



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS  
AT THE SEDOS SEMINAR HELD IN MARCH 1983

<u>Cong.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Cong.</u>	<u>Names</u>
CICM	Albert Depre	PME	Jean-Louis Martin
CICM	Laurence Mpongo	RGS	Mauraid Moran
CMI	Albert Nambiaperambil	RSCJ	Paquita Tomaya
CP	Vincenzo Carletti	SA	Christine Middelhoff
CSSP	Thomas Farrelly	SCJ	Wilibrordo Van den Boogaard
CSSP	Joseph Gross	SCMM-M	Godlieve Prové
CSSR	Ignaz Dekkers	SDB	Anthony Smit
FMM	Rose Fernando	SFM	Clair Yaeck
ICM	Armandine Demeyer	SJ	Casimir Gnanadickam
IEME	Vincente Abad Sauri	SMA	Harrie Van Hoof
IEME	Rafael Janin Orradre	SMB	Joseph Amstutz
MC	Lena Emilia	SMC	Giuseppina Tresoldi
MC	Giuseppina Morelli	SMC	Franca Fusato
MC	Paula Gepris	SMSM	Margaret Slaughter
MCCJ	Adriano Danzi	SMB	Joseph Elsener
MDI	Angelica Fernandes	SNDN	Ann Lynch
MEP	Jean Paul Bayzelon 306	SSC	Bill Halliden
MG	Rodolfo Navarro Guerra	SSpS	Eugenia Berming
MHM	Bishop Cornelio de Wit	SVD	Henry Heekeren
MHM	Henrich Pallhuber	SVD	Karl Muller
MDS	Matilda Trinchera	SVD	Jacob Kavumkal
MM	Joseph O'Neill	SX	Zannini Francesco
MM	James Noonan		
MM	Joseph Lang	<u>SEDOS:</u>	
MDS	Elvina Barkat	CSSp.	Fr. Willie Jenkinson
MSC	Ron Larkin		Executive Secretary
MEP	Jean Michel Cuny		Jacintha Alagiah
NDA	Marciana O'Keefe	<u>TRANSLATORS:</u>	
NDA	Marie Rose Bequé	FSG	Louis Gloriau
OFM	Ignatio Unanue	RJM	Sr. Berchmans
OMI	Bill Sheehan	SVD	Tony Pates
OSU	Jeanne Hartono		
OSB	Simone Tonini	SA	Jeannette Dastous
PIME	Filippo Commissari		
PA	Robert Gay		

RESOURCE PERSONS

Mgr.	Jean Zoa, Archbishop of Youndé	Sr. Eugenia d'Costa, OLM
Sr.	Ishpriya RSCJ	Fr. Desmond Hartford, SSC
Fr.	Ignatius Hirudayam, SJ	Fr. Mike Fitzgerald, PA

Sr. Maria Arlinda

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DIALOGUE IN MISSION

A REPORT ON  
THE SEDOS SEMINAR, ROME, MARCH 1983

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Background to the Choice of this Theme: The Sedos Research Seminar of 1981 identified four directions in Mission to-day: proclamation, dialogue, inculturation and liberation. It gave a pre-eminent place to proclamation in which it distinguished two approaches:

*"The first is concerned with extending the visible communion of the Church, a "centripetal" purpose, leading people directly into the Church. The second is concerned with recognising and furthering the values of the Kingdom, a "centrifugal" purpose, allowing the power of the Gospel to encounter and move humanity in its struggles and diversity....."*

*This second model is achieving more prominence to-day and may be directing us to what will become the priority in much future missionary proclamation". (The first is concerned with conversion, the second with dialogue).*

Considering the three other directions in missionary activity it was felt that over the past years a lot of thought was given to the aspect of inculturation so much so that to-day it is generally accepted as a 'sine qua non' of mission. So also, liberation has been the focus of much attention. Dialogue, on the other hand, appeared to be an aspect that is far less generally understood or practised; rather it is often restricted to specialists or to charismatic persons.

It was felt that the time had come to focus attention on dialogue, seeing it as more englobing than either inculturation or liberation, and even as an aspect of proclamation. The same question which the Sedos Research Seminar, 1981, asked about proclamation is thus asked about dialogue:

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

(See Sedos Bulletins No.7, May 1, 1981 & No.3, Feb.15, 1983).

## II. METHODOLOGY

The approach was pastoral and experiential. The Resource Persons described their experiences of a lived dialogue with Hindus, Moslems people of traditional religions and also with the poor.

4. The participants at the Seminar did not attempt to move from these experiences to agreed principles and definitions as such a procedure would have been of doubtful value. They did reach however, a general consensus on many criteria of authentic dialogue and the importance of dialogue in Mission to-day.
5. They reiterated a number of the "Considerations" which emerged at the Sedos Research Seminar of 1981 while they deepened the understanding of these "Considerations" and added their own further insights.
6. They recognised that dialogue is a term used with a variety of meanings and so they distinguished between, for example,
  - Inter religious dialogue:  
at the level of social contacts and collaboration  
at the level of theological and religious discussion  
at the level of sharing of faith experience.
  - Dialogue within the Church:  
with the authorities (Bishops, Superiors)  
between different tendencies.
  - Dialogue within the individual person.  
These meanings were reflected in the findings of the Seminar.
7. Some difficulties of the dialogical approach to Mission emerged during the Seminar. Simplistic generalisations were avoided and the significance of factors of time and place in dialogue recognised. The Seminar thus pointed to an incompleting agenda of further questions and issues.

(Note: Sedos Bulletin, No.7, May 1, 1981 contains The Sedos Research Seminar Agenda for Future Planning, Study and Research in Mission. The full Report of the Seminar is available in Mission in Dialogue. Eds. Motte, Mary, FMM. and Lang, Joseph, MM. New York, Orbis Books, 1982.)

### III. RE-AFFIRMATION OF "CONSIDERATIONS ON DIALOGUE" WHICH EMERGED AT THE SEDOS RESEARCH SEMINAR ON THE FUTURE OF MISSION, MARCH 1981

The following 'Considerations' of the 1981 Seminar on the Future of Mission were re-affirmed at the 1983 Seminar on Dialogue in Mission.

8. It is clear that Christians in dialogue seek to find Jesus Christ already present in the other person, institutionalised religion, even ideology or secular reality. This search in honest and respectful dialogue involves risks on both sides. (See Agenda for Future Planning, Study and Research in Mission.12).
9. Dialogue is not a diminished form of mission or an expedient to be used where and when direct proclamation is not possible It is a genuine form of Christian witness and it is implied in all genuinely missionary activity. (Agenda, 13).

10. Dialogue readily acknowledges that the Catholic Church is also a "Searching Church". The life and mission of the Church are only understandable in terms of the larger realities of the Risen Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom, all of which while being distinct from the Church are inseparable from her total reality. (Agenda, 18).
11. Dialogue presupposes deep faith in the interior action of the Holy Spirit in the human hearts. (Agenda, 25)
12. Concrete situations are the focus of dialogue, not just principles and abstract presentations of positions. (Agenda, 16).
13. Any kind of dialogue is rooted in a "dialogue of life".. It supports more formal exchanges and brings about a growing together in closer communion. This often effects a kind of conversion in both parties by a deeper submissiveness to the truth. (Agenda, 27).
14. Dialogue presupposes a desire for the total liberation of one's partner in dialogue and a concrete involvement, where possible, in effecting this liberation. Christians in dialogue must be sensitive to the seeds of a future liberation of the poor and to the search for kingdom values. (Agenda, 19).
15. Authentic dialogue with those of other faiths and of no faith will be a self-evangelisation for Christians themselves for it calls for an accompanying dialogue both within the individual and within the Christian community. (Agenda, 15).
16. Qualities of dialogue are interior silence (contemplation), modesty, recognition of the value of little gestures, absence of anxiety for quick results, a person oriented rather than a results oriented approach. (Agenda, 20).
17. Contemplation holds a privileged place for Christians involved in dialogue with followers of Asian religions (Agenda, 26).

