
WOMEN AND MEN IN MINISTRY
THE UISG/USG JUSTICE AND PEACE SEMINAR

On Monday evening, March 25, Feast of the Annunciation, through Wednesday evening, March 27, forty-four men and women religious from Generalates here and abroad, gathered at Via Aurelia, 476, to reflect and discuss on the topic of "Women and Men in Ministry." Dr. Catharina Halkes, professor of feminist theology, who occupies the chair for "Feminism and Christianity" at the University of Nijmegen, assisted the group in their reflections. The following are a few of the points that emerged in the discussion:

There is only one vocation-to become fully human in the image of God. Male and female are not the most important determinants.

Women and men are in a process of transformation. Critical questions are being asked of existing structures as we search for a greater fullness of our common humanity.

There is no "cheap" way to brotherhood and sisterhood. We need to listen to the faith experiences of one another.

A recurring and unanswerable question at this time: the relationship between nature and culture?

In our monotheistic expressions of God, we have lost the motherhood/fertility symbols of the earlier peoples and have narrowed our concept of God by our expressions of God as male.

We need to broaden our image of God as Father by also using other symbols and images that give more space life-giving. It is not a question of replacing symbols, but broadening them and creating new ones that might better fit our present day.

The Church has not worked through the problem of sex and sacrality.

There has been an overuse and misuse of Eve as temptress-it was the devil who was the one to tempt. Eve gave the apple to her husband and he ate of it. Feminist theologians are doing a new exegesis from the perspective of women.

There is a need for new symbols and emphases in regard to Mary. On this point in particular, the small group reflections revealed that while many men are very satisfied with looking to Mary as Mother, for many women, the need for relationship to Mary as another woman, as sister, is much more life-giving.

The image of Jesus as Brother was also much more meaningful to the men than to many of the women.

The implications of these two points in regard to homilies given by male priests to predominantly female congregations were discussed.

BUDDHISM IN EUROPE
REFLECTIONS ON THE TURIN MEETING

Kathleen England, OSU.

(Les Bouddhistes en Europe se trouvent confrontés avec des problèmes que rencontrent aussi les missionnaires chrétiens. Ils ont examinés lors de leur récente réunion à Turin, à laquelle assistait Soeur KATHLEEN: catéchèse, oecuménisme, mariages mixtes, éducation, traduction de leurs textes sacrés, inculturation. Mais leur souci principal est sans doute une authentique recherche d'une expérience spirituelle personnelle parmi les chrétiens. "Nous rendons-nous pleinement compte qu'ils attendent des signes montrant que nous possédons une vie intérieure et une expérience spirituelle qui soit communicable?" Partager une expérience spirituelle authentique et personnelle, voilà ce qu'ils recherchent et cela à un niveau profond. Sommes-nous capables de partager notre tradition spirituelle chrétienne, dont les racines ne datent pas du 19^e ou du 16^e siècle, mais remontent aux premiers écrivains chrétiens et au Nouveau Testament où le mysticisme chrétien tire ses origines?)

Last September, an international meeting on BUDDHISM IN EUROPE was held in Turin. This gathering, and various contacts before and after, seemed like the tip of an iceberg. No one quite knew what was and is going on underneath. Something, in fact, is quietly moving, changing and seeping into the high-ways and bye-ways of everyday life in Europe. It has to do with inter-religious dialogue, but not the wellknown more spectacular and expert species. Are we sufficiently aware of a mutation taking place beneath the surface, for the moment insignificant enough, like Elijah's small cloud - but touching ordinary people more and more?

The Turin meeting, which has had many precedents all over the globe, had a particular implication: it represented what European Buddhists themselves were trying to sort out - the practical politics of mission in the West. There were familiar sounding problems for the Christian missionary on other points of the globe: catechesis; how to educate children of mixed marriages; varieties of Buddhism in Europe that needed an ecumenism of their own in order to present themselves as united within a Christian environment; the plight of immigrant and refugee Buddhists; the need for further research and for translation of their sacred books into European languages to serve, not merely the scholar, but the ordinary person; the need for government recognition in some countries; a general demand for inculturation. Finally there was a deep respect for the culture and religion of the European setting and an emphasis on the great role of peace-making, Buddhism's gift to the world.

Buddhist unions of most European countries were represented (Italy has lately set up a union of its own), and all seemed acutely conscious of being at a turning point calling for fresh vision and unification of energies.

Everyone knows of the widespread interest in Buddhism in the West: meditation, study, practice. That there are thousands of Europeans who profess to be Buddhists is common knowledge. But are we so aware of the gap that exists between our own Christian spiritual living and these, for the most part, earnest seekers for the deeper reaches of the Spirit? This is the question that concerns us here.

Apart from freaks and fringe hangers-on, there are many levels of genuine seeking and numbers of eager people who have only too often been disappointed and off-put by Christians to whom they have turned for help at one time or another. These latter suppose, frequently quite erroneously, that it is a question of a fad or fashion that will wear off sooner or later. True, this does happen to some. But there are the others - the majority - to whom it is quite inadequate to offer pious platitudes and the like. Neither will they be helped by psychological gimmicks. Sharing of genuine, personal spiritual experience is what they are after, and at a very deep level. They do not find this in prayer sessions or charismatic meetings. No amount of superficial good advice will satisfy them.

