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Editorial

The November issue opens with a very interesting contribution from the African theologian LAURENTI MAGESA. In his article on the Spirit's role in the African understanding of the Church-as-Family, he explains the aptness of the image, because African culture represents a very rich resource for understanding what Church-as-family intends to convey in Christian life. —

Fr MICHAEL Mc CABE, SMA, studies different missionary motivations in theological discussion today. He concludes that the ancient notion of the Church as "the sacrament of salvation" seems especially rich, because it expresses the essential vocation of the Church to incarnate herself in each culture and make herself a sign of God's transforming presence in it. —

Fr JEROOM HEYNDRIKX, CICM, has been following the situation of the Catholic Church in Continental China for many years. He suggests in his article that the very fact of the episcopal ordinations at Epiphany 2000, pushed by the Government, represents an urgent invitation for patriotic Catholics and underground Christians to enter into a serious dialogue. —

A group of CUBAN PRIESTS presents a critical evaluation of the national and pastoral situation in Cuba. They note a certain apathy and insecurity in the Church after the Pope's Visit. While the Government used the visit cleverly as a propaganda tool outside the country, the Church did not know how to react afterwards and seems further more to be defenceless against the giant machine. —

We conclude the issue with a study from Asia. Fr JACOB KAVUNKAL, SVD, studies the concept of inculturation used in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Asia" of Pope John Paul II. He believes that the concept of inculturation in the document is too Church-centred forgetting the autonomy of a given culture. He pleads for a missionary inculturation that becomes an "other-centred process". —

Brazil

INSTEAD, POVERTY IS INCREASING

A recent study of the IPEA (Institute for Applied Economics Research) demonstrates that in President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's second term in office, poverty in the country has increased. In 1998, 33.4 per cent of the Brazilian population lived in a state of poverty (poverty being defined as a state in which a person makes enough to eat the minimum necessary, but does not earn enough to pay for other essentials such as clothes and decent housing). Last year, the number rose to 34.9 per cent of the population, a total of 54.1 million people. Cardoso, following the policies given by the International Monetary Fund and other international lending institutions, has not been able to achieve what he said would be his primary goal in his second term: to begin making advances in the area of poverty and misery.

(Source: *Folha de São Paulo*, 9 October 2000, also in *Sejup*, Brazil, n. 421, October 2000.

FEDERAL POLICE THREATENS INVESTIGATION AGAINST MISSIONARIES

The Brazilian Federal Police is threatening to open an investigation against Cimi (Indigenous Missionary Council), accusing the organization of manipulating and stirring up the indigenous people. According to Cimi, the Federal Police are doing this so as to try to discredit the organization, just as they are currently trying to do with the MST (Movement of Rural Workers Without Land). However, the Federal Police are without proof of such accusations. Cimi has already suffered death threats and assassination attempts due to its efforts to protect the Indigenous from land-grabbers. Cimi believes that the announcement from the Federal Police will now intensify acts directed against Indigenous Peoples Rights as well as the persecution of members of Cimi.

(Source: *Linha Aberta*, 24 October 2000, also in *Sejup*, n. 423, 26 October 2000).

Christ's Spirit as Empowerment of the Church-as-Family

Practically, the Spirit of Christ is an extension of the activities of the Jesus of history. For we know best the spirit, intentions and goals of a person by observing his actions. What Christ's Spirit does today to empower the Church has its basis in the actual life and message of Jesus. To have some understanding, therefore, of this process of Christ's current empowerment of the Church, one needs to look at Jesus' process of empowerment of his contemporaries. The central question of our discussion is whether we can trace the model or image of the family in the empowering activities of the historical Jesus. That would, of course, render firm theological grounding to our own use of that model for the Church today. It would also show how Christ and the Church are interlinked and interrelated, not merely in theory (as theology or doctrine), but especially in practice (as a way of life and pastoral practice).

Was the Historical Jesus Unique?

Through historical and textual criticism, it is now possible to reconstruct to a certain plausible degree the cultural, social and political environment into which Jesus was born. It is also possible to appreciate much better than before the nature of the message and ministry of Jesus during his life on earth. This is an important achievement. It is now well known that the Gospels and the New Testament in general, paint a picture of a Jesus of faith. The New Testament «justifies» the activities of Jesus by appealing to Jewish religious expectations and the Hebrew Scriptures. It is a look into the past to explain the present, several decades after the crucial event of Jesus' execution. The result is what scholars have characterized as «the Christ of faith». Of course, that exercise presents Jesus as being unique in every way; in fact, to be from his birth the expected «Christ» with all that the notion of Christ, the anointed of God, implied at the time in people's religious understanding was uniqueness itself. For our purposes, however, we cannot avoid the question whether the historical Jesus was unique among his contemporaries, and if so in what way.

The answer to that question is at the same time positive and negative, if we are to be faithful to available evidence. In many ways Jesus was not unique neither as a person nor as a teacher. Born into a peasant/artisan family in a strictly stratified society, Jesus grew up working and behaving like any other mem-

ber of that class. But there is no doubt that he was a gifted speaker, an inspiring orator. It was towards the end of his life that he became an itinerant preacher and began to use this talent.

However, even in his preaching Jesus was not exceptionally unique, if by uniqueness is meant that he broke new philosophical ground. Other religious leaders before him in different parts of the world had said, many years before his birth, what he himself was to express in his own way. The stress on love, justice, peace, reconciliation, piety and so on, is not peculiar to Jesus. The Hebrew Scriptures with which Jesus was familiar and from which he constantly drew inspiration for his own preaching, is alone ample illustration of this assertion. Around his own time, as the New Testament itself indicates, there were most probably other itinerant teachers who went around the country preaching and teaching just as Jesus did. Some of them, again like Jesus, met their fate at the hands of the Roman colonial authorities and their Jewish collaborators.¹ But on the other hand, Jesus was unique, and it is this «peculiarity» in his public preaching, character and life, that led to his execution on being accused of sedition. This uniqueness of the historical Jesus is what constitutes his Spirit, and has fundamental consequences for the Church-as-family.

What was the Uniqueness of Jesus?

To appreciate the revolutionary and, to many of his contemporaries, even «sacrilegious» character of the activities of Jesus that constitutes his uniqueness, it is necessary to understand the socio-economic structure of his day. This structure was the foundation on which the religious convictions and religiosity of the people were based. Disturb this structure and you destroy not only the economic and social system of the first century Jews (and Romans), but also their system of religious beliefs. Jesus' public life was a complete and unequivocal rejection of the basic foundations of this system. As such he was in trouble from the very beginning, and he knew it. Under the circumstances, it was not difficult for him, or anybody else, for that matter, to predict his death, and even the manner of it.

What then was the socio-economic structure of the society in which Jesus lived?² It was a highly and strictly stratified, hierarchical society composed of two main socio-economic classes. At the top of the hierar-

chy was the small patron class composed of monied people wielding power and influence. They were the makers and shakers of society, the equivalent of today's rulers, millionaires, multi-national company executives, and perhaps Bishops and other dignitaries of the Church. Only unlike the latter, their position was mostly hereditary. The vast majority of the population formed the lower class whose very survival depended on the patron class. Crossan explains this social stratification.

On one side of that great divide were the Rulers and the Governors, who together made up one per cent of the population but owned at least half of the land. Also on that same side were three other classes: the Priests who could own as much as 15 per cent of the land; the Retainers ranging from military generals to expert bureaucrats; and the Merchants, who probably evolved upward from the lower classes but who could end up with considerable wealth and even some political power as well. The peasant population lived at subsistence level, barely able to support their family, animals, and social obligations and still have enough for the following year's seed supply. If they were not lucky, drought, debt, disease or death forced them off their own land and into share-cropping, tenant farming, or worse. Next came the Artisans, about five per cent of the population, below the peasants in the social hierarchy. Beneath them were the Degraded and the Expendable classes — the former with origins, occupations or conditions rendering them outcasts; the latter may have constituted 10 per cent of the population and ranged from beggars and outlaws, to day labourers and slaves.³

Let me emphasize once again, that in Jewish-Roman times of the first century these structures were more than just social and economic class divisions. They were religious divisions implying both divine and moral judgment. The implication of this was quite simple and straight-forward to the societies under consideration. The classes at the top of the hierarchy were the blessed of God. From among them came gods and children of gods. Several among them, for example Roman Emperors, were deified. Their actions were not only legal (they were the legislators), but also moral (they were the righteous). Those at the bottom, the peasants, artisans and expendables, were by that very fact alone, the accursed of God. They were morally impure. They were considered sinners. Their sin was believed to be manifested physically in the form of disease, such as leprosy; or psychologically as demonic possession. So the peasants and those in this general lower class were, according to the day's accepted social structure, sinners and lepers with whom there should have been no contact at all. In short, the social structure mandated that every class should keep strictly to itself as far as any significant

human intercourse was concerned. This separation applied also to gender and familial relations. Both women and children were the property either of their fathers, male guardians or husbands.

When that environment is well understood it is possible to appreciate the utterly "revolutionary" character of Jesus' teaching and behaviour and why his death by crucifixion could be easily predictable from the outset. What did he do? Jesus' life and preaching were to his contemporaries, totally dedicated to breaking down these sacrosanct barriers. Instead of respecting them as divine institutions, he ridiculed them as positively obstructive to God's will. He did more than simply ignore them; he actively campaigned against them. It is therefore not surprising that given the socio-political and economic atmosphere of the day, he could not last. How could he when he went about the country arguing that, before God, there was really no difference between patron and client, and behaving accordingly?

For Jesus, God required a radically new social order where people would relate and socialise not only within, but also across class, gender and descent barriers — with equal dignity. He verbally advocated, and physically lived in an unrestricted social confluence. No one was expendable, he proclaimed. All human beings of any and all classes are valuable. Perhaps those of the lower classes have the advantage of being more open to, and more receptive of, the will of God. "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is God's house". This is what, in the preaching and life of Jesus, surprised the masses and irked the religious and civil authorities so much: his preferential option for what Franz Fanon called "the wretched of the earth".

Examples of both of those reactions can be found throughout the Gospels. Indeed, it is more accurate to say that the Gospels are a composition of reminiscences of these reactions to Jesus' option by four different communities. In the first place, they are recollections of the words and behaviour of Jesus. Second, they are compositions of the reactions of the masses — from pleasant surprise to convictions about the divinity of Jesus. Third, they are a recollection of the reaction of the authorities — from ridicule to bewilderment and anger. Let me illustrate briefly instances of these three levels of the process which the Evangelists, on behalf of their communities, tried to put into coherent stories.

Jesus' preference for an unrestricted social confluence is best illustrated in the Gospel parables. As an accomplished orator, Jesus must have been extremely deft at using the story art form for so many parables to have survived. The "lack of comprehension" by the listeners noted at the end of certain parables,⁴ goes only to underline the fantastic and preposterous character, under the prevailing circumstances, of the point Jesus was trying to put across.

The easiest and most striking ones we can use to

illustrate our point are recorded in Luke (some with parallels in the other Synoptic Gospels). The parables of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), the Rich Fool (12:16-21), and the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31), for example, are, to begin with, clearly unimaginable in the Palestinian and Roman times of the first century. By definition, at that time, a Samaritan could not be “good” or act the way the parable says he did to a Jew. A rich man was, by definition, wise and could not be considered by anyone, least of all God, as a fool. The strong belief was that wealth signified divine wisdom and wisdom was manifested in wealth. But most preposterous of all would have been the claim in 16:19-31 that a poor person, an expendable, would receive God’s favour in preference to a rich person. Yet the parables’ point is simple: it is by living in solidarity without discrimination of any kind that one becomes a truly religious person, pleasing to God.⁵ To Jesus such behaviour was alone the measure of authentic religion.

