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## EDITORIAL

*In the first article of our October issue, Ms MUSIMBI KANYORO, an African Lutheran theologian and General Secretary of the World YWCA in Geneva, reflects from a woman's point of view on mission in Africa today and on the very special role women should assume in this mission. —*

*Our second contribution describes the theological strength of the Church in Asia. Several well known ASIAN THEOLOGICALS have written a very helpful 'Vademecum' on the Pastoral and Theological Orientations of the FABC. Although this important document may be familiar to our readers in Asia, we would like to make it available to missionary readers in other continents. —*

*The recent visit of Pope John Paul II to Cuba has once again focused Catholic and public interest on the difficult religious, economic and political situation on this island. ALBERT LONGCHAMP, SJ, reflects on the consequences of the Papal Visit for the present and for the future of the Church and of the country. —*

*Interreligious dialogue in Europe does not remain a question of intellectual reflection and writings, it has become for many an everyday life reality: in European schools, work places and religious expressions. Msgr. MICHAEL FITZGERALD, MAfr. discovers in this new reality many hopeful perspectives for a new Christian-Muslim dialogue in Europe. —*

*Missionaries in the field and in their Generalates are confronted more and more with extreme violence in their local missions. Fr ÉTIENNE RENAUD, MAfr., a previous Superior General of his Congregation and now director of PISAI in Rome, reflects, in a lecture given to friends of their institute, on the different reasons that motivate missionaries to continue their witness in dangerous situations.*

## NEW GENERALS

Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
IBVM

**Sr Mary WRIGHT**

Oblates of Mary Immaculate, OMI

**Fr Wilhelm STECKLING**

•••••

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## THINKING MISSION IN AFRICA

**Musimbi Kanyoro**

*General secretary of the World YWCA in Geneva, having previously served as executive secretary for Women in Church and Society at the Lutheran World Federation.*

### Challenged to be in Mission

I often think that we in Africa have misunderstood our call to mission. The word mission itself raises certain ambiguities in our understanding. Mention mission and missionaries and you think of all the foreign brothers and sisters who live in our villages working in hospitals, translating our Bibles and teaching women hygiene and sewing. They bring themselves and the money that runs our churches. We therefore often understand mission as *receiving* something rather than as *giving*. We also often think mission is only possible when it involves movement to other places, and witness to people other than one's own. Thus mission among ourselves and for ourselves is not an issue that keeps us awake with concern.

It is not only Africans who interpret mission in this manner. Our Christian sisters and brothers who qualify as missionaries in our lands believe it even more than we do ourselves. I am reminded with some concern of an incident that happened to us in Nairobi only recently. My family arrived in Nairobi from Geneva and we went to a place that has apartments owned by a church in Kenya. We asked if there was room for us to stay there, but we were turned away — not because there was no room but because the apartments were reserved for missionaries — meaning for White people from Europe and America! Even though we saw ourselves as missionaries in our service abroad, at home we could not qualify. We as the People of God empowered by the Holy Spirit must get back to the Scriptures and indeed strive to reclaim our rights and responsibilities as missionaries of God's work. We must indeed ask “where is our Jerusalem where we must start our mission work before going to the ends of the world?”

### Biblical Mission Mandate

In my adult life as a practising Christian and theologian, the re-reading of the Bible for myself has completely changed my understanding about mission. The apostolic mandate for mission found in the Gospel of Matthew (28:18-20) challenges all Christians to share

the good news of Jesus with others both in their own “homes” and beyond their geographical boundaries.

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles tells the beginning of that mission story. The scene is set with the ascension of Jesus, and the beginning of the new era of the *ecclesia*. In Acts, *ecclesia* refers to a community of God's people, men and women living with concrete hopes, undeniable anxieties, and most of all, a willingness to be changed by God, and to bring change to their community. In Acts, people share their learning, their belongings, their personal experiences of the good news. Their very actions define mission as the sharing of the good news both in proclamation of God's word as well as in material welfare. This has no limitation. Indeed every believer is obliged to share.

*I, too, and all Africans too, have been mandated with this call to be missionaries, beginning in Jerusalem. Our localities in Africa are our Jerusalem; they are our home base where our mission work must begin.*

Hardly any other book gives such vivid descriptions of this movement by relating the numerous “travels” and the continual changes of the people and places which come in contact with this movement. This movement was to “begin in Jerusalem and to continue to the ends of the earth”. This indication and specification of place is not only used because the story began there. Jerusalem was the city that was indispensable to the nation of the Jewish people. The beginning of Acts brings us right to the centre of Judaism and as such to the centre of all that was religion. Thus mission is centred where there is the greatest need and the greatest challenge.

*Africa, my continent, is a place of mission. We have many needs and challenges.*

But equally important is the fact that by the time Acts was written, this centre no longer existed. It had been obliterated by the Roman legions. That means that Judaism had no centre, either geographically or

spiritually or politically. It is for this reason that the people ask whether the kingdom of Israel will be restored. This movement was to begin here — where people needed their hope restored, but it had to spread to other parts. In spreading, a challenge was being put directly to the Roman Empire, and as we know, the movement spread beyond what was considered as the Roman Empire.

*Africa, my continent, is a place of mission. Many of our people need their hope restored.*

But Luke hastens to show that the spread of this movement was made possible by the activity of the Holy Spirit. The centrality of the Holy Spirit in the line of the early Christian church is shown by the fact that believers were even instructed *not* to begin the task of witness alone:

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift I told you about; the gift Father promised” (Acts 1:4 GNB).

The Holy Spirit is given freely as a gift to enable the disciples to enter into a new life of intimacy and obedience to God. Obedience in Acts begins with the helpless waiting. Helpless in the sense that the disciples were being told that on their own, they had no power. They need to be empowered for whatever service or call that God would send them to do. The disciples were also being told that they did not have to perform any particular duties, nor did they need to win the Holy Spirit. Rather their task was to wait in trust and hope. This is the hope which we Christians continue to carry every Easter as we proclaim “Christ is risen — He is risen indeed!”

This waiting was a command to all the followers who had believed. The command is given to the Apostles, to the men of Galilee, to some women, to Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers and finally, to one hundred and twenty other persons. Yet all are addressed with the same words and given the same promise without any reference to status or any other distinctions we could imagine. Every one of them was commanded by the risen Saviour to wait for this gift from God the Father!

The waiting for the Holy Spirit is not an event without aim or purpose. It is an event which invokes patience, hope and trust. Waiting is the making of space and time for God. It is the prayer time, the self-examination and the willingness to turn away from that which obstructs the work of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is the heart of spirituality. Each one of us who

is serious about wanting to experience the Holy Spirit’s action in our life simply must find ways to make space and time for God by waiting in prayer. There are no specifications for prayer. There are no set patterns, no perfect time nor ideal place.

*Africa, my continent, has learned to wait and to pray and to believe. That is why the Church is growing on this continent with so many ambiguities.*

The Book of Acts tells us that waiting culminates in the receiving of the Holy Spirit:

“When the Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit is a new beginning of an old prophecy. The prophet Joel had long foretold this event (Jl 3:1,2). It is however a new beginning in God’s saving activity in human history because, through this event, Pentecost ceases to be only a Jewish celebration and becomes a realization that God’s salvation extends far beyond the chosen people of Israel. Clearly there is scriptural emphasis for inclusivity in God’s mission. *All* were to wait for the Holy Spirit, (Acts 1:4); *all* had to be witnesses (Acts 1:8); *all* were filled with the Holy Spirit, (Acts 2:4). This emphasis on *all* in the Book of Acts is rather too conspicuous to simply let it pass without significance. The author must have wanted to communicate a message. This affirmation is recorded in the Scriptures:

“And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21).

The drama of the Pentecost event becomes even more interesting when we see it in its totality. The Apostles and the disciples were gathered in prayer (Acts 1:12-14), and suddenly those present heard the sound of a mighty wind rush upon them. This sound filled the whole house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2). They saw tongues of fire distributed and resting on each one of them. They all acted — by speaking words of prophecy in many languages. Each one heard the other as if he or she were speaking the same language.

Why have I used the Book of Acts so extensively to divert from the focus on Africa? If I was preparing a presentation for the United Nations, my reference to the Bible would be only minimal or altogether absent. I believe that as Churches we must revert back to the Scriptures for the authority of what we do and say. In

our times, illiteracy in the Scriptures is a trend that we can only change by reverting back to the reading of the Bible. Without identifying the source of what we do as Christians, we render ourselves to becoming simply a social organization. I believe that when we do mission — whether it includes proclamation, advocacy or *diakonia* — we do so because our faith through our commitment to the Gospel commands us to do so.

The Book of Acts presents to me many points of connection for speaking to the challenges facing us as Africans on our continent. Think of the passage on Pentecost and think of my continent Africa — and indeed many other parts of the world — where plurality of languages translates into difficulties of communication across boundaries, ethnic conflicts, illiteracy, and all sorts of other barriers. I wish Pentecost would literally come to us. I mean the language aspect so that we could at least hear and understand one another. I think of the many wise people who, due to language barriers, are unable to share their testimonies beyond their borders. I think of how these language barriers have become causes of other tensions leading to ethnic imprisonment or so-called tribalism or nationalism. I think of how English, French or Portuguese determine success on my continent. I thirst and long for the oneness of the Pentecost event — when I see how fragmented our continent is due to linguistic and cultural differences.

But I am aware too of the fact that the point of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not just that people who spoke different languages could then understand each other. The real point of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to make the connection, the bridge, between Jesus and the believers, and to remove the barriers that separated the believers in terms of age, gender and class. The outpouring of the Spirit is a very conspicuous event — with visible and physical signs, recognized by all — Apostles, menservants, maidservants, the youth, the old, the Jews and the Gentiles. What other affirmation would be needed as evidence that, in the new order, all have value in God's eyes? And so we come, perhaps, to the crux of the matter. What does it mean for us African Christians that we see ourselves as empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses for Jesus? What tasks is the Spirit calling us to heed in regard to our continent and its many challenges? To what is the Holy Spirit calling us, as individual men and women, young and old, poor and rich, or as faith communities, or as members of civil society at large? What is our witness in Africa and to the uttermost ends of the earth?

## African Challenges in Mission

On our continent every minute spells death. We are perpetually put down by malaria; our children die merely from dehydration. Today we have the extra burden of the deadly HIV/AIDS virus. Wars of various types are at our doorsteps. The economic situations of our countries do not provide for even the essential basic needs for the majority of their populations. Every younger generation only continues to inherit a bigger national debt, while the accumulation of national wealth by a few knows no bounds. Frequently our eyes are clouded with tears as we experience sorrow after sorrow. In the village where I grew up, I remember vividly the sound of the drum announcing death — and we always had to run quickly and ask, who is it today? In this context, every day is clouded with the question: “What does the Holy Spirit give us, Christians in Africa, the power and the ability to do in our setting and time?”

## Facing our Mission Challenges

Perhaps when we look at our troubled Africa, imprisoned by wars, debt, famine, corruption, political irresponsibilities, held to ransom by disease and poverty, blinded by elitism, tribalism, materialism, illiteracy — the list has no end — we almost see no beginning or end to what our mission could be. Therefore, we wonder within ourselves how individual Christians and the Churches in Africa can or should witness to the risen Jesus within this set-up in which so much effort is needed just to alleviate human suffering and to improve community life? How can we, as a Church, be involved in programmes which provide not only for the witness of the Gospel by word, but also by deed? Is it part of our mission as the Church in Africa to respond to the socio-economic needs of our communities, or to the human rights which are violated every day? Is our task mainly to preach the Gospel in word? Specific incidents have taken place in the recent past in Somalia, Liberia, the Great Lakes, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and many other countries. The Liberian and Somalian and Rwanda-Burundi civil wars in particular left us tongue-tied and helpless at the atrocities inflicted upon human life. While celebrating the independence of South Africa from the structures of *apartheid*, we cannot stop hoping and wishing for some good to come out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that is still going on. We on the continent of Africa must reflect on the question of accountability for our actions, both past and present, otherwise we are not going to be able to leave any heritage for the future of our continent. One of our most urgent tasks is to remem-

ber the future. Do we care enough for our continent now so as to lay the foundations for the future?

To this question many of us will say that we are already involved in many good deeds. The Churches have established community centres along with kindergartens, schools and hospitals. Eager to live in obedience to Christ, we as Churches have continually thrown ourselves into activities of loving service to others. We have gathered in the street children, fed the hungry, visited the lonely, given refuge to victims of war and other displaced people, we have tended the sick and dying. Our hearts ache for children orphaned by war, and those touched by HIV/AIDS and other calamities. We have been busy binding wounds but have not stopped the war. We have prepared bodies for burial, but have not stopped the killing. But I dare ask, is our involvement a sufficient and efficient way to carry out our mission? Do these efforts witness effectively to our being missionaries on our continent?

We should see these challenges as presenting exciting rather than depressing moments in our journey of faith. In the early Church, the more the persecution and the conflict grew, the more the disciples made it a priority to proclaim the Good News about Jesus. In the Book of Acts, Luke paints a picture of rapid evangelistic growth: three thousand persons were converted (Acts 2:41); then another five thousand (Acts 4:4), and so on. Converted disciples included religious leaders whom Luke describes as “a great many priests” (Acts 6:7).

The disciples also testified before kings and governors even as Jesus had foretold (Lk 12:11, 12). Peter proclaimed the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ to the rulers, elders and scribes gathered in Jerusalem. Paul testified before Festus (Acts 25:1-12) and also before King Agrippa (Acts 26).

We know that Stephen was stoned to death and that this event marked a decisive escalation of tension, conflict and persecution for the Church (Acts 8:1-3). But it also opened new evangelistic outreach within the Church which spread to Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1-8), which included Africa through the testimonies of a man from Ethiopia described as a eunuch (Acts 8: 26-40). These episodes in Acts are familiar to us. They are being re-enacted on our continent today.

I want to suggest that it does not matter how much material wealth the Church has and how much it devotes to our communities; we will not save Africa by

providing bandages for the wounds and bruises that our communities continue to receive. Our children will continue to die due to lack of sufficient medical help, while the resources of our countries are directed to military services and the benefit of the privileged few. Therefore, we bring no good news to the poor of our societies. Illiteracy will continue to haunt us. We need to re-read our Scriptures with new eyes and see that God is calling us and empowering us to do the more difficult tasks of our mission — that is, to speak out for the truth. We must rethink our mission tasks as Africans in Africa.

This means taking the risk and daring to be a conscience and stimulus for change in our own societies. Speaking up on issues that diminish life has been the most difficult part of our self-understanding as individuals and as Churches. Speaking out is a prophetic task, involving some very serious risks. For our situation where democracy is thought to be a luxury, speaking up involves first and foremost risking the wrath of the powerful. This is the horrendous situation of Africa today.