Do we fully realise that they expect us to show signs ourselves of possessing an inner life and a spiritual experience that is communicable? Too many of these deeply committed people have had to turn away finally in a kind of despair of ever making themselves understood by Christians who have no answer for them, whose insensitivity and indifference offers them stones for bread, and who remain almost totally unaware of the drama going at a profound spiritual level.

That there should be a fair number of buddhist nuns and monks of christian origin being ordained today may perhaps be traced back to the above situation. That these same buddhist nuns and monks should be seeking here and there for contacts with christian nuns and monks in order to ask their spiritual help is maybe not so well-known. They are interrogating us and our spiritual experience. The question is, are we ready to receive these sisters and brothers of ours with understanding, open-heartedly, without putting up impossible barriers through fear or prejudice? Not everyone will catch the sound of this hidden call for help, nor will they always perceive what is being asked. It is, in reality, a summons to sustain and encourage those who, through our own insufficiency have now to tread a different spiritual path. And since it is binding for each one of us to follow the thread of our innermost faith, these ordained nuns and monks must go their way, their Buddhist way, spiritually pleasing to the Lord who made us all.

For such contacts and sharing it is evident that a certain background of knowledge and experience is required. It is not everyone's cup of tea. But supposing we are able, we cannot and should not refuse to attempt to answer the questionings of those whose consecrated life in so many ways resembles our own, yet whose path for one reason or another has taken a different direction and become singularly difficult, rooted as it is in a double origin.

We cannot and should not dismiss this problem airily and unconcernedly! "A crazy vogue that will pass!", "Everything is in the Creed, what more do they want?", "We already have everything, why should they seek elsewhere?" These reactions heard textually, are saddening because

they denote an alarming ignorance of the situation; and when this is accompanied by fear of sects and the devil himself the lack of understanding is complete.

Areas being touched upon have to do with the search for deeper levels of prayer and life. This demands we give sincere attention to those who are begging our help. At the same time it shows up the woeful fact of our inadequacy.

Do we realise, I wonder, how little the average christian knows of the treasures of our own spiritual tradition? A cultured Christian man, after a Zen sesshin was heard to remark: " There is nothing like this in Christianity!" Why did he know nothing of John of the Cross, Master Eckhart, The Cloud of Unknowing, the Greek Fathers and the Philokalia? Why had he heard nothing of Evagrius and Gregory of Nyssa and the Fathers of the Desert! Perhaps he had heard vaguely of Teresa of Avila and the Exercises of St. Ignatius: had he ever read the Gospel of St. John in depth? Must we for ever go on taking for granted a common knowledge of our spiritual heritage, a heritage treasured in the Eastern Church, but that we ourselves in the West have for so long ignored, or else hidden away so effectually in our storehouses that it can neither be known nor shared.

Christian spirituality was not our invention, nor was it discovered yesterday. It did not start in the 19th or even the 16th century. If we want to know what the neo-buddhists are searching after from our christian experience we have to step right into the New Testament where christian mysticism originated, lived, grew up and flourished. Odd questions here and there will suddenly bring us up short and challenge us forcibly to produce our treasure. And that challenge has to be met!

An example of one of those questions came to the surface recently in Rome. A group of practitioners of vipassana meditation asked to be told something about christian mysticism. For the first time they have come in contact with the writings of the Philokalia and their reaction is symptomatic. Eager, intense and very peaceful, they drink in every word, like the good ground receiving the good seed. For the first time they are learning, as born christians, what they have long known as practitioners of vipassana meditation. Consonances, correlation is there in these ways of the spirit. But there must be someone present to point it out.

The Spirit is saying something to us through these christian brothers and sisters of ours, who have often long ago rejected outward allegiance to the christian faith or its ecclesial forms. They go searching, sacrificing time and means, sometimes entering into the discipline of a monastic life, sometimes remaining where they are, but always persevering against great odds. And here and there they turn to us for support.

UNE EGLISE DANS LA MAISON DE L'ISLAM
QUELLE MISSION?

Réflexions sur la vocation chrétienne en Afrique du Nord

Mgr. Henri Teissier

(Mgr. Teissier is Co-adjutor to Cardinal Leon Etienne Duval Archbishop of Alger in Algeria. He spoke to a group of SEDOS members on November 6, 1984 in Rome about the situation of Christians in Algeria and North Africa in general. Following his talk there was a lively question session. He is utterly convinced of the need for Christian - Muslim dialogue and the enrichment that it can be for both communities. Even when there is no climate for dialogue at the religious level he is still convinced of the need for a 'dialogue of life').

UNE EGLISE DEUX FOIS NAUFRAGÉE

A travers la situation des chrétiens en Algérie, je voudrais présenter un type de réalisation de la "vocation missionnaire" en pays musulman. La forme prise par le témoignage de l'Eglise en Algérie - et plus largement en Afrique du Nord - car les situations sont très semblables au Maroc et en Tunisie, et assez proches en Libye et en Maurétanie - est très liée à l'histoire particulière de la présence chrétienne dans le pays. Il est bien évident que, dans d'autres régions (Moyen-Orient, Afrique Noire etc...) où les chrétiens sont autochtones, les Eglises ont, et doivent avoir, une autre façon de concevoir leur place dans leur pays.

Pour diverses raisons la rencontre entre l'Islam et le christianisme prend une forme particulière en Afrique du Nord et, spécialement, en Algérie. C'est cette situation que l'on veut donc présenter.