As I have noted, the first reaction of the people listening to Jesus was a lack of understanding. Few could believe their ears hearing this itinerant preacher, impressive in so many other ways, publicly advocate the equality of humanity including the peasant class! It was too good to be true. It bordered, in fact, on being mad, precisely what many, particularly close relatives, believed Jesus to be (as in Mark 3:30). But gradually disbelief gave way to wonder and admiration. Expressions such as, “Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel” must have been remembered for a long time by the Matthean community.⁶

In such passages as Matthew 13:53-58, Mark 6:1-6 and Luke 4:16-30, this development from disbelief, through scepticism, to admiration by the people has been maintained. The debate might still have been (until the very end of his life) whether or not Jesus was a good man, as John 7:12 records. From early on there was no question but that as a teacher he was head and shoulders above others:

And he taught the people in their synagogue in such a way that they were astonished, and said, “Where did he get this wisdom, and the power to perform these wonders? Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother’s name Mary, and are not his brothers named James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? And do not all his sisters live here among us? Then where did he get all this?”⁷

After Jesus’ death the only possible answer for the Christian communities to the last question was that Jesus’ wisdom and power were of divine origin. In fact it was a short step from this conviction to the confession that Jesus was indeed God incarnate. The divinity of the Christ of faith is thus a recognition of the Spirit or “spirituality” of the Jesus of history.

The implication of this Spirit or spirituality of Je-

sus, which manifests him as the Christ of Liberation, is consequential. For the contemporary Church it can be considered from at least three perspectives, that is, Christ’s spirituality in relationship to:

1. the understanding of the inner nature and mission of the Church-as-family;
2. the perception of the visible structure of the Church flowing from the above;
3. pastoral approaches, also in view of the above.

Was Jesus Merely a Social Reformer?

The three aspects just enumerated will constitute the rest of our paper. However before proceeding, the question needs to be addressed as to whether Jesus was a social reformer, or *merely* a social reformer. Some would place the uniqueness of Jesus in what they would term the “spiritual” realm: the realm of love of neighbour, of self-giving and self-sacrifice, of loving the enemy and offering “the other cheek”. Such concern is understandable given the strong influence of Graeco-Roman thought and spirituality that has influenced the Christian Churches up to the present day. But it was certainly not part of Jewish (and incidentally, it is not part of African) spirituality where the spiritual realm emanates from social realities, and the social sphere forms an integral part of the spiritual realm. In other words, the strong dichotomy we find in Greek thought between the spiritual and the worldly, the sacred and the secular, is foreign to Hebrew thought and religiosity.

When, therefore, Jesus protested against distinctions of nation, gender, or social standing, he was without doubt advocating social reform. But it was precisely in social reform that the spiritual message of Jesus resided. Many sayings and passages in the Gospels indicate this orientation, and the “Lord’s Supper”, variously described in the New Testament, has solidarity as one of its central, if not indeed the central, theme. It is useful to recall the words of Paul in 1 Cor 11:27-29. He points out the reality, and not just the metaphorical sense, of the Eucharist. It is a warning to the rich, to those who would introduce discrimination into its sign of oneness. The “body” of Christ is everyone who has accepted his message:

This means that whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily sins against the body and blood of the Lord. One should examine oneself first; only then should one eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Paul makes this point even clearer in 1 Cor 10:17: “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf”. This must have sounded even more outrageous to Jewish-Roman ears of the time than Jesus putting forth his body and blood as food and drink. The very idea

that a member of Jewish aristocracy could be “one body” with a peasant or an expendable was loathsome.

This message was strong in the Church until the Constantinian Dispensation in the fourth century. Then it began to wane, and was almost completely forgotten until modern times with the rise of Communism. It was then that Pope Leo XIII articulated it tentatively in his 1891 Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. The Encyclical unleashed a profound renewal of the spirituality of Jesus that came to be known generically as the Social Teaching of the Church, a teaching that has been emphasized ever since as integral. This awareness has also given rise to a new way of doing theology known as the theology of liberation. Under what might seem at first sight as being merely social reform, the central intent of the theology of liberation is to build up the human family, of which the family called Church is symbol, witness and conscience.

The work of God combines two fundamental trusts, as Wilbert R. Shenk has so well explained it, “the universal and the particular in one action. The universal moves to bring all under the sovereignty of God, thereby relativising all other loyalties and claims. The trust of particularity moves toward every people and each person, for each bears the *imago Dei*; none is excluded from the reach of God’s love, each is invited to be reconciled to God”.^{7b}

Nature of Church-as-Family

The predominant images or models of the Church in the documents of Vatican II are those of the People of God and Body of Christ. Although in the documents these images are circumscribed with historical concerns of authority and government, they clearly retain the meaning of the spirituality of Jesus. *Lumen Gentium*, for example, asserts that “All people are called to belong to this Catholic unity of the People of God (that is, the Church) which anticipates and fosters universal peace”(cf.n.13). The same document continues to explain this assertion by saying that “in different ways, there belong to or are oriented towards this unity both the Catholic faithful and all believers in Christ as well as all people in general since they are called by the grace of God to salvation”(ibid).⁸

Taking the above description as the broader and more comprehensive meaning of Church, the Council in Number 7 of *Lumen Gentium* likens it to a Body whose head is Christ. In this Body, the Christ of faith shares the Spirit manifested by the historical Jesus. The spirit “being identically the same in Head and member, vivifies, unites, and moves the entire Body”. This sharing of the Spirit is now mystical, but the end to which it is directed remains the same as Jesus demonstrated during his life: to unite all peoples and foster universal peace. The Church is a Body of Christ as long as

it continues this mission.

The image of “family” applied to the Church acquires Christian theological relevance and validity only when it is seen and used within the context of that mission today. As Jesus became Christ because of his liberating activity, so does the Church become Christian. Fundamentally, Christ’s Church is not static; it is a dynamic movement for the integral liberation or salvation of people, a liberation constituted by love and unity overriding all differences. Christ’s Church is an activity of love.

What then is meant by Christ’s Spirit empowering the Church-as-family? It means Christ’s followers acting as Jesus did and continuing to do so.

This is the Jesus who actually calls individuals and peoples to freedom by his word and action. He does this through God’s continual self revelation in history.... In the process he gives a voice to the voiceless so that farmers, for example, can demand fair prices for their produce. He instills courage so that industrial workers, domestic servants and casual labourers can say ‘no’ to the arbitrary exploitation of their person and labour. He provides hope to prostitutes, parking boys and (the) sick and the lame so that they may realise that in spite of their degradation, suffering and handicaps, they are equal members of society and children of God with dignity in his sight.⁹

In very simple and straightforward terms, the movement directed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ is one towards integration and unity. To put it plainly, it is against discrimination and segregation. But if unity is not the *nature*, the *essence*, of family, of Church-as-family, then nothing is. Since the Church is constituted from the beginning by God’s action towards oneness, it may be said always to bear the seeds of being truly a family of God. But it is a serious mistake to imagine that the seed is already the fruit. Seeds must be fleshed out in concrete action for the unity of humanity. We may speak of the importance of the recurrence of the thought of “caring for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust”. The closer the Church moves towards universal solidarity, the more it becomes genuinely a family. The further away it moves from solidarity, the less it can claim the right to be called a family of God.

The aspects of solidarity, unity and communion form the difference between family as a merely human institution and the Church as a Church-as-family. When the African Synod used the latter image, it sought to eliminate any elements that circumscribe, and therefore limit, the extent, depth and quality of unity and communion that characterise human families. Quite distinct, or really different, from the understanding of the structure and functioning of human families, the Church-as-family embraces every-

one irrespective of class, gender, race or ability. This means that the Church-as-family is a universal communion in which *humanity*, fully common to all human beings, is the basic and most important element or measure. Taking historical-theological precedents, the pronouncements of Vatican II and the conclusions of the African Synod seriously, African theologians have tried to spell out what it all means for the Church in Africa. E.E. Uzukwu, for instance, demonstrates very convincingly that Africa's culture is a rich resource for understanding and living out what Church-as-family intends to convey in the Christian life. Uzukwu puts forward *consultation and listening* as the guiding principles for the existence of a Church consistent with what the Council and Synod have taught. The Church, according to Uzukwu, needs to be a "listening" Church. What the model of Church-as-family will most strongly evoke in Africa is the African family's relational principle. If carefully adhered to, this relational emphasis should help to eliminate the negative elements of the model when used uncritically. Patriarchy emerges as a clearly negative example, and the Synod failed to criticise it forcefully enough, or at least the *Ecclesia in Africa* does not demonstrate such critique. As a result, as Uzukwu observes only a short time after the Synod, there was already the tendency to link the notion of family with a spiritual "paternity" of priests! But the Christian value and power of the model becomes evident only when it is "stripped of all the characteristics of patriarchal dominance".¹⁰

The relational principle, on which the African family is based, fosters a type of community "of people promoting people's growth", as Waliggo notes. "Fellowship of brothers and sisters should be for the human growth of all people".¹¹ This is what Christ by his Spirit aims to do in the Church. In the words of Amaladoss:

He befriends the poor, the outcasts, the sinners, publicans and the marginalised under physical, psychological and social oppression. By his preaching and miracles, he set himself against the representatives of mammon in his time. He proclaims a new law that privileges poverty and meekness, peace and justice, forgiveness and reconciliation.... He leaves us a memorial banquet that symbolises and experiences in the sharing of food the sharing of life with each other and with God.¹²

What kind of Church-as-family emerges as a result of this activity and imperative of the Spirit? What kind of Church community is envisaged? To quote Amaladoss again, it must be one held together by the bonds of love and mutual acceptance. It is not based on geographic, ethnic, cultural and religious unity. It

is not bound by national, economic or caste barriers. It is not only comfortable with multi-culturalism, but sees it as the creative variety and riches of the human race.¹³

We have stressed the nature of Church-as-family as that of solidarity, unity and communion without barriers. We must now consider how it should shape the visible structure of the Church in the understanding that Church structures can impede or enhance the work of the Spirit of Jesus.

Visible Structure of the Church

To be Christologically or Pneumatologically valid, any structure or operational aspect of life of the Church needs to adhere to certain basic principles. The following are central:

- respect for the inalienable rights of an individual or group within the context of the larger community;
- respect for the dignity of the human in every person or group of persons. This presupposes the principle just mentioned;
- the preservation of the integrity and life of the community as a vital just and harmonious community.

What concrete theological mechanisms, then, need to be promoted to en flesh these principles? One immediately thinks of the mechanisms of subsidiarity, solidarity and participation/socialisation as the ones most pertinent to Jesus' practice. Let me elaborate on how the structure of subsidiarity, solidarity and participation, if authentic, preserves and promotes the dynamic respect for the rights and dignity of persons and the integrity of the community (all of which are signs of the presence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ). Subsidiarity promotes identity, the recognition of who and what is before God. A sense of identity is necessary for one to exercise properly one's responsibilities and rights. But identity is precisely what the poor and the exploited generally lack. They are conditioned by prevailing structures, which stress centralised power, to live their identity almost vicariously, that is, to see and experience their own identity in their "masters". "Peripheral" local Churches and much of the so-called Third World exist in the same way. The dynamic Spirit of Jesus, however, challenges this, as Jesus challenged the lack of identity in the peasant class of his own time. Authentic subsidiarity, promoting personal, group and social identity keeps the Spirit of Jesus alive and active.

Of the qualities that constitute true community, dialogue, trust and concern can never be dispensed with. Many Church documents, as well as the African Synod,¹⁴ have stressed this point and it hardly calls for further emphasis here. Dialogue, trust and concern

express solidarity, and solidarity is what the Church should be: one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. Dialogue is a pivotal element of accountability: of the whole Church to God, and of each and every member of the Church to one another in the Church's daily life. In addition participation as a means of socialisation and growth into, and within, the Church as family of God ought to be promoted. In this age of democratic institutions in all spheres of life, the necessity for this is self-evident. But I wish to indicate here how the significance of participation as socialisation has been recognised in the Church from early times. This is particularly demonstrated in the rite of Baptism in the history of the Church. The fact of Baptism of adults in stages as a process of gradual socialisation and growth into the Christian community is indicated as early as the second and third centuries by Justin (in his *First Apology*), Tertulian (*On Baptism*) and Hippolytus of Rome (*Apostolic Tradition*).

