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## EDITORIAL

While we are concluding this issue, the Bishops of Asia are assembled in their Special Synod. The meeting is a good reason to dedicate a part of this number to the Church in Asia. —

We start with a report of an International Forum organised during the month of March by Pax Romana in Manila as a preparation for the Synod for Asia. *ANSELMO LEE*, the International Secretary of the organisation, pinpoints a few major challenges for the Synod: workers, women, youth, ecological concerns and the role of the laity. —

Since youth constitutes a large and dynamic portion of the population of Asia, the Salesian Missionary, *Fr LUC VAN LOOY, SDB*, reflects on the possibility of a pastoral response to the extraordinary challenge of this mainly young population. He believes that although the differences are considerable from one country to another, some basic, common guidelines can be formulated. —

*Fr JAMES H. KROEGER, MM*, who is teaching missiology in Manila, takes the Asian Synod as a welcome opportunity to study the different Asian Mission Societies which are making an ever greater contribution to the missionary work of the immense continent. —

The meeting of the Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo meant an clear opening towards the local cultures of Latin America. The Mayan theologian, *ERENSTINA LÓPEZ BAC*, in a very interesting article, presents the main lines of a growing Latin-American Indigenous Theology. —

The Missionary and Anthropologist *Fr JON P. KIRYBY, SVD*, works in Africa and reflects in his contribution on the politics of religion in Northern Ghana. His very interesting observations are valid for many other countries which have similar ethnic and socio-religious conditions. —

We conclude the May issue with a biblical contribution. *SOLANGE NAVARRO* elaborates on the important role of women in the missionary activity of the early Church. They were ready to listen and quick to proclaim the Good News.

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# LAY PARTICIPATION IN RENEWING AND REBUILDING THE CHURCH IN ASIA FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Anselmo Lee

## FINAL STATEMENT

### I. Introduction

1. We, the participants from 14 Asia-Pacific countries and Europe including lay women and men, priests, religious and Bishops, gathered at the Oblate Missionary Center, Manila, around the theme «Lay Participation in Renewing and Rebuilding the Church in Asia for the Third Millennium», March 2 - 6, 1998. We deeply regretted the absence of sisters and brothers from West and Central Asia.

2. Our journey of participation in this Synodal process began at the consultation meeting of Asian Youth International Catholic Organizations (ICOs) held 6 - 12 April 1997, in Bohol, the Philippines. We studied the *Lineamenta* and conveyed our responses with critical comments to the Synod Secretariat in the Vatican. The first 'Asians in Europe Meeting' (ASEM I) held from 14 - 15 June 1997, also reflected on the *Lineamenta* and submitted a synthesis document.

3. At the Asian human rights workshop of ICMICA Asia held in Bangkok, Thailand, 2 - 9 August 1997, on the theme "Challenges of Globalisation for Human Rights in Asia — Role of Catholic Human Rights Professionals", we have analysed the response of the Church to globalisation and human rights in the context of the forthcoming Synod for Asia.

4. Finally now at Manila, we have studied in-depth the **Instrumentum Laboris** (*IL*) of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia (hereafter Synod for Asia) scheduled to take place in Rome, 19 April - 14 May 1998. In the light of our prayerful reflections, we have drafted this Statement as well as identified issues for interventions and propositions at the Synod for Asia — for further serious reflection and consideration.

5. As pointed out by the *IL*, the Synod for Asia is indeed a moment of grace for the Church in Asia, where the People of God in the company of millions of peoples with diverse languages, races, cultures and religions, "has been striving to assimilate and live Vatican II's ecclesiology of communion in Jesus Christ" (*IL*, n. 1).

### II. Worsening Economic Crisis and its Impact on the People in Asia

6. We have looked into some of the major developments and shifts taking place, particularly in the three regions of East Asia, South-east Asia and South Asia.

7. Deeply aware of the acute pain experienced by the victims of the current economic crisis, we reflected on the impact and social consequences of such a crisis on people in Asia. We learnt that the current crisis gripping some countries in South-east Asia and East Asia provides both a challenge and an opportunity for the Church to re-examine critically the current model of economic development based on ruthless competition, greed for profit, human exploitation and high social cost on the poor.

8. Globalisation itself is a complex process of inclusion and exclusion, empowering and disempowering, with its positive and negative effects which can be neither underestimated nor simplified. However, to our regret, the process of economic globalisation initiated by the *élites* and Trans-National Corporations (TNCs) has been accompanied by the policy of privatisation, liberalisation and de-regulation which has created an environment conducive to the recent financial crisis in Asia. We think the uncontrolled rapid economic growth and foreign investment, lack of State supervision over the private sector, corruption, nepotism and mismanagement by the Governments and the private sectors structurally contributed to the crisis. However, the immoral speculation of so-called 'hot money' (where speculative capital is quickly transferred to another venture the moment any problem arises) deserves the lion's share of the blame. The financial power of international capital and the conditions imposed on countries by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have meant national governments have less sovereignty and control in their own economic and political fields.

9. The worsening economic crisis particularly

in countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Korea under International Monetary Fund (IMF) rule has taken a heavy toll in terms of social impact on the poor and the marginalised. These victims are suffering from a crisis not of their creation and in which they had no part to play. Therefore, the IMF should not “set conditions which will affect the poor and marginalised sectors who are not involved in causing the debt” (*Forum of the Poor Statement*, Bangkok, 17 September 1997). There is a serious need to reassess the role of the IMF and even to question its relevance today.

### III. Asia on the Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

#### A. Changing reality of religion and culture in Asia

10. Asia is a continent of multitudes of peoples — almost two thirds of the world’s population — with their own specific languages, ethnicities, cultures and religions. There is an all-pervading sense of religiosity throughout the continent shared among the people in the major religious traditions. Religion-wise among the nation-States in Asia, nearly 53 per cent of them are Muslim, and 32 per cent Buddhist. The rest being Christian, Hindu, Jewish ...

11. Asia is also a continent of many different indigenous peoples who relate religion to land, respect nature and respect others. The indigenous people cannot identify themselves with the traditional concepts and notions of prevailing religion. And within the Asian context, those religious systems and indigenous beliefs have been the bedrock shaping Asian cultures. The two are so interconnected that religious discrimination is almost equivalent to cultural deprivation. “In the living heritage of cultures and religious traditions in Asia, we discern values and their expressions in symbols, stories and art forms that embody a vision of life; while we are critically aware of the distortions that have entered into these traditions. In these cultural and religious traditions, we also discovered the responses to life given by past generations of Asian peoples, which in turn become

***In the past we have always associated spirituality with an institutional way of living. But the incarnation of God tells us that spirituality is rooted in our humanity. Incarnational spirituality points to the image of God dynamically operating in each and every human being. The indicators of this dynamism are self-transcendence, search for meaning and gift of self.***

resources for our contemporary response” (FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly n. 9).

12. Currently there are increasing numbers of positive signs of revived interest toward religion and spirituality. Side by side, “it can be observed that there is growing religious activism” (ASEM I) that is challenging all the major religions. The groups subscribing to such religious activism support the religion-based policy model in which a certain religious tradition or community is politically established with more or less intimate interactions between religion and politics.

#### B. Geo-political reality of Asia

13. We observe that authoritarian governments and national security laws have pushed back the gains of democratisation in many Asian societies. Despite the decreasing presence of military regimes and growing

democratisation in certain Asian countries, there is still a strong militarisation as shown by the 22 per cent of growth in the arms trade since 1995. Asia is where the growth in arms purchases has been largest. Many Governments in Asia continue to wage wars against their own peoples — minorities, ethnic groups, political dissidents and social movements. We also cannot ignore the reality that the Cold War logic and confrontation between the East and West is not yet over in Asia particularly around the Korean peninsula where the difficult relationship between the two Koreas as well as between

China and Taiwan are strongly felt and are causing great suffering.

14. Like the Asian Bishops, we recognise “the growing violence, terrorism, conflict and nuclear proliferation fuelled by the arms trade and greed for profit, all of which violate people’s rights. They threaten participatory democracy, humane governance and a just and peaceful society” (FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly, n. 7). We deplore that some of the largest customers for the arms trade are in Asia and we believe that the money thus spent on armaments should be re-directed to socially beneficial purposes. The Church should play a leading role in convincing Governments along these lines.

### C. Emerging global-local civil society and people's power in Asia.

15. "Everywhere in Asia there is visible a new awareness carrying Asian people to liberate themselves from the legacy of negative traditions, social evils and situations associated with the past" (*IL*, n. 10). This growing consciousness is very much reflected in "the growing voices of groups and peoples for humanised development, specifically in the cries of the marginalised group for participatory and democratic governance" (FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly, n. 8).

16. In the face of the enormous challenges of globalisation, there have been constantly serious efforts to overcome the TNA (There is No Alternative) syndrome and to search for alternative ways of living together. The emergence of civil society institutions — community groups, people's organisations, non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) — at both local and global levels has sown the seeds of participatory democracy and solidarity among the people.

17. We also notice the increasing recognition, all over Asia, of women's rights, children's rights, and the rights of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. The voices of the voiceless go beyond the habitual practices of periodical exercising of their voting rights. In this connection, one notices emerging influences of judicial activism as an indispensable ally of the excluded and deprived.

18. "There is a growing awareness of human dignity, despite failures in some areas" and the people are demanding "their rights from governments and institutions of power whether national or international." (*IL*, n. 10)

## IV. A New Way of Being Church in Asia — Dialogue of Life

### A. A call to conversion

19. We are conscious of our baggage from the past of our culturally imperialistic mission approach. Our self-emptying after the example of the incarnated God implies two aspects:

1. The unloading of our culturally imperialist baggage.

2. The openness to discern the footprints of the Lord among Asian peoples — in their stories, traditions, cultures and religions.

20. We recognise that our conversion — individual, collective and ecclesial — must take place. At the same time we believe that conversion belongs to God. This conversion means "putting on the mind of Christ" (Phil 2:4, Rom 13:14), and following his footsteps among the people.

21. Conversion for the Asian Church means that the Church would become really and truly the Church of the poor. "You know well the generosity of Christ Jesus our Lord. Although he was rich he made himself poor to make us rich through his poverty" (2 Cor 8:9). This conversion demands a new attitude toward the poor. "The poor are the privileged carriers of the Lord, the principal heirs of the Kingdom with the potential to evangelize all nations and the Church as a whole" (Latin American Bishops, Puebla, n. 1147).

22. While we clarify our mission for the future in Asia, we are also aware of our duty to reassess our past mission approach and be historically conscious of our failures, not only of our successes. This reassessment should include our institution and structure in the spirit of humility and courage to repent and to change what needs to be changed.

23. Our vision for the future invites us to foster the communion of all peoples of Asia and the rest of the world. We include in our communion nature and the entire creation. This life of communion demands we ourselves in the local Churches bear witness to our "communion of communities". "In him and under him, God wanted to unite, when the fullness of time had come, everything in heaven and on earth" (Eph 1:10).

### B. Towards incarnational spirituality

24. "By his incarnation, the son of God united himself in a certain manner with each and every human being" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22). The credibility of our personal relationship with Jesus expresses itself in witnessing. This witnessing blossoms in a relationship in truth, love, compassion, justice and peace. This is what we understand by incarnational spirituality which grows out of our humanity.

25. In the past we have always associated spirituality with an institutional way of living. But the incarnation of God tells us that spirituality is rooted in our humanity. Incarnational spirituality points to the image of God dynamically operating in each and every human being. The indicators of this dynamism are self-transcendence, search for meaning and gift of self.

26. This life of the human spirit, which is incarnational spirituality, is common to all religions and to all human beings. It opens up a world of meaning to our relationship with all peoples and especially the poor who are the victims of a world where relationship is disordered and exploitative.

### C. Inter-religious harmony

27. The great philosophical and religious tradi-

tions of Asia have become very much a part of the life, tradition and culture of Asian peoples. On the other hand, because of the colonial experiences of Asian people, Christianity is looked upon as foreign. It is the religion of the White coloniser. In such a context, any programme under the title of “New Evangelization” makes people suspicious of Christians. Historically the approach of over-emphasising that Jesus is the only Saviour has provoked many questions and negative reactions.

28. Even efforts toward dialogue by the Church are looked upon as dialogue with a hidden agenda. The Church needs to move towards a new dialogue of life, which has established a mutual relationship among equals. Asian people appreciate the dialogue of life, which springs from life lived and experienced among the people, especially those who are victims of exploitation.

29. From a theological and pastoral perspective, the Kingdom of God as the basis of our commitment provides a better alternative. The spirit of God is greater than an institutionalised Church or religion; and for Jesus the only absolute was the Kingdom.

## V. Major Challenges and Concerns for the Synod for Asia

30. We have reflected on a number of concerns (indigenous peoples, media, ethnic conflicts, refugees and stateless persons, youth, children, workers, environment, peoples’ right to life, right to self determination, etc). Among these we have identified the following as major challenges, which we hope the Synod will be able to address:

### Workers

31. Opportunities for the traditional livelihood and employment for workers have been undermined by the rapid industrialisation of Asian societies. Globalisation adds to the pressures on workers, with little or no protection from unfair labour laws, grossly inadequate wages and frequently dangerous working conditions.

32. The situation of peasants and rural workers creates particular problems. The majority of people in Asia still rely on the land for survival. Due to the

growing phenomenon of landlessness as well as the increasing loss of productive land, the condition of Asian peasants has steadily worsened over recent years.

33. Among other particularly vulnerable categories are migrant workers and workers in the informal sector. Migrant workers, separated from their families, suffer the effects of racism and xenophobia and are exploited in foreign States with no rights and no law to defend them. Workers in the informal sector are denied job security, the right to organise, and legal protection. They live and work in dehumanising conditions. Being on the periphery of the labour market, they became the first victims of the recent economic crisis.

### Women

34. Increasingly we find that, on the one hand, women are becoming aware of the need for more equal relationships and on the other, men are becoming more sensitive to this need. As these changes come within families and extend even to the smallest village, women in Asia are challenging the foundational elements of Asian religions and cultural systems.