Secondly, there is the risk of facing the different opinions which bear on the understanding of the witness of the Church. We must come to accept that even within the Church, opinions will differ. Speaking up calls for credibility. If the Christian community in Africa has to be credible in its witness, we must approach the complex situations before us with expertise. The Churches have to open up more possibilities for the believers to listen to the many points of view and exercise discipline to acquire understanding of the complex forces at work in modern society.

Like the believers of the Book of Acts, we too are called to discuss with our governments and communities. We must call upon our respective Governments to use the resources we have and which we borrow to meet the needs of the people. We must show also by our lives that the Churches’ resources are used to heal society. We as a community of empowered believers must be able to risk our own security by being sincere and open about getting to the roots of what is wrong in our society and how the wrong should be put right. Our witness to Jesus does not depend only on how we preach the Gospel, but how we live the Gospel. Yes, they will know we are Christians by our love — our love for truth, fairness and justice. Most important, as individuals we must be credible. With regard to this last issue I have so much concern.

The Acts of the Apostles give us more than an account of the beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ.

It is also the story of God's faithfulness in times of opposition, persecution and trial. God, who took the initiative to send Jesus Christ to become an agent of blessing to the world, secures and preserves that blessing by protecting and delivering those who become witnesses to this Good News. But, even as it was in the early Church, even those who trust in God go through periods of temptation, failure, struggle, weakness and conflict.

Such is the case for the Christian Church in Africa today. The Church in Africa is experiencing opposition and conflict within itself in regard to other faiths, especially Islam, and in regard to new issues of our times. Today in Africa, ethical issues regarding what is moral or immoral in matters of sexuality, cultural traditions and practices, power and leadership are all out of the closet. We used to claim that our communitarian cultures helped us to be custodians of each other's morality. This claim is *passé*. We also know that the Church is facing conflict with regard to the dichotomy between the authority and responsibility of Church and State. Should the Church speak out its views on political and economic reforms being requested by the masses of African countries? Opinions are divided. Some feel the Church has no business in State matters. Others feel the Church is the conscience of society and must speak on every subject that affects God's creation — people, the land and all that was created.

Thus we have internal conflicts even within ourselves as the Church of Jesus Christ. We are struggling not only in the area of political stand, but also in other areas. We are struggling on issues of identity: should we be the Church of Africa or be an African Church? Are we Christians in Africa or African Christians? Should we, or can we retrieve some of our authentic spirituality?

For me, those who have dared to speak out despite all the risks involved are the missionaries that we need today. I think of various individual clergy from both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches in Zaire, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and so on. I think of the councils of churches on the continent. I think of others who have risked prison and detention in order to present the voices of the weak and the dying. For me, these people model what mission should be. They model mission which addresses our needs in our Jerusalem. They are our missionaries, our bearers of the Good News. I think of women. Women of Africa who are saying *No* to being relegated to the back, women who are saying *No* to cultural practices which dehumanize them and prevent

them from having life in abundance. Women are the prophets of Africa.

### **Mission to Women**

One of the urgent issues that must receive attention is the status of women in African societies. African women continue to be the foundation of hope in Church and society as they uphold the hope for tomorrow through the care-taking responsibilities. Within our present set-up, African women have more to offer than they are given opportunities for today. I can boldly say that women of Africa are the missionaries to our ailing society. Yet this is one area where the body of Christ is hurting. Women of Africa celebrate their experiences and affirm the gifting through service and reading of the Scriptures. They hear life-giving words about Baptism, Pentecost, being created in the image of God, the priesthood of all believers. Yet, they find a gap between these words and the practice of the Church! The same leaders who have wonderfully heeded the prophetic call in addressing other issues are often unprepared to take a risk on issues concerning women. Many marches have been performed for political issues, but one fails to hear of similar fire burning for the crimes committed against the women of Africa. How long must we wait? The rape cases in the war of the Great Lakes have hardly received any attention either locally or internationally. The daily death of women at child birth has not made our governments change their health policies to give priority to maternal health care. The frequent threats and death from female circumcision have not made the Church gather up all its strength to teach something new about culture and human dignity. African women are silenced daily by health issues, cultural prescriptions, illiteracy and endless chores that make us old before our time.

Women may have constitutional rights which are often overlooked or remain unknown when appointments or nominations are made, and hence their talents are unused except as typists or telephone operators. Therefore, improving the status of women is the *key* to development in Africa: it is crucial for improving health status, slower population growth and for economic and social progress. Investing in women leads to more rewarding lives for themselves, their families, communities and countries. Increasing the involvement of women at decision-making level remains crucial to long-term success in improving the status of women. This is dependent upon the availability of women with knowledge and skills required for these roles. A mission to women must ensure that they are equipped with better education, literacy skills

and health facilities, and that they are given a voice in making decisions in our Churches and societies.

### **ACTIONS ADVOCATED BY AFRICAN WOMEN ACTIVISTS**

Advocacy to reduce discrimination;

Capacity building; education and training opportunities; increased capacity of women to cope with situations that threaten their lives and survival;

Transform unequal relations in the family, community, work-place, church; address the problem of power relations that hamper equitable development and women's participation;

Improve women's access to support systems and resources;

Target women's programmes sharply, based on available information, and using the community based approach, i.e. facilitate the empowerment of the women;

Regularly evaluate and monitor the programmes and adjust them as necessary;

Try new approaches to enhance people-centred development;

Info-networking; develop an information exchange network to enhance learning from each other's experiences;

Make training opportunities available.

### **Women doing Mission**

So what about this litany of the sorry state of African women? Are the women of Africa just sitting there waiting for a handout? Far from being helpless victims of hunger, disease and exploitation, as we are often portrayed, the women of Africa are a major resource in search of ways out of the circumstances in which we are trapped.

Women are key actors in the economic system, often inventing various ways of working as small business entrepreneurs. Women control the non-monetary economy (subsistence agriculture, bearing and rearing of children, domestic labour);

African women control the informal sector cash economy (informal trade and wage employment);

80 per cent of economically active women are involved in agriculture, being 60 per cent of the informal sector producers, and producing over 80 per cent of food in Africa;

Women are the main health-care givers — in the home, the community and even at the health facilities. Africans take the brunt of the impact of disease and death, physically and emotionally, and yet we are neither adequately recognized nor rewarded.

### **Speaking for Ourselves!**

To cope with the tensions and strains emanating from our subordinate positions and to help execute our many roles, African women have over the years developed various networks to meet our many needs. Women have organized themselves into diverse groups and movements. Through these movements, they struggle collectively to combat poverty, low social status, social alienation, backbreaking chores and other socio-economic and political vagaries. These movements share the common objective of improving the condition of women in society. The movements also vary in the strategies adopted. In some, efforts are made not only to conscientize their members but society at large. Currently there are many different activists movements which reflect the present consciousness of African women in accordance with the times in which we are living. Women in these movements are concerned about education, health care, adequate shelter, security, theology and the quest for justice.

“Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the fruit of righteousness will be peace and the result of righteousness, undisturbed security for ever” (Is 32:16-17).

The key words in this prophetic vision for a new world order are righteousness, justice, peace and undisturbed security. A just society depends on just people. A just society is one where men and women are equally united in their struggle and in their reward (loss or gain; success or failure); a society of true partnership among men and women, characterized by righteousness, justice, peace and undisturbed security. A just society is one in which men and women struggle equally and benefit equally. Gender roles are neither unchangeable nor divine. They must change over time as contexts change over time. This will enhance women's participation not only in social and political development, it would also enhance and contribute to efficiency in utilization of resources and

effectiveness of programmes.

### Women in the Church in Africa

The notion of women as partners with men in the Church still frightens some among our communities. I remember a meeting I had with clergymen in Soweto, South Africa, in February 1993. These brothers had no problem with using the term “partnership” in referring to the marriage relationship, but they found the terminology quite unacceptable in addressing the relationship of women and men in the church. Many women in Africa testify to the Churches’ fear, suspicion of “women’s sexuality”. Sexuality is given as an excuse for denying ordination to women. Not only are women’s bodies seen as symbols of sexuality, but also, and because of that, women are seen to be unacceptable for church leadership. It is interesting to me that African society, which is very hospitable to new life, has not provided a theology which affirms the woman through whom new life finds a possibility for growth.

In listening to many experiences of church women in Africa, I feel that our cry for partnership in the Church is loud and clear. When we are denied partnership, we are denied the opportunity to bring our gifts to the altar to offer to God. Our talents often remain unused for Church growth. As women theologians, we may teach in scholastic institutions or work with secular and para-church organizations, but we are often not called upon to be co-ministers in shaping the Theology and Mission of the Church. When we ask for partnership, we get paternalism.

The church leaders from our communities continually heap praises upon us with words such as “women are the backbone of the Church”. Our paternalistic leaders desire to shield us from growing up. They encourage us to continue organizing our own parallel forums, but they do not listen to the issues that we are concerned about. They encourage us to be virtuous and to serve as volunteers for the church and to accept and support the *status quo*! They encourage us to remain children in our understanding of ourselves and our call to participate in God’s mission. They do not listen to our chorus of pain and contradictions. They do not hear the harmony of our lamentation. Our song asks our Churches to empower us, and to nurture us towards maturity and finally to welcome us as partners in God’s mission and ministry. Partnership is rooted in the shared resources of the community. The ministry of the Church in Africa today requires new, more collaborative strength. It is time that our male leaders let go of the heroic image

of owning the Church. God does not assign talents according to sex but according to divine will. To ignore this and continue business as usual at a time of crisis is to be bad stewards of God’s resources.

Today, the African women in the church can no longer wait for things to take their natural course. The models of women in the Bible teach us that change comes when the personal is made political and when the political is made personal. How else could you read the story of a woman with a haemorrhage who breaks all the taboo and hierarchy lines to touch the hem of Jesus’ clothes in order to be healed? If we African women continue to separate our private lives from our public ones, we will continue to experience both cultural and domestic violence against our bodies. So today, we read the Bible and then we say *No*, encouraged by women such as the one with the haemorrhage or the woman of Cana who insisted on the healing of her daughter at the expense of “feeding the household children first”. In the Bible, women who needed help show us they made a political and faith decision to act in a way in which they themselves caused help to come to them from a source beyond their immediate environment.

We, the Christians of Africa, are learning from the experiences of the Christian community recorded for us in the Book of Acts. The Christian community was empowered for discipleship amidst struggles and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. God through the Holy Spirit gives the Church power to stand and endure. The Church of God is made up of both men and women. God will definitely give the Church in Africa the power to stand firm. The Church in Africa has hope that through trusting and obedience, the promise given to us by the Holy Spirit is ours for the claiming.

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# WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES (Rv 2:7)

*A Vademecum on the Pastoral and Theological Orientations of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), prepared for the OTC by Fr Felix Wilfred, with the assistance of Fr M. Amaladoss, S.J., Fr S. Arokiasamy, S.J., Dr Georg Evers and Bro. A. Rogers. The Roman numbers in brackets refer to the various Plenary Assemblies of the FABC.*

This brief survey is an attempt to delineate the main pastoral and theological orientations of the FABC during the past 27 years of its existence. At the very outset, it is important to underscore the fact that in the thought of the FABC, the pastoral and the theological are intimately interlinked. The theological orientations have as their context the response of the Bishops to concrete pastoral situations and their exigencies. Only from this perspective can we gain a proper understanding of the reflections of the FABC. Further, the corpus of FABC thought has taken shape through a process of continuous listening and learning from the many voices in the continent, and by reading and interpreting the numerous signs of the times in Asia.

Obviously, the depth and richness of those reflections cannot be conveyed adequately in these few pages. This survey tries merely to highlight the basic convictions underlying the thought of the FABC as found in its copious documents relating to the life and mission of the Church in the FABC region. Every one of the thoughts presented here could be amplified with the help of many quotes from the rich reservoir of the FABC documents. However, for the sake of brevity and conciseness, this overview limits itself to a few selected passages. The reader may usefully consult the two volumes of the FABC documents published by Claretian Publications, Manila, and covering the entire period of 1970 - 1996.

This survey is structured into four parts:

- I. A New Way of Being Church in Asia
- II. The Challenge of Evangelisation
- III. Dialoguing with Sisters and Brothers of Other Faiths
- IV. Gospel-inspired Service to Life

Each one of these four parts is intimately connected with the others, and the spirit of one flows into the other. A proper perspective can be gained only by keeping all these four parts in their interconnectedness.

## I.

### A new way of being Church in Asia

Understandably, the predominant pastoral concern of the FABC has often led it to address ecclesiological themes and issues. Even when other questions are treated,

these have as their matrix a self-understanding of the Church and its role in the contemporary situation in the continent. In other words, a New Way of Being Church in Asia is the guiding principle to understand the overall orientation of the FABC. What that implies is spelt out in this section.

1. The self-understanding of the Church is one of being truly a *local* Church. It is "a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated" (I. 12). The mystery of Jesus' incarnation is the source and ultimate principle for understanding what it means to be a local Church. It is the Body of Christ realised and enfleshed in a particular people, time and space.

2. The becoming of the local Church is very much shaped by its relationship with the Asian world and the society around it. So too, the concrete mode of its evangelisation is moulded by the history, tradition and culture of the people of this ancient continent. All this indicates the central importance of the process of inculturation which itself needs to be understood in a dynamic way. As one of the theses of "Theses on the Local Church" by the Office of Theological Concerns (formerly known as Theological Advisory Commission) formulated it, "a local Church lives in an on-going historical process of inculturation, since the Church is a community of faith in growth and the culture itself continues to evolve and change. Today, a local Church realises itself by effectively responding to the challenges of new historical forces which give birth to the process of modernisation and which affect all areas and aspects of the life of a people" (no. 6). In other words and more basically, it is only by striking its roots deeply in the Asian soil that the Asian Church can become truly the bearer of mission for the Asian peoples.

3. In the concrete, the local Churches as communities of faith have to become *Asian in their way of thinking, living and sharing their own Christ-Experience with others*. The import of this statement can be assessed only in the light of the history of the past 500 years of mission in the different parts of the continent. Such an Asianness integrally includes the social concern of the Church for the peoples of Asia. It is called to bear witness to and share what it believes and lives, and receive what Asian religions and cultures have to offer.

4. To be truly a local and evangelising Church in Asia means that *dialogue should be the concrete mode of its existence*. The very First Plenary Assembly of the FABC spelt out this dialogic mode of its existence in three directions: dialogue with the cultures, with the religions and with the poor (see I, 12 - 24).

5. The Church is *discipleship of Jesus in Asia in service of life*; it is a sacrament of God's life to the peoples of Asia, of Jesus and the Kingdom of the God of Life. Its posture is an unambiguous and prophetic stand for life in its being, message, witness and action. To be Church is to share the life promised by Christ who came that "they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). In Asia, the Church is to be known and seen as serving, nurturing, protecting and enhancing life (see VI). This calls for the Church itself to become a *Church of the poor*. For, it is among them that the God-given gift of life is most threatened. "We commit ourselves ... to become a new way of being Church..., immersed in the life of the poor and struggling with them in accordance with the Go-spel, thus empowering the *anawim* of Asia to become active servant-leaders of the Kingdom of God" ("Colloquium on the Social Doctrine of the Church in the Context of Asia", no. 7).