With time, however, this was lost sight of and the rite was compressed into a shorter and shorter time with most emphasis placed only on Baptism. But in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Vatican II reformed the rite of Baptism and decreed a return to the ancient process. Thus the rite of Christian Initiation of Adults now consists of the candidates' acceptance into the catechumenate and the catechumenate itself as the first step, and the enrolment of names as the second. The period of Purification and Enlightenment consists of the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), and post-baptismal catechesis (or mystagogy) as the fourth step through which the newly baptised participate fully as members of the community or Church-as-family.¹⁵ The entire process deliberately takes time so that the growth into the faith may mature, especially through the help and example of the adult members of the family.

Pastoral Approaches

Our "imitation" of Jesus must be evident in the Church's pastoral work. This is to say that pastoral ministry, while excluding none of God's people, needs to pay more attention to today's expendables who, to be sure, are not so different from those of yesterday. Aguilar lists them as prostitutes, alcoholics, AIDS victims, women, refugees, exiles, the displaced and migrants.¹⁶ Perhaps these are the contemporary equivalent of the tax collectors and sinners who enjoyed Jesus' special favour and treatment. They move, as Aguilar notes:

Within boundaries of institutional, social and ritual circles of this world feeling, more than others, the presence or the absence of the Church and its pastoral agents. Nevertheless, every pastoral agent has encountered people who are convinced that the Church does not care about them, and who is familiar with situations

of helplessness that are a great challenge to ministry.¹⁷

Effective pastoral ministry to the outcasts, aiming to include them into the Church-as-family, cannot but revolve around the principles of subsidiarity, solidarity and, particularly, socialisation. Large Church communities such as the traditional parish or outstation are not practical structures for ministering to outcasts because of their size, which makes them rather impersonal. This means that there is not enough personal contact among members of the community at this level, and if there is, it is superficial. But what the imitation of Jesus, or Jesus-in-us, demands is the inclusion of the rejected as "part of us" in the sense of solidarity. This can only happen meaningfully and effectively when it takes place at the most local level of the local Church. In AMECEA ecclesiastical structures, this means at the level of the Small Christian Community.

Jesus' preaching and ministry — which we may describe as his pastoral strategy — was based on *presence*. He was present to his subjects, to those who were rejected by "respectable" society, and hence the accusations against him as the Evangelists must have recalled them. It is obvious, again in the Gospels, that presence must be practiced by anyone who would truly be Jesus' disciple. For Jesus the gist of this was to go into the villages, enter people's houses and eat with them — such was the beginning of God's reign.

The practice of subsidiarity facilitates the Church's presence in a given place. It promotes solidarity, the sign of the empowering Spirit of Christ. The dynamics of subsidiarity, presence and solidarity, therefore, constitute the work of the Spirit in the Church-as-family. But practical subsidiarity, presence and solidarity are not given realities; they are elements to be constantly struggled for and achieved, even if ever so partially. But every step in that direction is significant, and such steps are only possible through socialisation. "The individual Christian's personal responsibility towards justice, community solidarity and the social outcasts has to be awakened and then channelled through the common solidarity of a larger community by the pastoral agents".¹⁸

Socialisation means involvement, but right and purposeful involvement implies and demands training. This is where catechetical instruction and ongoing catechesis, the training and formation of pastoral agents, and the orientation of Christian higher educational institutions in our region come in. Do we train for exclusion or inclusion? Do we break down boundaries and castes or do we erect them? Do we promote involvement and solidarity regardless of existing classes, or do we view such with suspicion as a threat against our own status?

Emphasis is correctly placed when, in socialisation, leadership is underlined. The influence of correct leader-

ship cannot be over emphasised in this regard. We have Jesus himself and his activity as an example. In our own day, it is not possible to under-estimate the influence of the papacy in shaping the outlook of the universal Church. We know what tremendous impact a charismatic Bishop or parish priest can make in a Diocese or parish.

Eastern Africa is fortunate to have had some good leaders, both civil and religious, who have been genuinely committed to the cause of the marginalised. At one time in the '60s and '70s it seemed that the Church would make "the preferential option for the poor" its main pastoral orientation. But then came factors that began to undercut this orientation. There was, first, the strong centralising effort in the Church since the late '70s which went against the spirit of subsidiarity, so that even the competence of national or regional Episcopal Conferences to decide on local pastoral approaches was put into question by highly-placed Roman authorities. Then there was the collapse of the Eastern ideological bloc at around the same time, leaving the world with only one powerful social-economic ideology. This facilitated the phenomenon we know as globalisation, the collapsing of the entire world into one economic and cultural system with its centre in the few Northern most powerful industrialised nations. The consequence of centralisation, both in the Church and in the wider world, is to leave the poor more marginalised than ever. Whether as nations, groups or individuals, the poor are now truly expendable, truly excluded.

It will take extraordinary dedication and skill on the part of leaders to make solidarity a reality, even if not a respectable one, to any degree. Yet, it is possible. If leadership training in the Church emphasises once again service, respect for the humanity of all people, simplicity in lifestyle, cooperation and sharing of resources, we might yet again be surprised by the power of Christ's Spirit to transform the Church and the world.

Jesus Christ continues to inspire and empower the Church through the activity of his Spirit. As John 14:26 says; "But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything and remind you of all I have told you". The Paraclete is the advocate in the practical sense of the word, the *defender of the accused*. So, what the Paraclete does or means to do today in the Church is the very same thing that Jesus did in his life-time, to defend the lowly of the earth and bring all human beings into one communion.

Notes:

¹ Acts 5:36 gives the example of Theudas, a historical figure testified to by the historian Josephus. See J.L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965, p. 886.

² For details about this I am indebted to J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, Harper, San Francisco, 1995; E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: Allen Lane, 1993; M.I. Aguilar, *Ministry to Social and Religious Outcasts in Africa*, Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 1995, pp. 29 - 41.

³ Crossan, *Jesus*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴ For example, see Mk 4:11-12; Mt 13:10-17; Lk 8:9-10; Jn 12:40.

⁵ See Mt 13:47-48; Lk 19:12-27; Mt 21:33-44; Lk 15:11-32.

⁶ See Mt 9:33.

⁷ See Mt 13:54-56.

^{7b} See W. Saayman and K. Krtzinger, eds., *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch's Work Considered*, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 91.

⁸ Sexist language has been removed by the author from these quotations.

⁹ Laurenti Magesa, "Christ the Liberator and African Today", in J.N.K. Mugambi and L. Magesa, eds, *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, Nairobi: Initiatives, pp.85-86.

¹⁰ E.E. Uzukwu, *A listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in the African Churches*, New York: Orbis, 1996, p. 66.

¹¹ J.M. Waliggo, "The African Clan as the True Model of the African Church", in J.N.K. Mugambi and L. Magesa, eds, *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, Nairobi: Initiatives, 1990, p. 117.

¹² M. Amaladoss, "Mission in a Post-Modern World: A Call to be Counter-cultural", in *SEDOS Bulletin*, vol. 28, nn. 8, 9, p. 238.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-39. The reader may note that Amaladoss's hesitancy about the image of Body to describe the reality of the Church community is in slight opposition to *Lumen Gentium*, e.g. no. 7.

¹⁴ See *Ecclesia in Africa*, nn. 65-66.

¹⁵ See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; Study Edition*, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988.

Also B.M. Brazauskas, "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults", in R.P. McBrien, ed, *The Harpercollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, San Francisco: Harper, 1995, pp. 1119-1123.

¹⁶ See Aguilar, *Ministry*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Aguilar, *Ministry*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

Ref.: *The Model of "Church-as-Family": Meeting the African Challenge*, CUEA Publications, 1999.

Motivation Missionnaire Aujourd'hui

Introduction

Au cours des trente dernières années, nous avons été témoins d'un changement important dans la compréhension que l'Église a d'elle-même et de ses relations avec les autres religions. D'une manière un peu trop simpliste peut-être, nous pourrions dire que l'Église aujourd'hui ne prétend plus être la seule à posséder la vérité divine ni être l'agent exclusif du salut. Elle reconnaît que les autres religions, comme l'islam, l'hindouisme, le judaïsme et la religion traditionnelle, possèdent aussi des rayons de la lumière divine, et que les membres de ces religions ne manquent pas de la grâce nécessaire pour être sauvés.

Cette perspective, naturellement, soulève des questions délicates concernant la mission de l'Église. Si les autres religions fournissent des moyens de salut à ceux qui les suivent, la mission est-elle encore nécessaire ou appropriée et si oui, pourquoi ? Quelle est la motivation fondamentale pour la mission dans les nations ? Pour une Société comme la SMA, spécifiquement fondée pour l'évangélisation des non-chrétiens, ces questions n'ont pas un intérêt purement académique. Elles touchent notre véritable raison d'être. En essayant de répondre à ces questions et de fonder une motivation adéquate pour continuer la mission de l'Église auprès des nations, cet article veut se mettre à l'écoute des théologiens et des missiologues catholiques et de ce qu'ils ont écrit sur le sujet.

Les plus récentes approches du problème de la motivation missionnaire tendent à se ranger dans l'un de ces trois camps. Le premier est formé de ceux qui mettent l'accent sur les limites des autres religions et présentent l'Église comme une voie de salut plus sûre. Dans le second, il y a ceux qui mettent l'accent sur le Règne de Dieu et sur la responsabilité de l'Église de le proclamer et de l'étendre dans le monde. Dans le troisième camp, nous voyons ceux qui insistent en disant que, pour accomplir sa vocation comme sacrement universel de salut, l'Église doit s'incarner parmi les peuples et les cultures. Ces trois approches doivent être vues en contraste avec celle du passé: le souci du salut des autres qui donnait toute sa force à l'élan missionnaire de l'Église vers le monde non chrétien. Notre première étape sera donc un bref regard sur le passé.

Regard sur le passé

Jusque récemment encore, le but premier de la mission et sa motivation théologique fondamentale

était le salut des âmes. L'Église se voyait elle-même comme seul dépositaire de la révélation divine et unique moyen de salut pour tous les peuples. En général, les autres religions étaient vues comme un simple mélange d'idolâtrie et superstitions. Faire partie de l'Église était le seul moyen sûr de salut.¹ D'où l'absolue nécessité et l'urgence de la mission de l'Église aux nations.

En même temps, le salut des âmes n'était pas la seule raison pour la mission. Les territoires missionnaires étaient vus comme sous-développés et en grand besoin des bienfaits que les sociétés chrétiennes plus développées pouvaient leur offrir, spécialement dans les domaines de l'éducation et de la santé. Ainsi, beaucoup de missionnaires consacèrent une grande partie de leur temps et de leur énergie à mettre en place et à soutenir des services de santé et d'éducation dans les pays de mission. Cependant, un tel travail était considéré comme secondaire face à la mission première de l'Église: le salut éternel de ceux qui n'avaient jamais entendu parler du Christ.

Immédiatement après le Concile Vatican II, beaucoup de théologiens catholiques continuèrent à voir le but principal de la mission en termes de salut éternel pour ceux qui n'avaient jamais entendu parler du Christ. Bien qu'ils acceptent l'existence de valeurs positives dans les religions non chrétiennes, et qu'ils affirment la possibilité de salut pour ceux qui n'avaient jamais entendu parler du Christ ou de son Église, ces théologiens continuaient d'insister sur la nécessité de l'Église comme le moyen le plus sûr de salut.

