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**DECISION-MAKING IN INTER-CULTURAL
COMMUNITIES**

SEDOS SEMINAR - NOVEMBER 2, 1989

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IN THIS ISSUE

This issue contains the papers delivered at the SEDOS Seminar on Decision-Making in Inter-Cultural Communities. The attendance, (110) was the greatest at any one-day seminar and reflected the interest of SEDOS members in the topic. This issue contains also the texts of the Case-Studies used at the Seminar.

SEDOS - VIA DEI VERBITI, 1 - 00154 ROMA - TEL 5741350

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Methodology The four speakers presented their papers during the morning session. In the afternoon the participants formed ten groups - seven English, two French and one Italian-speaking. The participants received a selection of case-studies, typical of the problems encountered in arriving at decisions in inter-cultural communities. Each group chose one of these case-studies for discussion. Suggestions for work in the groups and some questions were also made available. These, too, are in this issue of the Bulletin. Each group reported on one or two salient features of their discussion and the seminar concluded with an open forum. Case-studies 3, 4 and 5 were chosen by most of the groups.

NEWS

SEDOS NEW MEMBER We welcome LA SAINTE UNION to membership of SEDOS. The Superior General is MARIA TERESA ARDANT, SUSC and their address is Viale Aurelio Saffi, 28, 00152 Roma (Tel. 58.10.378).

COMING EVENTS

SEDOS ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND 25TH ANNIVERSARY; Dec. 12 - 9.00 a.m. - 9.00 p.m. at Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane, Via Aurelia, 476.

SEDOS RESEARCH SEMINAR - LOCAL CHURCH: PRACTICES AND THEOLOGIES: Villa Cavalletti - Rome, March 20 - 24, 1990.

**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS:
A VIEW FROM JAPAN**

Kin Tanabe, RSCJ

I have been asked to share with you some of my experiences and some insights which those experiences have given me about the decision-making process in an international context. I am working now, here in Rome, as a member of the International Formation Team of the religious congregation to which I belong. My job gives me quite an experience of the international dimension but I am not in administration. Formation work does not require so much decision-making as an administrative role would but I am happy to share my experiences as a Japanese with you.

A CULTURAL SHOCK

I would like to begin by recalling a little experience of mine which I had about 14 years ago. I was invited to participate in a two-week meeting of formators from different parts of the world. This meeting was to produce a paper of some principles and guidelines for the initial formation of the congregation as a part of the preparation for the General Chapter of 1976. We were 15 in number; 10 formators who came from Europe, Africa, North and South America and Asia and 5 members of the General Council who were also from Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia. We listened to the stimulating conferences together, prayed together, shared our experiences of the formation work and exchanged our views, questions, difficulties and hopes together. Until then, it was wonderful. Towards the end, however, when the time came to draw up our statement together, I was at a loss and felt how different was my mentality and culture.

The group could discuss endlessly over a word to be used in the paper we were trying to draw together, in order, perhaps, to express an idea exactly. I was in admiration, on the one hand, at how precisely each term needed to be defined and how clearly each minute detail was to be analysed and expressed. No ambiguity was allowed to remain. On the other hand, I was very much frustrated, as the totality of the whole and the harmony of the parts were more important to me. I thought that a certain ambiguity and mystery of human life could not be precisely expressed nor neatly categorized by logical terms. I realized, then, that I was more intuitive and synthetic than logical and analytic. I had not previously known the extent to which this was part of my own cultural context. And moreover, in any case, when I returned to my own country, I would have to translate the paper and I would not use any of those terms over which the group could spend days discussing. I tried to communicate how I felt to the group but it seemed to me that the people were unable to understand me, except the fact that I was different from the others.

Cultural Pluriformity Fourteen years have passed since then. Now I see a great difference of attitude towards and awareness of the different cultures in my own congregation. Over 20 years have passed since Vatican II recognized the need for the Church to be

pluriform in order to be truly universal but we have just begun to become aware that different cultures have their own various ways of expressing the same truth and have different ways of discussing, exchanging opinions and communicating values. This awareness alone has already made an enormous difference in international groups. I find in several of the international groups in my congregation, an awareness of existing pluriformity and a conscious effort to help people of different cultures and mentalities to express themselves in their own ways.

As each one of us has his/her own culture and nobody can really change cultural patterns, we have to accept our limitation not to be able to understand fully the different mentalities and different cultural ways of behaviour, much less to be able to adopt them. The awareness of different cultural ways, however, allows us to relativize our own manner of proceeding and helps us to accept the fact that there are totally different but equally valid ways of expression, communication and of reaching a decision. There are, however, various degrees of this awareness. Accordingly, there are various ways of acting and various attitudes towards different cultures which assist the people of different cultures to participate fully in a decision-making process in an international context.

DIVERSITIES

Language I can share with you some of the differences or difficulties we, Japanese, often find in an international group, above all in a predominantly occidental one. I do not think that all the difficulties will be overcome. Some are bound to remain unsolved, for instance, the language difficulty about which I am going to speak. This will always remain a difficulty for some at least, in any international group, no matter in what language the group speaks or how efficiently the translation may be provided. I do not want to emphasize the difficulties but I choose to mention them with the hope that we may grow together in the awareness we all need.

Language is a primary means of communication, no matter what it is we may be discussing. There are, of course, a lot of other means of communication as well, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, movements of body, use of symbols and images, etc., etc. In some cultures, non-verbal communications are more important than verbal ones. When we want to come to a decision as a group however, language is indispensable as a means of communication. But there are many existing languages which will never be used as an international means of communication. In fact, there are many languages which are not even used as a national means of communication. In Asian international groups, for example, neither Korean, nor Chinese, nor Japanese, nor any of the Filipino languages can be used, as none of them has a sound system which can be understood or even guessed at by the speakers of the other Asian languages. None of them is thus likely to become a common means of communication in the Asian context; fortunately we are no longer living in the period of history when one nation conquered the others and consequently spread the use of its language among them.

Ways of Thinking Further, the fact is that when speaking in another language, we are not able to think exactly in the same way as we would normally do when speaking our own language. This is especially the case when we are speaking for example an Indo-European language which belongs to an entirely different type from that of our own native Asian tongues. A language expresses a mentality and its way of thinking. It also forms mentality and molds thoughts. I do not think that when I am talking in English, French or Spanish it is possible for me to think in the same way as I do when I speak Japanese. I cannot possibly switch back and forth between two entirely different processes of formulating and expressing an idea. I do believe, however, that I remain who I am at a deeper level and I still feel, and sense, and have intuitions as a Japanese, no matter what language I am speaking. The language difficulty will increase when one is less fluent in the language one is speaking or listening to. People of a non-verbal culture can easily give up expressing their ideas, etc., if the discussion gets too complicated or the speed of communication becomes too quick.

Non-Verbal Communication The next difficulty I experience comes sometimes from the nature of my non-verbal culture. People whose cultures are markedly non-verbal still use language as a normal means of communication. But the way the people of a non-verbal culture use the language or rather the way they understand what is said may be quite different. In a non-verbal culture like mine, people may also speak a lot. We do not just remain silent. Probably, however, the most important thing may not be expressed in speech. We need more space to think and to feel deeply. Silence is a space but some seemingly unnecessary and unimportant speech can also be a kind of silence which allows people to reflect and to listen to their own intuitive responses at which they arrive within. If Japanese people are obliged to listen to a logical argument which requires a quick and opportune response or opinion in order to express themselves or to defend their position, they may get exhausted and may not be able to express themselves at all, even if they are quite fluent in the language spoken.

Empty space, silence or wasted time is necessary for us to be fully intuitive and to find our way of expression in order to participate fully in a group and to contribute our part. Empty space or silence is apparently more passive than active. Just as darkness cannot remain dark if a ray of light comes into it, so if the time is filled with words which require attentive listening, there is no space, no "silence" which allows some mentalities to function better. Likewise, there may be some other cultures or mentalities which prefer other ways of filling time in the course of the decision-making process.