6. As for the concrete life of the Church, the FABC sees it as a *communion of communities*. In fact, in its depth, the Church is a "communion (*koinonia*) rooted in the life of the Trinity, and thus in its essential reality a sacrament (*mysterium et sacrum*) of the loving self-communication of God and the graced response of redeemed mankind in faith, hope and love" (III. 7. 1.). This communion is lived in the Church as a "a communion of committed disciples — be they clergy or laity — working for the liberation of Asia" (IV, 4.1.3).

The Fifth Plenary Assembly spells out the meaning of a communion of communities within the Church, in the line of *small communities*. The laity, the Religious and the clergy are "called together by the word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small Christian communities (e.g. neighbourhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities and 'covenant' communities). There, they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are 'in one mind and heart'" (V, 8. 1. 1).

The Church becomes a *participatory communion* when all the faithful — clergy, religious and the laity — exercise their charisma for building up the community and to fulfil the vocation of the Gospel. To this end participatory structures need to be established and continuously activated.

The Church lives its communion not only in its own life but also in relation to *other communities* and collaborates with *other Churches* in evangelical witness and service of our people (see II. and III. below).

## II.

### The Challenge of Evangelisation

This second section is, in a way, the completion of what was said in the previous part. For we understand the Asian Church properly only when we view it against the background of the challenge of evangelisation. It is a new epoch in which the Asian Churches themselves have become the subjects and bearers of the Gospel — mission in their societies, which are fast changing and becoming ever more complex. Through the exercise of mission the Asian Church renews itself and becomes more conformed to the Gospel.

1. From its very beginning the FABC has viewed the mission of the Churches in Asia as evangelisation. This is described as *the proclamation of the Good News* of Jesus' redemptive love which is the answer to Asia's quest for meaning and life, freedom and fullness, communion and peace. "For Christ alone, we believe, is for every man 'the Way, the Truth and the Life,' (Jn 14:6) 'who enlightens every man who comes into the world'" (Jn 1:9) (I, 7).

2. *The way of mission is dialogue with the realities of Asia*. The aspects of this reality are named as the poor, the rich cultures and the great religions of Asia. The process of dialogue through which the local Churches are built up in Asia is the focus of evangelisation. The very First Plenary Assembly noted: "To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. The primary focus of our task of evangelisation then, at this time in our history, is the *building up of a truly local Church*" (I, 9). It is important to note how evangelisation is seen as historically situated and context-related, and not presented in the abstract. This historical concreteness is further spelt out in FABC V, when it states: "Mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a being with the people, as was Jesus. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14). Therefore, mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word" (V, 3.1.2).

3. The FABC strongly emphasises that *evangelisation is the task of the local Church*. This further corroborates the historical concreteness and context-relatedness of evangelisation. "The acting subject of mission is the *local Church*, living and acting in communion with the universal Church. It is the local Churches and communities which can discern and work out (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of good will), the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realised in their own place and time..." (V, 3.3. 1).

4. The Bishops have stated unambiguously that there

is a distinctive Asian mode of mission. While affirming the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the centre and primary element of evangelisation, and while committing themselves to explicit proclamation of Jesus as Saviour, the Bishops specify what this “distinctive” Asian mode is: “For Christians in Asia to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbours of other faiths and persuasions, and to do his deeds by the power of his grace. *Proclamation through dialogue and deeds* — this is the first call to the Churches in Asia” (V, 4. 1). Undeterred by our minority status, we must be ready for effective prophetic actions “that would help dismantle structures of sin oppressive of our peoples” (V, 4.5).

5. The goal of evangelisation is the Kingdom of God. “Our challenge is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in these Asian realities, in short, it is to work to make the Kingdom of God a reality.... Our challenge is to cooperate with all peoples of goodwill in God’s action in the world in the service of justice and peace” (V, 1.7).

6. The FABC has also reflected on the *motivations for mission*. “We evangelise from a deep sense of *gratitude to God*, the Father ‘who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing’ (Eph 1:3) ... But mission is also a mandate. We evangelise because we are sent into the whole world to make disciples of all nations” (V, 3.1-2). *Our faith in Jesus* urges us to be his witnesses. Our incorporation into the Church by baptism is also a call to mission. Finally, the Gospel is a leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society.

7. Evangelisation is carried on in the midst of many *challenges and hopes in Asia*. The Sixth Plenary Assembly speaks of the death-dealing forces: whatever diminishes life and devalues human beings; economic Globalisation and its victims; the refugees and the marginalised everywhere; the exploitation of women and children; forces of terrorism and war; fundamentalistic religious streams; the destruction of the environment. It affirms the life-giving forces: peoples’ movements, the empowerment of the poor, the growing desire for participative democracy, solidarity with the oppressed like women and children, the protection of the environment, the use of the media in support of values and peoples’ movements (see VI, 7 and 8).

8. Particularly relevant for Asia is the *contemplative dimension of evangelisation*. It originates from a deep experience of the person and message of Jesus and leads us to effective evangelisation. Prayer and contemplation will be the sustaining force of evangelisation. In Asia there is a crisis that faces all religions, namely secularisation and erosion of true spiritual values. FABC II proposes *prayer as an antidote* and shows how it can transform developmental and educational projects and the conduct of everyday life. It regrets that the Church is not

known in Asia as a community of prayer, and it suggests means for making it such. In this context FABC II refers to what the Asian spiritual heritage could offer: “a richly developed prayer of the whole person in unity of body-psyche-spirit; contemplation of deep interiority and immanence; venerable sacred books and writings; traditions of asceticism and renunciation; techniques of contemplation found in the ancient eastern religions; simplified prayer-forms and other popular expressions of faith and piety easily available even to simple folk, whose hearts and minds so readily turn to God in their daily lives” (II, 3. 2).

Part of this contemplative dimension in evangelisation is the praxis of self-emptying or *kenosis* on the part of the Church. “The Church was not sent to observe but to serve — to serve the Asian people in their quest for God and for a better human life; to serve Asia under the leading of the Spirit of Christ and in the manner of Christ himself who did not come to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for all (Mk 10:45) — and to discern, in dialogue with Asian peoples and Asian realities, what deeds the Lord wills to be done...” (V, 6.3).

9. If the Church is a community of faith, then its evangelisation should be seen in its witnessing. “It is called to give witness to the meanings and values it professes, incarnating these in the ways of life of its own people, expressing them in its presence, dialogue and praxis in all the spheres of its activity as Church in history, within its own real world. Finally, it constantly moves forward in mission, as it accompanies all humankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father” (III, 15).

10. The theme of FABC IV, “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia”, enabled the Bishops to evoke the Church’s mission in the many spheres in which the laity are active: politics, issues of women, the family, education, the media and the world of work. The laity share in the messianic mission of Jesus as priest, prophet and king. Greater communion, a spirit of collegiality and co-responsibility are called for to be able to accomplish the evangelising mission of the Asian Churches.

### III.

#### Dialogue with Sisters and Brothers of other faiths

Interreligious dialogue has been one of the chief concerns of the FABC, and it is a current theme in almost every common deliberation about the Church and its presence on the Asian continent. The repeated insistence that interreligious dialogue is part and parcel of the way of being Churches in Asia, derives from the concrete existential reality of the multi-religious societies amidst which we find ourselves. It is the same dialogue that has given rise to theological reflections on religions in Asia. The Asian theology of religions is therefore, not the result of some theological deductions, but the fruit of a concrete praxis of dialogue. And that makes a lot of difference. In

this sense, what the FABC has tried to express out of its experience could be, if listened to with openness, of some benefit to other Churches in the world, who also find themselves more and more in multireligious situations.

Though, as noted above, the reflections on dialogue and theology of religions in the FABC are to be found in almost in all its documents, there are two important sources which have led to a certain maturation of its reflections: 1) The series of seminars of the Bishops' Institutes for Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA). The purpose of this series of seminars, from 1979 onwards, was to understand and deepen the theological implications of dialogue, to see the importance of dialogue for being Church in Asia, and to study the challenges for pastoral praxis which interreligious dialogue poses. 2) The document "Theses on Interreligious Dialogue" by the Office of Theological Concerns was a crystallisation of the insights that emerged out of the praxis of dialogue.

The following paragraphs try to capture the spirit and main features of the orientation of the FABC on the theme.

1. The most basic foundation for the theology of dialogue and religions is constituted by the conviction about the *universality of God's grace*. The self-gift of God is something over which we human beings cannot exercise any control. The path of divine grace is mysterious and we do not have full knowledge of the ways God deals with human beings placed in a wide variety of situations, including religious situations. That Christ is the centre of the process of God's universal dialogue with humanity (see Mission Congress, 1979, That is why we should acknowledge that God has spoken and continues to speak in a variety of ways. Attention to this fact is ultimately the tribute we pay to divine grace.

2. We should equally acknowledge that there are varieties of ways through which human beings respond to God's grace encountering them in their concrete existential situations which include also their religious belonging. In one sense, religions can be viewed as responses to *the encounter with the mystery of God*, or, the ultimate reality.

3. What has been said shows that the religious traditions of humanity have a place *in the economy of God's salvation*. This was clearly articulated in that very lapidary statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC: "We accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation" (I, 14).

4. The above two realisations lead us to respect the religious traditions of our neighbours, and even to learn from them. For the religious experience of our neighbours is part of God's inscrutable ways of salvation and expresses the unfathomable spirit of human beings responding to them. Hence, in the practice of dialogue, we are actually, in the words of Pope John Paul II, in a "dialogue of salvation". As the Pope says, "Interreligious dia-

logue at its deepest level is always a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity" (*Address to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, n. 2, 13 Nov. 1992).

5. Our attitude to dialogue and the religious experience of our neighbours is deepened through the realisation that the *Spirit of God is at work* in them and his activities go beyond the visible borders of the Church. It is "an inescapable truth that God's Spirit is at work in all religious traditions" (BIRA, IV, 12. 7). Dialogue is then a journeying with the Spirit to discover his path and the direction of his grace. That explains why it is a spiritual act, and one can make this journey only when open to the Spirit and alert to his voice. This dimension makes us also understand why dialogue is something that God desires.

6. True dialogue can never be opposed to our experience of the mystery of Jesus Christ and our faith about God's saving presence in his life, teachings, death and Resurrection. This experience and faith we share with the neighbours of other faiths, being aware Consensus Paper III, 3). The challenge, however, before us in Asia is to *proclaim Jesus Christ in such a way that it does not constitute an exclusion of the religious experiences of our neighbours in their religious traditions*. This leads us to the next point regarding the relationship of dialogue to evangelisation.

7. Dialogue and evangelisation are *not mutually exclusive, but are complementary*. However, as the joint ecumenical consultation of the FABC and the CCA (The Christian Conference of Asia) in 1987 on the issue of dialogue pointed out, both are not unrelated but *each one has its own "integrity and freedom" and its own distinct character*. But there is an important point to note: For both dialogue and proclamation to become effective, we require in Asia the spirit of Jesus' *kenosis* — self-emptying. On a continent which has all through its history set great value on the spirit of renunciation, "triumphalism and displays of pomp and human power do not witness to the abnegation of Jesus on the Cross; it is often from our weakness that God's love as life-giving grace is more clearly made manifest" (VI, 14.3). In other words, the way we fulfil the Gospel mandate of evangelisation in Asia cannot but be influenced by our practice of dialogue.

8. Our dialogue with our neighbours of other faiths should translate into jointly *working with them for what constituted Jesus' central concern in his preaching — the Kingdom of God* with its universalistic vision. For it is by acting together that our bonds of dialogue are strengthened. The fact that in our various countries we share the same history and the same social and political situations makes us closer to each other across religious borders and moves us to respond to the many critical is-

sues facing the people.

9. In our joint working with other Asian peoples we share with them the common Asian heritage of *karuna* or compassion. Our common involvement takes place in the spirit of harmony, which is also a very highly cherished Asian ideal. In fact, more than one Bishops' Institute for Religious Affairs (BIRA) devoted its attention entirely to deepening the concept of harmony; and the Office of Theological Concerns brought out a full-length document on this issue. "Harmony seems to constitute, in a certain sense, the intellectual and affective religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia. Hence the imperative of a study in depth of the theology of harmony in the Asian context leading to interreligious dialogue appeared clear to us" (BIRA IV, I. 13).

The theme of harmony, besides providing a common framework for involvement in the transformation of Asian societies, has become today a very key concept in interreligious dialogue and co-operation in Asia.

10. Finally, a very important pastoral issue addressed by the FABC concerns the means and institutions for translating into reality its vision of dialogue. Foremost attention in this regard is given to the necessity of *adequate formation for dialogue* at all levels. Given the fact that the Church runs a great number of schools and other educational institutions, these are to become the important centres for the formation for dialogue. Furthermore, unless our catechises also seriously takes up the issue of interreligious dialogue, we may not lead our people to overcome the long-standing prejudices and negative attitudes towards the religious traditions of our neighbours, and help them to forge new and enlightened relationships. Basic Christian or Ecclesial Communities offer a very congenial situation for the formation of the faithful in the practice of dialogue. Bishops' Conferences are called upon "to develop a formation process for clergy, religious and the laity toward the formation of 'persons of dialogue, who would be sensitive to other faiths and persuasions'" (V, 7.3.2.3. 1). Besides these, the creation of adequate new structures for formation in dialogue is called for.

#### IV.

#### Gospel and socio-political involvement

In its pastoral efforts, the FABC has tried to relate the faith with the socio-political situations obtaining in the continent. Obviously, in a highly advanced country like Japan the conditions are quite different from the conditions in fast growing economies like those of Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and more strikingly different from those obtaining in countries still marked by much poverty like the Philippines and the countries of South Asia. The social orientation of the FABC can be derived from statements interwoven in its numerous documents. However, they are found more directly in the documents of

the series of Bishops' Institutes for Social Action (BISA) conducted from 1974 to 1987, and in the new series of Faith Encounters in Social Action from 1993 onwards (FEISA).

The first thing we need to note is the methodology that has been followed. The social orientation was not the result of theoretical reflection on the concrete situation, but often the result of direct exposure to the social realities, and attempts on the part of the Bishops to immerse themselves in these realities. Such a methodology followed by BISA and FEISA helped the Bishops to experience intensely and reflect with a certain incisiveness on some of the crucial issues affecting people. Besides, through the exposure and immersion programmes, there resulted a methodology of "the pastoral cycle" (see BISA VII).

Here we shall focus our attention on some of the salient features of the FABC orientation on social issues.

1. It is a demand flowing from the Gospel that we be in solidarity with the people in their struggles. That we are with the people is more important than what we do for them. Therefore our *social commitment starts at the level of being in solidarity with the people*, especially with the poor and the marginalised of our Asian societies.