On sait que dans les premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne l'Eglise en Afrique du Nord a connu un développement considérable. A la veille de la période vandale (5^e siècle) on pouvait dénombrer, de la Libye actuelle jusqu'à Tanger, près de sept cents évêchés. Cette présence s'est évanouie entre le VII^e et le XII^e siècle avec la conquête arabe.

Du XII^e siècle, les petits groupes de chrétiens vivant au Maghreb sont, suivant les périodes, des mercenaires servant des princes musulmans, des marchands étrangers, des captifs travaillant comme esclaves. Il faut y ajouter des missionnaires franciscains au Maroc, des trinitaires ou des mercedaires ainsi que des lazaristes en Algérie et en Tunisie. Au XIX^e et XX^e siècle la présence coloniale assure la renaissance d'une Eglise locale d'origine étrangère à partir de 1880 en Tunisie et de 1912 au Maroc. La quasi-totalité de ces chrétiens a quitté l'Afrique du Nord, ou se prépare à la quitter, depuis les indépendances des trois pays.

APRES L'INDEPENDANCE, UNE EGLISE POUR LES MUSULMANS

Cependant les structures de l'Eglise sont restées debout sans leurs institutions sociales et scolaires (Algérie et Libye) ou avec ces institutions (Maroc et Tunisie).

Ainsi pour les chrétiens, prêtres, religieuses ou laïcs, le problème premier qui se pose à tous, comme témoins du christianisme, est celui du sens et des objectifs de leurs travaux quotidiens avec des musulmans.

Dans une Eglise comme celle de l'Algérie par exemple, il y a, en 1984, près de deux cents prêtres, plus de cinq cents religieuses, trois mille chrétiens pratiquants (et quelques soixante dix mille baptisés). Pour tous, la dimension spécifique de leur existence chrétienne est celle-ci:

Pourquoi suis-je chrétien et sont-ils musulmans? Avons-nous quelque chose à faire les uns pour les autres, du point de vue religieux? Notre co-existence professionnelle ou de voisinage, pendant un temps ou pendant longtemps, a-t-elle un sens pour l'Eglise et pour les musulmans?

Ces questions prennent une importance très particulière pour les prêtres, les religieuses et les laïcs qui veulent faire de cette relation avec des musulmans la vocation de toute leur existence. Mais elles ont aussi une grande signification pour les chrétiens de passage qui découvrent ainsi une nouvelle forme du témoignage de l'Eglise. Comment peut-on la comprendre?

DES LIEUX RARES ET PRECIEUX DE "DIALOGUE RELIGIEUX"

La première réponse proposée à des chrétiens s'interrogeant sur leurs relations avec des musulmans, est souvent formulée à partir du thème du "dialogue". Les musulmans, dit-on, sont très attachés à leurs convictions. Généralement ils n'acceptent pas le christianisme. Il n'y a donc pas de place en pays musulman pour la mission. Au mieux, ajoute-t-on, vous pourrez engager un dialogue religieux dans le sens des appels de la Déclaration de Vatican II pour les relations de l'Eglise avec les non-chrétiens. Ce dialogue spirituel permettra une meilleure connaissance réciproque et un élargissement des valeurs communes.

Une forme supérieure de ce partage est réalisée là où chrétiens et musulmans peuvent prier ensemble et s'exprimer les uns aux autres quelques aspects de leurs itinéraires spirituels. De fait certains groupes musulmans, plus directement engagés dans la tradition mystique de l'Islam (par exemple ceux de la Confrérie "Alawiya, en Algérie) acceptent ce dialogue de la prière.

De tels moments de communion spirituelle existent, plus souvent encore dans les relations individuelles entre des chrétiens et des musulmans liés par l'amitié et de vraies collaborations. A l'heure de grandes épreuves (un deuil) ou de grandes joies (une naissance) cette proximité spirituelle peut se traduire par l'expression, brève mais significative, d'une intercession commune. D'autres instants de partage spirituel s'expriment aussi quand, avec la grâce de Dieu,

les deux interlocuteurs éprouvent la profondeur de leur communion d'hommes et de croyants, parfois sans la médiation de la parole, par une sorte de connivence intérieure.

UN ISLAM PLUS PRÉOCCUPÉ D'APOLOGÉTIQUE QU'É DE DIALOGUE

Cependant la plupart des rencontres entre chrétiens et musulmans en Algérie se situe à un autre niveau que celui du dialogue religieux. Les responsables musulmans, en effet, sont surtout préoccupés, après la période coloniale, par la restauration des structures de l'Islam: mise en place d'un réseau serré de mosquées, enseignement de l'arabe et de l'Islam dans les écoles, rétablissement des obligations musulmanes dans la vie publique par l'interdiction de l'usage des boissons alcoolisées, de la viande de porc; célébration des fêtes de l'année musulmane; surveillance des mœurs et des publications etc...

Dans cette phase de récupération de la tradition originelle du pays, il y a autre chose à faire de plus urgent que de chercher le dialogue avec les chrétiens. On continue d'ailleurs à redouter que la rencontre n'ait pour but de reprendre, sous de nouvelles formes, les tentations missionnaires de la période coloniale.

Dans un tel contexte on comprend que le dialogue proprement religieux soit le plus souvent malaisé. Il tourne facilement à la confrontation de deux apologétiques, ou alors reste assez superficiel, chacun des deux interlocuteurs craignant de heurter les convictions de son partenaire.