Another difference I observe in an international group is that most people are eager to express their views, impressions, and so on in their own words even after almost exactly the same ideas have been expressed by somebody else. We Japanese in general, although of course there are exceptions, tend to refrain from voicing our opinions, ideas etc., and do not consider it necessary to repeat them, if somebody else has already expressed more or less similar ideas, even if these are not exactly the same. This is true even when we are speaking our own language. We would rather avoid filling the time with important or meaning-laden words. We often express our agreement or disagreement, comfortableness or uneasiness, etc., by body-language and unconsciously expect others to understand it.

Harmony Through my experiences of participating in an international group, I have come to realize that it is not an easy task for a Japanese to remain really him/herself in any group, especially in an international one. I know that it requires a certain degree of personal maturity and of inner freedom for anybody from any culture to remain who he/she is. A Japanese may find an additional difficulty that comes from our cultural values. It is a part of our culture to try to adapt ourselves to the other and to try to respond in the way that is expected from the other.

The Japanese usually value harmony and respect towards the other. We naturally tend to avoid disharmony or discord. We are ready to give up our own ways and to adopt different ways of acting as much as possible rather than insisting on our own ways thus creating disharmony. But dissatisfaction may remain in us all the same. Also, our culture tends to use symbols, images, parables, and so on to communicate our experiences or ideas and, above all, to communicate some inner realities. Symbols are not to be explained. Once they are explained, they lose their meaning, as it were. We let a symbol speak by itself and we would rather listen to it than try to confine it to the realm of reason and logic by explanations. These are only a few examples of differences and difficulties we find when we are in an international group.

DISCERNMENT

When we talk about a decision-making process, I think we are talking about a discernment process. The objective of this process is to seek together how best we can respond to God's call in a given, concrete situation. Therefore, it must be a faith experience of the group. Neither the reasonableness of sheer human intelligence nor conduciveness to a mere human success can be a deciding factor. We cannot expect a satisfying lucidity nor a clear and logical explanation of the experiences or of the situation, because the discernment has something to do with the domain of faith and mystery. We all know and accept that mystery is not explicable. It sometimes appears to us that people seek to find or to decide on a situation or an idea as being either black or white. Very often, however, the things may be neither white nor black. There are numerous degrees and shades of grey in-between, and also they can be green, pink or purple. The human reality is very complex and ambiguous but we believe that the Spirit's inspiration and the expression of faith experience can be quite different in various cultures, too. In order to discern together in an international group there must be some additional requirements for the participants. It seems to me that this area needs more research and probably more through experiences than through theories.

The first pre-requisite for each participant of the discernment process in an international group may be that each one should know the way he/she normally acts in the discernment process in his/her own cultural context. Each one needs to be aware how he/she perceives the signs of the Spirit and how he/she can express and share the inner movements or deeper sentiments. And also each one needs to know how he/she normally catches the movements of a group. Unless the individual knows his/her usual ways of the discernment process in his/her own culture, it will be very difficult to distinguish the influences and movements of the spirits within a group which has cultural differences and pluriform

ways of expressions. I think that every culture has some values which are not in accordance with our faith values. Each member needs to be aware of his/her cultural tendencies which may become obstacles to the discernment in faith. It seems to me that there is still much to learn in this respect.

Awareness of Differences Another prerequisite for participating in an international, multi-cultural group may be a rather high degree of awareness of existing differences among the participants. As I mentioned earlier, some difficulties cannot be overcome since they are a part of our human condition. However, we can be aware at least, of the differences and of the difficulties which some of the participants more than others may be having in a given context. This awareness can be developed probably through personal experiences. Seeing is believing. It is almost impossible, for example, to explain and make somebody understand what cold weather is like if he/she has never been to a cold country.

I would like to ask all the participants in a decision-making process in an international context to have had an experience of living in another cultural milieu for a certain length of time and to have had at least an experience of being obliged to live in another language than their own. These personal experiences will certainly help participants to have a keener awareness that there are different ways of thinking, conceiving ideas, expressing thoughts, feelings, insights, and so on. They will help them also to develop a certain sensitivity in perceiving the difficulties of those people who are obliged to use a foreign language. The personal experience of an exposure to different cultures will surely help all of us to relativize our own way of procedure, our communication and how we make decisions.

"Wasting" Time In an international group, there seems to be one more very important point. We must be ready to waste time. We cannot hurry in the decision-making process. Seemingly wasted time may be a very necessary factor in order to allow every participant to contribute to the process. What appears to me to be "waste" may be a very important and necessary process for others. As my little experience which I shared with you at the beginning illustrated, an endless discussion over a word which appeared to me a waste of time was an important process for the other participants. And probably an unimportant conversation which may precede the real issue to be discussed in my culture may appear a complete waste to the people of other cultures. Of course we cannot allow each participant to follow his/her ways individually but an international group may need to proceed more slowly and take extra time for breaks. We will learn little by little to accept different ways than our own. And gradually we would be able to see beauty and richness in the pluriformity of the world.

Basic Similarities Not Uniformity Although I have put so much emphasis on the necessity of awareness of the existing differences of cultures, I actually believe that we, human beings, possess more similarities than differences. Probably because of these fundamental similarities and common ways of acting and of reacting, we sometimes forget the differences.

Across the centuries of history, the Church insisted so much on uniformity all over the world that we have been accustomed to a uniform

way of acting, - believing it was the only way Christian faith could be lived. In many religious congregations, the way of life used to be uniform, probably taken from the place and the time of its foundation. It will take time to change our attitude towards and our understanding of pluriformity. God made us all, however, in his image. We are all given the capacity to think, to feel, to speak, to relate, and so on and on. We share the same faith, the same hope and the same love. And we are called to respect, to trust and to love each other beyond our differences. We are all guided by the same Spirit of God and I hope we live, attuned to the Spirit who will unite us through the beauty of the uniqueness of each one of us, across the differences of our cultures and the variety of our resources.

**INTERCULTURAL DECISION-MAKING
AT A GENERAL CHAPTER:
A NORTH AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE**

Ed Van Merrienboer, OP

Introduction

My remarks will be limited to our community's experience of being inter-cultural through its General Chapter experiences. In order to understand what I wish to share with you it is necessary that I give you some background information about how our General Chapter process functions.

Chapters The Dominican Friars have a General Chapter every three years the actual dates and location of which are determined by the previous General Chapter. These Chapters are usually of about 130 members with voting rights and are made up of Provincial Superiors, Vice-Proprials, Vicar-Proprials and elected members from the various Provinces.

After three years we have the second type of Chapter which is the Chapter of Diffinitors, it is solely of members elected by the various Provinces, Vice-Provinces, etc., and makes the decisions of the assembly. It could rightly be called a Chapter of the "base" because the Master of the Order is the only member of this Chapter having a vote; all others are non-superiors.

The third type of Chapter is of Proprials, Vice-Proprials, and Vicars. This chapter could be considered the upper house or, as one person called it "the House of Lords!"

In 1986, we had a Chapter of Diffinitors in Avila, Spain. It was the first time in the history of our foundation that the majority of the delegates (52%) were not from Europe. We were founded in 1216, so this could be considered a major shift in our historical process!

RULES OF PROCEDURE

At this 1986 Chapter, the process of decision making became a rather heated issue. The rules of procedure at this Chapter had been developed in 1968 and had been modified very little since then. There were strong opinions expressed that the rules favoured those from the "north" because the mentality which produced them reflected a European bias. In truth, they were developed by a North American friar because the Chapter of 1968 was held in the United States of America. Many from Asia, Africa, and Latin America felt that they had been manipulated on a number of the votes at that time. Some votes had to be retaken and it became clear that some thinking about the future had to take place. One issue was that the rules of procedure were only issued in Latin. It was decided that they would be issued at the following Chapter in the

official modern languages of the Chapter. It was also decided that more extended time should be taken to discuss the way we made decisions. If necessary, we would take some days to try to find a decision-making process which would be more fair to all before formal voting took place.

