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EDITORIAL

Our first article brings you the last conference of our Ariccia seminar on “the Bible and our Mission”. Sr NURIA CALDUCH-BENAGES, MN, who teaches Bible at the Biblicum here in Rome, proposes new possibilities for pastoral work with the Bible in Europe. — Our second article by Seven Different Authors, from every corner of the world, reflects on the question of ‘authentic development’. All agree that one of the principal dangers and limitations was (and still may be), to see development from a too economic point of view. — After Easter, IAMS, the International Association of Mission Studies met for a regular World Conference in Buenos Aires. About 140 specialists and theologians of mission, exchanged views on the main topic: *Mission and Economies in Conflict*. Here we are able to present to you the main address of the out-going president of IAMS, Fr MICHAEL AMALADOSS, SJ. — We conclude the issue with a contribution from THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION’s General Assembly in Hong Kong. The Final Statement of the international delegates on the theme “Word of God — Source of Life”, based on John’s Gospel in harmony with the 12th World Youth Day Message, could be put into any missionary’s ‘main folder’. —

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NOTE: June/July Issue

Due to a fault in the binding machine, a few issues of the last Bulletin (June/July) have 8 pages doubled, while others are missing. Please look at your last Bulletin to see if it contains pages 181-184 and 193-196. If you should have a copy with these pages missing, please send us a note and we shall send you a re-print of the two articles concerned. Thank you.

THE CHALLENGE OF BIBLICAL WORK IN EUROPE

Nuria Calduch-Benages, MN

PRESENTATION

Good evening. I would first of all like heartily to thank Father Walter von Holzen, Director of SEDOS, for inviting me to this meeting on the Bible and our mission today, and all present.

It was a great pleasure for me to receive the invitation. A pleasure that preceded the real work, when I had to measure up to this show of confidence. It is not easy to speak of Europe at this historic moment, much less of its rapport with Sacred Scripture. They are burning topics.

Biblicist and philologist by profession and vocation, I spend my day between the library and the lecture halls of the Pontifical Gregorian University teaching sapiential literature of the Old Testament. Research and teaching, books and students, are the masters who guide me daily on the road to Wisdom. To this activity is added my commitment to the world of women religious (I teach the Old Testament also in the Pontifical Institute “Regina Mundi”), which is carried out in many activities, some certainly addressed to my congregation (Missionary Daughters of the Holy Family of Nazareth) and to those who ask for help and advice.

Born in Barcelona, a maritime port, I am a daughter of the Mediterranean, the *Mare Nostrum*, the sea that washes the shores of the land of Jesus. Although travelling is an important facet of my work and though I know other cultures, my experience is limited to a rather academic experience, situated in the area of the Mediterranean, in this old Europe that preoccupies the Holy Father and all of us so much.

INTRODUCTION

I must confess that the theme which has been entrusted to me: “The Challenge of Biblical work in Europe” has become a true challenge. On the one hand it has compelled me to reflect on my cultural and Christian roots, on my traditional thinking, on the so-called Western world, on the Europe in which I was born, raised, and educated. On the other hand, I have had critically to appraise my work of teaching

and Biblical research and my pastoral activity addressed above all to the young students, the majority of whom have already made a choice of life in priestly ministry, in religious life or in the lay apostolate.

Having by this time accepted the double challenge, I put to you my reflections, which I have divided into three principal parts. In the first part we shall briefly analyse the European situation from the perspective of religious and spiritual values. In the second part we shall deal with the Bible as a means of evangelisation in the European culture, and in the third part, we shall try to offer some suggestions on mission. Finally, we shall close our discourse with a concluding reflection.

1. In the context of the “new evangelisation”

Our reflection fits into the context of the “new evangelisation” (this expression, first used by Pope John Paul II on his first Apostolic Visit to Poland, on 9 June 1979, in his address at Nowa Huta, frequently appears in his discourses and writings) in Europe, a continent that encompasses three important cultures of world influence (Græco-Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and Slavonic). This would be the first reality to contemplate. We, however, not being able to confront each of these cultural areas separately, shall speak of Europe in general, of the more significant problems which constitute the principal obstacles to proclaiming the Gospel.

Without entering directly into the discussion of the “new evangelisation”, we wish to clarify its concept. How we can speak of evangelising Europe, if Europe is already an evangelised continent? But, let us remember, that the principal movements of evangelisation in history came from Europe: the Slavs opened themselves to the Asiatic Orient, the Spaniards and Portuguese went to South America, and the Anglo-Saxons to North America. To understand the need of a new, second, evangelisation better, we must reflect on the present religious situation in Europe (as regards “*la nuova evangelizzazione e l’Europa*”, cf. the three editorials

in *Civiltà Cattolica* for the years 1991/3-4 and 1992/1).

The most relevant data on the European religious scene is the progressive growth of religious indifference, especially among the young. An indifference which is not an intellectual posture, the result of research or deep reflection, but a particular style of life, a concrete manner of confronting reality, of which we shall speak later. At this point I would like to mention a study made by G. Blasco and G. Anleo, entitled "*Sociedad y Religión en la España de los 1990*" (Society and Religion in the Spain of the 1990's), published by the Santa María Foundation in 1992, where the authors carefully analyse the relationship between religion and society in Spain at the end of the millennium. According to them, a process of "spiritual emigration" has developed in Spanish society, which, beginning with the Catholic dimension, passes through the discontinuance of pious practices, and ends up with religious indifference. I note down just a few facts to illustrate the situation: in 1970, 96% of Spaniards declared themselves Catholic; in 1992, only 76%. The stages of the process are the following: Catholic — non-practising Catholic — indifferent. We have spoken of Spain, however the same phenomenon (without reducing it to Catholicism) is verified in Italy, France, Belgium, Ireland, England, The Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany... Along with this indifference, there is a progressive distancing between faith and religious practice. I again quote some data furnished from the same study: only 30% of Spaniards who declare themselves Catholic attend Sunday Mass, 21% nearly each Sunday and 17% only on festive occasions (Christmas, Easter, and patron Saints).

As to the young people (15 to 24 years), the situation does not change much, although the inquiry "*Jóvenes 94*" (the Santa María Foundation) reveals a surprising fact: a good percentage of young Spaniards claim that they pray to God, not during Mass but in different circumstances of their lives (in difficult moments, spontaneously, with religious songs). Still on prayer, in no. 2 (1996) of "*Famiglia Cristiana*" (Christian Family), in the special section, dedicated to the 15 to 18 age group: "Today's Adolescents", we obtained the following information. To the question: "How often do you pray?", 30% replied: a few times per week, 29.5%: about once per day, 14.8%: never, 8.1% a few times per year, 11.5%: sometimes at Mass, and 6%: at various times per day. The findings speak for themselves.

In any case, we find ourselves facing a weak inconsistent religiosity. Although the majority of Europeans declare a belief in God (70%), the problem arises when it is a question of knowing who God is for them (a person, a spirit, a vital force, a superior power). They live a rather individualistic and subjective faith (everyone in his/her own fashion), that does not welcome contact with the Church or with any type of religious institution. Consequently, there are many Europeans who do not know the proclamation of the Gospel, especially among the young. Let us consider the question of teaching religion in school and the consequences which derive from it (for the Spanish situation, cf. the recent article by Marifé Ramos and Miguel A. Torres, "*La religión en la Escuela: ayer, hoy... ¿y mañana?*", *Vida Nueva*, no. 2029 (February 1996) 21-31). There are many Europeans who know the Good News in a vague, infantile, superficial or incorrect manner. Many are indifferent. They do not bother to know it, and others simply reject it. If we turn towards East Central Europe, on the one hand we find many Christians who have given their lives to defend Christ and the Church, on the other hand, however, are those who have lost the faith completely. To this list we must add the many children and young people who have grown up in total ignorance of the Christian faith, products of the more radical atheism.

The first evangelisation of Europe (that of the first millennium) is far distant. Today our Europe, old and tired, needs a deep spiritual renewal; it needs to rediscover its human and Christian roots, that the wave of secularisation, characteristic of the modernity of our century, attempts to trample on. Europe must rediscover its yearning for God, its longing for transcendence, for the infinite. Humankind cannot live marginalised from the spirit, taking for granted that spiritual values are a variation of life. The spirit is a constituent part of the human being. And this is exactly the message of Christ.

Some will think. Good. Let us get on with the job. There is no time to lose. Let us begin all over again. As if it were the first proclamation, as if it were the first time that the Gospel came to Europe. Unfortunately, it is not so easy to evangelise the Old Continent again. Why? Because the situation is no longer the same. Today the proclamation of Christ does not portray any novelty, it arouses no interest, it does not stimulate curiosity. Everyone, more or less knows, or thinks he or she knows, something of Jesus and Christianity, the Church and the Pope, priests and sisters. Today the novelty is in other religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, new religious movements and also everything that deals with

magical and esoteric religiosity which dazzle the more feeble and wavering spirits with their superficial, yet costly formulae. It is enough to look at the bookshop windows, the propaganda of films, the new markets of occult sciences ...

Notwithstanding this religious pluralism, culture, and European society are no longer religious but secular. This impression of laicity which is not always hostile to religion, but often indifferent, is manifested in the supremacy of science, technology, and rationality. The European has become used to thinking that all problems can be resolved technically. It is sufficient to know the formula and apply it. This phenomenon however stifles the possibility of the growth of the human being, sets off violence and accentuates the nostalgia for the community. Man feels more alone each time and without personal resources. The real problems of man are not technical breakdowns, which are resolved by pressing a key, but they are internal spiritual wounds, that can only be healed with much patience, time, space, dialogue and personal listening. Some could object that today, despite the described situation, we are witnessing a kind of "religious resurgence" in our society. It is true however, that we must make an important clarification. This return to religion is geared towards the East, that is towards the practices of oriental meditation, towards certain mystical experiences based on pure subjectivism or on the state of the mind at the present moment (the mystical-esoteric nebula) and also towards the dangerous sects that are spreading at a surprising rate.

How can we cope with this situation? How can we, in spite of the difficulty, proclaim the Gospel in the midst of religious indifference, religious pluralism and the current secularism that pervades the thought and life of our continent?

We need to pause a moment, firstly to conclude our analysis on religious indifference. Who is indifferent? Whoever lives without troubling to think about God. God does not influence these peoples' lives, because he is not important, he is not significant. According to them, they can do without him and live just the same, indeed perhaps more happily. Religious indifference has its origin in materialism, a philosophy which does not merely defend but fosters consumerism. The principal objective of the consumer society and the mass media is that of propelling man towards material needs, completely ignoring the life of the spirit. To attain this goal, it uses the most potent instrument in today's society: publicity. Thanks to a more refined strategy, the advertising media have created an authentic "culture

of desire" (cf. X. Quinzá Lleó, "La cultura del deseo y la seducción de Dios" *Cuadernos Fe y Secularidad* 24; *Sal Terrae: Maliaño* 1993). These are not limited to propaganda for products, aimed at increasing sales, but they teach us to desire what they want us to desire. In other words, the individual products incorporate a series of values which serve to create a social space, a style of life, and common attitudes with which children, young people and adults end by identifying themselves. We can speak of a true and proper organisation of vital space, which justifies a type of behaviour, a genuine mentality of desire.

The Bible has so profoundly marked Western culture that it cannot be understood without a knowledge of the Bible. The history of the culture of our Mediterranean area bears an indelible biblical mark. All the cultural phenomena are linked to the biblical message.

Worlds of fantasy, of extravagant luxury, of hedonism, of pleasing sensations (softness, lightness, gentleness, freshness...), of easy successes (especially in love, in work and with friends), of social recognition, (to be admired, respected, feared, have prestige, power, elegance), a world where each desire can be satisfied. There is nothing that cannot be obtained. A simulated world, where the frontiers between the actual and the fictitious are muddled, a world which embellishes daily facts of life and renders their contents banal, a world which leaves no place to discernment, reflection, introspection, positive criticism, or evaluation. The result of this culture is a man overflowing with desires to satisfy and with no orientation in life. The culture of desire is based on the concrete, on the tangible, on that which is easy to obtain. Said differently, the culture of desire is based not so much on desire as on the satisfaction of desire. "Who has said that one cannot have everything in life?" And the television picture is presented to us as being the "all": a beautiful machine for display. In this tangible external and sophisticated world, silence is non-existent. It does not exist because it is not interesting. Silence is dangerous: it allows us to enter into ourselves, to reflect on our being and our action, on our behaviour towards others, towards God. No, silence is not interesting. In fact, consumerism succeeds in extinguishing spiritual desires, which dwell in the heart of man. It is for us to know the correct method to rekindle them.

2. The Bible, an Instrument of Evangelisation

Let us proceed to the second part of our reflection. What place does the Bible occupy in this plan of the “new evangelisation”? Is it possible to propagate love for the Word in a society such as ours? How can we make the Bible known? How can we speak of the Bible? How can we present it? How can we teach it? These are only some of the numerous questions that are tossed around in our thoughts.

