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## Editorial

*The opening article of this issue presents the Conclusions of this year's ISHVANI-KENDRA RESEARCH SEMINAR held in India. In their missionary "Pointers for Action" the participants urge an ever greater awareness of the religious and cultural contexts reigning in India and a humble readiness to dialogue. —*

*Fr LUCIEN LEGRAND, MEP, working in India for over 40 years, studies the missionary spirituality of the original Church in his article. He discovers that the original objectives given by Jesus: "believe the Good News, live it and proclaim it. Witness must always be the Churches's fundamental way through history". —*

*Msgr. MICHAEL FITZGERALD, M.AFR., in an overview of the actual situation of Christian-Muslim Dialogue notes that different positive and not publicised initiatives are being taken on many fronts. The "critical" human situations being lived by the poor and oppressed in many countries, affects all the religious denominations. But he believes that there is always room to grow in mutual knowledge and esteem. —*

*In his paper on the "Moral Imperative" Christians must feel in front of the abysmal debt, Fr MICK SEIGEL, SVD, stresses that although the Jubilee campaign did not resolve the problem, it brought many to an increased awareness of the structural injustices which led to the poor-rich divide. Only a more equal access to the resources, a just distribution of goods and respect for the rights of each one will make real peace possible. —*

*We conclude our issue with a contribution from one of the trouble spots of our suffering world: Colombia. Out of the violent realities of urban life in Bogotá, the Capital of Colombia, GERT DANIELSEN elaborates on the great importance of communication of various kinds as a basic, effective means to transform a culture of violence. —*

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## Ishvani-Kendra Research Seminar 2000 — Conclusions

# 'A Vision of Mission for the New Millennium'

### Introduction

A microcosmic group of 44 concerned Christians, comprising theologians, social scientists, and activists, came together at the invitation of Ishvani Kendra, Pune, for a research seminar entitled "A Vision of Mission for the New Millennium". The group spent four days at the national missiological institute — from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2000 — in intense reflection on the various aspects of the Christian mission. The objective was to sketch out a vision of mission that is adequately responsive to the challenges posed by the contemporary realities of life in our country. This vision unfolded itself through the various moments of the seminar such as the input sessions given by the resource persons, interaction of the participants with the speakers, discussions in small groups, and exchanges in panels. The text that follows seeks to capture the essence of the deliberations on the floor of the assembly and thereby to present the chief ingredients of a vision of mission for the emerging era.

### Preamble

1. In recent years mission has been a subject of deep reflection and considerable debate within the Church and in the media and the political circles of our country. Expectedly, the latter's assessment of mission is in the light of the painful experiences associated with the age of colonization, with its despoilment of cultures, desecration of sacred places, and in some cases the use of economic and military power to ensure the numerical growth of the Christian community. These are hurtful memories of the past which we regret today and for which all of us Christians should be open to repentance and ready to seek pardon.

2. On the other hand, the Church's official teaching continues to be articulated in a language and a tone that are perceived by many of our fellow citizens as smacking of imperialism and as offensive in the context of the new democratic ethos and the enhanced self-understanding of most religions. We feel distressed when we realize that our catechetical language hurts the feelings of many brothers and sisters who are not only our fellow citizens but also our friends.

3. As members of the national community we Christians have absolutely no aggressive designs on the followers of other faith traditions. In fact we seek to be enriched by the religious and cultural values of the communities we are in contact with. We do also experience the call of God to continue the task enjoined on us by Jesus and commit ourselves to work towards enhanced life in ourselves and in others. Our intention in this research seminar has been to discover new ways of understanding mission in the specific context of our country and to give a more articulate expression to what a great part of the Indian Church experiences and practises today. We do not pretend to give an exhaustive new definition to all aspects of mission but to find a new language and a new style to speak about our mission that seems to us to be more respectful of the religious experiences and sensibilities of our fellow citizens and at the same time in line with the example of Jesus.

### I. The Challenge of the Indian Context

4. We began our search from our context. Our land, with its tradition of harmony, spiritual values, and democracy, is today sending counter signals of division, fundamentalism, and communalism. This makes us realize that our country is in the throes of many disturbing conflicts. From early times the legitimization of the caste system had turned India into a land of unequals. The contradiction we experience between political equality based on adult franchise on the one hand, and social/economic inequality that is the plight of more than 80 per cent of our population on the other, is one of the causes of our present malaise.

5. The emergence of the subaltern movements, of the Dalits, Tribals, women, and other backward castes, is threatening the stability of India's socio-economic structures. The inequality these impose on the poor and the marginalized, if left unrepaired, could blow up the basic framework of our democratic polity. The specific problem of Indian subaltern groups is that their rank in society is determined by birth which makes any improvement in their social, educational, cultural, religious, psychological, political, and economic status well nigh impossible.

6. The political quagmire that we find ourselves in is truly depressing. There are certain subtle changes taking place on the national scene which can be summarized as (a) an ideological shift from centrist to rightist, (b) a power shift from the Centre to the regions, and (c) a shift towards subaltern groups. These changes will become more pronounced with the passage of time and will eventually exert considerable influence on the dynamics shaping the Indian polity so that the role of regions and subaltern groups will become increasingly crucial.

7. The unchecked march of globalization is widening the gap between the rich and the poor like never before and, with the boost that it offers to the mindless exploitation of the planet's limited resources, is causing profound harm to the fragile eco-system. The impact of the communication media on the day-to-day life of the people and our rapid evolution into a society increasingly controlled by the dictates of the information technology are effecting rapid changes in value systems once thought of as unassailable.

8. Religious pluralism and religious tolerance, so characteristic of our nation in the past, are evidently at risk. Today what we are up against is a situation of 'religions in conflict'. These conflicts are not arising out of merely theological factors but also those socio-psychological, and have four important roots: (a) religion as a source of identity is closely linked to culture and may be further strengthened by ethnic identity, (b) defensive fundamentalism in every faith tradition that leads to exclusivistic tendencies, (c) communalism that uses religion as a political tool raises its ugly head in most religious groups which in turn leads to the branding of the other as enemy, and (d) hurtful memories of the unsavoury past associated with domination and even persecution, etc., that continue to burn within the hearts of religious groups. The combined might of these factors frequently leads people to set up 'institutionalized riot systems' as evidenced in Gujarat, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and other places.

9. Christian life, born of the Spirit, began in small witnessing communities that followed the life and mission of Jesus Christ. The Church has now become an enormous institution and in a certain sense, sadly, also an obstacle to its quintessential mission. Two major factors have been responsible for the decline of Christian life: an excessive institutionalization of the believing community and its identification with the Western world.

10. Institutionalization brings in its wake efficient government, enviable discipline, articulate doctrines,

and an impeccable system of worship. But then, in the resulting scenario, orthodoxy becomes more important than authentic Christian life and vital for the collective identity of the community. Church-going Christians are sacramentalized, but not always evangelized. The administrative structures of the Church with their increasing insistence on centralization, leave hardly any room for the local Church in the decision-making processes and for Christians to exercise their God-given charisms. The bane of institutionalization and the exclusive male character of the ministerial priesthood have led to the growing gap between the clergy and the laity and to the banishment of women to the periphery of Church life, resulting in their increasing devaluation in the Church.

11. The image of the Church in India is still very Western. Its association with the colonial conquest, domination, and exploitation as also its failure to insert itself into the culture and tradition of the country hamper our efforts at engaging in a credible dialogue with the people of our land with their unique cultural and religious identities.

All the above factors call for a new paradigm for mission.

## II. Towards a Paradigm Shift

12. We have normally approached missiology either from the perspective of the history of missions or from that of the 'Great Commission' texts, especially its Matthean version found in Mt 28:18-20, interpreting them in a narrow sense as a call to administer Baptism to everyone. In the past mission was by and large concerned with 'the salvation of souls'. Today we realize that the welfare of the whole creation is the object of the Christian mission. It is not a project for the construction of Noah's ark to rescue the 'Christian remnant' from the irredeemable rest. Instead, the Church is like leaven that is meant to facilitate the transformation of the world.

13. Reading the signs of the times we look at mission, the world, other religions, and the rest of humanity from a new perspective. The experience of our modern and complex world and a new understanding of revelation and of salvation, in fact, lead us to a new paradigm. This means that the experience of the Spirit's action in the world not only sets the agenda for the mission of the Church, but also enables us to understand mission itself in a fresh way.

14. According to the new paradigm, creation itself is a self-communication of God, who is reaching

out to all peoples through the Word and the Spirit in varied ways, at various times, and through the different religions. This ongoing divine-human encounter is salvific. However, God's plan is not merely to save individual souls, but to gather together all things in heaven and on earth. God is working out this plan in history through various sages and prophets. Jesus, the Word incarnate, has a specific role in this history of salvation. But Jesus' mission is at the service of God's mission. It does not replace it. Taking a kenotic form, it collaborates with other divine self-manifestations in other religions as God's mission is moving towards its eschatological fulfilment. As disciples of Jesus we must witness to the Abba and his kingdom of freedom and fellowship, love and justice. The 'preparation-fulfilment' framework that links Judaism and Christianity cannot be projected on to other religions.

15. For us in India, therefore, one of the primary tasks of mission is to be agents of an ongoing universal reconciliation. In this task the Church is not alone in the world but can find allies rather than enemies among the followers of other religious traditions and persons of good will.

16. In so far as God is ceaselessly active in the world, our mission does not consist in just giving but also in discovering and recognizing God's presence and receiving God's multiform revelation in others.

17. To be the light of the world we as Christians must become a more authentic community and overcome internal dissensions and resolve conflicts arising from narrow considerations of rites, castes, and majority/minority status. We must redefine our ecclesial boundaries and recognize the variety of ways of being Christian in the world.

### III. Characteristics of Mission

The new vision of mission is, therefore, marked by the paradigm shift outlined above. In the brief narrative that follows we present some of the salient features of this new understanding with no pretense, however, of providing an exhaustive listing.

18. Dialogue must be a way of life for the Christian in all his or her activities and relationships. Other believers are not adversaries but partners in mission. Christian mission is carried out in solidarity and not in isolation. Dialogue is its method, and the method itself is the message. This dialogue must be supported especially by a common action which is the best means for creating a new mindset. Only through a shared

commitment to the cause of justice shall we discover one another as brothers and sisters. In the measure in which we are involved in such a common responsibility in that same measure will our mission be effective.

19. Mission necessarily has a prophetic edge. But the prophetic edge does not show itself in a confrontation with other religions or their followers but with the forces of evil, both personal and structural, that hinder human growth and frustrate the fulfilment of God's plan for all. Such negative forces which we must jointly fight are all forms of individualism and egoism which manifest themselves as total insensitivity to the common good or the good of others, and in approaches shaped by the callous desire for profits for a few rather than by the concern for an equitable distribution of the goods of the earth. The strength of the mission will be proportionate to the strength of the prophetic challenge we are able to pose to the individuals and the structures of Satan and Mammon. We cannot discount the struggle involved in the service of God's rule. If mission is a prophetic task and if it is to be exercised in collaboration with others, it means that the call to this task is addressed to all who participate in God's mission.

20. The growth of the whole human family demands a special commitment to the weaker and the oppressed sections of society. The prophetic stand must include as a primary objective to work for providing a just space in the national community for women, Dalits, Tribals, and all other disadvantaged groups. Mission is characterized by this option.

21. Among the many oppressed sections of society and the Church, today we are conscious that women form the most disadvantaged group. Closer attention paid to the feminine face/aspect of the divine and an increased emphasis on the sense of belongingness to Mother Earth are among the ways to fight the marginalization of women. This would help the process of restoring the dignity of women and pave the way for empowering them as equal partners with men in the search for a new world.

22. This means that we oppose all tendencies of cultural nationalism and intolerance of pluralism whereby the rich variety of our country is sought to be wiped out by the protagonists of the inadmissible monoculturalism. At the same time we shall avoid the temptation to form quasi-political blocs of minorities to face the menace of the hegemonizing tendencies. While we commit ourselves to the service of all disadvantaged groups, we affirm that our mission is not directed against any particular community in the coun-

try but towards the establishment of a just and egalitarian society.

23. The task of being messengers of peace is enjoined on us by Jesus (Mt 5:9). One of the priorities of our missionary involvement will be to acquire the necessary know-how to resolve conflicts, especially in areas prone to religious or ethnic violence. We must analyse the real causes of conflicts, keep up a sustained interest in the restoration of justice wherever it has been denied, create appropriate rites for reconciliation and for healing of memories, and wherever necessary establish multi-cultural and multi-ethnic peace cells in areas where conflicts are likely to erupt.

24. Our mission is exercised within the limits of history and finds expression in concrete geographical situations. Yet it remains ever open to the eschatological reign of God, i.e., to the fulness of life to which all individuals and peoples are invited to aspire. The mission today must infuse hope in every person not only for higher levels of material prosperity, but also for richer relationships between persons and communities. Above all it should foster a genuine human response to the freely-offered experience of the Ultimate of which the Hindu scriptures speak as knowledge of 'the Bliss of Brahman by which every creature lives' and which the Christian tradition has always known as 'the seed of glory, a certain beginning of eternal life'. This God-given longing for a mystical union with the Absolute, however imperfectly experienced or variously expressed, and the ultimate awakening of every human being to the fulness of this Bliss, are the original inspiration and the sustaining power of all authentic mission.

25. In our commitment to the mission of God as Christians we carry with us the living memory of Jesus. He inspires us and we are happy to share his memory with others whenever an opportunity arises. This memory is for many a source of inspiration for a commitment to the good of others in a spirit of humility, after the example of the Suffering Servant, and the practice of a love which is stronger than death. At the same time we do not want to impose on others our way of following Jesus. We are aware that there are many forms of discipleship and that God invites each person to respond to God's call within the concrete circumstances and possibilities of his or her life. We are open to the possibility that others are inspired by and feel called to follow Jesus in their own way different from ours, while we welcome those who wish to join our community of his disciples, namely, the Church.

#### IV. Some Pointers for Action

26. Since every religion is proposing ways and means for liberation, both spiritual and material, attainable to some extent in this world and projected for fulfilment in the life after, Christianity needs to collaborate with other religions in the promotion of genuine human and cosmic liberation. The central point in this programme is that God is present in every religion and has infused into the heart of every human being a glimmer of God's loving care for each one.

27. In the area of inter-religious dialogue we feel that the focus of sharing religious experiences could be to evolve a consensus around the fundamental values of truth and justice, after the example set by Mahatma Gandhi through his prayer meetings. Inter-religious meetings could also evolve into common fora for discussing socio-economic and political issues of relevance to communities, both local and national. Such fora will make participatory resolutions to tackle the issues of truth and justice and implement them jointly. This will promote communal harmony.