The Chapter of Oakland-1989 The changes were put into operation at our recent Chapter held in Oakland, California in 1989. At the start the Master of the Order presented the rules of procedure. These had been duly translated into the four official languages, Spanish, English, French, and Italian. One of the moderators explained the process and gave examples of how it actually had worked in past chapters. There was little discussion about these rules of procedure and they were approved with only one major change.

This change had to do with proposing major alterations in a text once it had been through a number of consultations from the Commission which had proposed it. There was a general feeling that it was not necessary to take too much of the Chapter time on this point. It should be noted that this Chapter was of Provincials who go to many meetings on the national and international level and would therefore, be more familiar with a process which would be similar to "Robert's Rules of Order".

QUESTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Part of the rules of procedure mandated that in the report of a particular Commission at the Chapter the "prologue", which would be a more extended reflection on a given topic such as, preaching, common life, apostolic priorities, studies, economics, etc., could be proposed in one of the official languages. However, all other legislation had to be presented to the total Chapter in Latin.

The "prologue" or extended reflection of the first Commission to present its work concerned the nuns of our Order; it was in English and the other matters in Latin. It became very clear that most people did not understand the Latin part and there was no translation provided since it was assumed that all had "functional latin". This was a false assumption! After the struggle to make clear to everyone the importance of the vocation of our nuns in the task of preaching today the Chapter voted to make a change in the rules so that only those texts which treated of our Constitutions would be given in Latin because they would be of a more precise legal nature. The Commissions however, would decide on the language or languages of their texts for the remaining part of the Chapter.

Some Commissions simply chose one language - French or English or Spanish as their language. Nobody chose Italian..! One Commission decided to divide its work into two languages: French for the prologue and English for the minor legislation. This ran into difficulties. There was such a conflict over the use of "inclusive language", for those who spoke in French that in the end just to finish the work, it was issued in English only.

In another Commission, that one dealing with Government in the Order, other problems arose. The General Curia of the Order had sent a request to the General Chapter asking the members to determine the

official languages of succeeding Chapters. The Commission proposed that there be only three languages for the next General Chapter of Election in 1992, namely, Spanish, English, and French. This proposal was not accepted well by the Italian members who quickly proposed an amendment adding Italian. The result was that after many votes and a very heated debate which went on over a number of days, it was decided that those who used Italian could speak it but the other languages would not be translated into Italian. It would not be a working language of the next Chapter.

All of this may seem rather simple when stated in a rational way but I cannot convey to you the deep sense of emotion that was part of this process. Many of the French speakers remarked on the psychological blocks that dropping languages would cause. It was even, they said, a type of violence. Others, who came from "smaller Dominican" nations like Holland were expected to speak another European language. So, of course also, were those from China! There did not seem to be too much interest in learning Chinese!

Some expressed great sorrow over the death of Latin while others experienced great frustration in trying to express in Latin, modern economic terms such as 'the official exchange rate of the U.S. Dollar on the New York Bank rate of a given date'! Others, felt that it could hurt the Roman Universities, including the Angelicum, if people lost interest in learning Italian. Our former Prior General, Fr. Vincent de Couesnongle, O.P., was quoted as saying at the previous Chapter, that it was time for the Order to have two languages only - Spanish and English because the costs were becoming too much, etc. He had felt then that the Order should make this move quickly.

A NORTH AMERICAN'S PERSPECTIVE

When I describe the events of our General Chapter, I am speaking and thinking as a North-American. The concepts, evaluations, and insights that I have are conditioned by a cultural value system which puts strong emphasis on freedom and the individual. To speak out in public about one's thoughts is not only normal for me but an expected behaviour. I went to the Chapter with these types of expectations.

Public/Private It was often difficult for me to understand members who would tell me in private that they were not able or "free" to say certain things publicly but wanted me to know them. Members would tell me their position on issues in small groups or in private and never say a word in the plenary sessions. It was even harder for me to accept their behaviour when the Chapter went against their wishes partly because people did not know how they felt or what they were thinking. But they said nothing. This was my chief frustration and I am not sure how to resolve this cultural behaviour so very different from my own.

Prejudgements Another expectation I had was on the substantive level; I felt that there would be certain prejudgements about the North-Americans on particular issues. This was true in some cases but often delegates did not bring United States policy into the discussions. On one occasion when we discussed the role that our Order should have about members being military chaplains, I fully expected attacks, and

with just cause, from the "third world", especially Latin America. In fact, it was the British delegates who had the most to say against the U.S.A!

Nationalism On another occasion we had a rather unexpected conflict when a Commission proposed a text dealing with evangelization in diverse cultures, The text stated that: "Our brothers and sisters should lend support to movements which help overcome a narrow nationalism". This brought a strong protest from the French-speaking brethren because they saw no problem with nationalism! In fact, some delegates saw nationalism as something sadly lacking in the world today! The text did pass but I felt that there was still something fundamental about this issue which was not resolved and will have to be faced again in the future.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

These experiences and others have taught me a few things about being a North American at an international gathering. The first is that what you think might be a problem often is not a big issue and things that you think are unimportant become big conflicts. Of course, culture plays a big part in this. I would like to say a little more about the role that culture plays in this type of situation. When a North-American anticipates problems he or she will often be well prepared to argue their position. Much research will have been done and there will be a careful use of language which presents our position in the best possible light. When we do not think there is a problem we just take it for granted that everyone sees it in the same way. Most of the seven North-American delegates had this same experience. The two who were chairmen of Commissions took great care on points which might cause conflicts but became frustrated when members made "big issues about nothing!"

Second, for the North Americans, details of language could be important - and unimportant at the same time! It was important for example when a text did not have inclusive language, that did refer to men and women, brothers and sisters, etc. But it was unimportant and caused irritation when someone made a point about grammar in a given text. They felt that this should be left to the secretaries to adjust.

Lastly, I was very impressed at the great unity we experienced in our brotherhood. This went beyond all regions. There was a real peace among us and a spirit of joy which took the form of fun and good humour.

TOWARD A RESOLUTION

Even though there was a decision taken about the languages of the next elective Chapter it was clear to many of us that there was still a real tension about this issue. It is more clear to me now than even three years ago that we are in a deep struggle about the meaning of inter-cultural community. It will condition our decisions about leadership, liturgy, formation, and other issues for the near future. All of these issues will be touched by a certain sense of passion. What has been said about the value of culture for personal meaning in the articles we have read in preparation for this conference are true. (c.f. William E. Biernatzki, S.J. - Intercultural Communication and G. Douglass Lewis - Resolving Conflicts)

Our Chapter closed with a strong appeal of our Master General, that all of us learn a second language. He did not state which two languages we should learn but if all were to take up this challenge it would be a helpful direction for the future. Especially, among our young.

We have two fine examples of this effort in Central-West Africa where our young members are learning and studying in French and English; in the Caribbean they are learning English and Spanish. Both groups are able to make great contributions to our Dominican life and mission. In the United States, most of the provinces insist that the younger members learn Spanish in addition to English; and Canada has been bilingual for some time.

Rules of Procedure and languages are just two events in our development as an inter-cultural community but I believe that it is through these concrete experiences that we grow in a communion which is rooted in Jesus the grace of God.

**PROCESSES OF DECISION-MAKING IN AN
INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY INSTITUTE:
A VIEW FROM GHANA**

Rose Sumah, OLA

I am a member of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, an Institute specifically missionary and founded for Africa. Its membership includes nineteen nationalities which brings us into contact with many cultures. It is natural that we are influenced by these cultures in many facets of our lives and particularly in our decision-making. At the level of the General Chapter, Provincial Chapters, the General Council and Provincial Councils, decisions are oriented towards the interest of the Church, Mission, the Institute and its members. The words that come to my mind as I reflect on decision-making in our Institute are: "Let the message of Christ in all its richness find a home with you. Teach each other and advise each other in all wisdom" Col. 3:16. This is what all religious decision-making groups try to do so that the decisions made are nothing less than the creation of space in which the members of their societies can grow.