VIVRE "UN PARTAGE D'HUMANITE"

Quelle est donc, alors, la signification que nous donnons à notre rencontre entre chrétiens et musulmans dans notre situation actuelle? L'un d'entre nous, un père jésuite qui s'occupe depuis vingt ans d'une bibliothèque pour étudiants à Alger, écrivait récemment un article sous le titre "partage d'humanité en Algérie". Nous situons en effet, plus volontiers, notre témoignage chrétien au plan de "la vocation humaine" qu'à celui "du dialogue des religions".

Dans notre contexte, les échanges entre chrétiens et musulmans s'établissent, en effet, surtout au plan des collaborations qui naissent du travail ou des relations quotidiennes. Un enseignant communique avec ses élèves et ses collègues, un ingénieur avec son équipe de travail, un médecin avec ses malades ou le personnel de son service, un couple avec le couple voisin ou ami, des jeunes ou des enfants avec leurs camarades de classe ou de loisirs etc...

Dans cet échange, par touches successives, chrétiens et musulmans se livrent les uns aux autres leur façon de voir et de vivre "la vocation humaine".

RÉPONDRE ENSEMBLE A "NOTRE VOCATION HUMAINE"

Du point de vue chrétien, la rencontre entre chrétiens et musulmans collaborant ensemble, ne demeure donc pas seulement au niveau du dialogue des cultures. Elle implique nécessairement, peu à peu, une interpellation réciproque sur la façon de comprendre et de mettre en oeuvre une existence d'homme de conjoint, de parent, de citoyen, d'éducateur,

de médecin, de chercheur etc...Or, dans la foi, nous reconnaissons, derrière nos choix quotidiens, cette multitude de "oui" ou de "non" par lesquels chacun d'entre nous répond à l'appel intérieur que Dieu lui adresse. De nos réponses dépend notre entrée, en vérité, dans notre vraie "vocation" d'homme, de femme, de jeune etc...

Cette vocation, nous en connaissons l'itinéraire, comme chrétien, en méditant les paroles, les gestes et les attitudes de Jésus. Il n'y a finalement qu'un chemin pour accomplir en vérité notre existence c'est celui qui nous fait passer de l'égoïsme à l'ouverture aux autres, celui qui nous conduit à vivre notre existence non comme un bien personnel dont on use et abuse, mais comme un don reçu de plus haut et qu'il faut mettre au service des autres, aux plans familial, social, national, international etc...

Cette route n'est pas seulement celle sur laquelle doivent marcher les chrétiens. La vocation humaine fondamentale est la même pour tout homme. L'appel de Dieu au coeur de chaque conscience est, substantiellement identique, malgré la diversité des médiations culturelles.

SOUS LA DIVERSITÉ DES CULTURES RELIGIEUSES, UN UNIQUE APPEL

Certes, chaque homme s'exprime à lui-même ce que sa conscience lui dicte, par les moyens de sa culture ou de sa religion. Le musulman donne à sa fidélité un habit culturel islamique et coranique. Mais à un niveau plus profond que celui de la culture religieuse il y a la réponse de chacun à l'appel que Dieu lui adresse. Cet appel est, en son fond, commun à tous les hommes.

C'est à ce niveau là que nous voudrions regarder notre témoignage réciproque de chrétiens et de musulmans. Il n'élimine pas les valeurs religieuses à travers lesquelles les hommes s'expriment à eux-mêmes leur façon de comprendre l'appel que Dieu adresse à chacun. Mais il dépasse le plan du dialogue religieux pour situer la mission du chrétien et du non-chrétien à un autre niveau, celui d'un questionnement réciproque, implicite ou explicite, sur la vocation humaine et la façon d'y répondre.

Dans cet échange le chrétien s'engage avec tout le Message évangélique. Nous ne savons en effet ce qu'est l'homme que par l'accueil de Jésus et de son Message.

Dans le Christ, révélation nous est faite du mystère de Dieu et du mystère de l'homme. Le don spécifique fait aux chrétiens est l'engagement conscients dans ce double mystère. Il est serviteur de cet appel devant Dieu et devant les hommes. Il s'agit donc bien pour la partie chrétienne d'un témoignage "missionnaire". Il se situe cependant non pas d'abord au niveau de la communication d'un enseignement dogmatique, mais plutôt de la manifestation vécue de la vocation humaine telle que Dieu nous l'a révélée en Jésus-Christ.

Ceci sans oublier, évidemment, que le chrétien lui-même est prisonnier de ses propres médiations culturelle et toujours inférieur à l'idéal que Dieu a placé devant son regard en lui donnant Jésus-Christ. Telle est la manière selon laquelle nous pensons vivre notre "mission" dans la relation entre chrétiens et musulmans actuellement là où nous sommes.

QUESTIONS

1) Pourquoi les Eglises Orientales ont-elles survécu alors que l'Eglise en Afrique du Nord a disparu? Est-ce que le fait d'avoir un clergé marié a joué un rôle?