35. “Women continue to suffer indignities, exclusion and both subtle and overt forms of exploitation in the Church and in wider society” (BILA I on Women). As an example of this we note that women workers were among the first victims of the recent economic crisis.

36. We agree completely with the Asian Bishops in their Statement: “We cannot effectively promote our Christian vision of full life unless the Church as a communion of communities will credibly expend its moral and spiritual energies to the conversion of mentalities, the transformation of structures, and the eradication of practices that deny women and the girl child in Asia their God-given dignity”

women and the girl child in Asia their God-given dignity” (FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly, n. 15.2).

### Youth

37. We agree that youth constitutes a large and dynamic portion of the population in Asia (*vide* FABC

***“We cannot effectively promote our Christian vision of full life unless the Church as a communion of communities will credibly expend its moral and spiritual energies to the conversion of mentalities, the transformation of structures, and the eradication of practices that deny women and the girl child in Asia their God-given dignity”***

Sixth Plenary Assembly, n. 15.3, *IL*, n. 46). Youth are also the chief protagonists for the future of the Church in the third millennium. Yet we see the full effect of modernisation on the lives of young people who are driven by materialism, consumerism and careerism. Life is a struggle for existence for many Asian youth who live in situations of poverty, unemployment, exploitation and bondage. In particular, the large majority of the youth living in rural areas with minimal education and skills are faced with precarious conditions of livelihood. They deserve the special attention of the Church.

38. Like the Asian Bishops, “We commit ourselves to accompany their life-giving movement in their aspiration to transform themselves and our societies towards a fuller life” (FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly, n. 15.3).

### Ecological Concerns

39. Ecological concerns are becoming urgent all over Asia. We see in the countries of Asia continuing and unabated destruction of our environment — water, forests, plant and animal life, air and the support system of all created life.

40. “The Lord, the giver of life, calls our discipleship in Asia into question on the time-bomb issue of ecology. Choosing life requires our discipleship to discern and act with other faiths and groups against the forces of ecological destruction” (FABC Sixth Plenary Assembly, n. 15.4). We earnestly request the Church leaders to encourage the development of an eco-spirituality which integrates into the life of faith the dimensions of ecological concern and stewardship of creation.

### Church in China

41. China with its 1.3 billion people is of central importance for all Asian countries and Christian Churches in Asia. After many years of isolation, the Catholic Church in China is still alive and even strong in developing as a true local Catholic Church. The rich historical experiences of the Chinese Church in ecclesiology, liturgy, culture in religion, etc, are worthy of consideration and are of great importance to the universal Church and particularly to the other Churches in Asia.

42. The continuing division amongst the Chinese Catholics raises theological and ecclesial problems and challenges for the universal Church, and demands serious attention.

### Laity in the Church

43. As they enter the new millennium, the Asian Churches are faced with enormous challenges in the areas of lay formation, lay leadership and the various roles of the laity in the Church and in the secular world. New methods and pedagogies of lay formation need to be developed so that the laity become more aware that lived faith necessarily leads to social commitment. Investment in the formation of lay leadership needs to become a priority in the years to come. “Small Christian Communities are the means by which the Church is brought down to the daily life and concerns of people where they actually live. In them the Church takes on flesh and blood in the life situations of people” (AMECEA Study Conference, 1979).

### Renewing Lay Movements in Asia for Third Millennium

44. Being an integral part of the Church’s associative forms (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 37, Code of Canon Law 1983 Chapter 5) of living the faith, we, International Catholic Organisations (ICOs) in Asia, have provided formation and lay leadership in the Church and played significant roles in the emergence of civil society in the secular sphere as well as within the Church. As international movements, we have been able to contribute to the growth of both universal and local Churches. The Synod for Asia provides us with a new opportunity to look deeply into our history with its successes and failures and rededicate ourselves toward a new vision and mission of creating in Asia a relevant Church for the third millennium, in collaboration with all the faithful. We request we be given greater space for collaboration and constructive criticism with effective forms of communication that will enhance and reinforce the existing network of relationships with the Church leaders at different levels.

### Conclusion

45. Together with all Christians and all peoples of Asia, we wish this historic event of the Synod for Asia will be the beginning for all of us of a new way of being Church in Asia as we enter the third millennium: “new in its approaches, new in its theological expression, new its methods and new in its understanding of other religions” (*IL*, n. 55) and of civil society.

Ref.: *Pax Romana/ICMICA*

*Manila Forum on Synod for Asia (2-6 March 1998).*

## YOUTH MINISTRY IN ASIA

**Luc Van Looy**

*(Fr Luc Van Looy is the Vicar of the Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Before being elected to the Superior Council in Rome, Fr Luc was a missionary in Korea for several years. A linguist, he has mastered Korean. Earlier, as Councillor for Youth Pastoral and at present as Vicar, he has travelled extensively in Asia).*

It is an impossible task to speak for “Asia”, as the differences between the countries are of such a dimension and variety that there is hardly any way to speak of Asia as a unity, in any field. In a certain way, this makes it easier, as it allows me to choose the arguments I prefer, while it permits me to present from my own experience and insight some ideas to the people in charge of youth ministry in the various countries of Asia. The reader may ask what the difference would be with youth ministry in other continents. The choice of arguments would be different, as each context would need to be approached in a different way and each one needs to prioritise according to the situation. I feel the seven following guidelines would be the ones to be given preference in an Asian context.

There is one basic aspect which we will always have to bear in mind while involved in youth ministry: our ultimate concern ought to be to make known the person of Jesus, as he has come to speak about the works of the Father. This leads me to the first among the seven guidelines:

### **1. Narrative Ministry**

For two reasons this is the central point on which one needs to focus. First, because the communication of the faith goes through the recounting of the history of it. God came into the life of humankind in concrete ways in the history of his people. It is important to state this all the time, and to introduce young people into the world of religion through this. It may be that people are looking for some answer to their psychological problems or a solution for their social needs through their adherence to religion. This, however, is not what they will get in the Christian religion. It is something like what we see in the confrontation Jesus had with the seducer after 40 days in the desert. The seducer wanted to give an answer to the hunger of Jesus by suggesting that he make bread out of stones. That is not God’s way. Instead, when people came to listen to his words, and evening fell and the people

were many, their disposition to hear his word was such that Jesus offered them bread and fish to eat.

Some people may think that their closeness to the Church and their adherence to the Catholic religion will give them a sense of belonging which, in its turn, will bring them some material advantage. It is true that religion has a social aspect, that it seeks to solve social problems. But the fact of belonging to the Christian religion does not provide such a right as to put oneself at ease and wait.

The psychological and the sociological aspects of religion are not the purpose, nor do they define what the Christian religion is. If at all anything, they may be a result of the fact that one has been looking for the “precious pearl” and has been concentrating everything on it, in such a way that everything else, too, may come one’s way.

The second reason why narrative ministry is so important is that young Asians are good listeners. The way of communicating the faith goes not so much through the efficacious way of proofs and theological debate, but through the way of contact and life-communication. It is more important for the Asian youth to be able to visualise the person of Christ in his surroundings and to experience how the relationships of the people around him grew. Asian young people enjoy role-playing biblical scenes, and this brings them into a life contact with the content which they want to draw from the Gospel. As a matter of fact, this renders the reality of the Gospel very much alive and realistic.

### **2. Ministry of service**

The social and economic situations of so many young people in Asia make service ministry necessary. Young people in Asia do not approach the faith in a theoretical way. Neither would they profit much from that. Ministry needs to work on credibility, on the part of the message proclaimed and on that of the



messenger. It is true that the teacher-master will receive initially unconditioned credibility, but it is also true that the mentality of docility has changed a lot in recent years. Faith needs to make its way into life, and share in the real situations of the young. A Church which is committed to the people in its environment, a Church which puts its strengths at the disposition of the poor and the needy will be recognised easily as the true Church. Real signs are necessary to speak to the young. It is significant that many groups of young people are organising activities in favour of the suffering part of society.

The young are attentive to the attitude of service they encounter in the people who represent the Church. They themselves gladly take part in this service through volunteer movements and the like. It is important that the work of the Church is shared by many. Therefore a systematic training to service is extremely useful. In order to avoid the danger of voluntarism — that is, a service rendered without taking into account the whole context or the consequences of it — Christians need a good preparation and training in order to be able to serve well. Not everything that is good has to be done, not everything one can think of “for the good of the people” is indeed for their good. Therefore, not only do we have to develop a vision on the totality and the complexity of service that can be rendered, opening a good vision on reality, but, one needs to know to what framework his or her service belongs and what the motivations are for rendering service. Service can easily be taken as a mere “occupational therapy” for the young. Instead, by giving them an adequate formation to the motivation behind service, they will learn what it really means to serve the common good of the people and to be of service not only for an instant, but for life.

### 3. Inculturated Ministry

Asia is going through rapid changes, not at the same pace in every country. And it is amazing how certain ideas or currents penetrate. Mass communications render everything public and everybody has easy access to everything. This calls for an urgent response on the part of religions. As far as Christian ministry is concerned, the situation demands an accurate assistance of the young, so that they may learn to

read and interpret the reality in which they find themselves. In this connection, inculturation has to be understood as presence among the young in the culture of today following the pace of history. Often it is said that religions linger behind. This should not be the case with Christian youth ministry. A well thought through youth ministry will be capable of reading reality together, as a group of ministers, together with the young, remaining deeply present in the culture of the young. Knowledge of the youth context is a must for the youth ministry team, as this allows it to have a general picture so as to put the religious reality on solid grounds.

The history of the recent past shows that young people are not much introduced into the world of religion by their parents in the first years of their existence. This creates a need to explain the essential elements, often at a later stage. Of course, in several places a good number of youngsters are brought to the faith only as young people since their families have other religious roots. The communication of religious concepts and religious terminology is necessary in order to allow the young to encounter themselves in a context which is common to all and to be at home in a world which is not just measurable by efficiency or a human yardstick.

***Today a number of movements purposely try to avoid structuring themselves in order to remain flexible and not to exclude anyone. They would refer to a common spirituality and to a system of networking. No presidents or elections are considered. This has the great advantage of avoiding elitism in movements.***

The inculturated minister is the guide who has his own point of reference in God, in the Word spoken by the Father and the works done by his incarnated Son, and who stays present in the life of the young in order to assist and accompany them on their way. This attitude of sharing and staying with the young allows the adult to remain updated with regard to the world of the young, and also gives him the possibility to read together with them the interpretation of facts and events in the light of the faith. If any one wants to be a good interpreter, he needs to know both sides well, and bring about a blend of the two realities. This is something like the job of a technician who introduces a programme in the computer, in such a way that the keys on the keyboard correspond with the screen and express what the writer intends to say in a coherent way.

### 4. Celebrative Ministry

Faith needs not only to be presented and explained,

or lived together and witnessed through service. It needs also to be celebrated. Studies reveal that the young do not show great interest in the liturgy of the Church. This is largely due to the fact that the communication between minister and youngsters is poor, and that the message does not really find a place in the daily world of the young. Young people say that Sunday services repeat the same thing, that there is nothing new or exciting about them.

For the religious faith of young people it is of the utmost importance that they feel at home where the faith is celebrated. It has to be “their” expression of faith and “their” relationship with God. This calls for an attentive consideration of all we propose to them as liturgy and celebration. A careful introduction into what it means to enter into relationship, as a community, with God and how one addresses him is necessary. It is also indispensable to distinguish a religious celebration from other social or festive gatherings. As a principle, we have to create together with them the conditions for a liturgy they enjoy. If they participate only on the basis of the obligation imposed by the Church, then there is little chance that their life will be influenced by this. Young people need to move from the sense of duty to the sense of enjoyment when it comes to liturgical celebrations. This is possible if they are part of it, of the preparation, of the realisation, of the conclusion, and if the whole celebration has a link with important aspects of their life.

Once they can “do something” in order to make the liturgy more alive, they will start to enjoy it.

This has to be emphasised especially in Asia, where the young tend to remain passive, and the liturgical leaders, in their turn, tend to perpetuate this passive attitude. Here we need to reflect upon the evangelisation of Asian cultures. The Bible shows God’s vivid interest in what happens in the life of the people. The climax of this interest in the people is the incarnation of his only Son. Jesus, in his turn, spent his life going about with the Disciples, attending to people’s needs, confronting them with their own in-

terpretation of the law and trying to explain to them that God has been present in their life, all the time, through signs of love. This closely relates God with what is human and with the things people do and love. Liturgical celebrations must be an expression of young people’s approach to God as a community.

## 5. Inclusive Ministry

Liturgy and prayer lead us to community. Youth and faith pass through community. It is significant that Jesus, at the very outset of his ministry, creates a community of Disciples. When he works his first miracle in Cana of Galilee, his Mother and Disciples are there, and then immediately he “goes to Capernaum and remains with them for a few days” (cf. Jn 2:12). Here the first communitarian nucleus of Christianity began.

***An inculturated ministry will also speak the language of the young. Perhaps, this is one of the more urgent needs today as the young look for answers for their religious problems. It is often felt that the religious message is brought in a terminology of the past. Young people need to be introduced to the vocabulary of the faith. This calls for two things: first, religious people must come close to the young by speaking their language and feeling at home in their symbols and specific expressions; second, in making religious concepts meaningful to them.***

Youth ministry needs groups and movements. It is in this way that they develop their capacity of creativity and take upon themselves the organisation and expression of their faith. In groups they reflect on the content of their faith, they organise the services to be rendered, and they confront themselves with the problem of expressing their faith in daily life. The presence of an educator in the group is a precious way of assisting them in their search for relevance. It will offer opportunities to clear concepts and to share with the group the story of one’s faith experience.

The groups are composed of young people of all classes and races, creating an image of the Church as one fraternal community. At the moment of the appearance of the Apostles after the Resurrection of Jesus, it was clear that the Church did not want to create any racial barriers among believers. It has also been the great concern of St Paul to create this union between people of different origins. Groups and movements allow this. They bring together young people of different backgrounds. Rich and poor, weak and strong, White and Coloured — all find themselves at home in the one community with Christ as their Centre.