1. THE RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE ISSUES OF CULTURE

A life consecrated for Mission does not cease to be human, nor do the persons who are so consecrated lose their natural, human tendencies and reactions. Missionaries live out their lives in the face of the demands as well as the costly privilege of consecration and mission, and need the empathy and support of their Societies and Institutes. A large responsibility falls on those who guide these Societies.

They must seek the most effective ways of fulfilling the Mission entrusted to the Institute and of facilitating the members in their task of bringing Christ and his Message of Liberation to others, while finding the same Christ in the cultural milieu where they have been sent.

The whole undertaking of directing an Institute and animating its mission requires sensitivity to the diversity of cultures in the places where we work and an understanding of the values and forces that are operative there. Furthermore, we need to be aware that certain - if not all - cultures are in constant evolution, and that what was of primary value in a culture of 20 or 30 years ago, may not have the same priority today. Examples of this evolution are many. I mention just three:

- a) woman's' place in African society today is considerably different from what it was 30 years ago;
- b) due to the advent of the concept of dialogue the attitude to authority is changing, even though slowly;
- c) in the area of dress certain taboos are fading, e.g. women wearing slacks and having uncovered heads...

An inter-cultural, international, community offers first an opportunity to begin to learn about other cultures. Each member with his or

her cultural background has something to offer to the other and to the Institute. Cultural differences or conflicts may arise from time to time but behind all these is one unifying factor, one common denominator - the life, spirit and mission of the Congregation, the welfare of its members.

Perhaps one can say that Religious life also has a culture which I think, can legitimately colour our decisions. Such a culture will be determined by the spirit and charism of the particular Institute. However, while acknowledging this spirit, we must take into consideration fully the social, cultural and political background of both the people who decide and those being decided for.

2. THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE AND THE CONNOTATION OF WORDS.

It is sometimes amazing that one can spend hours discussing a word as for example, 'working for justice' or, 'proclaim Jesus Christ and His message of Liberation' or again the word, 'solidarity'. These words mean different things for different cultural groups. In this situation one looks for other words that could mean the same thing and that could be acceptable to each one. However, it is not always possible to find other words which express the same idea. In the case of an impasse, it helps to postpone the decision-making and to give time to think and feel more at home with the issue at stake. In my traditional setting a couple of sittings at a meeting may be necessary to arrive at a satisfactory decision.

The language spoken at meetings may cause cultural difficulties. So often people have had to learn the language spoken at such meetings as a second language. They do not always get the nuances of that language and may 'argue' unnecessarily on the correctness of the formulation of a statement. In such situations groups have to accept what is proposed as correct by those who speak the language as their mother tongue. Language has been a major area of frustration for me personally.

3. CULTURAL STANDPOINTS: THE IMPORTANCE OF REACTION, OPINION, PREJUDICE

If a decision is to be taken concerning a given cultural group then the views of that group should be taken into consideration. The Institute may feel that a given group should be doing what everybody else thinks they should be doing - except the very group concerned. In situations such as these, where there is no infringement of the Constitutions or Canon Law, then the voice of the group (or person) concerned should be heard.

This happened in one of our Provincial Chapters where everybody expected two Regions of our Congregation to merge and form one Province. One of the Regions resisted. The issue gave rise to tension which had not been intended. The more the group felt they were being constrained, the more they resisted. Eventually the Province had to respect the wishes of the group. It is possible that one day these two Regions may unite, not because they have been forced to do so but because they see the usefulness of it.

4. THE VALUE OF TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICE

Young Sisters are often being called into question. Young people today have a different mentality; perhaps we do not understand it. In order to give our young Sisters a chance to be understood and to understand what is expected of them, we, the Sisters at one of our Provincial Chapters, put forward the following proposal: A traditional (African) form of yearly evaluation is arranged of all our young Sisters in English-speaking West Africa. This will take place before 2 or 3 older Sisters who are responsible for their growth in community. At this evaluation one is given a chance to speak for herself about her progress and her difficulties; of the things which are helpful to her spiritual and personal growth in community and in the apostolate and those that are not helpful. She is also made aware of how others find her and she is given advice when it is needed. The family spirit and loyalty is very strong in the African (Ghanaian) and the shame or glory of one member of the family is the shame or glory of the whole family. These values also apply to the religious family.

I, as a Ghanaian, entering into decision-making with other cultural groups, bring with me the Ghanaian values of loyalty to the group, respect for authority, a readiness to listen to other peoples' points of view. I accept what is relevant to the common good in their culture in the same way as I would expect them to accept the good in my culture which can also contribute to the common good.

The Ghanaian attitude to authority, to elders, could deter me from dissenting when a decision I am not altogether happy about is being made - if a principle is not involved. In this matter I am in a learning situation. I am learning the values of team-work and consultation and my own personal responsibility as a member of the decision-making group. Whereas I may say very little at meetings and say perhaps, in one or two sentences, what I think about an issue, I realise that for others longer discussion is normal and necessary. I sometimes do not feel it necessary to voice what has already been said if I do not have contrary views. But it may be important at times that I affirm what has already been said.

When I was asked "What do you feel you bring to your Council meetings and decision-making?" I was first at a loss to think of anything specific! After some reflection perhaps I can say:

- i) I bring my own insight into and my understanding of the cultural background of Ghanaian or even African situations under discussion; I have an African (Ghanaian) perception of the problems that arise and of the possibilities in these problems.
- ii) I can sometimes foresee possible African (Ghanaian) connotations of words or expressions in texts under preparation, in questionnaires, Chapter Documents etc....
- iii) I offer occasionally a spontaneous Ghanaian reaction - which may well be a forecast of what the general African (Ghanaian) reaction to suggestions, plans or projects may be. Perhaps too, I may offer an African approach to projects that are mostly for Africa.

These contributions can modify certain decisions of our General Council regarding situations and projects in the African Continent. My own perception of the situation in Africa and my natural reaction to proposals coming from there may, at least make us aware in the Council, of aspects of the situation or reactions to it on the part of those who are closely concerned in the mission or community which is involved. This may lead to the acceptance of compromise in certain circumstances or in certain milieux where feeling is strong on some issues. I think of some examples:

- the handing over of an Institution or House of our Institute to a Local Community and the withdrawal of our own Institute from the locality. This could mean a change of apostolate.
- attendance or non-attendance of our Sisters at functions - such as funerals, weddings, ordinations where long journeys are involved etc....

DECISION-MAKING AT GENERAL CHAPTERS

All decisions, and especially major ones, require prayerful discernment and time and so decisions to be taken at General Chapters require long-term preparation. In our Institute questionnaires are sent out at least one year before the Chapter, some to each Sister, others to each community, for their prayerful discernment and discussion. These questionnaires deal with the different aspects of our life and charism:

mission
 life-style
 vocation policy
 initial & ongoing formation
 government

These aspects are first of all evaluated by the individual Sisters and then at community level. They are evaluated according to the challenges to, and achievements of, the apostolate in the world around us, and the problems and opportunities in what is still to be done. The responses to these issues can all be influenced by my cultural background.

The General Council correlates the responses and sends them back to the communities so that everyone has an opportunity to see what responses came from the various zones, regions and provinces. Following on this evaluation further questionnaires are sent out. These form a Preliminary Working paper for the 'Issues to be Discussed' at the Chapter. This gives an opportunity to all Sisters, all cultures and age groups, to take part in the decision-making process and the actual decisions at the Chapter. However, I must add that the General Council works through the Provincials and their Councils and so on down to the various communities and individual Sisters. Bishops of the various countries in which we work are also asked for suggestions with regard to our apostolates and our function etc.... We are partners in Mission.