The Bible has so profoundly marked Western culture that it cannot be understood without a knowledge of the Bible. The history of the culture of our Mediterranean area bears an indelible biblical mark. All the cultural phenomena are linked to the biblical message. Let us give some examples: how can we read Manzoni, contemplate the stained-glass windows of Chagall, listen to the oratorios of Bach, Hayden or Mendelssohn without knowing the Bible? (cf. G. Ravasi, “*Bibbia e Cultura*”, *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia Biblica* edited by P. Rossano, G. Ravasi and A. Girlanda [Edizioni Paoline: Cinisello Balsamo MI, 1988] 168-236). At this point we cannot but cite the magnificent book by Northrop Frye: “The Great Codex. The Bible in literature”, translated into Italian by Einaudi, Turin 1986. The title expressly refers to the expression of the English poet William Blake: “The Old and the New Testament are the great code of art”. The references and allusions to the Bible are not only found in the great works of art or literature, but also in our daily language. Who among us does not have recourse to the “Fleshpots of Egypt”, to the “Prodigal Son”, to the “Good Samaritan”, to the “Manna in the Desert”, to the “Kiss of Judas” to describe some situations in life? These expressions, so familiar to us, are unfortunately incomprehensible to a good number of both young and adults. To speak in real terms of Italy, you would be confronted with the very much discussed question here of the teaching of the Bible in the school (cf. “*Bibbia il libro assente*”, edited by the *Comitato Bibbia Cultura Scuola, Marietti Documenti: Casale Monferrato AL*, 1993).

The Bible however is not only a cultural fact, ignorance of which threatens future generations with losing the historical memory of their cultural roots. But the Bible is first and foremost a religious book. It is the Word of God which enters in communion with men through the human word rich in symbols, metaphors, and silence. It is the Word of God which wants to be engraved in the life of man, which wants to give a sense to life and death. The Word of God is never superficial, banal or ambiguous. Rather, it is profound, earnest and truthful. It is an effective word,

which accomplishes what it proclaims. No description excels that of the Prophet Isaiah:

As the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do (cf. Is 55:10-11).

Without wishing to compare ourselves to the genius of the prophet, we can say in a less poetic style that the Word of God is at one and the same time a fountain of culture and life. And how can we reveal this double source? A passage from the New Testament can help us: Acts 8:26-40. It deals with the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official, a eunuch, who was on his return journey to Ethiopia. Seated in his chariot — an attitude indicative of serious attention — he was reading the second part of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Sent by God, Philip arrives at the right moment to help the eunuch understand the passage that he was reading. To the opening question of the Apostle: “Do you really understand what you are reading?”, the eunuch replies: “Unfortunately it is not possible without someone to instruct me”. Philip’s reaction reveals a wise teacher. He, taking his cue from the text of Isaiah, turned the heart of the eunuch towards Jesus. What would we have done? or better — let me make fun of myself a little — what would a biblicist have done? Probably he/she would have begun the discourse by expounding the mysterious prophecy of Isaiah and all its associated interpretative problems, adding perhaps also some variant texts, and forgetting who was the listener and the actual situation: for the eunuch, that was his first encounter with the Word. What did Philip do? He knew how to announce the Gospel at the right moment, with the appropriate technique and making allowance for the receiver and the circumstances of the moment. In other words, as a good teacher, Philip knew how to make the transition from the book to life, respecting both.

Thus, as the eunuch did not succeed in grasping the meaning of the second Isaiah, today many Christians, practising or non-practising or just indifferent, find difficulty in reading the Bible, for various reasons, be it the Old or New Testament. There are quite a lot of difficulties: the Bible is an immense work, which bears witness to more than 2,000 years of history; its contents constitutes more than 70 books, written in different periods and in different manners; its pages reveal a great variety of

cultural influences the length of its history (Canaanite, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hellenistic ...). Beside these rather general difficulties, we can indicate some concerning the Old Testament and which have been presented by Professor J.L. Ska in his very interesting article (cf. “*Come leggere l'Antico Testamento?*”, *Civiltà Cattolica* [1993/3] 209-223). In addition to the problems of language, the readers of the Old Testament must confront three great obstacles which often constitute a serious cause for scandal: the questionable morality of some biblical personalities (e.g. the behaviour of Abram with his wife in Genesis 12:11-20, or that of Jephthah concerning his daughter in Judges 11:30-40), the divine violence in some texts (the conquered cities “under interdict” in Nm 21:24-35; Dt 7:1-2, Jos 6:1-5 and others) and an insufficient theology of the afterlife (cf. the Book of Job).

How do we surmount these reading obstacles? Firstly the Bible must be read in the context of the history of the people of which it speaks. The texts are only understood in referring to those facts which inspired them. Consequently, it would be necessary to know the languages (translations are a great help when one cannot have access to the originals), geography, environment, history, personalities, cultural patterns (cf. the method of cultural anthropology through the study of the New Testament) the literary styles and especially the narratives (cf. the narratory method) to be able to grasp the profound meaning of the texts. We cannot forget that — I quote verbatim J.L. Ska — “The Biblical texts define the relationship between the historical reality in accordance with the literary conventions of their period and produce their distinctive theology following their own ways”.

All this process of interpretation requires the presence of many Philips, men and women of faith, well prepared at the biblical and pedagogical level, capable of guiding young and old in the discovery of the Bible (the book by R.C. Hill, “*Breaking the Bread of the Word: Principles of Teaching Scripture*” [*Subsidia Biblica* 15; PIB: Roma 1991] is a very useful guide). The Second Vatican Council in *Dei Verbum*, n. 24, a section dedicated to Scripture and Theology, states that the ministry of the word includes, in addition to the homily, “pastoral preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction”. We must be a little precise, because “catechesis” and “Christian instruction” are quite broad and generic terms. It is necessary to make an accurate distinction between the various levels of catechesis and instruction, among localities, receivers, contexts and customary methods, without forgetting the valuable contribution of artists (e.g. musicians, song-writers, poets, painters

...), of the interpreters (the work of the Biblical Society) and the exegetes, who have committed their lives to the study of the Bible and the training of formation personnel.

In a word, the Bible being a privileged means of evangelisation, we must commit ourselves to the preparation of teachers of the Word, whose mission will be the same as that of Philip: to guide the children, youth, and adults towards the personal encounter with Jesus, through the reading of the Bible.

3. Suggestions for the Mission

Let us now go to the third part of our reflection and get down to concrete matters. We have spoken of contexts, various levels and methods in catechesis and Christian instruction. Perhaps it would be more practical to speak of education for children, young and adults, distinguishing in this last group three levels: a) initiation, b) in-depth study, and c) specialisation (university level), which we shall not consider here.

Normally, teaching of the Word is not done with groups that are too large. The importance of the group, namely of the community element is beyond doubt. Thus the participants can establish a rich network of communication among themselves. It is not a matter of listening to lectures or conferences, it is a matter of reading, listening, conversing, asking questions, reflecting together, in short “breaking the bread” of the Word. Some groups declare themselves studying the Word, others, groups listening to the Word or groups praying in the light of the Word. The first interest themselves in the Bible with a more intellectual openly formative aim, if we wish to use this term. The other two aim more on the incidence of the Word in life, and their meetings concentrate on common prayer and frequently on the preparation of the Sunday liturgy. All the groups are of a community character and all require a guide, a programme and method to follow.

Whatever the group or the method, the important thing is that the Word be communicated and that there be established an authentic rapport of “*koinônia*” between the text and the disciple, the disciple and the guide, and between all the members of the group. The basis of this rapport is the text, not the comments, the explanations, the applications, though important and necessary. It is necessary to be attentive to the text with the body, heart, and mind; to enter the text and let the text enter us, without fear, defence, protection, with the same attitude of the one who embraces a friend he has not seen in years. To

be able to enter into this vital harmony, — as we have said — there is a need to be attentive and we all know that the contrary of attention is distraction, dispersion, interior and exterior anxiety that hinders peaceful concentration. To be attentive means to let the text speak with all its strength and richness and to listen to its questions, its challenges, its resonance in our lives and that

It is not a matter of listening to lectures or conferences, it is a matter of reading, listening, conversing, asking questions, reflecting together, in short “breaking the bread” of the Word. Some groups declare themselves studying the Word, others, groups listening to the Word or groups praying in the light of the Word.

of our brothers. To be attentive signifies also to enter into the mystery of the Word which is not exhausted in a particular text, in a single biblical author or in the infinite details of each episode. Each text must open our eyes to the whole revelation of God. To be attentive signifies developing our capacity of feeling and intuition. In the biblical texts there are so many words, also however there are so many silences. The said and the unsaid are marvellously intertwined in an open mystery, that is daily offered to us without “a priori” barriers or qualifications. The Bible is an open book, a gushing source, a resplendent light, a diffused perfume, a handshake between God and man.

A specialist in religious education, T.H. Morris, notes down some suggestions for those who teach Scripture (cf. “*Guidelines for Ministers of the Word*”, PACE 18 (1987) 247-249):

- Approach the Bible, either for study or meditation, with a spirit of prayer and an interior predisposition.
- Recognise all the ways in which we come to the biblical text ... sometimes we think that we have exhausted the significance of the text, because we have read it many times. Instead, the text always opens up new meanings.
- If we are dealing with a very well known text, we can begin with this simple question: What new thing does it tell me?

- Repeatedly read the text with calmness once, twice, three times ... (allow yourself to be present to the text).
- After these readings, ask yourself: What does it mean to me? What do I feel in my heart?
- At this point the competent guide intervenes to orientate and explain the passage, not before.
- The personal meaning and commentary of the guide go together in the text.
- The global meaning of the text is applied to daily life by throwing light on it and giving it a deep meaning.
- Finally, the guide collects all the contributions and experiences concerning the text in question not only as teacher and guide, but also as a fellow traveller to all the members of the group.

Another interesting contribution concerning biblical education of adults and children is that which two specialists present to us on the subject (cf. M.C. Boys - T.H. Groome, “*Principles and Pedagogy in Biblical Study*”, Religious Education 77 [1982] 486-507). Their starting point is two initial questions: What is the Bible that we carry? Who are we who carry the Bible? The authors use the verb “to carry” with specific meaning. The Bible is a book which each of us carries with himself during our life journey; the Bible is not a museum piece, to be always placed in the same position in a shop window, to be contemplated from a distance by thousands of passers-by. The Bible is a useful book, it helps us to travel together and converse with our brethren. The Bible is not an antiquated work, it is a book full of life, which is vital for us. Then, if this is the book that we carry, how must we respond to it?

Two principles emerge from this question: firstly, we must show a critical attitude towards the text, toward ourselves, and towards our world. This means that we must read the biblical text with attention and profundity, seeking answers not only to our questioning and problems, but also to those of our brothers and of the entire humanity. In this reading we must seek help from specialists, from voices past and present, voices which declare the text from very diverse perspectives. Secondly, text and life must be placed together, one calls to mind the other and both form the fabric of Christian practice.

As a final point, I would like to say something on the “*lectio divina*”, quoted in the Post-Synodal

Exhortation of John Paul II on “Vita Consecrata”, n. 94: In “Listening to the word of God”. (The word of God is the first source of all Christian spirituality”). Today, the “*lectio divina*” is practised each time with more frequency not only in the religious communities but also in parishes, or other groups or religious associations. We cannot but cite the School of the Word created by Cardinal Carlo M. Martini in Milan in 1980, at the request of a group of young people of the city. Today there are more than 15,000 young people of the Diocese who frequent the school. Prompted by this experience, a School of the Word was created in 1994 in the canton of Graubunden, Switzerland, with ecumenical scope, which also addresses the young from 16 to 35. The success of the first celebration in the Cathedral of Lausanne encouraged those responsible for different confessions and denominations to continue. In 1995-1996 six meetings were held. The School of the Word follows the method of the individual “*lectio divina*”, experienced in five steps: preparation, reading, meditation, prayer and action (cf. M. Hoegger, “*Une ‘École de la Parole’ pour lire et prier la Bible. Les voies de la ‘Lectio divina’*”, *Hokhma* 61 [1996] 37-49).

I wanted to quote this very recent experience in the heart of Europe, because I am convinced that, in spite of the difficulty of the religious indifference, the religious pluralism and secularism that invades our society, the Word of God opens a way through to the youth. We must not extinguish our faith, our missionary commitment, thinking of the scanty results obtained in these past years. The mission is that of preaching always in any place. To preach in the desert has never been a sterile mission, at least in the eyes of God. We consider it infertile, because we think only of our personal, community, and ecclesiastical failure. Thus we err. It is God who acts in the heart of men. His word is, to use a quite modern term, “performance”, that is, it accomplishes what it proclaims. His word is capable of transforming the most arid desert into a green plain.

