

Sedos Executive Committee Meeting Friday, Feb.18, 16.00 hrs. at Sedos.

Sedos Residential Seminar: Tuesday, March 1st, 18.00 hrs.
Experiences in and Guidelines for to Saturday March 5th, 14.00 hrs.
Dialogue in Mission To-day. at Villa Cavalletti.

News:

Corso di Aggiornamento e Di Formazione Permanente per Missionari e Missionarie Reduci, Roma, 16 maggio - 4 giugno 1983.

Il Corso è organizzato dagli Istituti Missionari Italiani per i Missionari e le Missionarie reduci dalle Missioni.

E' aperto a tutti gli Istituti e alle Organizzazioni missionarie anche laicali. Prenotazione - Chi desiderasse partecipare al Corso è pregato di notificare al più presto la propria adesione a: Direttore del Corso P. Augusto LUCA - Missionari Saveriani Via Aurelia, 287 - 00165 ROMA. Tel. (06) 633.770.

P.M.V. Bulletin: This is a quarterly review appearing in English, French, Spanish, German and Dutch. Each Bulletin deals with a topic of interest to Church leaders throughout the world. Recent Bulletins which we have received deal with: Dialogue between Hindus and Christians in India; and The Future of Religion in Latin America: Divergences in Brazil. The Bulletin normally contains 32 pages and is available from Pro Mundi Vita, Rue de la Limite 6, B-1030 Brussels, Belgium.

Christian - Muslim Relations - New Bulletin. The Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian - Muslim Relations at Selly Oak have begun publishing a quarterly Review: "Bulletin on Islam and Christian - Muslim Relations in Africa". The first-Issue runs to 40 pages. Initially, the Bulletin will be distributed complementarily but it will be available also on request at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham B29 6LE, United Kingdom.

Dean of Mission The appointment of Dr. Marcella Hoesl, a Maryknoll Sister from the USA to the post of Dean of Mission, by the nine constituent Colleges at Selly Oak may be unique. The nine Colleges are all of the Reform tradition. Sr. Marcella replaces the outgoing dean Dr. Ian Fraser who had completed his term of office.

EATWOT The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians had its first meeting with theologians of Europe and North America at Geneva in January 1982.

PREPARATION FOR THE SEDOS SEMINAR
DIALOGUE IN MISSION

Background to the Choice of Theme: In looking at the "HOW" of mission today the Sedos Research Seminar of 1981 found four activities outstanding:

- proclamation
- dialogue
- inculturation
- liberation of the poor.

Proclamation: In the context of proclamation the following question emerged for exploration in the future: "What are the criteria to use in order to evaluate an authentic proclamation of the Gospel in different regions of the world today, whether it be by word, by action, or by silent presence?" The same question could be explored for each of the four main activities or "how's" of mission today. The ending of the above question: "by word, by action, or by silent presence", actually points in that direction.

Inculturation: Over the past years a lot of thought has been given to the aspect of inculturation so much so that today it could be said that inculturation is generally accepted as a 'conditio sine qua non' for any missionary activity.

Dialogue: On the other hand we feel that dialogue is an aspect that is far less generally understood or practised, rather it is to a great extent, still restricted,

- to the "specialists" who carry this out in a certain isolation from the lived realities of ordinary people;
- to some charismatic persons as e.g. Bede Griffiths who has the gift of combining the former with a total immersion in a Hindu environment.

We therefore feel that the time has come to focus on dialogue, in the light of the question quoted before:

"What are the criteria to evaluate an authentic dialogue in different regions of the world today, whether it be by word, by action, or silent presence?"

According to the Sedos Research Seminar of 1981, dialogue

- seeks to find Christ already present in a given situation
- effects a conversion by a deeper submissiveness in both parties to the truth and brings about a kind of mutual 'incorporation'
- transforms persons and through them becomes transformative of society and culture
- is a self-evangelization of christians.

This is the background to the choice of the theme for this year's Sedos Seminar DIALOGUE IN MISSION.

Methodology: Lived experiences will be shared by the resource persons and participants will have an opportunity to question reflect on and discuss these experiences in groups and in General Assembly.

Aim: The aim of the Seminar will be to arrive at criteria for authentic dialogue in Mission situations to-day.