ELECTION OF DELEGATES TO CHAPTERS

One cannot influence the election of Delegates to a Chapter among the members eligible for election. However, our Constitution states:

"...care will be taken to see that the different sectors of the Institute will be fairly represented, taking into consideration geographical distribution and that of different nationalities."
(No. 105).

If a sector is not represented, for example, English or French-speaking African Sisters, then a special vote is held among that specific group to ensure their representation at the Chapter. Those elected take part as representatives in all discussions but may not vote. Since young Sisters of less than 3 years profession are not elected as delegates to Chapters they are consulted through questionnaires etc. before the Chapter on issues which specifically concern them. The same procedure is followed for Provincial Chapters.

FORMATION

Unlike some Congregations that have International Novitiates, most of our formation is done locally. The European countries have their individual novitiates and the same applies to North Africa and the Middle East. In West Africa the French-speaking West African Province has one novitiate for all the Sisters of the six countries involved. Nigeria and Ghana share the same Novitiate in Nigeria.

It was deemed necessary however, to have a unified formation programme. Information and suggestions about this were sought and received from formation personnel and Sisters in responsible positions at various levels of the Congregation. A draft booklet on Vocation Policy and Initial Formation was then made and sent to the formators, to Sisters with responsibility at various levels in the Institute and to some communities for their study and comments. The formation personnel were then called to a general meeting here in Rome to again study the document together. This was submitted for study and approval to the Plenary Council of the Congregation which comprises the Superior General and Council, all the Provincials, District and Regional Superiors and representatives of certain sectors.

With the two examples given I hope it becomes clear how we, in our Institute arrive at decisions which take into account cultural and sub-cultural differences in the light of the Gospel. To help improve intercultural relationships regular international meetings, seminars and sessions are held in Rome and various parts of Africa. Such cultural encounters bring about better understanding of one another, of our situations and apostolates.

CONCLUSION

In making a decision as a group we try to be as aware as possible of the need to arrive at a true discernment. An atmosphere of faith is required for this and so before making any decision we as a General

Council always take time for personal and group discernment in a prayerful atmosphere. The same applies to decision-making throughout the Congregation at all levels. We each have to ask ourselves - "What does God want of me, my group, the community or Congregation in this particular situation?"

Distinctions must be made between values, between absolutes of faith and cultural relatives. The Gospel Values and Counsels are trans-cultural and this is our common ground for deciding priority. We know that we need spiritual freedom in order to discern as genuinely as possible what God's will seems to be. For an inter-cultural group this freedom embraces not only freedom from personal prejudices but also detachment from the customs and pull of traditional culture where these come into conflict with the demands of the Gospel and the response of the Institute to these demands. It is important that we pay attention to our own unique calling as a group, that is, to what I may call the "culture of the Institute". We are aware that true freedom comes from above and it is in humble dependence on this grace of God that we face our task.

**VERS UN AUTRE TYPE DE
COMMUNICATION INTERCULTURELLE:
LA REDACTION D'UNE "REGLE DE VIE"**

UN POINT DE VUE FRANCAIS

Francois Nicolas, CSSp

Je voudrais montrer comment la rédaction de notre Règle de Vie a mis en oeuvre des processus de communication permettant de mieux gérer notre diversité culturelle. S'entendre sur un texte aussi fondamental était une aventure périlleuse. C'était aussi une "première". Il s'agissait de refléter véritablement le caractère pluriculturel qui est celui de la Congrégation aujourd'hui.

En décrivant certaines de nos difficultés et découvertes, je me situerai à partir de ma sensibilité propre d'Européen en même de Français ... Je dirai comment j'ai découvert l'importance, pour la communication, de facteurs que je vais énumérer.

1) LA PRISE EN COMPTE DU TEMPS

Ma première réaction, après le Concile, a été une certaine impatience: j'aurais aimé que l'on rédige de suite une "Règle de Vie". Il s'est passé en fait 20 ans entre le Concile et l'édition de notre Règle de Vie (1986): ce temps a été nécessaire pour que tous les confrères de l'Institut "reçoivent" progressivement le Concile avec leurs sensibilités propres et le fassent fructifier dans la diversité de leurs expériences. Trois Chapitres généraux intermédiaires ont été en quelque sorte des bans d'essai et des renvois à la vérification des idées dans le "contexte" de la vie. Avec ma mentalité latine, j'avais accueilli la "rationalité" du Concile et j'étais certain que la vie suivrait les idées. Il est certain que l'esprit lui-même du Concile, ainsi que la valeur que d'autres cultures donnent à la rencontre et à l'accueil, m'auront aidé à me situer autrement par rapport au "temps".

L'importance du temps, je l'ai découverte aussi quand il s'est agi d'introduire la Règle par une ou deux pages résumant toute l'histoire de notre Institut missionnaire. Des Africains avaient très fortement réagi face au texte présenté, qui leur apparaissait une lecture très occidentale de notre passé. Un confrère m'écrivait récemment que l'acte le plus courageux et le plus significatif du Chapitre avait peut-être été de renoncer à écrire cette notice historique: l'"Europe" aurait pu se fâcher et dire: "après tout, c'est nous qui avons écrit cette histoire, laissez nous vous la dire, vous l'écrire". Elle a en fait renoncé, consciente qu'elle devait se déposséder de cette histoire pour que d'autres puissent la faire "leur". Nous avons pris conscience en tout cas du caractère profondément culturel et subjectif de toute lecture historique. Un confrère me faisait d'ailleurs remarquer ces jours-ci que la lecture que je fais aujourd'hui, l'histoire de la rédaction de notre Règle est ... très marquée culturellement!

J'ai découvert encore l'importance de ce poids culturel de l'histoire dans un certain nombre de débats. Telle intervention trop catégorique de ma part était prise plus négativement encore parce que située dans le contexte d'un passé dont j'étais inconsciemment solidaire par ma culture. En fait, ce facteur "historique" a été relativisé au cours des débats. La rédaction de la Règle a constitué en soi un "évènement", une "année de grâces du Seigneur" créant un espace de liberté par rapport à ce conditionnement du passé.

2) LES "CONDITIONS PREALABLES" DE LA COMMUNICATION

Une Assemblée qui s'est tenue au Portugal en 1983 a été l'évènement qui nous a permis d'atteindre à une grande qualité d'écoute mutuelle. Ceci à été du d'abord à la compétence du facilitateur. Il a proposé une méthode de dialogue donnant à tous le maximum de possibilité d'expression. Ainsi, dès le premier jour, mettant de côté les documents préparatoires, il a demandé à chacun de s'exprimer sur la question suivante: "que devrait être selon lui une Règle pour notre temps et adaptée à son pays ou sa région culturelle"? Ce tour de table a pris toute une journée. La réussite de cette Assemblée a été due également à certaines conditions que je vais décrire, au niveau des participants et de l'environnement.

a) les participants:

Je pense que les organisateurs ont su doser le nombre des participants de façon qu'aucun groupe ne se sente privilégié au départ. Cela supposait une bonne connaissance préalable des groupes et sous-groupes culturels et linguistiques de l'Institut. Il fallait de plus s'assurer que les personnes convoquées avaient une véritable capacité d'écoute mutuelle. On attendait des participants les quatre qualités suivantes:

1 - Capacité d'atteindre à la connaissance la plus objective de la position de l'autre et donc renoncer à une certaine subjectivité. Par exemple: qu'un Européen ne se sente pas agressé quand un Africain évoque les causes de la pauvreté, de la déculturation ...

2 - Capacité d'en analyser les données et de comprendre les motifs d'une telle position chez l'autre: pourquoi dit-il cela?