4. Concluding Reflection

I would like to conclude our reflection on Europe with a parable of eastern tradition entitled “The baker and the bread”. El Mulá Naserudín — the hero — arrived in a town hungry but penniless. While walking along the street he passed in front of a bakery and the delicious aroma of the bread, hardly out of the oven, led him inside. Once inside, he says to the baker: “Say, are these very delicious loaves of bread yours?” “Certainly they are mine”. “And these buns, so soft and appetising, are also yours?” “Certainly, I

myself have only just taken them out of the oven with my own hands and put them in a pile”. “And these ring-shaped cakes, so large and beautiful, are also yours?” “I have already told you! All these loaves of bread are mine and only mine”. “Well then, why don’t you eat them, man of God?” replied the desperately hungry Naserudín. He was desperate because the absent-minded baker had not understood his hints and had not even presented him with one of his delicious loaves.

The lesson of the parable is addressed to us, who often distribute bread to others without even tasting it. We know how to give good suggestions, teach doctrine, explain the Scriptures, guide prayer. Our market is open to all who wish to buy. We read, study, amass, and turn out the savoury bread of the doctrine and the Word. It is true, we know how to teach, but do we put into practice what we teach? We know how to show which road to follow, but do we travel over it? We speak of faith, of mission, of the Bible, but do our words become living? We prepare delicious bread for others, but do we know how to taste it sometimes? The market of the spirit asks for our testimony. Otherwise the demands will decrease. First we must taste the bread in order to be able to share it with the brethren.

QUEL DÉVELOPPEMENT AUJOURD'HUI?

Peut-on encore parler de développement aujourd'hui? Et comment? Nous avons posé la question à plusieurs personnes engagées à des titres divers — au Nord comme au Sud — dans une recherche d'alternatives au modèle dominant, aujourd'hui présenté comme seul remède à la crise.

CHANGER DE PARADIGME

Seri Phongphit, Thaïlande

Aujourd'hui, développement doit se traduire par «responsabilisation» des personnes. C'est-à-dire renforcement de la société civile. Constitution en réseau des organisations populaires de manière à former un mouvement. Le réseau doit déborder les frontières. Le monde est sur le point d'être uniformisé par le seul marché et la technologie de la communication. Une société sans frontières.

Développement veut dire société plus équilibrée. Equilibre entre trois pouvoirs: l'Etat, le capital et la société civile. Aujourd'hui, spécialement dans le tiers monde et les pays en développement, le pouvoir est manipulé soit par l'état soit par le capital, soit par les deux à la fois. Si la société civile ne se renforce pas, la manipulation se poursuivra et l'exploitation ira croissante.

Il nous faut réfléchir à la manière de responsabiliser les personnes. Nous n'avons pas suffisamment travaillé à créer des liens entre elles. La mise en relation des personnes n'est reconnue que dans la forme, pas dans les faits. On le constate partout même dans de nombreuses ONG, en particulier les grandes agences d'aide. Le partenariat n'est qu'un mot. Tant que nous ne coopérerons pas à l'extension de ce partenariat, parler du développement aujourd'hui n'offre aucun intérêt.

Le partenariat c'est l'âme du mouvement populaire. Si la question de l'environnement est devenue actuellement une problématique mondiale, cela est dû au travail réalisé depuis trente ans. Une prise de conscience de l'opinion publique s'est opérée parce que cette question est devenue, à travers le monde, l'âme du mouvement populaire. Il nous faut prendre en compte les problématiques

de la société actuelle et chercher à les résoudre au sein d'un partenariat de manière à renforcer le mouvement populaire.

Les pauvres ne peuvent défier les puissants s'ils ne s'organisent. C'est seulement à travers un mouvement, avec toutes ses dynamiques, que l'on peut mettre en place une relation basée sur la dignité et le respect. Et les pauvres seront alors écoutés et auront une part plus équilibrée au sein du pouvoir —pour la gestion des ressources et la conduite des affaires courantes de la société.

Le paradoxe, aujourd'hui, est que, plus nous sommes reliés les uns aux autres par toutes sortes de moyens techniques, plus nous sommes isolés, séparés les uns des autres. Comment faire pour que les moyens mis à notre disposition servent à créer de véritables liens entre les personnes? Comment concrétiser ce que nous affirmons sans cesse: «La communication c'est le développement»?

Nous devrions continuer de parler de développement, mais ensemble, en travaillant collectivement. Nous devrions nous parler face à face, dans une relation interpersonnelle, par une méthode interactive, en instaurant un dialogue et non un monologue comme c'est le cas la plupart du temps.

Telle est la réflexion que m'inspire mon expérience avec les mouvements de base en Thaïlande, pays de contrastes et de contradictions. Notre unique espoir, dans ce pays, est que le mouvement populaire devienne de plus en plus fort, que la société civile se façonne elle-même. Mais cela nous ne pouvons le réaliser seuls. Nous avons besoin d'un partenariat avec les autres peuples du

monde, spécialement ceux des pays dits développés.

Nous sommes très en deçà des fulgurants changements qui s'opèrent dans la société. Nous pouvons à peine y faire face. Nous ne parvenons pas à relever le défi parce que nous traînons toujours avec nous l'ancienne et classique conception du développement. Nous devons véritablement changer de paradigme. Nous devons changer notre manière de penser, d'agir et d'évaluer en nous basant sur une nouvelle approche de la réalité qui est en train de changer radicalement.

Comment pouvons-nous développer ce nouveau paradigme si nous ne sommes pas reliés les uns aux autres. Nous ne nous parlons jamais face à face, nous ne disposons d'aucun réseau. Tout ce que nous faisons nous le faisons de façon isolée avec un esprit de clocher et une manière partisane de penser.

Chaque jour des millions de personnes voyagent à travers le monde, elles communiquent entre elles grâce à des moyens modernes. Elles font du tourisme, elles réalisent des affaires, elles discutent de problèmes politiques. Pourtant peu de choses sont mises en œuvre concernant ce que nous appelons le «développement».

Nous avons besoin de catalyseurs au niveau local, national et international pour créer des liens entre les personnes. Nous apprendrons comment le faire quand nous nous mettrons à le faire.

NE PAS DÉSESPÉRER DE L'HUMAIN

Jean-Jacques Pérennès, op., Rome

La notion de développement a connu des fortunes très diverses au cours des quatre dernières décennies. Largement admise dans les années de l'après-guerre et de l'émergence des «jeunes nations», qui y voyaient un modèle à suivre, elle fut ensuite très discutée, à la fois pour ses origines trop exclusivement occidentales et pour ses liens avec une approche de la croissance dont la fin s'annonçait dans le monde post-industriel. On peut se demander si aujourd'hui, à la faveur de la mondialisation, on ne revient pas, sans le dire, à un paradigme dont on a pourtant vu les limites. Ce qui pourrait bien motiver à revenir sur l'apport très fondamental de Lebreton.

Le développement, un concept occidental: la critique mérite d'être réentendue à l'heure de la mondialisation. A l'évidence, le concept doit beaucoup à la problématique du progrès issue de la philosophie des Lumières et mise en œuvre, non sans succès, par la civilisation de la Révolution industrielle. Les cultures d'Afrique, d'Asie et de ce qui reste des cultures locales de l'Amérique latine se reconnaissent fort peu, on l'a souvent dit, dans une vision prométhéenne où le souci de dominer la nature fait si peu droit à d'autres manières d'habiter le monde: respecter toute la richesse du vivant; éviter d'y porter atteinte; percevoir d'autres forces à l'œuvre dans l'univers, depuis le monde des ancêtres jusqu'aux énergies cachées du vivant. Recherche de l'harmonie plutôt que souci de la maîtrise.

Ces thématiques ont été à peine effleurées, y compris par ceux qui en sont les défenseurs. Peut-être parce que la mise en mots et en thèmes abstraits est, elle aussi, une obsession occidentale. Si quelque chose de tout cela survit à la mondialisation en cours, ce sera une réflexion à reprendre. Car si l'on a beaucoup dit qu'il fallait une alternative à cette conception dominante du développement, fort peu de propositions conséquentes ont été faites à ce jour. On s'est souvent contenté de changer d'adjectif pour essayer de qualifier, autrement une approche à l'évidence limitée: développement «durable» étant une des dernières formulations, après bien d'autres tentatives (y compris, celle de développement harmonisé de Lebreton).

La seconde critique est venue de l'intérieur même du monde occidental. Même si l'on considère aujourd'hui que la réflexion sur les limites de la croissance s'est quelque peu égarée à un certain

moment (Club de Rome, croissance zéro, etc.), les impasses croissantes du modèle dominant obligent les pays industriels à repenser leur projet de société. Destruction de l'environnement et menace pour les générations futures, croissance inquiétante de l'exclusion et rupture du lien social, la liste est longue des fragilités du colosse au pied d'argile qui a servi de référence aux politiques mises en œuvre dans les pays industriels. Ici aussi, l'appel à des alternatives n'a guère débouché sur de vraies politiques de rechange. La dramatique persistance du chômage commence à peine à susciter une réflexion en profondeur sur le travail et le revenu.

Malgré cette double mise en cause de l'idéologie du développement l'ère n'est plus à la rupture, comme ce fut le cas il y a 25 ans. Pour ce qui est du tiers monde en particulier tous les efforts portent sur l'intégration la plus rapide possible aux grandes zones commerciales où se partage la richesse mondiale ou la possibilité d'y accéder. Chacun se presse pour entrer dans ces ententes régionales ou sous-continentales (NAFTA, Pacte Andin, Mercosur, ASEAN, etc.), quelque soit le coût social et humain des ajustements structurels nécessaires.

Cette tendance de fond des économies est amplifiée par la mondialisation des échanges d'information et de technologie. On entend, certes, ici ou là, des appels désespérés au sursaut des économies et des cultures nationales, mais ceci relève plus de l'incantation que d'une stratégie de remplacement, comme celle qui semblait s'esquisser lors des négociations des années 70 pour un nouvel ordre économique international. On sait ce qu'il en advint.

Ce tour d'horizon un peu désespérant souligne combien les idées de Lebreton sur le développement gardent un intérêt pour aujourd'hui. A part Paul VI qui les prit au sérieux, surtout dans *Populorum progressio*, et François Perroux à qui Lebreton devait beaucoup, peu de théoriciens du changement social ou de responsables politiques ont pris véritablement au sérieux l'appel à un développement intégral et solidaire.

Lorsque l'engouement pour la mondialisation et la course au modèle unique auront vécu, il sera peut-être précieux de pouvoir revenir à une vision

généreuse de l'économie où l'humain est au centre des préoccupations:

«Passage d'une phase moins humaine à une phase plus humaine, au coût le moins élevé possible, compte-tenu de la solidarité entre toutes les fractions de population d'une même nation et entre toutes les nations».

La crise sociale qui mit Lebret en marche à Saint-Malo à la fin des années 30 n'est peut-être pas sans parenté avec la détresse présente. Des choses se cherchent autour du travail, des formes nouvelles de solidarité. Même si on est loin d'avoir continué à progresser dans une dynamique de relations contractuelles avec les pays du Sud, des hommes et des femmes de bonne volonté continuent à ne pas désespérer de l'humain et à montrer un chemin. Il conviendra d'entendre ces prophètes avant qu'il ne soit trop tard.

DÉVELOPPEMENT ET CITOYENNETÉ

Chico Whitaker Ferreira, Brésil

Le développement, comme *«séries de passages d'une phase moins humaine à une phase plus humaine»* d'une population déterminée selon la conception de Lebret, est bien sûr un objectif toujours à poursuivre. L'histoire du monde est quand même celle d'un processus de civilisation et donc de «montée humaine». Même si nous sommes très souvent surpris par des atrocités et si des cruautés et sauvageries sophistiquées se cachent de notre vue, tous les jours, dans le monde moderne.

Mais cette «montée» semble maintenant presque bloquée, justement par les tendances perverses que Lebret a voulu exorciser en parlant de développement de *«tout l'homme et tous les hommes»*.

En fait, dans le premier monde, autant que chez les élites du tiers monde, c'est le «à chacun selon ses moyens» qui s'est imposé. L'augmentation et la diversification de la production, ainsi que le développement technologique pris dans la logique du marché, se sont tournés vers une satisfaction sans fin des «besoins de confort», gaspilleurs et sans souci écologique.

Cette logique noie alors la satisfaction des «besoins de dépassement» concernant notre croissance en tant qu'êtres humains solidaires. De l'autre côté, pour les deux tiers de l'humanité dans le tiers monde, leurs «besoins essentiels» ne sont toujours pas pris en considération et ils accumulent un retard chaque jour plus difficile à rattraper. A

ceux-ci s'ajoute maintenant un contingent croissant d'«exclus» à l'intérieur même du premier monde.