Aspects of Dialogue: The programme will include these main aspects of Dialogue:

1. Dialogue with World Religions - particularly Hinduism and Islam,
2. Dialogue with Traditional Religions - with the focus on Africa,
3. Dialogue with Popular-religion (*religiosidad popular*) with Brazil as starting point.

PREPARATORY NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP MEETINGS

The Executive Committee decided to convene small neighbourhood group meetings of Sedos members in preparation for the Seminar and the Seminar Preparatory Committee drew up the following guidelines.

Why meetings in neighbourhood groups: It is thought that these meetings will help:

- to sharpen the prospective participants' understanding of the issues involved;
- to let the resource people know from the very beginning what interests the participants;
- to allow the seminar to address more speedily the criteria for fruitful dialogue in mission.

Questions for neighbourhood groups:

1. What shape is dialogue in mission taking in your Institute today?
2. What are the main issues which this dialogue had raised for your Institute? (v.g. with regard to formation, community life, new commitments)

The answers to these questions should be based on experience, the personal experience of the participants, but also the collective experience of the Institute.

Reports from meetings: Reports should come from these meetings. These would help the resource persons and the steering Committee. The Executive Secretary will ask for your help and co-operation in arranging these group meetings. They will be held in mid-February.

SEDOS SEMINAR - DIALOGUE IN MISSION

Villa Cavalletti, 1st - 5th March, 1983

RESOURCE PERSONS FOR THE SEMINAR

Africa: Experience of Traditional Religions

Mgr. Jean Zoa, Archbishop of Yaoundé, Cameroon, West Africa.

Asia: Experience of Hinduism

Sister Ishiprya, RSCJ. Bombay.
Father Ignatius Hirudayam, Madras.

Asia: Experience of Islam

Sr. Eugenia d'Costa, OLM. Bangladesh.
Fr. Mike Fitzgerald, WF. Rome.
Fr. Desmond Hartford, SSC. Marawi, Southern Philippines.

Latin America: Experience of dialogue in the call to a
Consecrated/ apostolic life among rural people.

Sr. Maria de Lourdes Rodriguez, Joao Pessoa,
Northern Brazil.

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS. A PASTORAL LETTER

George E. Dion, O.M.I. Bishop-Vicar of Sulu
and Tawi-Tawi (Philippines).

Les Musulmans ne constituent qu'une faible partie de la population des Philippines. Mais dans le Vicariat Apostolique de Sulu et Tawi-Tawi ils sont 95%. Dans sa lettre pastorale, le Vicaire Apostolique lance un appel pour le respect des Musulmans de leur religion et de leur culture. Leur culture a souvent été traitée avec peu de respect et de sympathie de la part du monde chrétien, dans le passé. De plus, l'intégration des musulmans dans le monde politique a rencontré de l'opposition, parce que cela était considéré comme une assimilation et une inculturation. "Nous devons nous débarrasser de l'idée qu'un Philipin fait nécessairement partie d'une culture chrétienne", écrit-il. Cette lettre soulève des questions intéressantes sur la distinction et le rapport entre religion et culture, et sur l'attitude d'une majorité chrétienne envers une population musulmane en minorité.

My dear People of God,

This past February our country enjoyed the tremendous blessing of a visit by the Holy Father, John Paul II. While in the South he went out of his way to greet our Muslim friends, in these words: "Dear Brothers, it is always a pleasure for me to meet the members of the Muslim communities during my journeys, and to give them my personal greetings and those of all their Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world. I deliberately address you as "brothers", that is certainly what we are, because we are members of the same human family, whose efforts, whether people realize it or not, tend towards God and the truth that comes from Him. But we are especially brothers in God, who created us and whom we are trying to reach, in our own ways, through faith, prayer and worship, through the keeping of his law and through submission to his designs."

Such an attitude might come as a surprise to not a few among us when we recall the 300 years of conflict between the Christians and the Muslims of the Philippines. As the pastor of a Vicariate where 95% of the people are Muslims, we would like to make everyone aware of the remarkable change in the Church's approach. The Church is divine, but it is composed of human beings who make mistakes. Fortunately these members are open to correction, always ready to reform themselves, for the Church is a church that grows, one that is ever the same yet ever different. Just as a little child is very different from the adult he will eventually become and yet the same just so does the Church have continuity: the

same personality, the same characteristics, the same identity. The new stance of the Church then was officially stated in the Second Vatican Council and we bring this to all our good people in its solemn declaration; "Upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin mother, at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgement when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Although in the course of centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safe-guarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom.