3 - Même si on ne partage pas "globalement" l'opinion d'autrui, savoir en retenir les éléments positifs; et les intégrer dans sa propre synthèse. Pour cela, garder sa synthèse ouverte jusqu'à la fin de la réunion.

4 - Capacité de comprendre les réactions passionnelles des autres, de les relativiser, en y voyant parfois une forme de langage à interpréter: ce qui paraît agressif dans une culture (asiatique par exemple, peut paraître normal dans une autre (nord américaine par exemple)).

b) l'environnement:

Un autre facteur important de la réussite de la rencontre a été son environnement, le rythme et le climat des échanges. La rencontre avait

lieu au Portugal et non en France, ce qui créait déjà un élément nouveau par rapport aux habitudes de la Congrégation. Elle avait lieu pendant le temps de Noël, avec tout le climat de fête que cela suppose. En conséquence, deux modes de communication très importants ont été mis en concurrence avec le mode de communication "rationnel" des assemblées ordinaires: la communication liturgique, qui a été particulièrement riche et ouverte aux différentes sensibilités culturelles; la communication "sociale" à travers les repas et divers moments de détente, les échanges avec la communauté locale.

Il me semble qu'il y a eu les conditions d'émergence de ce que des spécialistes appellent un "haut niveau" d'échange culturel. Le vécu dépassait largement les limites de la communication intellectuelle et verbale.

En fait, ce phénomène se vérifie maintenant dans la plupart de nos Chapitres. Pour un Français comme moi, il est toujours intéressant de découvrir que des breaks ou des "social" sont aussi utiles que les moments officiels de travail (parfois peut-être de façon disproportionnée, il est vrai). On sait toutefois depuis le Concile, que l'Esprit-Saint peut aussi travailler au bar ...!

3) UN LANGAGE COMMUN

La première difficulté rencontrée pour la rédaction de notre Règle de Vie a été celle du langage. Il fallait s'entendre sur les langues de travail et sur la langue du texte écrit de base. Il fallait surtout trouver un langage ou un style d'expression commun. C'est à ces différents niveaux que les mentalités ont eu à faire le plus de progrès, mais avec des résultats très positifs.

a) les langues de travail:

Il a fallu limiter au minimum les langues de travail et se contenter des langues qui sont "officielles" dans notre Institut: le français, l'anglais et le portugais. Ce sont des langues européennes et je ne rendais pas toujours compte auparavant de l'aspect frustrant que cela peut représenter pour d'autres cultures de la Congrégation: celles-ci sont toujours obligées de s'exprimer par l'intermédiaire d'une langue étrangère. Vu l'importance du sujet que nous traitons, il était en tout cas important que chacun ait la possibilité de bien comprendre l'autre et de s'exprimer sans contrainte. Quel que soit le système de traduction (immédiate ou simultanée), la langue ne doit pas être un obstacle, ni développer l'agressivité. Dans notre réunion du Portugal, nous avons remarqué que presque tous les participants avaient fait auparavant l'expérience d'une communauté internationale et pratiquaient donc le bilinguisme. Il semble difficile de parler de dialogue interculturel s'il n'y a pas cette condition préalable.

b) la langue de référence du texte écrit:

Il fallait bien avoir des textes de base, et pour cela choisir une langue. Pour des raisons historiques, les Règles précédentes ayant été composées en français, c'est pourquoi on garda cette langue comme langue de base. Certains y ont vu une sorte de fixation sur le "passé"...! Cela devait poser aussi quelques questions pour les traducteurs car chaque

langue a ses expressions intraduisibles. Pour un Français, cela ne pose aucun problème d'employer parmi les mots clefs de la Règle, des expressions comme "animer", "animateur", "animation", ou encore: "projet communautaire" ou même "ressourcement". Le rédacteur français du texte était souvent très étonné et voir que ce qui lui paraissait "évident" ne passait pas. Il écrira ensuite dans son rapport à la Maison Généralice: "la méthode que nous avons employée (traduction dans une autre langue et retraduction en français pour vérifier) a obligé à relativiser des propos et même des points de vue: une phrase choc, comme il peut en exister par exemple dans la langue française, peut tomber à plat et n'être que de la "poésie" dans une autre langue ...".

En fait, les confrères des autres cultures ont adopté certains de ces mots français "intraduisibles" quitte à les mettre tels quels, entre guillemets, dans leur traduction. Il faut reconnaître par contre que le texte français de base n'a "accueilli" aucun mot provenant d'une langue étrangère. On pourrait imaginer que dans l'avenir, si nous connaissons mieux la richesse et le génie de nos différentes cultures, même une Règle écrite en français pourrait citer entre guillemets tel mot d'une langue africaine ou autre. Ce serait une façon de signifier qu'un aspect profond de la sensibilité d'un peuple passe, à travers la langue, dans le patrimoine de la Congrégation. Le problème est que si l'on arrive encore à saisir les "mots" d'une autre culture, il est beaucoup plus difficile d'entrer dans les mentalités.

c) trouver un langage "inspirateur" ...

Au-delà des langues employées, je voudrais montrer comment on a abordé le problème du "langage" ou du "style" de communication qui devait marquer la Règle. L'importance décisive n'a été perçue que progressivement.

Avant notre rencontre du Portugal, un projet de Règle avait été rédigé par deux confrères, mandatés pour cela par la Maison Généralice. Ils firent un excellent travail en ce sens qu'ils avaient déjà inséré dans la Règle la plupart des éléments qui se retrouveront dans le texte définitif. Ils ont facilité le travail de l'Assemblée qui n'avait pas à partir de zéro. Dans les discussions interculturelles, il faut bien que quelqu'un ait la simplicité d'affronter la critique en lançant le débat.

Ce texte préliminaire avait pour principal défaut de n'avoir pas de résonance dans les différents langages ou cultures de la Congrégation. Il avait adopté le langage ecclésial du Concile et du Droit canonique. Pour l'un des rédacteurs, c'était le passage obligé: "si nous voulons que notre Règle soit reconnue par la Congrégation des Religieux, il faut employer le 'stylus curiae'". On lui dit qu'il fallait trouver un langage adapté aux vrais utilisateurs. Le même rédacteur objecta alors qu'il était prétentieux de vouloir dire mieux ou plus que le Concile ... Sans doute: mais l'esprit du Concile ne demandait-il pas de s'interroger sur tout "langage", même celui de l'Eglise?

C'est principalement pour résoudre ce problème du langage que la Maison Généralice avait réuni la petite Assemblée du Portugal. Il fallait trouver un langage "inspirateur": langage adapté aux différentes sensibilités culturelles; langage devant traduire le dynamisme actuel de la Congrégation en termes de vocation et de charisme apostolique, plutôt qu'en termes de "buts généraux et spécifiques"?

Je dois dire qu'en arrivant à cette Assemblée du Portugal, je fus à l'origine d'une tempête que je n'avais pas prévu. J'étais persuadé que le meilleur moyen de retrouver un langage inspirateur était de nous référer à la Règle primitive de Libermann.

Le "poids de l'histoire"

Je présentais donc à l'Assemblée tout un plan qui selon moi permettrait de redonner du souffle à la Règle. Quelle ne fut pas ma surprise de me trouver devant un barrage immédiat venant de la part des confrères des pays d'Afrique et d'Amérique Latine. Mon projet était un "retour au XIXème siècle et à l'ère coloniale". Peu préparé à lire les "feelings", je me demandais si je ne me trouvais pas en présence d'une sorte de "théologie du ressentiment". En fait, le "poids de l'histoire" avait certes joué contre moi, mais je devais découvrir que c'était en fait ma présentation cartésienne des Fondateurs qui était refusée. Je pense avoir aidé mes confrères d'autres cultures à mieux découvrir nos Fondateurs. Ce sont eux cependant, des africains en particulier, qui m'ont aidé à faire "parler" les mots. Il suffisait de mettre en valeur dans la Règle seulement l'un ou l'autre mot, mais de telle sorte qu'il agisse de façon symbolique et donc avec une force vitale encore plus grande!