Il est toujours difficile de préciser les causes d'une évolution historique. Elles sont généralement multiples. Il y a eu un clergé marié en Afrique du Nord. En Nubie (Nord Soudan) il y avait aussi un clergé marié dans les villages et l'Eglise a cependant disparu au XVII^e siècle. A mon avis la cause la plus importante est le manque d'insertion de l'Eglise d'Afrique du Nord dans la culture berbère. La langue berbère a survécu à quatorze siècles de présence musulmane. Si la Bible et la liturgie avaient été traduites en berbère, on peut penser qu'aujourd'hui encore dans les milieux berbérophones, aurait subsisté une petite Eglise comme il reste des Eglises arménienne, syriaque, copte etc...

2) L'Islam se présente comme une religion de tolérance, alors qu'en Europe on le considère marqué par l'intolérance. Comment expliquer cette divergence d'appréciation?

Les musulmans sont convaincus que l'Islam est une religion particulièrement tolérante parce que la loi musulmane, sur la base de certains textes coraniques fait une place, dans la société musulmane, à l'existence de communautés "protégées", chrétienne ou juive. La société chrétienne du Moyen-Age n'a pas accepté aussi facilement l'existence de minorités juives et a éliminé en Espagne les minorités musulmanes, qui représentaient, il est vrai, un groupe conquérant toujours menaçant aux frontières.

Cependant, aujourd'hui, les chrétiens ou les juifs n'acceptent plus dans une société moderne, d'être seulement considérés comme des citoyens "protégés". Par ailleurs, dans la phase actuelle, après la période coloniale, l'Islam veut rétablir ses fidèles dans une nouvelle adhésion à tout son patrimoine. La période actuelle n'est donc pas d'abord celle du dialogue, mais celle de la restauration de la société musulmane dans son identité après les menaces qu'a fait peser l'influence de l'Occident sur les pays musulmans.

3) N'est-il pas vrai que le dialogue avec les gens simples est possible alors que le dialogue avec les "savants" est plus difficile? Que peut-on faire?

Je suis d'accord avec vous. Dans la phase actuelle, comme on vient de le dire, les responsables de l'Islam sont surtout préoccupés par le rétablissement de la communauté musulmane dans toutes ses convictions et toutes les traditions compatibles avec le monde moderne. Dans la rencontre avec ces responsables, souvent les souvenirs des antagonismes passés et le désir de faire une apologétique bloquent le dialogue. Les responsabilités des combats passés sont inscrits exclusivement sur le dos des chrétiens, ce qui n'est pas juste.

Par contre, avec des personnes simples, on peut plus facilement se rencontrer au plan de la vie quotidienne, pour partager des sentiments humains, pour réaliser des tâches ensemble. La foi profonde et directe

des plus simples s'exprime spontanément devant les épreuves de la vie, à l'occasion de l'accomplissement du devoir religieux de l'hospitalité etc...

Comme on l'a dit dans "le partage d'humanité", notre vocation humaine est engagée, c'est-à-dire, vue à la lumière de la foi, le "oui" ou le "non" que nous donnons à l'Esprit de Dieu.

Mais les collaborations quotidiennes et les amitiés vraies établissent un échange entre chrétiens et musulmans qui atteint un niveau plus profond de l'existence. Disons qu'il s'agit alors de témoignage réciproque, et non pas simplement de dialogue, terme qui garde souvent une signification trop abstraite.

4) Est-ce que l'Islam influence la foi d'un chrétien qui vit dans le monde musulman?

Chacun d'entre nous est impressionné par la réponse collective des musulmans à leurs traditions religieuses, dans la prière, le jeûne, l'aumône, et surtout dans la foi à la présence du Dieu Tout-puissant et miséricordieux derrière chaque événement de la vie.

Une autre conséquence de notre présence de chrétiens dans une société musulmane, c'est la découverte de ce que l'action de Dieu dépasse toutes les frontières religieuses. Nous sommes conduits quotidiennement à découvrir le don de Dieu présent dans la vie de certains de nos partenaires. Ceci modifie notre compréhension du "témoignage de l'Eglise" dans le monde, et nous conduit, pensons-nous, à vivre sur un mode nouveau "la Mission de l'Eglise".

Le centre spirituel de cette évolution est, sans doute, la découverte de la gratuité absolue de l'amour évangélique. Chrétiens et musulmans, nous voulons vivre ensemble et nous entraider les uns les autres, non pas pour susciter des conversions, mais parce que l'amour universel est le mode d'être auquel Dieu nous appelle, les uns les autres. C'est l'Esprit qui conduit toute l'histoire spirituelle. Cette conviction donne une grande liberté intérieure dans la rencontre, C'est là, me semble-t-il, une conséquence très heureuse de notre existence de minoritaires.

5) Vous parlez de la situation de l'Eglise dans un pays à forte majorité musulmane. Que faut-il conseiller à des chrétiens qui vivent dans un pays comme le Soudan, où il y a une assez grande minorité de chrétiens?

Je suis très content que cette question soit posée. Cela me permet de souligner que j'ai essayé d'exprimer devant vous notre méditation de chrétiens d'origine étrangère dans une société musulmane. Il est bien évident que dans chaque région du monde, la rencontre entre chrétiens et musulmans prend des caractéristiques particulières. Dans un pays comme le Soudan il est normal que l'Eglise demande à ce que la loi musulmane ne soit pas appliquée aux chrétiens.

6) Nous voyons dans certains pays, par exemple la Nigeria, que des chrétiens se convertissent à l'Islam pour des motivations diverses: mariage, avantages matériels, ou parce que l'Islam est senti plus proche de la tradition africaine. Que faut-il penser de ces conversions?

