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Editorial

We open this issue with a very interesting article by the well known French Dominican, Fr CHRISTIAN DUQUOC, OP. He comments on the remarkably non-obliging or “discrete” (discretion) way, God reveals himself in the historic Jesus of Nazareth, and how this way of making the Father and the kingdom present, will mark the continuing mission of the Church.—

Our mission work originates in the sending Word of God. Sr MARIA KO HA-FONG, FMA, helps us to understand the ‘symbolic’ character of the Bible. To do this means to recognise it as a “manifestation (Epiphany) of a reality that is hidden within it, but which is greater than it and transcends it”.—

Africa is living hours of crisis and suffering in many countries, but hope persists because of the great richness of its people. CHU S.P. OKONGWU considers the place Africa should have in the new emerging world order. He thinks that to succeed, political and State structures have to be reorganised and that also in Africa, like in the other continents, stronger alliances between geographical areas are urgent. —

During the last few years the MST (Movement of the Landless), which represents almost five million families without land, has achieved political recognition and formulated the problem with heroic patience. BERNARDO MANÇANO FERNANDES makes clear that in Brazil there is still no real “reforma agraria”, no real change in the balance of possession. The Government is (with public funds) buying some land from the already very rich owners to give it to a few poor families. —

In his challenging intervention in the Synod for Oceania, Fr MICHAEL CURRAN, Superior General of the MSC, dwelt briefly on some important questions the Church is facing today. To resolve them with courage, he suggests that at the beginning of the new millennium, an Ecumenical Council should be held in order to tackle evident organisational and theological questions.

We conclude the issue with a short statement of the SOUTH ASIAN JESUIT PROVINCIALS in support of the work of their theologians. They feel there is a “lack of appreciation of difference and of proper procedures, when decisions are taken unilaterally without a dialogue with the Asian Churches”. —

Brazil

Politicians in stratosphere

In an interview yesterday, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso spoke out strongly against recent statements from the CNBB (Brazilian Bishops’ Conference) on the topic of the Government’s economic policies. He first attacked the advisors of the CNBB and those who have critiqued the government:

“I don’t see how the Church could have endorsed these opinions, which are from *advisors who should have studied better the numbers; and if they had better formation in economics, it would help*”. He went on to criticize the CNBB itself: “*Just as I don’t give my opinions concerning the dogmas of the Church, it would be better if the Church would not give its opinions on matters of the economy*”. He ended by also attacking the MST (Movement of the Landless) by calling them a “*paramilitary group*”.

In response, the ex-president of the CNBB, Bishop Ivo Lorscheiter said that FHC’s remarks reminded him of the days of the military dictatorship, when the Government used the same arguments. “*It is an old thesis that I thought had already been laid to rest. One time, one of the military presidents said to us, ‘If you continue to try to handle matters of the Government, I’ll start teaching catechism’*”. Another prelate, Bishop Mauro Morelli, said that to ask the Church to be silent on these issues would be “*to ask the Church to go to the stratosphere, where many of the politicians live. It is a very immature and very authoritarian reaction*”.

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From FOLHA DE SAO PAULO

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Christian Duquoc, OP

Discrétion du Dieu trinitaire et mission chrétienne

Christian Duquoc, o.p., a enseigné à la Faculté de théologie de l'Université Catholique de Lyon de 1957 à 1992, ainsi qu'à la Faculté autonome de théologie protestante à Genève, de 1979 à 1991. Il est membre de la direction de la revue Concilium et directeur de la revue Lumière et Vie. Il est l'auteur d'une quinzaine d'ouvrages, notamment en Christologie ainsi que de très nombreux articles de recherche.

Une rumeur persiste en Occident: Dieu aurait déserté ce monde. Peut-être existe-t-il! Nul ne saurait affirmer ou infirmer sa réalité. Ce qui, par contre, paraît de plus en plus évident, c'est qu'il ne se soucie pas de l'histoire humaine. Aussi faut-il organiser sa vie, construire sa morale, donner du sens à son existence, sans avoir recours à une quelconque présence divine pleine de sollicitude. Il serait déraisonnable dans une si grande absence de Dieu de tabler, pour mobiliser l'action, sur une espérance transcendante. Le monde humain est voué à sa propre liberté, limitée et éphémère, à l'égard de laquelle le mouvement de l'immense cosmos, à l'instar de Dieu si il existe, est indifférent.

Devant cette situation où l'espérance se dérobe, l'agnosticisme contemporain ne se dit pas triomphant: il n'éprouve aucune sympathie pour les athéismes militants qui ont cru naguère faire naître une vie humaine digne de ce nom sur la disparition des croyances en Dieu.

Cette modestie ne comble pas le désir. Des mouvements religieux, sans référence à une Divinité transcendante, se promettent d'assouvir le désir insatisfait en travaillant à l'épanouissement par intégration au mouvement cosmique, à la nature, favorisant ainsi un accès à soi sans séparation d'avec le Tout et envisageant le cycle des réincarnations comme la condition de possibilité de l'exploration heureuse de toutes les potentialités d'un soi en harmonie avec le cosmos. L'autonomie du sujet suffit à ce mouvement d'apparente décentration de soi par centration sur le soi cosmique. Le Dieu qui meurt dans la rumeur est le Dieu séparé, celui de la Parole et de la Loi, celui qui est hétérogène, celui qui pâtit du discrédit social du christianisme. Le désir court vers un divin homogène pour lequel la blessure de la parole est inconcevable. Dieu meurt du souci et du contentement de soi. Il n'a rien à donner parce qu'il est étranger.

La rumeur de son absence est le symptôme public

de son extériorité. N'étant pas le fond heureux de nous-mêmes, il est sans intérêt. Son intervention, par médiation humaine, a été source de violence: il imposait son point de vue. Dans l'expérience religieuse qui s'annonce, nul ne magnifie son point de vue: il le vit comme sa réussite propre, étrangère à la réussite de l'autre. Aussi la tolérance, le débat indéfini sont-ils les qualités majeures de cette quête d'un Absolu qui comble sans séparer, en unifiant sans violence les contraires. La rumeur de l'absence de Dieu annonce l'ère de la grande paix puisque nul être divin ne saurait prêcher aujourd'hui: «Je ne suis pas venu apporter la paix, mais la division». Quel lien existe-t-il entre cette disparition de Dieu transmise de bouche à oreille, et la discrétion de son apparition dans le christianisme? C'est ce sujet que je voudrais traiter sur l'horizon d'une exigence: «Allez enseigner à toutes les nations».

Je procéderai de la façon suivante:

- 1 - Le retrait du Père
- 2 - La kénose du Fils
- 3 - L'énigme de l'Esprit
- 4 - La discrétion divine et sa racine trinitaire
- 5 - La pudeur de l'annonce

Conclusion: une interprétation incertaine de la crise présente de la foi

1 - Le retrait du Père

Le Dieu qui est requis par le désir est un Dieu qui sait montrer que sa bonté supposée est accoudée à une puissance: ce qui est demandé à son père par un enfant en danger, ce n'est pas de pleurer avec lui ou de compatir à son malheur, c'est de l'en délivrer. Si Dieu se retire dans une apparente inertie, c'est ou bien qu'il est faible et qu'il ne saurait être d'aucun secours, ou bien qu'il est indifférent et qu'il ne daigne pas imposer sa puissance pour que vivent les hommes. Le retrait du Père dans une stricte neutralité, par inac-

tion, paraît donc frustrer le désir d'une demande radicale à son égard.

Mais le désir est ambigu: il exige du Père une protection qui lui pèse parce qu'il le condamne à une liberté surveillée. Le retrait du Père, laissant le champ libre à l'inventivité humaine, est donc aussi désiré que sa présence puissante, imposante et supposée bienveillante: «Je fais ça pour votre bien» n'est pas la meilleure façon de faire accéder à la liberté.

Une réaction populaire sur la manifestation de Dieu au Sinaï est révélation de cette ambiguïté du désir: «Parle-nous toi-même, dit le peuple à Moïse, et nous entendrons ; mais que Dieu ne nous parle pas, ce serait notre mort» (Ex 20, 19). Le désir de Moïse affronte cette peur: Dieu le connaissait face à face (Dt 34,12), aussi Moïse désire-t-il voir la gloire de Dieu (Ex 33, 18). Dieu lui réplique: «Tu ne peux pas voir ma face, car l'homme ne saurait me voir et vivre» (Ex 33, 20). Il ne verra Dieu que de dos (Ex 33, 23), comme plus tard il ne verra la terre promise que de loin (Dt 33, 4). Mais selon le midrash, Dieu se repent de cette brimade en lui assurant une mort affectueuse: «L'Éternel cueillit l'âme sur la bouche de Moïse ; et le prophète mourut dans le baiser de Dieu».

C'est par miséricorde que Dieu s'efface. Ce retrait laisse à l'homme un espace pour vivre.

Cet effacement n'est pas facile à supporter comme en témoignent constamment les cris des suppliants dans les psaumes et les efforts de la théologie pour le rationaliser: déjà anciennement des rabbins parlaient du retrait de Dieu en vertu de son acte créateur. Il voulait, disaient-ils, laisser à l'être humain la totalité de la responsabilité à l'égard de l'univers; plus récemment, le silence de Dieu lors de l'extermination des juifs par les nazis a conduit à des doctrines proches (Cf. H. Jonas, «Le concept de Dieu après Auschwitz», Rivages Poche, Paris, 1994).

Le Nouveau Testament introduit une dimension différente et originale: le Père se retire devant le Fils. Cette lecture implique que le silence du Père soit la conséquence du mode de manifestation du Fils. En effet, si l'on confesse la foi de Nicée, comme interprétation authentique de l'apport néotestamentaire sur l'identité de Jésus: il est le Fils éternel. On doit admettre que cette identité filiale, désignant sa divinité, se traduit humainement, dans le parcours choisi, sous la forme d'un déni de puissance. La doctrine paulinienne de la kénose en Philippiens 2 forme la synthèse du parcours christique: Jésus se révèle divin par rupture avec ce que le désir souhaite du divin. Le silence du Père, lors du parcours de Jésus par lequel il est reconnu et invoqué sans préciser en rien son mode d'intervention en ce monde, est un corrélat du choix du Fils de ne pas entrer dans les attentes du peuple auquel il annonce le Règne de Dieu.

2 - La kénose du Fils

Ma réflexion s'inscrit ici sur l'horizon de la foi de Nicée. Cette foi développe les implications de l'événement pascal quant à l'identité de Jésus. Or cette foi qui affirme la divinité de Jésus, en raison de l'Incarnation: «Le Verbe s'est fait chair et il a habité parmi nous», s'arc-boute à une advenue paradoxale du Fils en ce monde: il vit trente années dans l'anonymat, il parcourt la Galilée en annonçant la venue du Règne, mais il n'en impose aucunement l'autorité, il est écarté par les pouvoirs civils et religieux et condamné à mort. Ce parcours terrestre, inversé par rapport à ce qu'on pourrait attendre de l'existence humaine d'un être estimé divin, est marqué par la kénose: c'est-à-dire par le refus d'inscrire dans la vie manifeste la puissance et la gloire de la divinité.

Ce refus se présente sous trois formes:

- a - L'anonymat de l'existence nazaréenne
- b - La non-messianité de la vie publique
- c - La mort par condamnation

a - L'anonymat de l'existence nazaréenne

Les réactions des compatriotes et de la famille de Jésus à sa prise de parole publique et à son style prophétique annonçant l'imminence de la venue du Règne de Dieu témoignent, par leur incrédulité et leur stupéfaction, que le nouveau prophète n'avait rien laissé paraître, dans la vie quotidienne menée pendant trois décennies à Nazareth, de sa mission future et de son identité réelle confessée plus tard sur la base de sa résurrection. Si l'on admet la confession chrétienne sur la filiation divine de Jésus dès son origine humaine, on est contraint de conclure qu'aucun signe de cette identité n'avait été perçu par son entourage pendant les trois décennies que Jésus vécut dans ce village.

Le fait a inquiété les communautés chrétiennes puisque deux essais de relativiser cet anonymat ont été produits:

L'un accepté dans le Canon subséquent des Écritures: les évangiles de l'enfance de Matthieu et de Luc. Leur but fut de manifester que des traces de son destin futur furent présentes à l'origine.

L'autre, écarté du Canon: les évangiles apocryphes qui s'efforcèrent, par recours au merveilleux, de briser cet anonymat.

Ces essais montrent que l'anonymat du Fils n'allait pas de soi. Il contredisait le désir populaire sur la manifestation du divin.

Cet anonymat premier ne fut pas sans effet sur la compréhension chrétienne de la présence divine au monde. Des théologies et des spiritualités de l'enfouissement, fondées sur cette incarnation sans signe pu-

blic, ont traversé l'histoire de l'Église: elles ont eu une grande force dans le mouvement des prêtres-ouvriers.

L'anonymat n'est pas la kénose. Car l'anonymat ne fait signe qu'à partir de la kénose qui se définit par le choix de Jésus de se manifester en rupture avec la demande messianique.

b - La non-messianité de la vie publique

L'Ancien Testament et le judaïsme du temps de Jésus n'ont pas une doctrine unifiée du messianisme. Ils proposent des figures diverses de la réalisation de la Promesse divine à l'égard du peuple. Le médiateur de l'advenue d'un Règne de justice et de paix, avec mise à l'écart des ennemis d'Israël, point central de la fraternité entre les nations dans la reconnaissance du Dieu d'Abraham, peut être un roi, un prêtre, un prophète, le peuple lui-même, etc. Les moyens du messianisme peuvent être spirituels ou violents. L'idéologie nationaliste, due à l'impatience d'Israël à l'égard de l'oppression étrangère, dominait dans le peuple lors de la venue de Jésus. Celui-ci en rappelant la prophétie d'Isaïe sur la libération de tous les opprimés lors de son discours inaugural à Nazareth, semble entrer dans le désir du peuple. Son annonce de l'imminence de la venue du Règne paraît aller dans le même sens.

Toutefois la parcimonie avec laquelle il opère des miracles, sa prise de distance à l'égard de tout désir et de toute tentative de prendre le pouvoir politique, le mettent peu à peu en porte à faux à l'égard de l'espérance messianique du peuple. Il n'est pas le messie conforme à l'attente. Il parle et il agit dans une perspective qui n'est pas définie par la requête populaire. En bref, Jésus n'use pas de la puissance divine pour mettre en train un programme social et politique qui changerait la face du monde à partir de la liberté d'Israël. Il convoque Israël à une autre vocation que celle de rassembler les nations par une démonstration divine de puissance en raison de son élection. Son chemin original (ni la violence, ni la loi, ni l'ascèse ne forcent l'irruption du Règne) conduit à l'incompréhension et à l'hostilité. Jésus comme prophète et thaumaturge manifeste suffisamment de puissance divine pour éveiller l'espoir, il en modère l'usage pour provoquer la déception.

c - La mort par condamnation

L'hostilité provoquée par le choix d'un chemin inédit qui frustrait le peuple de ses attentes, mettait mal à l'aise les fidèles de la loi, inquiéta les négociateurs d'un compromis avec le pouvoir romain (Saducéens). Il conduisit à mettre le prophète en accusa-

tion: son Règne de Dieu et surtout les moyens pour en discerner l'advenue dite imminente ne convenaient à personne. Lorsque Jésus parut aux chefs un danger pour l'équilibre religieux et politique d'Israël, il fut décidé de l'éliminer.