IV. CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE:  
 FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS EMERGING AT THIS  
 1983 SEMINAR ON DIALOGUE

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18. An important factor in dialogue is the life-style of the partners. Without a certain simplicity of life-style and a movement of identification with the poor dialogue is difficult if not meaningless.
19. Dialogue cannot take place from a position of power. There is a powerlessness that is empowering, the powerlessness manifested in the life of Jesus. Dialogue requires this powerlessness. It is not contrived. It does not seek to dominate or to pressurise. It seeks truth.

20. Dialogue is not a technique or a process necessarily bringing results. When there is an impasse it may continue only as a dialogue of life or a dialogue of prayer but these are not alternate or further steps undertaken because dialogue at the level of mutual conversation has ceased.

21. Dialogue is a way of being in mission.

22. Basic to dialogue is an understanding of oneself, of ones values attitudes, prejudices. Without this inner (or intra) dialogue and centeredness, 'inter' dialogue is extremely difficult.

This growth in self knowledge is not only a prerequisite but also a consequence of dialogue. It is part of the wider requirement which is needed in order to understand the other and the situation in which dialogue is taking place.

23. Dialogue is a fruitful "locus" of theology. The reflection of the Church on situations of dialogue and the practice of dialogue is itself a valuable source of theology. Theology should not only underpin dialogue but should arise from it.

24. A dialogical attitude is an absolute necessity for all engaged in mission today. There is a sense in which dialogue can be described as constitutive of mission, an integral part of proclaiming the gospel, as justice was recognized to be an integral part of proclaiming the Gospel by the Synod and in Paul VI's Evangelii Nuntiandi. Nevertheless it is not an end in itself. The Kingdom and its values are the goal of dialogue.

25. The love of Christ leaves us no option but to dialogue. Questions like, how? with whom?, call for practical approaches and follow-up. Unless one goes to meet the other in life situations one may never become involved with him or her in dialogue. It is necessary to risk taking the first step in breaking the vicious circle of misunderstanding.

26. Dialogue of life frequently involves sharing poverty, insecurity and involvement in a search for justice and integral liberation. In many of the situations of dialogue presented at the Seminar it appeared that 'the option for the poor' was no longer optional. Such an option frequently brings its own rewards: a deeper awareness of the bonds of humanness which unite all women and men, a deepening of one's own faith and liberation from a ghetto mentality.

27. Dialogue presupposes a strong faith in God, a deep hope in the continuing action of the Holy Spirit in all men and women and a fidelity to prayer.

28. Inter-religious dialogue presupposes religious people and is often exercised in a dynamic of "faith supporting faith".

29. The complexity and variety of situations of dialogue should be recognised. There is inter-religious dialogue with people of other faiths, as for example the great religions of Asia. There is dialogue with people of ancestral religions, not only in Africa but also in Asia and Latin America. There is also dialogue with "post-Christians", with non-believers, with Marxists, with followers of secular ideologies. There is dialogue between the great religions of Asia which we can only observe and accompany sympathetically, and there are other forms of dialogue.
30. Recognition and acceptance of legitimate pluralism in interpreting the Christian message and in the self-understanding of other faiths is necessary for dialogue.
31. Discernment of kingdom values and their pursuit is of paramount importance in dialogue which often begins in the common search for these values. Acceptance of and pursuit of kingdom values can bring about solidarity, understanding, confidence and trust, mutual enrichment, communion and participation. These values can be discerned beyond the confines of different religions. It could be said that the soul of dialogue is disinterested communion.
32. For Christians dialogue has an ecclesial dimension which implies contact with, support and encouragement of the Institutional Church. Members of mission Societies have an analogous relationship with the appropriate authorities of those Societies. This support should extend to understanding forgiveness when mistakes are made.
33. Dialogue within the Church itself is called for. It is difficult to participate in dialogue with others and to inculcate its value and necessity if the Church itself is lacking in dialogue at appropriate levels and in appropriate situations.
34. Deeper understanding of ancestral religions is an increasingly important aspect of dialogue today. The Church may be a real and significant protector of these religions and of the Kingdom values found in them.
35. Local Christians emersed in a society strongly marked by another religious tradition may find dialogue more difficult than the expatriate missionary. The missionary should understand this but not be deterred from wanting to promote dialogue.
36. The experience of dialogue can be one of great joy but when dialogue is difficult or seemingly impossible those involved in it may find their role closer to that of the suffering servant requiring of them the ability to absorb criticism and suffer pain.

## V. CRITERIA WHICH EMERGED RELEVANT TO FORMATION

37. Given the complexity of dialogue specialised preparation is necessary for those undertaking it as a special ministry but preparation is necessary proportionately for all who engage in mission to-day.
38. Realistic preparation is also required for those who are chosen or who opt for a special ministry of dialogue with risks of involvement in conflictual situations. This preparation should include a process of discernment of spirits.
39. It is of vital importance for those in formation and preparation for dialogue to experience their Christian belief as a liberating force in their own lives enabling them to reach out to others in dialogue.
40. The demands of dialogue should be reflected in faculty programmes of novitiates, seminaries and scholasticates and in the various channels of information such as magazines, propaganda publications and internal bulletins.
41. Preparation should be aimed not only at those in formation but at all those engaged in mission. Informing the latter about the increasing demands of dialogue may well be the more urgent requirement to-day.

### VI. QUESTIONS THAT EMERGED FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

42. How is dialogue related to the call to cross geographical or cultural boundaries in order to share the Good News; to be an intermediary as Annanias was for Saul; to give an account of the hope that is in one in a manner more direct than simply the witness of a way of life?
43. "God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him" (i.e. in Christ). (Col.1,19-20).

On the basis of this and similar texts the "fulfilment" theory has been developed: the good news of the Gospel is to subsume the values, fill the lacunae, and overcome the evil dimensions of the culture it encounters. Yet some feel that this theory is intolerably patronising, that it does not recognize that the Good News is necessarily conveyed through a cultural medium.

How valid is the "fulfilment" theory? How does it work out in

practice? Can an adequate distinction be made between the Gospel and its cultural medium? Is the Church always a searching Church, always seeking to reform itself no matter the culture in which it is incarnated, even 'Western' culture? ...

44. Is dialogue an integral part of mission? The practical consequences of a positive answer could be as far reaching as the Synodal assertion that the pursuit of justice is an integral part of evangelisation.

If action undertaken for justice is an integral part of evangelisation, is action undertaken for dialogue similarly justifiable?

45. Dialogue does not lead to mutual enrichment when one partner is clearly unwilling to remain open. How can dialogue continue in the face of such an impasse? By praying, living in hope, learning to ask the right questions, to hear the answers, to understand the significance of the answers?

46. The impossibility of dialogue from a position of power raises questions for professional experts. The exercise of a profession even in a spirit of service can place one in a position of quasi-dominative power. Such may be the situation of the mission doctor in an area where the poor are unable to pay hospital fees and hospital beds remain unoccupied, or, for example, the principal of a Christian School where parents of other faiths beg for admission of their children to the School. Can or should such situations be avoided?

47. Is there a tendency to separate kerygma and diakonia too rigidly?

48. What are the differences between dialogue with highly structured religions and with uncodified ancestral religions?

49. Does the possibility of conversion militate against sincere dialogue? What are the criteria for sincere conversion?

50. Dialogue is said to be oriented to persons rather than to results: what lessons can we learn about this from the dialogues of Jesus?

51. Dialogue leads to an even more fundamental question: What is the nature of the Christian presence in the world to-day? How do we distinguish the essential from the non-essential elements in the Church?

The Christian was "The soul of the world" for some of the Fathers of the Church. What relevance has this in the dialogical approach of to-day?

