only in regard to our works but, first of all, in regard to our way of seeing things and our style of living."

For those of us who have been Oblates for ten, twenty or even fifty years, looking at the CC. & RR. as a challenge to a second conversion, making them an expression of new hope, presupposes that they will be not only read but also prayed through attentively.

In this prayerful attention to the text, however, the careful reader will soon become aware that the CC. & RR. are not a totally consistent set of words. This is the new word for us at this time; and yet the text is not all of one piece. Several different vocabularies are used. What I would now like to do with you is examine some of these diverse languages, these different words.

First of all, we find in the text traditional Oblate vocabulary, what we have come to call "charism language." The second paragraph of Article 1 of the Constitutions touches the traditional themes in traditional Oblate language:

Priests and Brothers united in apostolic communities, we bind ourselves to God by the vows of religion. Cooperating with the Saviour and imitating His example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor.

C.5 speaks of the poor and the most abandoned; C.6 speaks of the Church; C.10 speaks of Mary: "We shall always look on her as our Mother".

Secondly, we find the language of salvation history and of Vatican II, the language which was incorporated into the CC. & RR. of 1966. This language is often heavily biblical in tone, even when citations are not explicit.

Thirdly, there is the language of kingdom theology with its eschatological emphasis. This language became public Oblate discourse in the MISSIONARY OUTLOOK document of 1972. This vocabulary identifies the poor as the privileged of God's reign and situates the Oblate calling in relation to them. There has been an advance here, I think, because unlike 1972 when this language was used only to describe our mission, it is now also used in speaking of our religious consecration:

Our mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to seek it before all else. (C.11)

Jesus personally formed the disciples He had chosen, initiating them into 'the mystery of the Kingdom of God'. (C.44)

Fourthly, there is the language of personal growth and development. Derived to some extent from the human potential movement in North America, this form of discourse can be found most often in the sections which consider formation:

Formation is a process which aims at the integral growth of a person and lasts a lifetime. It enables us to accept ourselves as we are and to develop into the persons we are called to be. (C.46)

In living their consecration, Oblates will endeavour to help each other to grow in maturity. (R.11)

Human development among Oblates, however, is always in a communitarian context; and the fifth set of terms we find is language about community:

We are all involved in a process of mutual evangelization, supporting one another in a healing and empowering way. Together, we create an atmosphere of freedom and mutual trust in which we call each other to an ever deeper commitment. (C.47)

Community is the life-giving reality fashioned by the vows which bind us in love to the Lord and to His people. Thus we become a cell in the Church in which we strive together to bring to its fullness the grace of our baptism. (C.12)

A spirit of simplicity and joyfulness marks our communities. In sharing what we are and what we have with one another, we find acceptance and support. Each of us contributes his capacity for friendship and his God-given talents. This enriches our spiritual life, our intellectual development and apostolic activity. (C.38)

Sixthly, concern for justice as an integral and essential dimension of evangelization means that liberation language also finds its place in the new CC. & RR. The Chapter made our own the 1971 Roman Synod Statement:

Action on behalf of justice is an integral part of evangelization. (R.9)

The language of liberation is spoken most clearly in C.9:

We are members of the prophetic Church. While recognizing our own need for conversion, we bear witness to God's holiness and justice. We announce the liberating presence of Jesus Christ and the new world born in His resurrection. We will hear and make heard the clamour of the voiceless crying out to God who brings down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the lowly.

A seventh vocabulary is still somewhat specialized and had some difficulty being adopted by the Chapter. It is the language of inculturation of the faith, and it can be found when the text treats of both mission and formation:

We have as our goal to establish Christian communities and churches deeply rooted in the local culture and fully responsible for their own development and growth. (C.7)

We must always be sensitive to the mentality of the people, drawing on the riches of their culture and religious traditions. (R.8)

The proclamation of the Word to all peoples requires a deep rooting of the faith in their respective cultures. While formation opens the Oblate to an appreciation of all cultures, it will especially help him to be formed in and through the authentic values of the people among whom he lives and works. (R.37)

Lastly, since we are speaking of languages in a constitutional text, legal and canonical vocabulary is also evident, especially in the last section.

Why this diversity of languages? Again, we can find answers at different levels. The easiest response is that the text was written by a committee whose members represented many different points of view and then rewritten by a Chapter of 111 people from all over the world.

Moreover, beyond the practical problem of adopting a single form of speech when we have such great diversity in the Congregation, the different languages or vocabularies can even be regarded as a celebration of our differences, an acceptance of them as a source of enrichment.

Diverse vocabularies might also be seen as necessary in order to capture some of the current trends in the Congregation, trends not yet fully integrated into Oblate life and mission. I believe this last insight helps us to understand how words are used in a normative text such as the Constitutions.

Words are used both to legitimate and to liberate. Words legitimate by approving the past and providing boundaries in the present, giving a stable context in which we make the decisions that shape our life and our work. Words liberate when they break the chains of conventional discourse and point, sometimes in a hazy fashion, to a new vision of things. The text of the Constitutions should be read, I believe, so that it both legitimates and liberates.