28. With regard to dialogue with the promoters of other ideologies such as environmental groups, we go by our own experience of Jesus which impels us to join forces with our sisters and brothers in India for the much-needed protection of our imperilled environment. This we believe will amount to the promotion of a campaign to ensure a better and fuller human life for all of India's citizens, especially the poor and the downtrodden. To this end our mission challenges us to collaborate unstintingly with those who struggle to safeguard our planet against all forms of exploitation and against the wilful destruction of the fragile eco-system.

29. On the question of dialogue with the laity we propose that we promote regular formal dialogue processes between the clergy and lay bodies at the parish/diocesan/national levels that may result in participatory decision making in the Church and enhanced clergy-laity collaboration in the ministry.

30. While affirming the central place of inculturation in all evangelical involvements, we feel that inculturation is not merely about changes in rituals, external observances, and theology. Crucial to the concept is entering into the very struggles of the marginalized peoples. The Christian community needs to identify itself with the struggling sections of society and share the suffering of the people. A community that reaches out to the wounded people after the

example of Jesus who shared the concerns of the excluded categories of his time will become a truly evangelizing community.

31. Teams comprising clergy, religious, and lay people may be set up in each Diocese/parish. Planning Cells can draw up parish pastoral plans and monitor their implementation.

32. Lay Catholic Associations may be constituted and authorised to represent even officially local Churches and national Christian bodies in fora discussing the socio-political affairs of the nation.

33. There is an urgent need to purge fundamentalism from the Church vis-à-vis all aspects of its exclusivistic claims. Transcending the narrow rite boundaries and fostering genuine openness to develop indigenous rites for local Churches should form part of our commitment to mission.

34. Creation of fellow-feeling, communion, and togetherness among the various communities of the Church, fostering reconciliation and a sense of Christian solidarity are all essential aspects of the new vision.

35. Structural changes are a must for the implementation of the new vision of mission. Democratization of the present ecclesial structures and networking among theologians and grass-root level activists will contribute to the emergence of a more enlightened leadership at all levels in the Church. This democratization should also become operative in the liturgy of the Church through a greater practical emphasis on the common priesthood of the faithful, particularly that of women.

36. The emphasis today should fall on formation for human community leadership rather than on preparation for clerical ritualistic ministries. More self-reliant means of support have to be tried in the case of the financing of the projects of formation in seminaries and religious houses. This will in turn bear witness to our own commitment to the national policies on self-reliance and sustainable economic development.

37. Christian involvement in politics has to be holistic in nature. Since there are larger life-based issues which demand Christian engagement in every area of human life, it has to be both prophetic and messianic. As prophetic (Is 61:1-3; Lk 4:18-19) the Christians' political involvement must be aimed at the protection of the poor and the weak, the oppressed

and the marginalized and against the agents of exploitation in our democratic system. As messianic, it must also be a reminder to the oppressors that the true sovereign is God, and under God the State is a servant of the people in protecting their rights and their human dignity. Justice and truth must be the only guiding principles of Christian political action for attaining its messianic goals (Is 11:4-5).

38. Jesus' own messianic model of the Suffering Servant, adopted to some extent by Mahatma Gandhi, who followed the ideals of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, should become a source of inspiration also for the Christian politician. The objective of the politics of Jesus was the formation of a society built on the foundation of justice and righteousness. It is these which must set the parameters of our participation in the political processes of the country. This is part of our Christian responsibility and it is to be shared with other secular agencies for building up a just society in India.

39. It is also the duty of every Christian to support the democratic system which is today closest to the Christian understanding of being human and the political order derived from the law of love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This will include the practice of equality in all our Christian involvements and the quickening of the process of establishing social democracy paving the way for a just society. In short, the Christian political involvement will definitely have to move into the groove of people's movements.

40. We need education for building up a new democratic ethos. Democracy is not a system in which the will of the majority is allowed to prevail unquestionably. The will of the majority itself is controlled by other institutions and values, a process which ensures that the whims of the majority are not ruthlessly imposed on the minority. The new order of democratic polity will be respectful of the diversity of cultures and communities and their claims for equal recognition, and hence participatory on a representative basis, allowing each group to contribute its riches to the common good.

41. Christians in general need a systematic political education, which presently they lack. Average Christians do not know even their basic constitutional rights, fundamental as well as civic. So is the case with the fundamental duties and obligations of responsible citizens. Therefore the Christian institutions need to undertake on a regular basis a programme of political education about the rights and duties so that the Christian leaders, specially the laity, can play a

meaningful role participating in the total life of the country, and take part in programmes conceived and executed for the welfare of the weaker sections of society.

### Conclusion

42. Reading the signs of the times enjoins on us the duty to reformulate the meaning of mission in response to present day exigencies. What our milieu calls for is a clear departure from the preferred positions of the past resulting from blatant triumphalism, unqualified claims of absolutism, smothering hierarchism, unhealthy dualism, and debilitating male domination. For tomorrow's Christian mission, the methods we adopt will be the ultimate message. Accepting mission as the art of negotiating boundaries, evangelizers are called upon to ready themselves for the task of communing across the borders, recognized as essentially porous and fluid. Moving beyond the confines of mere inclusivism and pluralism, they embrace the concept of kenotic universality, as opposed to hegemonic universality, and thus turn themselves into harbingers of a culture of tolerance and peace and messengers of hope. By the same token the Christian community is invited to overcome the ghetto mentality and insert itself into the *real-politik* of the day and work tirelessly for the promotion of justice in society. The new vision of mission invites the followers of Jesus to abandon the language of fulness, which only promoted isolation in the past, and willingly adopt a language of emptiness and powerlessness. What it envisages is a continuous dialogue with religions and civil society in general leading to the creation of wider human communities that transcend local and limited identities yet having their roots in them. Such mission will indeed render them worthy inheritors of the legacy of their master, the Suffering Servant, whose most striking exhortation was that his followers become effective yet totally unpretentious agents of transformation in society in the manner of light, salt, and leaven.

### Afro-Colombians have the worst living conditions

In Colombia the 10,5 million citizens of African descent have the lowest living standard in the country, although they represent one quarter of the total population in Colombia, with the 26%. Along the Colombian Pacific Coast the percentage of the Black population is even 80%. In the most important cities their proportion is especially high. In Cali there are over one million Afro-Colombians. In Bogotá there are more than 900.000 and in Barranquilla almost 700.000. Eighty per cent of Afro-Colombians live in conditions of extreme poverty. Their per-capita income is only one third of the average per-capita income in Columbia that amounts to 1.500 US\$ per year. Three out of four Afro-Colombians have an income that is below the minimum wage laid down by the Government. All this has consequences. So the life expectation of an Afro-Colombian is 55 years, while generally in Colombia it is 65 years. The rate of infant mortality is 191 deaths to 1000 births. Generally in Colombia it is 39 out of 1000 births. The supply of drinking water, the waste removal and drainage are insufficient, which lead to an increase in diseases like cholera, malaria, typhoid fever and hepatitis especially in this section of the population. The level of literary is also low. 43% of the Black population in rural areas are illiterate. In the cities there are still more than 20% illiterate. The national average is 23.4% in rural areas and 7,3% in the towns.

### Forty million more poor people within 20 years

During the last 20 years the number of people who live in poverty in Latin America has increased by about 40 million. This figure has been published now by the President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn during a meeting of the Latin American Ministers of Finance in Cancún, Mexico. Wolfensohn is convinced that it will be impossible for Latin America to reach a long-term economic growth, as long as the instability of many Latin America countries is not redressed. Fifteen per cent of the poor live in extreme poverty. The Indian population is especially affected by it with 80% living in poverty.

The President of the World Bank also criticised the distribution of income in Central and South America as "the worst in the world". According to the research of the World Bank 20% of the poorest in Latin America have a share of 4,5% in the wealth.... Even in Africa it is still 5,2% and in South East Asia about 8,8%. It is estimated that the total number of the poor in Latin America is 175 million. This is 36% of the total population.

## «Sois sans crainte, petit troupeau» (Lc 12, 32)

Prêtre des Missions Étrangères de Paris, Lucien Legrand est missionnaire en Inde depuis 1953. Il enseigne l'Écriture Sainte au grand séminaire de Bangalore. Auteur de nombreux articles, il a publié un livre important : *Le Dieu qui vient. La mission dans la Bible.* (Desclée, 1988)

Il se penche ici sur la stratégie évangélique de l'Église primitive. Sa priorité est de montrer qu'elle vise avant tout à vivre de la Bonne Nouvelle, à l'annoncer et à en témoigner.

☞ *«Sois sans crainte, petit troupeau»* : tel est le conseil que Luc a ajouté à la péripécie sur l'insouciance du disciple qui croit vraiment au Père (Lc 12,22-31). C'est le texte qui revient spontanément à l'esprit du chrétien perdu au milieu des masses grouillantes d'Asie, d'Afrique ou d'ailleurs quand lui vient la tentation de peur ou de découragement. Il se rappelle alors l'encouragement qui suit : *«Car votre Père a trouvé bon de vous donner le royaume»*. C'est la **perspective du «petit reste»** dans lequel les prophètes voyaient le germe d'un regain glorieux : *«Il ne reste qu'une souche. Mais la souche est une semence sainte»* disait Isaïe (6,13), thème auquel faisait écho un texte plus tardif : *«Pour toujours ils hériteront la terre, eux, bouture de mes plantations... Le plus petit deviendra un millier; le plus chétif une nation comptant des myriades»* (Is 60,21-22; cf. Mi 4,6-8).

On peut alors illustrer la parole de Jésus par les succès apostoliques racontés par les Actes des Apôtres. Au petit troupeau des Onze s'adjoint bien vite la foule des 3000 convertis du jour de la Pentecôte (Actes 2,41), qui sont bientôt 5000 (4,4), se répandent en Samarie (8,1), à Damas (9,2), Antioche (13,1) pour envahir, avec Paul, l'Asie Mineure et l'Europe. Perspective glorieuse qui se conclut par la vision triomphante *«de la foule immense que nul ne pouvait dénombrer, de toutes nations, tribus, peuples et langues»*, venus de la grande épreuve et rassemblés autour de l'Agneau pour partager sa victoire (Ap 7,9.14).

Dans ce contexte, la situation minoritaire où se trouvent souvent les chrétiens n'est perçue que comme état transitoire, base de lancement, ou à l'inverse, stade temporaire de régression. L'idée fondamentale reste toujours que normalement *la Mission doit conquérir le monde*, que l'envolée de la Bonne Nouvelle doit recouvrir toute l'humanité. Si ce résultat glorieux n'a pas encore été atteint après 2000 ans de christianisme, c'est dû à *«l'échec de la Mission»*, au manque d'intelligence de ses émissai-

res, à la rigidité et à l'étroitesse de l'institution ecclésiale, à l'absence d'inculturation, à l'incapacité de s'adapter à la modernité ou à la post-modernité, bref au fait que les agents de la mission n'étaient pas la pure incarnation de l'Esprit Saint.

Cette vision des choses est-elle convaincante? La mission en Corée fut-elle plus intelligente qu'au Japon? Au Cambodge qu'au Viêt-nam? En Afrique sub-saharienne qu'au Maghreb? Pour en revenir à notre texte, est-ce bien la conquête du monde que Jésus offre comme consolation aux disciples isolés? *Est-ce bien cela que signifie le «Royaume» promis au «petit troupeau»?* Il y a là une question fondamentale de stratégie missionnaire. La visée prioritaire de la Mission est-elle bien de *«conquérir le monde»?* Il convient de considérer la question à la lumière des données bibliques et particulièrement de ce que nous pouvons reconstituer des stratégies évangéliques de Jésus, de l'Église primitive et de Paul.

### Jésus : Grandeur et Petitesse

#### Le champ missionnaire de Jésus

La conquête du monde ne fut pas l'objectif prioritaire de Jésus. De fait, il n'y est fait allusion que dans un seul endroit des évangiles et cela dans le contexte des tentations : *«Je te donnerai tout ce pouvoir avec la gloire de ces royaumes»* (Lc 4,6). Mais c'est Satan qui offre ces perspectives et au prix de l'apostasie ultime : *«Si tu m'adores»* (4,7). Ce contexte met en garde contre l'ambiguïté que comporte cet idéal de conquête.

*Tel n'était pas l'idéal de Jésus. En général, sa mission reste confinée à la Palestine.* Il lui arrivait bien de passer en terre païenne. Mais il ne faut pas exagérer l'importance de ces déplacements. La Décapole où il trouve des porcs et un démoniaque (Mc 5,1-20) se trouvait juste de l'autre côté du lac de Génésareth, à quelques encablures de Caphar-

naïm et de Bethsaïde. Le “territoire de Tyr” où il rencontre la Syro-phénicienne (Mc 7,24-30) s’étirait jusqu’aux abords de Césarée Maritime, recouvrant la baie d’Akko et le Carmel, à une vingtaine de kilomètres de Nazareth. Ces quelques sorties ne méritent pas le titre de “voyages apostoliques” au sens paulinien du terme. On ne peut même pas parler d’un ministère de Jésus chez les Gentils au sens d’une campagne organisée: “*Je n’ai été envoyé qu’aux brebis perdues d’Israël*” dit-il selon Mt 15,24.

Dans ce cadre restreint d’Israël, au moins si l’on en croit les Synoptiques, *Jésus se cantonne à la Galilée et, dans la Galilée elle-même, il se borne principalement à la zone Nord du lac*. Ce qu’on a appelé le “triangle évangélique”, contenu entre Corozain au Nord, Tabgha et Bethsaïde au Sud, ne fait guère qu’une dizaine de kilomètres de base sur cinq de hauteur. Aucune des villes les plus importantes de Galilée ne figure sur les itinéraires de Jésus. L’histoire retracée par Josèphe de la campagne de Galilée en 66-67 donne la carte des centres urbains que devait viser une stratégie de conquête: Gischala, Jotapata, Sepphoris, Tibériade, Sennabis. Ce serait justement la carte des lieux où Jésus ne proclama pas son évangile.

Notons spécialement Sepphoris. Cette capitale administrative de la Galilée Romaine n’était qu’à six kilomètres de Nazareth. On a supposé que Jehoshua, le charpentier de Nazareth, avait dû y trouver des marchés fructueux auprès de la garnison romaine pour son entreprise de menuiserie.<sup>1</sup> Mais rien dans les textes ne justifie cette reconstitution fictive d’un Jésus petit patron menuisier-ébéniste. Pas plus, ne le voit-on à Tibériade où Hérode avait lancé de grands chantiers pour faire de la ville un centre touristique et balnéaire.