52. Is aptitude for interreligious dialogue a special charism which should be given consideration in formation programmes and in assignments?

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A NOTE ON THE SYNTHESIS  
AND THE METHODOLOGY

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While there are many variations of the experiential methodology all agree on its three main stages. These are:

- i. Presentation of a lived experience;
- ii. Reflection on the experience;
- iii. Synthesis.

At the presentation stage the important point is the communication of a personal statement of a lived experience rather than a statement of a theoretical nature. At this stage the experience is still a personal event which may or may not have wider significance.

At the second stage there is reflection on the experience by the group in an effort to see it in a wider context. There are three dimensions to this reflection. These are, consideration of the experience in the light of Gospel values, in the light of the traditions and values of the Christian community and in the light of present realities. At the second stage the group may call on the expertise of specialists such as scripture scholars, theologians and sociologists.

In the third stage an effort is made to synthesize the findings which have emerged from the second stage so as to indicate the relevance of the experiences in a wider context. This synthesis then becomes a guide for further action and reflection.

In our 1983 Seminar experiences in dialogue were vividly presented by the resource persons. These experiences were then reflected on the groups and in plenary sessions. There was not time, however, for the elaboration of a satisfactory synthesis. The task of attempting such a synthesis was first given to the drafting committee at the Seminar and finally to the Executive Committee of Sedos. The results of their efforts are presented in the above synthesis.

The experiential methodology does not lend itself to the development of a closely reasoned document such as might emerge from a seminar based on position papers prepared beforehand. The main virtue of the methodology is as a technique for reflection. The main beneficiaries are the participants who have gone through the threefold process described above. It is a technique which is open-ended, designed to encourage further reflection rather than to give definitive answers.

We hope that the synthesis presented here meets the expectations of the participants. It does not exclude their developing a better synthesis of their own.

In the remaining part of this report we present edited accounts of the resource persons' lived experiences which we hope capture some of their spontaneity and vividness. For these personal accounts and their willingness to share themselves with us we are most grateful.

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DIALOGUE IN HINDUISM I.

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Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam

*Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam is a Jesuit. He is Director of Aikiya Alayam, an Inter-Religious Research and Dialogue Centre & Institute for Inculturation in Madras. There he lives and prays and dialogues with Buddhists and Hindus and other Christians.*

Coming to this Seminar I felt uneasy when I read your preparatory Statement. You were concerned, you wrote, with the "how" of mission. I am still much concerned with the "why" and "what" of mission. Perhaps these still need to be continually re-examined as the Church continually grows in self-understanding.

Two thirds of the people in the world are not Christians. We have made much progress in the understanding of other faiths. The different faiths stimulate, challenge and correct each other on the way to the final eschatology which we Christians see has already begun in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The followers of these religions are not concerned with what we call sin. Their problems revolve around the ego, the self, and the transformation of the self or unity with God. Our concept of grace is foreign to them. Salvation is a private matter. We are still only at the threshold of understanding Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism. The Church is called to meditate constantly on the meaning of the missionary mandate as she grows in knowledge of these faiths.

There is a hunger for the building up of communion and communication between people. That is the first goal of dialogue. There is a great lack of unity among Christians which makes dialogue with other religions more difficult. This is seen specially in the evangelical missionary approach based on a fundamentalist understanding of scripture.

There is also the widespread attachment of Christians to the fulfilment theory. It is intolerably patronising to convey to a Hindu that in bringing Christianity you are fulfilling what is lacking in his culture. Acknowledging the uniqueness of Christ does not imply condemning cultures. In the self understanding of the Church to-day she sees herself as the sacrament of man's relationship to God and of the unity and equality of all people. This approach enables a Christian to have a sincere and honest approach to other religions.

The missionary zeal which led to polemics must cede to a willingness to listen to what the other faiths have to say to us. This will lead to more, not less love of Christ. The love of Christ urges us to go on loving and to see the face of the omnipresent Christ in the one we call "non Christian". My comprehension of my Hindu partner is partial. He or she may be more selfless, more Christlike than I am. The Christian has to be dialogical not dialectical. Missionary "professionalism" and "efficiency" do not really impress me.

This does not mean that we water down our faith. The irreducible insights of the faiths point to the "coincidentia oppositorum" of the eschaton, but the eschaton has already been inaugurated. Those who have been converted in our Ashram in Madras were always warned against despising their old religion. We may wish for conversions but we may not wish for the disappearance of other faiths which God in his Providence has willed. And we have to acknowledge the right of others to convert us.

The method of proclaiming our faith has to change - it must not jeopardise the dialogue. The contradiction of some trying to dialogue, while others try to convert is not easily understood. I am convinced of my right to proclaim my own experience of God in Jesus on the Cross and in His Resurrection while I respect the Hindu's right to proclaim his or her experience of God. I have noticed that Christians are normally much less ready than Hindus to give evidence of why they are Christians, of how they experience God.

I rejoice in the life style of many Christians as it has blossomed in this generation out of meeting Christ not only in their own Scriptures but also in the Scriptures, the poetry, the feasts, the dance and music of other religions.

I recall being in the Dancing Shiva's Temple in Madras once with a priest from Rome. At the high point of the ceremony the silver doors opened under the golden dome of the temple. There was complete silence and tears on the faces of many as they were caught up in the moment of fervour. "What faith! How these people pray" exclaimed the priest. "This has been the way of salvation for generations of my forefathers" I replied.

I present Christianity as a form of Hinduism and I remain a Hindu while my chosen God is Jesus Christ. In doing this I do not compromise my faith - but I try to open doors and windows to other faiths and my own faith is enriched by another faith experience.

Many of you have said: "Mission is for Dialogue". What a beautiful way of expressing it! Dialogue is not for mission. Dialogue is the way my faith has to be lived. There is a Hindu Psalm, of which there are thousands, some going back to 1500 BC: It calls us to love one another. I paraphrase it thus:

Come together  
 Speak to one another  
 Listen to one another  
 Open to one another  
 Let your minds become one  
 Let your hearts become one.

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DIALOGUE WITH HINDUS II.

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Sr. Ishpriya

*(Sr. Ishpriya is a religious of the Society of the Sacred Heart. She left Lecturing in Psychology in a London College in 1971 to join the Indian Province in a first attempt to experiment with a more indigenous form of Religious life.*

*The first years of experimentation were in Pune in an Ashram owned by the Church of North India the community being composed of Anglican and Catholic Religious and 2 lay Hindus.*

*During this time contact was made with several Hindu Gurus in North India and from 1973 to 1978 - Srs. Ishpriya and Vandana spent several months each year as members of a Hindu Ashram in Rishikesh - a place "Holy", orthodox and a centre of pilgrimage.*

*In 1979 with the support and help of some Hindu Gurus and the opposition of others, they opened a small Christian Ashram by the Ganges - probably the first permanent Christian presence ever in that important area.*

*They continue to live there for half of the year and for the rest of the year they continue the dialogue, but among their Christian Community by giving directed Retreats and workshops based on Indian Spirituality in India and abroad.)*

Sr. Ishpriya began her talk by reciting Om Shanti which she described as being like the Hail Mary for Catholics. "What has dialogue done for me?", she asked.

It has given me a great thirst for prayer, enabled me to take risks, made me aware of the vital need to create community among peoples, deepened my consciousness of being called to my Congregation and to the Church.

It has brought about a kind of transformation in me, given me confidence, released me of fear and anxiety, led me to share, to realise that dialogue is a giving and receiving, deepened my respect for the other and reassured me of their respect for me and lastly has helped me to clarify my own convictions.

Living in dialogue is now my daily way of life. I practise it in the market place. I question whether it can be a means to mission or even an aspect of mission. When Sr. Vandana and I went to live in Rishikesh we went with the intention of learning, and then stayed to be friends, not to dialogue. We saw the importance of meeting and living with Hindus in India. It would have been easy to meet them in books

but it was far more important to have the experience of meeting them in person. Learning to listen to them, learning to listen to one's own body and mind takes time.