L'Église: un moyen de salut plus sûr

Un certain nombre de théologiens catholiques après Vatican II disent que, bien que les non-chrétiens puissent être sauvés en agissant en accord avec les croyances de leur propre religion, ils auraient cependant une meilleure chance de salut à l'intérieur de l'Église. Cette dernière serait donc gravement irresponsable si elle ne leur proposait pas cette meilleure voie. Paul de Surgy déclare que, malgré les valeurs positives des religions non chrétiennes, la situation de leurs membres est néanmoins « précaire et manifestement moins favorable au salut qu'une foi explicite au Christ et une appartenance visible à l'Église ».²

Domenico Grasso soutient que la difficulté de réaliser le salut en dehors de l'Église est une ample justification de la mission auprès des Nations. S'il est difficile pour le chrétien « qui connaît Dieu et dispose

de tous les moyens du salut» de faire acte de charité, «nous devons dire que cette difficulté est encore beaucoup plus grande pour les païens qui sont privés de tous ces moyens et qui ont souvent une imparfaite connaissance de Dieu». ³ Dès lors, il incombe à l'Église «de mettre à la disposition du païen qui est normalement aussi et même plus faible que le chrétien, ces mêmes moyens de salut qui feront sa tâche plus aisée, son chemin infiniment plus sûr, son avenir infiniment plus favorable». ⁴ Selon le missiologue Joseph Masson, c'est la volonté de Dieu «de donner à la bonne volonté des hommes un chemin normal et plus aisé pour venir jusqu'à lui, par le Christ et l'Église». ⁵

Un théologien irlandais, Kevin McNamara, affirme que toute remise en question de la motivation traditionnelle pour le travail missionnaire «a besoin d'être traitée avec grande prudence». ⁶ «Nous ne pouvons pas, insistait-il, utiliser la possibilité de salut pour les non-croyants comme base d'une règle pratique pour l'annonce de l'Évangile». ⁷ Les gens ont un droit de recevoir l'Évangile «qui nous a été donné par Dieu comme un puissant moyen pour la conversion des pécheurs». ⁸ Il ne peut pas y avoir de plus grande faute contre l'amour, insiste McNamara, que «de négliger de prêcher l'Évangile aux non-chrétiens. Là où cette négligence existe, le salut est mis en danger non seulement pour ceux qui en sont coupables mais aussi pour tous les autres... La prédication missionnaire de l'Évangile ne peut être omise sans conséquences nuisibles et peut-être même fatales pour le salut éternel d'un grand nombre de gens». ⁹

Charles Davis prend une ligne quelque peu semblable dans son article «Les incroyants peuvent-ils être sauvés?». ¹⁰ Alors qu'il admet que les non-chrétiens sont capables d'une «foi implicite», cela reste, dit-il, «la foi mutilée d'infirmes dans la vie de foi» jusqu'à ce qu'elle soit complétée et rendue parfaite par la présentation explicite de l'Évangile. Dès lors, les chrétiens «ont une sérieuse responsabilité apostolique... donner aux autres la chance de la vraie vie de foi dont ils sont privés. Si Dieu a veillé à ce que dans chaque événement, tout homme ait l'occasion de parvenir au salut, il a aussi choisi librement les chrétiens comme responsables de porter tous les fruits de la Rédemption au reste de l'Humanité». ¹¹

Même un théologien de la stature de Karl Rahner semble avoir soutenu cette ligne de pensée dans quelques-uns de ses premiers écrits. Dans un article des années soixante, il dit que la foi explicite du chrétien et son adhésion visible à l'Église «offre une plus grande chance de salut pour l'individu que s'il était resté simplement un chrétien anonyme». ¹²

Cette motivation missionnaire (de pourvoir les non-chrétiens de moyens de salut plus faciles et plus sûrs) a l'avantage de maintenir la continuité avec le passé. Cela ne demande des missionnaires qu'une légère modification de leur motivation traditionnelle

pour leur apostolat. Tandis que les non-chrétiens peuvent être sauvés en dehors des limites juridiques de l'Église, l'appartenance à cette Église demeure le moyen de salut le plus facile et le plus assuré. En gardant, comme elle le fait, la visée de l'Église sur le salut individuel et sur l'entrée des gens dans l'Église, cette approche fournit aussi aux missionnaires des buts précis et des méthodes claires. La principale tâche de la mission est de convertir le plus de gens possible au Christ, par l'appartenance à l'Église.

Si attirante qu'elle soit, cette approche «du plus sûr moyen de salut» devient de plus en plus difficile à soutenir aujourd'hui et pour des raisons évidentes. D'abord, elle semble n'être guère plus qu'une version déguisée et diplomatique d'une position extrême prise il y a quelques cinquante ans par Leonard Feeney. Ce jésuite américain était en faveur d'une interprétation strictement littérale de l'axiome «*Extra ecclesiam, nulla salus* (hors de l'Église, pas de salut)» et, insistait-il, que c'est seulement en devenant membres de la véritable Église que les gens peuvent être sauvés. ¹³ Tandis que le magistère condamnait la thèse de Feeney, la ligne de base de sa pensée continue de trouver des supports même dans l'Église d'après Vatican II. Le salut est encore la carotte pouvant être balancée devant les non-chrétiens pour les persuader d'entrer dans l'Église.

Deuxièmement, cette approche semble ne donner qu'une adhésion pleine de réticences et conditionnelle à l'enseignement clair de Vatican II sur la possibilité du salut en dehors des limites juridiques de l'Église. Si Dieu offre aux non-chrétiens le salut par la médiation de leur propre religion, il est sûrement mesquin et invraisemblable de penser qu'il leur offre seulement une demi-chance de salut ou bien qu'il leur fournit des moyens moins adéquats de salut que ceux qu'il propose aux chrétiens.

Troisièmement, offrir aux gens des moyens meilleurs et plus aisés de salut sent le pélagianisme. Pélagie enseigne que, tandis que les païens peuvent être sauvés par la simple force de leurs vertus humaines, les chrétiens peuvent l'être plus aisément par la vertu de la grâce du Christ.

Enfin, d'un point de vue pratique, aussi rapidement que puisse augmenter le nombre de ses membres dans le futur, il est tout à fait probable que l'Église ne constituera jamais qu'une minorité importante de la population du monde. Les êtres humains dans leur plus grand nombre seront-ils laissés à eux-mêmes pour faire leur salut avec des moyens moins efficaces et de moins bonne qualité que ceux dont disposeraient les membres de l'Église?

Un nombre de plus en plus important de théologiens catholiques répondent par la négative à cette question. La plus grande partie de l'humanité n'est pas abandonnée à elle-même pour faire son salut avec des moyens imparfaits et d'efficacité douteuse. Le salut ne peut pas être plus facilement disponible pour les membres de l'Église que pour ceux qui sont en dehors. L'amour

salvifique de Dieu est le même pour tous les êtres humains, quelle que soit l'époque à laquelle ils appartiennent ou l'ère géographique dans laquelle ils vivent.

Toute histoire humaine est une histoire de salut, parce qu'elle est imprégnée de la présence de Dieu, qui, dans l'amour, va à la rencontre de tous les êtres humains. Voici ce qu'écrit Eugène Hillman: «La même grâce par laquelle la conversion intérieure est réalisée pour les chrétiens de bonne volonté est aussi disponible pour les non-chrétiens de bonne volonté... Et, s'il y a des degrés de sainteté parmi les membres visibles de l'Eglise, alors ces mêmes degrés doivent exister de la même façon pour ceux qui, à cause de leur situation historique, ne peuvent pas avoir une foi explicite dans le Christ».¹⁴

Alors, le salut n'est pas plus facilement disponible pour «ceux auxquels il a été donné de naître au bon moment et à la bonne place: il est pour toute l'humanité. L'amour de Dieu n'est pas frustré par la venue relativement tardive du Christ dans l'histoire, ni par la grande léthargie des chrétiens pour annoncer cet événement parmi les nations».¹⁵ Si cette reconnaissance de la disponibilité universelle du salut divin gêne certains missionnaires en raison de possibles «effets de refroidissement sur le zèle apostolique», alors il est temps, dit Hillman, de faire «une honnête réévaluation: un réexamen radical et résolu des buts et des motivations du mouvement missionnaire».¹⁶ Ce dont on a besoin, c'est d'un point de départ nouveau et d'une approche nouvelle pour toute la question du sens et de la nécessité de l'Eglise et de son activité missionnaire. Beaucoup de théologiens et de missiologues ont trouvé dans la notion du Royaume ou Règne de Dieu un nouveau point de départ pour comprendre la mission de l'Eglise, et en conséquence, une nouvelle motivation.

La mission: Proclamer et promouvoir le règne de Dieu

S'éloignant de ce centrage étroit de l'ecclésiologie sur le salut comme motivation de la mission, plusieurs théologiens catholiques pensent aujourd'hui que la tâche principale de la mission est de proclamer et de promouvoir le Règne de Dieu. La mission de l'Eglise est une continuation de celle du Christ. Comme le fait remarquer John Fuellenbach, le but principal de la vie du Christ était la proclamation et l'inauguration du Royaume de Dieu.¹⁷ Le Royaume «n'est pas seulement le thème central de la prédication de Jésus, le point de référence de la plupart de ses paraboles et le sujet d'un grand nombre de ses paroles, il est aussi le contenu de ses actions symboliques».¹⁸ Le royaume de Dieu est le règne de la liberté, de la fraternité et de l'amour. C'est le nouvel ordre divin de paix, de justice et d'amour. C'est un ordre de libération intégrale, englobant l'humain dans toutes ses dimensions, personnelles et communautaires, spirituelles et matérielles. C'est un ordre qui a une

préférence spéciale pour le pauvre.¹⁹

En tant que communauté de ceux qui ont été choisis pour continuer la mission de Jésus, l'Eglise doit se définir en relation avec le Royaume, qui veut embrasser tous les humains et toute la création. L'Eglise n'est pas le Royaume, pas même dans sa forme présente sur la terre. Elle est, ainsi que le remarque Michael Amaladoss, «le symbole et la servante du Royaume».²⁰ Comme symbole, sa tâche est d'être lumière des nations, de donner un clair témoignage aux valeurs du Royaume. Comme servante, elle a à promouvoir le Règne de Dieu dans le monde, à discerner les signes des temps et à collaborer avec tous ces mouvements de grâce par lesquels l'Esprit Saint fait advenir le Royaume dans et pour le monde.²¹

Selon Amaladoss, la mission de l'Eglise dans le service du Royaume comporte trois dimensions essentielles et reliées entre elles: promotion humaine, inculturation et dialogue interreligieux. Promouvoir le Royaume, c'est, d'abord et avant tout, s'impliquer dans le combat incessant entre opprimés et oppresseurs et faire sienne la cause des opprimés. Dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, la promotion de la justice est l'élément clef pour l'avènement du Règne de Dieu. Mais pour promouvoir la justice et vraiment libérer les hommes de tout ce qui les opprime personnellement, socialement, religieusement, l'Eglise doit s'impliquer dans la transformation des cultures. Et les cultures ne peuvent être transformées que de l'intérieur. C'est seulement lorsque l'Eglise pénètre une culture qu'elle peut être prophétique et la transformer.²²

Dans ce processus de changement, l'Eglise n'est pas seule. En centrant clairement son attention sur le Royaume, elle est amenée à voir les membres des autres religions comme des collaborateurs plutôt que des adversaires. Et ainsi, le dialogue interreligieux devient un élément vital dans la construction du Royaume. Dans ce dialogue, quelques membres des autres religions peuvent se sentir appelés par l'Esprit pour devenir disciples du Christ d'une manière plus profonde. Cependant, le but du dialogue n'est pas de faire des convertis pour l'Eglise mais de promouvoir le Royaume.²³

Les relations entre ces trois dimensions de la mission de l'Eglise au service du Royaume sont exprimées de manière succincte dans le «Document Final de la 34e Congrégation Générale de la Société de Jésus» où il est dit: Pas de service de la foi sans promotion de la Justice, entrée dans les cultures, ouverture aux autres expériences religieuses.