Thus spoke the Synod of Rome to the whole world. The Synod held in Manila October 21-28, 1979 spoke in no different terms. "A vicariate for Muslims shall be eventually established in the archdiocese. Its main function shall be to foster genuine dialogue with our brother Muslims, awakening sincere concern for their problems, both sociological and religious, particularly in the areas of social justice and family life. This will help in overcoming the communication gap existing between Christians and Muslims in the archdiocese."

Fortunately our Muslim brothers share these sentiments. When the three Muslim communities in Lanao, Maguindanao and Sulu spoke to the Holy Father through their respective representatives they assured him that was their new spirit too. They insisted that the recent conflict was never one of religions. In fact the conflict exists in Samar, Leyte, even in Luzon, and there the religion is the same. They proposed unity in many fields and mentioned the collaboration of "Muslim & Christian organizations in projects of human welfare, for community extension services so as to pave the way for practical commitment to genuine reconciliation, understanding and compassion." Why did this spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation not come sooner? Because as our Holy Father said while in the Philippines, "the climate of mutual esteem and trust had too often deteriorated in the past. There is no reason, however, why that past should continue being written today. If at all we should look back with pain at the past, it is in order to ensure the establishment of a better future."

Let us review that past briefly to find the causes that brought on such a division between Muslims and Christians so that we can take steps to remedy the situation for the peace and happiness of both

communities involved. In doing so, however, let us render our judgments humbly, remembering that it is so easy to criticise from where we stand today, with a knowledge and climate that could not be that of our predecessors. The Spaniards and Americans were creatures of their time and of a typical conditioning. They could not possibly jump out of their skins, or out of their values, to see matters as we see them today. Yet a statement must be made. The feuds, not to say the wars, between the Christians and the Muslims date back to the Middle Ages. For centuries mutual respect was non-existent and dialogue impossible between the two. When the Americans came to the Philippines after the Spaniards they were not conscious enough of Muslim culture to handle the situation flawlessly. Finally when the Philippine Islands were declared independent in 1946, it happened that too many confused integration with assimilation and acculturation.

It is not my intent to review that past in detail but just enough to discover that the solution to our problems lies in the correction of a few confused and biased ideas and a change of attitude on both sides. This change of attitudes must filter down to the masses both the Christians and the Muslims. We are hereby trying to reach all the Christians of the Vicariate hoping that perhaps this might reach all Christians and Muslims throughout the Philippines.

We exhort all Christians to respect the Muslims, their religion and culture.

First their religion. It is monotheistic like ours, i.e. both of us maintain that there is but one God. He must be the same God or we'd have two Gods, one for each religion. It is only the approach that is different. We go up to the mountain on one side, they on the other. One God, all brothers! In these days of materialism and Godlessness it is well that we do not divide forces, but witness to God together. Rather than underline our differences why don't we strive to find our similarities, similarities that we perhaps never knew existed. Both holy Books the Koran and the Bible mention Abraham as our father in faith. Both mention God as creator of the world, both look forward to the next life where virtue will be rewarded and evil punished. The koranic texts mention: Adam, Noah, Joseph and his brothers, Moses, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, even Jesus, although in a different way, and Mary. In fact the Virgin Mary occupies a special place. Her life is considered by the Muslims as completely exceptional. As found in the Koran she was selected by God in a very special way and by his help was never soiled by any sin. Popular devotion in certain Muslim countries is found for "Leila Meryam". Both the Christians and Muslims believe in prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Both refer to God as "the Merciful", "the Compassionate", "the Glorious". Both live to do His will. What could be more beautiful than this text from Surah 49:10 "Believers are nothing else than brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah", and this other text: "All men are equal like the teeth of a comb on the loom".