2. What guides us in this commitment is, first and foremost, the *example of Jesus* himself. In his being *with* the people we experience the mystery of the incarnation, God's solidarity with suffering human beings. Secondly, Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God spurs us on to create a just and egalitarian society. It is a new order of things according to the plan of God. We need to collaborate with this plan by shaping the history of our societies in the direction of the ultimate vision of God's Kingdom. Thirdly, we encounter the presence of God and his action in the social and secular realities. Hence, our commitment to the transformation of the socio-political realities is not simply a profane activity, but something that derives from our experience of God's presence in the socio-political realities of our continent. Fourthly, our involvement in the social realm and our commitment to the poor are an integral part of our work of evangelisation. The teaching of the Synod of 1971 on Justice in the World is very clear on this point.

3. The above have consequences for the concrete life and exercise of mission by the Asian Churches. The most important challenge for the Church is truly to become a *Church of the poor*. For, if the Church is the instrument of God's Kingdom, and the Kingdom of God itself was proclaimed to the poor (Lk 4:18), then Asian Churches, as communities of the disciples of Jesus in Asia cannot but become truly Churches which have opted for the poor. This is further corroborated by the understanding of the constitution of local Churches in Asia through a process of dialogue with the poor. The consequences of such an option found expression in the very First Bishops' Insti-

tute of Social Action:

Thus opting to be with the poor involves the risk of conflict with vested interests or 'establishments', religious, economic, social, political. It also involves for leaders of the Church especially, *loss of security*, and that not only material but spiritual. For it means taking the unfamiliar course of looking for guidelines of policy and action, not to ready-made theological legal and sociological systems developed principally in the West but to a discernment of the historical process talking place among our own people (BISA I, 6).

4. To be able to realise today Jesus' way of solidarity with the poor and struggling people, we need to enter into a deeper *analysis of the causes of the present situations in our societies*. They derive from such sources as colonial history, feudal structures, and from the contemporary model of development being imported into Asia and adopted by Asians. Only an enlightened approach that digs deeper into the causes can help us to change the present situation. As a matter of fact, analysis of the situation has become a very important element in the methodology of the FABC. The analysis is sharpened when dealing with concrete issues like immigrant labourers, industrial workers, exploitative tourism and refugees.

5. The FABC documents view with concern the progressive penetration of the liberal market economy into almost every part of Asia. While not denying the economic growth in many parts of the continent, the serious *negative consequences of the present model of development* are clearly pointed out. These forces are named and denounced. The present model of development fosters individualism and a spirit of competition, and causes the loss of solidarity and harmony.

6. In the present socio-political scenario of Asian societies, one of the chief instruments for the defence of the poor and the victims is to be found in the concept of *human rights*. Therefore, the involvement of the Church should go in the direction of upholding the rights of the poor and vulnerable segments of society. However, a certain re-dimensioning is required. The concept of human rights as articulated in the West, seems to place the greatest emphasis on the rights of *individuals*. In the Asian context, on the other hand, human rights should be seen in a collective and *communitarian* context. The concept of human rights should be an instrument to foster solidarity and to build up community.

7. The nature and magnitude of Asian socio-political problems are such that their resolution calls more and more for the help of *Asian resources*. There is the conviction, that the great civilisations of Asia with their millennial history and resilience possess the necessary resources to overcome the present crisis. We need only to discover them and bring them to bear upon the current

situation.

8. The social involvement of the Asian Churches need to be *animated by a spiritual vision*. The FABC speaks of a "contemplative dimension of human development" (BISA VII, 1.1). We need to see the presence of Jesus in the struggling and suffering missions of Asia. The participants of the above mentioned BISA express their spiritual perception saying that "The Lord of History is at work in that world of poverty. Seeing the Lord in the poor, making sense out of his action among them, discerning the direction of his action with them — this we felt deeply within us was the more specific challenge we have to face" (BISA V ff, 20). We can also draw from the Asian spiritual resources which help us to discover God's presence in all the realities around us, including the socio-political.

Our spirituality needs to be linked with the many *signs of hope* we find in our Asian societies. One such sign, for example, is the general awakening among the poor and the victims in our societies and their determination to transform the present unjust order of things. We cannot but see the presence and the power of God in this movement of the poor. Besides, we find also an intense longing among our people for the creation of communities for peace and harmony. Finally, the growing co-operation among the followers of different religious traditions for creating a just society augurs well for the future of Asia.

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## CUBA: L'ÉGLISE CATHOLIQUE EN REMPART MORAL

Albert Longchamp, SJ  
*L'Echo Magazine, Genève*

Le 81<sup>e</sup> voyage pastoral du pape Jean Paul II hors des frontières de l'Italie l'a conduit sur les terres de Fidel Castro du 21 au 25 janvier 1998. De toutes les visites papales de ces dernières années, ce fut la plus attendue et de loin la plus médiatisée. Trois mille journalistes, au bas mot, avaient fait le déplacement. La «bande-annonce» de cette page certes historique du pontificat actuel était au diapason. «Rencontre entre deux monstres sacrés», «Le choc de deux mondes», «Le pape au pays des transes». On attendait un «duel de titans», la chute d'un «second Mur de Berlin».

Fidel Castro n'est pas tombé. La visite du pape fut un incontestable succès, mais les catholiques cubains, à l'instar du Vatican, gardent le triomphe modeste. Beaucoup craignaient, après cinq journées de rêve, un réveil brutal ou les rudes désillusions. Pour le cardinal Jaime Ortega, archevêque de La Havane et grand artisan de cet événement à haut risque, la tâche n'est pas achevée: «Les catholiques cubains doivent continuer sur un chemin de loyauté et de fidélité à l'Évangile, en occupant progressivement l'espace accordé, tout en avançant au large dans la perspective du Jubilé de l'an 2000» (interview au journal *La Croix*, 4 mars 1998, p. 24).

L'enjeu du déplacement à Cuba — une visite ébauchée à partir de mai 1989 et pratiquement acquise depuis la rencontre de Jean Paul II et Fidel Castro au Vatican le 19 novembre 1996 — reposait sur un «pacte» tacite acquis au terme d'interminables tractations. Chacune des parties mettait en sourdine ses griefs à l'égard de son partenaire et jouait cartes sur table: parmi les fruits du voyage, l'Église attendait davantage de libertés et l'ouverture d'un nouvel espace social; Fidel Castro escomptait une reconnaissance internationale et l'allègement de l'embargo américain. Dans ces conditions, il revenait au sens diplomatique de Jean Paul II de tenir sur l'île caraïbe à la fois un ferme discours sur les droits de l'Homme et une sérieuse remise en cause, voire une condamnation formelle de l'embargo des États-Unis, qui frappe Cuba depuis octobre 1960. Le résultat se rapproche des objectifs, sans désarmer totalement quatre décennies de brouille et de méfiance réciproques.

### Messager de la Vérité et de l'Espérance

Dans l'art de peser les mots, l'Église romaine s'est

toujours montrée habile. A Cuba, elle s'est surpassée. Face au pouvoir sans partage du *commandante* Castro, le pape avait pour mission d'indiquer la *désespérance* du peuple et de faire admettre au *Lider maximo* que l'Église n'est plus la force contre-révolutionnaire qu'il se targue de mettre au pas.

Le pari n'était pas évident. Fort des convictions marxistes auxquelles il reste attaché (il l'a rappelé haut et fort en prenant congé de Jean Paul II, au soir du 25 janvier), Castro entretient à l'égard du clergé et de la hiérarchie une méfiance qui le pousse aux «attaques surprises» dont il a le secret. C'est ainsi qu'en mars 1990, du Brésil où il était en visite officielle, il lançait contre toute attente une violente diatribe dénonçant l'«Église des riches», l'«Église de ceux qui vivent à Miami», en accusant la «haute hiérarchie» d'être le seul «obstacle» à l'entrée de catholiques dans le Parti communiste cubain. Cette *faveur*; l'épiscopat ne l'avait pas sollicitée; en revanche, il avait eu l'audace, avant le départ du chef de l'État, de réclamer la «démocratisation» du régime. La visite du pape était alors inscrite sur l'agenda de 1991. Afin d'éviter semblable retour de flamme, il s'agissait donc, avant la venue de Jean Paul II définitivement fixée à la fin janvier 1998, de trouver un langage «politiquement correct». Ainsi fut conçu le slogan du voyage: le pape viendra à Cuba en «messager de la Vérité et de l'Espérance». Le thème ne pouvait porter ombrage à Fidel Castro et à son entourage, le chef de l'Église catholique ne sachant se prévaloir d'une autre Vérité et d'une autre Espérance que celles de l'Évangile dont il est porteur.

L'épiscopat cubain, habitué à la prudence sinon à la ruse, s'est chargé de préparer le terrain. Dans un document du 22 novembre 1997, qui tente de répondre aux «jugements» émis, tant à Cuba qu'à l'étranger, «sur le sens de la présence du pape dans ce pays qui a des caractéristiques politiques, économiques et sociales bien marquées», les évêques soulignent le fait que Jean Paul II arrive «à un moment parmi les plus difficiles de notre histoire». Façon élégante d'exprimer la conviction partagée discrètement par l'homme de la rue: le régime est arrivé à un tournant; s'il ne peut pas maîtriser son évolution économique, il risque un cataclysme social qui surgirait au plus mauvais moment, la relève des élites étant loin d'être assurée. Autrement dit: la chute du régime, sans rien

arranger, pourrait être violente. Pour l'éviter et empêcher l'intrusion d'un capitalisme sauvage qui envahirait le pays sans améliorer le sort des démunis, «l'Eglise à Cuba est appelée à animer l'espérance du peuple devant l'avenir».

### Sortir de l'ostracisme

De la sorte, l'épiscopat cubain se présentait, à la veille de l'arrivée du pape, en recours — pour ne pas dire en roue de secours — d'un régime à bout de souffle! Se gardant bien de brandir l'Évangile comme une «Vérité» qui chercherait à nuire au «socialisme réel», il affirmait avec vigueur le caractère non idéologique de la foi chrétienne: «Elle peut se vivre dans n'importe quel système politique ou processus historique, sans s'identifier nécessairement et totalement à aucun d'entre eux». Par conséquent, outre son activité culturelle, l'Eglise à Cuba «a une mission prophétique et caritative»; en outre, elle est chargée d'offrir une *éthique* à toutes les réalités de la vie économique, politique, sociale et culturelle du pays. Le document épiscopal s'achevait sur l'énumération des cinq «fruits» attendus de la visite du pape: prêcher ouvertement Jésus-Christ; animer l'espérance du peuple; aider à retrouver les valeurs éthiques personnelles, familiales et sociales; voir reconnu le rôle positif de l'Eglise dans la société et admise sa triple mission culturelle, prophétique et caritative; enfin, promouvoir la réconciliation entre tous les Cubains. En un mot, les évêques se risquaient à produire une liste de *revendications* qui n'était pas loin de suggérer la liste parallèle de leurs *doléances*. Longtemps victime d'ostracisme, l'Eglise exprimait en termes dépourvus de toute ambiguïté quelle place elle entend désormais occuper et quel rôle elle compte jouer au sein de la nation. S'adressant aux fidèles et non directement au chef de l'Etat, le document du 1er novembre 1997 constituait l'ultime mise à l'épreuve du régime avant le 21 janvier 1998, jour de l'arrivée du pape. Une réaction négative, un nouveau coup de sang du *commandante*, pouvait ruiner les espoirs les plus légitimes. Le test s'avéra positif. Somme toute, Fidel Castro n'avait rien à perdre d'une Eglise qui ne revendiquait le droit de vivre en pleine liberté que pour «apporter ainsi sa contribution au progrès et au bien du peuple cubain».

### «Le service de l'homme est le chemin de l'Eglise»

Le 21 janvier est un anniversaire marquant dans le calendrier... marxiste: 21 janvier 1924, mort de Vladimir Illich Lénine, «fondateur du premier Etat ouvrier-paysan». La notice historique, en ce 21 janvier 1998, figure à la dernière page de *Granma*, l'or-

gane officiel du Comité central du Parti Communiste Cubain. A la une, le quotidien souhaite la bienvenue à *Su Santidad Juan Pablo II*. Propos de circonstance, que n'accompagne aucun éditorial. Le journal se contente de diffuser une interview du cardinal Roger Etchegaray, qui fait partie de la suite pontificale avec les cardinaux Angelo Sodano, secrétaire d'Etat, et Bernardin Gantin, préfet de la Congrégation des évêques. Et *Granma* se plaît à relever, avec raison d'ailleurs, que rarement une visite papale a soulevé un tel intérêt international. A 16 heures, en cette mémorable journée, l'appareil d'Alitalia se présente devant la passerelle de l'aéroport José-Martí. Sur le tapis rouge, au bas des marches, un homme en parfait costume de ville, couleur bleu sombre: Fidel Castro. Le *Lider maximo* accueille le pape, qu'il domine d'une tête, avec déférence et gravité.

Jusqu'à cet instant, les Cubains ont douté. Mais Jean Paul II est bien là, Fidel à ses côtés. Les premiers discours donneront le ton. L'allocution de bienvenue du chef de l'Etat est attendue avec impatience. Elle rappelle au pape qu'il ne verra ici aucun descendant des autochtones «pacifiques et bienveillants» qui peuplaient l'île avant l'arrivée des Européens: «Ils furent presque tous exterminés». L'entrée en matière, plutôt «fraîche», se transforme en autosatisfaction:

*Que pouvons-nous vous offrir à Cuba, Sainteté ? Un peuple avec moins d'inégalités, moins de citoyens sans toit, moins d'enfants sans école, moins de malades sans hôpital, plus d'enseignants et de médecins par habitant que n'importe quel autre pays du monde que Votre Sainteté a visité.*

Dans sa réponse, Jean Paul II rappelle que «le service de l'homme est le chemin de l'Eglise». Pour le pape, un «peuple qui emprunte ce chemin est un peuple animé par l'espérance d'un avenir meilleur», et c'est pourquoi il veut affirmer, comme au début de son pontificat: «N'ayez pas peur d'ouvrir votre cœur au Christ». Jean Paul II a choisi le terrain de la spiritualité, mais n'oublie pas sa mission «politique»: «Que Cuba s'ouvre au monde avec toutes ses extraordinaires capacités, et que le monde s'ouvre à Cuba pour que ce peuple [...] puisse regarder l'avenir avec espérance». Il usera pratiquement des mêmes termes dans son allocution de départ, le 25 janvier.

### Sous le signe de l'ouverture

Ainsi l'ensemble de la visite, un parcours ponctué quotidiennement de longues liturgies, a été placé, avec une insistance croissante, sous le signe de cette «ouverture» au monde et du monde, en parallèle avec

l'ouverture au message de l'Évangile. A Santa-Clara, le 22 janvier, l'homélie de Jean Paul II concentre son propos sur la famille, et le pape en profite pour rappeler la nécessité d'ouvrir les «familles et les écoles» aux valeurs de l'Évangile de Jésus-Christ, «valeurs qui ne sont jamais un danger pour quelque projet social que ce soit». Le lendemain, sur la place Ignacio-Agramonte de Camagüey, s'adressant aux jeunes, il insiste: «Ne vous laissez séduire ni par des schémas culturels vides, ni par le relativisme moral».