La stratégie de Jésus ne visait donc pas à occuper les points forts pour en faire la base de conquêtes futures. **Sa priorité** consistait plutôt à **proclamer la Bonne Nouvelle** et à montrer la venue du Règne de Dieu dans son action, ses options, son style de vie. Son souci premier était de présenter au monde le reflet le plus expressif de l’amour du Père à travers les paroles, les actions et la vie d’un Fils. Finalement, *le champ missionnaire de Jésus se réduira aux dimensions d’une croix* et c’est là qu’il sauvera le monde.

### Bienheureux les petits

Dans le cadre restreint où s’exerce l’action de

Jésus, il faut encore réduire les perspectives et noter que cette action s’adresse de préférence aux petites gens: “*Bienheureux êtes-vous les pauvres... Les pauvres reçoivent la Bonne Nouvelle*” (Lc 6,20; 7,22). Ces déclarations de principe sont mises en œuvre dans *une stratégie orientée vers les laissés-pour-compte* de l’économie hérodiennne. Les ambitions urbanistes d’Hérode Antipas ne profitaient guère aux petits paysans qui n’en récoltaient qu’un accroissement des taxes et des corvées. C’est à ce milieu rural galiléen, aux villageois refoulés vers les collines au sol ingrat et rocailleux, aux journaliers dépossédés de leurs terres que Jésus s’adresse. C’est d’ailleurs à ce milieu socio-politique qu’il appartient.<sup>2</sup>

L’option pour les pauvres est également illustrée par la “politique messianique” reflétée dans ses miracles. Jésus le guérisseur semble réserver l’exercice de ses pouvoirs de thérapeute aux éléments rejetés par la société palestinienne, aux lépreux, aveugles, boiteux, sourds-muets. Même Jean-Baptiste s’en offusque. N’est-ce pas un gâchis de pouvoirs messianiques? Jésus doit lui rappeler que tel est bien le plan de Dieu annoncé par les prophètes et que c’est bien ainsi que la Bonne Nouvelle doit être annoncée aux pauvres tant en actes qu’en paroles (Mt 11,4-6 en référence à Is 29,18; 33,5-6; 61,1).

### Le Dieu des petits riens

Cette attention aux petits et à ce qui est petit se reflète dans le langage de Jésus. On a souvent noté que le matériel symbolique des paraboles part en général des petits riens de la vie quotidienne. Il ne s’agit plus de rois et de palais comme souvent dans les paraboles rabbiniques mais du petit cultivateur, de l’ouvrier agricole, de la ménagère. Le Royaume est représenté par ces vétilles que sont la semence et la graine de moutarde, la pâte à pain et le levain, la pincée de sel, le lumignon, la petite pièce de monnaie perdue, le maigre salaire du tâcheron.

L’analyse littéraire nous a rappelé que le moyen d’expression fait partie du message. Il n’est pas indifférent que l’imagination de Jésus se meuve de préférence dans le champ des petites choses de la vie courante des petites gens. *Ce champ symbolique fait ressortir le fond de sa visée évangélique*. En s’attachant au “petit” Jésus, la piété populaire a perçu un titre christologique peut-être trop négligé par la théologie officielle. Ce n’est pas seulement à l’enfant de la crèche que ce titre s’applique. Il exprime tout un aspect de la mission de Jésus. **La**

**petitesse caractérise l'action même du Nazaréen.** Ce n'est pas qu'il voyait petit. C'est plutôt qu'il discernait la dialectique du zéro et de l'infini, la grandeur infinie de l'amour du Père au cœur de la banalité quotidienne (Lc 12, 22-30). Si Jésus se limite à un terrain réduit tant géographiquement que sociologiquement, ce n'est pas seulement par tactique, pour établir une base solide en vue de déploiements futurs. C'est plutôt *qu'il voit dans ce monde des petits son objectif prioritaire* : déceler la venue de Dieu en son règne dans le menu détail de la vie des défavorisés, être aussi transparent que possible au Dieu et Père des pauvres. Être la lumière du monde ne veut pas dire que la mèche et sa flamme doivent occuper toute la pièce. Ce qui est nécessaire et suffisant, c'est qu'elle soit bien allumée et que la flamme ne soit pas camouflée (Mt 5,15).

## L'Esprit n'a jamais fini de nous surprendre

### Les actes des apôtres

On dira que tout cela ne vaut que pour la période pré-pascale. Avec la Résurrection le mandat missionnaire, limité en un premier temps aux *“brebis perdues d'Israël”* à l'exclusion des Samaritains et des païens (Mt 10,6), va s'étendre à *“toutes les nations”* (Mt 28,19; Lc 24,47). C'est ce que Luc entendrait montrer dans les Actes des Apôtres selon le programme tracé par le Ressuscité au début du livre: *“Vous serez mes témoins à Jérusalem, dans toute la Judée et la Samarie et jusqu'aux extrémités de la terre”* (Ac 1,8). La tâche des disciples est maintenant nettement marquée: c'est à eux qu'il revient de déployer dans le monde entier l'action palestinienne de Jésus. Mais justement, comme on vient de le voir, le projet de Jésus en Palestine ne visait pas à la recouvrir toute entière de son influence, ni même toute la Galilée. Son objectif était différent: il fallait *lancer la semence, allumer la lumière*. Cela ne restera-t-il pas aussi l'objectif des disciples à travers le monde ?

On notera d'abord que les traductions habituelles d'Actes 1,8 sont quelque peu trompeuses. Le pluriel des *“extrémités de la terre”* évoque un mouvement tous azimuts.<sup>3</sup> En fait la terre, du moins selon les anciens, avait plusieurs *“extrémités”*. Luc le sait bien qui, dans son récit de la Pentecôte en Actes 2,9-11, donne une liste de pays situés aux quatre coins du monde: à l'Est (Parthes et Mèdes), à l'Ouest (Rome), au Sud (Égypte et Lybie), au Nord (Cappadoce et Pont-Euxin). C'était *l'univers mental du Juif moyen tel que le suggérait le spectacle des foules de pèlerins rassemblés pour les*

*fêtes de Jérusalem*. C'était l'univers de la diaspora, qu'Israël et sa Torah avaient pénétré en profondeur. L'Asie des *“Mèdes et de la Mésopotamie”* était en contact avec le peuple juif et sa foi depuis les temps lointains de l'Exil. Pour être plus récente, la présence juive en Égypte n'en était pas moins importante. Il ne s'agissait pas d'une simple infiltration mais d'un mouvement de masse se chiffrant par millions d'émigrés.<sup>4</sup>

Or Paul, dans les Actes comme en réalité, est loin de couvrir ce vaste champ. En fait, à part Rome, la carte dessinée par Actes 2,9-11 serait plutôt la carte des lieux où Paul ne se rendit pas. Tel qu'il est retracé par Luc, **le ministère de Paul ne se dirige pas vers les quatre coins du monde**. Il se meut dans une seule direction, vers l'Ouest. Or cet Occident, avant les événements de 70, était dans son ensemble terre des Nations. À part la ville de Rome et un pointillé de présence juive sur la façade orientale de la mère Égée, il n'y avait guère de juiveries en Europe.<sup>5</sup> Allant vers l'Ouest, Paul remplit sa mission d'Apôtre des Nations, des *go'im*. C'est cette *“conquête de l'Ouest”* païen et non l'extension de l'Évangile au monde entier que décrivent les Actes.

Luc ne veut donc pas faire de Paul l'Apôtre universel, qu'il n'était d'ailleurs pas. Il veut plutôt illustrer le miracle inattendu de **l'accueil de l'Évangile par les non-Juifs**. Le livre des Actes ne veut pas faire le panégyrique des exploits missionnaires de Paul; il célèbre la merveille imprévisible du renversement des situations. *Il n'est pas le livre de la conquête du monde mais celui du bouleversement historique et théologique de l'histoire du salut*. Le plan de Dieu reposait sur Israël. Mais le temps venu, ce furent les Nations qui répondirent. Ce retournement avait à la fois émerveillé et déchiré Paul. Il continuait à questionner Luc et les Églises de son temps. La conclusion du livre donne une clé d'interprétation en assurant que tel était bien en fait le plan de Dieu comme en témoigne Is 6,9-10 cité en Actes 28,26-28. L'accent est sur la conclusion: *“c'est aux païens qu'a été envoyé le salut de Dieu”*.

Comprenons-nous bien: l'auteur des Actes envisageait certainement l'expansion de l'Évangile dans le monde entier. Mais il ne l'attribue pas à Paul qui n'ira que vers l'Occident, symbole du monde païen des Nations. Les autres points du monde seront l'affaire des milieux de la diaspora évoqués en Actes 2,9-11. Si Luc met l'accent sur le ministère de Paul, ce n'est pas pour mettre en vedette les prouesses apostoliques du Tarsiate mais

plutôt pour faire ressortir le mystère insondable de la réponse des Gentils à la Bonne Nouvelle. C'est ce que signifiait le programme esquissé en 1,8. Il ne prédisait pas l'occupation du monde par le peuple chrétien. Il proclamait la puissance de l'Esprit qui souffle où il veut et qui n'a jamais fini de nous surprendre.

**“J'ai pleinement assuré l'annonce de l'Évangile”  
(Rm 15,19)**

De toute façon, même dans l'espace où il exerçait son activité, Paul était loin d'établir des communautés majoritaires. Si l'on en croit les Actes, son ministère, surtout à ses débuts, est du genre du “camp volant”. Au cours du premier voyage, il évangélise sept villes, Salamine, Paphos, Antioche de Pisidie, Iconium, Lystra, Derbé et Pergé, couvrant quelques 1500 kilomètres en deux ans environ. Le rythme se calme un peu au cours des second et troisième voyages missionnaires qui verront des séjours plus prolongés à Corinthe (“assez longtemps”, 18,18) et à Éphèse (“deux ans” selon 19,10 ou “trois ans” selon 20,31). En toute hypothèse, il n'était pas question, dans ce cours délaissé, de convertir toutes ces villes avec leurs campagnes environnantes.

On dira que Paul se voyait en pionnier, ouvrant les grands axes et laissant le quadrillage du terrain à ceux qui le suivaient. Peut-être. Cependant ses lettres ne semblent pas refléter la préoccupation de mobiliser les nouvelles communautés pour augmenter les effectifs. Écrites à l'usage interne, les épîtres visent à **faire des communautés des centres rayonnants de foi vécue**. Mais la lumière qui rayonne de ces Eglises c'est la gloire du Seigneur qui rayonne sur la face du Christ (2 Cor 4,6) et se reflète<sup>6</sup> dans la vie transfigurée du chrétien (2 Cor 3,18).<sup>7</sup> Dans les quelques passages où Paul s'intéresse aux “non-croyants”, c'est pour exhorter la communauté à garder toute liberté à leur égard (1 Cor 7,12-16; 2 Cor 6,14-18), à ne pas donner de contre-témoignage (1 Cor 14,22-25) ou pour la mettre en garde contre le danger de contamination (1 Cor 6,6; 2 Cor 6,14-15).

Paul ne semble pas avoir été soucieux outre mesure de rassembler tous les habitants de l'univers dans les filets de l'Évangile. Un texte particulièrement révélateur nous éclaire sur ses objectifs apostoliques. À la fin de la lettre aux Romains, il assure avoir “pleinement assuré l'annonce de l'Évangile du Christ” (15,19). Ayant proclamé la Bonne Nouvelle de Jérusalem à l'Illyrie,<sup>8</sup> il n'a

“plus de champ d'action dans ces contrées” (15,23). Parvenu à Rome, il ne lui reste plus qu'à pousser jusqu'en Espagne (15,24.29) pour atteindre les extrémités de la terre. Vaste atlas missionnaire qui révèle bien l'optique occidentale du ministère de Paul aux “Nations”. D'autre part, il fait aussi ressortir la façon dont Paul perçoit son rôle d'évangéliste. Il est bien évident qu'il n'avait pas converti tout l'Occident. Tout grand voyageur apostolique qu'il ait été, il est loin d'avoir couvert toute l'Europe.

L'accomplissement de l'annonce de l'Évangile ne peut donc s'entendre qu'au sens collectif et représentatif. Le point de vue de Paul est communautaire.<sup>9</sup> Si Paul a “au cœur une grande douleur incessante” (Rm 9,1) à propos de son peuple juif, ce n'est pas parce qu'il craint que chacun des fils d'Israël risque d'aller en enfer. Il s'agit d'Israël globalement, du peuple de l'élection qui “est passé à côté” de ce que la Loi devait lui apporter (Rm 9,31). Parallèlement, s'il a hâte d'atteindre les frontières de l'Occident, ce n'est pas comme St François Xavier à la pensée de toutes ces âmes qui risquent d'être damnées. C'est parce que les “temps de la plénitude des Nations” (Rm 11,25) sont accomplis et que la foi doit leur être offerte.

Pour les Nations comme pour Israël, Paul ne fait pas le compte des têtes à baptiser. **Il embrasse le projet divin dans son ensemble**. La Bonne Nouvelle n'a pas été présentée à chacune des Nations et encore moins à chaque individu. Elle l'a été aux “Nations” collectivement, au sens juif du terme, c'est à dire aux *go'im*, au non-Juifs. Cet Occident que la révélation faite à Israël n'avait pas encore touché, a maintenant entendu la Parole de Dieu. Celle-ci a retenti dans les lieux les plus représentatifs de la partie du monde resté à l'écart de la zone d'extension d'Israël. L'Apôtre a porté la flamme jusqu'au bout du territoire qui lui avait été confié. C'est au feu maintenant de s'embraser. Ou pour employer une image plus proche du langage paulinien, il a fait rayonner “la lumière de l'Évangile de la gloire du Christ qui est l'image de Dieu” (2 Cor 4,4). C'est à cette lumière de gloire de chasser les ténèbres.

Pour Paul aussi, le projet divin fonctionne sur **le principe du “petit reste”** (Rm 9,27). C'est la vitalité de ce reste et non ses dimensions qui assureront “que le Seigneur accomplira pleinement et promptement sa parole sur terre” (Rm 9,28 = Is 10,22). Telle était la ligne directrice de la stratégie paulinienne, celle qui explique à la fois son dyna-

misme et ses curieux raccourcis.