Nos confrères africains nous ont aidé aussi à donner à la Règle une unité qui ne soit pas seulement "logique". Chaque chapitre rappelait en quelques mots le thème développé dans les autres chapitres et incitait à une provocation mutuelle des différents aspects de notre vie: la vie est "une" et ne peut pas être divisée, même par les exigences de la logique. Un chapitre introductif sur notre "Vocation" donnait d'ailleurs le "rythme" global de la Règle. Il faut préciser que lors du chapitre qui fera la rédaction définitive de la Règle, il a fallu défendre fortement cette option contre une tentation de retour à une logique trop cartésienne.

d) le critère du langage biblique:

C'est en fait en s'interrogeant sur la signification du mot pauvre que nous avons fini par trouver les sources d'un langage commun. On alla voir dans l'Écriture ce qui était dit des "pauvres". On se référa au passage de St Luc (Lc, 14-18) où Jésus définit pour la première fois sa "mission" devant ses concitoyens de Nazareth. N'était-ce pas la meilleure référence puisque par vocation nous avons à prolonger aujourd'hui cette mission de Jésus?

Le mot "pauvre"

Des confrères européens et latino-américains souhaitaient que ce texte figure au début de la Règle car il y était vraiment question de "libération" des pauvres, d'une soif de justice et de paix. D'autres, qui ne se reconnaissaient pas dans cette lecture "sociale" de Luc, voulaient que l'on trouve un autre texte. En fait, les uns et les autres ne se rendaient pas compte qu'ils faisaient une lecture culturelle trop exclusive de l'Écriture. Le mot "pauvre" n'est-il pas, par exemple, l'objet d'une approche culturelle très différente entre les Européens et les Africains? Combien de débats culturels n'y a-t-il pas eu dans notre Institut (et d'autres aussi sans doute) quand il s'agissait de définir notre Mission comme le fait d'aller "vers les plus pauvres" et les plus

"abandonnés"? Ce fut un confrère africain qui nous aida à sortir de l'impasse: il était en même temps exégète

Le texte de Luc, reposant sur Isaïe et sur toute la tradition biblique, permettait d'avoir une approche très "intégrale" de la pauvreté, dans ses aspects à la fois spirituels, matériels et sociaux. Ce texte ne réduisait pas la pauvreté à un aspect particulier mais il agissait de façon symbolique en faisant jouer les différents niveaux de la pauvreté les uns par rapport aux autres.

Nous nous sommes aperçus que le texte évangélique examiné de près, pouvait inclure les orientations principales de la vie et de l'apostolat spiritain. Le langage biblique agissait à la fois par mode de ralliement et de défi. C'est un langage imagé qui ne s'attarde pas sur les prescriptions et définitions mais suggère, interroge, met en question et laisse à chacun le soin de trouver la réponse: c'est un langage ouvert et non fermé. Parce que ce langage met en mouvement, permet l'écoute tout en proposant des exigences très fortes, nous avons pensé que c'était le meilleur langage de référence pour construire le propre langage de notre Règle.

"Mission"

Je voudrais prendre aussi l'exemple du mot "Mission". Si nous restions restés dans la signification traditionnelle de ce mot, nous aurions pu commencer le Chapitre de la Règle sur la Mission, par la citation de Mat. 28/16-20: "allex, de toutes les nations faites des disciples, baptisez-les ...".

Il y a eu, au cours de l'histoire, une identification de ce texte évangélique avec une mentalité "occidentale, volontariste et activiste". De ce fait, l'idée de Mission a entraîné dans les cultures du Tiers-Monde une image de dépendance qui la rendait difficilement acceptable. Dans notre Institut lui-même, il y avait depuis longtemps une tension entre ceux qui identifiaient mission et "mission a l'extérieur", et d'autres, engagés notamment dans des oeuvres d'enseignement en pays anglophones, qui faisaient en quelque sorte une autre lecture du même texte de Mathieu: peut-on "faire" des disciples si on ne les "forme" pas, c'est-à-dire sans éduquer intégralement la personne et son environnement? Ceux d'entre nous qui sont engagés en Amérique Latine pouvaient dire tout aussi bien que la Mission de Jésus, telle que présentée en St Mathieu, consiste avant tout à rassembler un "peuple" qui soit vraiment le "peuple de Dieu", dans la continuité d'une histoire conduisant à sa libération. En ce sens, la Mission prend un caractère surtout historique et communautaire; elle doit intégrer toutes les catégories de la vie d'un peuple, y compris ses aspects socio-économiques et politiques. Les confrères engagés dans les pays à culture islamique, pouvaient de leur côté revendiquer une Mission non limitée à l'élargissement des frontières de l'Eglise. Et pour cela ils trouvaient en St Mathieu les fondements d'une théologie du Royaume de Dieu.

Dépasser les tensions

Le fait de nous réunir pour définir la Mission nous a permis de dépasser les tensions théologiques mais aussi culturelles liées à ce mot pour la transformer en tension évangélique. Ceci a été possible tout d'abord, en rappelant la source trinitaire de la Mission; nous avons pu

reprendre conscience que la Mission était effectivement un "départ au loin", mais qui allait plus loin encore que le départ géographique. Le "départ" est d'abord sortie de soi, de ses égoïsmes personnels mais aussi nationaux, linguistiques et culturels.

Cette mission n'est pas une conquête mais un service et une libération. Elle est conduite par les pauvres. Sur le plan du langage, ce type de mission comprend une part très importante de silence et d'écoute, car elle cherche à libérer "la Parole" agissante au coeur de tout homme et de toute culture.

A partir de cette conception de la Mission, nous avons pu trouver d'ailleurs de quoi préciser le sens spécifique de notre vie religieuse et communautaire. L'écoute mutuelle de nos diversités devenait elle-même Mission: "Qu'ils soient uns afin que le monde croie". L'envoi en mission johannique complétait celui de Mathieu.

Je crois pouvoir dire que l'ensemble de notre Règle est bâtie sur ce schéma de la Mission. Cela n'enlève pas les tensions entre les différents types d'apostolat qui sont actuellement les nôtres. On a du moins trouvé le dynamisme qui devrait permettre de les faire se rapprocher progressivement. Ces tensions culturelles sont devenues créatives.

Ce faisant, nous avons évité que des secteurs entiers de la Congrégation ne se trouvent marginalisés, parce que au nom de l'Évangile, nous avons fait une interprétation de la Mission qui était en fait une lecture réduite à une culture.

4) LE FONCTIONNEMENT DEMOCRATIQUE ET LE CONSENSUS

Le dernier facteur sur lequel je voudrais insister est le fonctionnement démocratique de notre Assemblée. J'étais habitué à des votes majoritaires à l'Occidentale. Il reste toujours nécessaire de fonctionner ainsi, mais le recours à cette seule méthode risque de rejeter des minorités culturelles porteuses d'appels prophétiques. Au Portugal, comme dans nos autres Assemblées, nous nous sommes acheminés vers une méthode de consensus dans laquelle tous se sont trouvés à l'aise. Nos confrères africains, habitués à la démocratie de la "palabre" s'y reconnaissaient particulièrement bien. Il y avait cependant parmi eux des confrères qui, tout en reconnaissant que leur culture africaine était en harmonie avec ce nouveau type d'approche, avaient opté pour une vue théologique appartenant à une autre culture et à une autre époque. Ceci était une conséquence d'une pratique passée et même encore présente de l'Église vis-à-vis de l'inculturation. Nous nous sommes entendus, par exemple, pour que les décisions finales reflètent toujours, d'une manière ou d'une autre, les opinions minoritaires qui s'étaient exprimées.

Nous avons précisé que même l'opinion d'une seule personne devait figurer dans le texte final qui serait soumis à l'Assemblée: cette alternative devait être prise au sérieux par les capitulants. En fait, personne ne revendiqua ce droit: le processus de communication avait été suffisamment ouvert pour qu'un consensus véritable se fasse sur les points fondamentaux.