Il ne suffit donc pas de dire que le «développement» est différent et qualitativement supérieur à la «croissance économique». Même les maîtres du monde parlent aujourd'hui de «développement social», mais ce qu'ils imposent aux pays dépendants va dans l'autre sens. Ils arrivent même à exporter vers le tiers monde de nouveaux problèmes, comme celui des technologies productrices de chômage. Ce qui rend les déséquilibres caractéristiques des pays dits «pauvres», comme la distribution scandaleuse des revenus, encore plus graves.

Ce qui semble bloqué, c'est la discussion rationnelle du «comment assurer au plus grand nombre des conditions de vie dignes». La possibilité de construire des «économies humaines» par la volonté des dirigeants politiques des nations semble repoussée à un futur lointain. L'échec des expériences socialistes a aussi aidé à enterrer bien des espoirs dans ce sens.

Le capital transnational, partout présent et omnipotent, devenu entièrement impersonnel, erratique et insatiable, ne comprend que le langage de la «demande solvable». Et les bénéficiaires de l'actuelle phase du processus de «mondialisation» croient avoir soumis de façon définitive tous les peuples aux règles froides et a-éthiques de cette domination.

Il est donc inutile d'insister sur la nécessité de combiner croissance économique et autres conditions d'un réel développement ou de lutter uniquement pour augmenter cette espace de compensation historique que sont les fonds d'aide solidaire du premier au tiers monde. Le développement s'est cantonné à l'économique, concentrant toujours plus les richesses et ne menant qu'à un processus de consommation excessive des nantis du premier et du tiers monde.

La lutte pour un développement de *«tout l'homme et tous les hommes»* n'est plus alors seulement une affaire technique. Elle est devenue directement politique en tant que lutte pour des droits, lutte qui passe par des changements dans les institutions politiques et dans les conditions de contrôle de ces institutions par le peuple. Or, cette lutte n'est efficace que si elle est menée à partir des «perdants». Les résultats socialement bénéfiques ne sont pas automatiques et les privilégiés ne font pas de cadeaux.

Maintenant, c'est donc la prise de conscience de la citoyenneté qu'il faut réveiller, pour ne pas se soumettre à l'idéologie du marché, et y compris pour éviter des pas en arrière dans la «montée humaine». Parler de développement et des besoins aujourd'hui, c'est parler de citoyenneté et des droits de l'homme, ces concepts s'unissant dans une seule dynamique: celle de l'action de citoyens actifs — qui n'attendent pas pour agir — et solidaires — qui ne luttent pas seulement pour leurs propres droits mais aussi et surtout pour les droits des autres.

Ce défi est immense dans le tiers monde. Ses masses misérables sont constituées encore de demi-citoyens: ils ont des droits — bien reconnus dans les Constitutions nationales — mais ne luttent pas pour eux, puisqu'ils n'ont même pas conscience de les avoir. Ceux qui en ont conscience, et qui ont certains droits respectés, sont dispersés dans un tissu social sans densité et restent passifs, soit parce qu'ils ne croient pas à leur propre pouvoir soit parce que l'alternance démocratie-dictature mène à la peur.

Ceux qui ont du courage et s'organisent dans des associations, syndicats, partis constituent en fait des minorités et restent en général cantonnés dans des luttes corporatives basées sur une éthique individualiste. Ceux qui exercent leur citoyenneté selon une éthique de solidarité sont alors des minorités encore plus réduites, affrontées au contrôle de l'information par ceux qui dominent dans une démocratie faussée par des machines électorales qui

manipulent de façon perverse les carences et l'ignorance populaire.

Au niveau des élites et des dirigeants politiques c'est alors le règne du gain facile, de l'irresponsabilité, de la corruption, de l'impunité, de l'autoritarisme. Le tout ouvrant des voies faciles à la violence et à la drogue.

L'égoïsme individualiste, solidement ancré dans le confort atteint dans les pays riches, rend aussi difficile le défi des citoyens actifs et solidaires du premier monde. Mais la lutte politique pour le dépassement du modèle économique dominant pourrait unifier, dans une démarche de même type, le combat aujourd'hui pour un vrai développement dans le premier et dans le tiers monde. Et ouvrir la place pour une entraide fraternelle entre ceux qui, n'importe où, pensent encore que le monde peut être plus humain.

L'INDISPENSABLE CONTRIBUTION DES FEMMES

Maryse Durrer, Genève

«*Qu'importe ceux qui questionnent seuls comptent ceux qui portent*». En paraphrasant ce proverbe, il n'est pas déplacé de dire que quand on parle de développement — qu'il s'agisse de développement durable, mal développement, sous développement, en voie de développement, que sais-je encore — il y a beaucoup de questionneurs et peu de porteurs.

Une deuxième image me vient à l'esprit. Quand j'étais en première année de primaire, l'institutrice demanda par où l'on commençait à construire une maison. Les enfants répondirent d'une seule voix: par le toit. Bien des experts, des technocrates, des agences de financement ont fait la même réponse au cours des trente années écoulées.

Dans ce bref article, je prends résolument le parti de voir la question «d'un œil de femme». Oeil de femmes confrontées au quotidien à la tâche de nourrir une famille, d'assurer le bien-être de chacun de ses membres, de travailler au dedans et au dehors. Avec une certaine amertume, force est de constater que nos expériences, nos besoins, nos savoir-faire, notre vision n'ont pratiquement jamais été pris en compte par ceux qui pensent le développement. Dans ces conditions, l'échec de toutes les stratégies depuis trois décennies ne nous paraît pas surprenant... Il était même programmé !

Alors faut-il baisser les bras? Certes non! Mais avoir peut-être l'humilité de reprendre la question à la base, en partant de ce que sont les gens, de ce qu'ils savent, en valorisant leurs savoir-faire. Trop de femmes, dans le Sud surtout, se sont vu retirer des tâches qu'elles accomplissaient depuis toujours — les soins de santé primaires ou la production vivrière par exemple — pour en confier la gestion à des soi-disant experts (des hommes en général).

Dans la pratique, l'échec des théories a fait qu'elles ont continué à faire ce qu'elles avaient toujours fait, mais leur contribution a été dévaluée, elle est devenue invisible. A cet égard, il est important de noter la réticence, voire le refus des Etats de comptabiliser la valeur économique du travail non rémunéré — le plus souvent fourni par les femmes. Nous savons que dans certains pays, il représenterait une augmentation de 70 % du PIB.

Comment définir et mettre en pratique un vrai développement? Dans un document de travail,

Misereor (Ong allemande de développement rattachée à l'Eglise catholique) remarque que «*le développement intégral n'est pas possible sans le respect de la dignité des deux sexes et sans la participation des femmes, dans la parité, à la réforme des conditions sociales*». Après les cinq grandes conférences des Nations Unies et tout particulièrement celle de Pékin, on pourrait penser que tous les Etats et les grandes agences de développement sont conscientes de ce fait et se sont engagées à agir. Une «militante avertie» sait que tant que les belles idées ne sont pas transformées en actions concrètes sur le terrain, elles restent de belles paroles.

Saurons-nous, hommes et femmes, être des groupes de pression suffisamment motivés pour contraindre gouvernements et experts à passer de la parole aux actes? Nous savons aussi que rien ne change au niveau collectif s'il n'y a pas changement au niveau personnel, individuel. Sommes-nous prêt(e)s à mettre en pratique la parité dans notre couple, notre famille, partout où la décision de le faire nous appartient?

Les femmes africaines, lors de la Conférence préparatoire de Dakar en novembre 1994, ont réfléchi à ces questions. Elles nous disent: «*Le changement de perspective pourrait commencer par redéfinir les ressources et l'ensemble des catégories qui décrivent et comptabilisent les activités économiques. Les bilans qui font des constats négatifs ne font pas état des richesses (non comptables) accumulées par les femmes en terme de compétences, d'expériences et de conscience, en un mot de capacités propres à développer des stratégies pour sortir de l'impasse*».

Elles disent aussi: «*Il s'agit de recenser tous les savoirs et savoir-faire des femmes, non pas comme recettes à appliquer, mais comme méthodes d'approches et processus de résolution des problèmes économiques. Ecouter au sens fort, les propositions faites par les femmes. Il serait temps de cesser de considérer les femmes africaines comme des ménagères marginalisées qu'il faut aider pour enfin reconnaître en elles de véritables ressources de matières grises, c'est-à-dire des individus qui ont les pleines capacités d'analyser et de formuler les conditions d'une aide éventuelle, en un mot, de*

concevoir des politiques économiques viables et durables».

Les femmes du monde entier peuvent se retrouver dans ce plaidoyer, car les femmes des pays riches et dits développés sont tout aussi absentes des grandes manœuvres de l'économie ou de la définition du développement.

Ces quelques lignes n'ont pas la prétention de faire le tour du problème et de réduire le développement à la vision des femmes; mais si chacun des acteurs de la société partageait avec les autres son domaine d'excellence, qu'il y ait écoute et concertation, nous pourrions alors rêver d'un véritable développement.

Utopie? En attendant quelques pistes pour faire les premiers pas sur ce nouveau chemin:

— rechercher le dialogue avec les femmes pour connaître leurs conditions de vie véritables;

— s'informer de leurs expériences, mais aussi écouter et tenir compte de leurs aspirations;

— relever le défi, dans la société et dans l'Eglise, de remettre en cause des types de comportement bien établis.

La liste pourrait être encore longue... Relevons déjà le défi de faire ensemble les quelques pas proposés, femmes et hommes en partenaires égaux.

DE LA RHÉTORIQUE A L'ACTION

Frère Nzamujo, *op*, Bénin

Jusqu'à une période récente, l'économie du développement était dominée par les thèses de l'école orthodoxe et traditionnelle, dont les principaux outils d'analyse étaient empruntés à l'économie néoclassique. Les prescriptions de cette école traditionnelle semblent avoir échoué dans presque tous les pays qui les ont adoptées. La persistance et l'aggravation d'une pauvreté de masse dans les pays du tiers monde, malgré l'attention particulière qui leur a été accordée ces cinquante dernières années, en est la preuve.

Il est clair que le cadre conceptuel et institutionnel présent dans les pays dits «non-développés» ne correspond pas au système économique que l'on tente d'y introduire. Les hypothèses ont été articulées à partir d'une lecture du fonctionnement de l'économie occidentale moderne et de l'expérience récente du Plan Marshall dans l'Europe d'après-guerre.

Ignorant la spécificité du processus de développement des économies paysannes et agraires, les agents du développement ont adopté le même schéma conceptuel que celui appliqué à l'analyse de la croissance économique dans les sociétés industrialisées juste avant et immédiatement après la guerre.

Cette approche a conduit à mettre l'accent sur le financement de programmes qui, loin de tenir compte des causes profondes de cet échec par des actions correctives appropriées, n'en traitent que les symptômes. Les actions qui s'ensuivent sont alors inévitablement coûteuses, incomplètes, souvent contradictoires et finalement inefficaces.

Ainsi, nous sommes parvenus à transformer une pauvreté sous-développée en une pauvreté développée, installant ainsi un mécanisme de sous-développement... Dans ce «cercle vicieux» de la pauvreté, les gens, bloqués dans l'histoire, sont à la fois agents et victimes d'un système social incapable de générer de lui-même les forces sociales nécessaires à son maintien et sa survie.

Comment renverser le mécanisme actuel de sous-développement? Nous n'avons pas le droit de critiquer ce qui se passe dans le tiers monde, plus particulièrement en Afrique, et de nous en tenir là.

La seule manière d'atteindre un développement durable, c'est d'avoir le courage de nous engager dans un projet global de société:

— Une société où les peuples seraient considérés comme des êtres humains.

— Une société capable de mobiliser et d'exploiter les ressources humaines et matérielles si abondantes.

— Une société dans laquelle les principes, les valeurs et les comportements à la base d'une bonne éthique de travail (fierté et dignité, respect de la société et désir de protéger les intérêts de celle-ci, conformité aux normes et aux règlements des institutions sociales, engagement à travailler dur et équitablement) font partie intégrante de la conscience de chaque citoyen.

— Une société capable de participer aux affaires internationales selon ses propres exigences.

Il y a raison d'espérer. Il existe un nombre croissant de personnes et groupes qui refusent d'avoir une vision sombre du monde de demain. Ces groupes ne se contentent pas de refuser la médiocrité. Ils n'acceptent pas non plus de considérer comme normales des conditions de vie inhumaines.

Cette réaction est-elle un signe que nous sommes au rendez-vous de l'évolution de notre temps? Qui se chargera d'animer cette dynamique ou de la provoquer? Qui en tracera les repères?

C'est aux groupes les plus touchés, aux animateurs du développement, qu'il revient non seulement de reconnaître et de canaliser ces nouvelles ressources humaines, mais aussi de les engager dans la construction de cette nouvelle société.