### Conclusions

Dans la foi des païens qu'il avait rencontrés, Jésus avait perçu l'amorce du rassemblement eschatologique des Nations. Après la Résurrection et déjà avec le ministère de Pierre, le mouvement s'était amplifié. Dans l'afflux des *go'im*, Paul avait vu le renversement de la structure des temps du salut. Pour l'Ancien Testament, le temps actuel était celui du rassemblement des enfants d'Israël ou au moins de leur "reste". La venue des Nations était laissée pour la fin des temps. Paul voit la situation s'inverser: les Nations affluent et c'est le retour d'Israël qui est remis à la fin des temps.

Mais ni Jésus, ni l'Église primitive, ni Paul ne pensent à une conversion massive de tout le genre humain. *La situation de minorité du "reste" ne leur paraît pas anormale et ils n'en font pas un complexe d'infériorité ou de culpabilité.* Ils ne le considèrent même pas comme un problème de fond auquel il faudrait en priorité apporter une solution. De ces données du Nouveau Testament, peut-on tirer des conséquences actuelles?

Le contexte du logion sur le "petit troupeau" donne la note exacte: *"Cherchez plutôt son Règne (de Dieu) et cela vous sera donné par surcroît"* (Lc 12, 31). Chercher le Royaume ce n'est pas d'abord accroître les effectifs. Le Royaume, c'est *"la promesse en voie de réalisation, l'expérience cristallisée en Jésus, dans sa Parole et dans l'Esprit... (C'est) l'espace de Dieu qui englobe la création, la dépasse et la régénère, ... le temps de Dieu qui assume et transfigure le nôtre"*.<sup>10</sup> Chercher le Royaume, c'est vivre intensément la prière au Père pour la venue du Règne.<sup>11</sup> Telle sera toujours la priorité fondamentale de Jésus, des Apôtres, de Paul et de tout disciple. Le reste, y compris l'accroissement des effectifs, sera donné par surcroît.

Il n'est donc pas question de prôner une "démobilisation" de la Mission. Il serait faux de conclure: *"Jésus s'est contenté d'un petit nombre. Paul n'a jamais pensé à convertir le monde. Alors à quoi bon se fatiguer? Nous ne sommes pas meilleurs que nos pères"*. Comme dans tout le contexte sur "l'insouciance du croyant", *"on détournerait les paroles de Jésus de leur vrai sens si l'on y voyait un encouragement à la paresse et à l'incurie"*.<sup>12</sup> Il faut plutôt prendre la question par l'autre bout. Jésus a révélé la Bonne Nouvelle de la venue du Dieu Père dans son règne de justice et

d'amour. Il s'est donné à sa mission jusqu'à la mort. Paul fut porté sur les routes du monde par sa foi en l'Évangile qu'il portait. Ni Jésus ni Paul ne donnent une image de résignation et d'attente passive de la fin du monde.

Pour la question qui nous concerne, celle des situations d'Église minoritaire, le regard porté sur Jésus et Paul est au contraire encourageant. Pour ce qui est de la moisson des Nations, *il ne nous appartient pas de décider des temps et des moments* où les épis seront mûrs. C'est à Dieu, maître de la moisson de décider qu'ici, pour tel ou tel peuple, *"les champs sont blancs pour la moisson"*, là que l'heure de l'engrangement n'est pas encore venue. Mais tant ici que là, la semence de l'Évangile est présente avec toute sa force vitale. **Croire en la Bonne Nouvelle, en vivre, l'annoncer et en témoigner**, telle est l'objectif prioritaire indiqué par Jésus, visé par l'Église primitive et par Paul. Pour ceux qui, comme Paul, vivent de cette foi en l'Évangile, il se pourrait d'ailleurs que, comme Paul, ils aient la surprise de trouver un peuple en attente ailleurs qu'ils ne le pensaient, plus nombreux qu'ils n'en rêvaient.

La Mission garde son horizon eschatologique. **Elle se vit en espérance.** Son échelle des temps se prête à la patience de Dieu. Elle sait aussi que le rassemblement eschatologique des nations se fera dans un monde nouveau, une Église nouvelle, d'une façon qui dépasse infiniment tout ce que nous pouvons demander et concevoir (Ep 3,20).

Le rassemblement eschatologique est pourtant déjà inauguré. La moisson se fait non seulement dans l'Église mais aussi en dehors d'elle. Jésus admirait la foi de la Cananéenne, la générosité au cœur du Centurion. Paul en Grèce, nous dit Luc, s'émerveillait de la religiosité des Athéniens et des intuitions de leurs sages (Actes 17,22-28). Ainsi la Mission doit-elle être prête à **rejoindre l'action de l'Esprit** qui s'exerce en dehors de ses murs, *"sans limites d'espace et de temps"* (RM 28). Aucune institution historique ne peut contenir la plénitude eschatologique. C'est ce que signifie le dialogue comme attention à l'Esprit dont *"la présence et l'activité ne concernent pas seulement les individus, mais la société et l'histoire, les peuples, les cultures, les religions"* (RM 28). La Mission n'est pas que don unilatéral de l'Évangile. Elle est aussi découverte sans cesse renouvelée et émerveillée de l'action de l'Esprit dans le monde. Même quand il est en nombre infime, le chrétien se sent toujours entouré par un peuple immense dans la communion

de l'Esprit.

Enfin, il ne faut jamais oublier **le message de la croix**. Si la force à l'œuvre dans la mission est la puissance de la Bonne Nouvelle, l'annonce la plus effective se trouvera dans la plus grande transparence à cette puissance. L'être est plus révélateur que l'agir et l'agir l'est plus que les mots. La parole d'Évangile la plus forte de Jésus ne fut pas le sermon sur la montagne mais le message muet de la croix (cf. 1 Cor 2,2). Le messager de l'Évangile ou le groupe infime des croyants, noyés au cœur des masses, peuvent se sentir ridiculement petits au milieu des multitudes qui les entourent. Quand ils sont tentés par le doute et se demandent si leur présence et leur fidélité ont vraiment un sens, qu'ils se souviennent de Jésus seul au Calvaire, *du grain de blé qui meurt enfoui dans la terre mais qui porte aussi l'espoir de la moisson* (Jn 12,24).

J'aimerais conclure par une réflexion faite récemment lors d'une rencontre entre un groupe de représentants des OPM de France en visite en Inde et un groupe de chrétiens locaux. C'était au moment où, dans l'Inde du Nord, les chrétiens avaient été victimes d'actes de violence de la part des mouvements intégristes hindous. À la fin de l'entretien, un porte-parole du groupe français a demandé : " Pour terminer, auriez-vous un message que vous voudriez nous laisser, à nous, chrétiens de France ? ". Après un moment de silence, un prêtre indien a pris la parole : " Oui, je crois que je puis vous laisser un message. Il paraît qu'en Europe également les chrétiens deviennent minoritaires. Eh bien, faites comme nous. Nous n'avons pas peur. Vous aussi, soyez sans crainte ".

## References

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R.A. Batey, *Is not this the Carpenter?* NTS 30, 1984, pp. 249-258; *Jesus and the Theater*, NTS 30, 1984, pp. 563-574; *Sepphoris. An Urban Portrait of Jesus* BAR 18/3, 1992, pp. 50-64. Les données évangéliques et le langage des paraboles en particulier s'inscrivent en faux contre ces reconstitutions qui voudraient faire de Jésus un modèle pour nos pme. Cf. L. Legrand *Jésus' Paraboles viewed from the Dekkan Plateau*, *Indian Theological Studies* 23, 1986, pp. 154-170 et note suivante.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Freyne: *Galilée, Jesus and the Gospels*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1988; *Jesus and the Urban Culture of Galilee*, in Torn Fornberg and D. Hellholm, *Texts and Contexts. Essays in Honor of Lars Hartmann*, Oslo-Stockholm, Scandinavian University Press, 1995, pp. 597-622; R.A. Horsley, *Archeology, History and Society in Galilee. The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis*, Valley Forge, Trinity Press International, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> C'est du moins la traduction de la tob et de bj. D'autres traductions évitent prudemment un pluriel que n'a pas le grec (*eôs eschatou tês gês*): Osty a le singulier: *l'extrémité de la terre*; la Pléiade parle du *bout de la terre* et le Français courant du *bout du monde*.

<sup>4</sup> Pour le nombre des Juifs de la diaspora, on peut estimer qu'il y en aurait eu 1 million dans l'empire parthe. Ils seraient à peu près 1 million en Égypte sur une population de 7 millions. On sait que dans la ville d'Alexandrie, ils occupaient deux des cinq quartiers, ce qui fait supposer qu'ils y représentaient entre 100 000 et 400 000 habitants, selon que l'on attribue à l'agglomération un effectif de 700 000 ou un million de personnes. C. Saulnier - C. Perrot, *Histoire d'Israël. De la Conquête d'Alexandre à la Destruction du Temple*, Paris, Cerf, 1985, pp. 287-288.

<sup>5</sup> Voir, E. Schürer- G.Vermes, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. III/1, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986; L. Legrand, *Gal 2:9 and the Mission Strategy of the Early Church*, dans T. Fornberg (éd.), *Bible, Hermeneutics, Mission*, Uppsala, Swedish Institute for Missionary Research, 1995, pp. 44-45.

<sup>6</sup> Si du moins on accepte la traduction "reflétons" avec la tob, jb, Pléiade, Osty à l'encontre de plusieurs traductions anglaises (nab, Douay, kj) et des commentaires (Bultmann, njbc) qui préfèrent "contemplons".

<sup>7</sup> Il est d'ailleurs probable, vu le contexte, que le "nous" de ce verset est le "nous" apostolique et non le "nous" inclusif qui engloberait la communauté de Corinthe.

<sup>8</sup> La côte Dalmate et la Bosnie-Herzégovine actuelle. Cf. A.A.M. Van der Heyden- H.H. Scullard, *Atlas of the Classical World*, Edinburgh, Nelson, 1963, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> Selon D.J. Bosch, c'est le catholicisme médiéval qui, à la suite de St Augustin, a individualisé le concept du salut. *Transforming Mission. Paradigms Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1991, p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> F.Bovon, *L'Évangile selon Saint Luc: 9,51-14,35*, CNT III b, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1996, pp. 278-9.

<sup>11</sup> G. Schneider, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas Kapitel 11-24*, ötbk 3/2, Gütersloh-Wurzburg, Mohn-Echter, 1977, p. 286.

<sup>12</sup> A. Valensin et J.Huby, *Évangile selon Saint Luc*, VS III, Paris, Beauchesne, 1941, p. 253.

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## Christian-Muslim Dialogue A Survey of Recent Developments

**1** This paper will attempt to survey the recent developments in relations between Christians and Muslims, that is the relations that have developed within the last 30 years or so. While there will be references to different Christian Churches, and in particular to the World Council of Churches, it will deal more specifically with relations between Catholics and Muslims. In the conclusion some ways will be suggested in which dialogue could perhaps be developed further.

2. By way of introduction, let it be said that there have always been relations between Christians and Muslims. The Qur'an itself contains references to Christians and indications on the way dialogue should be conducted. At different periods and in different places the relationship has been one of co-operation or conflict. There has been much cultural interaction between Christians and Muslims. One could mention the Christian contributions to the Islamic assimilation of the Greek heritage in 'Abbasid times and then the transmission of this heritage to Europe. One could mention the cultural developments in Ummayyad Spain and in Sicily under the Normans. One could recall the collaboration of Christians and Muslims during the *Nahda*, the Arab renaissance. It is not really necessary to go into detail. Yet it is also true that certain factors have rendered relations more difficult. The Islamic world and the Western Christian world became two blocs, a division which the Crusades helped to perpetuate. Then the colonial era brought about what could be termed a "love-hate relationship" with the Christian West. Its technical advances were admired, and desired, but its domination was abhorred. There was also the religious factor. Christians did not really have an adequate theological basis for an open relationship with Muslims. Islam tended to be looked upon as a sort of Christian heresy, and Muslims therefore worthy of condemnation. On the other hand, while Islamic society allowed a place for Christians in its system, as *ahl al-dhimma*, it had little sympathy for the specific beliefs of Christians.

3. For Catholics, the Second Vatican Council, the great gathering of Bishops from all over the world which took place from 1962 to 1965, marked a new beginning in Christian-Muslim relations. It brought about a new attitude towards the followers of other

religions in general, and towards Muslims in particular. The specific Declaration of the Vatican Council on the relationship of the Church towards other religions, *Nostra Aetate*, states that the Church has "a high regard" for Muslims (n. 3). This is indeed a change. The text goes on: "Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values" (*ibid.*).

4. The theological bases for this attitude of esteem are found dispersed throughout the various documents of the Council. God wills the salvation of all. The whole human race is united in its origin and its destiny. God is active in the hearts of human beings, drawing them to him, as he is active in the different religious rites which give corporate expression to the human response to God. Yet human beings have been created with free will. Therefore they must respond freely to God, according to the dictates of their conscience, while always searching for the truth. This, though put very succinctly, is the foundation for *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom. It is also the basis for interreligious dialogue as encouraged by the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*.

5. More specifically, this last mentioned document points briefly to elements which are common to Christianity and Islam. Speaking of Muslims, it says: "They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting" (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 3).

6. It fell to the Popes, and in particular to Pope

Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, to oversee the application of the Second Vatican Council. I would be failing in my duty if I did not underline their strong commitment to interreligious dialogue in general and to dialogue with Muslims in particular. This can be seen from the fact that during their apostolic journeys to different countries time has always been set aside for a meeting with the leaders of other religions, including Muslims. They have also received Muslim leaders in the Vatican and taken the opportunity of talking over matters of common concern. Worthy of special mention are the Visits of Pope John Paul II to Morocco (1985) where he addressed a large gathering of Muslim youth, and to Tunis (1996) where he laid special emphasis on dialogue within the Mediterranean area.

7. Nor should one forget the initiative of Pope John Paul II in inviting religious leaders to come to Assisi in 1986 to pray for peace in the world. A number of Muslims accepted the invitation. The common commitment to pray for peace was shown again in 1993. When John Paul II and the Catholic Bishops of Europe called for a special week-end of prayer in Assisi to pray for peace in Europe, and especially in the Balkans, Muslims from nearly every country of Western Europe, as well as a delegation from Bosnia, took pains to be present.

8. It is obvious that the Pope cannot do everything by himself. He has to rely on his collaborators. Already during the Vatican Council Pope Paul VI set up the Secretariat for Non Christians, later to become the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, as one of the organs of the Roman Curia. The purpose of this body was to promote among Catholics this new attitude of dialogue. This entailed first of all reflection and writing so that false ideas might be dispelled and prejudices overcome. As part of this effort a book of *Guidelines* for dialogue between Christians and Muslims was published in 1969. It was later revised and a new edition brought out in 1981. This has been translated into a number of different languages, including Arabic.