La condamnation de Jésus est la conséquence de son annonce d'un règne divin qui se démarquait radicalement, en ses moyens et ses objectifs, de l'espérance messianique telle qu'elle était vécue sous des formes diversifiées à son époque. La kénose du Fils revient à cette volonté de ne pas écarter l'hostilité par la puissance qu'il détenait en vertu de sa filiation divine. Il s'agit bien d'un retrait mais sous l'horizon d'une annonce de la présence de Dieu (le Règne): il déconcerte.

La mort de Jésus révèle, par leur fuite, combien les disciples eux-mêmes étaient plongés dans le doute. Aussi n'eurent-ils, à la Résurrection, si l'on en croit Luc, d'autre souci que de voir le Ressuscité reprendre l'idéologie messianique délaissée pendant la vie du prophète. Sa mort n'aurait été qu'un malentendu. La manière dont l'Esprit est donné ne fait que soutenir le chemin inédit: kénotique, révéler le divin sous son contraire.

3 - L'énigme de l'Esprit

L'énigme de l'Esprit se repère au mieux dans la division qui affecte la communauté primitive. Celle-ci pense que Jésus, approuvé par Dieu en vertu de la Résurrection, avait lancé un mouvement de réforme en Israël; il n'avait pas aboli la loi de séparation avec les païens, mais donné un sens nouveau à l'élection en l'ouvrant à tous, sans détruire la particularité d'Israël.

L'ouverture aux païens inscrite dans cette perspective conduisit à un remaniement tel qu'il aboutit à la division. Paul fut l'artisan de cette division en pensant l'advenue du Règne non à partir de la singularité ou de l'élection d'Israël, mais de la libéralité de Dieu: elle concernait tous les hommes et la loi n'avait de valeur que provisoire. Même si Paul essaya en Rom 9-11 de penser positivement la singularité d'Israël dans le dessein de Dieu, il n'en reste pas moins que l'égalité qu'il prône entre circoncis et incirconcis, relativisant de fait la loi, situait pratiquement Israël dans une position seconde: les judéo-chrétiens eux-mêmes ne détenaient pas la clef de l'interprétation chrétienne. La division s'installe et c'est à partir de cette division originaire que Paul pensa le lien dialectique, mais positif à long terme, entre Israël et les Nations. L'Église ne remplaçait pas Israël.

La division originaire, c'est-à-dire l'incapacité de rassembler en unité visible les témoins du Règne advenant, prolonge dans le temps historique la distance

que Jésus prit à l'égard de la messianité. Tout se passe comme si l'advenue du Règne était conditionnée par l'incapacité de l'établir à partir d'un pôle institutionnel, unifiant le peuple et comblant son attente. Ce que j'appelle «l'énigme de l'Esprit» est cette retenue à l'égard d'une unité originaire et historiquement perceptible. On pourrait peut-être dire que les divisions subséquentes, et même les formes religieuses multiples, sont comme les témoins de la brisure originaire insurmontée, et donc le signe de la non-messianité du christianisme. Les tentatives pour dépasser cette brisure par la séduction ou la force politique (contraindre à entrer) se sont soldées par des échecs: l'idée de chrétienté, c'est-à-dire d'une unité repérable, par la médiation d'une institution, entre le devenir du monde et le Règne de Dieu a conduit à une vraie corruption de l'institution et à une idéologie intolérante en porte-à-faux avec les orientations du Nouveau Testament. L'Esprit se signifie dans une pluralité de témoignages dont l'unité nous échappe. Peut-être est-ce la raison pour laquelle il est si ardu de proposer une théologie de l'Esprit: son action se dérobe à toute unification à partir d'un critère unique, raisonnable, logique. Il se révèle sous l'inverse de ce qui est attendu comme le divin s'est donné en Jésus sous son inversion kénotique. Aucune unité de l'histoire ne nous est donnée à décrypter. L'Esprit est discret.

4 - La discrétion divine et sa racine trinitaire

À partir de la forme de révélation du Fils incarné et de l'Esprit, s'insérant l'un et l'autre en ce monde dans la discrétion, peut-on inférer une raison qui ne relèverait pas de la seule histoire sous l'horizon de la Bible, mais ouvrirait à une pensée du Dieu trinitaire? Bref, peut-on découvrir une racine trinitaire au mode discret de la révélation biblique?

Penser autant que faire se peut le Dieu Un sous la figure trinitaire, c'est ouvrir un champ de réflexion sur les noms qui accèdent les trois instances: Père, Fils et Esprit, et sur leurs relations mutuelles.

Une première remarque peut être faite: le Père n'existe que du Fils: il laisse être le Fils. Et dans leur mutuelle relation, le Père et le Fils n'existent que de l'Esprit: ils laissent être l'Esprit comme celui qui leur permet d'être Père et Fils sans confusion et sans séparation. Ainsi le mouvement trinitaire tel qu'il est décrit dans le Symbole de Nicée met en lumière la non-suffisance du Père à épuiser la réalité de Dieu: il n'est que de ne pas se fermer à un autre qu'il engendre, il ne se replie pas sur lui-même, il se donne sans rien retenir. Le bénéficiaire est un autre avec lequel il ne s'identifiera pas puisque le Fils est une manière originale et incommunicable d'être Dieu: il n'est

pas le Père. C'est dans cette ouverture de lui-même à son autre, le Fils, que le Père est Dieu comme si la «source de la divinité», pour reprendre une métaphore patristique, n'était elle-même qu'en se perdant.

Quant au Fils, n'engendrant pas, il renonce à la place occupée par celui qui l'engendre dans la manière d'être divin: il ne sera pas le Père, et c'est en acceptant de n'être pas le Père qu'il est divin.

Le sceau consacrant cet écart insurmontable, puisque les places sont inéchangeables, est nommé l'Esprit. Il garantit que le Père soit Père et que le Fils soit Fils comme Tiers qui maintient à distance tout en unissant. L'Esprit est celui qui assure la double ouverture, en se tenant lui-même en retrait pour ne pas se substituer au mode d'être divin des deux premières instances.

Si l'on désire user d'une métaphore décrivant ce mouvement, rien ne s'oppose à évoquer la discrétion: le Père ne s'impose pas, il laisse le Fils être le Fils, et le Fils ne se désole pas de n'être que le Fils, l'Esprit se glorifie de se retirer dans l'acte même où il maintient chacun dans son mode original d'exister Dieu.

J'ai traduit en d'autres termes ce qui sous-tend la synthèse de Nicée. Les figures trinitaires donnent à entendre un monothéisme en décalage avec les concepts que suggèrent les philosophies théistes ou les théodicées: la suffisance divine n'est pas ancrée dans la possession de soi, mais dans le don de soi, selon des modalités différentes.

Peut-être pourrait-on transposer dans le mouvement trinitaire la parole qui, dans l'épître aux Philippiens (2, 6), concerne Jésus: «Lui qui est de condition divine n'a pas considéré comme une proie à saisir d'être l'égal de Dieu». Le Père ne s'agrippe pas à sa situation de «principe» pour demeurer lui-même en sa propre contemplation et en sa propre suffisance, il ne fait pas de sa situation d'origine première une «proie»: il se donne au Fils en égalité d'être et de dignité. Il ne s'agit pas pour le Père d'un abaissement comme dans la kénose, mais d'un don, condition de possibilité intradivine du parcours humble du Fils puisque ce dernier ne profite pas de sa qualité divine de Fils comme d'un tremplin pour investir l'origine première. En ce sens, la discrétion de la révélation biblique renvoie bien à une origine trinitaire pour autant qu'elle nous entrouvre quelques aperçus sur le mouvement de la vie en Dieu. La mission de l'Église ne saurait s'éloigner sans préjudice de cette dynamique.

5 - La pudeur de l'annonce

Le disciple n'est pas au-dessus du maître: il serait incongru que l'annonce évangélique, obéissant au commandement du Ressuscité («Allez donc: de tou-

tes les nations, faites des disciples, les baptisant au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint Esprit...» Mt 28, 19) s'écartât de la conduite qui fut celle de Jésus. Le prophète galiléen annonça la venue du Règne par la seule force de la Parole et par des signes miraculeux limités, il ne préconisa aucunement le recours à la pression étatique, l'appel à la force de la loi ou à l'opinion majoritaire de la foule pour contraindre à être disciple. Il proposa, sans rien imposer, mais non sans explorer la dureté du cœur.

La conversion de l'Empire romain, habitué d'une religion civile, fit croire aux disciples de Jésus que l'organisation institutionnelle et légale de la société par le politique se référant aux exigences évangéliques pourrait opérer comme par osmose l'adhésion des citoyens au Règne de Dieu. Ainsi l'évangélisation se déplaça-t-elle de l'accent mis sur la Parole en vue d'une écoute et d'une conversion personnelle vers une maîtrise institutionnelle, englobant dans une même adhésion sociale les membres de la société. On est ainsi passé de la discrétion originaire de l'annonce, liée à une pratique communautaire sans écart excessif avec l'idéal prêché, à une transmission sociale forte, fondée sur le consensus majoritaire de la foule, rejetant toute déviance comme attitude antisociale. Sans doute ne méprisait-on pas la conversion du cœur, elle appartenait à la doctrine, mais elle paraissait seconde dans la stratégie sociale de la mission évangélique. L'évidence de la foi était socialement et politiquement trop forte pour qu'il en fût autrement. Christianiser la société fut la condition préalable de la conversion personnelle.

L'effondrement de la chrétienté, les ruptures intraecclésiales n'ont pas immédiatement eu des conséquences sur la façon d'envisager la transmission de l'Évangile. Les Églises étaient trop imbriquées dans la culture occidentale et son idéal, pourtant vacillant, de chrétienté, pour mesurer les changements qui allaient s'opérer: réinterpréter ou actualiser l'annonce en fonction de ce qu'elle fut originellement, un appel sans pression politique et sociale.

Cette reprise de la stratégie ancienne allait permettre de penser le difficile principe de l'acculturation qui, fondamentalement, s'appuie sur la distance de l'Évangile à l'égard de toute culture. La pudeur invite à ne pas manipuler autrui, à se tenir en retrait dans la proximité. L'autonomie lentement acquise du politique facilita ce renversement d'attitude: ne plus miser sur le consensus de la foule et la pression qu'elle exerce, ne plus tabler sur la force des lois et la solidité des institutions, mais éveiller au désir qui sommeille en chacun d'un lien avec l'Évangile par la discrétion de la Parole.

Autant il est simple d'émettre des principes qui régissent la mission, autant il est ardu pour une insti-

tution de les suivre: elle doit assurer sa survie si elle veut transmettre le message pour lequel elle existe, l'Évangile.

Ce n'est pas, me semble-t-il, par soif du pouvoir ou de la puissance que l'Église ancienne a cédé à la tentation politique et légale pour dynamiser l'expansion chrétienne; c'est parce qu'ils apparaissaient, pour une prédication qui visait la foule et non plus une élite héroïque comme au temps des persécutions, plus efficaces: c'était une question de rentabilité conforme aux moeurs de l'époque. La conversion du chef politique entraînait celle de ses sujets. Le cadre de l'annonce et de la conversion était fixé par l'adhésion collective.

L'autonomie de l'État, l'émergence des démocraties invitent à une autre pratique, plus conforme à la discrétion de Jésus. Encore faut-il que cette pratique pleine de pudeur parce que s'adressant au sujet humain, honnête ou pervers, ne dérive pas vers une timidité qui la rendrait muette et inexistante dans l'espace social du libre débat. La démocratie peut pousser à l'exacerbation indécente de la publicité ou au mutisme de ceux qui ne perçoivent plus d'espace pour une parole en rupture avec la mode dominante et les idéologies consensuelles. La pudeur n'est ni le retrait érémitique, ni l'indifférence, elle est une attitude risquée parce que sans cesse à réexaminer, dans le cadre de l'annonce de la Parole, selon les variations et les humeurs des auditeurs ou partenaires potentiels.

Il me faut conclure: le discrédit social du christianisme n'engendre pas nécessairement une crise de la foi, par contre il provoque à une autre forme de l'annonce évangélique, sinon plus conforme à son origine, du moins plus accordée à nos moeurs démocratiques qui n'imposent aucune croyance, mais exigent en principe le respect du débat libre.

Cette nouvelle donne sociale est peut-être une chance pour la foi chrétienne: elle lui facilite le retour à l'intuition première, Dieu ne s'impose pas, il se cherche et se désire; la discrétion de Dieu manifestée dans le parcours de Jésus et en quelque sorte vérifiée dans le retrait silencieux de l'Esprit peut susciter à partir de la retenue de la communauté et de la pudeur de son annonce une séduction autre que celle du consensus superficiel ou social, éloignée de toute pression de pouvoir et de la fascination de la puissance. Dieu se révèle Dieu dans l'inverse de ce qu'en imaginent trop immédiatement les hommes. C'est lorsqu'il se dérobe que Dieu se fait proche.

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"The Whole Bible Is a Parable"

In this contribution I would like to present symbolism as a dimension that is inherent in the entire Bible. In other words, I shall not attempt to carry out a reflection on the numerous symbols in the Bible, but on the Bible as symbol. I shall not reflect on the possibility of a symbolic reading of the Bible but on the Bible in its function as symbol.

To view the biblical text as symbol is not new. Already Clement of Alexandria asserted, "The whole Bible is a parable".¹ And indeed a certain symbolic value in the sense of a surplus of meaning has been attributed to the Bible in all phases of the history of exegesis.

We must ask: what are we to understand by the word "symbol". The etymology of the word "symbol" leads us to the concept of "join together". The preposition "*syn*" followed by the verb "*ballo*" suggests the idea of two things that are placed in relationship to each other.

Thus the symbolic is in no way placed in opposition to "real" or to "historic"; on the contrary, it is nothing other than a reality that bears in itself potentially a superabundance of significance. "The symbol makes one reflect", says Ricoeur; it opens up a surplus of intelligibility, which indeed does not appear on the surface, but is also not externally or artificially thought up. In this regard X. Léon-Dufour writes: "A symbol joins together two realities, one that is immediately perceptible and one that remains invisible, to which it draws us; the latter shines immediately through the former. From this it follows that the former does not point to the second as something distant and heterogeneous. Although it is indeed not the meaning, it enables the meaning to manifest itself and communicate itself to consciousness".²

To consider the Bible as symbol means therefore to underline its peculiar character, namely, to be a manifestation (Epiphany) of a reality that is hidden within it, but which is greater than it and transcends it. The symbol "joins together", the symbol points beyond itself, the symbol "masks and reveals". How is all this realized in the Bible? What does it join to-

gether? To what does it point? In what way does it both mask and uncover the mystery of salvation? To these and similar questions we want to direct our attention now.