Et nous, en tant que membres de la famille chrétienne, n'avons-nous pas aussi un rôle à jouer? Au lieu de condamner les politiciens, ne devrions-nous pas plutôt suivre l'enseignement de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, qui disait que «*le monde appartient à ceux qui portent l'espoir*». Un espoir qui doit s'enraciner dans la réalité de la souffrance

et de la peine, avec comme mot d'ordre: «*Etre dans le monde, mais pas du monde*».

Notre foi doit nous inciter à créer une atmosphère qui annoncerait concrètement à notre peuple que «*nous devons vivre, même si le monde est en train de brûler*». L'urgence de notre mission aujourd'hui est donc de créer, à travers nos actions pastorales, un espoir farouche, courageux, en ce que «*toute chose sera rendue neuve*».

Tous ensemble, chrétiens ou non, engagés dans le développement et désireux d'éradiquer à jamais la souffrance humaine, nous devons commencer par créer un forum qui nous permette d'articuler nos problèmes et de chercher à nous entendre sur les causes de notre pauvreté. Cette démarche nous aiderait à donner un sens à l'enchevêtrement de nos difficultés politiques, économiques, sociales, culturelles, techniques et environnementales.

Si nous connaissons les contraintes et que nous développons un «vouloir-vivre», nous trouverons alors les stimulants ou les raisons — intellectuelles, morales et sociales — de construire une structure sociale et organisationnelle appropriée, qui nous permettrait de rassembler nos énergies et nos efforts dans des programmes socio-économiques viables.

Nous, Africains et peuples des pays pauvres, tout en gardant notre héritage culturel, nos cadres conceptuels, nos savoir-être et savoir-faire comme socle, nous devrions maintenir ouvertes nos fenêtres culturelles. Et développer une faculté d'absorption sélective, en utilisant tout ce qui permet de poser les jalons de notre cheminement vers l'amélioration significative de la qualité de vie de nos peuples.

En effet, nous ne voulons pas construire une société *ex nihilo* — en faisant table rase ou en restant prisonniers du passé. En revanche, ce que nous pouvons faire, c'est créer une ambiance propice à sa naissance — exactement comme une sage-femme confirmée.

NOUVEAUX IMPÉRATIFS

Jean-François Giovannini, Berne (Suisse)

Le monde connaît depuis la fin de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale un développement économique sans précédent; obtenu en partie par la consommation d'un capital naturel non renouvelable, mais surtout par une progression technologique exceptionnelle. Bien entendu, il ne s'agit pas d'un mouvement constant: il y a des périodes de recul ou de stagnation entre des périodes d'expansion rapide. Le mouvement a touché la plupart des régions du monde, à l'exception des pays les moins avancés et de quelques autres pays très pauvres. Dans l'ensemble, le monde produit et consomme beaucoup plus de richesses que jamais dans l'histoire.

Cette évolution a aussi été le fait des pays en développement. Il ne faut pas oublier les aspects positifs de près de quarante ans d'efforts entrepris par ces pays, avec le soutien de la communauté internationale, pour améliorer la qualité de vie de leurs populations. De grands progrès ont été réalisés. C'est ainsi que l'espérance de vie est passée en moyenne de 45 ans en 1960 à plus de 60 ans maintenant; la population ayant accès à de l'eau potable est passée de 35 % à 70 % et le pourcentage d'enfants scolarisés est passé de 35 % à plus de 60%.

Et pourtant, jamais la misère n'a été aussi répandue. A ce jour, on estime à 1,3 milliard le nombre de personnel dans les pays en développement qui ne peuvent pas obtenir une alimentation suffisante. 1 milliard de personnel n'ont aucun accès à des services de santé, 1,3 milliard n'ont pas d'eau potable. Au moins 80 millions d'enfants en âge scolaire ne vont pas à l'école. 200 millions d'enfants en-des-sous de 5 ans souffrent de malnutrition. Dans le monde entier, la proportion d'exclus, de sans-emploi, tend à croître.

Les femmes et les filles sont largement majoritaires dans ces populations défavorisées car elles souffrent partout de graves discriminations, et cela dans tous les aspects de la vie: accès à l'école, aux services de santé, à la nourriture, à la vie professionnelle, au crédit, à la terre. La discrimination est si grave qu'on estime à plus de cent millions le nombre de filles et de femmes qui manquent dans la population mondiale, c'est-à-dire qui sont mortes prématurément en raison de leur situation défavorisée, parfois même à la suite d'un infanticide.

Par ailleurs, le développement économique a partout conduit à de graves déséquilibres de l'environnement: destruction des sols, des forêts, disparition des espèces, pollution des océans, désertification, etc.

Je pense donc que beaucoup a été fait, et que beaucoup reste à faire. Un meilleur développement reste une tâche essentielle de nos sociétés, en apportant de nombreuses corrections à l'effort entrepris jusqu'ici:

1) Les efforts de développement doivent être clairement orientés vers le bien-être matériel (besoins essentiels) et immatériel (justice, sécurité, reconnaissance) de chaque personne.

2) Une importance beaucoup plus grande doit être accordée aux conditions - cadres politiques. La guerre ou l'instabilité, comme aussi la dictature, la corruption ou le manque de respect des droits de l'homme sont les principaux obstacles à un développement au service de la personne. Il s'agit donc de promouvoir activement la paix, le respect du droit, les libertés personnelles et associatives et la participation de tous à la gestion des affaires publiques.

3) Les programmes de développement doivent être beaucoup plus précisément organisés pour renforcer la position sociale des plus pauvres, se baser sur la participation active des groupes concernés. Cette réorientation doit en particulier être faite au profit des femmes, et cela non seulement dans des petits projets pilotes, mais dans tous les programmes.

4) Les pays les plus pauvres, en particulier les pays de l'Afrique au sud du Sahara sont confrontés à une crise économique et financière d'une telle gravité qu'ils ne sont guère en mesure d'améliorer leurs efforts de développement social en faveur des plus pauvres, même quand ils procèdent aux réformes nécessaires de leur gestion. Une solution doit être trouvée au problème de leur dette extérieure qui les asphyxie. La dette devrait être ramenée à un niveau compatible avec le développement, c'est-à-dire très souvent à zéro. Il faut aussi trouver un mode

d'insertion dans le commerce international qui tiennent compte de leurs capacités réelles de concurrence. Enfin, il est nécessaire de leur accorder des ressources financières adéquates.

5) Tout développement futur devra tenir compte des limites physiques de la planète. L'action dessinée à la Conférence de Rio de 1992 devra surtout se faire dans les pays industrialisés qui sont les principaux responsables du gaspillage actuel.

Beaucoup peut être fait sans diminuer la qualité de vie, et même en améliorant la qualité de vie des plus démunis, mais cela suppose un changement profond de la gestion économique publique et privée, par exemple une modification des systèmes fiscaux, qui à l'heure actuelle pénalisent le travail et encouragent le gaspillage d'énergie.

UNE LOGIQUE A RENVERSER

Pierre-Henri Chalvidan, France

Peut-on encore parler de développement aujourd'hui? La réponse positive est, évidemment, appelée par la forme même de la question... Et si l'on peut encore parler de développement cela tient à la fois à des raisons conjoncturelles et structurelles étroitement liées.

On peut, et même on doit en parler, d'abord parce que la question n'est évidemment pas résolue. A supposer, pour l'instant, réglé ce problème de savoir exactement ce que l'on met sous ce mot de développement, il est clair que pour de nombreux pays, le développement reste «voie» quand il n'est pas en panne... Ce serait déjà une raison suffisante pour en parler.

Mais il en est une autre plus profonde, c'est que jamais, peut-être, les temps n'ont été aussi favorables pour une parole renouvelée sur le développement. Il semblerait en effet que nous connaissons une sorte de «fenêtre historique» ouverte sur des possibles jusqu'ici difficilement envisageables. La fin d'un monde utopiste prenant en tenaille le Sud — même s'il tend à être remplacé par une globalisation de plus en plus prégnante — une fluidité qu'il serait regrettable de ne pas mettre à profit.

Certes on peut n'en apercevoir, en première approche, que le versant négatif de la décomposition (guerres, massacres, corruptions, etc.). Il est assurément bien réel, mais il ne doit pas occulter le versant d'une recomposition dont les signes ne manquent pas: nouvelles formes de coopération, décollage économique de certains pays, etc.

Ce dont il s'agit au niveau de la «parole» — c'est-à-dire de la pensée qui précède l'action — c'est de contribuer d'une part à une bonne appréciation des décompositions en cours et d'autre part à la mise en route de seines recompositions susceptibles d'éviter de nouvelles décennies perdues.

Qu'est-ce à dire? D'abord qu'il faut mettre à profit ce temps de fluidité pour dresser un solide constat des aspects négatifs et des aspects positifs de la problématique du développement telle qu'elle fonctionne aujourd'hui. L'aspect négatif c'est certainement la continuité, voire l'aggravation d'une

conception économiste que la mondialisation et l'ajustement structurel rendent implacables.

L'économie surdétermine tous les autres champs du développement qu'il s'agisse de la politique, de la culture et même de la foi. Le fondement et l'aboutissement de cette logique étant l'anthropologie libérale restrictive de l'«homo economicus» de l'homme «animal marchand».

Sans oublier toutefois qu'elle a des aspects positifs: une autodépendance accrue qui, si elle est encore pas trop inégalitaire peut cependant constituer un fondement objectif pour la solidarité et un effet d'entraînement économique qui, s'il est encore limité et inégal, n'en est pas moins une avancée dans la satisfaction des besoins primordiaux.

A partir de là, ce à quoi il faut arriver c'est au renversement ou, tout au moins, à la correction de cette logique dominante par une réactualisation de la problématique du développement qui replace l'homme en son centre. L'homme, c'est-à-dire une liberté capable de surplomber tous les déterminismes et tous les fatalismes et de se «développer» dans un processus enfoui de personnalisation.

Une «montée en humanité», comme disait le Père L.-J. Lebreton, qui s'inscrit d'abord sur le terrain de la culture où se détermine le sens de ce développement, qui s'inscrit ensuite dans des choix politiques et qui s'enracine enfin dans une économie politique et non plus une politique d'ajustement aux prétendues lois de l'économie.

Utopie, dira-t-on. Non: espérance même quand l'espoir semblerait interdit. Une espérance fondée sur la croyance en l'indéfectible alliance de Dieu avec un homme, créé, à son image, comme être de liberté, c'est-à-dire doté d'une capacité illimitée de commencement et recommencement. A condition toutefois que cette liberté ne se replie pas sur elle-même mais se déplie, se développe incessamment dans cette ouverture et cette relation à l'autre qui est son seul espace d'apparition.

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MISSION IN A POST-MODERN WORLD

A Call to be Counter-cultural

Michael Amaladoss, S.J.

We are reflecting during these days on the impact of the dominant liberal capitalist economic and commercial systems on our societies and on the challenges they pose to us as witnesses to Jesus' Good News of the Reign of God. The poor are not only increasing in number but are becoming poorer. The resources of the earth, common to all, are being abused by a few and depleted and destroyed. Social inequalities follow the growing economic inequalities and give rise to tensions and violent conflicts. We have seen how the economic and commercial systems are supported by the political systems, whatever be their democratic façades. The political regimes are further sustained by military systems that impose internal and external control to facilitate economic and commercial activity. The military systems are in turn promoted and sustained by the industrial complex through the production and sale of arms. We are also realising how this network of exploitation and control today has global dimensions. We understand how the monetisation of the economy has given rise to financial markets in which, through speculation, money makes more money.

We realise that the only effective way of witnessing to and promoting the Reign of God in this situation is to adopt a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand we have to show in practice that people can meet their needs through alternative technologies and alternative economic and commercial practices. On the other hand the people must progressively gain participative control of the systems that govern their lives and, in this manner, humanise and socialise them. This strategy has to be pioneered by small groups of people who link themselves into networks; nationally and internationally, to put pressure on the powers that be so as to bring about progressive change.

I would like to suggest that such a strategy will not be effective unless it is accompanied by a cultural transformation, namely a change in peoples' world-views and systems of values. The roots of such a cultural transformation will be a spirituality

that motivates, inspires, and enables people to search for a fuller life for all. Any spirituality today, in a world of religious pluralism, can only be human and global, cutting across religious frontiers. The mission of the Good News in such a context requires counter-cultural communities who do not believe in the power of money or numbers or even of truth, perceived in the abstract, but in the power of the Spirit and in their own call to serve.