At this point it may be useful to distinguish between movements and groups. Movements do not necessarily have a strictly defined structure. Instead, groups are more structured. Today a number of movements purposely try to avoid structuring themselves in order to remain flexible and not to exclude anyone. They would refer to a common spirituality and to a system of networking. No presidents or elections are considered. This has the great advantage of avoiding elitism in movements. The important aspect is that the process through which young people can come into contact with the other members of the movement, even though one may find oneself at a totally different level of faith expression and in totally different cultures. These movements allow the young to meet on their own level, between individuals and groups, in order to dialogue, to confront different issues, to exchange educational and formative experiences and to enjoy being together in their own way. Often, these movements will open the perspective of joyful celebrations and they will spread their spirit and message through leaflets, newsletters and other kinds of communication, getting other young people involved.

Groups are in a special way the trampoline towards the formation of animators, as they need leaders and they have the possibility to organise adequate training for their own members and for others.

## 6. Personalised Ministry

The heart of faith experience is the encounter between God and the person. This will be greatly facilitated by the ambience created and by the personal links which become possible through this. Young people of today need very much to express their anxieties and their uncertainties. The most precious thing they receive in groups and movements is the presence of some credible adults, who are there because of their faith, and who accompany the young through often dark tunnels of fear and insecurity. It is here that the touch of grace is mediated by the adult who listens and encourages. The important task is to draw from within the young person his sense of religion and faith, make him or her aware of it and activate it in such a way that it becomes significant in the realisation of the task foreseen in life. In this way, many young people discover the active presence of the Spirit in them and,

what makes it more appealing, is the fact that they recognise this same spirit present in other persons. They soon find out that the practice of faith does not carry them away from life, that the growth of a spirituality allows them to live an intense inner peace and does not allow secondary things to take the lead. Today we speak of a youth spirituality, which is an expression of this joy of living the faith and of living it in communication with others, as a way of making the kingdom of God present in daily life.

While being very communicative, this way of living the faith is felt as being strongly personal. Meeting with others, especially with someone who invites one to share on a deeper level, leads to the capacity of a personal meeting with Christ.

Prayer and contemplation are the immediate result of this PERSONALISED approach to religion. The activities of the group, the service rendered, the celebration enjoyed — all remain valid and precious, but at this point everything concentrates itself on the love relationship between the individual and Christ. This rich moment of sharing with Jesus will ultimately find its consolidation in certain moments of narrating the experience, and, in this way communicating it to persons who take part in the process of walking with the Spirit.

## 7. Bible Ministry

Youth ministry builds strongly on the Bible. This is a very good way to avoid approaches to the faith which may mislead and cause confusion. In an environment where many religions co-exist, it is of the utmost importance to refer to sure texts and references. Once again, it is good to remember that God has been the One to create heaven and earth, as stated in Genesis 1:1, and that he has constantly followed up on the course of history. The “order” given to creation is his. Young people need models, and in the biblical stories and teachings there are many examples of the struggle people go through and of the way how people return to God. Persons like Moses and David, or John the Baptist and Paul of Tarsus have strong messages for young people. There are a few principles to observe when reading the Bible with young people. First, there

***The second reason why narrative ministry is so important is that young Asians are good listeners. The way of communicating the faith goes not so much through the efficacious way of proofs and theological debate, but through the way of contact and life-communication.***

are different ways of reading the Bible. One can approach the texts from a historical, dogmatic or literary point of view, or one can make a pastoral reading. Second, when it comes to the pastoral reading, there is the charismatic reading, and there is also the educative-pastoral reading, or the way to look for life-models rather than for theories, to search for the turning point in the stories, such as in the dialogue Jesus has with the people he meets, looking for the decisive moment in which the person turns to Jesus and to discover the pedagogy the Bible uses in approaching people.

This educative and pastoral reading of the Bible will start from experience, and go through a process of confrontation and evaluation of one's own life in comparison with the figures and the processes one encounters in the Bible. All this becomes a very rich experience. As a result, the Word of God remains no longer something outside of one's own being, but it becomes part of oneself. Together with others, it becomes a point of confrontation and it provides ways of narrating one's own life to others.

It will not be difficult to recognise ourselves in persons of the Bible, like in Jonah who runs away from his calling, or in the brothers of Joseph when they try to eliminate their uncomfortable brother-dreamer, or the story told by Jesus of the publican and the Pharisee praying in the temple.

The Bible in youth ministry soon becomes an inviting mirror, through which we meet ourselves in the depth of our being and put ourselves on the road to Jerusalem, together with Jesus and the Disciples.

## **8. Conclusion: a carefully planned Ministry**

The most important thing in youth ministry in the last few years is the fact that a community of youth ministers are together involved in the planning and actualisation of the whole process rather than a single individual doing what he or she likes. Young people, as well as adults, are together undertaking the road to God, following an itinerary which is based on the careful study of the youth context, confronting them with the content of the faith and creating a community of people who witness the joy of being called into the discipleship of the Lord in order to build the kingdom.

At the conclusion of these reflections, it would be appropriate to emphasise that the process of faith formation should help to transform society. The Lord

calls young Christians to enter responsibly and freely into the world, conscious of their task of bringing to life the values of the Gospel and to present them to the whole of humankind.

The task of Asian Christian youth is particularly arduous when it comes to bringing the values of Christ and Christianity into the area of ethics, politics and education. This does not allow improvisation. It needs careful planning by the whole community if it wants to be effective by "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 18).

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# INTRODUCING ASIA'S MISSION SOCIETIES

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True, beautiful, and inspiring! This is an accurate description of the words of Pope Paul VI when he described the Church's evangelising mission in *Evangelii nuntiandi*. He noted: "We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelising all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church... Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise" (n. 14).

In recent years Asia's local Churches have made steady progress in their understanding of and commitment to this mission of evangelisation. Although these Churches are a minority (2-3 per cent of Asia's burgeoning masses) and even if they face numerous and complex challenges in the vastness of the Asian continent, they make a significant contribution to realising the Church in Asia as a Church "missionary by her very nature" (*Ad gentes*, n. 2).

In the continent of Asia (home to 85 per cent of all the world's non-Christians), the local Churches always affirm: "Our challenge is to proclaim the Good News" (FABC V: 1,7). For these Asian faith-communities, evangelisation concretely means becoming Churches that are "in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions [of Asia]" (FABC I: 12).

Among the many mission initiatives that have been launched in Asia in recent decades, the emergence of several missionary societies of apostolic life is particularly noteworthy. While most international societies of men and women have a home in Asia, the growth of Asian-born mission communities augurs well for the future of evangelisation and the growth of the local Churches of Asia. These societies concretise the words of John Paul II in *Redemptoris missio*: "The special vocation of missionaries '*for life*' retains all its validity: it is the model of the Church's missionary commitment, which always stands in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold en-

deavours" (n. 66).

Currently, there are six such societies existing in Asia; two are of Philippine origin; two emerged from Indian initiatives; Korea and Thailand each have one institute. All six are of diocesan right; five are of the Roman Church and one is of the Syro-Malabar Church. It is noteworthy that all these societies have been founded in the wake of Vatican II, that is, 1965 and following.

As Missionary Societies of Apostolic Life, they bring a particular focus to mission. Their contribution is: *ad gentes* (to those who have not yet heard the salvific and liberating Good News of Jesus Christ), *ad exteros* (to people outside their own cultural-language group and nation), and *ad vitam* (devoting themselves to a life-long commitment to this unique form of missionary witness).

This brief essay now turns to presenting a short synopsis of the history, charism, membership, works, statistics, and contact information for each society. As one reads, there emerges a clear appreciation of what the Holy Spirit, "the principal agent of mission" (*Redemptoris missio*, nn. 21, 30), is enabling and unfolding in the local Churches of Asia.

## The Mission Society of the Philippines

On the fourth centenary of the evangelisation of the Philippine Islands (1565-1965) the Catholic Hierarchy declared that "to express in the concrete our gratitude to God for the gift of our Faith we will organise the Foreign Mission Society of the Philippines". The official or statutory name of the society is: Mission Society of the Philippines (MSP), often popularly referred to as "Fil-Mission". It is a diocesan Filipino Clerical Mission Society of Apostolic Life.

The MSP defines its charism in these words: "In love and gratitude to the Father, ours is a joyful mis-

sionary spirit flowing from deep union with Christ through Mary and in the power of the Holy Spirit, willing to spend and be spent in sharing his Gospel to all". From its beginnings, the MSP desired pontifical status; Rome requested the MSP to begin on the local level. The Society has a juridical personality under the Archbishop of Manila (current statutes approved on 29 January 1989).

Membership in the MSP is open to natural-born Filipinos; the Society also welcomes Filipino diocesan priests as associate members to serve in foreign mission. The MSP considers its mission apostolate in *de jure* and *de facto* mission territories as its foremost duty and privilege. Asia has always been the highest priority in the choice of mission apostolates. Presently, MSP missionaries are working in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Korea, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, and the Solomon Islands.

MSP statistics (1997) count 51 permanent members and five associate priests. Fr Ruben C. Elago, MSP is the Father Moderator; he can be addressed at: MSP Central House; 9105 Banuyo Street; San Antonio Village; M.C.P.O. Box 1006; Makati City, the Philippines.

### **Missionary Society of Saint Thomas the Apostle**

The Missionary Society of St Thomas the Apostle (MST) in India is an indigenous missionary institute of the Syro-Malabar Church. In 1960, Mar Sebastian Vayalil sought the permission of the Holy See to found a mission society. Rome asked Bishop Vayalil to submit a draft constitution of the proposed society in 1963; he accomplished this in 1964. The nascent society began as a Pius Union of Diocesan Clergy in 1965. Additional steps were taken, and the MST was founded at Deepti Nagar, Melampara, Bharananganam on 22 February 1968. The founding members of MST were 18 diocesan priests who made their Promise of Incorporation to MST on 16 July 1968.

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The scope of the Society is "mission *ad gentes*" in the less Christian regions of India and beyond, "remaining faithful to the heritage and identity of the Syro-Malabar Church". MST now serves three mission regions (Ujjain, Mandya, and Sangli). In 1995 the MST accepted to begin work in Leh-Ladakh; the Society sent three people to work in this area known as the "Roof of the World". Some MST members also render service in various Indian Dioceses and in Tanzania, Germany, and America.

The growth of MST in its first 29 years of existence (1968-1997) has been phenomenal. Today (1997) there are 217 priest members, 35 theology students, 37 philosophy students, and a total of 106 students at other levels of formation. In 1993 when the MST celebrated its silver jubilee, the Syro-Malabar Bishops through a joint Pastoral Letter again owned the Society and exhorted the faithful to support its missionary activities. The current Director General is Father Sebastian Vadakel; his address is: Missionary Society of St Thomas; MST Deepti Bhavan; Melampara 686594; Kerala, India.

### **Catholic Foreign Mission Society of Korea**

In late 1974 a Korean preparation committee was established to explore the possible formation of a mission society. By a decision of the Korean Bishops' Conference, the Korean Foreign Mission Society was founded on 26 February 1975. A formation house was opened in 1976, and the first priest for the society was ordained in 1981. In the same year the first missionary was sent to Papua New Guinea.

The KMS (Korean Mission Society) seeks to proclaim the Gospel and imitate Jesus Christ, the model for all missionaries. "We also model ourselves on the evangelical spirit of the 103 Korean martyrs who witnessed to Jesus even unto their

death". They also "make a preferential option for the poor and are in solidarity with their spiritual and material sufferings".

There are at present 72 members of the Society (1997); 17 are priests; six are deacons; there are 15

temporary oath seminarians, 20 major seminarians, and 14 in the spiritual formation year. Members work within Korea (Suwon and Seoul Dioceses) and also in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and Italy.

The vision of the KMS foresees new missions in China, Cambodia, Mongolia, as well as Central and South Asia. Additional plans envision co-operative endeavours with other mission societies; the KMS also hopes to establish an Asian Mission Research Institute.

The current Superior of the KMS is Father Bonaventura Jung, KMS; Korean Foreign Mission Society; 1 Ga 120 Sung Buk Dong; Sung Buk Gu, Seoul, Korea 136-021.

### **Missionary Society of the Heralds of Good News**

In 1971 Father Jose Kaimlett, a priest of the Vijayawada Diocese in Andhra Pradesh, India, thought of founding a missionary society to serve the universal Church. However, as Fr Jose himself says, “in God’s plan the time was not yet ripe”.

In December 1976, a new diocese of Eluru was created with territory taken from Vijayawada. Fr Kaimlett temporarily managed the Diocese until the appointment of Bishop John Mulagada. Fr Kaimlett was sent to Rome for canon law studies and returned to serve the Diocese of Eluru. His dream of a male missionary institute continued. In 1984 with three priests and two brothers of the Diocese, he founded the Society of the Heralds of Good News.

Episcopal approval of the foundation was formalised on 14 October 1984. In early 1985 the first members made their perpetual vows. On 5 May 1991, Bishop John Mulagada, with the *nihil obstat* from the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, instituted the Missionary Society of the Heralds of Good News of diocesan right.

The main focus of the Society is to form and send

“zealous, hard-working and holy missionaries”. Our Lady Queen of the Apostles and Saint Joseph are its patrons. Today the Society has 62 priests working in India, South Africa, Papua New Guinea, and the U.S.A. There are 429 scholastics at various levels of formation.

In its 13 years of existence, the Society has opened four minor and two major seminaries. Fr Kaimlett has also founded a female branch: the Sisters of the Good News, with current membership standing at 66 sisters. Father Jose Kaimlett, present Superior, can be contacted at: Heralds of Good News; Eluru R. S. 534-005; W. G. Dt., Andhra Pradesh, India.

### **Mission Society of Thailand**

In March 1987, the Superior of the Paris Foreign Mission Society in Thailand addressed a letter to the Bishops’ Conference suggesting the formation of a missionary group of Thai priests. They were to work with the Hill Tribe peoples in Northern Thailand. The idea was well received by the Bishops; contacts were made with diocesan seminaries, religious congregations, and lay people. The responsibility for the project came to rest upon Bishop Banchong Aribarg from Nakhon Sawan.