We had to learn to listen before we could hear, (we are still learning after three years); to learn to ask the right questions, (for example about the ego rather than about sin); and how to absorb the answers. Only then were we able to hear the questions that were being asked of us. We had to be wary lest we interpret the answers through our own theological concepts. We had to learn the symbols. We began by choosing texts on God the Father and the Son to adorn the outside walls of our ashram, as is the custom, but we learned to put texts on light and love instead.

"Lived dialogue" takes place travelling in the local bus, buying in the market place, meeting pilgrims at the ferry, grieving with a mother at the loss of a six year old child, sharing in our own way in their fasts.

I learnt also to appreciate the beauty of the Hindu Scriptures. The study of these must go on hand in hand with the study of the Christian Scriptures.

There are advantages in being women in dialogue. We are accepted as being believers and lovers of God more readily than are men. We are not seen as priests, officials or administrators of Sacraments. As women we seem to be more sensitive to the "first moments of awakening" in people. I remember exchanging stories of the awakening of vocations and religious experiences in seven-year-olds and realising how difficult it is to meet the adult if one has not met the child.

One night in the Temple of Shiva we met two young girls, 13 and 15 years of age taking part in the festival. At the high point of the ceremony I saw enthralled expression in the faces of those girls, a dawning of the knowledge of God, an awakening to the Spirit of God. I reflected that the following morning that expressions would disappear as they donned their uniforms for school and it would be difficult for another person to recapture it. As women we can read the cradle tales of Hinduism as well as the academic treatises and more easily become like little children.

One of the criteria for dialogue is to be able simply to enjoy the exchange.

What I say now applies to both partners in the dialogue. We have to take the risk to move toward the other in love and friendship. Dialogue often springs from spontaneity rather than from contrived situations.

Attention and skill are required to be able to listen to the other and to oneself simultaneously. The partners should not be naive. One needs to be informed and to have a certain intelligence; to have the wisdom to discriminate in responding to new situations; to have courage to absorb new elements of truth; to have convictions while suspending judgement; to have a love of contemplative prayer. William Johnson remarks that the person involved in dialogue "must be a mystic". And although to be able to enjoy is a characteristic of dialogue one must have also the capacity to absorb hostility.

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 DIALOGUE WITH MUSLIMS I.
 

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Fr. Desmond Hartford

*(Fr. Desmond Hartford is a member of the Society of St. Columban. Two years ago he went to live with a Muslim family. The people of the area are virtually all Muslim but they form only a very small minority of the total population of the country. This is his story).*

The history of Muslim Christian relations in the Southern Philippines has been one of conflict and as a result there are many Muslims and Christians who feel a deep sense of distrust and prejudice towards each other. The roots of the conflict are complex, ranging from land, socio-economic and political problems to cultural and religious ones. By the early 1970's the conflict had become a war in many areas. In the mid-seventies under the inspiration of Bishop Tutud the Prelature of Marawi was set up. The main vision of the new Prelature was that the Christian Community would become a sign of reconciliation for their Muslim brothers through a Dialogue of life and faith. The vision was beautiful; the problem was how to live it. What I would like to share with you are a few lived experiences, which highlight some aspects of the vision.

When the Prelature of Marawi was set up I was working in another part of Mindanao and did not feel any special attraction to dedicate my life to Muslim Christian dialogue. However, when I went on a thirty day retreat in Ireland in 1977 I felt a strong conviction that I should engage in this life of Dialogue and so on my return to P.I. I joined the Prelature of Marawi and was assigned to a small town named Karomatan. The town had a mixed Muslim Christian population, but as you moved from the town in one direction the area was almost totally Christian and as you moved in the other direction it was almost totally Muslim. It was to some extent a frontier situation. Some Christians had crossed the frontier to seek land or to work in logging operations in the area.

"Christian" soldiers, carrying their armalites and machine guns crossed the frontier to protect the interests of the rich in the area. In an effort to understand more deeply the Maranao Muslim people I left where I was living in 1979 and went to a large village about 15Klms. into the Muslim area and lived there with a Muslim family.

From the beginning I was received by the family with typical muslim hospitality. The trust they showed in accepting me, considering the difficult circumstances, was to grow over a period of two years into a deep sense of brotherhood. The family was composed of the parents and eight children ranging from age 17 to 4. There were also four teenage girls staying at the house and studying in the local Madrasa School. They were considered part of the extended family. During my early months with the family I spent nearly all my time in the study of the local dialect. Relationships began to grow on the human level. I was impressed by the deep concern of the parents of the family children. I also began to relate to the family on the basis of human needs and I came to realise that the ultimate basis of all dialogue is the single humanity of all people. I told myself that as a basis I must start thinking in . . . . .

terms of "we humans" rather than we Muslims or we Christians. Reflection on the Creation Covenant helped me in this respect.

In the Maranao culture the word *pagari* has a deep significance. It means brother or sister and it is also applied to those who are accepted into the extended family as brother or sisters. After some time I noticed that this term was being used for my relationship to Muslims and the family. I realised that I had been accepted as a brother when on a few occasions I was left alone at night in the house with the teenage girls. It is nice to be accepted as a brother but brotherhood has two sides. It means giving as well as receiving. In this respect I found that what I had considered "my" radio or "my" room was being freely used by others. For me the dialogue was liberating and it was in the dialogue that God was manifested. God's spirit was the Go-between Spirit in the liberating communication between man and man. Put in Islamic terms we could say "Allah is He.... The source of Peace" (Qur'an 59.23). My presence had become for me a sign of hope.

I would not like to give the impression that the dialogue was purely humanistic. When Muslims and Christians of deep religious conviction enter into a dialogue of life, they can only do so as Muslims and Christians. In other words, in the dialogue of life there is also a dialogue of faith. One of my deepest impressions in this respect was that for the Muslim, God is the One Who Is. God is alive and pervades every aspect of human existence. This realisation is deeply felt when one observes the Muslim at prayer. For the Muslim God must be worshipped in deep submission.

There was an occasion shortly after I arrived in the village when I was praying in the evening, in a very relaxed chair with my legs on a small coffee table. When I was finished some of my Muslim friends present reminded me that it was time for evening prayer. They had not recognised that I had been praying. For a Christian not to recognise that a Muslim is performing his prescribed prayer is impossible. The Muslim has taught me the importance of worship in prayer and the need to express this sense of worship in my bodily gestures.

Just before the month of Fasting I asked some of the women in the house if they were going to fast. I myself was bracing myself to fast for a few days as a sign of solidarity and through pure dint of perseverance. They simply replied that they would fast if God willed it. The Muslim continually reminds one that we have to live within the plan of God for our lives. The religious Muslim also manifests his deep submission to God through his profound respect for God's word in the Holy Qur-an. The word is Proclaimed; received by the believer in his heart, ruminated on in the remembrance (Dikr) and returned to God in worship and acclamation. There was an occasion when I experienced this process. I was invited to a celebration of the Prophets Birthday. A young girl chanted the Qur-an with great depth and feeling, the community present accepted the word and returned it to God in the Acclamation 'Allah-Allah'. The dialogue of faith goes side by side with the dialogue of life. It is through

experiences like these that the freedom comes to move forward. God is already present and is calling humanity into a new future where Kingdom values will be lived.

For a Christian living with a Muslim family in rural Mindanao, it is not sufficient to become brother to one particular family one must also reach out in an effort to become a brother to the poor.

There are times when it is easier for a priest who is a foreigner to do this than for others. This happened in the following incident. Some Muslims from near the village where I lived took part in an armed robbery of six passenger buses passing through a remote area. The robbers were surrounded by the army and several of them were killed. Two from near my village were taken captive, by the army. Everyone in the village suspected that they would be either tortured or killed, and no one was willing to find out because they feared the army. I decided to look for them because it is easier for the army to "salvage" people if nobody follows them up. Eventually I found them 100 Kms. away in Pagadian City. They had been beaten but not badly. One of them said simply to me, "If you help us in this situation you are our brother." Brotherhood is for all but it must first be offered to those in the greatest need.