9. There was too a desire to be in direct contact with Muslims. As has been mentioned, many spiritual leaders came to Rome and were received by Pope Paul VI. They were also welcomed at the Secretariat. Special mention could be made of a delegation from the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, in Cairo, which paid an official visit in December 1970. This visit was reciprocated in 1974 by Cardinal Pignedoli, Msgr. Rossano and Fr Abou Mokh (now Patriarchal Vicar of His Beatitude Maximos V). Opening the way

for this exchange there had been the visit of H.E. Cardinal König to Cairo in 1965 and his historic lecture on monotheism at Al-Azhar. In April 1974 Cardinal Pignedoli had visited Saudi Arabia and had met King Faysal. Later that year a Saudi delegation of experts in Islamic law, in Europe for discussions on human rights, held working sessions with Vatican officials and were received in audience by Paul VI. It would be too long to enumerate all the visits received or made over the years (cf. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds that Unite Us. Sixteen years of Christian-Muslim relations*, Vatican City 1994; Michael Fitzgerald, *The Secretariat for Non Christians is Ten Years Old*, in *Islamochristiana* 1(1975) pp.87-95; Michael Fitzgerald, *Twenty-five Years of Dialogue: the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, in *Islamochristiana* 15(1989) pp.109-120) but they certainly helped to strengthen relations.

10. In the meantime, in fact in 1968, the Secretariat had begun the habit of addressing a message to Muslims for the end of Ramadan. In recent years care has been taken to have this message translated into the various languages used by Muslims, not only Arabic, English and French, but also Turkish, Urdu, Bengali, Bahasa Indonesia and others. The message is signed by the President of the Council. In 1991, because of the suffering caused by the Gulf War, the message was signed by His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

11. Organized dialogue between Christians and Muslims, at least in modern times, can perhaps be dated back to 1969. In March of that year the World Council of Churches gathered together in Cartigny (Geneva) about 20 concerned Christians and Muslims to explore the possibilities of dialogue and make plans for the future. This led to an international meeting, held in Broumana (Lebanon) in July 1972, in which 50 people, equally divided between the two religions, took part. The Broumana meeting was followed up by two regional gatherings, one in Accra (Ghana) in July 1974, the other in Hong Kong in January 1975. Mention has already been made of the meetings between the Secretariat for Non Christians and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, in Rome in December 1970, and in Cairo in September 1974.

12. Quite independently of these efforts on the part of official organs of the Churches, the Spanish Association for Muslim-Christian Friendship organized a congress in Cordoba, in September 1974. A number of themes had been selected: how Christians and Muslims each present the other religion; the implications of political expansion and the spread of re-

ligion; crisis of faith and the response of religious education. The congress was attended by roughly a 100 people. A second congress was held in March 1977 with double the number of participants. This time a more specific theme was selected: "Positive Esteem for Muhammad and Jesus in Christianity and Islam". This did not fail to arouse emotions, particularly as certain orators tried to introduce fine distinctions in their appreciation of Muhammad and Jesus. Yet the "spirit of Cordoba", which had been created during the first meeting, managed to prevail.

13. Now during this time complaints were being voiced on the Christian side deploring Muslim passivity. All the initiatives seemed to be coming from the Christian side, but it was felt that dialogue should not be one-way. Such a situation provoked some Muslim university lecturers in Tunisia into launching a series of Christian-Muslim encounters. The organizational burden was carried by the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (C.E.R.E.S.) in Tunis. Starting in 1974 five encounters were held. The first of these took as its theme "Muslim and Christian Responsibility faced with the Problem of Development". The choice of topic is interesting. It was deliberately oriented to a domain which would provide a possibility for a common search for solutions, rather than one which would arouse confrontation.

14. Between the first and second of the encounters organized by C.E.R.E.S. in Tunis, a Christian-Muslim seminar was held in Tripoli, Libya. This took place in February, 1976. Though it came about by agreement between the Secretariat for Non Christians and the Arab Socialist Union of Libya, the initiative really came from the Muslim side. Since the Libyans were the hosts, the main burden of organization fell to them. This in fact led to some surprises. Through the generosity of the Libyan leader, Colonel Mu'ammarr Gaddafi, about 500 people, Christians and Muslims, from all over the world, were invited to Tripoli for the occasion. So what had been intended as a private meeting between theologians turned into a public manifestation, held in the main theatre of Tripoli, with the participation one evening of Colonel Gaddafi himself. It must be said, these conditions made the dialogue difficult. There is a great difference between exchanges in a closed circle and papers read to the public.

15. For several years there was an annual commemoration of the Tripoli seminar. Then, for reasons which are unknown to me, these meetings stopped. In recent years dialogue has been taken up again between a Libyan-based organization, the World Islamic Call Society, and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious

Dialogue. After a preliminary meeting in 1989, four colloquia have been held: "The Idea and Practice of Mission and Da'wah" (Rome 1990), "Co-existence between Religions. Reality and Horizons" (Malta 1990), "The Media and the Presentation of Religion" (Tripoli 1993), "The Concept and Practice of Mission and Da'wah" (Rome 1997). The 1993 colloquium was followed by a workshop for journalists (Vienna 1994).

16. Another Muslim body which has taken the initiative to engage in dialogue with Christians is the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research, one of the branches of the Al Albait Foundation, in Amman, Jordan. Since the head of the Al Albait foundation is Prince Hassan bin Talal, it was perhaps natural that contact should first be made with a royal establishment on the Christian side. So it came about that the first dialogues were arranged together with the Anglicans of St George's House (Windsor Castle, U.K.). Several features of these meetings are worth noting. The discussions have not been confined to Jordanians and British. The Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research has each time brought together an international team of Muslims. The Dean of St George's has, for his part, invited people of other nationalities and of other Christian denominations, including Catholics, to participate on the Christian side. On some occasions there has also been an active participation of Jews. The theme of these meetings has turned around common values, regarding family life, business and the ethics of banking. Overtures were made by the Al Albait to the Orthodox also. This has led to a series of consultations set up jointly with the Orthodox Centre in Chambésy (Geneva). In one of these, concerning peace and justice, one of the speakers on the Christian side was Cardinal Ratzinger. So Catholics have not been absent from these meetings. Prince Hassan however wished to have direct dialogue with the Catholic Church. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue accepted to co-sponsor a further series of colloquia, the sole proviso being that there be a strong participation of the Local Church. The planning has therefore always been carried out together with His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. Six consultations have taken place so far: "Religious Education" (Rome 1989), "The Rights of Children" (Amman 1990), "Women in Society" (Rome 1992), "Religion and Nationalism Today: Problems and Challenges" (Amman 1994), "The Use of the Earth's Resources" (Rome 1996), "Human Dignity" (Amman 1997).

17. Most of these meetings have been with Sunni Muslims. It is worth mentioning a colloquium which

was held in Teheran in 1994. This was organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue with the Secretariat of Interreligious Dialogue of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Teheran. The topic addressed was a theological evaluation of modernity. The Iranians have also been in dialogue with Greek Orthodox, with the German Evangelical Church, and with the World Council of Churches. Most recently, in December 1998, a consultation was held in Turin under the auspices of the Agnelli Foundation.

18. In many parts of the world, in India for instance, dialogue tends to be multilateral, with people of all different religions coming together to exchange on a given topic. This multilaterality can sometimes help to prevent contrasts in positions from arising, but it can also mean that a sharp focus on particular questions is lost. There is also the experience of trilateral dialogue, of Jews, Christians and Muslims. Such movements as *La Fraternité d'Abraham* have long been practising such dialogue, and other similar movements have been formed. Our Council, together with the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, the World Council of Churches and the World Lutheran Federation, has organized two trilateral meetings on Jerusalem, in Glion (Switzerland) in 1992, and Thessaloniki (Greece) in 1996. On both occasions the majority of the participants came from Palestine and Israel. Neither of these meetings was easy, but on each occasion it proved possible to agree on a short concluding statement.

19. It would be tedious to list all the formal dialogues that have taken place, in different parts of the world, whether bilateral, trilateral or multilateral (cf. Institut d'Etudes Islamo-Chrétiennes (Beirut), *al-Bayanât al-masîhiyya l-islâmiyya l-mushtarika (min 1373/1954 ilâ 1412/1992) (nusûs mukhtâra)*, Beirut, Dal el-Machreq, 1995, 206 pp.). Nevertheless I wish to refer to a series of regional meetings of Christians and Muslims organized by our Pontifical Council. The first of these was for Christians and Muslims from the countries of North Africa, from Mauritania to Egypt, though in fact it took place in Assisi, Italy, (October 1998). The theme discussed was "Co-existence in the Midst of Differences". A similar meeting was held in Ibadan, Nigeria (1991), on "Cooperation in Development" for participants for English-speaking countries of West Africa. The third meeting in this series brought together in Pattaya, Thailand (1994), Christians and Muslims from South East Asia. They discussed "Harmony among Believers of the Living Faiths". The special feature of these meetings is that they have been prepared at local and national

level. This means that the participants do not divide into Christians on the one side and Muslims on the other. Rather they contribute as mixed national delegations. This creates an interesting dynamic which would appear to stimulate true dialogue.

20. Other initiatives could also be mentioned. There is the academic agreement between Ankara University, in Turkey, and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. This has resulted in an exchange of professors, and also in a number of colloquia held both in Rome and in Ankara. To this could be added a more recent agreement between the Zaytouna University in Tunis and the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, both in Rome. As a result, a first colloquium was held in Tunis (1997) on Qur'anic and Biblical Exegesis. A further colloquium was held in Rome (March 1998) on the image of the believer in Islam and Christianity. In this context it is interesting to note the growing number of Muslim scholars who are undertaking serious study of Christianity. To this our Council is contributing in a modest way by offering scholarships for brief study periods in Rome.

21. Christian-Muslim dialogue groups exist in a number of countries. One example, of course, is Al-Liqâ', with its headquarters in Bethlehem. Yet there are others, such as the Pakistan Association for Interreligious Dialogue, the Warm Hearts Association in Bangladesh, the Silsilah Movement in the Philippines. Perhaps the oldest of all such dialogue groups is the Association for Religious Fraternity (*al-ikhâ' al-dîni*) in Cairo. In its present form it dates to 1975, but in fact it is the revival of an earlier body, the Association of the Sincere Brothers (*ikhwân al-safâ'*), which met from 1941 until the Egyptian revolution in 1953. It is unlikely that there were many places in the world at that time where Christians and Muslims were meeting together for formal dialogue on a regular basis.

22. Nor would it be right to overlook another group that has been in existence since 1978. It grew out of a reaction to the congresses held in the early and mid-70s. A certain number of Muslim and Christian scholars, particularly in Tunisia, felt that these large meetings were not the best way to conduct joint theological research. In such gatherings there is always a tendency to start again from zero, as if nothing has been said or written about the topics on the programme. There is also often little opportunity for real discussion. So these scholars aspired after a more stable association which would provide the continuity necessary for achieving some progress. Hence the

formation of the “Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chrétien” (GRIC). GRIC has branches in Tunisia, Morocco, France and Belgium. Every year a meeting of representatives of the national sections is held, the work accomplished is reviewed and material for publication is approved. GRIC has tackled the following questions: revelation, secularism, faith and justice. It is at present working on the concept of sin and ethical responsibility, and also on the notion of exclusion. Three works by GRIC have been published so far: *Ces Ecritures qui nous questionnent, la Bible et le Coran* (Paris, Centurion, 1987; English translation *The Challenge of the Scriptures, the Bible and the Qur'an*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1989); *Foi et Justice* (Paris, Centurion, 1993); *Pluralisme et laïcité. Chrétiens et Musulmans proposent* (Paris, Bayard Ed./Centurion, 1996). A fourth book is in preparation on sin and ethical responsibility.

23. The desire for continuity in relations has led the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to form two joint committees with Muslims. The first of these, the Catholic-Muslim Liaison Committee, started its work in 1995. On the Muslim side various international organizations are represented: the World Muslim Congress, the World Muslim League, the International Islamic Committee for Da'wah and Humanitarian Relief, and the Islamic Economic Social and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) which is one of the organs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The committee meets annually for an exchange of ideas on topics of common interest or on current situations. On 28 May 1998, a special agreement was signed setting up a joint committee with Al-Azhar. Already delegates from Al-Azhar had been present in 1995 when the first committee was formed. Taking into account that Al-Azhar is not exactly an international organization, but nevertheless has historically played an important role in the Islamic world and enjoys considerable prestige, it was judged suitable to set up a parallel committee. It is too early yet to evaluate the effectiveness of these bodies, but they do provide a forum for communication.

24. Let me refer briefly, without going into detail, to some other structures for dialogue. A joint Christian-Muslim dialogue group exists in the Lebanon. An interesting feature of this body is that, on the Christian side, it includes representatives of the different Churches, and on the Muslim side representatives of the Sunni, Shi'a and Druze communities. The Middle East Council of Churches has also been instrumental in setting up a Christian-Muslim dialogue group covering the whole of the Middle East.

25. After this survey of various initiatives and structures, let me try to indicate in which directions I think Christian-Muslim dialogue could be moving. Here it may be useful to follow the fourfold typology of dialogue as given by recent Vatican documents (cf. *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions* (1984), nn. 28-35; *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), n. 42): dialogue of life, dialogue of deeds, dialogue of discourse, dialogue of religious experience.

26. There is always a need for Christians and Muslims to grow in mutual knowledge and esteem. Even when they have been living side by side for many years, perhaps for centuries, real knowledge and appreciation of the other is often very slight. An effort has to be made, otherwise the harmony that has been taken for granted may suddenly be threatened. We have seen, in recent years, bitter conflicts arise in places which had been noted for peaceful interreligious relations. Outside influences have often aggravated growing tensions, and the existing bonds have not been strong enough to resist. It would seem to me that religious leaders have a particular responsibility here. They, after all, are often the ones to transmit attitudes to the members of their respective congregations. It would surely be helpful if clergy and imams were to meet regularly for discussions on a friendly basis. This is being done in certain areas, for example in the Southern Philippines where war has been going on intermittently for several decades. In recent years the Bishops and the 'Ulama' in the island of Mindanao have been meeting regularly every few months. They have now been invited to send representatives to the negotiations between the Philippines Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. There has also been at least one meeting between Catholic priests and imams in the region, and it is hoped that these will be multiplied.