Second, we must respect their culture. Too often Muslims have met with little sympathy from the Christian world in the past. In reality, their dresses are colourful and distinct, the object of many a coloured snapshot by visiting tourists. Their dances have been incorporated by the Bayanihan Dancers who provoked admiration by showing them around the world. I'll mention but one I like very much myself: "The Singkil". Their "Tullahs" are often masterpieces of ingenuity and emotion. Their exquisitely wrought brassware, bolos and krisos are scooped up by connoisseurs & collectors for their beauty and craftsmanship. Only a lack of sympathy prevents anyone from seeing this. We will never dialogue in a friendly way unless we accept the Muslim as the sort of man he chooses to be. Relationships are born between human beings not between systems. It behoves the Christian to make the first step. Let us love them first and they will love us right back. Over the past 40 years we personally have created deep friendship with many a Muslim both from among the rich and the poor. If changes are ever to come they must somehow come from WITHIN and never be imposed from outside. Love is elicited not commanded. It must be spontaneous. It must be earned.

Integration of the Muslims into the body politic has met with opposition because it was confused with assimilation and acculturation. We must get rid of the concept that a Filipino is necessarily of Christian culture. We can be under the same flag but have a pluralistic society. In Belgium there are Waloons and Flemish, Protestants and Catholics, in Canada there are French speaking and English, and in the United States you find a melting pot of many ethnic groups and different religions but all solidly Americans. Let us be careful with the words we use for they betray our attitudes. "Filipino" refers to a country, "Christian" refers to a religion and so does "Muslim". 'Bisaya' is not a religion but refers to an ethnic group as does 'Dongo, Tao-Sug or Samal'. Some Bisayas have become Muslim without ceasing to be Bisaya which proves that "Bisayas" is not interchangeable with Christian. Likewise a Badjao could be a non-Muslim without ceasing to be Badjao. Newspapers and radio too often confuse all these and much harm is done.

With us, the above doctrine has not been mere words. We have tried to live it out. Since our arrival in Sulu, 42 years ago, the Christian leaders in the Vicariate of Sulu from the Bishop and on, have worked in that very spirit. They set up clinics, even a hospital in Bongao, where the sick and the poor have been cared for regardless of religious affiliations. They have helped the Philippine Tuberculosis Society and the Sulu Sanitarium as much as could be done. In the latter institution every single Hansenite is a Muslim. To help our Muslim brothers take their rightful position in society, schools were brought to many of the islands. Again the majority of students are Muslims, ranging from 80 to 100 per cent as in Takawan and Sibutu. Credit unions and co-ops of various types for consumers, fishermen, sidewalk vendors, pedicab drivers, farmers, etc. have been of service to both Muslims and

Christians indiscriminately. The same goes for the house to house visits of a medical team and the vast health and nutrition programs throughout the Vicariate and the Adult Literacy classes. Finally the colossal housing projects of Kasanyangan Kakuyagan, Kasalamatan and Kasulutan (about 1,500 homes) benefited both the Muslims and the Christians. Discrimination or favoritism, on a religious basis has never been our policy. Christian faith demands that we love all men, regardless.

We conclude. It is not easy to free ourselves from the prejudices that run so deeply due to our reprehensible past but a change of attitude is our first priority. This has already begun among many of us, both Muslims and Christians. It must be pursued relentlessly. Human decency demands giving in on both sides. Since this is painful it will demand a large dose of understanding, tolerance, forbearance and self-sacrifice. Again we quote the Holy Father from his trip to Mindanao and Sulu: "Dear Muslims, my brothers, I would like to add that we Christians, just like you, seek the basis and model of mercy in God himself, the God to whom your Book gives the very beautiful name of al-Rahman, while the Bible calls him al-Rahum, the Merciful One. I wish you to be convinced of the fact that your Christian brothers and sisters need you and they need your love. And the whole world, with its longing for greater peace, brotherhood and harmony, needs to see fraternal coexistence between Christians and Muslims in a modern, believing and peaceful community". How true. It is necessary that we become brothers for "love gives new eyes".

- end -

MINORITAS

The admonition of Francis to his brothers "to live among them" (Muslims) is the direct consequence of his choice to be "minor" at all times and everywhere. For this reason he rejected signs of power such as the Crusades and other ways of being "maior". In opposition to the Crusader mentality of conquering the Muslims, Francis wanted his brothers to be subject to them for the love of God, and so to bear witness that they are Christians. This witness of life in "minoritas" is very much in accordance with the exhortation of Evangelii Nuntiandi (No.21)...