Ce discours n'est pas neuf sur les lèvres de Jean Paul II, mais, derrière l'encouragement à suivre les valeurs morales chrétiennes, se profilent tant la critique d'un système politique et social créateur de «vide», que la condamnation d'attitudes égoïstes qui provoquent «le désir de l'évasion et l'émigration, en fuyant l'engagement et la responsabilité, pour se réfugier dans un monde faux dont les bases sont l'aliénation et le déracinement». L'allusion, à peine voilée, vise les Cubains réfugiés à Miami, dont une cinquantaine de prêtres. L'Église catholique, le cardinal Jaime Ortega en tête, déplore le comportement de ceux qui ont choisi cet «exil doré [...] au lieu de participer courageusement à la construction d'un avenir plus juste à Cuba» (*ibidem*). Le pape vient ainsi prêter main forte à la hiérarchie, navrée de la déperdition des forces vives du pays, et d'autant moins portée à soutenir une émigration «cléricale» qu'elle ne compte que 210 prêtres pour 11 millions d'habitants, dont plus de 90 % sont catholiques. A l'adresse des jeunes tentés par le mirage de la consommation, Jean Paul II souligne fermement: «Le bonheur s'obtient par le sacrifice. Ne cherchez pas au dehors ce que vous pouvez trouver au dedans [...]. Ne remettez pas à demain la construction d'une société nouvelle».

### Le visage de l'avenir

Quel sera le visage de cette «construction nouvelle», comment adviendra-t-elle? Jean Paul II n'a pas manqué d'évoquer la figure du Père Félix Varela, prêtre «exemplaire» et patriote «indiscutable», qui a renouvelé au siècle dernier les méthodes pédagogiques et le contenu de l'enseignement universitaire cubain. Le citant en modèle de l'action de l'Église en faveur de la «cubanité», le pape encourageait les intellectuels, lors d'une rencontre à l'Université de la capitale, à chercher et trouver «une synthèse avec laquelle tous les Cubains puissent s'identifier». La «nouvelle société» ne sera pas fondée sur un rejet des racines, mais sur la fusion des «souches chrétiennes» et de «l'empreinte culturelle» des peuples rassemblés par l'histoire sur l'île de Cuba. Ce discours avait pour but de pallier un clivage grandissant — et que pour-

rait aggraver un changement de régime — entre la minorité «blanche» (espagnole), économiquement et politiquement dominante, et la majorité noire ou métisse, confinée dans les rôles subalternes et à maigres revenus. Dans la course aux dollars d'une île «plongée dans l'abîme économique» (Sylvie Kaufmann, *Le Monde*, 17 janvier 1998, supplément «Les Cubains entre dollars et religion», page II), l'émergence d'une société à deux vitesses, contrée de force, jusqu'ici, par le système Castro, entraînerait fatalement le pays vers la violence. Même si cette prise de conscience est récente, l'Église cubaine s'emploie à prévenir l'en-semble de la société civile de l'imminence du danger.

Cette Église, a souligné encore Jean Paul II lors de son homélie à Santiago de Cuba, «ne cherche aucune forme de pouvoir politique pour développer sa mission, mais se veut être un germe fécond pour le bien commun, en se rendant présente dans les structures sociales». Les discours du pape, on le voit, ont suivi pas à pas les «revendications» de l'épiscopat dans son message de novembre 1997. L'Église se pose en «animatrice» de l'espérance, propose des valeurs éthiques, mais ne s'impose pas comme un contre-pouvoir. Cependant, pour remplir sa mission de service, elle se doit d'être présente dans la culture, dans les structures sociales, sans restriction ni discrimination.

Le dimanche 25 juin, sous un ciel gris qui n'a pas troublé la ferveur de 300,000 personnes, Jean Paul II avait rendez-vous avec le peuple de la capitale. Sur la Place de la Révolution José-Martí, encadrée par un portrait géant de Che Guevara et une peinture murale de Jésus au format équivalent, couvrant la façade d'un édifice public, le pape célèbre la messe en présence de Fidel Castro. C'est l'heure du suprême «affrontement», que guettent les médias du monde entier. L'homélie du pape se présente plutôt comme une «charte» de l'État moderne, qui «ne peut pas faire de l'athéisme ou de la religion un de ses fondements politiques». Loin donc de «tout fanatisme ou sécularisme extrémiste, [cet État] doit promouvoir un climat social serein et une législation appropriée qui permette à chaque personne et à chaque confession religieuse de vivre librement sa foi [...]». L'Église propose moins une «nouvelle société» qu'une «nouvelle justice», fondée sur les libertés, étayée par la «Vérité». L'homélie à La Havane restera comme une «ode aux libertés», selon le titre judicieux de *Libération* (Lundi, 26 janvier 1998, p. 8), mais aussi comme l'une des plus sévères condamnations de cette forme de «néo-libéralisme capitaliste» qui «asservit la personne humaine et conditionne le développement des peuples aux forces aveugles du marché, en aggravant, depuis leurs centres de pouvoir, la situation des pays les moins favorisés avec des changements insupportables».

## Un régime en sursis?

C'est seulement lors de la cérémonie du départ, au soir du dimanche, 25 janvier, que le pape s'est exprimé en termes tranchants sur l'embargo américain. Sans citer de nom, ni même le mot «embargo», il s'est élevé contre les «mesures économiques restrictives imposées de l'extérieur du pays de manière injuste et moralement inacceptable». A Washington, le message a été reçu plutôt de mauvaise grâce. Avec un délai «raisonnable», pour ne pas donner l'impression d'être aux ordres du Vatican, la Maison Blanche annonçait, le 20 mars, un assouplissement «humanitaire» du blocus économique, afin d'alléger les «souffrances» des Cubains. Octroi de permis d'exportation de médicaments vers Cuba, rétablissement de l'autorisation aux Cubains vivant sur le territoire des Etats-Unis d'envoyer 300 dollars par trimestre aux familles restées sur l'île caraïbe, reprise de certains vols directs des Etats-Unis vers Cuba: trois fois rien, et ce geste ne remet pas en cause la politique de Bill Clinton, dont la chute de Castro reste l'objectif; mais un symbole tout de même. Le système de sanctions américain est ébranlé. Jean Paul II marque un point.

La Havane avait aussi, après le départ du pape, du pain sur la planche. Le 22 janvier, le Saint-Siège avait présenté aux autorités cubaines, par l'entremise du cardinal Sodano, une liste de personnes détenues pour des motifs politiques. Le 12 février, la Secrétaire d'Etat annonçait la grâce de «plusieurs dizaines» de prisonniers inscrits sur la liste du Vatican et la libération d'un «nombre important de détenus pour des motifs divers»; 289 détenus auraient été effectivement libérés, dont une centaine de prisonniers politiques.

Trois mesures d'assouplissement de l'embargo, une vague de prisonniers libérés, est-ce le seul bilan d'une visite dont Jean Paul II lui-même, lors de l'audience générale du 28 janvier, estimait qu'elle fut un «grand événement de réconciliation spirituelle, culturelle et sociale»? Le pape ayant appelé de ses vœux «une libération» pour Cuba, on est encore loin du compte. Après la première visite du pape en Pologne, en 1979, une longue décennie s'est écoulée avant d'en récolter le fruit le plus évident, la fin du régime communiste. Le but de Jean Paul II à Cuba était-il semblable? Sur place, l'un de nos interlocuteurs en doutait, plaçant cette visite sur un autre registre:

*Il n'est pas certain que le Vatican cherche à faire tomber le régime, comme il l'a fait en Pologne, où le pape était chez lui. Ici, les choses sont plus subtiles. L'Eglise a des difficultés, mais elle est influente. Castro n'est pas éternel, son système non plus. L'Eglise se place à la fois comme force d'opposition et comme appui pour la transition. L'Eglise sera le*

*rempart moral de notre pays dans un proche avenir.*

La charpente des discours prononcés à Cuba tendrait à donner raison à cette analyse. Leur tonalité politique visait moins à créer une alternative qu'à stimuler l'Eglise elle-même, pour qu'elle prenne toute sa place dans la société cubaine. Les évêques ont qualifié ce rôle de «présence prophétique», qui implique l'exercice du parler vrai sans chercher une confrontation stérile avec le régime. Les caciques du pouvoir et les radicaux de la diaspora risquent de pousser les catholiques à la faute qui remettrait tout en cause. Le voyage du pape a posé les jalons d'un dialogue exigeant, marqué un tournant politique et ecclésial. Il a rendu leur voix aux catholiques Cubains, élargi leur espace vital, créé un appel d'air. Mais dans ce pays, où la pratique religieuse reste faible et souvent liée à un syncrétisme sur lequel l'Eglise manque de prise, l'avenir reste incertain.

Pendant la visite de Jean Paul II, le peuple s'est en réalité peu exprimé. Fondus dans la masse, les catholiques ont applaudi. Jamais ils n'ont sifflé Castro hors jeu. Bien malin qui dirait ce que ces millions de citoyens pensent effectivement du régime et de l'action de l'Eglise.

Rien ne permet de penser qu'au terme de ce voyage les deux *leaders* aient changé objectivement d'opinion sur leur vis-à-vis. Ils se sont respectés, ont observé les règles de l'hospitalité, mais il semble évident que le socialisme, «réel» ou mitigé, reste une doctrine sans rémission pour Jean Paul II, voire une coupable illusion, et que la doctrine sociale proposée par le pape demeure pour Fidel Castro une «utopie sans avenir» (François Houtart, *Le pape à Cuba: une visite qui se voulait un tournant et qui pourrait bien n'être qu'une parenthèse, document inédit*). Le temps va départager les protagonistes. Il laisse un sursis à Castro. Il donne une chance à l'Eglise catholique. Sauront-ils, l'un et l'autre, profiter des germes de janvier 1998 pour conduire le pays vers une transition pacifique? Sur ce point, le bilan de la visite de Jean Paul II reste entièrement ouvert.

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# CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN EUROPE: PERSPECTIVES FOR DIALOGUE

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*The presence of Muslims in Europe raises serious pastoral problems for the Churches. Already in 1986 the French Episcopal Conference had dedicated its Plenary Assembly to this question. On this occasion, to help them in their reflection, they had invited Fr Maurice Borrmans, of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, and Professor Rémy Leveau, of the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Paris. Yet within a decade the situation has changed quite considerably. Not only has the number of Muslims in Europe increased, but also Muslim communities have become more stable. The French Bishops therefore decided to return to the topic of Christian-Muslim relations, taking it as a subject for reflection over a two-year period, for the Plenary Assemblies of 1997 and 1998. For the 1997 Assembly the Secrétariat pour les Relations avec l'Islam (SRI), an official organ of the Episcopal Conference, produced a survey of the situation in France. For the sake of comparison, and in order to place the reflection within a wider context, a paper was requested on the European scene. This was delivered by Msgr. Michael Fitzgerald, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Finally some theological reflections on the encounter with Muslims were presented by Msgr. Joseph Doré, of the Institut Catholique de Paris, now Archbishop of Strasbourg.*

*Msgr. Fitzgerald's paper was published in French in La documentation catholique (N°2171, 7 December 1997). The English version presented here has been slightly revised.*

*The Editor, Encounter.*

In 1974 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, then the Secretariat for Non-Christians, took the initiative of organizing a reflection on the subject of Christian-Muslim relations at the European level. A meeting was held in Luxemburg on 13-14 March of that year on non-Christians in Europe, but the emphasis was in fact mainly on the presence of Muslims. In 1978 a representative from our Council took part in an encounter on relations with Muslims organised by the Conference of European Churches (KEK), and since that date we have also taken part, as observers, in the work of the "Islam in Europe" Committee. This committee has, since 1988, assembled representatives from the KEK and the European Council of Episcopal Conferences. Another venue for reflection, less official but very useful, has been provided by the "Journées d'Arras". We have taken part in these a little less regularly.

Hence it can be said that a certain collective experience underpins the reflections presented today, but the limitations of this communication must be borne in mind. It will attempt to give an overall picture of the situation in Europe, without entering into too much detail. In particular, there will not be much emphasis on the situation in France on which there has already been a communication.

## 1. The situation

### 1.1. The religious map of Europe

In his first Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, Pope John Paul II referred to the religious map of the world. He underlined the importance for the Church of taking account of religious plurality. By reducing the scale, we can apply the Pope's reflection to Europe.

In the Synod for Europe, where the question of the Christian roots of European culture was raised, there were already those who voiced reminders that Jewish communities existed in Europe in the Mediterranean areas before the arrival of Christianity. These communities provided points of entry for the first messengers of the Gospel. Thus in our continent, Jews and Christians have a shared history, which included periods of collaboration, even if it was also characterized by recurrent phases of anti-Semitism, and reached the height of evil in the *shoah*.

Very soon after its birth, Islam, expanding fast, established itself in Spain, Sicily and southern Italy. Even if the Norman Conquest and the *Reconquista* led by Isabella and Ferdinand put an end to its presence, these events did not wipe out the contribution of

Islam to European culture. There have been Muslim communities over a very long time in other regions of Europe: the Tatars in Russia, around the borders of Poland and Ukraine, and even in Finland; the populations of Turkish origin, and those that were converted to Islam following the Ottoman invasion in the Balkans. These communities are outside the area we are concerned with, but the attitude of Western Europe towards the Muslims in Bosnia or Albania can be thought to have some bearing on the future of Christian-Muslim relations.

In Western Europe it is this century that has seen the growth of Islam. Immigration began at the start of the century, in particular after the “Great War”, and then intensified after the Second World War. The origins of the various Muslim communities reflect the varying colonial experience of Western powers. This is a subject to which it will be necessary to return later.

Immigrants from other religious obediences should not be forgotten: a considerable number of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains in the United Kingdom; Buddhists from Indochina who sought refuge in France; and more recently the establishment of Tibetan monasteries in several countries. We are all aware of the development of Buddhism in Western Europe and its attraction for a considerable number of our fellow-Europeans. It is so that relationships between Christians and Muslims can be seen in a wider setting that the existence of other religious communities has been mentioned at the outset.

## 1.2. Diverse origins

The exact number of Muslims in Europe is not known. There is no census giving accurate statistics. A report issued by the “Islam in Europe” committee puts the figure at around 20 to 24 million for the whole of Europe including Russia. The number of Muslims in Western Europe could be estimated at around 12 million.

It should be noted that there is some unevenness in distribution. The greatest number are to be found in France (3,500,000 — 4,000,000), followed by Germany (2,500,000 and then Britain (1,750,000). The Netherlands (500,000) and Belgium (300,000) have less Muslims in absolute numbers, but when the population is taken into account the proportion is quite high. Spain (200,000) and Italy (500,000, though some sources quote twice this number) have a small number in relation to their populations.