27. The problems of this world — drought, disease, poverty, the displacement of persons — do not respect any religious divide. People of all religions, including Christians and Muslims, are equally affected. There are vast fields here open for Christian-Muslim cooperation. With regard to refugees, for instance, a start was made through a joint conference of Christian and Muslim organizations, held in Malta, in April 1991, but the resolutions of that meeting need to be implemented. At the time of the Social Summit in Copenhagen members of Christian and Muslim NGO's met to exchange experience and plans for future action. There are other domains too where Christians and Muslims are joining together, but where more

could be done: defence of life, care for drug addicts, care of the handicapped, concern for the aged and the dying. An example of such collaboration was the exchange of views between our Pontifical Council and representatives of Islamic Organizations prior to the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, in Cairo, 1994. There was a definite proximity in the Catholic and Muslim positions on the family, and such questions as abortion, homosexuality and promiscuity. Wherever human beings are in need there is a call for joint efforts to respond to these needs. In such cases trust has to be built up. Yet joint action is important, for it shows that our respective religions are not out for self-aggrandizement at the expense of others' sufferings, that they are not profiting by people's weaknesses, but that they are truly serving their brothers and sisters for the sake of God.

28. When mention is made of dialogue it is usually formal discussion between experts that comes to mind. It must be stated clearly that this is not the only form of dialogue, but it does have its own importance. It should serve to facilitate the dialogue of life and the dialogue of deeds by clarifying ideas and dissipating prejudices. From what has been said above, it will have been noted that much formal dialogue concentrates on social issues. It is useful to examine different religious perspectives on these issues in order, precisely, to build up mutual confidence. On theological matters it will be hard to come to agreement. From this point of view, interreligious dialogue differs from the ecumenical dialogue among Christians which aims at bringing about a unity of faith. It is obvious that Christians and Muslims will continue to differ on essential matters of faith. For this reason the purpose of theological dialogue will not be to prove that one side is right and the other wrong, but rather to explore respective positions in order to understand them better. When this is done many prejudices, built upon half-truths, will fall by the wayside. Since delicate issues are involved here, it is particularly useful that they be studied by groups which have a certain stability. This allows for questions to be re-examined, looked at in new ways, with a readiness to go beyond ready-made formulas which often falsify the other's position.

29. The dialogue of religious experience is sometimes merely a special instance of the dialogue of discourse. What distinguishes it is that the matter under examination is the spiritual tradition of Christianity and Islam respectively. Attention may be paid to the spiritual message of the Bible and of the Qur'an, but also to the writings of spiritual authors, of sufis and mystics. Such exchanges, especially when they take

place in an atmosphere of faith and silence before God, can be of immense help in building up mutual respect. Some groups engaging in such spiritual exploration do exist already, but there would surely be room for more in the current efforts at Christian-Muslim dialogue. Within the realm of religious experience other possibilities may also be mentioned. There are occasions for being present during the worship of the other community. A Muslim may be invited to a baptism or a wedding in a Christian church. A Christian may at times be invited to be present during the performance of *salât*. Reverent observation, while uniting the heart in prayer to God, can surely help to deepen appreciation for the spiritual riches of the other tradition. There are times too when Muslims and Christians may want to join in common supplication to God. During the Gulf War, in a number of places Christians and Muslims, and Jews too, came together to pray for peace. When praying together in this way, care has obviously to be taken not to cause embarrassment by the choice of inappropriate formulas or gestures. Where such care is taken, and particularly when the planning is carried out jointly, the common standing before God does help to knit minds and hearts.

30. To my mind all these forms of dialogue can be contributions towards peace in the world. The dialogue of life will provide an understanding and a harmony between individuals and communities strong enough to resist being broken by outside influences. Dialogue of deeds, with a common response to the effects of war, will reinforce the will to ban armed conflict as a way of resolving disputes. The specialist dialogue will help to clarify issues, and also to plan strategies. The dialogue of religious experience will help to provide motivation and will also be a source of strength to persevere. All this may seem very idealistic. It is true that we have to take reality into account, that we have to take people as they are. Nevertheless we have to keep ideals before us, we have to maintain a vision, otherwise we shall just resign ourselves to constant conflict. As a new millennium approaches, should we not set our sights higher?

Michael T. Seigel

## Beyond Mere Cancellation of Debt: The Moral Imperative of a Just Society

I would like to thank for this opportunity to talk to the SEDOS congregations. It is now slightly more than five years that I have been involved with the SEDOS World Debt Working Group, and from my involvement with that, with the justice and peace promoters, and with the JPIC Commission of the Unions of Superiors General, I think that I have had a good vantage point to see the level of commitment among religious congregations to the debt issue and to the broader issues of justice in the global economy. The level of commitment is high. Throughout the world, religious have organized themselves in this campaign to a remarkable degree.

This commitment has borne some fruit, however distant we may still be from the final goal. The creditors have been pressured into seriously looking at the issue, and they have made some moves to reduce the debt burden of poor countries. The attention that has been paid to the issue and whatever debt reduction has been achieved, are clear achievements of the campaign.

But there is a more important achievement, and that is the awareness of the debt issue that has been achieved. Nowadays, in most countries, if you mention the debt issue, most people will know what you are talking about. I have mentioned the issue to friends and acquaintances from both Australia and Japan, individuals whom I would normally expect to have little interest in international issues, and found to my surprise that not only did I not have to explain the issue, but that I could even take for granted some degree of awareness of the rationale of the campaign. A number of people who were previously opposed to debt cancellation have recently told me that they have changed their minds and are now for it. Likewise, at the WTO meeting in Seattle and since, politicians such as Bill Clinton and many others have spoken of some degree of support for the protesters, and Mike Moore of the WTO has spoken of the need to listen to them. Whatever else this says, it at least means that these politicians recognize that the issues being posed by civil society cannot be ignored. It means that, to some extent at any rate, the demand for a more equitable world economy has come into the mainstream of popular awareness. I think, by the way, that one of the

reasons that the civil society campaigns against the Multilateral Agreement on Investments and against the new Millennium Round at the WTO meeting in Seattle were successful was because they were able to build on the networks and awareness raising already achieved by the campaign for debt cancellation.

This kind of popular awareness is the most important force for change that there is. In the days of the Vietnam War and the Anti-War Movement, we were fond of quoting the saying that, "There is no force so powerful as an idea whose time has come". Popular awareness is one of the main vehicles through which ideas have an impact, and the more we can raise public awareness, the more we can influence the very frame of reference by which people interpret the news they hear and the speeches and policies of politicians, and by which they choose how they themselves will relate to society.

Economics is a complex field that uses a lot of esoteric language and most often seems out of reach to normal folk. The task of creating a credible popular awareness on economic issues is not an easy one, although given the way that economics has come to be the central issue of our age, it is an increasingly important one. I think that the achievement of the debt campaign in contributing to this awareness is probably its most important achievement. And I think that the role Catholic religious have played and can continue to play in this awareness raising is one of the most important contributions we have to make.

### What has been granted

Before I continue with this line of thinking, let me diverge for a moment, and summarize where the campaign stands in terms of achieving its concrete goal of debt cancellation. I have written a critique of the Cologne Debt Initiative, and I will not go into that in detail here. Given the complexity of the figures, it is difficult enough to follow the rationale and calculations on paper, much less in a talk like this.

Let me give an example, first, to show why the amount of debt reduction is not sufficient. Let us say that I owe someone a debt for which I must pay, an-

nually, \$1000 dollars in debt service. Let us then say that by cutting down to one meal a day, and (let us say that I am a family man) by not sending my children to school, and cutting down on health-care, I am just barely able to pay \$500 per year. Suppose then that my creditor grants me sufficient debt cancellation so that I only have to pay \$500 per year. What change does this bring to my situation? I will still have to limit myself to one meal a day. I still will not be able to send my children to school. So long as debt cancellation does not go beyond the amount I cannot pay anyway, then it makes no difference.

Essentially, that is what has happened with the cancellation of the debt of poor countries. What they have not been paying anyway has been cancelled. There may be a very small number of countries where the amount of debt cancellation will make some difference, but for most of these countries there will be no change in real terms in the amount they have to sacrifice the well being of their people for the sake of debt servicing and repayments. Because the debt reduction is not distributed evenly among indebted countries, but is rather conditioned on the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, then a few countries such as Uganda and Mozambique which are proving particularly successful at implementing structural adjustment may get a positive amount of debt relief. Further, some of the more recent bilateral debt cancellations by the U.S., Britain, and Canada may amount to a debt reduction slightly beyond what was not being paid anyway. It should be remembered, however, that these recent cancellations refer to very small sums of money, barely exceeding US\$10 billion *in toto*.

In sum, the amount of debt cancellation is too little and it applies to too few countries. The Jubilee 2000 campaign is asking for debt cancellation for 52 countries, but only 35 countries are even being considered as possibly eligible for debt reduction under the present initiatives, and not all of these are likely to actually receive it.

Further, there is question about whether the debt reduction promised by the Cologne Summit will actually be carried out as promised. Contrary to original promises of speedy implementation, so far only three countries have received any debt reduction at all and in the coming months, there seems to be little prospect of more than nine countries receiving any benefits.

### **Debt Relief Conditional on Structural Adjustment**

The biggest problem with all the debt relief granted

so far is that it is conditional on the implementation of structural adjustment programmes. I would like to dwell on this a little, since I think it raises important questions of how we interpret the debt crisis as such.

Prior to the Cologne Summit, debt relief was conditional on six years of structural adjustment. The Cologne Summit reduced this to four years. The subsequent debt cancellations by the United States, Britain and Canada all continue with this requirement of four years of structural adjustment.

The phrase “structural adjustment” refers to a set of economic policies developed for each country under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund. The main policies involve privatization, a reduction of government spending, liberalization and deregulation with regard to investment and trade policies, and an implementation of policies to promote exports. These are all policies that emerge from the neo-liberal school of thought, and all these policies have their critics. Joseph Stiglitz, the recently resigned chief economist of the World Bank, has attacked every aspect of structural adjustment. Many impact studies of structural adjustment programmes have shown that they damage the well-being of small farmers, the rural poor, and the urban poor. In all these cases, the impact of structural adjustment on women is particularly severe. Further, damaging effects on health-care and education have been clearly documented, particularly by OXFAM. Other studies have directly linked structural adjustment programmes with an increase in the concentration of land ownership. I think that most of us, too, have ample evidence in the witness of our own members who work in the countries undergoing these structural adjustment programmes. I have, myself, only met one missionary who saw structural adjustment as a beneficial thing, and he has subsequently informed me that he has changed his mind. In fact, what missionaries most give evidence to is a reduced availability of funds for health-care, education, and welfare, an increasing gap between rich and poor, and an increasing marginalization of certain sectors such as the rural poor.

In fact, structural adjustment programmes have been the response of the creditors to the debt crisis for more than 20 years. One must surely wonder, if they have not been effective by now, will they ever be.

Given the amount of opposition to these programmes, of course, the question must be asked, “Why do the creditors insist on them?”. Since this is a question of interpreting people’s motivation, there is no simple answer. But I will suggest a couple of possibilities.

First, I think that there is a real intellectual bias involved. We think of education as something that enhances us, but the fact is that it can limit us. The education we receive does not predetermine us and obviously many people develop attitudes and ideas completely different from what they were taught. Nevertheless, for the most part, people educated in a conservative way are more inclined to be conservative and people educated in a liberal way are more likely to be liberal. Likewise, economists who received their education in an institution that favours neo-liberalism are more likely to have an intellectual bias along neo-liberal lines, while those more educated in the economic thought of John Maynard Keynes are more likely to have an intellectual bias in favour of government intervention. From the time of the combined inflation and stagnation of the '70s, neo-liberalism has emerged as the dominant school of economic thought. Economists espousing neo-liberal ideas came more to the fore and came to occupy more and more positions of influence. I think that is a significant dimension of the situation we have today. Neo-liberal ideas predominate simply because they are the ideas of the people in positions of influence.

There are obviously going to be many other factors, of course. The use of GDP and other measures to evaluate economic well-being may be a problem in that these figures may leave out certain aspects of the situation. The figures that emerge after the implementation of structural adjustment programmes may look better than the actual situation on the ground.

But there is a further question that must be raised. I think that one of the important contributions that feminist theologians have made to the methodology of theology is the idea of the hermeneutics of suspicion. The idea is to raise the question of the possibility of greed and the desire for power and control as a motivating factor. If, for example, the Church is in the control of men, and these men teach that women are to be excluded from positions of power, then you have to raise the question of whether this position is held precisely to protect that male dominance. The hermeneutics of suspicion does not presume ill will and greed, but it does raise the question. It does not preclude openness to the arguments that others present. But it does consider the possibility that there is greed and the desire to control behind those arguments.

If we apply the hermeneutics of suspicion to our reflections on structural adjustment and the debt crisis, then there are certain questions we must raise.

Firstly, with regard to structural adjustment, one must ask the question of whether structural adjust-

ment is really for the benefit of the indebted country or for the benefit of the creditors? There are numerous effects of structural adjustment that appear to be to the benefit of the creditors, the so-called developed countries. Structural adjustment opens up the indebted countries for trade and investment without placing the same burden of openness on the creditor countries. Structural adjustment also orders the economies of the indebted countries towards giving priority to meeting their debt obligations, frequently at the sacrifice of social sector spending — a clear benefit for the creditors and to the long term detriment of the indebted country. Additionally, by promoting exports, frequently accompanied by the devaluation of the currency of the exporting country, structural adjustment makes the resources of the indebted countries available to the rest of the world at relatively low prices. In fact commodity prices have declined in the wake of structural adjustment and this has had a direct relationship to the taming of inflation that was achieved in the '80s and the high levels of growth that have been characteristic of creditor countries during the '90s.

There is reason, therefore, to consider that the formulation and implementation of structural adjustment programmes has been motivated at least in part by the benefits that could accrue to the creditors.

The next question to be raised is that of the debt itself. As we have discussed on previous occasions, the debt, for the most part, emerged in the 1970s as a result of failures in development programmes, inequities in trade relations, corruption, and fluctuations in interest rates and exchange rates. For many indebted countries, debt was already a crisis in the late 1970s. In 1982, when Mexico defaulted, the debt crisis reached such a proportion that it was now a threat to the creditors. Through various strategies, these creditors were bailed out by governments and more particularly by the World Bank and the IMF. These bailouts had the net result of transferring the debt from private banks to bilateral and multilateral creditors.