"Minoritas" even affects our attitude to religious truths. It opens our hearts and minds to perceive different emphases in a commonly shared doctrine, e.g. God's transcendence in today's world, reverence for the Word, the holiness of God's Name, and to reconsider the absoluteness of our own formulations of truth. God is greater than all formulations.

Ref. From the Letter of the First Franciscan Conference on Islam, Assisi, 5-12 October, 1982.

CHRISTMAS IN RISHIKESH WITH MEISTER ECKHART

Sr. Vandana, R.S.C.J.

("Permettez que le Fils de Dieu naisse en vous" disait Maître Eckhart. Dans la région de l'Inde où vit Soeur Vandana, toute femme est habituellement désignée sous le nom de "Mataji", c'est-à-dire mère. De plus, toute personne, et Dieu lui-même, a quelque chose de maternel. "Tvameva Matacha Pita tvameva" - "Vous êtes ma mère et mon père": telles sont les premières paroles d'une prière très célèbre, récitée tous les jours par un grand nombre un peu partout dans le pays. Maître Eckhart nous dit maintenant que chacun de nous, homme ou femme, est appelé, comme Marie, à être Theotokos, à donner naissance à Dieu, à être ses parents.... Telles sont les pensées de Sr. Vandana, à l'occasion de Noël, au milieu des Hindous de Rishikesh. N.d.l.R)

You might wonder how I managed that! Let me explain. I spend a few months each year in this place holy to our Hindu brethren, where hundreds come to seek God. In fact, "seeking God" is serious business here, whether the seekers are Indians from different parts of this continent visiting "Mother Ganga", or foreigners from various other countries. The latter are invited at Christmas time, to one big Ashram here which is very open to all, as its founder Swami Sivananda had a very open mind, large heart and a very Christlike spirit.

It is here that each year we too are invited to share "their" Christmas Eve celebrations. A crib is put up with magnificent decorations: lights, balloons, streamers, - all in the style they think Westerners or Christians (often the two are synonymous for them) - would like it. They begin at about eight and till 11-45 p.m. there are chants, hymns (bhajans) carols, plays and a few speeches about Christ. One or two special Guest-Speakers are invited, - sometimes one of our priest-friends, if present with us. Normally our part in the Satsang consists of a presentation of the Nativity Story with slides, songs and talks lasting about an hour. At 11-45 there is Silent Meditation till midnight. As the clock strikes 12, the Prologue of St. John is read and the chief Guru, Head of the Ashram or in his absence, the second, gives his talk on the meaning of Christmas. This is followed by the giving out of prasad when of course all the children who have been sleeping or yawning come awake and alive.

Year after year I find myself thinking: I wonder how many Christians in India or abroad are preparing for Christ's coming by a continuous four-hour prayer session? This is but the immediate preparation for His coming. About ten days before the 25th, there is the remote preparation. The handful of Christians, usually mostly visitors to the Ashram, are invited to organise an "Akhand Kirtan" (non-stop praise of the name of

Jesus the Christ) or as non-stop as possible, - the way they do for the feasts of Shivratri, Navratri etc. Anyone who has participated in hours-long sessions of repeating the same Name (Nama Japa), knows what a powerful impact such a prayer-experience can make on the mind and heart of the lover of God.

And what has all this to do with Meister Eckhart? - the long-forgotten, unorthodox, eccentric German medieval mystic recently become so popular? Master Eckhart has always struck me as having a very wide and in some ways what might today be termed a "dialogical" spirit, whose teachings seem to be intelligible to educated and well-informed Hindus. So I chose to spend my Christmas preparation time in his company, with his thought on the "Birthing of Christ". It is some of these thoughts of his I should like to share with you, - thoughts which seem to appeal to our Hindu friends.

1. "Let yourself give birth to the Son of God", said Eckhart. Every woman in this area is normally addressed as "Mataji" or Mother. More, every person, nay, God Himself has something of the Mother. "Tvameva Matacha Pita tvameva" "You are my Mother and my Father" begins a famous prayer recited daily by many all over the country. Now Eckhart says whether male or female, we are all called like Mary, to be Theotokos, to give birth to God, to become His parents. "He must generate through you.... This is the fulness of time when the Son of God is begotten in you". For what profit is there in Christ having been born once upon a time in Bethlehem, if He is not born anew in me, in you, in my brother, in the whole of society? This "birthing" however requires an awakening or a break-through.