Radical Modernity or Post-Modernity

Sociologists are not in agreement about whether we are now in a period of post-modernity or of radical modernity. I think that one reason for this dispute is how one looks at modernity itself. We can look at modernity as having its beginnings with the push given to science in the age of Descartes, Newton and Blake. Science discovered its autonomy with the principles of rationality and immanence. People were convinced that the phenomena of nature can be understood by the powers of practical reason, through observation and measurement, analysis and experimental verification. Investigation discovered nature's laws, based on the principle of cause and effect, without feeling the need to invoke supernatural causes. Technology, with human imaginative skills, sought to use the laws of nature, not only to predict natural phenomena like eclipses and earthquakes, but also to control nature and to produce goods, using nature's laws. Monetisation facilitated commerce and mechanical production of goods provided the objects for trade. Science, technology and commerce have joined forces to dominate the whole earth and become global. Some would even say that, driven only by the quest for profit and not bound by any national or cultural roots, it is bound to become global. This is what is happening today. Globalisation however has not brought community among peoples, but only fragmentation and competition for the scarce resources. People feel that they are slaves to the impersonal forces of machines and markets. All these developments do not imply the end of modernity, but its full flowering or its radical, global consequences.

But the people who speak of post-modernity also have a point. Modernity also refers to a new outlook on the world that had its origin in relation to modernity. Science affirmed the autonomy of the world for purposes of analysis. People absolutised this autonomy and denied any transcendent Principle on which the world was dependent. Science used practical reason for its discoveries. People said that anything that

Our mission in the past has been so much directed to strengthening 'our' religion and conquering or making inroads into other religions that the focus of the mission on the Reign of God and the perception of the believers of other religions as allies in a common struggle with Mammon may be termed a paradigm shift.

cannot be analysed by practical reason does not exist. Technology provided the tools for the production of material goods. People imagined that the power they had over nature was absolute and allowed them to exploit it without limit or control. Such a shift in perspective is not simply the natural outcome of science and technology, but is the result of a human, moral choice, through which theoretical reason becomes the slave of the practical one. The new developments brought about by science and technology also gave rise to the myth of indefinite and continuing progress. History was seen as uni-directional. People felt that they were masters of themselves and of the world. It is this modern outlook that is being questioned today. After two world wars and many, even more deadly, regional ones rather than progressing mankind seems to be moving towards self-destruction. There is a growing awareness that all knowledge is conditioned by a variety of human factors and that any pretension to objectivity and absoluteness in knowledge is misplaced. The Transcendent has refused to disappear and, faced with the risks and uncertainties of life, people seem to be turning again to religion in some form. The ambition of building one world governed by reason has collapsed in the face of the experience of and the self-assertion by ethnic, cultural and religious pluralism. The groups searching for alternative technologies and experiences of community witness to the failure of the modern ideal. From this point of view one can say that we have moved into a post-modern phase.

A Cultural Crisis

We are therefore living a moment of crisis and tension between the radical modernity of the scientific-technological world and the post-modernity of the cultural perspectives. Nowhere is this tension more actual than in the realm of community and religion. On the one hand modernity has broken down the traditional groups including the family and promoted individualism, mobility and competition. On the other hand, faced with an inhuman world, people are searching for new identities and relationships of support and solidarity and finding it in factors like ethnicity and religion. Even in the field of religion people are moving away from institutional controls and dogmatic certainties to associative communities and to an experience of freedom to search and to choose. People who postulate post-modernism focus more on the deconstruction of modern societies than on any viable alternatives. No one seems to emerge with an alternative vision. This is unfortunately true of the Churches too. Though there is much talk of mission, a convincing new vision that one could propose, relevant to the post-modern world, seems lacking.

Modernity and the Churches

One reason for this is that the Churches themselves have become compromised with modernity in many ways. Some Christians would even claim that modernity itself is a fruit of the Christian doctrine of creation that sets the Creator apart from the created world and gives the latter an independent reality. The scientific world-view has largely been accepted by Christians who either voluntarily limit their faith to the sphere of revelation and the supernatural as opposed to reason and nature or seek to show that their faith too is not opposed to reason. The Churches willingly believed in the myth of indefinite progress and added to it the sacred dimension of salvation history. They believed in the invincible and uni-directional march of history and imagined themselves to be at the vanguard of that movement. While they were critical of some of the aspects of the commercial and colonial conquest of the world, they did profit from the facilities it offered to further their mission. Their vision of mission as the planting of the Church in a process of universal, of course religious, conquest in the name of God was not very different from the colonial perspective, mobilising financial and personnel resources, though it may have been expressed in biblical images. The Churches have sought to dialogue with the philosophical perspectives of modernity, letting modernity set their theological agenda rather than seek alterna-

tives to it. It is significant that many of the small groups that are trying out alternative life-styles often look to the Orient for inspiration and the exodus from the institutional structures of the Church is not decreasing.

The Churches seem hesitant to move towards reconciling the pluralism of perspectives among themselves, in spite of many inter-confessional dialogues. They have not really come to terms either with the cultural and religious pluralism of the world, in spite of continuing study projects on “Gospel and Culture” and on “Dialogue with Other Living Faiths and Ideologies”. I am aware that I am making broad general statements and that there were and are small groups of people in the various Churches who are walking along different paths. It may also be that my view of the Churches looked at from India, with our experience of continuing economic and cultural colonialism and of a Christian existence that makes us foreigners in our own country seems different from the view had by others looking at it from elsewhere. But the question I wish to raise is how much the Churches themselves have been affected by the perspectives of modernity and how free and ready they are today to be on mission witnessing to the Reign of God in the post-modern world. Are the Churches ready to accept cultural and religious pluralism that is struggling with the monochrome perspectives of modernity, the freedom of people even in the sphere of religion and their quest for associative, experiential communities moving beyond institutional structures?

Our Mission Today

What are the challenges then to mission in a post-modern world? I would like to make two clarifications at this point. First of all the Good News of Jesus directly addresses the world-views and value systems of our cultures and through them seeks to influence the choices that we make in the economic and political spheres. That is why I am speaking here of post-modernity rather than of radical modernity as the locus of mission. Secondly, any vision of mission in today’s world must arise from the point of view of its victims — the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed. They are the mediators of the challenging demands of the Good News. (Talking in Latin America I need not elaborate this point).

Our mission today should be to offer an alternative way of living in the world. I would like to highlight three aspects of this alternative way. They are: *an affirmation of life, an experience of life in community and an awareness of transcendence.*

An Affirmation of Life

Modernity has accustomed us to turn everything into an object which can be observed, measured, manipulated and exploited for selfish, human ends. Growing mechanisation makes the human a slave of the machine. Such an approach to nature has led to a large scale exploitation and destruction of nature and its many forms of life, jeopardising the ecological balance and the future of our earth itself. The human being too is objectified. The human body is treated like a machine, whose life processes can be interfered with and controlled to one’s own benefit. Medicine has become an industry. The media has turned the human body into a consumer product. Human labour has been commodified so that it can be bought and sold in the market. The current economic system has increased the mass of the poor in the world who are not able to meet their basic needs to live a dignified human life. Even the life of the rich is dehumanised by consumerism so that life loses its meaning and becomes a burden and an alienation.

The challenge of mission today is therefore to be a counter-cultural community that will embody in itself these values of life, community and transcendence so as to witness to and to promote the Reign of God in the world. How do we envisage such counter-cultural community? To be counter-cultural is to be prophetic.

In this context, the Good News affirms life. Affirming life is not believing in life after death, but promoting life before death. God is the Creator and giver of life to the cosmos and to human beings. In making human beings in God’s own image, God made them, not only to live in harmony with nature, but also to be creative and lead life to its fullness. Contemporary science has made us aware that life is a network that links the whole cosmos into an eco-system. It is not just a giant machine as industrial technocrats seem to assume or lifeless matter that one can exploit with impunity. Human life too is part of this system. The earth can survive without man; but mankind cannot survive without the earth. But the cosmos itself finds in human beings a new, creative dimension of life that gives it a meaning and purpose. To affirm human life is to affirm the human subject, who has freedom and who, while rooted in nature, can create a fuller life with richness and diversity.

The human person is not a machine, condemned to repetitive action. Man's freedom is more than the randomness that one can discover in nature; it can be purposeful. To defend and promote life is therefore not only to enable the poor to survive, but to affirm their freedom, their capacity for creative self-expression, and the means and space necessary for their creativity to be fruitful and enrich human life. Human beings do this through culture, through which they humanise the world and give it meaning. They learn to use science and employ appropriate technologies for human purposes. To affirm life is to affirm culture, the identity it brings to people, the diversity of its expressions and the freedom that is necessary for its creation.

Life in Community

To discover life profoundly is to become aware of it as sharing, as gift, as love, as community. If the cosmos itself is a network of life, man becomes human in and through a community. It is in relating to another

First of all the Good News of Jesus directly addresses the world-views and value systems of our cultures and through them seeks to influence the choices that we make in the economic and political spheres.

that one fully discovers oneself. This is not a discovery of contemporary psychology. This is an experience of life. God made the human person male and female in God's image. This sets up a basic relationship and reciprocity that governs the whole of life. But because man is made in God's image, this reciprocity is not automatic, but has to be assumed and lived by the human being in freedom. The human person is born in community; but the community has to be constantly built up.

Human egoism, shown in desire and love for power is the obstacle to community. This egoism has been further strengthened by the modern stress on individualism and competition. Even the so-called corporate culture owes loyalty, not to the other, but to the company. Any consideration for the other is seen as interfering with the unique objective of pursuing profit. So there is a culture of individualism and anonymity. But in a competitive world individualism involves not only isolation from the other, but also the effort to dominate the other. The domination takes the form of economic power,

supported by political and military power. It leads to social inequality, that is based on economic inequality, but often shown cumulatively in many other spheres. Such domination of human beings by other human beings has taken a particular historical and cultural form in the domination of the men over the women as a group. Some have pointed out how this sexual domination is very much part and parcel of the whole scientific-technological-commercial enterprise that privileges certain human characteristics identified as male, like aggressive and exploitative domination, and, that the exploitation and subjugation of women goes hand in hand with the exploitation and subjugation of nature.

Jesus' Vision

Jesus' Good News of the Reign of God projects an alternate vision of community. He proclaims justice and liberation to the poor and the oppressed. He befriends the poor, the outcaste, the sinner, publicans and the marginalised of his own day. He brings healing and wholeness to the people suffering under physical, psychological and social oppression. By his preaching and miracles he set himself against the representatives of Mammon in his time. He proclaims a new law that privileges poverty and meekness, peace and justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. He gives us a new Commandment of love, sharing with us his Father's love and life. He does not hesitate to lay down his own life as an affirmation of his love, thus actuating the power of reconciliation. He leaves us a memorial banquet that symbolises and experiences in the sharing of food the sharing of life with each other and with God.

Such a community in God is held together by the bonds of love and mutual acceptance. It is not based on geographic, ethnic, cultural and religious unity. It is not bound by national, economic or caste barriers. It is not only comfortable with multi-culturalism, but sees it as the creative variety and richness of the human race. Its model of community-in-difference is neither architectonic like a building or temple nor even organic — like a tree or a body — but human-divine like a family or the Trinity itself. We would not dare to propose the Trinity as a model, if Jesus himself had not done so: "May all be one as you Father are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us"! (Jn 17:21).

An Awareness of Transcendence

Jesus in his own person is the presence of God to humanity in its life, history and togetherness. The incarnation of Jesus is the assurance that the divine is

not merely an addition from the outside to the human person but is a dimension of the human. It is part of human history. Jesus is God-with-us, God-in-us. One of the consequences of the immanence of modernity is the declaration of the absolute autonomy of the cosmic and the human. It denies any meaning for transcendence, which is not necessary for its understanding of the world. In the face of such denial, it is not helpful to affirm transcendence as something in addition to the cosmos or as something that follows history in the future. We have to discover transcendence as the depth or roots of the cosmos and of the human. On the other hand we cannot fully understand the cosmos and the human person unless we see them as rooted in the Transcendent. This enduring reality is personalised and made historical by Jesus' entry into our history and his continuing presence with us.

Secularisation is one of the consequences of modernity. In so far as it involves a certain autonomy of other social institutions from religion as an institution and its domination on every aspect of life, it is indeed welcome. It has done away with a God who is simply an image of our ignorance, stepping in to explain what we have not yet discovered. But when the autonomy becomes, not only absolute, but atheistic, it subverts the real. The tension today is, not that people have lost interest in religion, but that they accept without question the autonomy of the cosmos, so that religion becomes a private affair catering to personal psychological needs rather than making social demands. In Jesus as part of our history, God's secularity is affirmed and becomes real to us. God is not above us or beyond us or before us. God is with us energising us for our life in the world leading it to fullness. He is particularly manifest in the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised in whom the quest for life is acute. It is the image of the Spirit, not only praying in us, but groaning in the very forces of the cosmos, giving birth to a new humanity of freedom, fellowship and justice in a new world. This alternate vision of the cosmos does not cut us away from it in our quest for the divine but helps us to become aware of the divine in its transcendent depths. To become aware of the secularity of God is to relativise the religious institutions as special and exclusive mediations of the Sacred. They assume a symbolic role of service.