-Pas de promotion de justice sans communication de la foi, transformation des cultures, collaboration avec les autres traditions.

-Pas d'inculturation sans communication de foi avec les autres, dialogue avec les autres traditions, engagement pour la Justice.

-Pas de dialogue sans partage de foi avec les autres, évaluation des cultures, souci de la Justice (Art 19).

John Fuellenbach adopte lui aussi une vision de la

mission centrée sur le Royaume, mais il insiste davantage que Amaladoss sur son aspect ecclésiologique. Construire le Royaume de Dieu dans le monde ne veut pas dire négliger la croissance de l'Église. Bien que l'Église ne doive pas s'identifier elle-même avec le Royaume, elle est néanmoins appelée à en être le signe. Un signe pour être utile à tous doit être vu. Dès lors, l'Église doit lutter « pour bâtir des communautés de témoins partout dans le monde, dans chaque culture, parmi tous les peuples et toutes régions géographiques ». ²⁴

Cependant, lorsque Fuellenbach parle de croissance, il ne s'agit pas d'abord d'une expansion du nombre des membres de l'Église, mais qu'elle devienne un signe plus authentique du Royaume et qu'elle rende un témoignage plus effectif de l'action de Dieu transformant le monde. ²⁵ L'Église existe, non pour elle-même, mais à cause du Royaume qui advient dans notre monde de bien des manières et en beaucoup de lieux, bien au-delà des frontières institutionnelles de celle-ci. En fin de compte, Fuellenbach rejoint Amaladoss lorsqu'il évoque les missionnaires encore trop préoccupés de bâtir des communautés tout en négligeant les défis plus récents du dialogue interreligieux et la promotion de la justice.

La motivation pour la mission fondée sur le Royaume redonne une « espérance de vie » à toute une nouvelle génération de missionnaires. Elle libère l'Église de l'intolérable fardeau de la responsabilité du salut du monde et lui donne encore de solides motivations pour la mission. Comme le remarque Fuellenbach, un monde transformé par l'avènement du Royaume, comme l'envisageait le Christ, demeure « la vision la plus grandiose que le monde ait jamais connue ». ²⁶ De plus, même si tous les hommes devaient être sauvés dans le monde à venir, le Royaume tel que le voyait le Christ est encore loin d'être une réalité dans ce monde. Avoir le Règne de Dieu comme but de la mission, cela a élargi de manière significative le champ du travail missionnaire au-delà des activités traditionnelles d'enseignement, de catéchèse, de baptêmes et de mise en place des structures d'Église. Le service du Royaume a pourvu les missionnaires d'une structure théologique qui fait de l'engagement pour la justice, la paix, la réconciliation, et le dialogue interreligieux des dimensions essentielles et intégrales de la mission de l'Église et non plus des éléments préliminaires ou secondaires.

Tous les missionnaires n'ont pas encore trouvé dans le service du Royaume une motivation adéquate pour entreprendre de traverser les frontières, cet acte spécifique et souvent coûteux qui caractérise la mission à toutes les nations. Si l'Église est seulement une des nombreuses agences qui contribuent à la croissance du Royaume dans le monde, a-t-elle quelque chose à offrir que les autres n'ont pas? Et en plus, recentrer la mission sur le Royaume tend à minimiser la signification de l'Église dans le plan du salut de Dieu. L'Église peut être un signe important du Royaume, mais elle n'est pas le seul.

Quelques théologiens sont même allés jusqu'à dire

que, comme le Christ, l'Église doit mourir à elle-même comme institution pour donner naissance au Royaume. ²⁷ Le service de l'humanité, non pas le service de l'Église, doit être prépondérant pour la mission. Construire l'Église comme institution doit être remplacé par des idéaux plus humbles tels que entrer en solidarité avec les pauvres et prendre part à leurs efforts pour se libérer des forces d'oppression qui se lèvent contre eux, respecter la diversité culturelle et religieuse et promouvoir l'unité de la communauté humaine par le dialogue interreligieux, collaborer avec d'autres acteurs dans leurs efforts pour résoudre les conflits et bâtir la paix, s'opposer à l'exploitation des ressources de la terre et promouvoir l'intégrité de la création. Bien que ce soit là de très beaux idéaux, bien sûr, ils semblent être bien loin des préoccupations habituelles et quotidiennes des missionnaires qui sont sur le terrain. Ne sont-ils pas des buts très vastes qui pourraient bien ne jamais être réalisés dans l'histoire? Est-ce que ce programme du Royaume ne sape pas finalement tout sens d'urgence à proclamer l'Évangile et à planter l'Église parmi les non-chrétiens? Et, mises à part les valeurs du Royaume, que fait-on de la vérité que proclame l'Évangile? ²⁸

La grande encyclique missionnaire du Pape Jean-Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, porte un jugement critique sur les efforts faits pour réécrire le programme de la mission de l'Église dans les termes des valeurs du Royaume. Bien que la tâche de l'Église soit de promouvoir le Règne de Dieu, cela ne peut se réduire à travailler pour une vision sécularisée et humaniste du monde. Cela ne signifie pas non plus promouvoir une vision religieuse commune qui combinerait les idéaux et les valeurs de toutes les religions (Rm 19). Le Royaume que l'Église est appelée à proclamer et à servir est indissociablement lié à la proclamation de l'Évangile du Christ et à son extension (Rm 19).

Redemptoris Missio affirme la continuelle nécessité, la convenance et l'urgence de la mission de l'Église auprès des nations et insiste pour que celle-ci contienne la proclamation explicite du Christ comme Sauveur du monde (Rm 5). De plus, le salut apporté par le Christ n'est pas seulement intérieur, personnel, spirituel ou une réalité d'un autre monde. Il est plutôt un salut intégral comprenant tous les aspects matériels et spirituels, personnels, historiques et politiques de l'existence humaine (Rm 11). Ce salut intégral est offert à chacun, mais jamais en dehors de la médiation du Christ et de son Église (Rm 10). Bien que l'encyclique n'établisse pas la base théologique de cette déclaration d'importance vitale, elle suggère où le fondement peut en être trouvé: dans la notion de l'Église « sacrement du salut pour le genre humain » (Rm 20).

L'Église: Sacrement de salut universel

Nous avons vu les difficultés que cela implique

d'affirmer que l'Église est une voie de salut plus assurée et plus facile. Nous avons aussi vu que le service du Royaume ne parvient pas à fournir une motivation adéquate pour un témoignage explicite au Christ et pour l'extension de l'Église parmi les non-chrétiens. En suivant *Redemptoris Missio*, je crois que, dans la notion théologique fondamentale de l'Église comme sacrement du salut, nous pouvons trouver une motivation adéquate pour la mission de l'Église aujourd'hui auprès des nations.

La notion de l'Église comme sacrement du salut n'est pas tout à fait nouvelle. Comme le souligne Avery Dulles, cette notion était déjà contenue dans les écrits de Cyprien, d'Augustin et de Thomas d'Aquin.²⁹ Dans les temps plus récents, cela fut un thème important dans les écrits d'Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Yves Congar, Piet Smulders, Gustave Martelet et beaucoup d'autres.³⁰ Je n'ai pas l'intention de donner ici un résumé de ce thème théologique important. Il a déjà été traité d'une manière suffisante par Christian van Bunn en son article de la série «Mission aux nations» du Bulletin SMA.³¹ Ce que je veux souligner est la signification de ce thème comme motif de la mission de l'Église aux nations.

Les implications missionnaires de l'Église comme sacrement du salut ont été traitées d'une manière complète et solide par Eugène Hillman dans son livre *The Wider Ecumenism*. Pour Hillman, l'Église est nécessaire pour le salut. Cependant cette nécessité appartient non pas à l'ordre juridique mais à l'ordre sacramental.³² Le sacrement est un symbole, un signe visible et tangible d'une réalité invisible et mystérieuse. Un symbole est seulement une part de la réalité qu'il signifie, mais c'est une part qui représente le tout. Par exemple, le corps humain est un symbole de la personne mais il n'est pas toute la personne. L'Eucharistie est un symbole de l'Église mais elle n'est pas toute l'Église. Bien plutôt, elle représente ce que l'Église est. De même, dire que l'Église est un sacrement, c'est dire qu'elle représente une réalité plus grande qu'elle-même. La réalité dont l'Église est le symbole est celle de la grâce salvatrice qui vient du Christ et embrasse toute l'humanité.³³

En tant que communauté sacramentelle et représentative, portant un témoignage explicite à la grâce du Christ sauveur, l'Église n'a pas à faire de chaque personne sur la terre un de ses membres. «La signification sacramentelle de l'Église peut être pleinement réalisée dans un peuple particulier, même si celle-ci peut ne pas englober juridiquement et numériquement chacun des membres particuliers de ce peuple. Comme le Christ représente toute l'humanité, ainsi l'Église, fermement et localement établie dans un peuple particulier, représente tous les membres de ce peuple. Précisément, à cause de la nature symbolique de l'Église, la réalisation de sa mission d'incarnation dans les nations ne doit pas être prise dans

un sens quantitativement et numériquement inclusif. L'important est que l'Église puisse être établie parmi un assez grand nombre de peuples pour symboliser la présence réelle du Christ parmi les hommes en tout point du monde».³⁴

L'affirmation que l'Église est le Sacrement du salut universel est plus une déclaration d'engagement qu'une déclaration de fait. C'est une expression de la vocation essentielle de l'Église. Pour réaliser cette vocation (être le sacrement d'un salut qui embrasse tous les peuples), l'Église doit constamment s'efforcer de s'incarner elle-même en chaque peuple et en chaque culture. Comme le dit Gustave Martelet: «L'Église ne sera pas sacrement aux yeux des gens simplement du fait qu'elle dit être telle. Pour être sacrement, elle doit s'engager elle-même à être le moyen de ce qu'elle signifie. Elle doit s'efforcer de rendre toujours plus apparent le sens qu'elle a dans le signe qu'elle est».³⁵

Pour l'Église, se refermer sur elle-même et cesser d'aller vers les autres serait nier sa vocation première, sa «raison d'être» même.³⁶ Comme le fait remarquer Hillman, «Là où l'Église est tournée sur elle-même pour s'occuper de ses membres en priorité, négligeant la mission universelle, les raisons chrétiennes de l'existence de la communauté sont perdues. Là, l'Église ne signifie rien de plus qu'une autre religion tribale; même si elle continue sur ce plan à servir ses membres immédiats, en leur procurant sécurité psychologique et autres aides que toutes les religions procurent. Alors elle peut disparaître complètement, elle a perdu sa signification spécifique».³⁷

La mission de l'Église n'est donc pas d'apporter le salut au monde. Le monde a déjà été sauvé par le Christ et il ne sera jamais plus sauvé que maintenant.³⁸ La mission de l'Église est de devenir un signe de plus en plus effectif, toujours plus universel, de ce salut que Dieu, dans le Christ, a destiné à l'humanité. C'est pourquoi, selon Hillman, la mission aux nations est la tâche première de l'Église.³⁹ C'est dans et à travers sa mission aux nations que l'Église accomplit sa vocation de sacrement du salut universel, représentation symbolique de Dieu Sauveur qui embrasse toute l'humanité dans le Christ. «Toutes les autres activités doivent venir après cela, dans l'ordre du temps et de l'urgence».⁴⁰

L'activité missionnaire ne doit pas être confondue avec ou réduite au travail pastoral et social en faveur des membres présents, ni avec les efforts pour refaire l'unité des chrétiens ni avec la réévangélisation des chrétiens non pratiquants. Ces œuvres, aussi importantes qu'elles soient, doivent être subordonnées à la tâche de «l'annonce de l'Évangile aux nations qui n'ont jamais vu s'élever au milieu d'elles le signe de leur salut ancré sur de solides fondations indigènes».⁴¹

À la différence des pasteurs, les missionnaires, selon Hillman, ne sont pas envoyés «à ceux parmi lesquels 'le Christ a déjà été proclamé' (Rm 15,20)

ou pour être absorbés dans le service ordinaire d'une communauté chrétienne existante... Le missionnaire pose la première fondation de l'Église dans un nouveau peuple puis dans un autre». ⁴² De cette manière, les missionnaires sont les catalyseurs de ce que Hillman appelle «le projet œcuménique» de Dieu dans l'histoire. ⁴³ Si l'Église est le sacrement du salut universel, cela n'est pas un privilège mais une responsabilité. C'est un appel à servir, un appel à aimer — un appel à aimer ou servir non seulement ceux qui sont proches, mais aussi ceux qui sont le plus loin de nous. ⁴⁴ Le missionnaire est celui qui rend effectif cet appel particulier d'une manière concrète, radicale et pratique.