In 1989 four seminarians volunteered to become members of the Society. In June 1990 and in January 1991 the first two priests were ordained for the Missionary Society of Thailand (MST); this is considered the real beginning of MST.

This society of secular priests (with religious and lay associates) aims to do “apostolic work among those who do not know Jesus Christ in Thailand and out of Thailand”. Currently, they serve in Northern Thailand and in Cambodia.

As a Society of Apostolic Life, MST is responsible to the Bishops’ Conference of Thailand; the Bishops appoint the superior of the society. Full members are secular, diocesan priests who join the society with the approval of their Bishop; they keep a special relationship with their home Diocese, even though they are incardinated

into the MST. Religious and lay people may be accepted as associates for a three-year period. At present, consideration is being given to setting up an auto-

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mous branch for lay people.

At present, MST counts three priests, six religious sisters, and four lay persons as their personnel. Bishop Banchong Aribarg is responsible through the Bishops' Conference, who have approved a temporary MST constitution. Father Jean Dantonel, MEP is the first Superior of the MST (a Bishops' Conference appointee); a Thai priest acts as his assistant. They can be reached at: Mission Society of Thailand; Lux Mundi Seminary; 20 Petchkasem Road; Sampran, Nakom Pathom 73110, Thailand.

### **Lorenzo Ruiz Mission Society**

In 1949 during civil disturbances in China, the Saint Joseph Regional Seminary which was under Jesuit administration was transferred to Manila. In the ensuing years about 60 Chinese seminarians were ordained in the Philippines; they went on to found 14 Filipino-Chinese parishes and 18 Filipino-Chinese schools.

To facilitate the continuation of these apostolates and to recruit and train younger clergy, Jaime Cardinal Sin of Manila established the Lorenzo Mission Institute (a Filipino-Chinese seminary) in 1987. Pope John Paul II has also requested Cardinal Sin to help prepare missionaries for China. During the Pope's January 1995 sojourn in Manila, he visited this seminary, instructing the Cardinal to "maintain and preserve the said seminary at all cost".

In this context the Lorenzo Ruiz Mission Society (LRMS) has been formed; it received its decree of approval from Cardinal Sin on 14 January 1997. It is a Clerical Society of Apostolic Life of diocesan right with its ecclesiastical seat in the Archdiocese of Manila. The LRMS draws its inspiration from Saint Lorenzo, the first Filipino saint who was of mixed Filipino and Chinese descent. He was martyred in Japan where he went as a lay catechist with Spanish Dominican friars in the 1600's.

The LRMS is "intrinsically and eminently missionary in spirit and finality". The members are committed to the Church in China, the Filipino-Chinese Apostolate, and other overseas Chinese Communities. Currently, there are seven ordained priests, 15 theology seminarians, and 19 philosophy students. Some members have studied language and culture in Northern China. The Archbishop of Manila governs the Society through his delegate. A General Chapter may be convoked when membership reaches ten ordained priest-members with perpetual commitment. Corre-

spondence may be addressed to: Msgr. Paul Lu, PME; Lorenzo Ruiz Mission Society; San Carlos - EDSA - Guadalupe; M.C.P.O. Box 144; 1254 Makati City, the Philippines.

### **Conclusion**

The story of evangelisation in Asia is rich and has many facets; without doubt, much more could be written about these Asian-born missionary societies. In this light, the reader's attention is directed toward a colloquium held in Thailand in April 1997 (organised by the Office of Evangelisation of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences — FABC); it brought together representatives of the Asian missionary societies as well as personnel from several other such missionary societies that serve in Asia. The papers of this gathering and additional pertinent materials are being published in a 1998 book entitled: *Heralds of the Gospel in Asia: a Study of the History and Contribution of Missionary Societies to the Local Churches of Asia* (contact: Sacred Heart Theological College; Shillong 793 008, India).

As the dawn of the third millennium approaches, it is appropriate to recall John Paul II's persistent focus on the continent of "Asia, towards which the Church's mission *ad gentes* ought to be chiefly directed" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 37; cf. *ibid.*, nn. 55, 91). The emergence, growth, and continued service of "Asia's own" missionary societies is a special blessing for all God's Asian peoples. Under the lead of the "befriending Spirit" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 3), Asia will emerge as a continent of missionary hope in the third millennium.



# QU'EST-CE QUE LA THÉOLOGIE INDIENNE LATINO-AMÉRICAINE ?

Ernestina López Bac

*Les peuples indigènes d'Amérique latine réaffirment avec une vigueur croissante leurs propres identités. Ce phénomène majeur est à saisir aux différents niveaux de sa manifestation, notamment au plan religieux dont l'importance est considérable dans la culture de ces peuples. Les religions indiennes latino-américaines ont survécu clandestinement aux siècles de la domination coloniale et catholique. Elles ressurgissent aujourd'hui en plein jour. Du point de vue théologique, cette renaissance s'opère sous la double forme de ce qu'il est désormais convenu d'appeler la "théologie indienne indienne" et la "théologie indienne chrétienne". C'est ce dernier courant, puisant sa sève à ses doubles racines indiennes et bibliques, désormais encouragé au sein des grandes Églises historiques mais combattu par d'autres mouvements confessionnels sectaires, dont nous présentons les grandes lignes grâce à l'article de la théologienne maya Ernestina López Bac, paru dans Voces del Tiempo, n. 22, Guatemala, juin 1997."*

*"Et la Parole de Dieu s'est faite indienne"*

Pour vous et pour tous ceux qui cheminent par monts et par vaux, parcourant déserts et plaines, fleuves et torrents, villages et villes, et qui, par leurs combats et leurs luttes se rassemblent en une seule grappe de raisin, en un seul cœur, à nos peuples indigènes qui sont en quête de fraternité, de justice, de libération et de paix: *"Que vienne le jour que se lève l'aurore! Que les peuples soient dans la paix, dans une paix profonde et qu'ils soient heureux!"* (Pop Wuj)

Dans un premier temps, nous voudrions partager ce que représente notre démarche théologique, vous indiquer quelques-unes des lignes de force sur lesquelles nous sommes d'accord : faire une théologie indienne, comment la faire, qu'est-ce que la théologie indienne, pourquoi parler de théologie indienne ou de théologies indiennes. Nous soulignerons ensuite les axes fondamentaux, c'est-à-dire les principes de la théologie indienne, et finalement, en guise de conclusion, nous vous indiquerons quelques règles à respecter.

## 1. Théologie Indienne

### *Démarche théologique*

Il est important de prendre conscience que ce moment de notre histoire est en vérité un *kairos* un temps de grâce qui marque le passage de Dieu parmi nous. Nous avons fait cette expérience lors des différentes rencontres, débats, forums et autres instances qui se sont ouverts à la théologie indienne. Il s'agit d'un moment où le monde indigène fait irruption dans la société et dans l'Église.

*"Nous sommes passés d'une résistance passive à une résistance active, d'une lutte solitaire à une action d'ensemble menée dans un esprit de solidarité avec d'autres forces sociales et ecclésiales, de manifestations de refus à l'élaboration de propositions nouvelles."*

*Nous constatons que la voix des indigènes commence à se faire entendre aussi bien dans la société que dans l'Église. Nous sommes convaincus que nous ne devons pas 'avoir deux cœurs', mais non plus le même cœur, que nous ne devons pas faire de nos peuples un champ de bataille pour des combats de théologie ou de religion."*

*Pour éviter cet écueil, nous devons mettre en œuvre d'amples processus de thérapie spirituelle qui, grâce au dialogue, nous permettront d'arriver à des synthèses qui marqueront le triomphe de la vie."*

### **Faire de la théologie indienne**

Faire de la théologie indienne c'est avant tout *"recueillir dans les sillons de la vie de nos peuples la bonne nouvelle de la présence vivante et vivifiante de Dieu Père et Mère et du Fils de Dieu qui vient, qui est tout proche, au milieu de nous, peuples indigènes: que ce soit comme une semence qui n'a pas encore germé, comme un arbre feuillu qui nous abrite sous son ombre ou comme les fruits de la vie que l'on peut partager"*.

### **Comment élaborer une théologie indienne**

Pour élaborer une théologie indienne il faut partir de **l'expérience concrète du Dieu de vie qui est Père**

**et Mère.** La théologie indienne *“contemple la vie en la savourant; elle plonge dans son mystère et c’est ainsi qu’elle en extrait peu à peu sa sagesse millénaire. Elle accompagne toujours les projets de vie des populations, les enracine dans le passé, souligne le sens qu’ils prennent dans l’actualité et les ouvre en direction de l’avenir.”*

Dans la théologie indienne, c’est le peuple qui est le sujet pensant, qui élabore sa pensée de façon collective. C’est une théologie qui émane du peuple ou des communautés de croyants et non pas de penseurs individuels qui sont isolés de la collectivité. Nos peuples indigènes ne parlent pas de Dieu. On devrait plutôt dire qu’ils parlent avec Dieu. Ils font l’expérience de Dieu, puis ils transmettent cette expérience d’une façon qui est à la fois mythique et symbolique, à la manière des anciens.

Tout au long de ce cheminement qui nous amène à escalader les pierres du passé, à remettre nos pieds dans les traces sanglantes et vivifiantes de nos pères, nous contemplons dans la profondeur du grand fleuve de vie de nos peuples, quelle est la route que nous devons suivre.

À partir de là nous reprenons notre quête du **cœur de la théologie indienne** dans la mémoire historique de nos peuples (braises fumant encore dans l’âtre que les générations précédentes ont entretenues et protégées avec les cendres de leurs propres ossements, avec leur propre sang et la sève vivante de la Mère Nature au cœur de la Terre Mère). Sous ces cendres nous voyons affleurer le trésor de la théologie indienne qui montre les images de Dieu les plus anciennes et pourtant les plus neuves que nos peuples ont toujours eues et qu’ils possèdent encore:

- Un Dieu qui nous étreint et que nous étreignons, qui est tout proche de nous et avec nous.
- Un Dieu qui a de l’estime pour nous et qui ne détruit pas notre culture.
- Un Dieu compagnon, ami et frère.
- Un Dieu qui nous montre de mille façons le frémissement de son amour.
- Celui qui est notre raison de vivre, le Cœur du peuple, Cœur du ciel, Cœur de la Terre, notre Mère et notre Père.

### ***Qu’est-ce que la théologie indienne?***

Bien qu’il n’existe pas de consensus général à ce

sujet, nous autres qui avons essayé d’instaurer un dialogue ecclésial et interreligieux avons déclaré que **la théologie indienne est “l’ensemble de la sagesse religieuse des peuples originaires de l’Amérique grâce à laquelle ils ont affronté et continuent d’affronter les difficultés de la vie”**.

*“Lorsque l’Indien se sent agressé, il se réfugie dans le silence ou a recours au rite; non pas parce qu’il serait incapable de répondre mais parce que les mots ne pourraient exprimer tout ce qu’il ressent, et que le rite est beaucoup plus expressif.”*

*La théologie indienne, c’est aussi “l’ensemble des connaissances religieuses que nous autres, Indiens, possédons et qui nous permettent d’expliquer, depuis des milliers d’années jusqu’à ce jour, notre expérience de la foi”.*

**La Terre est un territoire qui appartient à tous, c’est la terre de nos ancêtres, c’est là où ils reposent. Là, dans cet espace bien concret, Dieu se manifeste. Là se trouvent les lieux sacrés. La terre est un être vivant qui réagit suivant le comportement de ceux qui l’habitent. La terre n’est pas pour nous objet d’exploitation ou de production. Nous avons avec elle une relation fondée sur l’amour et le respect.**

*“C’est un patrimoine de sagesse populaire et théologique auquel nous référons pour affronter, aujourd’hui comme hier, les défis de la vie.” La théologie indienne nous parle de la proximité de Dieu dans les événements de la vie du peuple car c’est là où il se fait reconnaître, le lieu privilégié de la présence de Dieu étant la communauté.*

*Sa présence est manifeste dans tout ce qui vit, c’est pourquoi l’expérience de Dieu peut se faire en tout lieu de la nature. Le peuple le sait bien qui le rencontre dans les marais, les coteaux, les ruisseaux, les montagnes, le soleil, les étoiles, la lune; dans les signes des temps, dans les manifestations de l’être humain et de la Mère Nature.*

*“Il est également des lieux où cette présence de Dieu se fait plus concrète: ce sont les lieux de célébration, les Collines Sacrées, les lieux où la communauté se rassemble car dans ces endroits-là on réfléchit et la vie renaît.”*

### ***Doit-on parler de théologie indienne au singulier ou au pluriel?***

**Théologie indienne** au singulier, parce que nous avons le sentiment de former un seul peuple ayant la même histoire et partageant le même projet de vie. Et **théologies indiennes**, parce que nous sommes un grand nombre de peuples, que chaque peuple a sa propre identité et que, dans notre effort pour assumer et vivre le processus de purification de notre être indien,

nous retrouvons les uns et les autres nos noms d'origine.

Nous allons parler à présent de la théologie christiano-indienne.

*“La théologie indienne chrétienne est née au XVIème siècle dans un effort de dialogue avec le christianisme sur la base de l’affirmation que le Dieu chrétien et le Dieu indigène ne font qu’un.”*

*Mais lors de la première évangélisation les représentants de l’Église n’étaient pas capables d’entendre ce discours indigène car la force des armes leur conférait une sécurité théologique qu’il leur semblait naturel d’imposer aux peuples vaincus... Nos ancêtres, hommes et femmes, ont maintenu leur affirmation première à savoir que les deux peuples vénéraient le même Dieu. Ce sont eux qui ont entamé le dialogue interculturel et interreligieux dont le résultat est le christianisme indigène que nous vivons aujourd’hui.”*

Cette théologie est indienne, mais elle ne l’est pas purement et simplement “en elle-même”. En effet, nous autres, peuples originaires de ce continent, nous n’étions pas Indiens avant 1492. C’est la société coloniale qui a fait de nous des Indiens pour mieux nous asservir. Notre identité première n’est pas d’être indien. Mais nous qui avons parcouru ensemble un chemin théologique, nous assumons notre caractère indien parce qu’il fait de nous les frères de tous les peuples de Abya Yala (Terre mère: les peuples d’Amérique), qui, comme nous, les Mayas, ont été d’une manière ou d’une autre victimes des structures colonialistes. Nous voulons construire ensemble pour nous et pour tous un avenir meilleur. Il est certain que notre identité première qui vient de nos racines ancestrales n’existe plus à l’état pur mais elle est profondément marquée par la connotation indienne. C’est pour cela que nous devons agir dans la société et dans l’Église, à partir de notre identité indienne.