It is in stretching out our hands in dialogue to the poor that we are enriched because "theirs is the Kingdom". It is the poor who know the meaning of the Kingdom values of generosity and sharing and so they hold the "keys of the Kingdom" for the rest of the world.

This was brought home to me on an occasion when three poor Muslim children came to the house selling vegetables. I had just had some visitors and there were some cakes and sweets on the table which I gave to the children. They stayed to talk for a while and I noticed that one of them was not eating her sweets or cake. I asked her why and she replied, that she was bringing them home to her little sister who was not feeling well that day. I have failed to find generosity of this nature among the children of the rich.

The Muslim poor of Mindanao are yearning for Justice. They are yearning for a time when Kingdom values will be lived. Genuine dialogue of life between the Muslim poor and the Christian poor can give hope to that yearning. The Christian Community must try to become a sign of hope that this dialogue is possible. For dialogue to have long term results in Mindanao it must be a dialogue of life between the ordinary members of the Christian Community and those of the Muslim Community. However people with special callings or charisms may have a role in initiating this dialogue.

In summary, my understanding of the vision is this. Christ lived and died proclaiming the values of the Kingdom. He died so that men and women might have fullness of life. In the global village of to-day the Kingdom cannot come because of the great divisions among people. In our times God is calling men, women and communities to cross those divisions and in a dialogue of life to share the richness of humanity, their faith and their resources. The hope is that through this dialogue God will bring about His Kingdom of Justice, reconciliation, brotherhood and peace.

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DIALOGUE WITH MUSLIMS II.  
A: EXPERIENCE OF ISLAM IN BANGLADESH

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Eugenia d'Costa

*(Sr. Eugenia from Bangladesh is a member of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions. She teaches in a school which has about fifty Catholic children in a roll of well over a thousand pupils. At present she is attending the Pontifical Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies in Rome. She is happy to have been born in a Muslim country and shared some of the positive and negative aspects of living in a Muslim country. She told us "who she was" in this talk which she began by saying a beautiful Bengali psalm of praise.)*

Islam in Bangladesh is 800 years old, brought by the missionaries from Arabia. It is a distinct aspect of Islam, and Sufism. This Sufism is found in the poems and songs of the Bengali people. Christianity is 300 years old - brought by the Portuguese missionaries.

The population totals 87 million. 75% are illiterate, poor farmers. They are simple people. 25% are literate, mostly civil servants and business men, mostly rich. Less than 1% are Christians; over 85% are Muslims. The area is politically and economically very unstable.

I would like to give you some concrete aspects of living with my Muslim brothers and sisters. I was born in a village having only eight Catholic families. In the vicinity were ten Muslim villages, mostly rich, each of which has about 4 or 5 Catholic families, mostly poor. It is God's grace that saved me and my family. Our faith was passed on by our ancestors. In my village and in other villages Muslims think that I am a privileged foreigner. My parish priest is Italian. Christians enjoy his support, friendship, trust and material help. He is involved in all kinds of good works.

By degrees Muslims saw me and father in a different way. My father is a God-fearing, praying person, just and honest, helpful and sympathetic. His home is open to all at any moment. His life was one of dialogue. He became the man whom people trusted completely. He settles quarrels over property or any other social injustice with the help of the Chairman (a Muslim) and other prominent leaders of the village. These cases take place in our home. They are all Muslims. They can be very aggressive in quarrels related to property.

I went away from home to become a religious. When my Muslim friends saw me during my holidays I was different and they could not accept why I should choose such a rigid life. It was a mystery to them. Man meets God, serves God in any state of life, why then this extra austere life, they asked?

I answered "I can pray more for you all". At this they were happy. I tried to explain the idea of the great commandment of love taught by Jesus and how we teach all our children to be like him. I felt this greatly 5 years ago when for the first time in our history we managed to celebrate Eucharist in the University hall. How respectful and helpful all the students were while the word of God was read and explained, and all through the service! I felt no division among them. My convent is attached to the mosque. The school has 1250 students with only 50 Christians. I meet the parents monthly. I, a Christian am living dialogue with them.

There are so many questions! Is it enough to pray once a week, on Sunday, they asked? What is your fixed time for prayer? Why can't you come and pray with us? and like us? Why do you use the word Jesus more than God (Allah)? He is only a prophet and messenger. Why don't you allow us to pray with you? What is the reason? All of us will become Muslim one day!

Sometimes I am able to satisfy them with my answers but at times I am unable to satisfy their hunger specially the religious leaders and government officials who are educated and have a different outlook.

I do not give enough time to prayer and the scriptures. I look at my family, my people, my parish and I ask the question: "Do we really walk in the presence of God? When? How? My Muslim friends pray five times a day, recite the beads with the ninety nine names of God, recite the Koran. We will conquer the world, they say, the day our 'Imam' (faith) and your 'love' become one. Yet, I, a Christian have to be a woman, a man of prayer. Is my light strong enough to shine before them? I ask myself too, how do I give them my own personal experience of Jesus, my own relationship with Jesus? How can I show them who Jesus is?

I find there are also negative aspects in living together with Muslims. There are local injustices from which Christians suffer. The poor are exploited, and we are mostly poor. We live in fear of losing our faith. This has happened to a number. I myself felt frustrated for although my examination results were excellent I did not get a scholarship; it was given to a Muslim. There is little regard for the needs of the poor. There are so many Islamic courses and seminars. On Sundays our school is open, yet for example on the death of an Islamic leader anywhere in the world all schools will be closed.

There are very few Christians attending college or university. All those who attend are continually harassed and tempted to lose their faith. Wealth has a lot to do with this. If a Muslim boy or girl wants to become a Christian there will be great hostility, anger and suspicion of that person and of the Church. The person will be cut off from the family and even from the country. Women suffer from many prejudices. There are also the evils of a caste system.

There is also the great scandal of Middle-Cast Christian families who keep Muslim girls for domestic work in a situation akin to slavery.

I share a lot with the rich educated minority but I see little results from this sharing. I do not find the presence of God among these people and I wonder about it. What sort of image of God do they have? Is he only a God of justice? A God far away? Do they really worship him as the 75% are doing? I see my role is to ask these questions. We held a seminar for youth on the topic "Who God is to me?" There was a great response. Some found a personal loving God. But I really find the presence of God among the poor, simple, uneducated, suffering people of the villages more easily than among those who live in the town where there are more rich people.

I am convinced that I and my people and my Church need to see the many good and holy values of the Islamic religion and to see God's love for Muslims. The seed is planted and growing in my village and I see it extending in a few years time to the orientation of my people. The Church will take a new and different shape in the dialogue of life in Bangladesh. I believe it will be seen in two ways specially:

- 1) more sharing
- 2) more prayer life in
  - i) contemplation
  - ii) silence
  - iii) austere living (monastic witness)
  - iv) and consecrated life.

We have begun commissions to work at peace and justice and at Dialogue. They are a seed. Maybe they will bring about inner conversions in people.

I am happy to be born in a Muslim country and to be living a challenging life, a life of faith with them. I am continuously reminded of the presence of God, where in a Catholic country I see religion taken for granted. My life of faith and prayer are not challenged in Rome. I do not wish to snatch away the faith of the Muslims through religious conversions. The presence of God in the man or woman of God is the great thing. I would like to see them come more close to personal contact with Him (Jesus) whose face is still hidden from them. Maybe I can achieve this by living a life of dialogue. It is more difficult for me, a Bangladeshi, than for a foreigner and maybe more important that I do it.