2. "The Break-Through" - for which Eckhart coined a new word ("Durchbruch") is, he says, greater than creation, for it is a "Birthing" of God that is an awakening. We wake up to see that we can let God be God in us - by "letting go" and "letting God." Thus God can happen in us. He so badly wants to happen in us, be born in us. The birth and break-through is God's, ours the letting go and the awakening. This letting-go is the true renunciation of self, the ego-self. This renunciation is the true Sannyasa (Sam-perfect; nyasa-abandonment) as the Bhagvad Gita teaches. Living as I do in a place where one constantly sees men and women clad in saffron, I am perpetually reminded of what the colour stands for: that the ego-self is meant to be totally burned up in these people so that they are aflame with the love of God. For this reason they are not cremated at death like their other Hindu brothers and sisters; they are already meant to be burnt up, and alive and awake to their real Self. They more than any others, have heard the call of the Upanishads: "Arise, awake, be enlightened...." And now they can see "the Self seated in the heart of all things." By letting go, by this awakening or break-through, one is thus meant to enter into the Godhead. (And Eckhart distinguishes between God and the Godhead - again, something which makes sense to the Hindu). We

let God happen in us, he says. And yet, it does not just "happen" - any more than a birth "happens". The ground has to be prepared for the seed.

3. "In the Grace of Stillness the World is Born in Us." Stillness is so holy, says Eckhart, because it is in stillness that birth is allowed to happen. "Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness". And again: "The best and noblest of all I can come to in this life is to be silent and let God work and let God speak." This silence is active and pregnant. It means non-verbal communication. Some Gurus like Sri Ramana Maharishi taught their disciples and gave them enlightenment, i.e. awakened them to their real Self, through "maun vyakhya", silent discourse. But to be able to do this, usually years of "sadhana" have to be put in, - serious spiritual striving and asceticism and hours of meditation. When I see here men and women, young and old, Indian and foreign, learning to sit for hours, motionless in Yogic Meditation, I realise a little why the psalmist calls us to "Be still and know that I am God". It is then that one forgets the little "self" and begins to understand a little St. Catherine of Genoa's "My Me is God". As Eckhart himself says, "It is in a forgetting and non-knowing that the Word will come", -recalling to us the unknown mystic author of "The Cloud of Unknowing". "There is no question," he says, "that the proper way to hear the Word (and to give birth to the Word) is in a stillness and in a silence... When we allow ourselves to hold back, we become fuller than when we work." Meister Eckhart, I am sure, would have felt quite at home waiting in silent meditation for the fifteen minutes before the midnight hour of Christ's birth in the Hindu ashram. And yet, being able to sit silent and still before God does not mean not being able to work and share.

4. Without the Hard Work of Human-kind, God is not Continually Reborn and therefore God dies. We "lay God." We cannot live without some work as the Gita says; only we must work for "Loka sangraha"- for the welfare of others, not only for ourselves. To work unselfishly without looking for any rewards or honour for oneself, is considered by Hindu masters, one of the most salutary ways for beginners in the spiritual life to purify themselves, to lose their ego selves. Only so the Real Self may be born. "He must increase, I must decrease" is the law announced in the Baptist's words, he who came to prepare the Way for the coming of the Lord. The Lord Jesus was born to give us life and "more abundantly." When we have received something in abundance, we have to work, not only to keep it and not lose it, but it also behoves us to share it with others. And Christmas is known as the Feast of Sharing. What better Christmas gift can we give anyone than a share in this life, not in words but through our actions, our work! And this often means giving up something we enjoy - even if it is holy thing, a spiritual experience, an enjoying of God for oneself! And so Eckhart tells us: "We should abandon rapture sometimes for the sake of a better love, which is to perform a loving ministry of work."

Ref. The Examiner, Bombay, Dec. 18, 1982.