En ce sens, **le mot “indien” n’est pas accepté par tous car il est étranger et offensant.** Il est évident que le côté étranger du mot “indien” dont l’origine est due à une erreur géographique de Colomb, n’aurait pour nous aucune connotation offensive s’il n’avait été chargé de tout le poids négatif que la société coloniale lui a donné pendant 500 ans.

Car de fait, chez nous indien a fini par devenir synonyme de **non femme, non homme, non personne, non peuple, non croyant**, c’est-à-dire quelqu’un qui a été complètement privé de tous ses droits civiques, politiques, culturels et religieux. Une notion de ce type provoque évidemment le dégoût de tous ceux qui réalisent ce qu’elle implique car ni nos ancêtres, ni

nous-mêmes, que nous soyons homme ou femme, ne voulons correspondre au modèle imposé par la société coloniale.

Il est donc tout à fait compréhensible que nombre d’indigènes refusent d’entendre parler de théologie indienne ou d’être appelé Indiens. Ils préfèrent fouiller dans leur passé pour en exhumer les noms qui, à l’origine, étaient ceux de leurs peuples et de leurs communautés. Ils essaient de retrouver les noms qui disent la vocation sublime qu’ils ont héritée de Dieu et de leurs ancêtres, des noms qui leur permettent de se sentir frères de tout homme mais aussi de retrouver les signes de leur propre identité et de leur différence.

Continuer à accepter que d’autres nous imposent un nom, c’est d’abord manquer d’esprit critique, mais c’est surtout renoncer à notre droit d’exister par nous-mêmes, à notre droit d’être nous-mêmes. Au contraire, reprendre les noms qui nous viennent de notre pérégrination millénaire c’est faire revivre notre projet de vie, c’est retrouver notre identité propre. C’est commencer à exercer notre droit à l’autodétermination, fondement de notre autonomie. Un jour viendra où apparaîtront les théologies qui se cachent sous les mots, c’est-à-dire les théologies des peuples qu’on appellera par leurs noms: **théologie maya, théologie zapotèque, théologie aymara,...**

Toutefois, de même que nous affirmons ce qui précède, de même nous soutenons que le fait d’accepter la dénomination globalisante d’“indien” n’implique pas nécessairement qu’on ait pris son parti de l’oppression. C’est aussi **prendre conscience d’une réalité donnée qui, précisément parce qu’elle nous fait mal, doit nous inciter à nous engager pour la changer.** Accepter d’être Indiens c’est aussi une manière d’assumer la réalité du refus qui nous a été imposé afin de le transformer en affirmation de notre être, par l’union de tous nos efforts avec tous nos frères qui sont victimes de la même situation. Le fait d’être Indiens fait de nous les frères de tous les descendants des peuples originaires d’Amérique.

Au vu de notre expérience, nous sommes arrivés à la conviction qu’il ne nous est pas possible de faire revivre nos noms d’origine si nous ne passons pas auparavant par un processus de purification de notre être indien. Ils ont bien raison ceux qui affirment que *“si le mot indien a servi à nous opprimer, il sera désormais le signe de notre libération”*.

Actuellement, pour retrouver notre être maya (identité culturelle spécifique qui nous vient de notre appartenance ethnique), nous devons d’abord assumer notre être indien (identité sociologique générique qui provient de notre condition de classe sociale op-

primée). Seule une prise de conscience réelle de cette situation historique nous amènera à nous engager personnellement sur la voie de notre libération et nous permettra de faire route ensemble, de bâtir des projets de vie, de travailler à notre libération commune et à l'union de tous nos peuples.

## 2. Fondements ou principes de la Théologie Indienne

Si nous prenons pour fondement la mémoire historique de nos peuples et ce qui vient d'être dit, nous serons prêts à continuer l'œuvre tissée et brodée de mille couleurs commencée par les sages, hommes et femmes, qui nous ont précédés: tels sont les fondements de la théologie indienne.

### *Dieu Père et Mère de la vie, Cœur du peuple, Cœur du ciel, Cœur de la terre*

*“Dieu est Mère et Père, et nous, nous sommes ses fils et ses filles; nous sommes les doigts de ses pieds et de ses mains; il nous donne la vie et nous fait vivre. Dieu est la vie du ciel et de la terre, du jour et de la nuit, d'en-haut et d'en-bas, des montagnes et des vallées, des hauteurs et des plaines, le maître de tous les animaux.*

*Il est le Cœur du ciel et de la terre, il est notre maître, le cœur de l'eau, le cœur de la mer, il est notre origine et notre géniteur. Le maître de ce qui est tout proche. Il est la Mère de sainteté. Il est le Père de sainteté. Il est au milieu de la communauté; il est le Seigneur des quatre coins du monde, des quatre vents. Dieu travaille avec l'homme au triomphe de la vie, il agit dans le monde et dans l'histoire.*

*La source de vie de toute la création c'est un “Papa-Maman” qui est vivant, qui s'inquiète de nous, qui se donne du mal pour nous entourer de soins et d'amour. Dieu est source de vie. Je suis venu pour qu'ils aient la vie et qu'ils l'aient en abondance. (Jn 10,10)*

*Le Dieu de la vie nous fait nécessairement sentir qu'il vibre de partout, en tout ce qui vit. Sentir les vibrations du cœur de Dieu dans chaque palpitation de la terre, dans chaque palpitation d'homme, dans chaque palpitation d'amour.*

*Cela implique par conséquent une attitude cohérente vis-à-vis de la terre, de la nature et des êtres humains; une attitude sincère, confiante, accueillante, respectueuse, affectueuse à l'égard de chaque être vivant, de chaque être humain.”*

### *Dieu Créateur et Artisan qui a voulu que la vie de l'homme soit en harmonie avec la sienne.*

Le Dieu Créateur et Artisan a créé un univers harmonieux qu'il a rempli de sa vie et de sa présence et dans cet univers il a créé la nature. Dans ce contexte harmonieux qui soutient le tout, l'homme et la femme ne s'affrontent pas à la nature. Celle-ci n'est ni une ennemie, ni un objet de domination mais un tout avec lequel la vie de l'homme doit entretenir des relations harmonieuses.

*“Notre vie n'est possible que si nous sommes en relation profonde avec le monde, avec les autres et avec Dieu.”*

### *La femme et l'homme, signes sur la terre de l'unité harmonieuse en Dieu, chargés de donner et d'entretenir la vie.*

Notre vie humaine est un être-à-deux. Elle engendre la vie. Elle est principe de vie, d'existence, du vivre ensemble, de l'histoire, de la transformation, de la communauté, de l'être du peuple.

*“Dans notre être-à-deux, femme-homme, nous nous respectons, nous nous aimons. Notre vie de personnes, de familles et de peuples n'est possible que s'il y a relation de réciprocité entre femme et homme, ciel et terre, personne et création, Dieu et personne, maman et papa, grands-parents et petits-enfants, pères et fils, eau et feu, lune et soleil, air et montagne, maïs et pluie, semences et récoltes.*

*Tel est notre être-à-deux, notre être égal. C'est notre relation vitale qui fait notre identité de peuples, de communautés et de familles et qui rend possible la vie humaine.*

*Femme-homme, dans une relation de réciprocité, nous sommes l'un pour l'autre la canne à sucre, l'arbre de vie. Arbre vers qui je regarde et qui me regarde au cœur.*

*Arbre que je soigne et qui me soigne pour qu'il puisse vivre et grandir. Arbre que j'abrite et qui m'abrite sous son ombre. Moi, avec vous et vous avec moi, nous sommes accomplis, complets, entiers, en plénitude.*

*Notre être-à-deux, c'est la même canne à sucre, la même chair et le même sang, les mêmes racines et le même tronc, les mêmes feuilles et les mêmes branches, les mêmes fleurs et les mêmes fruits. Nous sommes deux et formons un être complet.*

*“Dans l'acte de donner et de protéger la vie, d'après nos réflexions théologiques, Dieu a besoin, au même titre, du concours de la femme et de l'homme. Cela veut dire que, aujourd'hui comme hier, dans*

*la vie de nos peuples, femmes et hommes se font serviteurs et guides pour aider à la résolution des problèmes. Les uns et les autres habités par la sagesse, nous sommes porteurs de la sagesse héritée de leurs ancêtres et créateurs d'une sagesse nouvelle afin de conforter et transformer la vie du peuple."*

***Le témoignage des ancêtres: femmes et hommes habités par la sagesse, martyrs d'hier et d'aujourd'hui.***

*"Nous sommes l'histoire, parce que nous sommes l'héritage engendré par la peine de nos ancêtres. Nous sommes un événement de création profonde dont nous faisons l'expérience par la vie dans le monde, dans l'histoire, dans le temps et dans l'espace."*

Ce sont elles et eux, les semailles et la moisson d'une vie nouvelle pour nos peuples. Dans le champ de maïs qu'ils nous ont laissé est en train de germer, est en train de naître la semence indigène de la vie que nos ancêtres ont semée.

Leur sang qui court par monts, vallées et torrents, irrigue les sillons afin que germent de nouveau la fraternité, la justice et la paix.

Ce sont elles et eux, les aïeules et les aïeux, nos morts et en particulier nos martyrs, qui nous invitent à *"nous asseoir sur le tapis (pop) de notre peuple"*, à dialoguer avec chacun, à monter sur la colline afin d'y prier. Ils nous invitent à monter jusqu'au Calvaire, sur le chemin que Jésus a parcouru, en portant la croix de notre peuple; et de là, l'entendre nous dire la Bonne Nouvelle: *"Il n'y a pas de plus grand amour que de donner sa vie."* Dans ce dialogue de proximité avec notre peuple, faisons en sorte *"que le jour se lève et que jaillisse l'aurore..."* C'est le message que continuent de nous transmettre nos aïeules et nos aïeux.

Nous proclamons que ceux qui ont versé leur sang sur notre terre pour défendre notre vie sont toujours vivants au milieu de nous. Ils vivent au milieu de nous par leur parole, leur pensée, leur travail et leur témoignage. *"Ceux-là viennent de la grande épreuve, ils ont lavé leurs robes et les ont blanchies dans le sang de l'Agneau."* (Ap 7, 14 b)

***La terre, lieu de rencontre et de communion, où se fait et se construit la communauté.***

La Terre est un territoire qui appartient à tous, c'est la terre de nos ancêtres, c'est là où ils reposent. Là, dans cet espace bien concret, Dieu se manifeste. Là se trouvent les lieux sacrés. La terre est un être vivant qui réagit suivant le comportement de ceux qui l'habitent. La terre n'est pas pour nous objet d'exploitation ou de production. Nous avons avec elle une relation fondée sur l'amour et le respect.

La terre n'est pas une propriété privée, elle appartient à la communauté. Elle ne peut être vendue à des étrangers qui la violenteraient impitoyablement

pour en tirer un plus grand profit. Celui qui travaille la terre entretient avec elle une relation faite d'affection et de tendresse. Elle est la Mère, et la Nature est le fruit de ses entrailles destiné à être partagé en famille ou en communauté.

C'est elle qui donne naissance à la communauté et la fait vivre; en elle se développe une

atmosphère de coopération, d'aide, de solidarité aux jours de joie et de fête comme aux heures de peine.

L'aide se fait concrète quand il s'agit de faire les semailles ou la récolte, de construire la maison d'un frère; d'organiser une fête pour un baptême, un mariage, une veillée funèbre ou un enterrement.

Le travail communautaire est toujours festif, joyeux, responsable; il génère la participation de tous dans un même esprit de communion et de service.

C'est pourquoi nous disons que *"nous nous sentons en relation et en communion avec la totalité des frères, avec les peuples d'Orient et d'Occident, du Nord et du Sud. Nous avons le sentiment d'appartenir à la même famille."*

***La mort et nos rapports avec ceux qui reposent déjà dans le cœur de la Terre Mère.***

*"Nous entretenons une relation de vie avec l'histoire, avec le cheminement des hommes sur cette terre; nous sommes la vie de ceux qui sont morts hier et avant-hier, et nous sommes la mort de ceux qui vivront demain. Nous sommes hier, aujourd'hui et demain. Nous sommes fécondité vivante au sein*

***Car de fait, chez nous indien a fini par devenir synonyme de non femme, non homme, non personne, non peuple, non croyant, c'est-à-dire quelqu'un qui a été complètement privé de tous ses droits civiques, politiques, culturels et religieux. Une notion de ce type provoque évidemment le dégoût de tous ceux qui réalisent ce qu'elle implique car ni nos ancêtres, ni nous-mêmes, que nous soyons homme ou femme, ne voulons correspondre au modèle imposé par la société coloniale.***

de la mort. Nous sommes la vie dans la mort.

*La mort fait partie de notre vie, elle est communion entre les vivants et les ancêtres. Eux, ils nous ont devancés, ils s'en sont allés nous préparer une place pour que nous puissions vivre ensemble la communion définitive, la vie en plénitude.*

*La mort c'est le prolongement de la vie, dans les enfants, les petits-enfants et les arrière petits-enfants. Nos morts sont partis, mais nous sommes leur prolongement; en eux, nous partageons la vie de l'au-delà tandis qu'eux continuent à vivre à travers nous et en nous."*

### **Les services dans la communauté**

Le Dieu Créateur suscite dans le cœur du peuple le don d'un service théologique. Parmi ces services, on peut citer:

Le serviteur de la Parole de Dieu, c'est **"celui qui parle, celui qui est responsable de la Parole"**.