En tant qu'acte d'amour, ce continuel mouvement de l'Église pour aller vers les autres peuples et les autres cultures n'a rien à voir avec un quelconque impérialisme culturel ou religieux. La mission de l'Église n'est pas d'étendre le domaine de la chrétienté ou de transplanter ailleurs l'Église telle qu'elle a existé à Jérusalem ou à Rome. Son souci, c'est créer quelque chose de nouveau, en incarnant l'Évangile dans tous les peuples et toutes les cultures. ⁴⁵

La mission signifie l'engagement à une nouvelle création. En allant en mission vers les autres, l'Église «s'ouvre elle-même à des modes d'existence aux formes diverses qui n'étaient pas les siens auparavant. Ainsi elle s'humilie afin d'assumer, d'expérimenter, d'exprimer et de célébrer une vie nouvelle de tous les autres peuples parmi lesquels elle n'a pas encore d'existence indigène». ⁴⁶ Alors le chemin de la mission doit être celui de la solidarité, de l'inculturation et du dialogue, suivant l'exemple du Christ qui, par son incarnation, s'est engagé lui-même dans les circonstances sociales et culturelles particulières des gens parmi lesquels il a vécu.

La première action du missionnaire doit être d'entrer dans la vie du peuple au milieu duquel il se trouve, d'expérimenter ses luttes quotidiennes pour sa survie, de partager ses souffrances et ses célébrations, d'être en lien avec son expérience de Dieu et de son histoire comme peuple aimé et sauvé par Lui. Le travail missionnaire n'est pas d'apporter un peuple à Dieu ou d'apporter Dieu à un peuple, ce qui voudrait dire que Dieu n'est pas déjà présent dans sa vie. Le travail missionnaire est né dans la contemplation. Le missionnaire s'efforce de reconnaître et de discerner comment Dieu a été actif et présent dans un peuple particulier avant qu'il arrive. Dans cette écoute et ce discernement, les missionnaires amèneront le peuple au service duquel ils travaillent à voir plus clairement les nombreuses manières par lesquelles Dieu touche leur vie.

Les missionnaires qui prennent le temps d'être avec les gens, et d'apprendre d'eux les chemins de Dieu, trouvent invariablement qu'ils reçoivent plus qu'ils ne donnent. Quand ils deviennent leurs amis et

quand ils les aident à dire et apprécier leur expérience religieuse, ils découvrent que leur propre sens de la présence de Dieu est grandement enrichi. Ainsi leur mission n'est pas seulement une activité à sens unique pour donner ou apporter; c'est vraiment un processus d'échange — on donne et on reçoit dans la liberté et dans l'amour.

Conclusion

Le but de cet article a été d'essayer de trouver une raison appropriée et suffisante pour la mission de l'Église aux nations aujourd'hui. Nous avons vu comment la motivation dominante jusque récemment — le salut des âmes — était ébranlée ou du moins rendue quelque peu problématique par l'enseignement clair de Vatican II sur le travail de l'Esprit Saint et l'existence de la grâce en dehors des frontières de la véritable Église. Nous avons alors examiné trois tentatives pour trouver une motivation alternative pour le travail missionnaire.

La première tentative soutient que, bien que les non-chrétiens puissent être sauvés par la pratique consciencieuse de leur propre religion, l'Église offre un moyen de salut plus sûr et plus facile. Ce serait un grave manquement de charité chrétienne si l'Église ne se proposait pas elle-même avec ses moyens de salut à tous les peuples. Cette manière de regarder la mission qui reste très proche de celle d'avant Vatican II, tout en soulignant le sens d'apostolat spirituel de l'Église, semble déprécier la valeur salvifique des autres religions.

La deuxième tentative que nous avons examinée met de côté la question du salut et centre la mission de l'Église sur le Royaume et le Règne de Dieu. Cette manière de regarder soutient que le but principal de l'Église n'est pas le salut des âmes mais bien l'avènement du règne de Dieu, règne de justice, de paix, d'amour dans le monde présent. Dans cette perspective, le service du Royaume est la principale motivation de la mission de l'Église parmi les nations. Cette approche, comme nous l'avons vu, élargit de manière significative la portée du travail missionnaire et insiste sur la contribution de l'Église pour la création d'un monde meilleur. Cependant, il lui manque de pouvoir fournir un fondement adéquat pour la proclamation explicite du Christ par l'Église et pour l'établissement de communautés ecclésiales.

La troisième approche, comme nous l'avons vu, fonde la motivation missionnaire dans la nature de l'Église comme sacrement de salut universel. Bien que ce ne soit pas une nécessité juridique pour le salut d'être membre de l'Église, la médiation sacramentelle de l'Église, basée sur la médiation unique du Christ réalisée une fois pour toutes, est instrument de salut pour tous les peuples. La vocation de l'Église est d'être le sacrement de salut pour tous — pour chaque tribu, langue, peuple et nation. Si l'Église veut accomplir cette vocation, elle doit s'incarner dans chaque peuple et chaque culture, et ceci a été, est et

continuera d'être sa mission fondamentale dans le monde.

La manière dont l'Église accomplit cette mission (d'être sacrement de salut pour tous) doit être cohérente avec sa reconnaissance de l'action de l'Esprit Saint et de la présence de la grâce parmi ceux qui suivent les autres religions. Dès lors, elle doit passer par le dialogue et l'inculturation. L'Église apprend autant qu'elle reçoit dans l'exercice de sa mission auprès des nations. Il semblerait que cette approche fournisse la base théologique et la motivation la plus solide de la mission aux nations. Elle allie les points forts des deux premières; approches et elle en évite les faiblesses. Elle donne aux missionnaires un sens fort de leur identité et les appelle à être vraiment ouverts aux autres peuples, à leurs cultures et religions. Ainsi la semence (de la Parole), déjà semée par Dieu, peut «grandir sur son propre terrain, obéir à ses propres besoins naissants, et former ses pousses de vie nouvelle».⁴⁷

Notes:

(1) Cf. Cyprien, Épître 73,21. L'affirmation de Cyprien qu'appartenir à l'Église est nécessaire pour le salut semble avoir été prise de manière tout à fait littérale par le pape Grégoire XVI dans son encyclique *Mirari Vos* en 1842. Plus tard, cependant, le pape Pie IX admettait que ceux qui, sans faute de leur part, demeuraient ignorants de la vraie Église pouvaient être sauvés en suivant leur conscience.

(2) *The Mystery of salvation*, Sheed and Ward, Londres, 1966 p. 199.

(3) "The reasons for Missionary Activity" dans *Teaching All Nations*, octobre 1966, p. 268.

(4) *Ibid.*

(5) Dans *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, éd. Joseph Neuner SJ, Burns & Oates, Londres, 1967, p. 133.

(6) "Go make disciples – The Implications for a Believing Community". Dans *The Church is Mission* (Une compilation d'articles à la Semaine Nationale d'Étude sur la Mission à Navan Irlande 1968), publiée par Geoffrey Chapman Ltd. Dublin, 1969, p. 34

(7) *Op. cit.*, p.35.

(8) *Ibid.*

(9) *Op. cit.*, p.36.

(10) Dans *The Study of Theology*, Sheed and Ward, Londres, 1962, pp. 127-133.

(11) *Op.cit.*, p. 133.

(12) "Christianity and non-Christian Religions" dans *The Church: Readings in Theology*, publié par R.J. Kennedy & Sons, New York, 1963, p. 133.

(13) Cité dans Yves Congar O.P. *The Wide World My Parish*, Darton, Longman & Todd, Londres, 1961, p. 102.

(14) *The Wider Ecumenisme*, Herder & Herder, New York, 1968, p. 49.

(15) *Ibid.*

(16) *Op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

(17) "Le Royaume de Dieu: le message central de Jésus vit dans les défis d'aujourd'hui" (Conférence donnée au SEDOS le 14 février 1996 à Rome) p. 1.

(18) *Ibid.*

(19) Cf Art. cit., p.7.

(20) Cette expression est tirée de la causerie "Inculturation et dialogue"

donnée par M. Amaladoss, SJ, au IMU Jubilee Seminar, Dublin, en Novembre 1995. La distinction entre le Royaume et l'Église (et ses implications cruciales pour la mission de l'Église) est aussi développée par John Fuellenbach, *art cit.* pp. 6-7.

(21) Cf. M. Amaladoss "Les nouveaux visages de la mission", SEDOS Bulletin, 15 février 1995, p. 45.

(22) "Inculturation et dialogue", test, p. 7.

(23) *Art. cit.*, p. 8.

(24) "The Kingdom of God", p. 12.

(25) *Ibid.*

(26) *Ibid.*

(27) Ceci est la thèse centrale du livre de Robert Adolfs *The Grave of God: Has the Church a Future*, Burns & Oates, Londres, 1967. Adolfs argumente qu'au lieu de s'efforcer d'augmenter son pouvoir et son influence dans le monde, l'Église doit se vider de tous les signes extérieurs de prestige et de pouvoir pour suivre l'exemple du Christ venu comme serviteur de l'humanité (cf. *op. cit.* pp. 109 et as.) Le regard d'Adolfs trouve un écho dans les plus récents ouvrages de Fuellenbach et Amaladoss.

(28) Cf. Lesslie Newbingin dans *Truth to Tell* (L'Évangile comme Vérité Publique). W.B. Eerdman's Pub.Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1991. Newbingin remet en question l'idée communément acceptée aujourd'hui que l'Église "n'est pas tant une source de vraie connaissance qu'une agence qui représente les bonnes valeurs". Il affirme au contraire que la mission centrale et toujours valable de l'Église est de proclamer l'Évangile de Jésus-Christ et de l'affirmer "comme vérité publique qui doit être reconnue comme vraie pour toute la vie de la société" (p. 2).

(29) Cf. Avery Dulles, SJ, *Models of the Church*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1974, p.58.

(30) *Op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

(31) Cf. "L'Église et la Mission" dans le Bulletin SMA, n. 90, juin 1993, pp. 54-71.

(32) Cf E. Hillman, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-86.

(33) *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

(34) *Op. cit.*, pp. 108-109.

(35) Gustave Martelet, *Deux mille ans d'Église en question*, Cerf, tome 1, Paris, 1984, p. 41.

(36) Selon Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, "Pour l'Église, renoncer à son effort pour évangéliser les non-chrétiens serait renoncer à la réalisation de sa propre catholicité -et ceci elle ne peut pas le faire". De *The Church We believe in*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1988, P. 131.

(37) Hillman, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

(38) *Op. cit.*, p. 124.

(39) *Op. cit.*, p. 126.

(40) *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

(41) *Ibid.*

(42) *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

(43) *Op. cit.*, p. 140.

(44) *Op. cit.*, p. 142.

(45) Cf E. Hillman, CSSp, *Toward an African Christianity* (inculturation appliquée) Paulist Press New York, 1993, pp.32-33.

(46) *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

(47) John Vjingaards, "New ways for Mission", *The Tablet*, 22 Octobre 1988,1), 1208.

Ref.: *Mission Étrangères de Paris*, n.337, Mars 1999.