I add a word about "fear". When I am confronted with problems it is difficult to stand up for the kingdom values. It is important to me that I have the support of my Congregation, the one who sends me and the support of the Christian community, if I am to persevere.

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**DIALOGUE WITH MUSLIMS IN AFRICA**

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Michael Fitzgerald

*(Fr. Fitzgerald is a member of the Society of White Fathers. He worked on the mission in Uganda and Sudan and at the Pontifical Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies. He is at present a member of the White Fathers' General Council in Rome. He described his experience of a lived dialogue in Uganda and Sudan.)*

These are some personal reflections on my experiences in two African countries, Uganda and Sudan.

I. Uganda has a Christian majority with few Muslims. My experience there was a personal venture in a University context from 1969-1971. I worked in collaboration with Muslim lecturers at the University one of whom was Said Hamdun, traditional, conservative but open to co-operation with Christians. He accepted invitations to speak in the Senior Seminary and wanted a Christian lecturer in the University as a bridge, because a majority of students there were Christian. I had complete freedom to teach my course at the University including Qur'an.

There was freedom of investigation for students. A knowledge of Sunni tradition was important and this I was able to give while learning from the students, particularly Ismailis, about their tradition. They had received encouragement from the Aga Khan to broaden their knowledge of Islam. It was a common effort on both our parts to counteract received ideas, and on my part, to deal with, for example, the prejudices of Christians.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of my presence was witness. As a member of the Catholic community I showed a genuine and respectful attitude towards Islam. (To some outsiders I became known as "Father Mohammed!"). I was also able to give talks to some Catholic groups and deaneries.

Other examples of co-operation could be given. The President of the Christian Community, a worker in the local sugar factory, was able to call on the Muslim factory authorities for help after a fire in the Catholic Chapel. Invitations to Muslims for celebrations were common as was co-operation in organising literacy classes. Contacts with Muslim officials were generally good.

I was welcomed in the circle of the Sheikh to listen to lessons on law, or reading Qur'an. They allowed me to go to the mosque and they prayed for me. In turn they were welcomed by members of our confraternity.

One attempt at explicit dialogue was an invitation to the

Comboni Fathers to give some talks but not many people attended. There was a lack of continuity when I departed but the community survives. I saw dialogue in this personal experience as building relations. Dialogue was not necessarily, not only explicitly religious. I noted too that it was easier for a foreigner than for a native Christian.

The lack of dialogue and the pain that accompanies efforts to live it are illustrated by an incident. I was invited to attend the mosque for a meeting with a visiting Sheikh but when I was there a young Muslim was annoyed and unaware of my invitation tried to have me removed.

A few days later some Muslims visited our church. Christians were now unhappy feeling the Muslims had no right to go into our Church. I was able to point out to them that this is just what happened to me!

II. Sudan has a Muslim majority with few Christians. I lived in a Parish in the Eastern part of the Archdiocese of Khartoum from 1978 to 1980

There were a few Syrian families, Southern Sudanese Christians, a small Coptic community and some Eritrean refugees, a few of whom were Catholics. It was a Church of the poor made up mainly of workers on low wages and of refugees. There was a lot of racial prejudice. I was able to witness to concern for Christians, to give religious instruction, to pray and to visit the local community.

"Why do you bother with them?", I was frequently asked. My aim was to prevent the Christian community from being a ghetto taking into account the history of the country and the civil war.

My main activity in dialogue was a Community Project, an Evening School where I had contact with Muslims. The school was run in conjunction with the Adult Education Board and so was mostly staffed by Muslim teachers.

I wanted to show that the Church served everyone but in fact not many Christians were involved. I am of the opinion that beyond the human contact basic to building relations, there is need for prayer and contemplation. Although the gospel tells us to enter our rooms and pray in secret, there are times when it may be good to be seen to pray.

For those engaged in dialogue there is often need for a spirituality on the model of the "suffering servant", a capacity for absorbing aggression and an emphasis on gentleness.

I think too that women have a special importance in dialogue with Muslims. They pose less threat than men in the family and can share in the aspect of powerlessness which empowers.

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LE DIALOGUE AVEC LES RELIGIONS TRADITIONNELLES  
EN AFRIQUE.

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Mgr. Jean Zoa

I. A LA RECHERCHE D'UN INTERLOCUTEUR

De toute évidence, la 1<sup>ère</sup> question qui se présente est celle-ci: "Qui instaure ce dialogue?". Il me semble qu'il s'agit du missionnaire chrétien, et, à travers lui, de toute l'Eglise. Notons tout de suite que ce missionnaire a été multiple et successif. Car on peut distinguer plusieurs moments dans le processus de la rencontre entre le missionnaire chrétien et les religions traditionnelles en Afrique.

II. "QUI EST SON INTERLOCUTEUR?"

La missionnaire chrétien avait moins de chance que les apôtres: ceux-ci étaient des colonisés qui portaient évangéliser des colonisateurs. Le missionnaire était, objectivement, du côté de la science, de la technique, de la puissance, de la richesse, du progrès. Il devait lutter contre son environnement culturel pour ne pas confondre sa mission évangélisatrice avec la mission "civilisatrice" de son pays, en terre sauvage et barbare. Il devait se battre pour affirmer que le noir avait une âme immortelle, pour laquelle le Christ est mort et ressuscité.

la 1<sup>ère</sup> démarche donc du missionnaire en terre d'Afrique a été d'aller à la recherche de l'interlocuteur, de l'identifier. Car sans interlocuteur, point de dialogue, mais seulement un monologue. Il est très frappant de noter l'insistance de nos premiers évêques missionnaires sur les contacts avec les populations: obligation d'apprendre les langues, de connaître les coutumes, les secrets de sa religion, de visiter les villages de brousse, etc.

Le missionnaire a donc réellement rencontré l'homme africain. Mais a-t-il pu rencontrer sa religion?

Le Secret de sa religion: Cette religion se manifestait par des pratiques qualifiées de "fétiches", de superstitions. Cette attitude condamnait d'un coup, et au nom de la foi, des activités culturelles certes, mais aussi médicales et culturelles... Dans ma langue "mebala" et "mengan" signifient remède, traitement médical; le mot "mengan" connotant l'idée de secret et d'initiation.

La religion traditionnelle n'a pas de documents écrits, d'archives. Elle possède tout juste des traces "réelles", des choses sacrées,

arbres, lieux, animaux sacrés, des temps sacrés. Les croyances n'étaient pas codifiées. Le culte lui-même n'était pas organisé à une échelle étendue. Il faut dire que la vie dans les clairières forestières condamnait au cloisonnement des clans.

Dans ce contexte, le missionnaire s'efforçait d'entrer en contact avec le chef ou l'ancien du groupe. Sa bienveillance et son accord entraînaient généralement ceux de tout le groupe.

En revanche, les zones africaines dont l'histoire ou la structure géographique (pays de savane) ont permis une organisation socio-politico-économique solide et étendue, ont affiché parfois une opposition efficace à l'action missionnaire. Je pense ici à deux ethnies africaines puissantes et dynamiques, et pas très éloignées l'une de l'autre: les Ibos au Nigeria, et les Bamilékés, au Cameroun.

### III. LE DIALOGUE

Il semble donc difficile de parler d'un dialogue vrai entre l'Eglise et les religions traditionnelles. Ajoutons que ces religions sont aujourd'hui en danger de mort et de disparition. Je pense, qu'en Afrique, l'Eglise a, vis-à-vis de ces religions, une tâche qui dépasse amplement le simple devoir de dialogue. L'Eglise, en Afrique, me semble être l'unique planche de salut pour ces religions traditionnelles, non pas en tant que structures religieuses organisées, mais elle doit se sentir responsable:

1) de sauver, de préserver, de développer et d'accomplir les valeurs, totalement ou partiellement, authentiques dont elles étaient porteuses;

2) de retenir et d'explicitier les aspirations profondes des individus et des sociétés africaines auxquelles voulaient répondre telles croyances,

tels gestes culturels,  
telles pratiques ou tels rites,  
telles attitudes,  
tels interdits,  
telles lois ou prescriptions éthiques.