It is important to look at these bailouts and at the transfer of the debt to the World Bank and the IMF. Remember that it was devotees of neo-liberalism that carried out these bailouts. In doing so, they went against the very principles of neo-liberalism. It was an intervention into the workings of the market by public agencies that protected creditors from the consequences of their own bad lending policies — precisely the kind of public intervention that neo-liberalism opposes.

Furthermore, from the point of view of the indebted

countries, this intervention perpetuated the debt crisis far beyond what would have happened if the intervention had not taken place. If the intervention had not taken place, most of the private banks would have had to write the loans off as non-recoverable. Private banks cannot afford to keep trying to get back irrecoverable funds. They cannot afford to “throw good money after bad”. It is only a guess, but probably, if there had been no intervention, the debt crisis would have been largely resolved by the end of the ’80s. How many banks would have gone bankrupt and what the consequences would have been, I am not able to say. Perhaps, as was argued, something had to be done to avoid a financial crisis. But what was done clearly favoured the creditors and perpetuated the crisis for the indebted countries.

There is another aspect of the transfer of the debt to the World Bank and the IMF that we must look at. We have become familiar with the IMF and the World Bank being at centre stage in the world economy. I suggest that you think back to the 1960s and even the 1970s. If someone mentioned “international institutions” in those days, surely we would have all thought of the United Nations. Very few, if any, would have thought of the IMF and the World Bank. Now, even when we disagree with them, we take for granted that they are the dominant institutions for setting economic and development policy and sometimes even social policy for an increasingly large number of countries. Yet these institutions, the World Bank and the IMF, actually have no legal authority over countries. They do not have the political authority to impose any kind of policy on any government. They can only impose policy by making that policy a condition for funds. And therefore, the more countries are dependent on the World Bank and the IMF, the more power these institutions have to impose policy. In fact, the transfer of the debt to the World Bank and the IMF in the 1980s was a transfer of power to impose policy. The centrality of the World Bank and the IMF in the world economy that we have come to take for granted, particularly the relationship to developing countries, is a result of this transfer of power. Without the debt crisis, it would have been impossible, or, at the very least, improbable.

One question that we must ask is, “if the outcome of the transfer of the debt to the World Bank and the IMF was the granting of power to these institutions to impose policy, was that also the motivation?”. This does not necessarily suggest some kind of a conspiracy. In fact, the kind of broad conspiratorial plan that would be necessary would probably be impossible, given the large number and different interests of the people in-

involved. But the composite effect of numerous actors giving top priority to their own interests, not necessarily with ill will towards others, but at least without a great desire to look at the implications for others, can have the same effect as a conspiracy, especially when the strongest actors share interests and philosophy.

Another question that we must ask is “whether the World Bank and the IMF, whose very power derives from the debt, are the right institutions to be placed in charge of resolving the debt crisis?”. Are they really likely to relinquish the power that the debt crisis gives them?

### **The Debt in Context**

Let me now turn my attention once again to the campaign for debt cancellation. When the SEDOS World Debt Working Group began its activities, one of the questions we raised was “Why focus on the debt?”. In discussing that, we came up with one reason to hesitate about this focus, and two reasons to go ahead with it.

The reason for hesitating about focussing on the debt was the belief that the debt as such could not be the real problem. Rather, it is a symptom of much more serious problems in the economy and these needed to be addressed. If the debt were fully cancelled today, without any other changes being brought about, within a few years the debt would be back again. Therefore, to focus too much on the debt would be focussing on a symptom, not on the real problem.

One reason for going ahead with the focus on the debt was the disastrous consequences that the debt in its own right is having on the poor of the world. Even if it is only a symptom of a more fundamental problem, it is a symptom that is causing untold suffering.

The other reason for continuing with the focus on the debt was the belief that it could provide a window for looking at the economy as a whole and for highlighting the more fundamental inequities that have given rise to the crisis.

In attempting to look behind the debt to its causes, we noted the weakness of primary products and raw materials in the world market, we noted inequities in trade relationships, we noted structures that protected creditors from taking responsibility for bad lending policies, and we noted that developed countries and international agencies set the agenda for development in poor countries, often even imposing or initiating

programmes and projects, without being held accountable for the failures of these.

In this questioning, we were continually thrown back to the question of whether the debt itself is not simply a means of control over access to the resources of the indebted countries by the creditors. It is easy to see parallels to colonialism. During the era of colonialism, the wealthy countries controlled access to the resources and markets of the rest of the world by direct political control. Growing independence movements made this form of control non-viable, and in the first couple of decades of the post-colonial era, the same control was maintained by propping up corrupt dictatorships in the former colonies. Opposition to this, in turn, grew and it became a less viable means of control. So the next form of control was the debt. This is a way of looking at it, and it is consistent with the perceptions of many people within the indebted countries. It is almost definitely a part of the truth, even if it is not the whole truth.

I would like to turn, at this point, to some developments and discussions that are taking place within the campaign for debt cancellation, since these discussions are very relevant to what I have just been saying.

The campaign for debt cancellation, especially the Jubilee 2000 Coalition has brought together a large number of NGOs and individuals from all over the world to campaign for debt cancellation. Many of these groups and individuals are from the indebted countries, and these have formed a branch within the Jubilee 2000 Coalition called Jubilee South. They had their own special gatherings at the Jubilee 2000 Conference in Rome in 1998 and again at the Cologne Summit. Then they called a special conference in Johannesburg in November 1999. These groups of debt campaigners from the indebted countries express a number of concerns about the whole debt campaign, and I think it is worth looking at these concerns:

— Firstly, the most serious concern is that the whole campaign focusses too much on just debt cancellation and therefore that it will accept debt cancellation even if that cancellation is conditioned on structural adjustment. These groups from the South see the debt as one dimension of a more serious problem which is the control of the economies of the South by, and for the benefit of, the North. While they see the debt as a very serious issue, they do not see it in isolation from this control, and they would not welcome a resolution to the debt crisis that does not also restore autonomy.

— Secondly, the groups from the South insist that the debt has already been repaid. Because of the amount that the debt has escalated due to fluctuations in exchange rates and interest rates, and because of the way that the debt crisis has been drawn out by the intervention of governments and international financial institutions, the amount that has to be repaid in relation to the original loans is exorbitant, and I believe that their claim here is quite valid.

— Thirdly, the groups from the South argue that the debt itself is unjust. This argument is based on the facts that I have already pointed out: that the debt emerged from imposed economic policies and development programmes, from inequities in trade agreements, from loans to corrupt dictatorships motivated by the Cold War or by economic interest, and by interest rate fluctuations that would not have been legal within any of the creditor countries.

— Fourthly, the groups from the South argue that the real indebtedness goes in the opposite direction. If the human and material resources that have been extracted from the indebted countries in the days of colonialism are considered, then this is certainly the case.

Let me add here that there is no essential disagreement with these points in the campaigns from the North. However, there is a tendency in the groups from the North to speak glowingly of modest successes such as the Cologne Debt Initiative and Clinton's cancellation of debt. I think that some statements by debt campaigners from the North have encouraged the idea that a great deal has been achieved and that we are well on our way towards a resolution to the crisis. So let me hasten to add that nothing could be further from the truth. Neither is the amount of cancellation adequate, nor are the conditions attached to cancellation conducive to a real alleviation of poverty, nor does there seem to be any willingness on the part of the creditors to budge on the all important question of imposing structural adjustment as a condition for debt relief, nor does there seem to be willingness to establish a neutral forum representative of debtors, creditors, and neutral arbitrators (something that would be normal legal procedure in a debt crisis within almost any country). Rather, every move to deal with the debt crisis places more and more responsibility in the hands of the World Bank and the IMF, two institutions that, I have already noted, are dependent on the debt for their very authority and are very unlikely to be capable of genuine objectivity in relation to it.

The conclusion, then, is that although the campaign for debt cancellation has succeeded in making its voice heard and in bringing the issue to public awareness, in fact very little has been achieved in terms of the actual goals of the campaign. The Jubilee 2000 Coalition has set this year as the target year for debt cancellation. The G7, the heads of government of the leading developed nations, have decided to hold their meeting this year in Okinawa, Japan, in July. This certainly seems like a deliberate attempt to make the kind of demonstration that was held in Cologne last year impossible. Okinawa is distant and expensive and small. It is a tourist resort in Japan, so prices are high even on a Japanese standard. Japanese civil society is very preoccupied with the question of the U.S. military bases, and it will be difficult to get support for the debt campaign, about which there is not a high level of awareness in Japan anyway. There are rumours afloat that the Japanese Government, which is the host government and therefore has a good deal of control over the agenda, does not intend to include the debt issue in the discussion or at best to make it a very minor point. There are also rumours that there will be restrictions on demonstrations.

I think it is important that we continue to campaign for debt cancellation. The Jubilee 2000 Campaign is continuing the signature campaign. They submitted over 17 million signatures in Cologne. Since then, I feel that there has been a lull in this campaign, in some sense, a feeling that it has come to an end. I think it would be good to try to overcome this feeling and give the signature campaign another boost. The Jubilee 2000 Campaign aims at 23 million signatures by the Okinawa Summit. If we can help them achieve this, it would be worth doing. It would help the demand for debt cancellation.

I think that it is also imperative that we try to make effective appeals to the Okinawa Summit, and after my talk, Kathy Arata, also of the SEDOS World Debt Working Group, will make some concrete suggestions as to how we can approach this Summit.

### Conclusion

As a final point, I would like to make a few comments about the goal of the campaign, connecting it to what I have already said about seeing the debt in relation to the whole context of the global economy, and I would like to do this with special reference to the subtitle of this talk, *The Moral Imperative of a Just Society*. I have not spoken directly of Catholic social teaching in this talk. Let me sum up here that the basis for all our social thought is the love of God

for all human beings and the whole of nature. What derives from this love is the dignity of all human beings and of the whole of nature. In social ethics, this dignity of human beings expresses itself, first as a primordial right to access to the earth's resources in order to be able to maintain well-being. This means access to adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical resources for all people. Secondly, it expresses itself in the right of people (individuals, communities, and peoples) to be, as much as possible, in charge of their own lives. And thirdly, it expresses itself in the right to participate. People are not meant to be well-fed and autonomous in an isolated way. People belong together, in solidarity and equality. These three fundamental principles are the guiding principles of all our social thought in any day and age.

But they have particular relevance today. Let me point to some simple mathematical details of the present world situation. In the next 25 years, world population is expected to increase by two billion people — an increase equivalent to the whole world population as recently as 1925. At the same time, natural population growth in the wealthier countries is expected to become negative. In other words, in the so-called developed countries, except for immigration, population will decline. That means that more than 100 per cent of that population growth will take place in poorer countries. At the same time, ecological problems and absorption of the world's resources by this increased population is surely going to mean that this increased population will be competing for reduced resources. If we look at the conflicts that have taken place in the past over control of resources, and the conflicts taking place now in so many of the resource rich areas of the planet, we must surely look forward to the next few decades with a sense of foreboding.

If our world is to be a peaceful one, the only path open to us is to make our world one of equity in access to the world's resources, fairness in distribution of the world's goods, respect for the rights of peoples to sustain themselves in dignity and with an appropriate level of autonomy, and open to the participation of all. The campaign for debt cancellation is therefore not just a campaign to help some poor people who unfortunately allowed their borrowing to get out of hand. It is a starting point, an inroad, for dealing with the whole inequity and exploitativeness of the economy.

I would like to call to mind that from the beginning, there have been three dimensions to the goal of the campaign. One dimension has been the cancellation of unpayable debts. A second dimension has been

the demand that this cancellation take place under an independent and transparent procedure. The third dimension has been that measures be put in place to see that such huge levels of debt do not arise again.

Since the initial formulation of these goals, and as a result of debates within the campaign and a strengthening of the voice of the campaigns from the indebted countries, there have been certain additions and clarifications with regard to these goals.

Firstly, with the recognition of the basic injustice of the debt, comes the demand that not just unpayable debt but all unjust debt be cancelled, and unjust debt would include cases in which the debt involves a misallocation of accountability, debts arising from changes in interest rates, and debts arising from loans to corrupt or repressive regimes.

Secondly, it has been made clear that the neutral and transparent procedure demanded must involve the civil society of the indebted country. The Cologne Debt Initiative gives civil society a role in developing programmes for poverty alleviation but that is not enough. Civil society must have a role in determining the very processes of debt cancellation, in determining what debt must be classed as unjust debt. Civil society must be included in the debate from the beginning. That means that the discussion of debt cancellation should not be carried out by the creditors alone but in the public forum, under neutral arbitration, and with broad participation of civil society.

Thirdly, the debt crisis and the question of debt cancellation should not be addressed in a way that treats the debt as a failure of the indebted countries and debt cancellation as an act of charity on the part of the creditors (which is the way it is currently being handled). The real accountability of all parties needs to be duly assessed and appropriate responsibility taken. Debt cancellation should not be seen as help from the wealthy world to the poor, but as a step towards redressing the injustices and exploitation that created the differences between wealthy and poor.

Fourthly, the measures that need to be taken to prevent similar crises from emerging again would definitely not include structural adjustment in the indebted countries, but rather changes in the whole international economy and particularly in the wealthy countries. Here are some measures that would seem to be appropriate:

— recognition in international law, in a binding way, that the first responsibility of all governments

is the food security and the provision of adequate housing, health-care, and education for all the people, and that it is the responsibility of all other persons and institutions to support governments in this role. And that therefore a certain portion of the budget of every country should be considered sacrosanct and unavailable for repayment of loans and the meeting of other financial obligations, and this sacrosanct portion should include, as well as financing for health, education and welfare, a sufficient amount of financing for development so that the country does not get caught in a trap of dependency.

— Trade should supplement and not replace local self-reliance. Production under local ownership, using local resources and oriented to the local market, should be seen as a positive value. Excessive diversion of economies towards exports and dependence on imports should be avoided. While the Principle of Comparative Advantage should be applied to avoid forms of production that are not suitable for a particular country, it should not be applied in a way that locks countries in to a particular level of development or to a dependence on a small number of primary exports. A one-size fits all approach to liberalization should be abandoned and the right of governments to protect fledgling industries should be recognized. At the same time, priority should be given to opening the markets of the developed countries to the goods of the developing countries.

— The idea of a trickle-down approach to economic development should be abandoned. Investment in the poor, for production oriented towards the needs of the poor, should be encouraged, replacing the trickle-down approach with a “percolate-up” approach.

— International trade and investment negotiations that will affect the whole populace should be carried out in the public forum, with the possibility for public debate and broad participation.