The Way of Dialogue

A Chinese reporter asked me to write down my opinion on “Dialogue with China after Epiphany 2000”. I hesitated at first because I have already expressed my opinion, as a foreigner (cf. *Jiaoyou Shenghuo*, January 2000). What seems to me more important at the moment is dialogue among Chinese Catholics, priests, and Bishops. However, I decided to respond in writing to the reporter’s request. I write as a friend and a brother who, though a foreigner, feels very much part of the Chinese Church. I do not intend to impose my views. Exchanging views is healthy, and to dialogue about how to build a local Church makes us grow in our faith.

Our “sense of Church” must help us appreciate the Pope’s concern

We along with the Chinese Catholics from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Diaspora as well as those on the Mainland, the underground, as well as the open Church, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association leaders as well as the Catholic laity, all need to dialogue together in order to understand more clearly the complex situation of the Church in China strictly from the point of view of faith in Christ. Christ united all Chinese Catholics in one faith through Baptism. He is the only one who can reunite them again. His Spirit is stronger than all the political prejudices that have caused divisions in the past.

We can look at the efforts of the Holy See to normalize diplomatic relations from a Taiwan political and patriotic point of view, but I hope that as Catholics we can go beyond that. A sense of Church should help us to appreciate that the Pope has made efforts to normalize the life of faith of Catholics in China for the last 20 years. By sense of Church, I mean the ability of Catholics to care not only for their own needs or the needs of their own local Church but also for the needs of the whole Church. After what happened in Beijing on 6 January, the discussion on the normalization of Sino-Vatican relations is muted. But are we Catholics in Taiwan concerned about what happens to our Catholic brothers and sisters in Mainland China? If we just continue to do business with China without worrying about the religious issues there, is this not a sign that we Catholics in Taiwan are not concerned enough about the whole Church?

We should think beyond such issues as Taiwan independence, or the Mainland-Taiwan political confrontation, or any other political issue. Taiwan Catho-

lics, who are members of a political party, may have their own party-vision on whether to confront or to dialogue with the PRC. This, however, does not enter into our present reflection. If we as Catholics mix politics with our reflection on how better to understand the situation of the Church in China, I as a foreigner will remain silent. Furthermore, such a discussion will be very complex. I wonder whether we, outside, as well as those inside Mainland China, who so often fail to separate politics and faith, may not be responsible for much of the confusion about the Chinese Church. The Church in China today is experiencing changes unparalleled since the Cultural Revolution, and these are definitely not for the good of the Chinese Catholics. Are we aware of this, and as Catholics, are we concerned?

Modernization in China prompted the Pope to take an attitude of dialogue

The illegal consecration of bishops in Beijing on 6 January should not cause us to change our attitude on dialogue. For the last 18 years we have dialogued with Catholic authorities in Beijing, with Bishops as well as lay leaders of the Church. After the Cultural Revolution the PRC itself changed its attitude of confrontation. It became willing to co-operate with capitalistic countries that hold a totally different world view from that of China. That was the beginning of the open door policy of the PRC. China officially reintroduced “freedom of religion” in its Constitution (1982) and proved it with facts: the opening of churches, of seminaries and Sisters’ novitiates, printing of Bibles, praying openly for the Pope, patriotic Bishops asking and obtaining recognition from the Pope, etc. Even though the Church was still very much controlled, no one could deny the changes.

Deng Xiaoping’s Four Modernizations were fundamentally changing the economy, agriculture, industry, and scientific research in the PRC. Many were hoping that this policy would also lead to a modernization in the field of religion. Pope John Paul II himself took a positive attitude of dialogue and hope as evidenced in his speech to Chinese Catholics over Radio Veritas in Manila in 1981. He said: “Look to the future, not to the past!”.

Dialogue is more in line with the Gospel than confrontation

We, Church people, therefore, also took on an at-

titude of dialogue. In 1987, after visiting China several times, I wrote in the Italian weekly, *30 GIORNI*: “We are optimistic, yes, but not naïve”. Optimistic because of the positive changes which I have described above. But not naïve, because we observed that the government, assisted by the CCPA, strictly controlled even the internal religious matters of the Church. Chinese Bishops were not given full authority over their own Dioceses”. All this was against the law and the theology of the Church.

In articles for reader’s abroad I expressed much praise for the progress taking place in the field of religion, but, not being naïve, I also added some critical remarks. For this, I was refused a visa and became *persona non grata* for three years. In spite of that, I continue to believe that in our work, we Church people should observe the same policy of dialogue that the Pope observes in leading the Church. This attitude is more in line with the Gospel. It is better to remain in communication even if only to express disagreement. Confrontation will not help to normalize religious life in China, nor is it through confrontation that the PRC will be able to impose its own will on the Catholic Church.

After Epiphany 2000 underground and patriotic Catholics should enter into dialogue

I always find it difficult to understand why some Chinese friends continue to speak as if Chinese Catholics can only be considered good Catholics if they oppose the PRC Government. This may have been true during the Cultural Revolution when the PRC tried to eliminate the Chinese Catholic Church entirely. But after China introduced its policy of openness, it seemed advisable to try to dialogue also in the field of religion. We all know that many underground Catholics suffered much in the past. We fully understand why they find it difficult to follow our logic of dialogue with communist authorities. They know much better than we do the situation of total control over religion that has continued to exist.

I regret, however, that they are not able to distinguish between the Bishops, priests, and Catholic laity of the official (patriotic) Church community on the one side, whose attitude of faithfulness to Rome has been very clear ever since the 80’s, and on the other side the leaders of the CCPA whose faithfulness to Rome is ambiguous. Friends of the underground community keep identifying the official Church community with the CCPA. These are two different realities, two different groups of people. I clarified that distinction for myself and expressed it in an article in 1986. The events of Epiphany 2000, in Beijing recently revealed to the Universal Church and to the underground Chinese Catholics that priests and Catho-

lics of the official Church community are united with the Pope and refuse to be identified with the policy of the CCPA. This makes the Universal Church happy and should also bring the unofficial (underground) Catholics closer to the official Church Catholics, priests, and Bishops. Since both communities now know that they are united in faith, what keeps them from entering into a dialogue that could gradually lead to unity? Politics has disrupted their unity in Jesus Christ, but politics will not and cannot reunite them. It is the privilege of Chinese Catholics themselves to re-establish that unity. This will require a heartfelt decision of faith. Neither government pressure nor obedience to the CCPA can impose unity in faith on Catholics who refuse it.

On Epiphany the PRC opted to cut off dialogue and appoint atheistic cadres to lead the Church

China made progress in modernization only after 1980 when Deng Xiaoping stopped party secretaries from running the economy and replaced them with experts. We started to hope that this simple and evident logic could also be applied to the field of religion, that Church experts and not atheistic cadres would make the decisions related to matters of the Catholic faith. Epiphany 2000 destroyed this hope.

Atheistic communist cadres, with the help of untrained CCPA Catholics, decide who have the qualifications to become bishops, and where they are to be assigned, who can be ordained to the priesthood, who can take religious vows, etc. How can a policy that China publicly recognized as a disaster for its economy be less disastrous for religion? Or is this perhaps the hidden agenda?

I have in the past happily informed our brothers and sisters about the positive evolution that has taken place in the Chinese Catholic Church. These friends now look at me with bewilderment when I tell them about recent events happening in the same PRC. They wonder aloud: is China returning to the past? Sadly enough, I feel that it is my duty to tell them now that things are definitely not going the way we all had hoped. More episcopal consecrations are scheduled during the coming months. So-called illegal church buildings are being destroyed. The CCPA is being introduced in areas where it never existed before. Party cadres are travelling to the countryside to put pressure on underground Bishops to promise obedience to the CCPA (not just cooperation). Without any consultation with Church leaders, sweeping changes are now being made in the division of Dioceses. Dioceses, which just a few years ago were divided unexpectedly, are now suddenly reunited or abolished without any previous notice. The purpose is obviously to elimi-

nate under ground Bishops and force them under the control of the CCPA.

This follow-up to Epiphany 2000 shocks Chinese Catholics and also the Church outside. The authorities that enforce this negative transformation render a bad service to China's already very vulnerable international religious image. We have reasons to doubt whether the attitude of confrontation carries the approval of all official authorities in China.

Imposing a "One Church Two Systems" policy creates an obstacle for unity with the Universal Church

The Epiphany event in Beijing collapsed the Sino-Vatican Bridge which was under construction. Of the 192 countries in the world, 171 have relations with the Vatican and find no problem in respecting the laws of the Church. China is the only country that rejects these laws. It also tries to impose a policy of One Church Two Systems on Rome. Yet China knows very well that this goes against the identity of the Catholic Church and that the Pope can never accept this. If that policy were accepted and implemented, it would create a false impression of unity because it would be an impeded unity, a unity without *communio*. That means a *de facto* separation.

Chinese Bishops, prevented at home from directing their own Church, would also remain physically cut off from contact with the Holy See. What then is left of their function as Catholic Bishops? After a number of years, what would be the difference between this unity without *communio*, as imposed by the One Church Two Systems policy, and a real schism?

Are CCPA leaders, who promote this *de facto* separation of the Chinese Catholic Church from Rome, aware of the grave historic error they are committing? This matter calls for open and frank discussion and dialogue by competent people in our Church. These people should strongly object to this policy of the Chinese authorities. By refusing Chinese bishops and their Catholics the freedom that Catholics enjoy in all other countries of the world, Chinese authorities make life very difficult for them. Strictly speaking it means that in China Catholics are not allowed to be Catholics.

To dialogue is not to be naïve

In spite of all this, I remain convinced that as Catholics we should continue to keep an attitude of openness to dialogue. What means does the small Catholic community in China have in terms of power and strength if it enters into confrontation? If all Chinese Catholics unite to dialogue and to defend the point of view of their one faith in Christ, they are strong.

Of course it is more difficult to disagree openly and frankly and to search for an agreement through dialogue than to break off relations and enter into confrontation. Chinese Catholics who dialogue about these problems take a positive attitude towards their country and also towards their Church. Their dialogue lays the foundations for a united Catholic Chinese Church.

To remain optimistic but not naïve, is part of evangelization in China today. This implies that sometimes we have to take the blows of such disappointing events as Epiphany 2000, when our hopes for dialogue are dashed. But as Catholics we must, in our pastoral and missionary planning, follow the Pope's pilgrimage of dialogue in hope and optimism towards the future. This dialogue could include encouraging experts to study Church and State relations. These efforts could contribute invaluable data to Chinese experts as they try to develop a new law on religion. Joint research is also a way of dialogue.

Although little may be left of our past optimism, we now must show that, as Catholics, we remain willing to dialogue in an attitude of mutual respect, but because we are not naïve, we are also very much concerned about the situation of our Catholic brothers and sisters in China today.

A Turning-Point in China-Church Relations: A Commentary

(The commentary below, written by one of the Centre's researchers at the request of the director of the Centre, also reflects the opinion of Tripod's editorial staff).

The event of 6 January 2000, the ordinations of five new bishops in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (Nantang) in Beijing, has sparked a reaction from many people concerned with the Church in China. These ordinations took everyone by surprise, especially since they occurred amidst growing speculation of an imminent *rapprochement* in Sino-Vatican relations. It is within this context that we wish to comment on a number of articles that have appeared recently, some before and some following the January 6 event. We wish to point out how these ordinations have undermined optimistic views on the present situation of the Church and China, and why we feel they constitute a turning-point. We also hope to illustrate ever more clearly our disappointment with the Patriotic leadership in Beijing.

All the articles under discussion are concerned with the unity of the Chinese Church, and the problem of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China. In reading the articles, we notice an obvious shift: from the optimism of last Christmas to the disappointment of the Epiphany, from polemics toward the underground Church to puzzle-

ment after the Beijing ordinations.