**Celui qui chante la tradition ou la sagesse millénaire du peuple.** Le chant sacré est un acte d'adoration de Dieu et en même temps un moyen efficace pour transmettre la tradition orale des peuples. C'est l'espace de la parole qui est partagée en communauté et qui entretient la vie du peuple.

**Le service qui consiste à denser les mythes** afin de maintenir en éveil la vie de Dieu et de la Terre Mère en vue de transmettre le contenu de la foi. La ritualisation des mythes est la manière la plus forte qui soit de rendre vivante et agissante la foi des peuples.

**Le service qui consiste à prier et à composer des prières.** C'est une des fonctions des prêtres. Ils faisaient des prières pour toute sorte d'occasion ou de besoin. De nos jours, les priants et les priantes gardent vivante cette tradition des prières; ils utilisent des formules chrétiennes ou en inventent d'autres suivant les besoins.

**"Jeter le maïs"**. Cette expression exprime symboliquement le service qui consiste à révéler l'horoscope des personnes.

**"Lire le calendrier"**. C'est une autre façon de révéler l'horoscope en se basant sur la lecture des dates de naissance des personnes.

**"Donner des conseils"**. C'est une autre modalité

de l'agir théologique: il consiste à orienter les personnes, c'est-à-dire à les aider à s'avancer sur le chemin de Dieu, en direction du soleil levant, et en suivant la volonté de Dieu.

**"Interpréter les songes"**. C'est une forme tout à fait privilégiée de faire de la théologie, non seulement à Abya Yala, mais dans d'autres parties du monde.

**"Garder vivante la mémoire historique"**. C'est peut-être la façon la plus dynamique et la plus traditionnelle de faire de la théologie que celle de raconter l'histoire du salut du peuple, en la reformulant au fur et à mesure que surgissent des situations nouvelles. Sur le plan théologique, c'est ce à quoi recourent le plus fréquemment les peuples qui sont conscients de leur identité culturelle et religieuse.

Parmi les autres services, les plus connus sont ceux des **sages-femmes** et des **soignantes**; ces dernières se préoccupent **aussi bien de la santé physique que de la santé mentale**; et tout cela au bénéfice de la vie des personnes et de la communauté.

**Nos peuples indigènes ne parlent pas de Dieu. On devrait plutôt dire qu'ils parlent avec Dieu. Ils font l'expérience de Dieu, puis ils transmettent cette expérience d'une façon qui est à la fois mythique et symbolique, à la manière des anciens.**

**Dieu-Jésus-Christ dans notre quotidien. Christ sur les chemins de nos vies humaines et de notre histoire**

*"Nous avons vécu la présence de Jésus Christ parmi nous de différentes façons. Prendre soin de notre vie, de nos relations entre frères dans le cadre de notre culture, nous l'avons fait en présence de Dieu qui agit et sème la vie au milieu de nous. Telle est notre*

*terre et notre culture, tels sont les fruits de Dieu, telle est la germination de la Parole de Dieu qui a été semée au milieu de nous."*

*"Nous ne sommes pas nés d'hier ou d'avant-hier. Nous existons depuis de longs siècles. 'C'est toute une vie que nous avons vue et entendue' nous disent nos aïeules (cf 1 Jn 1,1-2). Nous autres tant sur un plan individuel que communautaire, sommes le fruit d'une expérience qui est faite de joies et de peines. Et dans ce cheminement nous avons été accompagnés par le Beau Jour, la Grande Clarté, le Bon Soignant, le Grand Initiateur du Chemin. C'est pour quoi nous débordons de vie."*

### **3. Conclusion**

La théologie indienne a devant elle un avenir plein d'espérance: les épines et les pierres qu'elles a ren-

contrées sur son chemin ne l'ont pas arrêtée et ne l'arrêteront pas car son origine c'est Dieu lui-même dans une communion harmonieuse avec l'univers et avec l'humanité totale homme et femme. Elle est le fruit d'une attitude prophétique et d'un dialogue fraternel.

Elle est en lien avec la Révélation elle-même: la Révélation de Dieu dans l'histoire concrète de ces peuples avec leurs façons anciennes d'expliquer, d'adorer, de rencontrer le Dieu de la Vie. Elle garde et recrée l'espérance utopique de tous les peuples.

C'est une théologie qui existe à présent, qui a existé hier et qui existera dans le futur. Il ne s'agit pas de l'inventer ou de la créer, mais de la recréer, de la reconnaître, de la respecter et de la soutenir.

Tandis que nous sommes en train de tracer le chemin de notre libération, nous acceptons de la dire indienne. C'est ainsi qu'elle devient une théologie d'opprimés et de résistance à l'oppression. Une théologie qui lutte pour sortir de sa prostration. Ceci signifie que, en tant que peuples, nous comptons sur l'énergie libératrice qui va jaillir de notre propre théologie.

Ce n'est pas une théologie qui naît dans les livres mais dans la vie. Elle est très concrète. C'est une théologie intégrale, globalisante. Son langage est résolument religieux. Le moteur de cette théologie c'est l'Esprit Saint et le peuple qui l'élabore collectivement, en communauté. Son point de départ c'est la réalité qui donne la vie au peuple ou qui la lui refuse. Ses sources d'inspiration sont la spiritualité indigène et la Bible.

Elle fait partie de la diversité qui ne veut pas mourir sous l'effet de l'uniformisation en œuvre à tous niveaux. Elle ne se limite pas à maintenir ce qui est. Elle fait partie intégrante du peuple de l'espérance qui souhaite construire d'autres modèles de vie qui permettront de bâtir l'unité à partir de la diversité et de la pluralité.

Grâce à la théologie indienne, nous autres, indigènes, avons la possibilité d'être membres de l'Église du Christ sans cesser pour autant d'être nous-mêmes: des peuples ayant une identité, une histoire et une culture propres. Nous pouvons être une Église-Peuple de Dieu qui, tout en conférant à un peuple son identité, rassemble des peuples de toute race, langue et nation. Nous n'avons pas besoin de tuer notre Dieu pour arriver au Dieu libérateur des chrétiens, car c'est le même.

Pour nous, l'Église doit être cet arbre de la parabole de Jésus où peuvent se nicher tous les oiseaux du ciel (Lc 13,19) ou bien le Fromager Sacré des Mayas qui est capable de soutenir de ses branches la voûte

céleste pour transformer le chaos originel en la Grande Maison où pourront prendre place et vivre harmonieusement tous les peuples du monde. Nous, peuple maya, sommes en situation de résistance face à la menace mortelle que représente le néolibéralisme, tel "*le dragon prêt à dévorer l'enfant de la femme dès sa naissance*" (Ap 12,4b). Nous savons que nous pouvons contribuer à la solution de ces problèmes si nous faisons en sorte que tous aient conscience de l'énergie vitale que nous avons héritée de nos ancêtres.

Comme les premiers chrétiens, nous disons que nous n'avons ni or ni argent à donner aux autres (Ac 3,6). De tout cela nous avons été dépouillés. Mais, ce que nous sommes, nous sommes prêts à le partager, c'est-à-dire notre identité la plus profonde, nos rêves et notre espérance.

Nous espérons que le reste de l'Église pourra nous accompagner dans ce processus, à partir d'une nouvelle attitude et d'une nouvelle pratique pastorale, comme l'ont déclaré les évêques du Guatemala: "*OPTER POUR UNE PASTORALE INDIGÈNE, c'est-à-dire une pastorale spécifique et d'ensemble, qui avec respect et amour assume les personnes et les communautés indigènes, tenant compte de leur propre expression culturelle et religieuse et de leurs modes d'organisation, de sorte qu'ils deviennent les sujets de l'évangélisation de leur peuple et, par la libération intégrale, constituent d'authentiques Églises autochtones au sein de la Catholicité.*"

Telle est notre foi. Telle est notre espérance.

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## THOUGHTS ABOUT CULTURE

### 'The Politics of Religion in Northern Ghana'

Jon P. Kirby

The Christian Gospel appeals to individual decision and often changes a person's way of life in a very short space of time. Islam can also produce sudden conversions, but more often the change is slower. At first there may be no outward sign of a new allegiance, but a process may have started which will bear fruit in due course, perhaps not until the next generation or even a number of generations. Trimingham (in *The influence of Islam upon Africa*, Longman, 1968, p. 43) says it may take as long as three generations, and traces three stages marking the transition from paganism to Islam.

The first stage he calls preparatory. It involves contact of some sort with Islam, including visits and settlement by traders and malams and it leads to 'the breaking down of barriers and the adoption of certain aspects, mostly material, of Islamic culture — the wearing of Islamic amulets and dress'. At this stage the traditional African religious system is not yet up-set.

The second stage involves adopting real elements of Islamic religious culture, such as ritual prayer and recognition of certain permitted or forbidden actions; but at this stage they see no conflict between Islam and their traditional religion.

Eventually there is a crisis leading to the third stage, that of reorientation, when

'the old religious authority is consciously rejected, the village ritual pattern is disrupted, priests of communal cults lose their power, and the clergy take their place as the guides for the religio-social life. Ancestor-worship must go because it is the core of the old religion, but a great deal of the old is retained. Offerings continue to be made to the nature spirits; and medicine men since they as individual practitioners still flourish, but ... Islam is now really influencing society'.

Muslims in both Northern and Southern Ghana are a minority, under 18 per cent of the population, and commitment to Islam often seems shallow and nominal. But Trimingham's analysis is a reminder that

more may be happening in the hearts of the Ghanaian people than we see on the surface. There are signs that Islam is now rapidly moving from stage one and two to stage three of Trimingham's model. Everyone has observed the way attendance at mosques on Fridays has grown in recent years. We have also witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of sectarian clashes among the Muslims and a growing rift between Muslims and Christians.

The first stage of Islamic conversion has been strongly linked with the formation of ethnic identities and traditional states (see Levztion 1968). For over 1,000 years the process of state formation in the Western Sudan has been aided by the presence of Islam. At the religious level, state systems traced their theological and symbolic blueprint to the concept of an overarching 'sky God' or as the Dagombas say, 'spirit of the chief (*Naa-wuuni*)'. This 'God of the traditional state' or 'God of the sky' exercised authority over the many 'Earth' gods within the State's territorial boundaries just as chiefs exercised authority over the many cultural sub-groups that inhabited their area. Thus power relations in the visible world (chiefs over subjects) came to imitate those believed to obtain in the unseen world ('sky God' over 'Earth' deities). So, although the roots of traditional State formation in the Western Sudan are pre-Islamic and are linked to a host of political, economic and social factors including the appearance of cities, agricultural specialisation, slavery and long-distance trading, Muslim clerics found a convenient social niche for their specialisation's in the hierarchies of these early States.

Over the last 500 years the indigenous Guang and Gur peoples of Northern Ghana have been gradually re-forming their social identities from structurally simple organisations involving leadership by clan elders backed by religious beliefs in the primal authority of the ancestors, toward the 'traditional state' — a more highly structured form of social organisation with rulers and elaborate institutions including religious beliefs in the accessibility of a trans-territorial God. Local ethnic groups have been slowly incorporated into larger more highly stratified social and political



organisations at the lowest rung of a hierarchy (E. Goody 1973, Kirby 1986) which designated specialisation, distinguished the degrees of identity or belonging and structured the processes by which higher statuses and identities were acquired.

In Northern Ghana the 'traditional state' was introduced through small bands of slave-raiders who often travelled with itinerant Muslim clerics. The raiding, of course, severely limited the expansion of this kind of State. But during the colonial era and up until the early 1980's this process of 'traditional state' formation actually intensified in Northern Ghana. The British put a stop to seasonal raiding and established a stable political and social environment. Under the policy of 'Indirect Rule' they expanded the power and prestige of the chiefs and altered the concept and structures of the 'traditional states' to meet their own administrative needs. The peaceful environment engendered population growth, fostered trade and increased agricultural production, while the structures of the new bureaucracy brought about changes in political identity and ethnicity.

Most of the peoples that were ruled by these 'states' regarded the colonial imposition of Chiefs to collect taxes and muster road gangs as another form of repression. It gave license for their former raiders to extort with even greater efficiency than before. The colonial regime regarded the vast majority of the peoples of north, the non-Chiefly peoples as a liability, a contentious mass managed only with great difficulty. They were the unruly 'minorities'. The colonial system allowed for the repression and extortion of those without Chiefs and those at the bottom of the chiefly hierarchy while it focused power in Chiefs, thus creating a drive towards upward mobility. 'Minority' peoples continued to enter the stratified State systems at the lowest rungs, but now of their own accord. By becoming 'commoners' within the chiefly systems of Dagbon or Gonja, or by buying minor chiefdoms within these traditional states, 'minorities' also came to share some semblance of power and prosperity.

Thus 'non-chiefly' autochthones on the edges of Dagbon, Gonja, Mamprusi and Anufo and along commercial routes, learned the languages and cultures of their imposed rulers and forgot their lesser identities (see also Crowder 1968:345; Cornevin 1963; Froelich 1954:251 and Kirby 1986:40 footnotes 67 and 68). During the colonial era we find whole villages that changed their identities (complete with language) from Konkomba to Dagomba or Anufo 'commoners' within one generation.

As always, the most basic form of entrée into the 'state' system was through kinship. After raiding was

prohibited, those formerly raided continued their client relationship by sending women to their former masters. Even today low status 'commoners' and non-chiefly peoples (those formerly raided) on the fringe of power send women to high status chiefs in order to have a rich and powerful chief as a 'son-in-law' and later have a village 'son' who will be a 'real Chief'. As more women were fed into the system more Konkombas began calling themselves 'Dagombas' and more Guang groups strove to be called 'Gonja'. The grandmother of the current Ya Na, the paramount Chief of all Dagombas, for example, is a Konkomba, and his first son, who had to flee to Accra during the recent 'Northern Conflict', is by a Konkomba woman. Intermarriage was and still is so great that when the conflict broke out in February 1994, many Yendi Dagombas did not know who the enemy was. There was hardly a person who could claim pure Dagomba parentage or ancestry.