It may be permitted to me, as a Chinese, to reason as a Chinese. I proceed in a form that is more circular than linear, more through parataxis than through syntax. The language that I use is more symbolic and evocative than argumentative and speculative. My reflection is structured in three parts. It is not so much a question of three points as of three circles or rounds, three revolutions, around one and the same reality.

1. Theological principles that form the basis for the symbolic character of the Bible

The first step has as its goal to search out the basic theological principles on which the symbolic character of the Bible is based. Using as a point of departure above all the declarations of the Second Vatican Council, it seems to me that one can establish the following three principles.

1.1 The Incarnation

The Bible is the incarnation of the Word of God in human words. "The eternal Word of the Father became the human word, so that humans might understand the Word of God. The Word changed himself into words. The Truth accepted that it should be reflected — and fragmented — in many truths".³

This "condescension" (*synkatábasis*) of the divine Wisdom, hiding itself in a book, belongs to the same logic as the *kénosis* of the Incarnation. The Church Fathers, above all Origen, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great, who reflected very deeply indeed on the nature of the Bible, point out insistently this way of God's acting in the economy of salvation,⁴ echoing the astonishment and the moving gratitude of Jesus: "I thank you, Father, for you have hidden all this from the wise and the clever, and have revealed it instead to the simple" (Mt 11:25).

The Encyclical of Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, places the mystery of the Incarnation in a di-

rect relationship with the reality of the Bible. “As the substantial Word of God made himself similar to men in everything except sin (Eph 4:15) so also the words of God expressed in human speech have been made similar to human language in every respect except error”. This striking assertion is taken over almost word for word by the Second Vatican Council in the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*. The parallels are not to be overlooked: in becoming man God hides himself in the lowliness of human nature; in the Scripture he hides himself in the lowliness of human words.

By manifesting himself in human speech God anticipates his becoming man and prepares for it. The Scriptures of the Old Testament announce Jesus and direct our attention to him, the Word become flesh; they testify about him and make us recognize him. Jesus himself says it expressly when he reproaches the Jews: “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me” (Jh 5:39). His death and his resurrection occur, as he himself and his witnesses stress repeatedly “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). After his glorification and return to the Father, his remembrance is incarnated further in words, which arise under the direction of the Spirit in order to be shared with all and to be forever stamped on history.⁵

The human word of the Bible, although made capable of accommodating God, remains forever arrested in its historical concreteness that is typical of all human realities. It is fixed in a specific context of space and time, reflects the coordinates of a specific culture, is expressed by means of a specific language in a concrete literary form. It has human authors, whose names are often known and it is translated and handed on by specific processes of communication. The God of the Bible permits all this gladly and subjects himself to it joyfully, without ever letting himself be imprisoned by it. In the Bible the eternal dwells in the temporal, the creator learns to speak with his earthly creatures,⁶ the Almighty hides himself in a book.

The content goes beyond the container. The hidden mystery transcends its manifestation. “The Bible is like an icon, which guards the hidden God, ... it is a witness to the presence as well as to the absence of God in the *kénosis* of the letter”.⁷ Thus it becomes understandable why there is no immediate and total identification between the Bible and the word of God. “The holy Scripture is not the revelation, but rather a very precious testimony to it”.⁸ “The holy Scriptures contain the word of God”; they are the written form of the word of God intended and guaranteed by God

himself. S. Breton has rightly written, “the revelation by means of the Scriptures is the word of God; conversely the Word of God, expressed through the Scriptures, is the revelation”.

The Bible is the “tabernacle of the word of God”, it is a treasure preserved in an earthen vessel (cf. 2 Cor 4:7), a symbol that is to be understood in the perspective of the Incarnation. By means of this symbol the infinite distance of God and his complete accessibility are joined together. God himself says in Deuteronomy: “For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (Dt 30:11-14).

Before the Bible then there can be neither idolatry nor absolutizing, nor, on the other hand, scandal on account of its humble form but only “reverent listening” and thankful astonishment over the wonderful divine condescension.

1.2 The sacramental character

The sacramental character of the Bible is closely bound up with its integration in the mystery of the Incarnation. As in the Incarnation Jesus hides himself under the veil of the flesh and in the Eucharist under the veil of the bread and wine so also in the Scripture he hides himself under the veil of the word.

The Second Vatican Council stressed especially the parallel between the Word of God and the Eucharist and thereby underlined sacramentality as a basic dimension of the Bible: “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God’s Word and of Christ’s body”.⁹ This affirmation is, however, not a novelty of the Second Vatican Council. Rather it is found in an unbroken ecclesiastical tradition, which has been cultivated and strengthened since the days of the Church Fathers. In this context the words of Origen from a famous homily are well-known: “You who are accustomed to take part in divine mysteries know, when you receive the body of the Lord, how you protect it with all caution and veneration lest any small part fall from it, lest anything of the consecrated gift be lost. For you believe, and correctly, that you

are answerable if anything falls from there by neglect. But if you are so careful to preserve his body, and rightly so, how do you think that there is less guilt to have neglected God's word than to have neglected his body?"¹⁰

Jerome also expressed it very clearly: "Since the flesh of the Lord is true food and his blood true drink, the true good that is reserved for us in the present life is to nourish ourselves from his flesh and his blood, not only in the Eucharist, but also in the reading of sacred Scripture. In fact the word of God which is reached through knowledge of the Scriptures is true food and true drink".¹¹

The Bible and the sacrament of the Eucharist are two types of containers, two places of safe-keeping for the memory of Jesus. While the Bible fixes, prolongs and spreads everywhere the salvific event by means of the written word, the Eucharist does this by means of the celebration of the sacraments. The command "Go and proclaim" (cf. Mt 28:19) is inseparable from the saying "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19).

The sacramentality of the Scripture manifests itself also in the fact that the Word of God contained in it often has effects beyond the often inaccessible, limited, or imperfect powers of comprehension of the person. The Word of God, effective almost entirely by itself, does not let itself be conditioned, for it "is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12). It is like the rain and the snow, which does not return to heaven without having watered the earth and made it to sprout (cf. Is 55:10-11). It "is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). "In the sacred books", it says in the Constitution *Dei Verbum*, "the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons..."¹²

Just as in the sacraments the perceptible signs do not produce the salvific effects in an automatic way, so also the word fixed in the holy text does not have magical effects, but only in the encounter of reception, above all through the listening of the liturgical community. Every written determination is above all an act of inscription; the thought is expressed, enclosed in certain words, and printed on the paper. As soon as the hand of the writer is removed from the paper, that which is written takes on a life of its own. The author disappears, hides himself, and in a certain way dies in what is written. The latter appears then as his testament, an inheritance, that awaits those who

will read it. The books in the library, including the Bible, are at rest as in a cemetery and await their resurrection. The reading of a book is like a reawakening to a new life, to unimagined effect, to potentially unlimited meanings. The encounter of faith with the Bible opens the living Word to the reader and at the same time calls the holy text back to life. The celebration of the liturgy is the privileged place for the rebirth of the Bible, as it is also the place of its birth. In the liturgical proclamation of the Scripture the "It stands written" becomes the "Today the word of Scripture is fulfilled" (Lk 4:21).

1.3 Unity and Wholeness of the Mystery of Salvation

The symbol joins together different realities to create not just a sum of the parts but a unified whole. The Bible is a book and at the same time a library, or more precisely a library that forms a book. The different writings were born over a thousand year period, they tell of many figures, they have different authors, different literary forms, different historical contexts, different languages, but they form a unity in reference to a unique revealing God, to a single plan of salvation that unfolds in history. They are inspired by one single Spirit and they are addressed to one community united as one People of God. Above all they have their common centre in Jesus Christ.

The word Bible, *biblia*, the plural of *biblion*, reflects the "healthy neutrality of a singular-plural". Likewise the designation "Sacred Scripture", rather than "sacred writings" underscores the unity of the Revelation rather than the concrete form in which it has been fixed in a plurality of texts.

The Constitution *Dei Verbum* contains basic principles for the interpretation of the Bible and emphasizes: "But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out".¹³

From the beginning a conviction runs through the whole tradition of the Church that all of Sacred Scripture finds its unity and fullness in Christ. He is the Lamb who opens the book closed with the seven seals, which remains indecipherable and incomprehensible without him (cf. Rv 5:1-10). "God spoke a single Word, when he spoke through his Son", says Ambrose. And Origen writes: "The Word of God, which in the beginning was with God, is in his fullness not a multiplicity of words, not many words, but a single word

... and all the holy books together form a single book".¹⁴ Rupert of Deutz also stresses this aspect: "The entirety of the Scriptures, every single word, was brought together in the womb of the Virgin" — that is, in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary. Christ is designated by many medieval theologians as the *Verbum abbreviatum*, as the abbreviated word of God, condensed in his person.

In Christ the one is closely connected with the whole, for he is "the recapitulation of all things" (Eph 1:10); and the divine Scriptures participate in this characteristic of his. In fact they makes us know everything that is necessary. "Ignorance of the Scriptures, in fact, is ignorance of Christ"; but not only that, it is ignorance of the world, of life, of history, because "everything that a human tongue can say, and the mind of mortal man can grasp, is contained in this volume".¹⁵

The Bible is thus the symbol that gathers all into one and forms a whole that is not obtained from the sum of the parts. It is a synthesis that does not submit to any analysis. As a consequence, the interpretation of the Bible goes beyond every technical application and bursts the framework of historical-critical exegesis.

The awareness that the Bible, as well as its centre, Christ, is "all in one", creates in the reader the assurance that it is not necessary to search elsewhere for what is essential to his salvation. At the same time it spurs him on to sink himself more deeply into the ever new truth, the inexhaustible riches and fascinating beauty of the text, and finally to strive to make this precious good available to all others.

2. Symbols, which express the symbolic content of the Bible

In this second step we are trying to describe the symbolic character of the Bible by means of the symbols themselves. After having determined the basic principles, we want to ask ourselves the question whether the symbolic character of the text was discussed in the Bible itself or in the early Church, and if it was, then how was it discussed. In this way we will determine at once that the Bible prefers to present itself through pictures rather than through clearly defined concepts. Likewise among the Church Fathers the need was prevalent to describe the nature of the Bible with symbols and not so much through argumentation. Among the numerous pictures used in the Bible we want to select a few, which, in my opinion, show especially clearly the symbolic dimension of the

sacred text.

2.1 A Book to drink

The Constitution *Dei Verbum* states that the Holy Scripture is "a pure unquenchable source of life" and invites the Christians to be saturated with its Spirit".¹⁶

The Bible is a book to be drunk, an unquenchable spring, from which pure, fresh water bubbles forth. The image is very common in the Bible itself and in the Fathers. The Prophet Isaiah compares listening to the Word of God with drinking from a spring: "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters ...; Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live" (Is 55:1-3). In the New Testament this spring is Jesus and his salvific gifts, among which the Church Fathers give first place to the gift of his Word captured in the biblical text. The following invitation comes from Ambrose: "Draw up the water of Christ, this water that praises the Lord. Draw in many places the water that falls from the clouds of the prophets. Whoever collects water from the mountains and brings it into himself or whoever draws from the springs, he also, like the clouds, makes it to rain on others. Fill your soul completely with it so that your earth may be watered and irrigated from its own springs. Whoever reads much [in the Scriptures] and recognizes the meaning of what is read, is filled; and whoever has been filled, can also irrigate others ...".¹⁷ And also: "Drink from the springs of the Old and New Testament, for from both of them you drink Christ... One drinks the divine Scriptures, indeed one devours them precisely when the life-giving juice of the everlasting word penetrates the veins of the spirit and the powers of the soul".¹⁸

In his commentary on the story of the Samaritan woman, Origen points out that Scripture has the function of a symbol, of a trampoline, that brings us to Christ, just as Christ used the water of Jacob's well to bring the Samaritan woman to himself, the true source of the water of life: "Scripture is an introduction, it has the name therefore of 'Jacob's well'; whoever understands it exactly, comes unerringly to Jesus, so that he may give us a spring from which flows the water of everlasting life".¹⁹

There is also a splendid page in the works of Ephrem the Syrian where he applies to Scripture the symbol of a bubbling fountain, whose source never runs dry: "We are like thirsty people who drink from a fountain. Your word offers many different aspects, as different as are the viewpoints of those who study it. The Lord has hidden in his Word all manner of treasures, so that each of us may find riches in what

we contemplate. One who finds one of these riches should not think that there is nothing else in the word of God than that which he has found. Rather he should be aware that he has been able to discover only one among the many other things there. After being enriched from the Word, he should not think that it has been impoverished. Incapable of exhausting the riches, he should give thanks for its immensity. Rejoice that you have been sated, but do not be saddened by the fact that the riches of the word are beyond you. Whoever is thirsty is glad to be able to drink, but is not saddened because he cannot dry up the fountain. It is better that the fountain satisfy your thirst than that your thirst make the fountain run dry. Be grateful for that which you have received and do not murmur over that which remains unused. What you have taken away is yours, but what remains is also your heritage. What you have not been able to receive all at once because of your weakness, you may receive in other moments with perseverance. Do not have the impudence to want to take all at once what can only be attained in stages, and do not withdraw from that which you can receive only a little at a time".²⁰

Just as a spring offers its water to whoever wants to quench his thirst, so the Bible is open to all, its inexhaustible riches are not consumed with time. Like one who drinks from a spring, the reader of the Bible knows that he is in the presence of something inexhaustible and always available, which he approaches not with the desire to possess it but with the desire to let himself be permeated by it.

2.2 A Book to eat

The Bible is the "food of the soul".²¹ The image is very familiar to the Bible itself. In Deuteronomy 8:3 it says: "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord". This verse is cited then also by Jesus (Mt 4:4).

The manna (the word means "what is it?") is a reality whose consistency does not permit definition. "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat" is the only description that Moses is able to give. The Israelites "gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; each gathered according to what he could eat". Those who wanted to put away some to provide for the future found that "it bred worms and became foul" (Ex 16:12-21). It is a gratuitous divine gift that can-

not be expropriated, a food that cannot be measured but that satisfies all degrees of need. Origen sees it as an obvious symbol of Scripture. He writes, "Let us, therefore, now hasten to receive the heavenly manna. The manna imparts the kind of taste to each mouth that each one wishes. For hear also the Lord saying to those who approach him: 'Be it done unto you according to your faith' (Mt 8:13)". And, therefore, if you receive the Word of God which is preached in the Church with complete faith and devotion, that Word will become whatever you desire".²²

Scripture not only adapts itself to the one who nourishes himself from it, but also has the capacity to transform him and mould him according to his own needs. And, like the Eucharistic bread, Scripture assimilates the one who eats it. It is this that is emphasized in the accounts of the vocation of the prophets, especially that of Ezekiel. God asks him to eat the scroll: "Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it" (Ez 3:3). Only in this way, permeated by the Word of God, is the prophet able to speak in his name. Jeremiah experiences emotionally the marvellous effect produced by this food, exclaiming with joy "Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart" (Jer 15:16). In order that the taste of this food remain for a long time and so that the benefits that derive from it might be interiorized, the masters of spirituality insist on the necessity of *ruminatio*, that is to absorb thoroughly the Scripture that has been heard and read, turning it over continually in the heart and mind.