Being Counter-Cultural

The challenge of mission today is therefore to be a counter-cultural community that will embody in itself these values of life, community and transcendence so as to witness to and to promote the Reign of God in

the world. How do we envisage such counter-cultural community? To be counter-cultural is to be prophetic. It is to challenge people in the name of a vision of what they ought to become, by embodying that vision. In this sense it will always be critical of the present. We can perhaps understand better what such counter-cultural communities should be by attending to what they should not be.

Jesus' Good News of the Reign of God projects an alternate vision of community. He proclaims justice and liberation to the poor and the oppressed. He befriends the poor, the outcaste, the sinner, publicans and the marginalised of his own day. He brings healing and wholeness to the people suffering under physical, psychological and social oppression.

Quality or Numbers?

As we approach the year 2,000 there seems to be a millennial fever gripping some people in the Church who want to conquer the world for Christ. It is in the tradition of many such missionary projects in the past. It counts the numbers. Sometimes the attraction of quantity may make them overlook quality. Without wanting the counter-cultural communities to be intellectual, social or spiritual *élites* I think we can expect them to be people committed to their vision of the new society. They will not be mere sociological Christians. They will not seek the power of the institution. They will be serious searchers of the divine-human, respecting personal freedom including their own, and valuing pluralism as richness. When the community is not people-centred but becomes institutionalised in some way and related to political and other institutions, then it seems to lose the prophetic intensity and earnestness of the Good News.

Involved or Liminal?

When this happened in the history of the Church, the people who wanted to offer alternatives tended to set themselves apart as liminal communities — that is communities on the border line, so to speak — offering their witness and challenge not only to the world but also to the Church community. The Churches have had their hermits, contemplatives, monks, mendicants and various forms of apostolic groups in the course of their history. Such liminal

communities may be symbols of the Reign of God. But by their very nature they cannot be models for the people in the world. They are reminders of ideals that all are expected to live. But the ideals are lived out in a way that not all can imitate them. Speaking of the symbolic world of culture, Anthropologists distinguish between 'models of' and 'models for'. Counter-cultural communities should be both 'models of' and 'models for' the communities of the Reign of God. Their challenge will not be actual if they are not actively involved in the world in some way. I wonder whether some of the so-called secular institutes or movements, involved in the world in various ways, but representing and offering models for a different way of living, may not be more relevant today than the traditional religious institutes. Many of these, in any case, are or have become so task-oriented that they do not have much symbolic impact. When we think of community institutional structures immediately come to mind. When people come together for a common purpose we have a community. Such communities can be more or less permanent.

One can belong to more than one community. One can contrast John the Baptist and Jesus. John lived in the wilderness and preached conversion (cf. Mt 3:1-6). But Jesus lived with the people and preached the coming of the new world of the Reign of God and practised what he preached by gathering the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised around him.

An Alternate Way of Life

A counter-cultural community, in order to be authentic, should not be satisfied with presenting a model for a different way of life. It has to be involved in bringing about a transformation of the present world. It does not represent an absolute or other-worldly future. It suggests an alternate way in which people can live here and now. Its witness is rooted in history and seeks to change its course. It will necessarily get involved in peoples' movements. Its favourite self-images will be leaven or salt or light. It does not avoid conflict. But its conflict will be in the perspective of community. It does not rely on political, economic or military power. Its strength is in its moral power based on truth and love. One often discusses in the abstract about the relative efficacy of violence and non-violence. Violence may occasionally throw out a tyrant or a dictator. We still have to hear a true story where violence has brought about a social transformation. The option for the power of truth and love is more than a strategic

option. It is the only authentic way for a counter-cultural community.

Multi-Religious Communities

Such counter-cultural communities may not always carry the label 'Christian'. They may belong to other religions or they may be multi-religious. Given the present situation in the world today one can even say that often they are actually multi-religious. In the past our mission has often targeted the followers of other religions. The supposition then was that ours was the only true religion. Our evaluation of other religions and at least of some of their followers is more positive today. Besides, faced with the threat of global disaster brought about by radical modernity, we see in all those committed to an alternate world allies rather than enemies, whatever be their religious or ideological affiliation. A positive approach to believers of other religions is as much a reality of the post-modern world as multi-culturalism. Mission today will be dialogical. The dialogue should not limit itself to polite conversation but engage in common action for the defence of justice and the promotion of community. In Asia we have examples of such multi-religious communities.

In recent years one speaks about the need for a global ethic. Ethics somehow remains at the merely secular level. We should rather explore the possibilities of a global quest for spirituality, rooted in the experience of the divine or of the Transcendent. We should seek to go beyond agreeing upon some common human values that we wish to promote. Because I do not think that we can move towards a new human world if we keep God out of it. The religions, in spite of their differences and tensions, must play an active role. They should and will of course motivate and inspire their own followers. But beyond that they should create an atmosphere that takes seriously what I have characterised above as transcendence.

Religious leaders in Asia in recent years who have chosen to be counter-cultural in the face of the ravages brought about by liberal Capitalism and the free market system have distanced themselves not only from capitalism, but also from the alternative offered by Communism. They see them both as equally atheistic. Their positive affirmation is that one cannot have a just society which is not founded on religious perspectives of transcendence, whether the Ultimate is seen in personal or impersonal terms. This is true, for instance, of Ali Shariati in Iran, Mawlana Mawdudi in Pakistan, Mahatma Gandhi in India,

Bhikku Buddhadasa in Thailand and Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam.

People who have a deep experience of their own religion seem able to dialogue with others and to learn from them, because the deeper one's experience of the divine, the more one is aware of the limits of that experience. The greater one's focus on God, the more ready one is to recognise God's presence in others.

A Paradigm Shift

Our mission in the past has been so much directed to strengthening 'our' religion and conquering or making inroads into other religions that the focus of the mission on the Reign of God and the perception of the believers of other religions as allies in a common struggle with Mammon may be termed a paradigm shift. Our theological reflections are still coming to terms with this shift with questions turning around the uniqueness of Christ. (Going into these questions would require another address). But, I suggest that the discourse about the uniqueness of Christ is often a hidden discourse about the uniqueness of Christianity and about our desire to be the sole 'possessors' Christ. I think that we will not solve such questions without a real experience of working with other believers in our common fight with Mammon. Praxis must precede theory. Then we may discover that Christ is present, enabling the people, wherever the power of Mammon is challenged. Our mission to witness to this presence does not allow us to claim exclusive rights to it. What is more post-modern than such an experience of pluralism and a call to dialogue in the context of mutual respect and collaboration?

Conclusion

Let me recall some of the main points I have made by way of conclusion. Though our struggle against Mammon takes primarily economic and political forms, it has to be supported by efforts at cultural transformation. Today there is a tension between the radical modernity of science and technology and the post-modernity in the area of culture. The tension is all the more acute since post-modern trends in culture are not offering an alternate vision for life. This crisis is an opportunity for mission. The alternate way proposed by the Good News of Jesus in dialogue with post-modernity will have, among others, three characteristics: an affirmation of life, an experience of life in community and an awareness of transcendence. To embody these perspectives we need

counter-cultural communities, who will be both 'models of' and 'models for' the communities of the Reign of God. They should be neither institutional nor liminal. In today's world such communities will be inter-religious, people of different beliefs and ideologies united in their common struggle against Mammon.

CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION

V PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Final Statement of the Hong Kong Assembly (July 1996)

Catholic Biblical Federation

1.0 We, 170 delegates of the members of the Catholic Biblical Federation, coming from 70 countries, gathered at the University of Science and Technology, Clearwater Bay, Hong Kong, from 2-12 July 1996.

1.1 We had been invited to meet around the theme “Word of God—Source of Life”. This meeting gave us the opportunity to share our experiences, our richly diverse experiences, of the life-giving and also the death-dealing forces at work in our societies, and of the ways in which the Word of God, and our ministry of the Word, has been a source of life for us. We became increasingly aware that our world is profoundly marked by the challenges of social justice, of peace, and of the protection of creation. We were greatly encouraged in our work by the exhortation of Pope John Paul II in his Letter to the Assembly: “As you pray and study, you are deeply conscious of the quest for divine life which characterises men and women today, the deep longing for certainty and hope which fills many human hearts”, just as we had been encouraged and confirmed in our choice of theme for the Assembly by the Pope's passionate defence of the dignity of life, expressed in *Evangelium vitae* and in so many other places.

1.2 We reflected on the biblical text and on the ways in which it illuminates, and is illuminated by, our experience. In particular, we continued to return to the way in which the Gospel according to John presents the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42). This text was the matter for our daily *lectio divina*. In this Final Statement we offer one *lectio* of this text and try to relate it to our ministry for the coming six years. Our *lectio* reflects the Asian setting of our meeting. It is influenced by Asian traditions which value harmonious wisdom, which find life in the “cave of the heart”.

2. “Jesus, tired out by the journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon” (Jn 4:6).

2.1 Our story begins at noontime, a busy part of the day already behind, a fruitful part yet to come. It was but a pause in Jesus' life-journey, yet significant enough to affect us today. As members of the Catholic Biblical Federation, we have journeyed on from Bogota and, as we look with hope to the future, we have paused at Hong Kong's well. The people of Hong Kong are continuing their journey, pondering the opportunities and challenges of moving into a new millennium under a new political dispensation. This is a fitting place for us to assess our own journey in biblical pastoral ministry, and to ponder its challenges and opportunities.

2.2 Jesus sits at the well, at the place of encounter (cf. Gn 21:22-34; Gn 24:10-27; Gn 26:15-25; Ex 2:16-22). Around the well people shared, evaluated and planned their lives. Here they told the stories of their struggles, made known their thirst for harmony and peace. Precisely at Jacob's well, they were reminded of their ancestry, their age-old traditions, traditions of which we too are beneficiaries.

2.3 Jesus sits at the well, the place where the basic human need for water, for refreshment, is met. At the well we find the fresh water needed for life's journey.

2.4 Here in Hong Kong that act of Jesus resonates with our experience. We sit in a place where East meets West, where the ancient wisdom and traditions of China live side by side with modern urbanisation and commercial entrepreneurship. We sense here, as in so many cities, that people are hoping for, thirsting for, survival in the midst of so much consumerism and waste, for true community in the midst of loneliness and alienation. We see economic growth set in towering structures of glass and

concrete, and we see people suffering as a result of the greed of the powerful few, and hoping that the benefits of growth will be shared with those most in need. We are conscious, especially in a University of Science and Technology, of how technological advance shows forth our God-given human ingenuity, of technology's promise of relieving burdens and monotony. And we hope that this new world will be one in which human dignity and the integrity of creation are revered. We sense too a deeper thirst, a thirst for a continuing personal encounter with the God revealed in Jesus. Empowered by God's Spirit, we desire to share this life-giving experience. In the noonday heat of today's often alienated world, we thirst for the abundant life which Jesus as Source can offer.

3. "If only you knew what God gives ..." (Jn 4:10).

3.1 As we ponder this thirst for true life, we realise that God, the "lover of life" (Wis 11:26) has always been giving us life. God's creative Spirit has always been at work in the world, responding to our desire, our thirst, for survival, for bread, for shelter, for freedom, for community, for solidarity. God has been writing the book of life on the pages of different cultures, of different religious traditions, of the lives of ordinary women and men.

3.2 But we are easily blind to what God is doing. Our eyes need to be opened. We can easily stop short at superficial desires, desires that are still too self-centered. The Samaritan woman at first desired a world in which she would not have to come every day to fetch water. Her desires needed, as ours need, to be deepened and purified. The Word of God can give us deeper insight into reality, can help us to see God's hand at work in the splendour of creation, in communities striving for justice and peace, in the beauty of human life. Just as the Samaritan woman's desires were deepened and purified in her encounter with Jesus, so the Word of God can deepen and purify our desires, helping us realise that God's desire for us, the desire that "they may have life, and have it in all its fullness" (Jn 10:10) "can accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20). The Word enables us to see our reality and our hopes with new eyes. At the same time that reality can give us a new lens through which to read the Word.

3.3 This deepening of insight and desire takes place gradually. Such a process of conversion is the task of a lifetime. Only gradually did the woman of Samaria move from seeing Jesus as a Jew who, to her immense surprise, spoke to her, to seeing him as a

possible provider of ordinary water, to seeing him as a prophet, then as the Messiah, and finally enabling her people to see him for themselves as Saviour of the world. Only gradually did she move from a desire for water, to a desire for an unfailing source of water, to a desire for the water that springs up to eternal life. Only gradually does she become a disciple and apostle (cf. Mk 8:22-38; Jn 9:1-41; Jn 11:21-27). Only gradually have we, in this Plenary Assembly, through our listening, our sharing of experience, our *lectio divina*, been led more deeply into the mystery of God's life-giving love.

4. "It is I who am speaking to you" (Jn 4:26).