Probably more important than the number is the diversity of origins of these Muslim communities. In France, North Africans dominate the scene, and among

them Muslims from Algeria or of Algerian origin, but Muslims from West Africa should also be noted (Senegal, Mali), and the number of Turks is growing. Muslim presence in Germany is very markedly Turkish, following relations cultivated in the past by Germany with the Ottoman Empire, although there are Muslims from other areas, including Iran. In Britain, most Muslims are from the Indian sub-continent, but the Yemeni community, which is the most long-standing, should not be forgotten, nor the Cypriots, nor the large number of Arabs living in London. The Netherlands also have Muslims from their former colonies, particularly Surinam, and they have been joined by North Africans, mostly Moroccan, and Turks. The latter two groups are found in Belgium and also in Luxemburg, which is the European country with the largest proportion of foreign residents. In Spain the Muslim population is largely Moroccan, but there are also students from the Middle East. In Italy the growing number of Muslims is of varying origin — Tunisia, Egypt, Somalia, Morocco, Eritrea, and more recently Albania.

It should be noted that many of these Muslims are full citizens of the countries where they reside. This is particularly true of France and Britain. In Germany, it would appear that there are only 100,000 Muslims with German nationality. To these citizens of foreign extraction, or second or third generation descendants, should be added converts to Islam. The number here is difficult to assess, but they are in some instances influential in Islamic organizations.

There is a last remark to be made here: the variety of origins of these Muslims makes unity more difficult for them to achieve, within each country and within Europe.

## 1.3. Diverse social situations

The majority of Muslims in Western Europe belong to the working class (here a difference can be seen with ex-Yugoslavia, where many were in farming). It should be said that many are engaged in precarious employment, and unemployment, especially among young Muslims, is high.

But other categories of Muslims should not be forgotten. In many quarters they have established their own trades and businesses, cafés and restaurants. Hence there are a number who are self-employed. There are also professionals, doctors from North Africa or the Middle East, teachers and journalists. As the younger generation benefits by higher education, so the number belonging to professional categories will increase. Thus it is not only with the poor and

underprivileged that Christians are in contact.

#### 1.4. Legal status

Since relationships between “Church” and State vary from one European country to another, it is understandable that the legal status of Muslims should also vary. Belgium was the first country to give official recognition to Islam, as early as 1974. Austria followed in 1979, even though there was already a legislative basis dating back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The recognition granted in these countries has repercussions particularly in the field of education, but also in taxation. In Belgium, the Government, in the absence of a central Muslim organization, recognised the Islamic Cultural Centre as the representative. Since this Centre depended on the Embassies, the decision was disputed by a number of Muslims. The Government eventually created the “Committee of Sages”. This then became a “Constitutive Council” which elected an executive body of 17 members. This Committee can appoint teachers of religion, and also spiritual assistants for hospitals and prisons.

In Germany, the State maintains a position of neutrality towards religions. These religions can become “publicly recognised corporations” (*Körperschaft öffentlichen Rechts*). Once this is done, the State collects a special tax which it then allocates to the respective religions. Islam has not yet succeeded in obtaining this recognition on account of its lack of internal unity. It is interesting to note that in Germany, where many matters are settled at Federal State level (*Länder*), it was decided not to grant this recognition without the agreement of the other States. Muslim associations can be recognised as private law associations.

Another country where Islam could have obtained a degree of recognition is the Netherlands. Here too the State maintains neutrality, while at the same time applying what is known as the “system of pillars” (*verzuiling*). Four “pillars” are recognized: the Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, re-reformed communities and secularism/humanism. There was a recommendation to include Islam as another “pillar”, but it was not taken up, once again on account of lack of internal unity.

In Italy some Muslims are pressing the Government to establish an agreement (*intesa*) as has been done with other religious communities. This would enable Muslim bodies to benefit from the 8/1000 on tax from those registering as Muslims. However, the body that presented this demand is not considered as representative. There is no central body in the Muslim community which could manage the funds in the

name of all concerned.

In Britain, where the Anglican Church is the established Church in England, while the established Church in Scotland is the Presbyterian Church, each religious community has its particular status. Muslim organizations can register as charities, which confers some tax advantages.

## 2. Different tendencies among Muslims

### 2.1. Demands

In the fast years of the last wave of migrations, religion was not the central concern of Muslims. As a labour force they were looking for employment. They needed to learn the language of the country they had come to. Housing was another concern, since they were often in inadequate conditions materially, *gastarbeiter* huts or derelict housing earmarked for demolition. For them, material aspects were dominant concerns.

It was when these workers were able to have the wives and families join them that religious needs began to be felt. Not only were temporary places for prayer sought, there was also the desire to build mosques for purposes of religious education and as social centres.

In this area, Muslims encounter many difficulties. If in the Netherlands, at least in the 1976-1984 period, the Muslim community did receive subsidies from the Government for the construction of mosques (up to 30% of the total cost), it was not always easy to obtain the permission required. Bureaucratic delays were often a cover for opposition on the part of local populations. Conflicts arose between communities and civil authorities, sometimes caused by the fact that Muslims used private homes or other premises as mosques or prayer places, without waiting for the required authorisation to do so, or used mosques or places of prayer for other purposes (Qur’anic schools, clubs, the latter being possible logistic centres for the support of fundamentalist or even terrorist movements). This arouses suspicions in the local population who fear Muslim fundamentalism.

When Muslims gain strength, they begin to express demands in the area of ritual. Some wish to observe ritual prayer (*salât*) during working hours. They can ask for special time arrangements during the month of Ramadan. There are demands for the Muslim feasts of *Id al-Fitr* and *Id al-Adhâ* to be holidays, at least for Muslims. There is concern about obtaining *halâl* meat (which in Sweden has led to serious conflict with the civil authorities, since the Muslim method of slaughter is strictly forbidden as being completely barbarous). The communities also feel the need to have their own cemeteries, which is an indicator that they

are no longer looking towards their countries of origin. It is above all in the field of education that requirements are most felt. Many parents want for their children an educational environment able to provide moral values and respectful towards religion. There is often great dissatisfaction with State schools, which motivates the demand for the establishment of Muslim schools, but also the choice of Catholic schools by a significant number of parents. A special need is felt with regard to girls, since mixed education is refused by some parents, or at least they refuse to allow their daughters to take part in certain activities like swimming and gymnastics. Requirements for girls in the area of dress can also create problems, as is well known. Now there are boys entering into conflict with the educational authorities because they want to wear beards in accordance with the *sunna* (tradition) of the Prophet. This behaviour can be religiously motivated, but there can also be some ostentation in this manner of proclaiming identity.

Responses from authorities toward these demands differ from one country to another. When religion is included in the school curriculum, there is generally an arrangement for the teaching of Islam. Denmark is the most generous in this respect: for a group of 12 children, religious teaching and also native language teaching are provided. Elsewhere, in Austria, Germany, and Belgium, provisions exist for the teaching of Islam, but there is often a lack of teachers. In Britain, the latest educational reform (1988) stipulated that school assemblies and religious teaching should reflect the dominant culture and therefore be predominantly Christian. This caused considerable reaction among Muslim parents. Muslim organizations encouraged parents to “withdraw” their children from school assemblies and religious lessons. The demand for the establishment of Muslim schools is becoming more pressing. Normally speaking, where there are large numbers of Muslims, they should be able to open a school with Government subsidies (voluntary aided schools) in the same way as Christians and Jews. But the local authorities do not give the required permission, probably for fear that confessional schools would prevent integration of Muslims into society. A Government commission did not reach agreement on supporting the right of Muslims to have subsidies for their schools. Resentment on the part of Muslims is very strong, since they see this policy as being unfair and biased. They are obliged to establish private schools, the quality of which is often doubtful, on their own means.

## 2.2. Feelings of discrimination

There can be little doubt that there is indeed dis-

crimination against Muslims. But sometimes this discrimination relates to being migrants or newcomers, rather than to the religious factor. Salaries can be lower (especially with non-legalised workers), prospects for promotion more problematic, and likelihood of unemployment greater. To this should be added outbursts of racism that occur here and there, sometimes violently.

However, there appears to be the feeling among some that, though tolerated as migrants, they are not accepted as Muslims. Their rules regarding dress, diet or ritual are seen as “deviant”. They feel they are judged, not for themselves, but in relation to the outside: events in Algeria, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. If they put forward claims for the application of Muslim *family rights*, refusal is motivated by reference to *criminal law*. Mosques and Islamic centres are viewed with suspicion, as being likely to foster fundamentalism.

There are also those who are afraid of becoming the object of Christian mission. The proclamation of the “decade of evangelism” in Britain caused feelings of alarm, and moderate Muslims voiced protest.

## 2.3. Towards European Islam?

The “myth of the return home” entertained by the first Muslim migrants after the Second World War had a twofold consequence: the reference was not so much the country of integration as the country of origin, Algeria, Pakistan, Turkey or any other. Therefore it was less necessary to push religious demands, since they were accounted for in the home country. When the members of Muslim communities realised that their stay was not temporary but stable, it became important for them to be able to live out their religion in an integral manner.

At this juncture two issues appear: can Western European countries accept the existence of Muslim communities within them? can Muslim communities cope with a minority situation?

With respect to the first issue; it should be said that it is not merely a question of integrating individuals from another religion, but the encounter with a religion that refuses privatisation, that comprises requirements not only in the religious field, but also in the social field.

There are some who say that Europe has always been pluricultural, so that there should be no difficulty in assimilating newcomers and new cultural contributions. The multiple roots of European culture have been recalled above, but it must also be said that 19th century romanticism also produced national cultures. These cultures allow regional or religious sub-cultures

to persist, so long as the dominant culture is respected. Is it on this score, as sub-cultures, that Islamic communities will find their place in European countries? Or should something more be expected? Are the dominant cultures ready to make concessions and allow themselves to be changed?

Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, Grand Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, suggests a “community of communities” as a solution to this problem. The identity of each community would be respected, but the members would have a common language enabling communication and avoiding isolation of communities one from the other.

What is the identity of Muslim cultures in Western European countries? These communities, as has been said, are very fragmented — ethnic divisions, ideological differences, a multiplicity of organizations. One can wonder if the organizations are an advantage or a drawback for integration. Inasmuch as they depend on other countries in the Muslim world (India, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Senegal, or any other) for their programmes of action and also for their leaders, they tend to reinforce isolation. But as they have to adapt to rules dictated by the different countries they are in to be able to function, they are also factors for integration. They also become communication channels with civil authorities. It should be said that the authorities have sometimes encouraged collaboration among organizations in order to establish a body capable of representing the interests of the Muslim community with the Government. There are, therefore, various tendencies in these communities. There are two I would like to look at more closely.

### 2.3.1. Accommodating Islam

Some consider that Islam cannot live in a minority situation. According to this idea, it will always try to get the upper hand, to change the *dâr al-harb* (house of war) or *dâr al-sulh* (house of truce) into *dâr al-islam* (house of peace or islam). Is this strictly true? There are countries where Islam appears to accommodate to its minority status. South Africa is one, where Muslims contributed to reflection on the new Constitution. But the most striking example is India, where the Muslim minority is composed of those who opted against the separatist State of Pakistan. These Muslims had to justify their position with theological arguments.

It was an Indian Muslim, residing in Saudi Arabia, who founded the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. The review published by this institute contains articles on the situation of Muslims in different European countries. In these articles, neither the desire for integral application of Islamic law (*shari'a*)

nor the desire to impose Islam on the overall population of these countries is to be felt. On the contrary, partial application of the *shari'a* is advocated, for instance in the area of personal status, and the desire is for Islam to be recognised simply as one of the components of society. Hence it is not a question of forming Muslim States inside Europe, but of enabling Muslims to be fully German, Belgian, British or French while at the same time being fully Muslim.

### 2.3.2. Conquering Islam

Another tendency does exist that should not be forgotten. It is the “missionary” tendency which wants to win Europe over to Islam. This desire is motivated by the conviction that Islam is the ultimate revelation of the original religion; hence it is the religion for all. In addition, there is the conviction that atheistic communism and liberal capitalism are both failures. Europe is in a state of patent moral degeneracy. It is Islam, and Islam alone, that can offer salvation.

This message is proclaimed in various manners: via different Islamic centres, through publications intended to make Islam known, by public demonstration, that includes prayer in public places. Marriage and family are also a way to this end.

Although most mixed marriages are the result of encounters that one could term “non-motivated”, no mistake should be made about the intention of some young Muslims to seek out a Christian wife and convert her to Islam. Even if the wife remains Christian, the children will be Muslims. By way of large families, the growth of the Muslim community will be ensured, and one day it will achieve a majority.

There is no reason to be alarmist and to assume that all Muslims entertain a project of this sort, but it is not wise, on the other hand, to ignore it.

### 2.4. Openness to dialogue

We must now consider how the Church should react to this situation. Before envisaging the different aspects of this response, there is another question to be asked: are the Muslims in Europe open to dialogue?

First, some points of encounter can be acknowledged. Muslims take part in the activities of the Fraternity of Abraham and the Children of Abraham (Community of Jerusalem). They are members of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. There is a European movement, “Jews, Christians and Muslims” which organises yearly sessions for young people from the three religions who are training for religious re-

sponsibilities. A new “Three Faiths Forum” has been launched in Britain. There are other structures enabling dialogue, or at least consultation, such as *Marseille-Espérance* in France, or the Interfaith Network in Britain. Multilateral dialogue may be easier than face-to-face encounter.

On the bilateral score the *Groupe de Recherche Islamo-Chrétien* (GRIC) should be mentioned, with its branches in Paris and Belgium (as well as in Morocco and Tunisia). The GRIC has already issued courageous publications on revelation, on faith and justice, on secularism, and intends pursuing its work.

Other levels of encounter could be referred to. Mixed households meet for shared reflection, and there are also groups of Muslim and Christian women.

Some Muslim organizations invite Christian speakers to their meetings. A centre for the spread of Islam, the Islamic Foundation, in Leicester, UK, has just launched a publication called *Encounters* to encourage dialogue. Two of the people in charge of the journal were given grants by the Foundation “Nostra Aetate” established by our Council; one was for research in Christian-Muslim dialogue, the other for studies on Christianity.

It is true that those engaged in activities of this sort are not many in relation to the mass of Muslims. It can nevertheless be seen as a sign of a degree of opening up.

In January 1993, when Pope John Paul II along with the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Europe announced a weekend of special prayer in Assisi for peace in Europe and in particular in the Balkans, some 30 Muslim representatives from European countries responded to the invitation. This shows, I think, on the part of religious leaders, greater confidence with regard to encounters with Christians.

### 3. The response of the Church

#### 3.1. The eyes of truth

The first requirement is to look the reality of Muslim presence in Europe in the face, avoiding purely emotive responses. Irenicism, a naïve approach refusing to believe in the genuine difficulties in relationships with Muslims, does not make recognition of the truth easy. This may well be a past danger; the danger now is rather that of giving way to fear, fear of being submerged, fear of the loss of cultural identity.