Whoever "eats" the Bible lives from it and gradually comes, so to speak, to be "eaten" by it. This reciprocal consuming, mysterious but real, can be grasped only by means of the symbol, which "brings together", creating a new unity by mutual co-penetration.

2.3 A Book that runs

The Bible is like a wheel that turns. This symbolical interpretation is linked with the name of Gregory the Great, who, in order to illustrate the dynamism of Scripture, makes use of the text containing the vision of the four living beings in the Book of Ezekiel. The living beings are moved by the impulse of the Spirit. Beside each one of these, and connected with their movements, four wheels move. "And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose, too. Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the

spirit of the living creatures was also in the wheels” (Ez 1:19-20).

Already by the second century, as one can read in Irenaeus, the four living creatures were associated with the four Gospels. Gregory’s attention is attracted, instead, not so much by the creatures as by the wheels, which for him are a symbol of sacred Scripture. “What else does the wheel designate if not the sacred Scripture that turns in every direction in order to adapt itself to the mind of the one who is listening, and is not slowed down by any corner in its proclamation, that is, by any error? It turns in every direction so that it may proceed straight ahead and on the ground, in the midst of adversity and prosperity. The circle of its teachings is found now above, now below: what is said spiritually to the perfect is adapted to the weak according to the letter and what the little ones understand according to the letter, the more learned make rise on high through spiritual understanding”.²³

The wheel expresses the idea that the journey of the biblical word under the impulse of the Spirit is unstoppable and infallible. Paul also uses some very suggestive images to emphasize the liveliness and dynamism of the Word of God. This is “the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16); it must “run its course” (2 Thes 3:1), free and tenacious, like an athlete who runs unstoppably toward the goal. Its bearer can be in chains and persecuted but “the word of God is not fettered” (2 Tim 2:9). The Holy Spirit is the moving force in this race. In fact the day of Pentecost signals the beginning of this race from Jerusalem to reach the entire world. The Bible bears in itself all this dynamism of the Spirit. The sacred writings are inspired by the Spirit in a passive sense but they also “breathe the Spirit” in an active sense,²⁴ that is, the Spirit lives in the Bible and acts in and by means of it. It animates it in its race through the world.

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit enabled all of the hearers of the word of God to understand it in their own language. In its race through the world the Bible is translated into different languages and inculturated in diverse situations. Like the wheel that turns peacefully above the tall and the short, so also the Bible adapts itself sovereignly to all of its addressees. It “becomes all things to all” (1 Cor 9:22); arriving everywhere, it “brings together” all, attracting and involving all in forming unity.

2.4 A Book that grows

The dynamism is connected with growth. “And the Word of God increased” Luke testifies at the be-

ginning of the Church (Acts 6:7). The expression is dense with meaning. It is a growth of the visible word, recognizable in the increase of the number of disciples, by the constant diffusion of the Christian message in larger geographical areas, but it is also a growth that escapes statistical measurement: the growth and the development of God’s salvific project in history. Thus it is a growth of the Word itself.

It is true that with the definitive closing of the canon the quantitative content of the Bible is fixed forever. The Bible no longer grows in volume. It can grow only in reproductions, in translations, in new editions. Nevertheless, there is also a growth for the sacred text, invisible but not less real. In fact after the fixing of the canon, the Bible has never ceased to grow in the life of the Church. It grows in believability through those who live it and bear witness to it. It grows more profound through exegetical study and theological reflection. It grows in vitality in the liturgical celebrations and in pastoral activity. It grows in popularity through diffusion and penetration in diverse societies and cultures.

Developing the Gospel parable, Origen compares the Bible to a seed destined by its nature to grow and expand: “I think each word of Divine Scripture is like a seed whose nature is to multiply diffusely, reborn into an ear of corn or whatever its species be, when it has been cast into the earth”.²⁵

Gregory makes a very apt and well-known affirmation about the growth of the Bible: “Scriptum cum legente crescit”,²⁶ Scripture grows with the one reading it. It grows as a result of being read. It is a question of a simultaneous growth of the reader and the text, or better, of the reader with the text and of the text with the reader. The Bible, the final product of the fixing in writing of the Word of God, becomes the starting point for a process of unlimited growth. The text is then the juxtaposition of a goal and a launching point, the symbolism of a marvellous dynamism. Gregory also writes: “The Word of God will grow together with you, because from the Word of God you will draw profit to the extent to which you yourself will progress in it; better, one discovers the marvellous power of the Word of God when the soul of the one who reads is pervaded by love for the things above. Have you reached the active life? It walks with you. Have you reached a certain stability and consistency of spirit? It remains stable with you. Have you arrived, by the grace of God, at the contemplative life? The text flies with you”.²⁷

This simultaneous growth occurs not only at the

level of the individual reader but with even greater intensity in the community. It is Gregory who says also: "I know that often many things in the sacred Scripture that I did not succeed in understanding when I was alone, I did understand when I was in the midst of my brethren".²⁸ The ecclesial community and in particular the liturgical ecclesial community, the original birth place of Scripture, is also the privileged place for its growth.

2.5 A Book written within and without

In the vision of Ezekiel (2:9) as also in that of the Revelation (5:1) a book appears written on both sides, inside and outside. The association of this book with the Bible in the exegesis of the ancient Church is more than obvious. The fact that the book is written both on the inside and the outside becomes for the Fathers an argument in support of the different senses or different levels of interpretation of the Bible. Origen writes: "By this book is intended the Scripture in its entirety, writing 'outside' according to the immediate, that is, literal sense, and 'inside' according to the deeper and spiritual sense".²⁹ And Gregory explains: "The scroll of the Word of God is written inside by means of allegory, on the outside by means of the history; inside by means of the spiritual understanding, outside by means of the simple literal sense adapted to those spirits that are still weak; inside, because it promises invisible goods, outside because it establishes the order of the visible things with the rectitude of its precepts ...".³⁰

However the different senses of the Bible are proposed, one thing is clear: the Bible is poly-significant. It is a symbol in which the different senses can encounter each other without contradicting one another, can coexist without reciprocally excluding one another. The reading of the Bible thus creates a symbolic space in which the learned and the ignorant, saints and sinners, old and young, rich and poor, men and women of all cultures, all races and all times encounter one another to be united in Christ and find in him and in his Word life and salvation. There comes to mind spontaneously here the image that Isaiah uses to describe the messianic harmony and peace: "the calf and the lion will pasture together . . . and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Is 11:6-8). Gregory makes a charming comparison: the Bible is like "a river, low enough for a lamb to cross and deep enough for an elephant to swim in it". And Augustine exclaims with emotion: "O marvellous depths of your revelation! Behold, before us stands their surface smiling at the little ones; but their depths are marvellous. My God, marvellous is the depth! A holy terror compels us to immerse our

gaze in it, terror because of honour, tremor because of love".³¹

2.6 A Book that inflames

The Bible is not only a book that is read, but it reads its readers and works in them. In its function as symbol the Bible brings together the word of God "living and active" (Heb 4:12) and the person who receives it, offering itself as the field for divine action. The sacred Scripture is often compared to fire, above all when it is explained by Jesus. The two disciples of Emmaus who experienced this felt "our hearts burn within us" (Lk 24:32).

Fire inflames, burns, spreads, tends to involve and transform everything with which it comes in contact. Thus is the Word of God. It is an overwhelming power; it has the power of irresistible attraction. Jeremiah admits having to surrender before this word: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and thou hast prevailed ... there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer 20:7-9). Origen comments on this passage: "There is in fact a fire that burns the heart and, beginning from the heart, arrives at the bones, and spreading in the bones, penetrates the whole man and penetrates in such a way that the one who is so burned is unable to bear it. This fire is lit by the Lord who has said, 'I have come to cast fire upon the earth' (Lk 12:49). The Saviour begins to cast the fire in the heart of those who listen to him, as Simon and Cleophas confess with regard to his words "'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'" (Lk 24:32).

The Bible seduces, impassions, inflames. Whoever reads it must seek with all his power to let himself be devoured by that ardent fire hidden within. Reflecting on what God says in the Book of Jeremiah: "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jer 23:29), Gregory affirms that the Bible is truly like a flint stone, which is cold if it is only held in the hand, but if it is struck, it shoots forth sparks and emits fire. Ambrose associates this fire of Scripture with that which Moses saw in the burning bush, a fire that burns but does not consume, illuminates, elevates but does not destroy, and also with that which the Apostles received on the day of Pentecost, which is the image of the power of the Spirit.³²

Many other Fathers see in the fire symbolizing the Bible the seducing love of God that emanates from

the pages and from between the lines of sacred Scripture. Thus Augustine exclaims “O Lord, I love you. I do not doubt it, I am certain that I love you. You have struck my heart with your love and I loved you”.³³ To let oneself be inflamed by Scripture is being burned by those tongues of fire of which the Song of Songs speaks (cf. Song 8:6); it is to receive the kiss of the beloved (Song 1:1), to encounter the one who “comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills” (Song 2:8); it is to listen with love to the voice of the bridegroom, it is “to learn to know the heart of God through his words”³⁴ in order to conform oneself to him. Once alight with this fire, the reader comes gradually to “having the mind of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 2:16) and to have the same sentiments that were in him (cf. Phil 2:5), to being harmonized with him. The Bible explains in this way its function of symbol by making its reader “*sympathetikos*” with God.³⁵

2.7. A Book that wounds

The symbol often operates by means of a “diabolic” operation, that is, it brings together by dividing, associates by dissociating, unites by separating.

The encounter between God and man in the biblical word does not always occur in a peaceful way and without resistance, although man is structurally oriented to God and open to hearing his word. Sympathy, the fusion of the divine and human horizons, does not eliminate the distinction and the ontological distance and thus the encounter is not immune to conflicts. The book that is eaten is “sweet like honey” in the mouth but “fills the stomach with bitterness” (cf. Rv 10:8-10). Scripture is a kiss of the beloved but also a sharp two-edged sword, “piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow” (Heb 4:12).

The sword is one of the most frequent biblical symbols used to designate the Word of God. If it is a sword, that means that the Word wounds, cuts, provokes a shock, upsets, overturns schemes, takes away security, opens a wound. When Peter, after Pentecost, began to announce the Easter message, all “were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). The answer is immediate and unequivocal: “repent” (*metanoésate*). The same thing happens to the one who reads Scripture. It is necessary to let oneself be wounded, let oneself be judged, to change and convert to be conformed to its requirements. The reader is called to struggle with this book as Jacob struggled with God in the darkness. He will let himself be wounded not by the effort to snatch from the book its

secret but by hearing the word of divine blessing and by receiving a new name.

The experience of Augustine is emblematic. The mysterious divine invitation *tolle et lege*: “take and read”, guided him to find in the Bible the sword that set him free from his previous life, the fire that set him alight within, the water and the food that sustained him on the journey toward a new life. Gradually his life was transformed and his relationship with the Bible changed also. He himself recounts his conversion to the Bible: “Deceiving myself, I approached the Scriptures more with the intention of debating than with the desire of seeking, and thus, with my own attitude, I was closing the door of my Saviour in my face; instead of knocking that it might be opened, I was doing everything possible to keep it closed. In my pride I was claiming to search for that which only one who is humble can find.... Wretched me, thinking myself capable of flying, I abandoned the nest and fell before flying. But the Lord in his kindness picked me up and put me back in the nest so that I might not be trampled by the passers-by and die”.³⁶

Origen also, although his path to living the word was very different, affirms with conviction: “as long as we read the divine Scriptures without understanding, as long as what has been written is obscure to us and closed, we have not yet turned to the Lord”.³⁷

3. The reading of the Bible as symbolic experience

We have arrived at the third step in which we intend to explain quickly and by way of conclusion how the reading of the Bible, that is, the authentic encounter with the sacred text, can be considered a symbolic experience. The point of view now, as distinguished from the second step, is no longer the Bible, but the reader who approaches the Bible. Here also we will reflect with images without claiming to be either exhaustive or systematic. We will let ourselves be provoked by a few biblical words that have an intense symbolic power.

3.1 “Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this” (Ps 62:12)

This psalm verse has been used in Rabbinic biblical hermeneutics to demonstrate the superabundance of meaning in Scripture. Every word, every letter of the Bible is constrained, so to speak, to bear a weight many times superior to its strength. Every biblical word is a challenge to the unutterable, an attempt to say the unsayable. In every word something like “a

marvellous contraction of the infinite” is made present.³⁸ Thus the reading of the Bible is an immersion in the infinite through the means of the symbolism of the text. In this way one can understand an ancient saying that the interpretation of the Bible is infinite.³⁹ A work of art never ceases to give rise to amazement. Its eternal beauty is not due to the fact that it imposes a single unique sense on different people but because it succeeds in suggesting different senses to a single person.

John Paul II says in this regard: “When God expresses himself in human language, he does not give to every expression a uniform value but uses the possible nuances with great flexibility and accepts also their limitations. It is this that renders the task of the exegete so complex, so necessary and so engrossing”.⁴⁰

3.2 “Who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt 13:51)

This saying of Jesus, placed by Matthew at the end of the sermon on the parables, serves to underline the continuity and the perennial newness of the biblical revelation. God’s self-communication occurred in history following the rhythm of a historical development in which the new brings to completion the old without nullifying it, the previously unsaid surpasses the tradition without detaching itself from it. The Bible itself, in the mutually penetrating articulation of its two parts — the Old and the New Testaments — constructs a marvellous symbol that brings together the old and the new. The old is the bearer of the new and the new is permeated with the old.

The symbol is always old and always new because it belongs to all times and succeeds in uniting in itself past, present and future, placing all in a perspective that goes beyond time. In reading the Bible a person inserts his own brief and limited history in this flow of the history of salvation condensed in the text and discovers with wonder that between the “in that time”, “today” and “the days are coming”, between the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, there is a continuity founded on a single design.

In this way the reading of the Bible becomes an experience symbolic of the eschatological tension of the “already” and the “not yet”, of the harmony between the understanding coming from the tradition and the discovery of newness bearing the future.

3.3 “But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19-31)

Luke gives a stupendous description of Mary’s attitude living with Jesus, that is, of Mary who reads

not the Words of God fixed in a book, but the Word of God made flesh and become her Son. Luke has repeated this phrase twice and has used precisely the word *symbolousa*, that is, bring together, juxtapose to produce a symbolic experience.⁴¹ Mary is an excellent model of the Church and of every Christian who reads the Bible. She knows how to read the whole in the fragment, knows how to re-think things in a wider horizon, at a more profound level and in a dynamic way. Her heart is the place in which the salvific event, previously manifested in historical fragments, is recomposed in unity. She is herself a living symbol.