Comment les empêcher?

Le problème des conversions est au coeur du dialogue islamo-chrétien. Il faut, de notre côté, que nous cherchions à progresser toujours davantage dans le respect de la liberté intérieure de tous nos partenaires. En même temps, nous devons rechercher comment cette attitude pourra être comprise et acceptée par nos interlocuteurs musulmans.

En Algérie, les responsables musulmans font souvent venir des convertis du christianisme à l'Islam pour leur donner la parole. J'essaie toujours, dans ces cas-là, de faire comprendre que la conversion de ces personnes prouve qu'un choix religieux est une décision de conscience. Ceci va contre la tradition musulmane qui n'accepte aucun "retour en arrière" vers une religion "antérieure" et considérée comme dépassée.

Quant à la proximité de l'Islam par rapport à la tradition africaine, c'est une impression provisoire. Islam et Christianisme sont deux religions sémites par leur origine. C'est aux chrétiens africains d'assumer maintenant le christianisme de telle manière qu'il devienne chaque jour davantage africain.

7) N'avez-vous pas le désir de voir vos amis musulmans devenir chrétiens, comme ils ont eux-mêmes le désir de vous voir devenir musulmans?

Je dirais plutôt que j'ai le désir que nous puissions nous aider les uns les autres à être fidèles aux appels que Dieu nous adresse actuellement. La question qui se pose est donc celle-ci: avons-nous quelque chose à nous donner les uns aux autres, malgré la différence des religions? Il me semble que l'on peut répondre ainsi à cette question: Chaque chrétien est toujours responsable, dans toute rencontre, de manifester son adhésion à Jésus comme Celui qui nous révèle Dieu et la vocation humaine. Le chrétien s'engage donc dans toute collaboration avec cet apport spécifique: le sens de Dieu et de l'homme que l'Evangile nous apporte.

C'est notre contribution propre comme chrétiens à la marche commune des hommes. C'est la mission de l'Eglise dans sa rencontre avec les non-chrétiens. Car l'Eglise a une mission devant le monde entier et non seulement devant les chrétiens. Ce que devient ce témoignage dans la vie des personnes des autres communautés est le secret de Dieu. Mais nous avons la conviction d'être envoyés en mission pour que ce témoignage existe en terre d'Islam.

THE PROLIFERATION OF SECTS IN LATIN AMERICA
SOME CHARACTERISTICS

Helena Maria Bianchi, CSJ

(Les sectes ne sont plus des phénomènes exceptionnels. On les trouve dans tous les continents. Leur diversité est déconcertante. Même le suicide collectif d'une secte comme celle de Jim Jones, basée à San Francisco, ne semble pas avoir occasionné un recul dans leur croissance et leur prolifération. Elles n'ont pas de problèmes de financement. Ce court extrait d'une conférence de Soeur Bianchi CSJ, donnée à Rome, contient une esquisse fort utile sur les caractéristiques des Sectes. Cette esquisse a été faite par le CELAM, en référence à la situation en Amérique Latine, mais elle comporte des ressemblances évidentes avec ce qui se passe dans le reste du monde.)

Speaking to Commissio "18" at their meeting held on March 25, 1985 Sr. Bianchi, CSJ singled out three challenges to the mission of evangelisation in Latin America today: the problems of land ownership, the proliferation of sects; manipulation of base communities by political parties.

We give here the analysis of sects made by CELAM in 1981 and quoted by Sister in her presentation. It will be of interest beyond Latin America - Ed.

The proliferation of sects in Latin America is a proven fact, especially in the last two decades. Besides the Afro-Americans, there is a proliferation of sects of the most varied origins. The Bishops at Puebla called them "free religious movements".

THEOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

These sects that proliferate in Latin America today are characterized by common tendencies. Let us look at a few of these tendencies as they were identified by the CELAM pastoral theological reflection group (1981).

a) "Reductionism"

The sects that keep Christian elements are characterized by a reduction of Revelation. The few truths that they borrow from Christianity are formulated in a simplistic and partial way.

b) Fundamentalism

There is a literal reading and interpretation of the Bible. Expressions are taken out of the text without any relation to the context.

c) Salvationism

The sects select from the Bible those texts that announce the end days in an apocalyptic way, and that we must prepare for salvation. This salvation is conceived primarily as "accepting Jesus Christ" who makes us participate in a number of eschatological goods after death.

d) Church-world relations

All these sects lack a correct relation between the Church and the world. They deny that Faith can rest on worldly elements.

c) "Electionism"

This form expresses the concept that only the adepts of the sects are the elect of God. They are the light that distinguishes them from the Catholics, especially, who are darkness.

RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS

a) Pietism

They rely on two elements: direct inspiration of each member of the community and the possibility of attaining perfect sanctity on earth.

b) The emotional cult

The religious ceremonies are strongly based on emotions, nostalgia, joy, spontaneous expression, welcoming gestures, etc.

c) Preaching

It has a primary place in the life of the groups. Long sermons are characterized by fundamentalism and simplism.

d) Moral

The moral demands that are taught are of the inflexible type. They are rigorous and puritanical. The search for truth is secondary.

e) Social commitment

In most cases there is an attitude of indifference, of alienation from the realities of the world and the social condition of the people.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

a) The promise of goods

These are promised by the leaders to their followers and include, for example: the certitude of being among the elect; physical cures; peace of mind; happiness, etc.

b) Partiality

It consists in obstinacy in one idea, the psychic fixation on the "prophecies" of the leader and especially the absence of all rational criticism.

c) Fanaticism

The phenomenon of fanaticism is often caused by the contagion of paranoid persons. This contagion causes the members of the sect to be taken with the idea or the mission and to commit themselves to have it triumph at any price.

SOCIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

a) Volunteer groups marked by fraternal relationships

The sect often begins as a community of persons who have common interests. Acceptance and relations of friendship are the initial attracting factors.

b) Control of groups

The fact that the groups are not numerous favours their control.

c) Atomization

Given their alienation in relation to social commitment, the sects proliferate very easily. For example, it is easier to open a "church" than to create a civic institution. Such a phenomenon causes a chain reaction.

MEANS AND METHOD OF DIFFUSION COMMON TO THE SECTS

Process

- Massive diffusion of propaganda over the radio
- Flyers, books and Bibles
- Bible lessons in the homes
- Followed by celebration of the cult in rented quarters
- Finally they buy the property and build a "church"
- Weakening of the Catholic consciousness by preaching over the radio
- Maintaining the ambiguity with which they confuse the simple people
- Taking advantage of anticlericalism and religious indifference
- Positively, the pastor creates a core that he "cultivates" (nurtures, takes care of) through personal contacts and good human relations. The smallness of the group makes it easy for the pastor to follow them. This experience is the key to success among them.

A typical formula for diffusion:

They take advantage of the phenomenon of adolescence and the worries that these cause their parents: the evangelical adolescents invite the young Catholics to live with them in a community atmosphere of sentimental religiosity. Then they are encouraged to have their brothers, their mother and finally their father participate. After that begins the serious work of catechumenate: a lot of Bible, simple sermons, concrete efforts, abstention from feasts, liquor, etc. From the very beginning they are careful not to be in contradiction with the Catholics.

Strategies The "missionaries" go into the suburbs and the less populated areas. They justify this by saying: "You Catholics do not go there. We go where you do not go".

The "missionaries" have organized campaigns of conferences, courses to make them capable of evangelizing, visits, radio and T.V. programs, magazines, flyers, etc. They get financial help from outside for this.

Consequences on Pastorate The Puebla document speaks of the Church's concern for the negative aspects of the sects. No doubt, there are some positive aspects that, through the grace of God, are present.

The phenomenon of the proliferation of sects challenges the Church of Latin America, especially in its pastoral and liturgical practice.

Ref. USG Circular No. 9/85 of March 25, 1985. Via dei Pen tenzieri, 19 Rome 00198.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF GRASSROOT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Maurice L. Monette, OMI.

(This is an extract from Fr. Monette's article which dealt also with grassroot communities in North America).

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The most obvious characteristic of South America's comunidades de base is their integration of prayer, scripture and spirituality with commitment to the social mission of the Church.

THE COMUNIDADES DE BASE

There are in Brazil alone over fifty thousand comunidades. These communities defy definition; they differ so in their structure, their degree of cohesion and their aims. Generally, however, the term comunidades de base refers to communities of Christians, perhaps as few as ten or as many as two hundred, who see themselves as church in its most basic form—much as we North Americans tend to understand the parish as our basic unit. In rural and urban areas alike, such communities flourish mainly among the poor.

In Sao Paulo: My first encounter with a comunidade was in Sao Paulo, Brazil, that great industrial city of over twelve million people—larger than New York City. I accompanied a US missionary, Father Bill Reinhard, OMI, to a community for Sunday Eucharist. We arrived at a location rather unseemly for Mass—a wooden shack on the outskirts of town in the middle of a favela, i.e., a squatter settlement. The shack, smaller than a two-car garage, was built as a "community center" for the 150 or so Catholics who meet there every Sunday either for a Liturgy of the Word, a Communion Service or for the monthly Eucharist with their parish priest.

The shack was jammed. The older folks sat on wooden benches while the younger stood along the walls or outside open windows. When we arrived people were already assembled and singing heartily. The leader of the community, a married man in his thirties, welcomed us and made the weekly announcements. He was like the people who elected him: an economic refugee from rural Brazil, a squatter, and one of those fortunate enough to be employed in an assembly plant.

These people joyfully and hopefully pondered the scriptures and unabashedly offered their own reflections on the theme of the day, "God's presence." Letters from fellow Christians in Brazilian jails were read as contemporary scripture. Prayers of the faithful echoed concern about friends and family and concern about the social structures which most influence their lives: the labour unions, the up-coming gubernatorial elections, the maintenance of the nursery schools, and the city's plans for bringing electricity, drains, lighting and paved

streets to their area.

The whole mood of the service was well captured in the official Brazilian response to "The Lord be with you": "He is already in our midst!" The closing song explained how: "The world is a better place when the one who is already suffering cares for the least of the brethren."

In the Amazon: On yet another occasion, I visited a comunidade in the Amazon jungle. It was a rainy Sunday afternoon when several members of a comunidade were taking shelter in the mud-hut home of the community leader. Conversation centered around the scripture text of the day, a text no less difficult than the Transfiguration! Since only one Bible was available, the text was re-read upon request. The leader himself was illiterate, but at the end of two hours he and the others had expertly interpreted the passage as to its original meaning (without of course the jargon of academe) and applied it to the life of the community.