After Independence, chiefs came to rule more directly and a new class of *élite* politicians from the princely classes came to take the place of the British, but the life of the village commoner did not change very much.

Today the 'traditional state' is being challenged as never before by the modernising influences of education, Christianity and democratic processes. New political and ethnic identities are being formed. Peoples who never before thought of themselves as being a 'real tribe' but merely a 'minority' at the bottom rung of a 'traditional state', are now suddenly aware of the importance of their own languages and cultures. They now want recognition; they want to have their own political leaders, and they want a voice in government affairs. In Northern Ghana these processes have resulted in conflicting political agendas that have accelerated Islamic conversion among the chiefly groups and fostered the conversion to Christianity among the minorities. The very problem the British had suppressed in Northern Ghana with their policy of 'Indirect Rule', i.e., how to deal with over 40 chiefless ethnic groups, has come back with even greater severity.

In the period following Independence, along with the growth in ethnic and political awareness, there comes a heightened consciousness of equality. Gradually the various forms of extortion that were rampant in the colonial period (see Tait 1963), ranging from levies of yams and other foodstuffs by overbearing chiefs to inappropriate judgements and unlawful demands arising from the imposition of a traditional court system (see Skalnik 1985) came to be perceived as 'injustices'.

These new awarenesses came about partially through education and literacy, 'getting one's eyes opened'. But the religious factor also played a part. In the North the British had established and sustained a system of inequalities. They suppressed the education of the masses and forced the education of the 'élites', the princes, especially the sons of senior chiefs. This started to change only in the 1950's with the arrival of missionaries with their clinics and above all their schools which they opened to all — including the lower class commoners and the non-chiefly peoples. After Independence, in the 1960's, Nkrumah followed suit with the policy of 'compulsory education' offered freely to all. Schools expanded enormously and illiteracy rates declined. It was in this period that the present leaders of the 'minority' groups were educated.

In some sense, therefore, Christian missionaries together with the First Republic disrupted the Pax Britannica, since British rule was not built on equality and it offered no solid foundation for a modern democracy. The missionaries with their schools, literacy projects and Bible translations challenged this and at the same time brought new unity and development to the North. The recent completion of the Konkomba Bible, for example, has done as much to unite these disparate peoples as the Guttenburg Bible did to unite the Germanic peoples linguistically and culturally.

Whether the missionaries realised it or not, even with relatively few conversions to Christianity, they were reversing the process of 'traditional state' formation among the uneducated masses in two important ways: (1) By offering the clan-based territorial groups, the 'minorities', an alternative, non-Islamic access to the 'sky God', through Christianity, the overarching theological blueprint for the higher political integration which was imposed by the 'traditional states' was by-passed. In very practical terms, this meant being able to build a new common political and ethnic identity for the 'minorities'. (2) By introducing a broader morality — that we are all equal in the eyes of God — Christianity ushered in the principle of equality.

Although on average less than 6 per cent of the Northern Region's population are baptised Christians, the strong presence of Christian institutions, schools, clinics, etc., has created a new 'understanding' even among Traditional Believers — that an overarching creator God has been made more accessible to everyone. For Africans, appeal to God is eminently practical — it frees them from the incessant trial and error of sacrifices; it brings certainty. Islam makes God's

power accessible through '*lada*' or merit which can be accrued through virtuous living, almsgiving and prayer. This certainty is extremely important for the success of development initiatives and it leads to political liberation. Christianity does not always emphasise this as much as Islam. But through the introduction of medical institutions emphasising prediction and preventative thinking and by offering alternative explanations for misfortune and the empowerment to take charge of one's own 'destiny', Christianity has in some sense gone even further than Islam in laying the religious and cosmological foundations for development and democracy.

Thus, apart from any strictly religious convictions brought about by conversion, the very presence of Christianity' in the North, more than Islam, has set the scene for egalitarian politics. The Churches have broadened awarenesses, expanded technical knowledge and helped cultivate a modern scientific mentality among all Northern peoples. They have offered better medicines, better jobs, development and the hope for a better life to all. But for the 'minorities' this hope is in itself a seed of resistance. It is the isolated and the oppressed, the marginalised that have been given a new religious and political identity.

Over the last 15 years, co-extensive with the ethnic conflicts, there has occurred an increasing religious polarisation. 'Chiefly' peoples do choose to be Christian but the 'non-Chiefly' at least nominally align themselves only with Christianity. The growing rift between Islam and Christianity in Northern Ghana is more political than religious and it involves the difficult transition from a hierarchical traditional State to a modern democratic one.

The polarisation has affected the Catholics more than non-Catholics. Although most Dagomba *élites* sympathise with and respect the Catholics for their great development efforts, especially in education, and many 'chiefly' elders do encourage their children to become Catholics, two fundamental biases are perceived by them within Catholicism. It is considered too 'foreign' and too much on the side of the 'minorities'. Dagombas are very proud of their culture and Catholicism is considered too Western. It does not 'feel right' and does not help them solve their traditional problems, whereas Islam does.

They also feel that Catholicism favours the 'minorities'. They claim that the expatriate missionaries help them more. This may in some cases be true because, as we have seen above, the 'non-chiefly' peoples are more attracted to Christianity. They also complain that they see mostly 'non-chiefly' peoples, especially 'Dagartis', in Church leadership positions.

The 'Dagartis' are one of the 'minority' groups their forefathers raided and enslaved. The Dagarti presence, especially in Church leadership, is indeed great due to a mass conversion to Catholicism in the 1930's. The impact of their culture on northern Catholicism has also been enormous. Rightly or wrongly, the 'chiefly' peoples suspect that the Church helps the others more and although the Church is aware of this suspicion and has tried to address it, it is still a sore point in relations.

In the early 1980's a friend commented to me that her husband, an important chief's son, who had been baptised as a Christian while at school, and had a Christian name alongside his Muslim inherited name was given the ultimatum by his colleagues that he must attend 'Friday mosque' if he wished to 'go anywhere' in politics. External and internal events made it no longer possible for him or for other 'élites' like him to blend his traditional beliefs with Islam, or Christianity as had always been done in the past. From the mid-'80's onward it was no longer possible for chiefs or their 'élite' princely sons to straddle the religious fence.

The new Islamic presence is evident everywhere in Ghana today but especially in the North. The villages around Tamale that had almost no Muslims 15 years ago are now 40 per cent Muslim. As the chiefly peoples are more and more coming to identify themselves as Muslims their traditions are changing. Old myths and oral histories are being retold from an Islamic perspective. Dagomba and Gonja culture are becoming increasingly Islamicized. Muslim missions to Northern Ghana have increased, hundreds of scholarships have been awarded Northern Ghanaians to attend Islamic Universities and they are now returning home with a new brand of Islam. Islamic schools have been built across the North and hundreds of mosques have been sponsored by Islamic States along with development projects aimed at serving only the Muslim communities and excluding Christians and Traditionalists. Muslim fundamentalism has also reached Ghana. The name of the Iranian development headquarters in Northern Ghana is 'Jihad House'.

Islam in Ghana is as divided as Christianity. There are three factions in Tamale, the Muslim centre for the North. The first is the 'traditional culture' group which is largely made up of educated 'élites,' bureaucrats and businessmen. The second group is the largest and attracts its mostly illiterate following from the youthful masses who have left the villages seeking prosperity in the city. They are strongly influenced by Saudi Wahabis. The third is a smaller but more radical group influenced by Shiites and led by a fiery fun-

damentalist imam. There are also the 'commercial' Muslims with Hausa and Yoruba connections though these are not politically significant. Infighting among the factions effectively limits political control but even with these limitations Muslim power is overwhelming. The leader of the second group once boasted that if he nominated a dog against any political candidate the North could offer, the dog would win.

The end of the Cold War has brought about major changes in African political alliances world-wide. A new balance of power has thrust religion into realms formerly reserved for politics. Competition between the two major world religions, Christianity and Islam, for the 50 per cent 'unconverted' African masses is now strongly influencing mainstream African politics. The old brand of African international politics which played off the World's two most prominent economic philosophies, capitalism and communism, is now being replaced by one which opposes the world's two most important philosophical, theological and cultural complexes — the (nominally) Christian culture of Europe and the Americas and the Islamic culture of the Middle-East, large parts of Asia, the Malay-Indonesian sub-continent, North Africa, much of Eastern coastal Africa and the Gulf States. At the vanguard of this opposition is Islamic fundamentalism, now the sworn enemy of Western culture and *ipso facto* Western Christianity.

This opposition is basically new for Ghana and other parts of Africa where the two religions have harmoniously dwelt side by side. But although the key players may have changed, the political objectives have not. These are: how best can these two rich and powerful culture complexes be manipulated to one's own interests? The game is being hotly played in Ghana these days. This is evident from the fact that with such a small percentage of its population Muslim, Ghana is labelled an 'Islamic State' (Barker 1986). The fact that most of Ghana's Muslims live in Southern cities, not in the North which is still mainly populated by Traditional Religionists (Dretke 1970: 1979; Barker 1986), dramatises the fact that the game need not correspond with realities but draws heavily on stereotypes. It is a dangerous game, and like the Cold War, no one wins it — least of all the poor African masses whether they be 'minorities' or 'chiefly peoples'.

As we have seen above, chiefly systems in West Africa have had access to Islam for centuries. What is changing the face of Africa now is the new potential for international alliances with powerful Islamic States.

African rulers of 'traditional states' and the new 'élites' are quickly finding more things in common

with Islamic Republics world-wide than they have with Western democracies. The chiefly peoples of Northern Ghana seem to be moving more and more toward international Islam in the hope of gaining international support, thus strengthening their control over Northern political processes in the face of growing democratisation.

The increase in politically motivated religious polarisation is a serious threat to peace and justice, freedom and democracy. Religious institutions, even more than others because of their fundamental nature, tend toward dogmatism. Issues quickly tend to become 'black and white'. Peoples are categorised as friend or foe. Suddenly all Christians are suspected because some are inimical toward the 'traditional state'. And all Muslims are suspected by 'minorities' precisely because Islam has always aligned itself with the 'traditional state'.

The divisions in Northern Ghana can only be healed by non-violent means. Jesus preached and lived non-violence, but not all his followers do as he says. It is therefore quite necessary here to carefully distinguish between nominal Christianity or Islam and a deep commitment in faith. In our research we found some interesting paradoxes. Most of the Konkomba leaders are at least nominally Christian but they fought in the Conflict. Yet none of the strongly committed Dagomba Christian prayer leaders of the village-based small Christian communities around the Tamale area fought because their beliefs convinced them it was wrong to do so (Boi-Nai and Kirby 1997).

During the conflict, Christian missions were at risk in Tamale and some institutions were ransacked. But chiefs and prominent Muslim leaders also intervened to save the lives of Christian missionaries. In Yendi the Catholic mission was burned and looted. But this was an exception. The Catholic mission at Bimbilla, for example, gave asylum alternately to the Konkombas then the Nanumbas as one group overcame the other in turns. Many Christian Dagombas around the Tamale area risked their lives during the war by harbouring Konkombas when angry mobs were searching for them. The opposite happened in areas controlled by the Konkombas. It has been rumoured that the Konkomba Chief, himself rescued some Dagomba children by carrying them across the Oti River in the dead of night. This kind of commitment to humanity offers great hope for it points beyond political factions and sectarian beliefs. It nullifies polarisation.

Dagombas are about 5 per cent Christian. Yet 'Bi-Tchabob' Konkombas who are often characterised as 'Christians', are only about 6 per cent Chris-

tian while the other more isolated and un-missionised groups like the Kombas are less than 1 per cent Christian. Obviously this stereotype is there not because of their faith but because of their cultural or political views and their strong desire to move into the modern world, to 'get their eyes opened'. Yet, clearly, one may assent to this without any deep commitment to the Christian or Muslim faith. On the other hand, where Christian or Muslim faith is deep and influences action, as it has done in the case of some 'chiefly group' Muslims as well as 'minority' Christians, we can see that such faith can lead to religious harmony and political freedom.

Northern Ghanaians yearn to be part of the modern world. They are involved in world organisations, they compete in world activities and hold important positions on the global scene. Through education in mission schools both 'chiefly' and 'non-chiefly' peoples have come to 'get their eyes opened' and now look beyond their village precincts to a larger reality. Some look toward the Islamic cultures, others toward Christian cultures. If unity and peace is to prevail in Northern Ghana it must start on the ground — in the villages. The Church's emphasis on freedom and equality, human dignity and development in the villages is a pledge of peace and love. Committed Christian leaders, through their work at the village level among chiefly and non-chiefly peoples, through local development schemes, health and literacy programmes shine as a beacon of hope for a peaceful future.

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## “ NE SERAIT-IL PAS LE CHRIST ? ”

# FEMMES MISSIONNAIRES DANS L'ÉVANGILE

Solange Navarro

*Dans la foule qui acclamait Jésus, nombreuses étaient les femmes, avides d'écouter la parole du Maître, de le rencontrer et d'être sauvées par lui.*

*Plusieurs d'entre elles furent même les disciples du Christ à un titre particulier. Comment s'étonner qu'elles soient devenues elles-mêmes porteuses de la Bonne Nouvelle, missionnaires auprès de leur entourage ?*

*Regardons-les, écoutons-les. Leur témoignage est fort.*

Comment parler en quelques pages de la mission de la femme ou des femmes dans la Bible? Ne faudrait-il pas pour cela commencer par le tout début, par les premières lignes de la Genèse ? En effet, nous y apprenons que la mission de garder le jardin d'Eden ne peut être assumée par Adam seul, mais par Adam en compagnie d'un être qui lui ressemble et qui lui fait face:

*“Le Seigneur Dieu dit: Il n'est pas bon pour l'homme d'être seul. Je veux lui faire une aide (un secours), comme son vis-à-vis” (Gn 2, 18).*

Et ce fil, nous pourrions le suivre jusque dans le dernier livre de la Bible, l'Apocalypse, où l'un des signes est une femme apparaissant dans le ciel:

*“Un grand signe apparut dans le ciel: une femme vêtue du soleil, la lune sous les pieds, et sur la tête une couronne de douze étoiles” (Ap 12, 1).*

Cette enquête devant être plus modeste, nous interrogerons une partie plus limitée des Écritures, mais elles seront notre guide. C'est vers l'évangile de Jean que nous allons nous tourner pour aborder ce sujet. Que se passe-t-il dans ce texte concernant les femmes?