3.4 “To turn the hearts of the children toward their fathers” (Mal 3:24)

The phrase is from the Prophet Malachi, who is speaking of the new Elijah. We may place it alongside the symbolic experience of reading the Bible.

To read the Bible is to listen to the Father who “meets his children with great love and speaks with them”.⁴² Obviously the reading nourishes the filial love for the Father and provokes the turning toward him by means of Jesus Christ. But there is still another dimension of filial conversion not less real, that is, the communion with the Fathers in the faith. The Bible inserts its reader into the chain of believers from Abraham to the contemporary Church creating a mysterious and strong sense of solidarity. Whoever reads the Bible has the experience of contemplating the faces of his own ancestors, of feeling himself “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1). The Bible brings together different histories of faith into the one history of salvation. The Bible is the symbol of human solidarity and communion. In reading the Bible one experiences a mystical living together with the protagonists whose stories are narrated in the books, with the generations of believers who have read them, interpreted them, impressed them on their memory, relived them and transmitted them, and with the future generations who will continue to read them and live them. The Bible becomes thus the heritage of all of humanity and the reading of the Bible an experience symbolic of returning home. One could apply to the Bible what the psalmist says: “The Lord records as he registers the peoples, ‘This one was born there’. Seven Singers and dancers alike say, ‘All my springs are in you’” (Ps 87:6-7).

3.5 “Read it in the square in the presence of the people” (Neh 8:3)

The sense of allusion to the description of the liturgy of the Word in the post-exilic community nar-

rated in the Book of Nehemiah is obvious. It underlines the communitarian dimension of the reading of the Bible. The Bible was born in the community of God's people and finds its most authentic place of proclamation, of listening and of interpretation in the community. The Bible can be considered a symbol of the ecclesiastical community, a community that lives and walks listening to the Word of God and in the celebration of its own salvation. In the Bible the community finds its identify and in the community the Bible finds its own vital context.

This symbolism reaches its most profound sense, its fullest manifestation, its most authentic truth in the liturgical proclamation.

3.6 "They need no light of lamp or sun" (Rv 22:5)

The symbol refers to something beyond itself. It is not an absolute; its function is tied to our historical and contingent existence. So also is the Bible. The word of God is eternal and will never pass away, but it is not so with the Bible. There will be a day when we will be able, like the seer of the Apocalypse, to "turn to see the voice" (Rv 1:12) of the one who has spoken to us through the writings. Then we will cease to read the Bible and we will contemplate him face to face. Then will cease the weary work of symbolic deciphering. The written words will disappear and the eternal Word will remain. The symbol will disappear, because there will no longer be need of something that "brings together"; there will be direct and immediate union.

Augustine has a beautiful page concerning this. I cite it as a conclusion of my reflection: "When the Lord returns, it will be a day so bright that lamps will no longer be necessary. The prophet will no longer be read, the book of the Apostle will no longer be opened, we will no longer seek the witness of John, we will no longer have need even of the Gospel. Therefore all the Scriptures will be eliminated, which were lit for us like lamps in the night of this age, because we will no longer be in the darkness. With all these things set aside, what will we see? On what will our mind feed? In what will our life take delight? From where will come that joy that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, that has never entered into the heart of man? What will we see? ... The Gospel tells us: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. You will arrive at the source from which you received a few drops of dew. You will see openly that light from which only a ray, indirectly and obliquely, has reached your heart still wrapped in dark-

ness and in need of purification. Finally you will be able to see that light and to bear its brightness".⁴³

Notes

¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VI, 15,125 (GCS 15,494).

² Léon-Dufour X., *Lecture de l'évangile selon Jean*, Paris, Ed. du Seuil 1987, 19.

³ Consiglio dell'Associazione professori e cultori di Liturgia (ed.), *Celebrare in Spirito e Verità. Sussidio teologico-pastorale per la formazione liturgica*, Rome, Edizioni liturgiche 1992, 33.

⁴ See, for example, Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV, 15-16 (SC 136, 217-221): "He adapted himself to the weakness of the one who could not bear the radiance and the splendor of his divinity, making himself so to speak, 'flesh' and expressing himself in bodily terms so as to permit whoever receives him in this form to raise himself rapidly by means of the Word even to contemplate, so to speak, his principal form"; John Chrysostom, *In Genesim homiliae* 17,1 (PG 53,134): "In the Scripture the condescension of the eternal Wisdom is manifested 'so that we might comprehend the ineffable goodness of God and to what extent he, caring and provident in regard to our human nature, has adapted his speech'". This is cited by the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, n. 13.

⁵ See the discourse of John Paul II of 23 April 1993 at the audience on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII., in Pontificia Commissione Biblica, *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1994, 8.

⁶ Cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 16,4 (CCL 2,1181).

⁷ Caillot J., *L'Évangile de la communication = Cogitatio Fidei* 152, Paris, Ed. du Cerf 1989, 274.

⁸ Martini - Pacomio, *I Libri di Dio* 2.

⁹ *Dei Verbum*, n. 21.

¹⁰ Origen, *In Exodum homiliae* 13-3 (SC 16,263). Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (trans. Ronald E. Heine; The Fathers of the Church 71; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982).

¹¹ Jerome, *Commentarius in Ecclesiastem* 3,13 (CCL 72,278).

¹² *Dei Verbum*, n. 21.

¹³ *ibid.*, n. 12

¹⁴ Origen, *Commentarius in Evangelium secundum Johannem* V, 5-6 (SC 120,380-384).

¹⁵ Jerome, *Commentarius in Isaiam Prophetam*, Prologus (PL 24,17-18).

¹⁶ *Dei Verbum*, n. 25.

¹⁷ Ambrose, *Epistola* II, 4 (PL 16,918).

¹⁸ Ambrose, *Enarratio in Psalmum* I, 33 (PL 14,983).

¹⁹ Origen, *Commentarius in Evangelium secundum Johannem* XIII, 6,37 (SC 222,50).

²⁰ Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentarius in Diatessaron* I, 18-19 (SC 121,52-53).

²¹ *Dei Verbum*, n. 21.

²² Origen, *In Exodum homiliae* 7-8 (SC 16,82). Eng. trans. Heine, p. 313 (see note 21).

²³ Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* I,5,2 (CCL 142,57)

²⁴ Cf. Ambrose, *De Spiritu Sancto* III,112 (PL 16,837). It is in this sense that *Dei Verbum* says of the Scriptures that "as inspired by God (passive inspiration!) and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit (active inspiration!) resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 21).

²⁵ Origen, *In Exodum homiliae* 1,1 (SC 16,77). Eng. trans. Heine, p. 227 (See note 21).

²⁶ Gregory the Great, *Moralia* 20,1 (CCL 143A,1003) as well as in several homilies.

²⁷ Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* I,7,9; I,7,15-16 (CCL 142,87-88; 92-93).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* II,2,1(CCL 142,225).

²⁹ Origen, *Commentarius in Evangelium secundum Johannem* V, 5-6 (SC 120,380-384).

³⁰ Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem* I,9,30 (CCL 142,139).

³¹ Augustine, *Confessionum* XII, 14,17 (PL 32,832)

³² Cf. Ambrose, *Enarratio in Psalmum* XXXVIII,15 (PL 14,1096).

³³ Augustine, *Confessionum* X, 6,8 (PL 32,782).

³⁴ Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistolarum* V,46 (CCL 140,340).

³⁵ *Syn-páthos*, to feel the same. "Sym-pathy is state in which a person is open to the presence of another. It is a sentiment that perceives the sentiment to which it reacts: the opposite of emotive solitude. In the prophetic sympathy, man is open to the presence and to the emotion of the transcendent Subject. He bears within himself the consciousness of what is happening to God". Heschel J.A., *Il messaggio dei profeti*. Rome, Borla 1981, 119.

³⁶ Augustine, Sermon 51 [ed. P. Verbraken, RB 91(1981) pp.23-45][this text p. 27].

³⁷ Origen, *In Exodum homiliae* 12,1 (SC 16,246); trad. Heine, p. 368 (see note 21).

³⁸ Levinas E., *L'aldilà del versetto*, Neapel, Guida Editori 1986,59

³⁹ Cf. Bori P.C., *L'interpretazione infinita*.

L'ermeneutica cristiana antica e le sue trasformazioni, Bologna, Il Mulino 1987.

⁴⁰ John Paul II., Discourse on the interpretation of the Bible in the Church given April 23, 1993 during the audience commemorating the centenary of the Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII, and the 50th anniversary of the Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII., in Pontificia Commissione Biblica, *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1993,10.

⁴¹ Hanel E.: "The expression *sym-bállousa*, which occurs only in Luke, means to solve a puzzle, to reconcile apparently irreconcilable opposites, 'to symbolise' in the original Greek sense of 'bringing together', to shake the dice in the palm of the hand. Maria turns over in her heart then the words and events provoking a beneficial collision and clarification of each". *Discernement "in spiritu" dans l'Évangile de l'Enfance selon Saint Luc*, in *Cahiers Mariels* 24 (1979) 184-185; cf. also Serra A., *Sapienza e contemplazione di Maria secondo Luca* 2, 19.51b, Roma, Edizioni Marianum 1982.

⁴² *Dei Verbum*, n. 21

⁴³ Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium tractatus* 35,9 (CCL 36,322-323).

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Africa and the Emerging World Order in the 21st Century: Challenges and Prospects

Convocation lecture at Spiritan International School of Theology Attakwu, Enugu, 10 June 1998.

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you. We did not eat any one’s bread without paying, but with toil and labour, we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. It was not because we have not the right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate” (2 Thes 3:6-9).

... we see only possibilities of action. And let us add at once, to anticipate an objection which automatically arises: these possibilities of action do not constitute any sort of connected system, they do not represent in each region an inseparable whole: if they are capable of being seized they cannot all be seized by men at the same time with the same force ... all possibilities are not compossibilities (Lucien Febvre, *A Geographical Introduction to History*, p. 174).

1 Introductory Remarks

Fifty years ago, on the justifiable basis of a sad incident with apparently disastrous consequences, a boy resolved to separate from the Church in any of its denominations. The lad was then in his second year at secondary school. His father, who had rendered some 28 years of illustrious service to the CMS establishment as a renowned schoolmaster, had died that Easter. Despite appeals from the Principal, the CMS authorities refused to assume the burden of the boy’s school fees, even as a minimal gesture of appreciation for the father’s long years of meritorious service. From the boy’s perspective, catastrophe seemed certain. The good Principal, finally, kindly remitted the fees to permit the boy to continue his education.

That boy, now an old man, today stands before you, eminent theologians, as an honoured guest, invited to concelebrate with you and to deliver the 1998 MA Convocation lecture is surely testimony to the greatness of God, his amazing grace and wondrous ways.

Viewed now with the luxury of retrospection, that incident was of course only one of many disturbances in life’s various and complex enjambments. Disturbances, as we shall see, are necessary ingredients of self-development. The proviso is that they be neither too large nor too frequent.

Our topic is at once noble, urgent and complex — as complex as Africa itself; and noble and urgent as regards its valid concern for an enduring resolution of Africa’s worsening predicament.

Given the complexity of the issues and the time constraint, I think that we can secure much analytical mileage if we mimic the method artists often employ: sketch the outline(s), albeit with crude brush strokes and later attend to the details and distinctnesses, extensions and amendments — especially during the discussion period and, more importantly, in our minds after today, if possible months or years on — when you are in the field — after tomorrow’s graduation formalities. Accordingly, this paper offers no more than *Discussion Notes*.

2. Definitions and Limitations

That we shall speak of Africa in no way implies that we are unmindful of its complexities. Africa for us is simply the continent as represented by today’s map-makers: that essential triangle, bounded on its northern flat by the Mediterranean and the Red Seas, and on its two other sides by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, together with its outlying islands. Just as with any other continent, it is subject to its own historical-geographical tensions, has its own internal networkings and external linkages with other conti-

nents (especially, Europe, Asia and the New World) — true with different traffic vectors, rhythms and mediators at different periods throughout history. The seas and even the Sahara desert were, as every school-boy knows, arterial highways in this networking. Note at once the heteroclit traffic vector, with differing geographies of derivation, but with New World terminus, sustained for over four centuries, which, composed with flows from Europe and Asia, facilitated the construction of the New World.

As to the 21st century, note that in reality, the universe has no centuries. Centuries start and end every day. What we now generally employ is the Gregorian convenience; and even at that there is some amusing debate as to whether the 21st century will start on 1 January, 2000 or 1 January, 2001. (See Asa Briggs and David Snowman (eds.), *Fins de Siècle, How Centuries End 1400-2000*, Yale, 1996, pp. 197-230, and the references cited therein).

At any rate, the simple point I wish to stress is two-fold: (1) From the viewpoint of global historical structure, the 21st century is already here, with a new era in world history which began about 1988-1994. We do not know when it will end but by all indications a new era is upon us. According to Eric Hobsbawm, "... there can be no serious doubt that in the late 1980s and early 1990s an era in world history ended and a new one began" (Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, Joseph, 1994, p. 5). (2) Those who are waiting for the year 2000 or 2001 will find themselves left behind by the global train.

Accordingly, I shall confine attention to what I call the *Early Current 21st Century*, that is the period 1988/1994 - 2038/2044 or thereabout. Kondratieff enthusiasts may take it as corresponding roughly to a fifth Kondratieff cycle lasting till about 2038/2044 with a 50-year span, although we must always bear in mind Schumpeter's caution against the dangers of such predictions.

We shall use the terms change, disturbance, challenge or shock interchangeably. For our purposes here, they are equivalent.

3. Some Dimensions of the African Predicament

Taking into account the pitfalls of statistical aggregates and projections therefrom, let us suppose that there obtains somehow in our period a magical situation whereby Africa enjoys a phenomenal growth rate of some 8 per cent per annum in per capita real GNP, while the rest of the world, especially the set of industrial centres, stands still. From a base of some \$US470 (1988) that would just about place sub-Saharan Africa after 50 years at a point (\$US22,044) in a neigh-

bourhood where North America was in 1988 (\$US 19,850). This supplies a crude measure of the African predicament and the indicated effort in the global context.

We may of course seek to improve the (information content of the) metric by adjoining to the foregoing a set of other quantities relating to food production, energy, access to education and health, employment, trade balance, housing, "consumption" of radio and television, human development and distress, depending on taste (see, example, UNDP, *Human Development Report*, OUP, for 1991 and other years).

However, it is clear that the rest of the world cannot and will not stand still. And we may legitimately query the information content of such a construct. What precisely do we mean when we compare the USA and United Arab Emirates (same per capita GDP), Qatar and Cuba, Saudi Arabia and China, or Nigeria and India?

Cross-sectional analysis offers important insights. But deprived of its basis and envelope of history, it is of limited utility; for our purposes, it is probably worse than useless. I believe that history is a more illuminating aid for capturing the key factors entailed in an enduring resolution of Africa's predicament. Consider the following sketch, which flows from our previous observation on the African triangle.