 INSTALLATION D'UN MOKAMBI

Kinshasa, 14 Fevrier, 1982

After several years of experiments and after the Eighth Theological Week of Kinshasa in 1973, which studied lay ministries and the Africanisation of the Church, Cardinal Malula officially announced his plan for pastoral renewal in the archdiocese of Kinshasa. The main lines of this initiative were:

- *we want to entrust a few parishes completely to some lay leaders who have followed a three-year formation and have given proof of their dedication.*
- *priests working in these parishes will retire from them. Indeed, lay people need to be left on their own in order not to be hindered in their tasks by their former parish priests.*
- *priests affected by this change will be concentrated in a nearby parish from where they will take care of one or two places of worship in the neighbourhood. Their ministry will be exclusively a priestly ministry: celebration of the eucharist, penance, etc. In addition they will take care of the spiritual guidance of the lay leaders.*
- *this plan should not let us forget the urgency of promoting other lay ministries in all parishes, and make us active in promoting the training of lay people in the pastoral work among the sick.*

The bishop gave those in charge of parishes a full year for reflection and preparation: the programme would start in September 1974. Approved by the hierarchy in this manner, the movement was launched. During 1975 eight bakambi were installed officially. There were 15 bakambi in 1981. Here is an account of the installation of the latest mokambi.

Nous sommes à Mombele, quartier de Kinshasa, ce dimanche 14 février 1982, 9 heures du matin. Du côté gauche de l'enclos paroissial, débouche un cortège: d'abord dix beaux jeunes gens en aube blanche ornée de bandes d'étoffe chamarrée de rouge et d'or; ensuite revêtus des mêmes ornements, une femme portant le livre des Evangiles et deux hommes, une sagaie à la main; puis un couple en costume civil (le futur "mokambi" et sa femme); enfin, simple et majestueux, la mitre bien ajustée, le cardinal Malula entouré de deux prêtres: Le Père Eugène Verhaert, prêtre-animateur de la paroisse S. Félix et le père D. Delanote, animateur des bakambi pour l'archidiocèse de Kinshasa.

Le cortège pénètre dans une église comble. L'assistance chante à tue-tête au son des tambours et des maracas. Au rythme entraînant des tamtams, le cortège avance sur un pas de danse discret, dessinant un lent

mouvement ondulatoire.

L'assemblée chante toujours de toutes ses forces en battant des mains. La messe d'installation officielle du mokambi de la paroisse S. Félix va commencer; elle est célébrée en rite zairois. Tout le cortège s'est rangé dans le chœur, autour de l'évêque assis sur un siège de bois sombre orné d'entrelacs sculptés. Dans le chœur, à gauche, la chorale groupe hommes et femmes de différents âges; elle entraînera et soutiendra les chants de l'assemblée, chants rythmés de battements des mains et accompagnés de balancements du corps; quelques cris pareils à une trompette apportent des accents de fête.

La messe se déroule entièrement en lingala, quelques petites modifications à la structure traditionnelle m'obligent à demander à ma compagne où l'on en est. Ainsi, la liturgie débute par une invocation des saints; les ancêtres, étant les saints du clan, sont également invoqués; le rite pénitentiel et le geste de paix se placent après l'évangile. A certains moments, les acolytes interviennent par des évolutions, un balancement du corps, de gracieux mouvements de bras: tout cela est très digne et mesuré. Après l'Evangile, l'archevêque prononce l'homélie. Le ton est simple et direct: la foule interpellée répond, quelquefois en achevant des phrases laissées intentionnellement inachevées par le prédicateur. La fin est vivement applaudie avec des cris de fête.

Dans son homélie, le cardinal a souligné l'importance des ministères laïcs, surtout celui de mokambi de paroisse, dans l'Eglise particulière de Kinshasa. Unique en son genre et toute nouvelle dans la tradition de l'Eglise, cette initiative pastorale suscite l'intérêt dans de nombreuses Eglises-soeurs d'Afrique et d'autres continents. Elle porte déjà, pour l'Eglise locale de Kinshasa, des fruits en abondance. Le cardinal insiste sur la collaboration nécessaire de tous les baptisés-confirmés, unis autour du mokambi et du prêtre-animateur, pour transformer notre société souffrante en Royaume de Dieu où règnent la justice et la vérité, la paix et la charité.

Après l'homélie, les acolytes vont en cortège dansant à la rencontre des fidèles, hommes et femmes, portant les offrandes et les corbeilles pour la quête. Celle-ci achevée, les fidèles remettent les offrandes dans les mains de l'évêque en disant: "Voici, Tata, les dons que nous avons collectés: ils sont l'expression de la charité fraternelle qui règne parmi nous". Les corbeilles sont alors déposées au pied de l'autel.