La relation de Jésus avec les femmes qu'il rencontre, telle que nous la présente l'évangéliste, peut-elle nous éclairer ?

### Des rencontres

Dans l'évangile de Jean, Jésus rencontre des hommes et des femmes sur son chemin, et ses rencontres avec des femmes ne sont pas des rencontres secondaires, anodines. Bien au contraire, ces rencontres sont souvent l'occasion d'un long dialogue entre elles et Jésus, où celui-ci révèle peu à peu son identité. Et ces femmes en témoigneront, car, souvent, de ces rencontres jaillira une confession de foi, voire davantage encore.

De plus, au long de l'Évangile, ces rencontres ne sont pas placées au hasard, elles sont situées à des moments-clés de la marche de Jésus vers sa Pâque: au tout début de sa mission, à Cana, quand son “heure” — le moment du don total de soi — n'est pas encore venue, comme lorsque l'“heure” est venue, au pied de la Croix ou devant le tombeau vide. Enfin n'oublions pas que c'est une femme qui sera la première à témoigner de la Résurrection auprès des disciples hommes.

Ces femmes sont assez différentes dans leur relation à Jésus, quand a lieu le dialogue. Elles peuvent être proches de lui, comme Marthe et Marie qui sont des amies, ou bien plus éloignées de lui, comme cette femme inconnue de Samarie. L'atmosphère où se fera la rencontre pourra se colorer, elle aussi, de toutes les tonalités de la vie: le quotidien, quand l'eau est à puiser pour remplir sa cruche; la joie des noces; ou la douleur de la mort d'un frère. C'est dans le cadre des événements que la rencontre avec Jésus sera capitale pour chacune d'elles.

Nous mettrons à part la figure de Marie, une femme, certes, mais particulière dans sa mission, pour nous consacrer davantage à ses compagnes. Car Marie est la figure du disciple par excellence; en effet, à l'heure de Jésus, elle sera appelée “mère”, et non pas mère de Jésus, mais mère des disciples:

*“Jésus dit à sa mère: Femme, voici ton fils. Il dit ensuite au disciple: voici ta mère” (Jn 19, 26).*

Sans doute, dès avant l'heure de Jésus, à Cana, Marie sut se situer face à son fils, comme disciple, dans la foi:

*“Sa mère dit aux serviteurs: quoi qu'il vous dise, faites-le” (Jn 2, 5).*

Cette réponse de Marie est l'écho d'une autre parole, de cet épisode où Pharaon, roi d'Égypte, demandera aux Égyptiens d'obéir en tout à Joseph, parce que l'esprit de Dieu est en lui (Gn 41, 37-55; en

particulier: "Allez à Joseph et faites ce qu'il vous dira" (Gn 41, 55).

Le signe qui en résultera à Cana produira un accroissement de foi, il aidera les disciples à croire:

*"Tel fut, à Cana de Galilée, le commencement des signes de Jésus. Il manifesta sa gloire et ses disciples crurent en lui"* (Jn 2, 12).

Après Marie, la première femme rencontrée est l'inconnue de Samarie.

### Au bord d'un puits

Au bord d'un puits, une femme vient puiser de l'eau. Rien de plus banal, mais le puits bibliquement nous indique qu'il peut être question de sagesse et aussi de mariage, d'alliance. De fait, au cours de la discussion, il sera bien question de vrai et de faux mari. Un long échange a lieu entre Jésus et cette femme, jusqu'à ce qu'il lui révèle qui il est, au cœur de son attente:

*"Je sais qu'un Messie doit venir celui qu'on appelle Christ. Lorsqu'il viendra, il vous annoncera toutes choses. Jésus lui dit: je le suis, moi qui te parle"* (Jn 4, 26).

Cette parole de Jésus est décisive pour elle, et, dans sa foi encore balbutiante, elle va devenir authentiquement missionnaire. Sa foi demeure en elle comme une question: *"Ne serait-il pas le Christ?"*; mais, pour l'annoncer, elle n'hésite pas à quitter son occupation présente, à laisser sa cruche:

*"La femme alors abandonna sa cruche s'en fut à la ville et dit aux gens: Venez donc voir un homme qui m'a dit tout ce que j'ai fait. Ne serait-il pas le Christ?"* (Jn 4, 28-29).

Laisser sa cruche, ou laisser ses filets, comme les disciples homme, c'est se placer dans une dynamique analogue. Elle devient témoin du Christ et son témoignage est vrai, dans la mesure où l'on y vérifie une loi de la mission: le témoin parle pour conduire au Christ, à une rencontre personnelle avec lui, et s'efface devant lui. Or, les gens de son village confirment que leur parcours a bien été celui-là:

*"Ce n'est plus seulement à cause de tes dires que nous croyons; nous l'avons entendu nous-mêmes et nous savons qu'il est vraiment le sauveur du monde"* (Jn 4, 42).

Elle est ainsi disciple, et conduit au Christ.

### Deux sœurs: Marthe et Marie

Marthe et Marie sont des amies de Jésus, et leur frère Lazare est malade. Ces deux sœurs vont se trouver confrontées à un obstacle majeur pour la foi: comment témoigner de la vie? Comment avoir foi en la résurrection face à la mort? La question va d'ailleurs

se redoubler: comment croire face à la mort d'un frère? Comment croire face à la mort du Messie? Nous sommes ici en un lieu particulièrement sensible pour la foi. Et cela d'autant plus que l'enjeu de la situation, la mort de Lazare, du point de vue de Jésus, est un enjeu de foi: afin que l'on croie qu'il est l'envoyé du Père. C'est pourquoi Jésus peut se réjouir de cet instant, car il ne se réjouit ni de la mort de son ami ni de la douleur des proches. A l'inverse, il est troublé, et il pleure:

*"Lorsqu'il les vit se lamenter, elle et les Juifs qui l'accompagnaient, Jésus frémit intérieurement et il se troubla. Il dit: où l'avez-vous déposé? Ils répondirent: Seigneur, viens voir. Alors Jésus pleura..."* (Jn 11, 3-36).

Devant ce scandale de la mort, Jésus parle avec Marthe. Elle a foi en lui, mais croit-elle jusque-là? Le peut-elle?

*"Je suis la Résurrection et la Vie: celui qui croit en moi, même s'il meurt, vivra [...] Crois-tu cela?"* (Jn 11, 25-26).

Marthe lui répond par la foi: il est le Messie, le fils de Dieu:

*"Je crois que tu es le Christ le fils de Dieu, celui qui vient dans le monde"* (Jn 11, 27).

Sa confession de foi exprime une plénitude de la révélation, ce n'est plus simplement une question comme la femme de Samarie. Sa parole, quant au contenu, est fort proche de celle de Pierre, répondant lui aussi à une question de Jésus:

*"Tu es le Christ. Le Fils du Dieu vivant [...]"* (Mt 16, 16).

Et elle est sans doute d'égale importance.

Alors a lieu le signe, le dernier signe de Jésus, le retour à la vie de Lazare, et ce signe, appuyé par la foi d'une femme, permettra à beaucoup de croire:

*"Beaucoup de ces Juifs qui étaient venus auprès de Marie et qui avaient vu ce que Jésus avait fait, crurent en lui"* (Jn 11, 45).

Marthe est ainsi missionnaire, en raison de la profondeur de sa foi; sa sœur Marie semble moins présente et pourtant elle aura un geste singulier, dont il faudra garder mémoire.

### Laver les pieds du Maître

Marie, à l'approche de la passion, va avoir un geste à la fois si audacieux et si étonnant, qu'il servira à la caractériser: elle sera celle *"qui avait oint le Seigneur d'une huile parfumée et lui avait essuyé les pieds avec ses cheveux"* (Jn 11,2). Marie va donner à Jésus une onction, répandant le parfum sur ses pieds et les essuyant, son geste est à la fois un geste d'amour et un geste annonçant la mort prochaine de Jésus. Un des disciples homme présent va contester ce geste, mais

Jésus l'approuvera, elle parfume son corps en vue de l'ensevelissement:

*“Laisse-la ! Elle observe cet usage en vue de mon ensevelissement. Des pauvres, vous en aurez toujours avec vous; mais moi, vous ne m'aurez pas toujours”* (Jn 12. 7-8).

Or ce geste qu'accomplit Marie est le geste même du disciple, celui que Jésus fera et qu'il laissera en mémorial à ses disciples, les invitant à faire de même:

*“Si je vous ai lavé les pieds, moi le Seigneur et le Maître, vous devez, vous aussi, vous laver les pieds les uns aux autres”* (Jn 13. 14).

On témoigne du Christ non seulement par la parole, mais par les actes. Marie témoigne par son geste, un geste de disciple, le geste auquel on peut reconnaître les disciples.

### Au pied de la croix

Parmi les femmes présentes à l'heure de Jésus, Marie de Magdala sera un témoin privilégié, elle en suivra toutes les étapes, de la Croix au tombeau vide, jusqu'à la rencontre avec le Ressuscité.

Au pied de la Croix, Marie de Magdala est là en compagnie d'autres femmes, dont Marie, mère de Jésus. Comment ces femmes regardent-elles la Croix? Ce qui se déroule en ce lieu accomplit différentes paroles de l'Écriture, dont une prophétie portant sur le regard précisément, celle du prophète Zacharie:

*“Ils verront celui qu'ils ont transpercé”* (Jn 19, 37).

Or, selon ce passage, recarder le transpercé, pleurer sur lui, se fait dans l'esprit:

*“Et je répandrai sur la maison de David et sur l'habitant de Jérusalem un esprit de bonne volonté et de supplication. Alors ils regarderont vers moi, celui qu'ils ont transpercé. Ils célébreront le deuil pour lui, comme pour le fils unique”* (Za 12,10).

Et cela est contemporain de l'ouverture d'une source:

*“En ce jour-là une source jaillira pour la maison de David et les habitants de Jérusalem, en remède au péché et à la souillure”* (Za 13, 1).

Peut-être petit-on prêter au petit groupe présent en cette heure redoutable, et à ces femmes, un regard de foi de cette profondeur.

### Le matin de Pâques

Puis, après le silence du sabbat, le premier jour de la semaine, Marie de Magdala prend l'initiative de se rendre de nuit au tombeau:

*“Le premier jour de la semaine, à l'aube, alors qu'il faisait encore sombre, Marie de Magdala se*

*rend au tombeau et voit que la pierre a été enlevée du tombeau”* (Jn 20, 1).

Découvrant le tombeau ouvert, elle en avertit Pierre et le disciple bien-aimé. Et elle demeure seule en larmes, près du tombeau, image sans doute de la bien-Aimée du Cantique des Cantiques:

*“Il faut que je me lève et que je fasse le tour de la ville, dans les rues et les places, que je cherche celui que j'aime”* (Ct 3, 2).

Jésus lui-même vient vers elle et il l'interroge, tout comme les disciples au début de l'Évangile, sur son désir, sur ce qu'elle cherche:

*“Que cherchez-vous?”* (Jn 1, 38).

*“Femme, pourquoi pleures-tu? Qui cherches-tu?”* (Jn 20, 15).

Et elle le reconnaît, quand il l'appelle par son nom, au son de sa voix. Elle affirme alors qu'il est le maître, l'enseignant, son maître “Rabbouni”.

Un message lui est confié, celui d'annoncer qu'il est vivant et que de lui est née la communauté des disciples de la Nouvelle Alliance, ses frères et ses sœurs:

*“Pour toi, va trouver mes frères et dis-leur que je monte vers mon Père qui est votre Père, vers mon Dieu, qui est votre Dieu”* (Jn 20, 17).

Ce qu'elle fait aussitôt:

*“Marie de Magdala vint donc annoncer aux disciples: J'ai vu le Seigneur et voici ce qu'il m'a dit”* (Jn 20, 18).

Marie de Magdala est la première à témoigner de la Résurrection et de ses effets sur la communauté nouvelle.

Comment conclure ? Peut-être en refusant de nous étonner qu'il en soit ainsi, que Jésus parle avec des femmes et leur confie sa parole. C'était, selon l'évangéliste Jean, une difficulté pour les disciples hommes accompagnant Jésus:

*“Ils s'étonnaient que Jésus parle avec une femme, cependant personne ne lui dit: Que cherches-tu? ou pourquoi lui parles-tu?”* (Jn 4, 27).

Or, Jésus les invite, et nous invite aujourd'hui, à regarder avec grande attention la moisson qui lève. Là est l'essentiel, et sans oublier que nous y œuvrons à plusieurs:

*“Car en ceci le proverbe dit vrai: l'un sème, l'autre moissonne”* (Jn 4, 37).

Solange Navarro, Xavière, enseigne l'Écriture Sainte au Centre Sèvres, Paris.

Ref.: *Mission d'Eglise*, Janvier, n. 118.

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## COMING EVENTS

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### SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 1998

Tuesday, 19 May (17:00h) - Saturday, 23 May (13:00h)  
Casa Divin Maestro, Ariccia

#### PROCLAMATION AND DIALOGUE IN MISSION TODAY

**Msgr. Michael Fitzgerald, Mafr. (Rome)**  
(Pontif. Council for Interreligious Dialogue)

**Sr Lucie Nzenzili Mboma, FMM (Zaire, USA)**  
(Ex-Provincial of Zaire, Lecturer in USA)

**Br Edmund Chia, FSC (Malaysia)**  
(Secr. General of Department of Dialogue of FABC)

#### WORKING GROUPS

<b>Thursday, 28 May</b>	World Debt	15:30 hrs at <b>SEDOS</b>
<b>Friday, 29 May</b>	Conflict Resolution	15:30 hrs at <b>SEDOS</b>