Once, from the age of sail, at the beginning of the early modern period, the Atlantic was the "Highway of the World". Given knowledge of the global wind system, and favourably located, Western Europe *grasped the presented opportunities* and travelled this highway to world hegemony (Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Millennium*, Bantam, 1995, Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th - 18th Century*, UCB and Harper, 3 vols, especially vol. 2, pp. 402 - 415). Five hundred years on, in the age of the microchip, the centre of gravity of global *initiative* (simply defined as the capacity to manage present and prospective change in terms of the important co-ordinates of enterprise, production and finance) is shifting towards Asia and the Pacific rim. This process has recently suffered a shock/setback but will undoubtedly recover and accelerate. But will it endure? Or, equivalently, after Asia, where next and when the shift, since nothing except change is permanent in human history — and herein has Francis Fukuyama's erred — for as long as there is humanity historical change will continue and there will be history.

Africa, which also abuts the Atlantic highway, was essentially sidelined in the shift of the early modern period, suffering conquest, depredation and partition in result. Why? Certainly, the relative interior isolation of her "shy and retiring" empires (Mali, Songhay, Ghana, Mwene Mutapa), defective structures of ex-

isting States (Morocco, Egypt), absence of viable State structures in the coastal areas (Ashanti, Dahomey, Benin, Kongo), technological backwardness when mastery of the wind system and possession of the gun were decisive, were contributory factors. Africa was thus unable to authentically participate in and profit from the ensuing unprecedented growth in world production and distribution of resources (so-called First Industrial Revolution and its aftermath).

In the current shift of initiative from the Atlantic to the Pacific — when Atlantic-side location and global wind system mastery have been displaced by control of the microchip in the advantage set — Africa is again being sidelined. It is plagued by political-social instability, infra-national and international tensions leading in the extreme to warfare, “foreign policy” adventures and famine, economic backwardness, excessive external debt burden, essentially failed State frameworks and infrastructure, rapid institutional decay — especially as regards the important co-ordinates of informal laws and tradition but also of formal laws — among other challenges. We may say that, structurally, in terms of the construction of socio-economic progress, Africa is, once again, *headed in the wrong direction*.

Our problem then is equivalently: How can such *structural misdirection* be reversed so that Africa participates in shaping and profiting from global economic progress? Or, which is the same, to better manage and possibly influence change.

4. Sources of Global Challenge

The helmsman (no gender bias is implied in this term) and system management — indeed, all sensible entrepreneurs in the system (political, social, economic, and intellectual) — should comprehend and well prepare to meet global shocks. Elsewhere, I have discussed in detail world system dynamics and sources of emerging global challenge (Chu Okongwu, *The Nigeria National Reconstruction Project*, 1992). Here I will update that discussion. The interested reader can modify the suggestive list.

From a global perspective some key sources of challenge are as follows:

4.1 Instability of the political situation of the global inter-State system, following from collapse of the Soviet Union.

4.2 Instability in the internal political situation of the world States and their institutions, following from infra-national tensions/forces, loss of power to supranational entities (UN, IBRD, IMF, EU, Coalitions, etc.), and “institutional decay”. The

theory and practice of the State and the size of the State are no longer received or settled matters. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto considers that big States will continue to fragment (*Millennium*, pp. 702-707). Note that the role and scope of supranational authorities are in flux.

4.3 Crisis of Liberal Democracy or the Democratic Predicament. For while there is clearly a need for democratic legitimacy of public authorities yet problems abound: decline of organised mass parties; depoliticization or alienation of the citizenry from the political process and relegation of State affairs to the so-called “political class”; public opinion is generally no guide to many decisions of public authorities (e.g. taxes, scientific and technical matters), given “rational ignorance” and “pervasive localism” in the polity; public opinion, as monitored by the polls, and magnified by the increasingly powerful and omnipresent media, often constitutes a siege on public decision-making; and political consensus had been generally undermined. The main issue, however, is to govern effectively and well. Moreover, democracy is like soup with an infinitude of variety according to taste, place and time. Besides, it is always easy to contrive a veneer or gloss of democracy.

4.4 Increased globalisation of the world economy entailing at least: (a) Increased polycentrism or pluralism of economic production, and relative shift towards Asia (China, Japan, NICs), and relative decline of “Eurocentricity”; (b) associated with and reinforcing (a), increased pluralism of global financial centres as well as ever increasing volumes, velocity and variegated menus of the financial flows — promoting trans-nationality of shock transmission, regardless of State boundary or ideology; (c) probable rise of protectionism in the ensuing intensified competition for market and resources; (d) increased gap between rich and poor countries.

4.5 Increased pace of technology change. Awesome challenges are issuing from rapid progress in (i) microelectronics, (ii) computers, (iii) optoelectronics, (iv) advanced manufacturing technologies, (v) biotechnology, and (vi) advanced raw materials technology.

4.6 Closely associated with this, the emergence of information as a key resource for transformation in a rapidly shrinking knowledge-based world. This should have profound impact not only on the demand for industrial raw materials and competi-

tive efficiency, but also on forms of enterprise organisation, some levels and forms of education, and even the future patterns of cities (agglomerations of activities).

4.7 Demographic pressure. While world population will grow, it is expected to stabilise around 10 billion by 2030. In the mean time, while the population structure of the advanced countries will experience relative “ageing”, the poorer countries, especially in Africa, will experience relative “youthfulness”. How do we propose to cater for an essentially youthful population of some 300-400 million?

4.8 Urbanisation. Similarly, even if we accept that “cities will eventually wither away” (*Millennium*, pp. 707-708) in the meantime the global structure of urbanisation will change and urban pressures will intensify for us. The population of Lagos has been projected to exceed 20 million! Which management will administer such a city and what infrastructure will service its mega-populace?

4.9 The probable emergence of South Africa, or at any rate Southern Africa, as a political-economic force on the continent.

4.10 The conjugation of the facts of (i) globalisation of activities, (ii) shrinking of the globe (“global villaging”), (iii) the “simultaneous coexistence of all history”, and (iv) the rapid pace of changes in (i). This poses severe shocks for all societies; but it is particularly destabilising for backward countries with fragile institutions. “*Perhaps the most striking characteristic at the end of the 20th century is the tension between this accelerating process of globalization and the inability of both public institutions and the collective behaviour of human beings to come to terms with it*” (Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 15).

4.11 The bio environment: ecology. Whether from pollution by the industrial centres, imprudent use of resources, pressure of population and urbanisation, the ecological crisis will probably develop.

4.12 It is worth calling separate attention to one source of global pressure alluded to above: namely, that concerted by developed countries and likely to intensify on developing countries. The concert may be exhibited in different supranational fora (UN Security Council, World Bank, GATT/WTO) or by regional blocks (EU) or single powers. The pressures may take different forms: litanies of

perceived democracy, human rights, secular theology of the beneficence of the unrestricted free market, or conditionally specifics, e.g. prescriptions of democracy, environmental indices, and “ideal” public expenditure composition linked with aid and debt resolution; high co-efficient of refusal to trade and exchange especially as regards “strategic” goods and services however defined (e.g. assertion of ‘intellectual property rights’ and “industrial watch lists”); expropriation of foreign assets (note in this regard that it is common but erroneous to presume that assets expropriation is the monopoly of developing countries); interdictions of trade (so-called sanctions, quarantine); impeded access to markets including global financial and intellectual resources; instigation and material support of one country against another; naked interference in the internal affairs of a developing country (e.g., support of fissiparous infra-national forces), with the extreme of force projection and supplanting of a genuine national government on grounds of any probable cause. (Note in this last regard that internal coryphaei and cohorts would not be wanting particularly under conditions of social instability or pervasive social injustice).

4.13 So-called “Global War”. Humanity of course has not abolished warfare; it is possible that with the development and use of nuclear weapons its “nature” and “dimensions” may have changed. We have also noted that Africa is plagued by internal wars. But it may be asked: which African country or group(s) of countries can credibly deter or successfully meet/fight continental invasion and reconquest, or protect its citizens from the perils of biological-chemical warfare?

4.14 Of special interest to Africa should be the following: (i) *External Debt Overhang*. Africa’s external debt stock now stands at some \$US320 billion (1996) with a debt-service burden of some 25% of exports. My own thinking is that while the debt problem will eventually “die by semantics”, this facility will be available to only (a) pure “basket cases”/non-viable countries, and (b) (potentially) viable countries that seriously organise themselves and engage in the requisite dialogue. Otherwise it will be an instrument for pressure (see above). (ii) *Minimalist State Philosophy and the predatory/vampire State*: Since the theory and practice of the State are under review given the secular ascendancy of minimalist State philosophies (neo-liberalism, conservatism, Thatcherism/Reaganism), there is the danger that Africa’s failed

State structures, instead of courageously reconstructing themselves, may well take refuge in such philosophies and intensify their predatory States. Consider that the industrial centres now confront the issues of how to meet social assurance (old age pensions, employment, and unemployment benefits, medical care, etc.) and public services. (iii) *Externalisation and Privatisation of (National) Assets*: Similarly, minimalist philosophies may drive the State to externalise national assets under the guise of privatisation and globalisation economics — thus creating problems for the future. (iv) Weak State structures would be particularly prone to undermining by several factors: e.g. (a) global shock transmissions, (b) intense array of NGO activities, (c) trusteeship status demands (voluntary and involuntary) on the part of their citizens (slavery phenomenon) etc. (v) *Nations and Nationalism/ Colonial Boundaries*: Although artificial boundaries are not unique to Africa, the high incidence, pervasive fragility of State structures and economies, “decolonization” process and decades of bad governance promote infra-national tensions.

5. World System Dynamics

Elements of global challenge or disturbance should not be seen as cause for despair. They are to be expected in system development. For the world system — roughly the global super-system with its network of State systems, national economies, division of labour, production, trade and payments, strategic interests, hierarchies of issues and of agents and the evolution of their power distribution over time, competition, and coalitions — is a self-developing system whose process continuously presents new opportunities for action while deleting or modifying old ones. This continuous process of presentation and deletion or modification of opportunities may simply be described as a shock process. No society, not even the most advanced, is immune to such shocks. Authentic survival and progress in the world system requires correct perception and exploitation of the opportunities presented — that is, successful adaptation to shocks. Indeed, such shocks provide the very ingredients of self-development, as I noted in the introductory remarks.

Some of these (emerging and probable future) shocks may represent/derive from envisaged profitable opportunities for economic activity, scientific-technological advancement, territorial expansion, or military aggrandisement. The fact of global competition will spur this effort of prospection and solution of problems.

From the economic-technical point of view, the most significant shocks presented continuously are those arising from scientific-technological progress, and, therefore, because of the entailed transformation, from the march of industrialisation.

The penalty for failure to anticipate or discern global challenges correctly and implement the requisite counter-measures is relative regression. If a system persists in this failure over a long period then the penalty is not only absolute regress but, in terms of the analytic dichotomy between centres and periphery, for it to be structured towards the periphery of the global super-system. There, its form of dependency would be a matter of the prevailing political convention: colony, neo-colony, or trust territory.

6. Internal Weaknesses and Permanent Factors

Clearly, shocks may also be internally generated, and in severe form may represent internal weaknesses — e.g., persistent high inflation, and other domestically induced imbalances; overhang of the public sector; atrophy of socio-economic infrastructure; large and growing informal sector; long-term policy instability; formal laws and erosion of traditional values, social tensions leading in the extreme to societal disorderliness, a hyperpraetorian State in which not only “every social force is a political force” but community is in disarray (S.P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale, 1968), or to national disintegration, etc.

Furthermore, since no system can ignore or violate its permanent attributes, account must also be taken of these in the transfer process. These may be historically derived (e.g., colonial heritage), geographical (e.g., location, trade structure and mode), or even expectative (e.g., for Africa, expectations of Blacks in the Diaspora, or internal expectations).

7. “World Orders, Old and New”, Whose?

From our approach, every viable State system would need to form a *worldview* — an expectation of its place and role in the global system in relation to its perceived self-interests and strategies for the promotion of such interests — as a crucial element in the transfer process. Such a vision is an ordering of the world in some sense. But it is clear that a State system may have to take global structure, institutions, and mechanisms as given, unable to influence or change them.

Abstractly, however, the expression *world order* is usually restricted to the worldview of the hegemonic State or coalition of States, specifications (usually

gilded) of global power distribution, and of institutions, mechanisms and enforcement, as a means of maintaining such hegemony. Note that the “world order” need not be “systematised” or “formalised”, interpretation or application depends on the hegemonic State(s). But this has always been the case.

“As for the new world order, it is very much like the old, in a new guise. There are important developments, notably the increasing internationalisation of the economy with its consequences ... and the extension of this system to the former Soviet domains. But there are no fundamental changes, and no ‘new paradigms’ are needed to make sense of what is happening. The basic rules of world order remain as they have always been: the rule of law for the weak, the rule of force for the strong; the principles of ‘economic rationality’ for the weak, State power and intervention for the strong” (Noam Chomsky, *World Orders, Old and New*, London: Pluto 1994, p. 271).

Interestingly, although world orders have existed as long as world hegemony, Chomsky considers that it was after the South Commission’s formal call for a “new world order” based on “justice, equity and democracy” (Noam Chomsky, *The Challenge to the South*, Report of the South Commission, Oxford 1990, p. 287) that US President George Bush “appropriated the phrase for his war in the Gulf”. Reflecting the fact of power relations, “It is George Bush’s call for a ‘new world order’ that resounded, not the plaintive plea of the South, unreported and unheard” (Chomsky, *The Challenge*, p. 7).

What I wish to stress is that in the beginning of the early current 21st century: (a) the reality of power remains unarguable; (b) much fog, and thus uncertainty, predominates in the global system; and (c) at all events, from our viewpoint, the impediments (and advantage set) of any world order represent challenges which State system management must confront, hopefully, sagaciously.

Four posers: (i) What is the internationally accepted status of Jerusalem (East or Greater)? Who signed such accord? (ii) Considering the recent financial shocks in East Asia, the possibility of transmission elsewhere, and, in any case, the desirability of shock regulation, which international agency supervises global financial markets? The IMF? Where is its mandate? (iii) Is the UN Security Council “balanced” or “democratic”? How may it be so rendered? (iv) What is the “*international community*” we hear so much about these days? The US, the EU or what?

8. Prospects

What are the prospects? Both optimism and the realities oblige me to say that the prospects are NOT hopeless but daunting, in view of the entailed tasks, as should be obvious from the foregoing sections.

The tasks revolve around the notion/concept of reconstitution or reconstruction: of individual Africa’s economics to get and keep the individual systems right/efficient, and the formation/construction of larger political-economic spaces.

Let me (try to) sketch the essential issues.

9. Getting African Economies Right

Africa’s economies have been long overdue for overhaul. Their decline and management inefficiencies can no longer be blamed on colonialism, neo-colonialism, and adverse terms of trade for agricultural or industrial raw materials, monoculture or monoprodukt base, and such. For instance, if you are in business and it is not yielding satisfactory returns then you should review your entire system for improved performance or, perhaps, it is time to try another line of business.