Faced with the “threat” of Islam taken as a worldwide phenomenon, it is good to try to ascertain the exact contours of Muslim communities, and their great fragmentation. Without seeking to play one group against the other, it can be seen that this lack of unity

weakens the strength of Islam, just in the same way as lack of unity decreases the strength of Christian witness.

Light also needs to be shed on motivations leading to encounters between Christians and Muslims. On the Christian side, we can be guided by the official teaching of the Church. Pope John Paul II stated: “Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity” (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 56). It is true that the Church will not renounce proclaiming the name of Christ, Lord and Saviour, for to do so would be to disclaim itself. But it does not enter into dialogue to draw people to itself. By providing a definition of dialogue, the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) already indicates its purpose: “In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment” (DM, n. 3), “in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both the witness and exploration of respective religious convictions” (DP, n. 9).

This same document goes further: “Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations. It reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one’s beliefs and a common exploration of one’s respective religious convictions. In dialogue, Christians and others are invited to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God’s personal call” (DP, n. 40).

I may appear to put too much emphasis on this point, but it seems to me very important. Our initiatives in the area of interreligious dialogue are often met with suspicion, a suspicion that needs constantly to be overcome. The gratuitous nature of our enterprise cannot be over-emphasised.

#### 3.2. Acting in truth

The first response of the Church towards Muslim migrants was assistance in social integration: literacy, material aid, help with administrative procedures, and so forth. This type of service, a form of expression of the *diakonia* which is an integral part of the mission of the Church, continues, especially in some countries still receiving waves of immigrants.

But as early as 1974, in the Luxemburg meeting mentioned earlier, the report of the study group for Muslims in Europe noted “a tendency on the part of organizations concerned with migrants not to respect the integrity of the religious values, and to reduce them

to their economic and social situation”.

To take account of the religion of migrants, of the Islam of Muslims, could well contribute to the shift from assistance to partnership. Even in the social field, Catholic organizations can be called upon to work *with* Muslims rather than work *for* them. Sometimes it is non-confessional bodies or multi-religious associations that enable collaboration between Muslims and Christians.

### 3.3. Mixed marriages

Christian-Muslim marriages are still a subject of concern for pastors, and rightly so, since these marriages raise a number of problems. Sometimes one has the impression that the issue is reduced to whether or not a dispensation is to be granted, whereas in fact many other questions arise. Should there be an effort to try to prevent Christian-Muslim marriages by warning young people about the difficulties involved? What preparation should be offered to mixed couples? How can contact be maintained with the Christian partner, even — or especially — when the wedding is only celebrated before civil authorities?

It is true that European Churches have given serious thought to the matter, and there are several documents to help ministers. The publications of the Secrétariat pour les Relations avec l’Islam (SRI) of the French Episcopal Conference, issued in 1983 and revised in 1995, should be noted in particular. There are also associations of mixed couples which can give advice and support, but these could well be more numerous.

I would like here to mention two recent documents which have resulted from ecumenical efforts. The first was issued by the “Islam in Europe” Committee. After describing the present situation in Europe with relation to marriage between Christians and Muslims, the document presents the Christian conception of marriage (noting differences on the part of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants) and the Muslim conception of the family and marriage (with notes on the legislation in force in Muslim home countries). It then goes on to pastoral responsibilities in general. The document distinguishes five stages in pastoral accompaniment:

- initial contacts
- decision-making
- preparation in view of marriage
- early years of marriage
- possible conflictual phase.

Relevant advice is given for each of these phases. The document cannot replace orientations provided by the authorities in each Church, but it is worth consulting.

The second document is the result of work undertaken together by our Council and the Office for Inter-Religious Relations of the World Council of Churches. It is at the same time wider in scope and less ambitious. It is wider in that it purposes to take account of all forms of marriage between believers of different traditions, not merely between Christians and Muslims. It is less ambitious in that it cannot enter into detail on the conceptions of marriage and issues of law. It first gives results of a survey of mixed marriages; it analyses some documents that are already available, and raises some issues that ministers cannot avoid (religious freedom, religious differences as a source of tension or enrichment, the education of children, relations with the Christian community). This document, which has been published in our Council’s review *Pro Dialogo*, can be seen as a complement to the first.

### 3.4. The international dimension of Christian-Muslim relations

Although each country has its own specific situation, we must take into account the repercussions that action or a style of relationships can have in other countries. This general reflection is intended to lead on to the question of reciprocity.

Many Oriental Christians, and some Western Christians, accuse those engaged in relations with Muslims in Europe of being naïve. According to this point of view, the people concerned, though generous in intention, do not know the real nature of Islam. A reply to this accusation has been given earlier: Islam cannot be treated as a monolithic block; the great diversity of tendencies within Muslim communities must be recognised.

There is another accusation: you facilitate the integration of Muslims in Europe, but you forget the suffering of Christians in Muslim countries; there should be reciprocity in relations.

The “Islam in Europe” Committee has given consideration to this question. After considerable discussion a first text was published in 1995. This text states that it is not possible to adopt the principle of reciprocity as applied in agreements between States. There is no cause to resort to retaliation if members of one community are ill-treated. Reciprocity in the religious field means “a relationship based on mutual assistance and respect”. This document presents a reflection on religious plurality, and its limitations, both in Muslim countries and so-called Christian countries. It then goes on to consider the situation of Christians in the Muslim world, and enumerates the difficulties they have to face: restrictions on assemblies, obstacles to the spread of the Christian message, legal se-

quels to the conversion to Christianity. Christians are asking Muslims to re-interpret their tradition in the light of the requirements of modern lifestyle, in a spirit of openness.

This text encountered much criticism from both Christians and Muslims. This criticism led the Committee to publish a "message" to European Churches on the subject of relations with Islam. This message, delivered at the Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, is entitled: "From reciprocity to reconciliation". Greater attention is paid to the asymmetrical nature of the situations. "People always talk and write about Islam and the West, rather than Islam and Christianity". It is not without reason, since, even if Western countries bear the mark of Christianity, "it is very difficult to consider that the West is composed of (Christian societies in the sense in which it can be said that the Islamic world is composed of Muslim societies)". There is also asymmetry in the founding processes of the two religions with regard to relationships between religion and State. This leads the authors of the message to suggest a shift "from the idea of reciprocity to that of reconciliation". Some of the implications of this orientation are indicated: having accurate ideas on Islam and Muslims, based on precise information; defending the religious freedom of Muslims in Europe, in the hope that Muslim countries might guarantee the same freedoms to Christians.

Although it may be agreed that reciprocity cannot be a "*do ut des*", it must surely be admitted that this message is rather toned-down in comparison with the initial text. There is room perhaps for more vigorous calls, better expressing the expectations of Christians. At the inauguration of the mosque in Rome, Pope John Paul II, at the General Audience that coincided with the ceremony, gave voice to this expectation. Church ministers have the duty to constantly emphasise the needs of Christian communities within Muslim societies, and to call for conditions of genuine freedom for these communities.

#### **4. Conclusion: towards the third millennium**

Pope John Paul II has invited the whole Church to prepare for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. He has outlined a programme of catechesis and reflection, underlining the ecumenical and interreligious nature of the Jubilee. He sees in the birth of Christ, of which the 20<sup>th</sup> centenary will be celebrated, a historical event that concerns all humanity. His wish is that all our brothers and sisters of all religious traditions join with us in these celebrations. It is our task to address these brothers and sisters. With regard to Muslims, can we establish dialogue with them on the

subject of Jesus who is the centre of the Jubilee? It does not seem appropriate to start from the Qur'an, since it formally denies the divinity of Christ. Starting from passages in the Gospels and the New Testament that state the divinity of Christ is equally difficult. Indeed, Islam claims that the true Gospel has been altered or falsified, so that these texts would be suspect. It seems preferable to start from the message of Christ, and from there to go on to the person of Our Lord and the mystery this involves.

But there are other aspects of the Jubilee: the combat for justice, the effort towards reconciliation. There is the passage from one millennium to the next. It is true that Muslims could say to us: "we have a different calendar, based on the *hijra*, the migration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. Your millennium is of no interest to us". What reply could be given? Can we not say that, in the present-day world, in politics, in trade, in communications, the Christian calendar has become that of the common era. On a purely human plane, there is a certain unity. Will you not reflect with us on the way in which humanity lives? What can we do together to improve our relations? What are our dreams for the coming millennium? What projects should be undertaken?

Seen in this perspective the Jubilee of the Year 2000 can provide a framework and possibilities for reinforcing dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Europe, a dialogue that already exists, but which needs to become more widespread and to go deeper.

Ref.: *ENCOUNTER*, n. 247, July - August 1998.

## SENS DE LA PRÉSENCE DES PÈRES BLANCS AU MAGHREB ET DANS LES PAYS À RISQUE

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Au départ, le thème que l'on m'avait proposé pour vous parler aujourd'hui était formulé ainsi: «Pourquoi les Pères Blancs restent-ils en Algérie?» J'ai pensé qu'il était préférable d'élargir la réflexion, d'abord pour dépasser la problématique 'rester ou partir?', somme toute assez limitée. Ensuite, parce que, où qu'ils soient, les Pères Blancs sont partie prenante d'une Eglise locale et c'est en Église, en concertation avec les évêques, que les décisions se mûrissent et se prennent. Par ailleurs, les quatre Pères Blancs qui ont été assassinés le 27 décembre 1994 à Tizi Ouzou font partie de ces dix-neuf membres de l'Eglise qui ont donné leur vie en Algérie au cours de ces deux dernières années, le dernier en date étant Mgr Claverie à Oran. Enfin, il est bon de se rappeler qu'il n'y a malheureusement pas que l'Algérie où les Pères Blancs doivent partager des situations de grande insécurité. Ce fut le cas pendant plusieurs années à Beyrouth, il y a eu l'Ouganda dans les années 80, et plus récemment le grand drame qui a secoué le Rwanda en 1994, où deux de nos confrères ont été tués. Et voilà que les séquelles de ce conflit se font sentir par une déstabilisation de toute la zone des Grands Lacs, mettant nos confrères, l'Eglise et tout un peuple dans un climat de danger, très difficile à vivre au fil des jours, très éprouvant pour les nerfs. Dans un cadre où il n'y a plus aucun îlot de sécurité, aucun recours immédiat, et où les gens sont lancés sur les routes de la faim, de l'épidémie, du désespoir.

Même si ce soir nous parlerons plus spécifiquement de l'Algérie, toutes ces zones à risque seront présentes comme toile de fond de notre réflexion. Mais, de plus, je voudrais situer l'Algérie dans son contexte en élargissant notre propos à la présence en terre d'Islam, en ce Maghreb qui nous a vus naître et qui reste pour nous une terre de prédilection; J'ajouterai pour finir que, pour quelqu'un qui vit tranquillement à Rome hors de ces zones à risque, il est un peu prétentieux de vouloir porter des jugements à distance. C'est pour-

quoi je voudrais dans toute la mesure du possible laisser parler ceux qui sont directement impliqués, et tout particulièrement ceux qui ont donné leur vie pour l'Algérie.

### Pas de réponse toute faite

Je reviens à la formulation initiale: «Pourquoi les Pères Blancs restent-ils en Algérie?» Il ne faudrait pas croire qu'il y ait une réponse évidente et définitive, qui ne serait jamais remise en question. En fait, un certain nombre de congrégations ont préféré retirer leurs membres, en attendant des jours meilleurs, ou pour répondre à d'autres appels, en des pays où l'on peut travailler sans entraves.

Le 20 janvier 1995, moins d'un mois après l'assassinat de nos confrères, le Conseil Général écrivait, s'adressant à tous les Pères Blancs d'Algérie: «Nous sommes profondément touchés par la façon courageuse avec laquelle vous répondez à cette situation dramatique. Vous continuez, en toute gratuité, à marcher sur le chemin de l'amitié et de la solidarité. Nous percevons, au cœur même de ces questionnements qui vous habitent, votre désir de fidélité à l'Esprit qui est votre guide. Devant les menaces que vous subissez, vous êtes intérieurement partagés entre le désir de rester avec ceux qui vous ont accueillis comme des frères et la décision de partir qui semble 'la décision raisonnable'. Chacun de vous se trouve confronté à ce dilemme; la question se pose aussi à vous comme groupe». Et plus loin: «Jusqu'à maintenant, à travers vous, nous restons présents en Algérie. Après avoir prié et réfléchi longtemps en Conseil Général, nous confirmons ce choix. Il est important cependant que chacun puisse se situer personnellement devant cette décision» (*Petit Echo*, 1995/2, p. 114-117).

Il faut bien noter que ce discernement implique tout le monde et renforce la cohésion du groupe, non seulement au niveau des Pères Blancs, mais de toute

l'Église concernée, qui en de telles circonstances se resserre autour de ses pasteurs. A plusieurs reprises, les évêques d'Algérie ont donné des directives pour ce discernement en temps de crise. Il est clair, en particulier que les personnes qui se trouveraient directement visées par des menaces devraient partir de l'endroit où elles sont. Il n'est jamais question de chercher le martyr, témoin cette réflexion d'un Père Abbé cistercien: «L'Ordre n'a pas besoin de martyrs, mais de moines». Il est des moments où les événements semblent décider pour nous, obligeant à des déplacements et des regroupements. Ainsi l'évacuation du poste de Ghardaïa.

Il peut aussi arriver que les conditions imposées par les autorités locales pour assurer la sécurité rendent finalement impossible toute forme de témoignage, ne laissant par exemple aucune liberté pour les visites. Songeons que les évêques se déplacent avec une escorte, et que des regroupements ont été imposés à Oran. Ces situations de regroupement forcé peuvent être à la rigueur acceptables pour des pères ou des sœurs ayant déjà vécu de longues années dans le pays, et qui continuent malgré tout à se sentir solidaires; mais il est difficilement concevable de mettre des jeunes dans de telles situations de grande frustration apostolique. Bref, il faut considérer que la situation est en évolution permanente, obligeant le discernement à évoluer en conséquence. Il n'y a pas de réponse toute faite, définitive.

### Dans la ligne de l'incarnation

Il était important de préciser tout cela au départ. Le moment est venu de réfléchir sur les raisons profondes qui nous font accepter les risques. Ce qui inspire la vie de tout missionnaire, c'est l'incarnation du Christ, venu assumer jusqu'en sa mort la solidarité avec les hommes. Le P. Christian de Chergé, quinze jours avant sa mort, parlant à Alger à un groupe de chrétiens, disait: «Nous devons trouver dans l'incarnation des vraies raisons de notre présence *pascale* en Algérie» (*Sept vies pour Dieu et l'Algérie*, Bayard/Centurion, Paris, 1996, p. 205).