— International lending should be governed in such a way as to avoid causing impoverishment and avoid creating debt crises. Lending leads to debt crises when the monies loaned do not generate a profit with which the debt can be serviced. For centuries Christianity forbade the taking of interest precisely because of the enslavement that can result from debt. This was during an era when people borrowed primarily for real needs related to health, sustenance, providing funerals for the

dead, etc. As people came to borrow not for these kinds of needs, but as an investment that would generate profits, then there was less reason for prohibiting the taking of interest. Nowadays, we have gone to the other extreme. Interest is applied to loans regardless of the nature of the loan. In international lending, particularly to countries that are not economically self-reliant, something like the following criteria would be appropriate:

- funding for projects that are not expected to be income generating (social sector spending such as health, education, welfare, disaster relief, etc.) should be in the form of grants and not loans.

- Funding for projects that are expected to be income generating only in an indirect way (such as financing for infrastructure) should be at minimal interest rates and should become payable only when these projects have started to generate profit.

- Funding for projects that are expected to be directly income generating should be made at market interest rates and follow normal business principles. In principle, loans for business investments that are expected to be income generating should not be government guaranteed and creditors should not be bailed out when they make inappropriate loans. If businesses in a country cannot attract loans without government guarantees, then that should be considered a sign that the country is not yet ready for that kind of investment and more development assistance should be given in the form of grants or loans at concessional interest rates. When these loans are to governments or are government guaranteed, they should only be paid for from a designated portion of the national budget.

An international agency should be set up that can arbitrate debt crises through procedures that are neutral, representative (of both creditor and debtor), and transparent. This agency would have the right and responsibility to determine accountability for debts so that debts from corrupt governments, or debts incurred as a result of policies imposed by the creditors themselves and from projects directed by international institutions, would not simply be passed on to the poor. This agency would also be empowered to declare certain governments (corrupt governments divorced in their practices from concern for the well-being of their people) as rogue governments for whose debts subsequent governments would not be held responsible.

In sum, then, let me reiterate that although we have been able to make our voice heard on the debt issue, we have not yet achieved the results we are seeking, and therefore it is imperative that we continue with this campaign. As we continue with it, let us keep in mind that the real goal is not simply debt cancellation but a world economy and a world society that is marked by equity, participation, transparency, and accountability. Let us therefore be cautious of strategies for debt relief that are determined by the creditors without real consultation with the debtors, or that leave control in the hands of the creditors alone, or that do not sufficiently appraise the accountability of the creditors and of the wealthy world in general for the debt crisis. And let us maintain our commitment to use the networks that we have as religious to deepen our understanding of the experience of the poor, to see the world as much as possible through their eyes, and to align ourselves with them as we work for a world of justice, peace, and equity.

Gert Danielsen, CODECAL

## Colombia: The Importance of Communication in Transforming a Culture of Violence

— With Reference to Urban Life in Santa Fe de Bogotá —

*Conflicts need to be transmitted, communicated, for them to spread, escalate and create change. My personal conflict will not escalate, change or affect anyone unless I communicate it to others. Through interaction, consciously or unconsciously, I will be able to change my conflict, for better or for worse. The moment of transmission is vital, and the mode of transmission is communication itself. Communication is a sensitive tool, and we need to be extremely conscious of how to use it, and what effects it may have.*

This essay focuses on the role of human communication, that is to say the interaction and transmission of messages and symbolism between human beings on an interpersonal level, in the conflictive urban setting of Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia. It will firstly outline some of the themes of conflict, look at their possible causes and focus on a few examples of non-verbal communication. It will then present the case of culturally-specific norms which make us unconscious of the effects of communication, and look at campaigns that have been presented in Santa Fe de Bogotá in order to create more public awareness. Finally, the paper will name some obstacles to transforming the culture of violence in Colombia, before summarising some of the needs for communication and change.

In order to approach the role of communication in transforming the culture of violence in Colombia, we evidently need to look at the main themes of conflict. A brief essay can surely not map out all the causes of conflict, but we may be able to outline a few contributing factors to the conflict Colombia is currently experiencing, factors one needs to work on in order for there to be peace.

There is great social misery and disparity in Colombia. Economic differences are enormous, and a minority controls most resources. There is a great popular need for resources, income and education, basic needs which are not fulfilled, creating pressure and desperation within the population. When the social, public system fails to support and create opportunities for the needy, people tend to create their own alternative paths, paths of mere survival, and often illegal. The ongoing crime and violence in Colombia has often been referred to as a culture of violence. Just as culture is carried on from generation to generation, so are violent tendencies in Colombia. Eight million children experience mental, physical or sexual abuse every year, and these children will carry this violence within them, as if infected by it, perhaps thinking that violence is the only way to communicate and

to solve their problems.

The cause behind this social misery, however, may go back to the fact that there is little feeling of community, responsibility and solidarity. This lack of solidarity creates the misery as much as maintains it, on political, social and economic levels. There is little interaction, and when there is interaction, it tends to be limited, with few commitments and continuation. So why do not people feel connected to and responsible for their neighbours and fellow citizens? Why is there such a sentiment of individuality and selfishness? These are key questions, and can in no way be analysed apart from a societal and historical context. They are issues of great importance in a very complex societal and cultural structure. However, it may be mentioned that few Colombians know their country and their fellow countrymen. The isolationism is also based on fear and insecurity, again in a vicious cycle. In order to break this cycle, we need to make a personal sacrifice, we need to start communicating and getting to know each other, and we need to be willing to open up for other human beings, their experiences, their opinions and their feelings. Only when we know them, will we be able to feel responsible for them, feel solidarity with them and feel part of their community, making them part of our community.

Within an urban context, human language is far from the only form of communication. Curiously, in Santa Fe de Bogotá there is an ample use of car horns. Some people start honking as soon as the light turns green, barely giving the car ahead a chance to move forward. Besides intrinsically producing a very aggressive sound, the car horn also represents the impatience, the frustration and, at times, the anger of the driver. I nearly become depressed only listening to the car horns, as of an orchestra of intolerance and stress, and smile eagerly on those days when there is less noise in the streets. The effect is clearly psychological. The example of the car horn is excellent to describe the face-to-faceless society we see in many cities. In this case, the interaction is only carried out

through noises, and there is little or no verbal communication. The few times people actually do shout at you, it is almost certain that they will never (have to) see you again.

This kind of communication is perhaps directed towards one specific receiver, although very often not identified clearly by the communicator, but it has an effect on multiple receivers. One might compare this to a speech in a conference hall, although the difference is that the rest of the “audience” is not listening voluntarily, but simply being affected by the communication between two or more parties.

From the car horn example we can observe two interesting factors. Firstly, there is communication. The car horn truly represents a message from the driver, certainly to be interpreted and acted upon by the receiver. He or she may decide to do nothing in response, but potentially there is a response by means of action. Secondly, it is usually one-way communication, as it rarely, if at all, opens up for dialogue. It is expected that the receiver acts and reacts according to the communicator’s expectations and desires, almost in an authoritative manner, giving orders. This may perhaps reflect a societal system in which people have been raised according to orders and authority, with little opportunity for dialogue or discussion. The car horn communication also implies that there is no humbleness, no need for discussion or compromise, as the driver assumes superiority and has all the right to express himself, with little consideration for what consequences it may have for others.

The parallel to be drawn between the communication through a car horn and other kinds of relatively anonymous communication is also interesting. The car serves namely as a mask, in the same way the mask of a policeman or a soldier serves as a dehumanizing element in the moment of confrontation with another human being, for instance in a demonstration or a march. In order to facilitate communication, or rather to avoid the personal consequences of this communication, we tend to protect ourselves through masks or lack of eye contact.

A similar example in Santa Fe de Bogotá, as in many other cities, is the lack of eye contact when the poor ask for money. If you do not feel like giving, you would rather avoid the feeling of guilt, and you look away, ignoring the person. I fear that this avoidance may have an even greater effect on the beggar, making him or her feel excluded, unimportant and rejected. In order to obtain the needed attention, as well as a daily income, the poor may go much further than simply asking for money, possibly causing violence and crime. The effects of these acts of violence or crimes will affect people who feel they are innocent and that they have nothing to do with the criminal.

In almost any society, and even more so in a face-to-faceless urban society, we tend not to make ourselves responsible for crimes committed by “the others”. We tend not to ask ourselves if we also are partly responsible for the poverty, the crime and the violence in society. We prefer to see things as separate elements, on a level of analysis, rather than as a series of interacting elements in a system where all parts of society are interconnected and have an effect on their surroundings. If the beggar cannot fulfill his or her needs kindly asking for money, and his personal feelings are ignored and suppressed by empty looks, ignorance and avoidance, this may ultimately jeopardise people’s security. Thus, there is a connection between our attitudes, communication or lack of such and the general situation of security and confidence in urban areas, although we may be unaware of its effect in the moment of transmission.

Although one cannot generalise, it can be seen that culturally or society-specific values, customs, habits and traditions tend to make us unaware or unconscious of the effects our own communication may have. An excellent example was U.S. Senator Bill Richardson’s meeting with Saddam Hussein in Bagdad a few years ago. Richardson sat down and crossed his legs, unaware of the cultural offense he committed by showing Hussein the heel of his shoe. Hussein immediately left the room, severely offended, without explaining why. Richardson was astonished, perplexed and confused, and potentially this apparently irrelevant element could have had severe implications for the political relations between the U.S. and Iraq.

In this case, Hussein could perhaps have been more aware of the cultural differences and given Richardson the benefit of the doubt, but it is also clear that Richardson could have investigated the cultural norms of Iraq, and thereby become conscious of the effects of his non-verbal communication.

Conscience and awareness establish main advantages in any conflictual situation. It is just as important to be self-conscious as it is to become conscious of the other party’s mode of communication. Showing interest will not only facilitate the achievement itself, but also improve the relationship between the two parties, as it shows humbleness and a desire to learn and to cooperate. Finally, the very means by which one can achieve this level of awareness, is communication itself.

Although there is a dominating lack of awareness in Colombia, there are also good intentions and a will to create public awareness and to open up for communication. The mayors in Santa Fe de Bogotá have attempted to launch several campaigns to address and change the pattern of violence in the city, one of these being an awareness campaign on good and bad behaviour in the streets of the capital.

When citizens were noticed to carry out positive attitudes and deeds, they were shown a poster with “thumbs up”, recognising their efforts. On the other hand, people who acted impolitely, broke rules and norms in the traffic or in the streets would be shown “thumbs down”, reminding them of what they were doing. While “thumbs up” was well received and appreciated, the “thumbs down” poster was not very successful. In fact, it resulted in several confrontations, as people felt offended and personally criticised. There were even cases of violence and aggression carried out as a reaction to the “reproach”. Obviously, in this case, the need for “good” behaviour in society should have been explained to the “offenders”. Many might have been well aware of their unacceptable acts, but were insulted by the imposition of morals and the “thumbs down” rejection and what the reproach might have implied to them.

Again, a symbol, such as the car horn or the “thumbs down” poster, are not sufficient, as it carries with it negative associations and one cannot be sure that these associations are general knowledge, common sense or shared connotations. The lack of education is certainly a factor which contributes to misunderstandings and confrontations, but while one is developing educational systems open and just for all, there is a clear necessity to take into account the situation and needs of the most vulnerable. There is a necessity to recognise these people and include them with confidence, good will and empathy. And most of all, there is a necessity to communicate with them, on their own premises.

The problems occurring within a culture of violence in urban Colombia may well reflect a general impression of two phenomena quite common in Colombia: protagonism and individualism. Generalising, one can say that many people act upon personal interest and with little or no consideration for others and their opinions. Years of dictatorship, corruption and violence may well “justify”, or at least explain, the development of such societal traits, in a system of the survival of the fittest, but this is only part of the equation in a vicious cycle. Individualism fosters selfishness and lack of confidence, which again foster lack of cooperation, knowledge and dialogue. If something occurs, with negative consequences, one does not see the relationship between one’s personal role and the given outcome. Personal exclusion from the problem is common, as are placing blame and accusations.

In Colombia there is also a lack of continuation. What is started by one governor, mayor or president is rarely completed by his successor, which certainly may partly explain why there are many social problems without apparent solutions. As mental, cultural and societal changes require long term reforms through

education and formation, there will not be a change unless there is a commitment to continuation. Individualism is closely related to this fact. We do not seem to have the humbleness and the common responsibility to carry on what our predecessors have begun, although it may prove to be to the benefit of the wider community.

Personal interest seems to interfere with the interest of Colombian society, a fact which also has opened up for NGOs and informal institutions, as they have a common objective for society, not based on their personal assets and interests. There are certainly examples of Colombian NGOs which have merely pursued their leaders’ or coordinators’ interest, but as most NGOs and social groups are established to address popular needs, and as people who are involved in these groups and organisations aspire to work for the same objectives as promoted by the group, there is a higher chance of continuation, irrespective of the leadership or persons in charge. Provided that there are resources and continuous formation, holistic and well-planned social education will, therefore, have a relatively high possibility of achieving success.

Finally, one might say that needs and necessities are communicated in today’s Colombia, through general strikes, demonstrations and popular protests, but these manifestations of communication are merely the top of the iceberg, and represent the symptoms of something far greater than a public outcry. When there is only emergency treatment of the problems which occur in society, there is no hope of preventing problems from developing.

In conclusion, in Colombia there is an urgent need to create awareness of the “other”, of the society and the interconnectedness people are living in and are being affected by. In such a case, people will perhaps feel more responsible and caring towards their fellow beings. The citizens of Colombia truly need to make a personal sacrifice in order to change the culture of violence they have been surrounded by and grown up with. They will need to break the vicious cycle and sacrifice their personal pride and vulnerability in order to create a society of lasting peace. And most of all, they will need to get to know each other and start communicating, face-to-face.

Gert Danielsen for CODECAL, Integral Corporation for Cultural and Social Development, Santa Fe de Bogotá, <http://www.codecal.org.co/>

*CODECAL is an educational non-profit organisation with more than 27 years experience in the field of social education, community and personal development, Christian formation and Conflict Transformation in Latin America.*

Ref.: *IDOC Internazionale*, 99/3-4 (July-December).

## COMING EVENTS

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### WORKING GROUPS

<b>Wednesday,</b>	<b>26 April</b>	Mission in Conflict	15:30 hrs at <b>SEDOS</b>
<b>Thursday,</b>	<b>27 April</b>	World Debt Group	15:30 hrs at <b>SEDOS</b>
<b>Wednesday,</b>	<b>3 May</b>	China Group	15:30 hrs at <b>SEDOS</b>