The internal reorganisation endeavour should include the following:

- Forge strong national unity with social justice to ensure national cohesion, so that society acts as one with the advantage of ethno-cultural diversity.

- With regard to the economy, pursue policies and programmes which focus more on wealth creation rather than redistribution, via market orientation, simplified procedures (laws and regulations), decentralisation and deconcentration. Resolutely pursue the elimination of the distortions in the various markets so that the economy can find its true internal laws of self-development and create and attract requisite resources for driving it to its set target. Abolish the instrumentality of economic rents. Resolutely promote valid risk taking and competition, and thus productive endeavours as against rent seeking. Promote the stake of each individual in society via ownership of assets and (equality of) access to infrastructure and opportunities for self-development. Improve the mass mobilisation and work ethic of citizens to secure gains in productivity, savings and production.

- Resolutely and intelligently legitimate the informal sector to enable it join the economic mainstream.

- Insist on simplification of administrative processes, of laws and regulations; certainty, ease and sanctity of titles and property rights; and the institution of adjudication of contracts. So that the broad

mass of the citizenry fully comprehend laws, regulations, procedures and their rights, have a stake in society and answer the call to production.

- Pay correct attention to the urgent task of rehabilitating the national equipment (roads, railroads, waterways, and public utilities). These will need continuous maximal maintenance and extension to help open up the economy and reduce transaction costs.

- Pay correct attention to the urgent task of maintenance of law and order so that economic agents can go about their legitimate business activity and produce the necessary increased output and productivity gains.

- Insist that each level of government faithfully carry out its responsibilities as an aspect of both decentralisation and social responsibility.

- Embark on quality education with emphasis on scientific technological education and accent on excellence.

- In a nutshell: firmly abolish the instrumentality of economic rents, encourage productive endeavours and the spirit of learning, as well as competition, with an accent on excellence.

These tasks can be decomposed into sub-tasks for system agents — especially the helmsman and system managers — with rewarding insights. But we shall not go into such details.

10. Formation of Larger Political-Economic Spaces

Wiser heads than mine, especially political scientists/philosophers, will no doubt be able to better inform you here. But I should at least point to some key concerns.

The African political-economic landscape is littered with many unviable State structures — with narrow bases and null presence or doubtful future viability, thus repeating, as we have seen, one crucial structural error of the past. No doubt there is the basis of colonial heritage. But some three decades have passed since Independence. Combined with the prevalence of bad governance on the continent, the State has become a danger to itself, its citizens and other States — a factor of regress.

The proliferation of weak State structures cannot enjoy the gains/externalities associated with strong States in the advancement of the interests of their citizens in domestic or external affairs (e.g. WTO, UN-based, IMF, or IBRD negotiations).

Notwithstanding (a) that the theory and practice of the State are under siege, (b) the prevalence of infra-national tensions, (c) the forecast that big States will continue to fragment, given the present state of knowledge, the “State” and the “nation-State” remain

vital instruments for regulating human affairs. Africans would need to forge larger nation-States (“unity”) and stronger States, to aid them in the development/transfer process.

The desiderata are not tyranny and bloatedness but strategic reconstruction for enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in order to better exploit the gains from the global system process.

If the construction of larger political-economic spaces is good for others, say, the Americans and Europeans, then it is good for Africans. If you are in doubt, ask the Chinese or the Indians.

There is every reason to urgently progress, for example, from ECOWAS to the United States of West Africa, and, similarly, larger constructs for Southern, Eastern and Northern Africa, as a minimum (for more on this see Chinweizu, *Project 2060: Business and Black Redemption*, Mimeo, lecture, ESUT Management Forum, Enugu, 29 August 1997).

Concluding Remarks

If African States and their economies are not reconstituted along the lines I have tried to indicate, then, even under the best scenario, the prospects can be confidently predicted as dim. The task ahead is intimidating and urgent. But no one will do it for Africa except the Africans themselves.

In conclusion, let me recall the words of Saint Paul, which are apposite to one of our major transfer strategies today:

“We did not eat any one’s bread without paying, but with toil and labour, we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you.

It was not because we have not the right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate” (2 Thes, 3:8-9).

Saint Paul was not only a supreme religious architect but also a practical institutional economist *par excellence*.

If the sketch I have presented today motivates you, as you go into the world, to share the ideas with someone, then I would be gratified that this meeting was truly ordained in Heaven. And speaking of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, here is Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Saint Luke: “... the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:21).

As the wise man said, the helping hand we need is at our fingertips.

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Bernardo Mançano Fernandes

Brésil : Quelle Réforme Agraire?

Qu'en est-il réellement de la réforme agraire au Brésil ? L'analyse ici présentée conduit son auteur à poser cette autre question : "Y a-t-il seulement une réforme agraire au Brésil ?" Le gouvernement fédéral n'a pas de vrai plan de réforme agraire : sa politique d'assentamentos (établissements de paysans sur des terres) ne fait que répondre aux luttes pour la terre menées par divers mouvements sociaux. Les grands latifundiaires trouvent avantage à l'achat des terres par le gouvernement. C'est la société qui paye l'addition.

Le travail ci-dessous, traduit par J.-Y. Martin, docteur en géographie de l'Université de Bordeaux III, a été présenté à l'occasion de la XIVème Rencontre nationale de géographie agraire, réalisée à la Faculté des sciences et technologie - FCT/UNESP, campus de Presidente Prudente - du 4 au 8 décembre 1998. Il a pour auteur Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, professeur du département de géographie de la FCT/UNESP (São Paulo) et coordonateur du NERA (Núcleo de Estudos, Pesquisas e Projetos de Reforma Agrária).

Depuis la fin des gouvernements militaires, en 1985, la question de la réforme agraire au Brésil a été sans cesse posée politiquement, dans l'espoir de sa réalisation. Mais ce sont les mouvements sociaux qui, au moyen de la lutte pour la terre, ont repris cette bannière historique, provoquant un débat à ce sujet. La tendance générale a toujours été d'affirmer que dans notre pays, la réforme agraire était en cours de réalisation. Il s'est même instauré un certain consensus autour d'une telle approche. Les voix discordantes sont peu nombreuses. Dans cet article, nous voulons, brièvement, faire entendre un autre son de cloche à propos de ce débat sur la réforme agraire.

L'objectif de ce texte est d'apporter une contribution à la mise à jour du débat. Dans ce but, nous analyserons quelques événements politiques et l'évolution récente du processus de la question agraire. Les données présentées dans ce travail sont partielles et font partie d'un projet de recherche en cours. De sorte que cette réflexion a davantage pour but d'exprimer l'état de la question, que celui de présenter une analyse achevée. Toutefois, les données et les faits que nous analysons ici constituent pourtant des indicateurs suffisants pour aller jusqu'à s'interroger sur l'existence ou non d'une réforme agraire. Dans cette optique nous voulons démontrer que c'est la lutte pour la terre qui est déterminante dans le déploiement d'une politique d'assentamentos ruraux par le gouvernement fédéral. D'un autre côté, la formule "réforme agraire" devient un euphémisme pour justifier une politique d'arrangement du gouvernement avec les propriétaires de terres. Utilisant l'idée de réforme agraire, le gouvernement devient acheteur de terres, allant jusqu'à créer un projet pour rendre possible l'achat de terres pour l'implantation d'assentamentos ruraux.

C'est la société qui paye l'addition et les grands latifundiaires et grileiros y trouvent avantage, pouvant ainsi transférer leurs capitaux vers d'autres secteurs de l'économie. Du fait de l'inexistence d'un plan de réforme agraire, la lutte pour la terre s'accroît dans tout le Brésil par le truchement des occupations de terres. Le nombre des mouvements sociaux de lutte pour la terre augmente aussi. Il est donc essentiel de mettre en question le consensus et la question à poser n'est donc pas "quelle réforme agraire ?", mais plutôt :

"y a-t-il seulement une réforme agraire au Brésil?"

Quelle réforme agraire ?

Le débat au sujet de la réforme agraire a occupé une place politique importante dans la société, spécialement dans les médias et, dans une certaine mesure, dans la recherche universitaire. Les occupations de terre, les différentes manifestations des mouvements sociaux et l'implantation d'assentamentos ruraux sont des faits qui, associés, nourrissent le débat. Toutefois, il est bon de poser une question : Quelle réforme agraire ? Où donc est-il en train de se faire une réforme agraire ? Qui fait cette réforme agraire ? De quel projet s'agit-il ? La formule "réforme agraire" tourne à la métaphore. Ces mots sont utilisés dans divers travaux universitaires se référant à la lutte pour la terre et à la conquête de la terre par les sans-terre.

Or, le gouvernement fédéral n'a pas un vrai projet de réforme agraire. En réalité il développe une politique d'assentamentos pour répondre au processus d'organisation des divers mouvements sociaux qui sont en lutte pour la terre. Au cours des cinq dernières années le nombre des mouvements sociaux de lutte

pour la terre, qui agissent surtout dans le Nordeste et dans le Centre-Sud, s'est accru. À l'exception de l'Amazonie, où l'INCRA (Institut national de la réforme agraire) a régularisé quelques zones de possession, dans les autres régions le gouvernement a négocié avec les mouvements qui, du fait de leurs actions, ont donné son rôle à la politique d'implantation d'assentamentos.

Mais la politique des assentamentos n'est pas la réforme agraire. Le gouvernement affirme avoir installé 300 000 familles en quatre ans. Le recensement de la réforme agraire contribue en partie à ce que nous connaissions partiellement le nombre des assentamentos existants. Devant la difficulté d'accès aux données en valeurs absolues et prenant en référence les données du dernier recensement agricole [1995-1996], de la recherche de terrain que nous avons effectuée en 1997 et les données du MST, nous formulons l'hypothèse qu'une partie importante du total des assentamentos n'est en vérité qu'une régularisation de possession [posse]. Une autre partie des assentamentos a été constituée par les occupations elles-mêmes. Le nombre des projets d'assentamentos ruraux créés par le gouvernement est la plus faible partie. Dans les États considérés, ont été implantés 393 assentamentos au cours de la période allant de 1994 à 1997. Dans ce total, 330 assentamentos ont été le résultat d'occupations de terre ; seulement 47, soit 12%, ont été le résultat de projets initiés par le gouvernement. Une autre preuve significative de ce qu'il n'y a pas une politique de réforme agraire est que la concentration de la terre continue à s'accroître. Les assentamentos implantés n'interviennent guère dans la structure foncière du pays. Un autre fait important est la diminution du nombre de personnes occupées dans les activités agricoles. Dans la période 1985-1995/1996, ce nombre diminue de 5 440 582 personnes. Les États du Pará, du Maranhão, du Pernambuco, de Bahia, de Minas Gerais, de São Paulo, de Paraná et du Rio Grande do Sul sont ceux qui ont eu les réductions les plus importantes. Ces données sont des indicateurs que les conditions d'occupation générées par la politique des assentamentos ne compensent pas les conséquences de l'expulsion provoquée par la politique économique. Le nombre de personnes qui s'occupent des activités agricoles ne représente à peu près plus que le quart de celles qui ont quitté ces activités. Depuis 1985, le Mouvement des travailleurs ruraux sans terre (MST), a pris la défense de l'existence d'au moins 4,8 millions de familles sans terre. Le gouvernement, et particulièrement le ministère extraordinaire de politique foncière, a toujours contesté ce chiffre. Cependant une étude récente commandée par le NEAD - Noyau d'études agraires et de développement du cabinet du ministre

extraordinaire de politique foncière - a avancé un nombre de 4,9 millions de familles. Ces chiffres sont des références. Il est nécessaire d'analyser, avec encore plus de détails, dans le recensement agricole de 1995-1996, les chiffres au sujet de la diminution de la population occupée dans l'agriculture. Le déploiement d'un véritable plan de réforme permettrait d'établir une estimation plus fondée de la population concernée par cette politique.

L'expulsion de la terre, le chômage et la concentration foncière sont des facteurs qui aident à comprendre la multiplication des occupations de terres. Dans la période 1987-1997, le nombre des occupations s'est accru de 600 % et le nombre des familles engagées de 400 % (voir le graphique). L'occupation contribue à la construction d'une politique, qui par le moyen de la pression exercée par la lutte pour la terre, conduit à la conquête des conditions de base pour la citoyenneté. Jusqu'à présent, le pouvoir de pression construit par les occupations n'a toujours pas été suffisant pour débloquer un projet de réforme agraire. En plus, dans les quatre dernières années, avec la diminution du prix de la terre et le souhait de nombreux latifundiaires de vendre leurs terres, le gouvernement peut s'emparer de ces terres, par l'achat et quelquefois par l'expropriation, pour l'implantation d'assentamentos. Cette conjoncture est donc encore plus favorable aux latifundiaires, avec le projet Cédula da Terra. Ce projet qui fut d'abord appelé Réforme agraire solidaire, donne une prime aux latifundiaires et aux grileiros, qui pourront ainsi disposer de terres pour les vendre à l'INCRA.

La montée de la lutte pour la terre a fait croître aussi le nombre de mouvements sociaux à la campagne. Même des institutions comme la CONTAG qui fut toujours opposée aux occupations, poussent désormais leurs syndicats à la pratique de cette forme de lutte.

Les mouvements sociaux de lutte pour la terre

Bien que le nombre de mouvements sociaux organisés soit croissant, ils n'obtiennent pas encore satisfaction dans leur lutte pour la terre. Beaucoup de familles se mobilisent dans des mouvements sociaux localisés, qui représentent une part considérable de la lutte. Leur analyse est difficile car ils ne possèdent pas de structure organisationnelle. Ils ne durent que le temps de la lutte pour la terre. On observera que sur les 14 mouvements, 10 sont apparus au cours des quatre dernières années et 2 seulement, pendant ce temps, ont intensifié les occupations de terre, comme c'est le cas des fédérations syndicales du Mato Grosso do Sul et de Minas Gerais. L'unique mouvement dont

l'activité est véritablement nationale est le MST (Mouvement des sans-terre). La CPT (Commission pastorale de la terre), qui a aussi un caractère national, agit de manière organisée dans le Mato Grosso do Sul et dans le Paraíba. Les autres mouvements agissent à l'échelle des États ou dans des microrégions [au sens de l'IBGE] comme c'est le cas du MAST (Mouvement des agriculteurs sans terre) et du MUST (Mouvement unifié des sans-terre) qui agissent dans le Pontal do Paranapanema (São Paulo). L'occupation de terre devient ainsi la forme la plus efficace de pression pour l'implantation d'assentamentos ruraux. Cette pratique activement développée par le MST est devenue au cours des dernières années une activité très pratiquée par les mouvements sociaux qui sont apparus dans la lutte pour la terre. Du fait de l'inexistence d'un plan de réforme agraire, les occupations remplissent un calendrier qui, pour la réalisation d'une politique d'assentamentos, donne le ton et le rythme à l'INCRA. Ce sont bien les occupations qui ont donc dynamisé cette politique. Mais, si d'un côté l'occupation a déterminé le rôle de cette politique, en même temps, du fait de l'inexistence d'un véritable plan de réforme agraire, la politique d'assentamentos en est venue à être manipulée par les propriétaires de terre, qui ont vu dans cette situation une opportunité pour vendre à un bon prix les terres au gouvernement. Les latifundiaires sont ainsi bénéficiaires de la politique d'assentamentos. Il est évident qu'il existe un ensemble de variables politiques qui impliquent des conflits entre les sans-terre et les latifundiaires. Parfois cela n'intéresse guère le grand propriétaire de se défaire des terres occupées. Mais ceci n'arrive cependant plus qu'en faible proportion. Dans la majorité des cas la désappropriation convient bien mieux aux latifundiaires. Ce qui est déterminant dans cette situation c'est surtout de savoir si les sans-terre occupent d'eux-mêmes ou si l'occupation s'est faite avec le consentement du propriétaire.