Le mokambi et son épouse sont assis au premier rang entourés de leurs enfants et des 15 bakambi déjà en fonction dans les paroisses de Kinshasa. Voici le moment de l'installation officielle du mokambi. Il se présente à l'archevêque assis sur son siège, à l'autel. Un dialogue s'engage. L'évêque s'adresse d'abord à la communauté paroissiale: "Mes frères bien-aimés, notre frère TSHIPAMPA Kapita a commencé une belle oeuvre au milieu de vous. Vous le connaissez, vous voyez comme il se donne à son travail: je suis venu lui confier la charge de mokambi dans

cette paroisse de S. Félix. Etes-vous d'accord?" La foule donne son accord.

L'Evêque s'adresse ensuite au mokambi: "Mon frère bien-aimé, TSHIPAMPA Kapita, vous savez pourquoi nous sommes ici en ce jour; vous connaissez la tâche que nous voulons vous confier. Acceptez-vous d'être mokambi au service du peuple de Dieu qui habite cette paroisse"? Le mokambi donne son accord. L'évêque lui remet son manuel et le livre des Evangiles. Sa femme le rejoint et l'évêque s'adresse alors zèle: "Ma soeur bien-aimée BUKATUSEKA, vous êtes la campagne de vie de notre frère TSHIPAMPA Kapita, soyez l'épouse fidèle et dévouée, la mère de famille pleine d'amour, à l'exemple de ces saintes femmes dont nous parle la Bible: fidèle comme Sara, la femme d'Abraham; dévouée comme Rébecca, la femme d'Isaac; aimable comme Rachel, la femme de Jacob. Servez le Seigneur comme Elisabeth, la femme de Zacharie... Etes-vous d'accord que votre époux assume la charge de mokambi dans cette paroisse? L'épouse acquiesce et rejoint sa place, et l'évêque prononce la prière de bénédiction: "Dieu tout-puissant, regarde avec bienveillance ton serviteur TSHIPAMPA Kapita; donne-lui la force de ton Esprit pour qu'il soit le guide des chrétiens de cette paroisse; qu'il annonce à tous ta Parole de vérité; qu'il dirige et préside les prières des fidèles de ce lieu; qu'il rassemble ton peuple dans la charité; qu'il leur dise toujours des paroles de sagesse. Qu'il soit le guide de ton peuple ici rassemblé et le gardien fidèle du sanctuaire de ce lieu".

Le mokambi reprend sa place à côté de son épouse, et la messe continue. Je m'y retrouve un peu mieux! Les deux prêtres concélébrent avec le cardinal. L'hostie consacrée est longuement offerte aux regards des fidèles. Au moment de la communion, le mokambi sort et revient, revêtu d'une aube pareille à celles des acolytes; il va aider les prêtres pour la distribution de l'Eucharistie. Corps contre corps, de longues files ondulantes s'avancent vers les points de distribution. La messe achevée, le même cortège qu'au début sort de l'église au pas de danse, à la tête de la masse compacte des assistants.

Les présentations terminées ainsi que les allocutions qui les accompagnent, nous entrons, . . . un dîner exquis nous est offert: du riz, de la chikwangue (manioc longuement travaillé), des feuilles de manioc cuites, du poulet, des poissons frais et secs, une bière bien fraîche. Nous sommes une douzaine autour de la table. Mon voisin de gauche est un pasteur presbytérien, en même temps, l'un des notables du secteur, il porte un "col romain"!

Dans la cour se déroulent des jeux, des danses, des saynettes pour divertir les assistants. Le repas fini - pour nous - nous sortons de la maison pour laisser la place au groupe suivant. Voilà une façon pratique de pallier le manque de places, de chaises; vaisselle et couverts, lavés entretemps, vont servir plusieurs fois, car tous les invités prendront leur part de ce repas de fête. Le cardinal s'attarde un peu avec les prêtres et les bakambi, puis il regagne sa résidence à bord de sa petite VW blanche qu'il conduit lui-même, tout simplement!.

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Sr. Agnetta SSpS.

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