### IV. UNE MISSION D'ASSOMPTION ET DE TRANSFIGURATION

Ainsi, à travers ses fils et ses communautés provenant de l'Afrique des religions traditionnelles, l'Eglise doit envisager et organiser une mission d'assomption et de transfiguration.

De fait, c'est dans les manuels de catéchèse que les nouvelles

génération d'Africains trouvent les tentatives de relecture et d'interprétation de la réponse que ces religions ont essayé de donner "aux énigmes cachées de la condition humaine et qui, hier, comme aujourd'hui troublent profondément le coeur humain" (Cf. Nostra Aetate, N.1, 3<sup>e</sup> alinéa).

Notre catéchisme Ewondo comporte une première partie obligatoire: "Nyebe be tara": "la Foi de nos Pères:"

"Qu'est-ce que l'homme?  
 Quel est le sens et le but de la vie?  
 Qu'est-ce que le bien et qu'est-ce que le péché?  
 Quels sont l'origine et le but de la souffrance?  
 Quelle est la voie pour parvenir au vrai bonheur?  
 Qu'est ce que la mort, le jugement et la rétribution après la mort?  
 Qu'est-ce enfin que le mystère dernier et ineffable qui entoure notre existence, d'où nous tirons notre origine et vers lequel nous tendons" (Nostra Aetate,1)

Sans doute, ces éléments fondamentaux, communs à toutes les religions, n'étaient pas perçus aussi clairement, et systématisés dans la formulation, par tous les premiers évangélistes de l'Afrique.

Cependant, au vu des résultats obtenus, force nous est de reconnaître que, malgré les lacunes et même les erreurs, attribuables aux préjugés et aux pollutions coloniales et culturelles du temps, le missionnaire "faisait de la prose sans le savoir".

Il a perçu, dès l'abord, dans les peuples africains, une constante "sensibilité à cette force cachée qui est présente au cours des choses et aux événements de la vie humaine". Le missionnaire est même souvent parti de "la reconnaissance de la Divinité suprême" (Nostra Aetate, n.2).

Valeurs Solides: La Mission chrétienne trouve là quelques valeurs solides des religions traditionnelles, auxquelles il faut ajouter:

- 1) le sens et le respect de la vie;
- 2) le sens de la solidarité familiale;
- 3) le sens de l'hospitalité et de l'accueil;
- 4) la croyance en la vie après la mort;
- 5) le sens d'une justice immanente;
- 6) la Vénération des vieillards, habitacles de sagesse et détenteurs de pouvoirs spéciaux leur permettant de bénir et de maudire efficacement;
- 7) le respect religieux de la nature.

Un humus religieux universel: On peut affirmer que ces données constituent un humus religieux universel et omniprésent dans l'Afrique Noire.

I. Là où l'on se trouverait en face d'un groupe humain ayant eu accès à ce que le peuple appelle chez moi "Deg Bekalara", la Sagesse du Livre, par l'école et l'université, mais ne connaissant pas la Bonne

Nouvelle de Jésus, ces éléments sont à tenir présents dans le dialogue. Mais, en même temps, il faut affirmer avec force ceci:

II. Tout Africain moderne ayant tant soit peu fait l'expérience de la vie au village demeure, au tréfonds de lui-même, un adepte et un témoin parfois inconscient de la religion traditionnelle. Et cela est un heureux acquis...

III. Au moment où un grand nombre de communautés chrétiennes africaines abordent la 2<sup>ème</sup> phase de leur évangélisation (celle de l'approfondissement de la foi) ces données constituent une véritable chance pour que l'Eglise ait un visage africain dans notre continent.

Si les premiers les ont utilisées par intuition et guidés par l'Esprit, le recours explicite à elles, aujourd'hui, s'impose pour élaborer:

- kérygme;
- catéchèse;
- théologie;
- initiation spirituelle.

Au-delà du dialogue, les religions traditionnelles demandent à l'Eglise de leur prêter sa voix.

*(Mgr. Jean Zoa, Archevêque de Yaoundé au Cameroun, est Président de la Conférence Episcopale du Cameroun et Vice-Président du Symposium des Conférences Episcopales de l'Afrique et du Madagascar (SECAM). Comme Archevêque, il a inspiré et encouragé une nouvelle approche de l'évangélisation à partir d'une vision de l'Eglise comme peuple de Dieu. Il a mis au centre de l'évangélisation la petite communauté Chrétienne comme noyau et agent de la pastorale, et a fait beaucoup pour la formation de laïcs responsables).*

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**INSERTION OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE MIDST OF THE POOR**

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Maria Arlinda

*(Sister Maria Arlinda Rodriguez is a member of the Congregation of the missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in João Ressoa, Paranaíba, Brazil. Her story of the Sisters' attempts to enter into dialogue with the poor brought a dimension to dialogue at many levels without which, many felt, our discussion would have lacked a serious element.)*

**Introduction** Before initiating our dialogue let us pray together the creed which was professed by the Latin American Bishops gathered together in Puebla:

*God is present and alive, in Jesus Christ the Liberator,  
in the heart of Latin America.  
We believe in the power of the Gospel  
We believe in the effectiveness of the gospel values of  
communion and participation for generating creativity and  
fostering pastoral experiences and new pastoral projects.  
We believe in the grace and power of the Lord Jesus that  
suffuses life and moves on toward conversion and solidarity.  
We believe in hope, which nourishes and fortifies human beings  
on their way to God, our Father.  
We believe in the civilization of love.  
May our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of Latin America,  
accompany us with her ever-present solicitude in this  
pilgrimage of peace. Amen.*

I will speak in the broad context of the life of the people in João Pessoa and the presence of the Sisters in their midst. But first I speak of Brazil in general.

I. SITUATION OF BRAZIL

Brazil is a large country with an area of approximately 3.500.000 square kilometers. It has 120 million inhabitants. It is a country endowed with rich natural resources, but the situation of the people is precarious. The actual situation of the people is that 5 percent are rich, 15 percent are middle class and 80 percent are poor, the social pyramid. Economic and political power is in the hands of the 5 percent, who enjoy the best social privileges and their consequences. The 80 percent are the poor masses who have nothing, and are at the service of the rich. They do not own the means of production and consequently have little or nothing. The minimum salary is very low and the cost of living is too high. The lands are in the hands of the landlords mostly for sugar plantation and cattle raising. The big agricultural firms own also vast area of lands.

There is a big problem of unemployment. In Recife, out of 1 million inhabitants, there are 360 thousand unemployed. The situation of the people is subhuman. They live in areas or "barrios" without any infra-structures or in "favelas". The shanties are made of palms or cardboard with one or two "rooms" for big families. Many of these "houses" are being rented to the people. The food is poor in calories, basically beans, cassava-flour rice, and a little piece of meat. 70 percent of the population live in hunger. 500,000 children die every year. 83% of the children are undernourished. There are 22,000,000 abandoned children.

In terms of education there are 1,500,000 children who have no school. Most of the children who go to school go for merienda or snacks. In the year 1964 the national budget for education was 12% of the total: in the year 1982 it is 6.5%. On the other hand the national budget for the military forces increases every year.

The problem of health is another social problem. There are 40 million sick of tuberculosis; 70 million with intestinal worms; 10 million with neurosis; 10 million suffer a sickness called "chagas". The medical assistance is very precarious. For example, the people have to fall in line at early dawn in order to obtain a medical consultation one to two months later. Many die because of the lack of medical assistance.

There are various regions which suffer from drought. And the government has no interest in solving this problem but exploits the situation to get votes in times of election. These are the results of an economic, political, social and cultural organization linked with the different multinationals of Europe, United States and Japan.