La loi est faite pour les latifundiaires. Même les occupations sur des terres attribuées ou abusivement appropriées par eux posent des problèmes aux sans-terre. De même pour les occupations sur des terres qui, selon les critères de l'INCRA, sont considérées comme improductives. Le pouvoir judiciaire devient un rempart politique contre la lutte pour la terre. Même les terres jugées dévolutives sont négociées et achetées. Nous avons qualifié de "judiciarisation" ce rempart du judiciaire, un procédé politique qui condamne les travailleurs qui luttent pour la terre et pour le travail. Le gouvernement défend l'État de droit, qui est la condition pour qu'il maintienne son contrôle sur la question. N'importe quel mouvement qui s'écarte de cet axe défie la judiciarisation. Le gouvernement fédéral s'est investi dans le dénigrement de l'image du

MST. Il diffuse de fausses informations dans les médias, criminalise les occupations et tente d'assimiler les actions populaires à des actes d'injustice, dans lesquels les travailleurs apparaissent comme des fauteurs de désordre dont les latifundiaires seraient les victimes. De plus, il a dépensé des millions dans des enquêtes d'opinion publique pour tenter de confirmer l'image ainsi créée et a diffusé les résultats obtenus dans la presse. Avec ce cercle vicieux il s'est construit une représentation négative au sujet de la lutte pour la terre et il s'est propagé un certain message à propos de la question de savoir qui fait la réforme agraire. Les occupations de terre et l'implantation d'assentamentos sont des politiques qui bousculent la question agraire aujourd'hui au Brésil. Elles se situent désormais dans une conjoncture qui bénéficie beaucoup plus aux propriétaires de la terre. Par l'inexistence d'un plan de réforme agraire, l'orientation de cette question tend à la mercantilisation, abandonnant la perspective de la désappropriation et de la pénalisation du latifúndio. La création du projet Cédula da Terra, à travers la Banque de la Terre, qui ne serait qu'une ligne de crédit au sein de la BNDS, avec l'appui de la Banque mondiale, scellerait la fin de la perspective d'une véritable réforme agraire.

La lutte pour la réforme agraire est une lutte contre le capital. Si elle n'est pas considérée sous cet angle, la réforme agraire peut alors devenir une arme du capital.

Traduction DIAL.

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Michael Curran, MSC, Superior General

A Culture of Dialogue ***(Address to the Synod for Oceania)***

1. Introduction

I am conscious of the privilege that is mine, as the representative of so many brothers and sisters, who have given their lives so that others might have a fuller life in the Churches of Oceania, to be called upon to address this Synod. I remember with a certain pride and joy the tribute paid by one of my Australian *confrères*, on the occasion of my visit to Hobart in Tasmania, to the Irish immigrants to Australia in the 19th century. They kept the faith alive in their hearts and in their families, and the Church in Australia is deeply indebted to them. I remember the stories told about the lay people who brought the faith with them from Tahiti to Kiribati and were the first evangelists of those islands. Above all, of course, I remember the story so often told and re-told among us, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, of the evangelization of the peoples in Papua New Guinea. Here too, the lay people, the catechists, had an irreplaceable role to play in the work of evangelization, working side by side with the foreign missionaries. Their commitment and fidelity have now been officially recognised in the beatification of Blessed Peter To Rot, who gave his life in fidelity to his vocation as a catechist in the dark days of the Second World War. I remember, finally, the first son of Papua New Guinea to become a Missionary of the Sacred Heart, later ordained to the presbyterate and episcopate, Mons. Louis Vangeke, msc, one of the many holy and dedicated Bishops to have served the Church in PNG.

2. A Culture of Dialogue

Dialogue is an essential dimension of the cultures of Melanesia and Micronesia. The people meet to discuss their affairs and to decide on ways and means to go about their business. Talking is an essential dimension of life, the means of handing on the wisdom of the past and the means of appropriating new discoveries and new ways of acting. There is here a culture of dialogue, something that we all badly need in the Church. It is true that traditionally the dialogue was enclosed within the limits of the language group, called “wantok” in Pidgin, and that this limitation had many drawbacks. In spite of this limitation, however, the culture of dialogue remains the rich soil in which

the Gospel, with its new perspectives, has been sown. Now the people comprises not just the members of the “wantok”, but also the members of all the other language groups spread throughout the nation and beyond. The dialogue has been deepened and broadened to include all the people.

It is in the workshop of living and talking that evangelization takes place. Some people, especially gifted in thought, in language, in artistic expression, in action on behalf of justice and a better quality of life, will arise and give new expression to the living faith of the people, a faith that is nourished by the word of God, by the liturgy and by dialogue. It is important that this kind of dialogue be promoted at all levels, from that of the basic community, to that of the parish, the Diocese and the Church at large. There is a widespread yearning in today’s Church for more ecclesial communion and for participation by all the members of the Church in the life, decision-making processes and ministries of the local Churches. This corresponds not only to modern sensibilities, but also to the ancient cultures, which are still alive among us, where people are charged with responsibility for the life of the local community. It is also more in tune with the spirit of government of the Church in the earliest times (cf. Acts 15:1-35; 1 Cor 12:4-30 and parallel texts) and with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nn. 2-3). Only when this participation is attempted with truly creative fidelity can the Church grow organically and healthily, respecting the various gifts of the Holy Spirit among the People of God.

One way of doing this would be through Synods at the level of the Diocese and of the Episcopal Conference. A diocesan Synod, including representation from the laity, from the missionary and religious communities and from the clergy, should be held from time to time, in order to animate the life of the local Church and give an impulse to its mission. A Synod at the level of the Episcopal Conferences, again incorporating all the apostolic forces of the local Churches, could be held every 10 years or so, in order to stimulate their life and development. The religious and apostolic families, for their part, need to promote this dialogue among their communities at the appropriate levels and continually to challenge one another to radically live the vocation to which they have been called.

By means of such dialogue, reflection and action, the work of evangelization will continue to bring forth rich fruits of Christian life from the cultures of the peoples, deepened as they are, healed and transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit and by the Gospel of Christ.

3. Sister Churches and Mother Church

We need to pay attention to certain tensions that exist, especially in Australia, between various groups in the Church, with their oftentimes diametrically opposed understandings of Church and ministry. We need to try to overcome these conflicts in a spirit of fraternal dialogue. Some of these conflicts have to do with the function of authority and its exercise in the Church, and also with the relationship that exists between the particular Churches and the See of Peter. There is a fairly widespread feeling that the growing centralisation of authority in the Roman Curia is doing damage to the legitimate autonomy of the local Churches and to the inculturation of the Gospel in a truly world-wide catholicity.

May I make bold to suggest that we need, at the beginning of the new millennium, an Ecumenical Council in order to deal directly and effectively with issues of Church Order and Government? In the preparation of such a Council, the question of the balance required between the authority of the local Churches, whether at the level of the Diocese, or of the Patriarchal Sees, or of the Episcopal Conferences, and the authority of the See of Peter would need to be deeply studied and debated by everybody concerned, that is, by the whole Church.

The Council would need to address itself not only to the general principles of Church Order, but also to deal with practical matters affecting the Church. For example, at a time when all the Churches have their own hierarchy legitimately established, do we need a Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples as at present constituted in Rome? Taking account of the principle of subsidiarity, what services do we need in Rome in order to further the mission of the Church in the third millennium? Would it not be better to place the appointment of Bishops in the hands of the Episcopal Conferences, after proper consultation of the people of the Diocese and with confirmation of their appointment by the Holy Father? What other areas of responsibility could be taken over by the Episcopal Conferences?

The Council would need to study and promote the original variety of charisma in the Church. It would, for example, have to consider the possibility of the ordination of women to the diaconate. It would also need to examine the Roman tradition of clerical

celibacy in the context of the apostolic tradition and in response to what the Holy Spirit is today saying to the Churches. Cannot the distinct gifts of celibate love and married love, freely chosen and maintained according as the Holy Spirit inspires the disciples and distributes his gifts among them, complement one another in the carrying out of the apostolic ministry? The gift of clerical celibacy can continue to be esteemed and maintained in the Roman Church along with the possibility of ordaining to the presbyterate tried and tested married men, mature in years and in their service to the Church. If this were seen to be what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches, would it not then also entail the compassionate consideration of the possibility of re-admitting some presbyters to the ministry, men who have left with an indult of secularisation, who are now married and who are giving a good witness of commitment to the Christian life in the Church, but who want to serve the Church in the priestly ministry?

All of these are urgent matters of Church Order that are now occupying the minds and hearts of a great number of faithful members of the Church, in Oceania and elsewhere. The Bishops need to listen with an open mind and heart to these questions and longings. It would be good to discuss them in the context of an Ecumenical Council, with a view to taking appropriate decisions.

4. Conclusion

There are new energies springing up in the life, liturgy and mission of the Churches in Oceania. We need new wine-skins for these new energies, new channels for their creative growth and development. At the threshold of a new millennium, we need a new mentality, one that encourages the local Churches to grow and to flourish, to light up the pilgrim way for the peoples in their search for a better world. We need a culture of dialogue in which to search for these new ways. It may be that the Church is moving into a situation of dispersal (diaspora) for the People of God, a people that knows itself to be loved by God and to be entrusted with the sowing of the good seed of the Kingdom far and wide. We need to mobilise all our resources and create structures that will enthuse the people. It is a good time for the Church in Oceania, a time that has been patiently prepared by more than a century of evangelization. We entrust this new millennium to the Good Spirit and to our sisters and brothers in Oceania.

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South Asian Jesuit Provincials Support Their Theologians

The universal Church's greater awareness of the need to incarnate itself in different cultures is amongst the most precious blessings God is showering on us in the last years of this millennium. At the Second Vatican Council the Church experienced itself as a world Church and laid the theological and pastoral foundations for the realisation that it is also a communion of local Churches, responsive to local experiences and problems in the context of mission.

Following this inspiration, Jesuits, like many others in South Asia, have engaged in serious research, reflection and praxis in many areas of the Church's life, particularly in the areas of theology, spirituality, interreligious dialogue and inculturation. They are reconnoitring new theological grounds which span a wide spectrum of reality constituted by the complexity of a multicultural and multireligious continent. In addition to its ancient traditions, the continent is now being influenced by scientific and secularising forces, economic upheavals, political uncertainties, environmental catastrophes, socio-cultural revolutions and fundamentalist religious uprisings. In India, the recent atrocities against minorities, including Christians, which have also directly affected some Jesuits, have made a dent in its commitment to a secular democracy.

It is in this context that we appreciate, support and encourage the work of our theologians and others to build up the local Church in India, and we want them to go even further and deeper, in fidelity to Christ and to the mission he has entrusted to us in the Church. We also note with satisfaction the demand by many Bishops at the Asian Synod for the autonomy due the local Churches in Asia. We regret that lack of enthusiasm within and various blocks from without the country have stalled the progress of inculturation in the sub-continent.

Living and working amidst such challenges, we, like many of our fellow Jesuits, are pained by the atmosphere of suspicion, not to say mistrust, created by recent decisions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith about our brothers Anthony de Mello and Jacques Dupuis, which seems symptomatic of a general discouragement, even disapproval, of the direction that Asian theology is taking. We think that such suspicion has been a disservice to the whole

Church. The late Anthony de Mello pioneered the integration of Asian and Christian spirituality and methods of prayer. He has helped thousands of people in South Asia and across the world in gaining freedom and in deepening their life of prayer, of which we have abundant testimonies and our own personal experiences. Jacques Dupuis taught theology for over 20 years in India before being appointed professor at the Gregorian University in Rome. His quest for a theology of religious pluralism is marked, both by his experience of the plurireligious situation in South Asia, and his loyalty to the doctrinal, magisterial and theological tradition of the Church.

We do not claim that their work is above critical attention. In an evolving situation, open and constructive criticism and dialogue are healthy and welcome. But we wish that this be done in full appreciation of the Asian cultural and plurireligious context in which these and other theologians are working. We also need to be mindful of the legitimate pluralism in theology within the unity of Faith and of the subsidiarity in decision-making in a Church that is also a communion of local Churches.

We think that there is a lack of appreciation of difference and of proper procedures, when decisions are taken unilaterally without a dialogue with the Asian Churches. We are afraid that such interventions are eventually detrimental to the life of the universal Church, to the cause of the Gospel and to the task of interpreting the Word to those who do not belong to the Western cultural tradition.

We are grateful for the appreciation and support our theologians have received from many Bishops and the People of God, in Asia and the world. We invite all, Bishops, clergy, and the laity, to continue to support them with a trust that is sympathetic but not naïve, critical but not censorious, because we are convinced of the importance of the theological task both for our work of evangelization, education and social justice, and for our whole thrust towards the inculturation of our faith. We would like to assure our theologians of our own continued support and encouragement to go ahead, joyfully and in fidelity to God, to the Gospel and to the Church, with the difficult and challenging task of making the Word of God relevant to the situation in South Asia.

COMING EVENTS

5th symposium of SEDOS synod for Europe 1999

12 October

6. Ms Mary Grey, Hampshire, United Kingdom
Specialist in Spirituality, Ecology and Women's Issues

WOMEN AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION — RE-DISCOVERING THE HEART OF ECCLESIA

7. Fr Jean Joncheray, Paris, France
Vice-rector of the Institut Catholique, Paris

L'EUROPE DE DEMAIN: TRANSFORMATION DANS LE PAYSAGE RELIGIEUX

7 December

8. Sr Grazyna Mech, FMM, Lubljana, Slovenia
Expert in youth work in Eastern Europe (University-Parish)

LA JEUNESSE DANS LES PAYS DE L'EST: LE DÉFI D'UNE EXPÉRIENCE RELIGIEUSE DANS UNE SITUATION NOUVELLE

9. Dr Gerhard Kruip, Germany
Catholic Academy for Youth, Germany

YOUTH AND CHRISTIAN FAITH IN WESTERN EUROPE — CRISIS, HOPES AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

WORKING GROUPS

Thursday, 27 May Mission in Conflict 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**

Friday, 11 June Mission in Conflict 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**