These simple rice-farmers spoke with firm conviction about their own experiences of Transfiguration, experiences which gave them the strength to face the large land owners and multinationals who, in pursuit of land, burned peasant homes and fields, kept low the prices paid for peasant farm products, and threatened the defenseless families with death. Jesus did not recoil from the civil and religious powers of Jerusalem, they said, and neither must we. To this day the small community of 50 immigrants are still looking to Jesus for the inspiration they need in their struggle with social structures that treat them like yoked animals. Every Sunday, with or without a priest, with little formal training, in the middle of the jungle!

OBSERVATIONS

1. The role of prayer in the comunidades . Just as comunidades de base almost defy definition, so does the role of prayer within them. Generally, however, one can observe three types of communities, each informed by a different approach to prayer: first, there are communities which are primarily concerned with the formation of religious community and the strengthening of sacramental life. These "communities of prayer and gospel sharing" place primary emphasis on charismatic-style prayer and/or on the study of scripture.

Secondly, there are communities which devote themselves to charity, mutual aid and perhaps the improvement of collective facilities like nurseries, dispensaries or primary schools. These projects are outgrowths of the community's scripture study and sacramental worship.

Thirdly, there are communities organized in response to specific social concerns. Some communities of the first and second type actually evolve into communities for social change. Most do not. The community in transition from reflection and prayer to action has greater difficulty than that in transition from action to prayer and reflection. Action for social mission demands the concrete commitment of time and resources and entails greater personal risk than mere reflection--sometimes the risk of one's very life. Non-conformism exacts a price.

2. The scope of prayer. In any Christian community, some prayers echo very individual or local concerns; others,

more communal, societal and global concerns. In South America we hear "prayers of the faithful," for personal favours, sick relatives, beloved dead, a father looking for work, and so on. But we also hear prayers for labour unions, hospitals and government.

The growth of a community can perhaps be measured by the scope of its prayer. Is its prayer inclusive of strangers and social rejects as well as self, friends and relatives? Does the prayer exhibit a realization that human suffering, like unemployment, hunger and sickness, is often caused and perpetuated by unjust structures? Does it demonstrate a commitment on the part of the community to transform social structures when appropriate and possible? Does the community concern itself with wider social needs while ignoring the needs of its immediate neighbours?

3. Leadership. Worship and Bible study in the comunidades is most often conducted by local leaders. There simply aren't enough trained, ordained, celibate clergy in South America to service all of the worshipping communities. A new kind of local "priesthood" is emerging, one which does not usurp the "priestly" responsibilities of all the faithful to break-open God's Word and facilitate the community in prayer. A "priesthood" is emerging which remains invested in and responsive to the social concerns of the local community. As a result of the shift, the cleric assumes new functions which include bridge-building among the communities and teaching the Tradition.

4. Approach to Scripture. South American scripture scholars like Carlos Mesters would agree that the proper interpretation of the Bible must include three elements: the Church community, the social reality and the biblical text itself. Therein is found the Word of God. Within many comunidades the Bible is understood to be of secondary importance in relation to the struggle of the community within its present social reality. This approach is markedly different from that of adult education programs in which the Bible is studied only for the-meaning-of the Bible-in-itself....

5. Types of Worship. A striking characteristic of the comunidades is their variety of worship forms. Where Eucharist is offered only once a month, the Liturgy of the Word often prevails. I attended one such liturgy in Sao Paulo. After the traditional Liturgy of the Word sequence (prayer, readings and songs, Gospel), the community broke into groups of four for reflections on the readings. The worship leader then invited a representative of each group to offer its major insights. Afterwards, summary reflections were invited. This format is frequently used in that comunidad.

The comunidades also make frequent use of the Communion Service. With appropriate prayers, the worship leader distributes Communion reserved from the last Eucharist. Other communities utilize the traditional Novena, the way of the Cross and the Rosary. The old forms are usually adapted in such a way as to take into account the themes of liberation theology and the concerns proper to the social context....

The comunidades are sensitive to the need for liturgies of various sizes. The small communities appreciate the opportunity to worship in a central parish church with other small communities on high feast days. The national and global dimensions of the faith are more evident in the large cathedral and shrine gatherings. These celebrations help to network the communities and infuse them with new life. Likewise, they provide the communities with a way to contribute the results of their weekly labours to wider populations. The great value of the church as institution is evident in South America, especially during times of repression when, because of its strong power-base, the church can protect those who speak out in the name of human dignity.

MISSION PROJECT SERVICE - NEW EDITION

PROJECT HELP

Mission Project Service has just published a new edition of "Agencies for Project Assistance". This directory contains complete profiles of 250 international agencies (73 new listings) that give aid to small church sponsored projects in the Third World. Thanks to a simple index the user can find the latest information on where to go for help with literacy projects, leadership development, agriculture, evangelization and other fields. Also included are tips for preparing a presentation.

The authors, Pierre Aubin, M.S.C. and George Cotter, M.M., are the founders of the Mission Project Service which, for the last ten years, has been helping missionaries and indigenous people think out project designs, prepare written presentations and select suitable agencies for assistance.

330 Pages, quality paperback. \$50. per copy which includes handling and airmail abroad. Prepayment requested.

Write: Mission Project Service, 204 West 97th St., New York, N.Y. 10025. Telephone 212 678-0836.

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 BOOK NOTES

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