Whether or not a given set of terms can be liberating very often depends not just on what is said nor how it is said, but especially on who is speaking. *Charism language*, for example, helps us discover our true identity and gives guidelines in making missionary decisions. It is both legitimating and liberating; but it could also be used oppressively to try to control behaviour by definition. I think people instinctively know when words are used as clubs; we recognize a non-liberating use of even a very good set of terms.

Another example: *the language of personal growth and development* can lead to a search for personal freedom, so that the Oblate is ready to give himself to something bigger than himself; or the vocabulary of personal development can become a lexicon of selfishness. I believe we recognize when it is used to liberate and when it becomes an excuse for individualism.

Liberation language itself, while useful in Latin America, expresses evangelical truth with difficulty in Eastern Europe, because to the extent it borrows from or depends upon Marxist analysis, it is, in Poland and Eastern Germany, the language of the oppressor. It has been co-opted and can no longer liberate.

Something similar is true of *inculturation language*. It is liberating in Asia, where the Church comes into contact with the religious richness of ancient cultures and must learn to speak their language. But I suppose you would have to be very careful, wouldn't you, in the use of inculturation language in South Africa where the language of separate development, of cultural analysis, has been used to justify oppression and racism.

Who is using language can determine whether it is liberating; there is no automatically liberating vocabulary. It is up to us, therefore, to make the Constitutions, as we speak them together, a liberating text.

Reference: DOCUMENTATION OMI, No. 104/81, October 1981.

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DOCUMENTATION AND THE NEW INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION ORDER

Charles H. Foubert

(The importance of grassroots documentation centres is increasingly evident as the North's domination of the international news network prevents countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America from talking effectively to each other. This field of documentation is one of the topics not sufficiently highlighted by the McBride Report. This is part of a contribution by Charles Foubert to IDOC's Communication in the Eighties: A reader on the McBride Report, Ed.)

THE SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION OF SMALL DOCUMENTATION CENTRES TO THE NIIO

The experience of the small, grassroots documentation centres in the last ten to fifteen years has helped in identifying at least four concepts which we believe are very important for the debate on the New International Information Order.

a. Appropriate Information. The task of the documentation centres has been to search for and collect information materials which are appropriate to a specific situation. Even though there is in today's world an abundance of information or, as some say, a phenomenon of "information pollution", experience has shown that very few of the information items are relevant to people's lives and appropriate to people's needs. Furthermore, among those few items, there are very serious distortions due to commercial interests, to the advertisement value of the news.

To give just an example, it required a great deal of documentation work on the part of development action groups and women's organizations before correct information on the baby food issue could be collected and distributed. Some documentation centres were created exclusively for this purpose.

It could be said that the emergence of documentation centres reflects the growing number of actors in society who do not find in the media the appropriate information they need: consumers' organizations and citizens' action groups, women's movements and peasant organizations, development and change agents, etc., feel the need to make their own research, to gather their own documentation, to publish their own newsletters, in other words to collect and disseminate information which, from their point of view, would be more appropriate to the needs of the people than what is available on the market.

b. Contextual Information. Another serious limitation of the present information order is the piece-meal character of the news. Sensationalism is one of the main principles drawn from the rules of the market to determine the news value of any event. Sensationalism is satisfied with the account of the crude facts, without identifying the causes or analyzing possible consequences, without providing the background of the event. Moreover, piece-meal information, the careful selection of the news and the way it is presented, is also essential to the task of directing public opinion in a pre-determined direction. Many studies on the early coverage of the war in Indochina, for instance, have shown that information items were filtered and selected in such a way as to create a consensus in favor of the American military involvement.

If one wants to know more about events, to follow trends and processes, to unmask manoeuvres or simply to avoid massification and continue thinking critically, it is necessary to go much beyond the news items distributed by the mass media and establish one's own documentation on the situation. Through the cluster of documents collected--including the critical cross-analysis of the press--it is possible to reconstitute the background and to understand the processes at work in the situation, in other words to place the news items offered to us in a fragmented way in their proper context.

c. Priority to Local Documentation Sources. Another contribution which documentation centres can offer to the search for a NIIO is the priority which they give to local sources, grassroots groups, direct protagonists and other immediate ("not mediated") information sources over the transnational news agencies and other sources of information located at the center of the world's economic and political power.

Of course, information will always be mediated by the written or visual elaboration of the situation. But it seems obvious to say that a local source reflecting the positions of the direct protagonists, will be the closest to the local views, interests and concerns when describing the local situation. The image of the situation arising from these local sources might sometimes be very different and "alternative" to the image which the mass media are propagating, but it will help the researcher get an over-all picture of the situation.

(Note: IAMS is currently studying the importance of small documentation centres for mission: see Sedos Bulletin No.6, of 1st April 1981).