## II. THE CHURCH IN BRAZIL

Since the beginning of the era of colonization, the Church was on the side of power, blessing the situation of exploitation and injustice. Due to economic interests slaves from Africa were brought to Brazil. The Church conformed to this situation of slavery. Till the time of Vatican Council II the Church was at the service of the 20 percent rich and privileged classes. After Vatican Council II and the Latin American Conferences of Bishops in Medellin and Puebla the Church took another position, in favour of the 80 percent poor.

The religious life, being an integral part of the Church was also on the side of the rich through schools, colleges and hospitals. In relation to the poor, the religious life was giving a mere service of assistance and on weekends a catechetical apostolate.

## III. THE INSERTION OF RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE MIDST OF THE POOR

Inspired by the evangelical appeal of the Word of God, we Sisters are beginning to live in the midst of the poor. I would like to refer to Luke 4, 16 ff: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has annointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". And also I would like to refer to the Book of Exodus 3, 9ff: "And now, behold the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." It is our response to the Church's preferential option for the poor. In the context of this ecclesial, evangelical, and situational appeal, we the Sisters are leaving the conventual life-style to live in the midst of the poor. We are living in poor barrios in small simple houses similar to those of the poor. We assume the daily domestic chores and we engage in remunerated jobs to support ourselves.

Our own house is totally open to the people. It is a centre of dialogue with the poor. The people have access to our house from 7 o'clock in the morning till 11 o'clock in the evening and participate in our life, meals, prayer and dialogue. It is quite different from that of the convent where the poor are treated outside or in the parlour. In this process of insertion there is a change of the "lugar social" or "social place", from the midst of the rich to the midst of the poor.

What do we do in the midst of the poor? In the first moment, we place ourselves gratuitously in their presence as sisters, a poor sister with the poor. We have to have an attitude of, "listening" to and "learning" from the poor, in a profound respect for their culture and reality. We begin to create bonds of friendship and to know their real situation. We are not assuming an attitude of being teachers; we do not teach; we do not bring any doctrine, but an attitude of humility to learn that leads us to discover a new world, the unknown, the world of the people. We learn to discover their words, language, resistance, potentialities, customs, organization and leadership. More profoundly we discover the "seeds of the Word" present in the people. (cf. Ad. Gentes)

These people have their own religious expressions or popular religiosity. They have a great devotion to the Passion of Christ because they identify themselves and their sufferings, with those of Christ. They have also a great devotion to the mystery of the incarnation. They like to pray the rosary, take part in "novenas", processions. They have a felt necessity to express their faith through pilgrimage or "romarias". Every region has its own sanctuary. In the Northeast, we have the sanctuary of Padre Cicero, San Francisco de Canindé and San Severino do Ramo in Pernambuco. The poor usually save an amount of money throughout the year in order to visit once a year one of these sanctuaries.

In the second moment, we begin to unite the people and form them into different groups, for dialogue in a broader horizon. We help the people discover together their situation and its causes. We conscientize them about their rights and help them revindicate their rights. In this context we try to discern the will of God.

We have different groups like "Comunidades Eclesiais de Base", where the children, the young and the adults are gathered together in order to celebrate their faith and their life. We have Youth Groups and the Friendship Movement of Children (MAC), helping them to reflect, out of their concrete reality, the plan of God. We have Community Councils, Barrio Organizations whose main apostolate is to revindicate the solutions for the social needs of the community: water, light, transportation, garbage collection, urbanization of the squatter areas, postal services etc. We help the people to be responsible and to assume different services and ministries in the community. We have ministries for the preparation and administration of the sacrament of Batism, communion for the sick, organization for religious celebration.

#### IV. PROPHETIC MISSION

Our mission together with the people is a prophetic mission. Together with the people, we announce the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of justice, equality truth and fellowship. At the same time we denounce the evil of sin: injustice, oppression, lies, marginalization, hunger and ignorance. We do this in the search for a new society according to the Kingdom of God.

Our insertion in the midst of the people is done in a communitarian way. What is important for us in the community life is a life of prayer. Prayer is fundamental for us. In this new life style we discover a new experience of God. Formerly, in the convent the experience of God was an experience of God and myself, God that leads me, God that loves me, God that pardons me. In the midst of the people we experience God as God who commits himself to the poor, a God of Justice, God present in the history of his people.

How do we organize our community life? Daily, at the end of the day we gather together for our prayer. Once a week in the evening we stay at home for community reflection, studies, sharing of experiences. Once a month we have our two day retreat in a deserted area where we make an evaluation of our life, work. The content of our prayer is the Word of God and the life of the people. We try to discern always the presence of God in this reality, thus being contemplative in action.

We consider the personal relations in our community as an important element. This is possible through continuous dialogue, mutual concern, fraternal correction, and sharing of experiences. We are four Sisters in our community and our community life is according to the spirit of collegiality. Decisions are made in common. We have a common fund where we put our salaries. This is being adminisitered monthly by one of the Sisters. The difficulties in a small community are greater than in large communities. The problem of one member affects the whole community. It is necessary to grow maturely and affectively. This kind of life needs a personal love for and option for the poor.

## V. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE INSERTION

1. An openness of the Religious Life to the world and its historical, social, political and economic dimension. There is a constant dialogue with the people in all dimensions of their life.
2. Growing discovery and awareness of the presence of God in the world, in events, and in the poor. It is in this context that the Incarnation and Contemplation dimensions of Religious Life find place.
3. There is a radical change in us, in our manner of viewing, of seeing the world. Before we saw the world from the optic of the rich, today we see it from the optic of the oppressed.
4. We are converted. We are evangelized by the poor. Before, the evangelical values were theoretical; today, together with the poor we live them, for example, the values of solidarity, sharing, hospitality, etc. It happened to us once that a father of a poor family died leaving behind the mother and three children. Another poor family accepted the family in their house and offered them the best they had. This happening has questioned us. We have a bigger house but we did not offer or welcome this widowed mother and children into our house.
5. The new life style put in question the existing structure of Religious Life, its structures of security. We live the insecurity of the poor in the spirit of continuous evaluation of our process. The vow of poverty for us is to be poor in solidarity with the poor. We live from our own work and salary. We do not depend economically from either Diocese or Congregation. The vow of obedience is the search for the will of God through dialogue and discernment together with the community and with our superiors.
6. We have a profound experience of Sisterhood and brotherhood, of sharing within the community and the community sharing with the people.
7. There is a growth in the awareness and practice of communion with, and participation in the local Church. We are integrated with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan and with the local priorities of the parish.
8. Through the force of the Holy Spirit a new church emerges in the midst of the poor, a poor, evangelical church.

## VI. THE DIFFICULTIES THAT WE ENCOUNTER IN THIS PROCESS OF INSERTION

1. We feel the difference in culture. We are formed according to the culture of the rich while the people have their own popular culture. The people have their customs, words, etc. We have to respect them. There is a danger of imposing our own culture or foreign culture on them.

2. There is a constant danger of assuming an attitude of being a teacher, a professor wanting always to teach. We have to re-educate ourselves in the midst of the people. This is very demanding and needs time.
3. There is an ongoing persecution of the Church that makes an option for the poor. The rich and the government calumniate and persecute the Church.
4. We encounter certain problems with other members of the Congregations, who want to maintain the existing works and feel threatened in their present life style. We feel the need of criteria in assuming this life style with the poor. There is also need for preparation and new formation in view of this mission.

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Coming Events (continued)

Religion as Realization (Dr. Thomas Aykara, CMI)	Thurs. May,26 - 17.00 hrs. at Pontifical Oriental Institute.
Satsang: Meditation: Bhajans	Sat. May,21 - 16.30 - 17.30 hrs. at C.I.I.S. Via Martino V. 26B. Tel: 6221676.
Executive Council Meeting	Monday, May,23 - 16.00 hrs. Sedos Secretariate.

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