CONCLUSION

Pour conclure cet exposé, je voudrais dire combien la rédaction de notre Règle de Vie m'a aidé à prendre en compte le facteur culturel dans le vie de notre Congrégation. Je dois reconnaître que, comme Européen, il m'a été assez difficile de percevoir ces aspects culturels car j'appartiens à une culture qui s'est jusqu'à une date récente, identifiée avec un certain type de pensée et de fonctionnement ecclésial, religieux et missionnaire. Ce qui se vit maintenant est l'étape la plus passionnante, car elle est celle de la création d'une sorte de nouvelle "culture" de la Congrégation et aussi de l'Eglise. La Règle nous donne les moyens de collaborer à construire cette nouvelle culture en nous conduisant tous à nous remettre en cause, à nous convertir vers "l'autre" en répondant à un défi qui s'inspire directement de l'Evangile. Finalement, c'est l'Esprit-Saint qui a aidé à "comprendre" chacun dans sa langue maternelle: lui seul peut faire qu'une Eglise pluriculturelle puisse rester unie et restant Eglise de Jésus-Christ.

CASE STUDIES AND METHODOLOGY

1. AUTHORITY

In the rules of your institute, all members who work in a given area must become part of the province and accountable to the Provincial Superior of that area. In recent years a number of your Vietnamese members have escaped from Vietnam and have settled in Canada. They refuse to be part of the Canadian province organization. Over the past five years, efforts have been made to resolve this impasse but after an agreement has been made the members from Vietnam continue independently of the Canadian province and Provincial. Their words and their actions are quite different.

Last week the Canadian Provincial wrote asking you as the person responsible for that area to intervene in some way to help resolve the issue.

2. PLACE OF STUDIES

Peru is a mission-region of the province of Spain and for 15 years has had its own novitiate and scholasticate. In the past 5 years two staff members of the scholasticate left the priesthood, but students go to a consortium for their theology.

The Spanish Provincial has asked the Superior General for permission to close the scholasticate in Peru and have the students study in Spain, where there are only two students in the formation house, or in San Francisco, where the American province will pay all expenses as a contribution to the mission in South America.

The Superior General who is an American, agrees with the proposal to close the scholasticate and move it but the General Councillor for Latin America (who is Brazilian) argues against it. The Superior General feels that the General Councillor for Latin America is so emotionally involved in liberation theology that he cannot appreciate the practical reasons for the closure. But the assistant knows that the Superior General is very critical of what he calls the 'social gospel' and is also a close friend of the local bishop in Peru, who calls on his priests and religious to concentrate more on prayer and building up the Church.

The other members of your General Administration are hesitant about 'taking sides' but as the one with responsibility for formation you have an important contribution to make in the discussion and decision.

3. INTERNATIONAL FORMATION

Almost since its foundation your international religious institute has had the tradition that each member prior to final profession participates in a one-year intensive formation programme. The members come from all over the world for this programme which is held in your generalate in Rome. Internationality is regarded as one of the essential elements of your congregation. Before making final profession, the young

religious deepen their knowledge of the spirituality and life of the institute through reflection and prayer on their lived experiences since entering the institute in light of the Constitutions. Also, living and sharing in an international community, the members have the opportunity to meet the Superior General and the members of the General Council and to be introduced to the work of the central and international life of the institute.

In recent years, there have been certain objections from your Latin American Provinces to sending the young religious to this formation programme in Rome in spite of the general agreement and positive evaluation of the rest of the congregation. The Latin American Provinces consider it a discrepancy in formation because the initial formation has been done in an inserted community. Besides spending a great sum of money for the journey to and from Rome, they regard it as unnecessary for young religious from the third world to experience life in the First World because solidarity with the poor is the fundamental option for the mission and life of the Congregation. What can "Rome" offer to the young today? Members from other Provinces in different parts of the world, including the Third World, want to send their young religious to Rome so that they will have an opportunity to look at the world in a wider context and from different points of view.

Your General Council is having a week-long planning meeting in ten days time. As the General Councillor in charge of formation you are responsible for presenting proposals and recommendations for next year's final profession programme.

4. DIALOGUE

Sister S. is a member of your congregation from the Kenya Province. Five years ago she sought and received permission from the Provincial to return to her village to look after her aged and sick mother.

During the five years that she has been living with her parents she has worked in the local parish doing catechetical work and youth ministry. This year her mother suffered a set-back and died after a short illness. One month later the new Provincial, a European, wrote to her to return to community and offered her assistance in finding new ministry near to the community. In response Sister S. has told her Provincial that she is very happy in her work at the parish. She feels that the parish priest will be let down if she leaves. Besides, her father will be alone if she returns to her community.

Two weeks later the Provincial receives a letter from Sister S. asking for permission to stay at home and look after her aged father. Her father is 75 years old and could live for another 15 years.

The Provincial knows that Sister is not a very good community person; her personal relationships do not help to build community. Her return may be more of a problem for whatever community she goes into.

In preparation for a meeting of newly elected Provincial Superiors to be held at your generalate here in Rome next week, you as the Councillor responsible for Africa have received a letter from Sister S.'s Provincial. The new Provincial is asking that at the meeting a community-wide

policy be developed and adopted for dealing with the ever increasing number of requests to live out of community to care for aging parents.

5. OPTION FOR THE POOR

At their last Chapter, the members of the Nigeria Province of your institute made a decision to intensify work among the poor and marginalized especially in the capital city of Lagos.

Three years have gone by and only two more remain before the next Chapter.

According to one newly-arrived young European member of the province the objective of the 'option for the poor' is far from being achieved. Nobody seems to be concerned about the poor. Everybody continues to do what they have always done. The young European member has approached the Provincial Superior, an African, for permission to move into one of the base communities and to raise the social consciousness among the slum dwellers. In order to be one with the poor the member does not want financial support from the community. Two or three other members of the Province are thinking of joining this person.

When the bishop of the diocese heard of the move he called in the Provincial Superior to ask if the institute still intended to fit in with the goals and priorities of the diocese which were pastoral work, lay leadership training and education. He asked why the Provincial Superior could not simply assign members to works that were in line with diocesan priorities.

In preparation for the General Chapter there will be a international meeting of Formation Directors of your institute. As the General Councillor with responsibility for formation you know that the above situation is occurring in many Provinces and will undoubtedly be brought up at the meeting. What is your response?

6. NEW RULE OF LIFE

Your institute has worked at its new Rule for about ten years. Now after wide consultation it has been approved by all.

The first problem which arose in your international generalate community about this new Rule concerned the method by which it would be presented or received (launched). At a meeting held to discuss how this should be done some wanted a rather elaborate solemn liturgical event. This was opposed by others who suggested other simpler forms of a liturgical service on that occasion. Still others were strongly opposed to any involvement of the liturgy in presenting and receiving the Rule. The reasons for this diversity of opinion were difficult to ascertain but the debate did surface differing concepts about the Rule itself which were associated with different cultures, attitudes towards the liturgy and ideas about community living.

A decision was put back to a following meeting. As a member of an international generalate community how would you approach the issue?

METHODOLOGIES AND QUESTIONS
PROPOSED FOR THE GROUPS

METHODS

1. Role play the council meeting; some members observe and report to the group what they 'saw' happening (choice of words, arguments, sensitivity to opponents etc.)
2. List arguments for and against or possible options. Discern the values underlying these. Identify clashing values. Are these personal, cultural, theological (ecclesiological)?

QUESTIONS

1. What do you find most difficult in general council discussions?
 2. Have you discovered any helps to cope with the problems of decision-making in inter-cultural groups, especially at general level?
 3. Can you list specific characteristics of different cultures that need to be taken into account in inter-cultural decision-making?
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JOHN TRA
SVD



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