Traduisant cela en langage concret, les supérieurs majeurs d'Algérie écrivaient le 17 mars 1995: «En dépit de nos fragilités, nous avons la conviction qu'il nous faut durer. Pour cela, mesurons mieux encore le prix de ces relations qui continuent à s'offrir à nous jour après jour [...] des relations simples avec des gens simples, par-delà les clivages politiques (*ibidem*, p. 155).

Il est un thème qui peu à peu s'est imposé à la

réflexion de l'Église locale, c'est le thème de l'alliance, tout à fait biblique en son inspiration. Le Conseil Général des Sœurs Blanches écrivait aux sœurs d'Algérie (4/9/1990): «Merci pour l'alliance faite avec le peuple algérien au nom de votre foi en Jésus-Christ. Cette alliance, c'est par votre présence que nous la signons avec vous. Dans la décision qu'ont prise les moines de Tibhirine de rester dans la zone de Médéa si exposée, il y avait aussi une autre raison propre à leur vocation: c'était le vœu de stabilité, évoqué par Dom Bernard Oliveira, général des Trappistes, dans une lettre largement diffusée intitulée *Pour une lecture croyante des événements*» (*ibidem*, p. 238). Et de son côté Mgr Claverie écrivait l'année dernière: «Nous ne sommes ni des prophètes, ni des fanatiques, ni des héros, ni des ilotes. Mais nous avons noué avec les Algériens des relations que rien ne pourra détruire, pas même la mort. Nous sommes en cela les disciples de Jésus Christ et c'est tout» (Claverie, P., *Lettres et messages d'Algérie*, Karthala, Paris, 1996, p. 172).

Il avait une expression qui lui était chère: il aimait dire que le rôle de l'Église est de se situer sur «les lignes de fracture de l'humanité», là où elle peut témoigner du mystère pascal. Par 'lignes de fracture' il faut entendre les tensions: Nord/Sud, riches/pauvres, Islam/Occident, etc. Une alliance qui va jusqu'au bout et qui accompagne gratuitement. Laissons encore parler le P. Claverie: «Douloureusement impuissant comme au chevet de l'ami malade, juste pour lui tenir la main, et éponger son front. Nous donnons du temps, les derniers moments de notre vie, simplement pour être présent, sans autre but que de dire: je continue d'être avec toi, maintenant que la fête est finie, je veux être présent à ta souffrance. Présence inutile, peut-être, mais présence-cadeau de l'amour vrai. C'est maintenant que l'Église prouve qu'elle n'est pas ici pour elle-même» (cité par P.J.- J. Pérennès, OP, N.D. de Paris, 9/9/1996).

C'est là que nous touchons quelque chose de très important: le contexte d'impuissance dans lequel se situe l'Église dans ce genre de situations. Et là, j'imagine facilement les réalités et le sentiment de dénuement dans lesquels sont plongés actuellement nos confrères du Kivu, devant cet afflux de réfugiés apeurés et en fuite. Le chapitre de 1992 s'était arrêté sur cet aspect, de façon quelque peu prophétique: «Au milieu des événements de ce monde, nous faisons l'expérience de notre faiblesse et de notre impuissance. Nous revivons la *kénose* du Seigneur, pour partager la puissance de sa Résurrection (Ph 3,10)».

Effectivement, au centre de cela, il y a l'expérience du Christ désarmé face à toute la violence qui déferle sur lui: «Dans sa chair, il a tué la haine». La faiblesse

de l'apôtre avait fait l'objet d'une méditation de notre confrère Christian Chessel, quelques mois avant sa mort: «Le Christ n'a jamais été autant sauveur que sur la croix. C'est dans cette extrême faiblesse qu'il sauve le monde. C'est pour cela qu'il nous demande de prendre le même chemin que lui. Faibles nous-mêmes, nous aurons un autre regard sur ceux qui viennent à nous dans cette faiblesse. Nous saurons les écouter, les recevoir. Ils attendent de nous que nous les comprenions, et quand quelqu'un a le sentiment d'avoir été compris, il sait qu'il est aimé. C'est ce qui nous est demandé: être des témoins, tout simplement, attentifs, respectueux du drame qui se joue. Et parce qu'on vit cette faiblesse-là avec eux, parce qu'on n'a pas peur, on pourra témoigner de la foi qui nous anime, de la force qui nous anime dans cette faiblesse, force qui repose sur Dieu» (cf. le numéro spécial de *Voix d'Afrique*, janvier 1995, pp. 10-11, où il développe sa pensée).

### L'Église acquiert ses lettres de créance

Les Algériens eux-mêmes ne s'y sont pas trompés: «Vous avez choisi le camp des opprimés». C'est étonnant de penser qu'à aucun moment de son histoire, l'Église n'a donné un témoignage aussi clair de ce qu'elle devrait être, porteuse d'un message chrétien dans toute sa pureté. Il n'y a pas de doute que ce message a finalement beaucoup plus de force, et rejoint beaucoup plus les cœurs et les consciences, que quand on construisait des basiliques, dans la période coloniale, alors qu'il y avait une forte présence chrétienne.

Dans cette épreuve, l'Église a trouvé tout à la fois sa légitimité et sa crédibilité. Comme le disait Mgr Teissier, archevêque d'Alger: «Il y a désormais de nombreux amis algériens pour qui nous sommes maintenant devenus l'Église d'Algérie».

Dans ce témoignage que l'Église donne en ce moment, je voudrais faire une mention particulière d'un texte que vous connaissez, j'en suis sûr, et qui fera un jour partie des anthologies de l'histoire de l'Église. Je veux parler du testament du P. Christian de Chergé, prieur des trappistes de Tighirine (*Sept vies...*, p. 210). Parmi beaucoup d'attitudes fondamentales que l'on y retrouve, il en est une qui ressort particulièrement: c'est le pardon accordé à l'avance à «l'ami de la dernière minute qui ne savait pas ce qu'il faisait». J'ai compris que, dans ce passage, il y avait une inspiration qui venait «non de la chair et du sang», mais de beaucoup plus loin, de cette source d'innocence de l'amour créateur. Le pardon est vraiment au cœur de la vocation chrétienne.

Ayant évoqué ce testament, je voudrais maintenant lire une lettre écrite par une mère de famille algérienne à Mgr Teissier: «Après la tragédie, après le sacrifice vécu par vous et par nous, après les larmes et le message de vie, d'honneur, de tolérance légué par nos frères moines à nous et à vous, j'ai décidé de lire le testament de Christian à haute voix et avec beaucoup de cœur à mes enfants, parce que j'ai senti qu'il était destiné à nous tous et toutes. Je voulais leur dire le message d'amour de Dieu et des hommes. La solidarité humaine et l'amour de l'autre est un itinéraire qui va jusqu'au sacrifice, jusqu'au repos éternel, jusqu'au bout. Mes enfants et moi nous sommes très touchés par cette grande humilité, ce grand cœur, cette paix dans l'âme et le pardon. Le testament de Christian est plus qu'un message, c'est un héritage» (*Rencontres*, Semaine religieuse d'Alger, n° 6, juin 1996, p. 143). Et elle concluait: «merci à l'Église d'être parmi nous aujourd'hui».

### Un témoignage en terre d'islam

Le temps est venu maintenant d'élargir notre propos à la présence de l'Église actuellement en Afrique du Nord. Je n'ai pas du tout l'intention de rouvrir le débat sur le sens global de notre présence dans un pays à 100% musulman et qui entend bien le rester. Beaucoup de choses ont été écrites sur ce thème et je crois pouvoir dire que les mentalités ont passablement évolué. Dans la Société, on entend moins souvent ce: «*Ad quid perditio hæc ?* Pourquoi perdez-vous votre temps, alors qu'il n'y a pas de conversions?» Le Concile a été pour beaucoup dans cette évolution, faisant comprendre que le dialogue avec les autres religions est une dimension intégrante de la mission de l'Église. Dieu n'est pas sensible aux frontières qu'ont bâties les hommes, et si l'Église a pour mission d'être témoin de l'amour universel du Père, comment pourrait-elle tranquillement se désintéresser d'un milliard d'hommes sous prétexte qu'ils sont musulmans?

On pourrait presque partir du paradoxe que plus la rencontre est difficile, plus elle est nécessaire. En première approximation, on constate que les évolutions politiques et la montée des fondamentalismes en certains pays ne favorisent pas la rencontre, parce qu'elles contribuent à entretenir des deux côtés une image de lutte et d'affrontements. C'est devenu un lieu commun de dire que dans la conscience occidentale, qui a besoin de se faire peur, l'islam est venu prendre le relais du communisme.

Je voudrais vous inviter à aller au-delà de cet islam bruyant qui fait la 'une' des journaux, et que j'appelle *l'islam des décibels*. Derrière cette façade qui

retient l'attention des médias, il y a une réalité beaucoup plus nuancée. Si nous déplorons le durcissement de l'islam, il est bon de nous rappeler que nombre de musulmans le regrettent autant que nous. Rappelons-nous que l'islam n'a pas qu'un seul visage et qu'il faut se garder de porter des jugements globaux trop hâtifs. Il y a actuellement des évolutions intéressantes et je voudrais en cueillir quelques signes.

C'est tout d'abord tout ce travail en profondeur, qui se fait au niveau des consciences, en face de la violence et du témoignage de non-violence que l'Église a donné en réponse. Nous l'avons suffisamment évoqué et tous les témoignages recueillis montrent que l'Esprit est à l'œuvre. Ce n'est pas par hasard si c'est précisément en Algérie que les gens se posent le plus de questions, et où les sympathies et les amitiés profondes se sont scellées dans l'épreuve.

Mais il y a d'autres contextes plus pacifiques, où l'on sent aussi des évolutions: j'ai pu en être témoin moi-même, ayant retrouvé la Tunisie en 1992, après exactement vingt ans d'absence. Et j'ai pu constater qu'en vingt ans les mentalités avaient passablement évolué: au début des années soixante-dix, proches des indépendances, le discours était encore celui de la recherche identitaire (*al-asâla*), l'arabité. Maintenant, face aux risques d'asphyxie et d'obscurantisme véhiculés par l'islamisme, on cherche ailleurs un peu d'oxygène. La Méditerranée est devenue la grande mode. On n'hésite plus à revendiquer les racines 'puniques', on évoque saint Augustin comme un penseur d'Afrique du Nord. Le développement des communications y a été pour beaucoup, en particulier les contacts avec les méthodes scientifiques de l'Université.

C'est pourquoi le renouveau et l'ouverture sont à chercher non pas du côté de l'*establishment* traditionnel, mais bien dans les élites de l'université moderne. Quelques faits:

- Un père de l'IBLA (Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes des Pères Blancs de Tunis) a été consulté pour la refonte des manuels d'histoire et d'enseignement religieux, pour voir si la présentation du christianisme était satisfaisante.

- Le GRIC (Groupe de Recherches islamo-chrétiennes) continue à travailler pour explorer des thèmes communs.

- Plus récemment, c'est l'université Zituna (pour la formation des cadres religieux) qui a fait appel au PISAI (Institut Pontifical d'Études Arabes et d'Islamologie) pour établir un lien de coopération.

- J'ai eu l'occasion de participer l'année dernière au Maroc à un débat télévisé sur le dialogue entre les religions monothéistes.

Tout cela sans parler des contacts d'amitié qui recueillent les fruits de longues années de présence et de partage. Bref, il y a des éléments qui permettent d'évoquer un souffle nouveau. N'ayons aucune illusion, il y a encore beaucoup de chemin à faire. Mais ce n'est pas au moment où ces petites signes se manifestent qu'il faudrait songer à partir. Bien plus, nous sommes invités à nous renouveler dans la fidélité.

### Une fidélité renouvelée

Et c'est sur ce mot de fidélité que je voudrais conclure, parce qu'au fond, il résume toute l'attitude que cherche à avoir l'Église au Maghreb. Redonnons la parole aux Supérieurs majeurs d'Algérie, qui écrivaient en 1995: «Nous nous savons convoqués à la vérité d'un cheminement spirituel: nous laisser creuser pour acquérir la disponibilité d'un cœur pauvre qui ne peut offrir que sa *fidélité* d'aujourd'hui; nous laisser envahir par la bienveillance de Dieu pour ce peuple qui souffre; et aussi nous laisser provoquer par l'épreuve à un surcroît d'humanité, entre nous d'abord, afin de contribuer à exorciser la violence et exerçant simplement le ministère de vivre ensemble» (*Sept vies...*, p. 1).

Fidélité dans l'épreuve c'est actuellement le cas non seulement en Algérie, mais au Rwanda, au Burundi, au Congo, etc. Fidélité aux intuitions du Cardinal Lavignerie quant à notre vocation de témoignage en terre d'islam.

J'ai profondément conscience de ne pas m'adresser ici à un auditoire ordinaire: l'Association des Amis des Pères Blancs a toujours exprimé une grande solidarité avec ce que nous vivons. Cette fidélité qui nous est demandée, c'est aussi la vôtre. Je dois dire que chaque fois que j'ai reçu la nouvelle d'un missionnaire tué, j'ai été renvoyé, comme vous l'êtes vous-mêmes, à ma propre fidélité. A chaque fois, la nouvelle nous provoque en ce lieu au fond du cœur où nous décidons de nos raisons de vivre et de mourir. La solidarité avec nos frères nous renvoie à notre fidélité quotidienne dans notre cadre de vie, ce coin de la vigne du Seigneur où nous sommes invités à participer à la construction du Royaume.

Ref.: *EUNTES*, Vol. 31, n. 2, Juin 1998.

## COMING EVENTS

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**PUBLIC MEETING OF USG/UISG JPIC COMMISSION**  
Brothers of the Christian Schools, Via Aurelia, 476, 27 OCTOBER 1998

**FAITH RESPONSE TO CONSUMERISM:  
FAIR TRADE — VOW OF ECONOMY OR VOW OF POVERTY?**

Mr Paulo Brichetti

**SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY — Morning Activities**  
TUESDAY, 1 DECEMBER 1998 — Brothers of the Christian Schools, 9.00 hrs

Fr Ignacio Harding, OFM  
**ADVOCACY AT THE UNITED NATIONS: POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS**

Sr Brigid Reynolds, SM / Fr Seán J. Healy, SMA  
**TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY AND THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY  
(AN IRISH CASE STUDY)**

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**SEDOS ONE-DAY ACTIVITY FOR THE SYNOD FOR OCEANIA**  
SATURDAY, 5 DECEMBER, 9.00 hrs

Fr Ennio Mantovani, SVD, New Guinea  
**KEY ISSUES OF A DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE  
IN MELANESIA**

Ms Irene Hancey, New Zealand  
**CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN NEW ZEALAND**

Msgr. Michel Visi, Vanuatu  
**L'ÉGLISE DU PACIFIQUE: DÉFIS PRINCIPAUX FACE AU NOUVEAU MILLÉNAIRE**

Msgr. Michael Putney, Brisbane  
**AUSTRALIA — ECUMENICAL QUESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE SYNOD**

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