4.1 "In many and varied ways" (Heb 1:1) God is present in life, in history, in the culture of people. How can we discover and experience this presence? How are we to read the Bible so that it reveals this fountain of life and truly becomes Good News, above all for the poor (Lk 4:18)?

The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan is no mere private conversation. It takes the woman back to her community.

4.2 Jesus revealed God as Father. His very food was to do the Father's will (cf. Jn 4:34). This was the wellspring of his mission: "I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me" (Jn 8:28). This is why he has a fresh outlook, which enables him to disclose the presence of God in life (cf. Jn 4:35). He is the gift God gives, the source of living water (cf. Jn 4:10). In his life, in all that he says and does, he lets us glimpse the face of God. "The one who sees me sees the Father" (Jn 14:9). He is the prism through which we discover the way that leads to the source of life.

4.3 Jesus was faithful to the culture and traditions of his people (cf. Jn 4:22). But his vivid sense of the presence of God as Father gave him great freedom with regard to laws and customs that were contrary to life and to brotherhood and sisterhood. Thus, he travels to Samaria (cf. Jn 4:3); though a man, he speaks openly to a woman (cf. Jn 4:7); though a Jew, he welcomes a Samaritan who was moreover an out-caste, and enters into respectful dialogue with her (cf. Jn 4:9); he lived with Samaritans for two days, not inhibited by the rules on ritual purity (cf. Jn 4:40).

4.4 The presence of God gives him new eyes with which to read the Bible, to discover new meanings there (cf. Jn 4:20-24), to understand in a new way the realities of life (cf. Jn 4:35), to see a source of life in people considered as heretics by his contemporaries, to enable them to see the gift of God in their lives (cf. Jn 4:14).

4.5 By living and by sharing life, Jesus reveals the face of God. But, at the same time, he lets people discover their own face, their own identity, their own ability to work together for a better life. In this way the Samaritan community was able to bridge the gulf that separated them from the Jews, and welcome Jesus the Jew into their midst.

We see economic growth set in towering structures of glass and concrete, and we see people suffering as a result of the greed of the powerful few, and hoping that the benefits of growth will be shared with those most in need.

4.6 This path that Jesus points out as leading to the source of life is a difficult path, a path beset by conflict. Today our path passes through the conflict between a culture of death and communities seeking the realisation of life-giving love. It is not always a clear path, something that Jesus himself experienced in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:11-13, 15, 17, 19-20). But this is the path by which he revealed himself as Messiah, the one who would fulfil the hope of his people (cf. Jn 4:26). And in living together with him, the Samaritans discovered who he was in fact — the “saviour of the world” (cf. Jn 4:42).

5. “...neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem” (Jn 4:21).

5.1 Jesus and the woman of Samaria argue about the place where God is truly worshipped. It is a dialogue that leads to the crossing, the transcending, of borders

— between cultures and religions (cf. *ibid.*, 4:9)

— between woman and man (cf. *ibid.*, 4:27)

— between the powerful and the powerless (cf. *ibid.*, 4:7).

This happens in the encounter between Jesus — hungry, thirsty and tired (cf. *ibid.*, 4:6,8) — and the woman — thirsting for life (cf. *ibid.*, 4:15). It happens at the well, the place of everyday reality. It happens in a dialogue of faith, in which both partners

experience at first difficulty and misunderstanding, but in which by listening to each other they are led to ever greater depths.

5.2 In this dialogue it becomes clear that the whole world and everyday life, and not merely some special holy places and times, is the place where God is worshipped “in spirit and in truth” (cf. Jn 4:23f.), and where Jesus first reveals himself as Messiah (cf. Jn 4:26). What is now decisive is life in the spirit of Jesus and in service to the truth, whose human face is the praxis of justice, is sisterhood and brotherhood, is living in compassion with the needy and suffering (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). This new life is shaped by attentiveness to the will of God, revealed to God’s own people, in accord with which Jesus himself lived (cf. Jn 4:34), and of which the Spirit ever reminds us (Jn 14:26).

5.3 A pastoral praxis that is inspired by and grounded in the Bible has much to learn from this border-transcending encounter and dialogue.

5.3.1 Biblical pastoral ministry is dialogical, sensitive to the real situations in which we live, sensitive to people’s thirst for life, ready to listen to and to respect those with whom we enter into conversation.

5.3.2 We need to learn that God can be encountered in utterly surprising and unfamiliar places, among people of other beliefs and of no belief, beyond the walls of the church, beyond holy times and places, and in all activities that truly seek the service of our individual or collective neighbour.

5.3.3 Many people live in a world where the struggle to survive is a daily reality. Many others are tasting the fruits of freedom after long oppression, and at the same time discovering the new challenges that freedom brings. Many too live in a world where people see themselves as secular and post-modern. But in each of these worlds people are seeking in the depth of the world an experience of the divine. Hence, biblical pastoral ministry cannot remain the business only of religious people, something carried on only within the Church community. It needs to bring the Good News into conversation with all areas of life, so that women and men can come to experience and confess that the presence of God, made visible in Jesus, can bring salvation and liberation,

peace and reconciliation to the whole world.

5.3.4 Such salvation and liberation, such peace and reconciliation, can come about only if we overcome both the tendency of many cultures and traditions (even of some Christian traditions!) to measure the worth of a person by his or her gender, race, religion, culture, economic status, or power, and the tendency to divide the world into the good and the bad, those for God and those against God.

5.3.5 This attitude of dialogue, of sensitivity to and feeling for “the other”, for people of different culture, different faith, different world-view, is totally incompatible with any religious arrogance and with any fundamentalist understanding of the Bible. The “spiritual narrowness” of such fundamentalisms has rightly been criticised (Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*).

6. “These are the true worshippers, whom the Father seeks” (Jn 4:23).

6.1 However much we long for life, however anxiously we seek it, God is even more eager to give it to us. The journey of humankind towards God is also God’s journey towards us. Our desire for true life meets God’s desire for true worshippers.

6.2 God “the lover of life” (Wis 11:26) meets God’s sons and daughters with great love and speaks with them (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 21), and is ready to share the divine life with them through Jesus Christ, who is present where two or three gather in his name.

6.3 We see this life-giving, initiative-taking God at work in Jesus as he meets the Samaritan woman, speaking to her heart, entering into the depth of her life, opening her towards the Father, introducing her to the infinite horizon of worship in Spirit and in truth.

6.4 Jesus spoke of his giving life to us as his “food”, the reason for his being in the world — “My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to complete the work he gave me to do” (Jn 4:34); “This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life”

(Jn 6:40); “I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness” (Jn 10:10).

6.5 Today Jesus continues his “work” through his word. This word is no dead letter. It has a life of its own. It is not first the reader who analyses, explains and discloses the meaning of the text. Rather it is the text itself that enlightens and reveals its truth. This attitude of respect before the living text resonates deeply with traditions in Asian cultures. It calls for both the effort of listening to God, and the awareness of God’s readiness to speak to us.

6.6 Hence, the reader comes in grateful wonder and sincere humility, in openness, in readiness to be surprised, to give praise, to be immersed in the infinite, to enter into God’s heart through God’s word, to be caught up in the fullness of life, a life which is walking in love and in light.

7. “We believe now ... because we have heard for ourselves” (Jn 4:42).

7.1 The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan is no mere private conversation. It takes the woman back to her community. It leads to a meeting between, a sharing of life between, a Samaritan community and a Jewish community.

7.2 In a way which must have caused surprise, even shock, the fourth Gospel presents a woman (traditionally an unqualified witness) as the first to whom Jesus reveals himself as Messiah. It goes further by presenting this woman, with all her unhappy history, as the apostle of her community. In inviting her fellow villagers to “come and see a man who has told me everything I have ever done” (Jn 4:29) she continues the work of Jesus who is depicted a few chapters earlier as inviting his first disciples to “come and see” (Jn 1:39).

7.3 But then the woman stops back from the scene; she speaks not of herself but of Jesus, decreasing so that he may increase (cf. Jn 3:30). She not only shares her experience of Jesus, but enables the others to enter into the experience of Jesus for themselves. And as they do so, they come to an even deeper and broader insight — Jesus truly is the “saviour of the *world*” (Jn 4:42).

7.4 Such experience and insight is not instantaneous. It comes only after “two days” (Jn 4:40), after a sharing not only of conversation, but of life.

7.5 The implications for biblical pastoral ministry are clear

- we, women and men both, are called to apostleship, to invite others to “come and see”
- we “preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus” (2 Cor 4:5)
- we engage in true dialogue when we do not just exchange words but share in solidarity in the realities of each other’s lives
- in such a dialogue we are both learners and teachers

In this dialogue it becomes clear that the whole world and everyday life, and not merely some special holy places and times, is the place where God is worshipped “in spirit and in truth” (cf. Jn 4:23f.), and where Jesus first reveals himself as Messiah (cf. Jn 4:26).

— in this dialogue, this encounter, we hope to meet the other, and together to meet Jesus and to experience the ways in which he is the life-giving saviour of the world.

8. “... look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting” (Jn 4:35).

8.0A true vision of our mission has touched our minds, our hearts and our imagination as we have “read” the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. If this vision is to become more of a reality during the next six years, we have to move from vision to action. Hence, we make the following commitments in our mission of sharing God’s Word of Life:

8.1 The Catholic Biblical Federation commits itself to:-

- 8.1.1 further strengthening the process of regionalisation begun in Bogota, and seeking creatively new forms of networking
- 8.1.2 deepening our reflection on reading the Bible in context, and on the related hermeneutical questions
- 8.1.3 promoting the possibility of a Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, with particular attention to the reception of chapter VI of *Dei Verbum*, and being ready to contribute to the preparation for such a Synod; in particular, preparing, through the Executive Committee and

sub/regional co-ordinators a paper on the “Role of the Bible and of Biblical Pastoral Ministry in the Church” in view of such a Synod

8.1.4 forming closer relationships with other groups in whose ministry the Bible plays or could play a central role, for example, liturgical institutes, catechetical and pastoral formation centres, commissions for justice, peace and the integrity of creation

8.1.5 seeking new possibilities for co-operation with the Pontifical Biblical Commission

8.1.6 networking with official national and local groups preparing for the religious celebration of the Third Millennium

8.1.7 working actively for the cancellation of international debts by the year 2,000, in order to make it a real year of Jubilee, a lifting of burdens from the oppressed

8.1.8 promoting the role of women in all activities of the Federation, and promoting the use of inclusive language in its activities at all levels

8.1.9 approaching, through the Executive Committee and/or General Secretariat, the competent ecclesiastical authorities with a view to having included in the regular curriculum of seminaries and ecclesiastical faculties courses on “The Reading of the Bible in the Church” (with a historical, hermeneutical and pastoral approach), and on non-Christian cultures, religions and philosophies in view of fruitful dialogue between them and the biblical message

8.1.10 approaching, through the Executive Committee and/or General Secretariat, the competent authorities with a view to co-operating in the revision of the Lectionary

8.2 The individual members of the Federation commit themselves to:-

8.2.1 a continuing study of the Final Statement of Bogota and of the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on the Interpretation of the Bible, in order to apply the insights of these documents in the different and plural contexts in which the members work

- 8.2.2 making explicit attention to biblical exegesis part of the workshops and meetings in which they participate, in order to provide models of the ways in which scientific exegesis and pastoral wisdom can be mutually enriching
- 8.2.3 making formation, of both lay people and clergy, for biblical pastoral ministry a high priority. Such formation programmes will
 - 8.2.3.1 include a grounding in sound principles of exegesis
 - 8.2.3.2 not be confined to classroom situations, but prepare people through experience for the “dialogue of life”, with other cultures, with other faith traditions, with the poor and marginalised. Dialogue with the fragile cultures of indigenous peoples is of distinctive importance.
- 8.2.4 for the liturgical celebration of God’s Word and for catechesis — working both to make existing forms more effective, and to develop new forms; being always attentive to the relationships between the Bible, life, and liturgy and catechesis
- 8.2.5 promoting a style of preaching that takes account of the community’s testimony to the ways in which God’s Word has been a source of life for them
- 8.2.6 creatively entering into the world of youth, so that the Word of God can become a source of life in their hopes and their uncertainties
- 8.2.7 making greater use of contemporary communications technology, for example, video productions, shared databases, the Internet
- 8.2.8 making a continuing thorough study of all the acts of this Plenary Assembly — the texts of the major presentations, the thematic papers on contexts of Bible reading, the workshop reports, as well as this Final Statement — and creatively applying the insights contained there in their biblical pastoral ministry.

8.3 These commitments are indeed many and varied, but they reflect our belief that the potential harvest is indeed great. At this moment in history, the suffering of the world and the challenges to the Church are all too obvious. We see challenges, however, as invitations to commitment and creativity, given hope by those words from the fourth Gospel: “Do you not say, ‘Four months and then the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting” (Jn 4:35).

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