On 24 December 1999, JCS printed an article, entitled: “The Pope, a Friend of China in the Year 2000?”. The title is somewhat misleading: this Pope, as well as all his Predecessors, has never ceased being a friend of the Chinese people and of Chinese Catholics. We must not confuse the “official friendship” toward the regime, with the genuine respect, care, love and friendship that various Popes have expressed toward the Chinese people, Chinese civilization, and Chinese Catholics. A number of people, including myself, were puzzled by the tone of that article: the underground Catholics were, it seemed to me, unfairly pinpointed as the major obstacle to possible reconciliation, as though they would become an embarrassment on the day there is a Sino-Vatican agreement.

The role of the underground

I believe that, by their present stand, the underground communities are playing an important role that the article fails to mention. These communities have not only suffered in the past, but are still suffering at present. They do not oppose the government simply for the sake of opposing it. In fact, they are not political activists. They simply want to live their faith in its total integrity. This is their right and their honour, and we must highly respect them for that. This group has clearly understood that in China there is no freedom of religion. Since Deng Xiaoping’s open policy, for pragmatic reasons — not out of genuine conviction — there has been more tolerance toward religion; yet the basic dictatorial oppression of the Chinese regime has not changed. Although the communists have changed some of their tactics, their basic system remains the same as that of the ’50s, the ’60s and the ’70s. There is one thread that unites the various fanatical political campaigns of the ’50s, the disastrous Cultural Revolution of the ’60s and ’70s, and the massacre of Tiananmen of 1989. This thread is the unchanged Marxist ideology that identifies the Communist Party with the State, that substitutes the good of the people for the interest of those in power, that substitutes the rule of law by an unaccountable one-party rule, or perhaps one man rule. I do not think we can fault the underground Catholics for refusing to compromise with such a regime on the content of their faith.

Freedom of religious belief

It seems to me that the real meaning behind the 1982 official statement on religion needs clarification. China did not reintroduce “freedom of religion”, but rather repeated the ambiguous formula of “freedom of religious belief” (Art. 36 of the Constitution). We

cannot miss the fundamental importance of this distinction. A believer can think what he or she wants, but certainly cannot freely practice his or her belief in freedom, as in most other places in the world. The principle of freedom of religious belief was already stated in Art. 88 of the 1954 constitution. Moreover, Article 36 of the Constitution of 27 April 1982, while it is not a novelty in itself, must be read in parallel with Document 19, that was published a few weeks earlier, on 31 March 1982. This document, which remains the basic text of the religious policy of the Deng Xiaoping era, does not concede any value to religion. The government has made a concession toward it simply because it realized that it had failed to abolish religion with decrees and force. Religion must be tolerated as part of the present reality, since the priority at the moment is “the common goal of building a modernized powerful Socialist State”. It is a given fact, according to Document 19, that religion will naturally disappear when the people are sufficiently educated and understand the secrets of science. It is useless, therefore, to forcibly eliminate religion as was attempted during the Cultural Revolution.

This is hardly a policy of religious freedom; it is rather a policy of political expediency.

Schism and the Holy See

In recent articles which have appeared in the *Sunday Examiner* and the *Tablet*, we read that, “for decades the Holy See thought that the official community was schismatic”. The fact is that the Holy See has never made any official pronouncement on this matter. In fact, it has always exercised restraint and moderation in this respect. On one occasion only, as far back as 15 December 1958, Pope John XXIII, while announcing the Council, did mention the word *schism*. It was right after the first illegitimate consecrations of bishops. After the Pope had been informed of the special and complex situation in China, and of the personal worthiness of most of the illegitimate bishops, neither Pope John nor any of his Successors ever used the word schism again.

What I would like to stress in this matter is the valuable contribution of the underground in preventing the Church in China from becoming schismatic. The permanence of the underground communities, notwithstanding the “tolerant” religious policy, has made the regime reluctantly aware that they did not solve the Catholic issue: the Catholic Church can never become independent. The underground has prompted the members of the official Church to see the necessity of seeking the approval of Rome in order to command the respect of the faithful. Without the underground, I do not believe that communion with the Pope and the Universal Church would be so prominent an item on

the agenda of the Catholic Church in China, and such a worry to the authorities. The underground must be credited for having prevented the “official” Church from succumbing to the pressure of the regime to distance itself from the Pope and Universal Church.

Epiphany ordinations, a turning-point

The ordinations in Beijing were a turning-point that signal the washout of the official Church led by the leaders of the Patriotic Association in Beijing. These “patriotic” leaders lead Catholics nowhere and sell out to the regime. They ruin young priests by putting the consciences of the best of them into confusion and by forcing some of them to accept elections that they would rather reject. This is certainly a sign that the underground had a few points correct. The fact that 130 seminarians of the Beijing National Seminary refused to participate in the State-propaganda-staged ordinations has been construed as a sign of the vitality of the official Church. We must add, however, that as a consequence of their action, the seminarians have now been put under tremendous pressure and “political re-education”. Who will come to their defence? Will the leaders of the official Church all concur with the seminarians’ present harassment?

It is important to note that the seminarians of the National Seminary hardly represent the “official Church”. They are rather a beautiful section of the Catholic Church in China, simply without any label whatsoever. Most of them come from traditional Catholic families from areas where the influence of the Patriotic Association is limited, or even absent. Some have an underground background. These have a clear knowledge of the political harassment against Church members. They have no illusion about the intentions of the regime.

January 6, 2000, was really a turning-point. However, even within that sad circumstance, someone optimistically saw three “friendly gestures” made by the regime towards the Holy See.

Taking a closer look at the “friendly gestures”

The first “friendly gesture” is worth mentioning because it regards the promise of obedience made by the five bishops to the Successor of Saint Peter, as spiritual leader. We agree that such a promise was made, but we are not sure that this was the first time such a promise was made during an “official” consecration in China. However, when asked about it, the president of the celebration said he was not sure if this did happen! This ambiguous answer certainly takes away from the credibility and dignity of this specific act.

The second “friendly gesture” is the mention of the Pope in the prayers of the faithful, and the third is a government spokesman’s declaration. These two “friendly gestures” are hardly friendly. The mention of the Pope during Mass is not a novelty. It has been widely practiced for several years. The declaration of Zhu Bangzao, the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “We want to improve our relations with the Holy See. But we do not want the Holy See to interfere in our internal affairs”, was nothing more than the repetition of the usual standard statement.

I acknowledge that these were not the first illegitimate consecrations in China. However, these constitute a dramatic and unfortunate turning-point. I will illustrate the nature of this turning-point by mentioning three “unfriendly gestures” that characterized the ceremony.

1. For more than a decade, the consecrations entailed only the consecration of one bishop. These were held in their local dioceses, and with a low profile without media or television. The 6 January 2000 mass ordinations were staged in the Beijing cathedral, and given an unprecedented high profile with authorities, police, television, media and Patriotic Association leaders giving TV interviews.

2. In the last 20 years or so the ordinations were an ecclesial affair, with the joyful participation of thousands of the People of God. This one was a State-staged, cold ceremony, with only a few faithful taking part, but attended by communist cadres, “protected” (from whom?) by a large number of policemen.

3. In the last 15 years or so, the bishop-elect was allowed, after or even before the ordination, to discreetly seek papal approval. This time the candidates were hastily brought to Beijing and put under formidable pressure to accept ordination against their own will. It turned out to be an extraordinary anti-Pope and anti-Church demonstration, where nothing was religious and everything was political.

The “patriotic” leaders of Beijing claimed that the dioceses needed bishops. Why then were the People of God conspicuously absent, and why did they not rejoice at these consecrations?

The Universal Church could have tolerated or even accepted the “illegitimate” ordinations as carried out before because they were still a genuine ecclesial event taking place under special circumstances and constraints. But in Beijing on Epiphany 2000, we witnessed pure confrontation, and a total disregard for the Church’s legitimate hopes, theology and regulations. This is why I call it a turning-point. It is about time to review our assessment of the “official” Church in China and our dealing with its “patriotic” leaders.

Cuba, its People and its Church

The following analysis was prepared by a group of Cuban Priests in mid-1999. The priests are from the four Dioceses on the eastern end of the island. It is highly critical of the Cuban Government and, at times, the Catholic hierarchy.

Introduction

The entire world expected something in the days leading up to the Pope's visit to Cuba. The Church wanted more space to carry out its mission; prisoners wanted freedom; homemakers wanted more food; and the people wanted their problems to be solved. There was also the awareness that these enormous expectations were not going to be met because of the papal visit. A year and a half after the historic papal visit to Cuba we need to ask where are we and what did we achieve from the Pope's visit to our country? We want to respond to these questions with the following reflection.

Papal suggestions and criticisms

All the expectations, both objective and fanciful, were embodied by a phrase that many Cubans believe summed up the Pope's visit: *"Cuba needs to open itself to the world and the world needs to open itself to Cuba"*. The phrase had a certainty to it, because it referred to the double blockade suffered by Cuba. There is the internal blockade, imposed by the communist system, and the external blockade, led by the North American economic embargo of the island. For those sectors that only believe in the importance of the first blockade, Cuba's problems will be solved with internal changes, with the evolution, transformation or dissolution of the current political system.

For those who blame everything on the external blockade, lifting the embargo (a decision that depends on a foreign government) will solve the nation's difficult situation. An objective analysis, however, shows that our problems are such that they involve decisions that need to be made internally and externally, personally and collectively and both within and outside Cuba. The Pope saw this and summarized it with the call for a double openness of Cuba to the world and the world to Cuba.

Another main idea expressed by the Pope was that Cubans need to be protagonists of our own history. This demand for protagonism carries a double criticism: The paternalism that makes us expect all solutions to come "from above" and the immobility that leads us to expect solutions "from outside", to cross our arms and let someone else "pull the coals from the fire". The solution must

come from within, from our people and from our hearts, or it will not be a solution.

Many years ago, after the first confrontations between the Church and the young socialist government, Bishop Perez Serantes said "Rome or Moscow", denying that the future of Cuba was between Washington and Moscow. Forty years later, the Pope told us that the future is in our hands and it depends on us. We need to ask what has stopped or what stops us from taking the reins of our lives and our history into our hands? To answer this question we need briefly to analyze the phenomenon of totalitarianism in which we have been immersed in one way or another over the past 40 years. The situation, which has characterized the development of the last 40 years of socio-economic and cultural revolution in Cuba, is summarized by one name: Totalitarianism.

Cuban communists did not invent totalitarianism. They simply adopted the Marxist-Leninist version and "benefited" from its long experience. When it had to confront the United States, the neighbouring superpower in the Cold War, the only door open to the Cuban Government was a strategic alliance with the bloc opposed to the Americans, the Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union. In this way, the existence and survival of the Cuban project was undeniably tied to the so-called "real socialism" and its methods for acting.

Totalitarianism adopts and permanently applies reactions typical of war, "the habit of violence, the simplicity of extreme passions, individual and collective submission" as a way of achieving its maximum expression of solidarity through fear, induced egalitarianism, unity without fissures and the need for actions directed and controlled by the leader. The totalitarian society exhibits a strange mix of fraternity and ferociousness.

If the context from which totalitarianism rises is war and violence, then its objective is the total destruction and reconstruction of a mass society through ideology and mechanisms for organization and control that use the most modern applications of science and technology. Ideology, however, is not a simple way of thinking or a philosophical structure, but an instrument for action that mobilizes historic forces toward a goal: Establishing absolute political power in the hands of one party in which "the people, united, will never be defeated". We can characterize the system based on the following elements:

- Creation of a new society and a new man that

mobilizes the action of all people

- Action is directed by one party that is hierarchically structured and headed by an absolute dictator
- A system of physical and psychological terror exercised and supervised by the party through a sophisticated system of security and vigilance that uses modern control methods and constant research on the opinions and feelings of the people
- Control of information through mass media allows for the creation of a “virtual reality” that has little or nothing to do with reality and makes people think that they live in the best of worlds
- Absolute control of weapons and the army, as well as a centrally planned economy, allows leaders maximum control over the lives of the people.

We are faced with an absolute control over the bodies and spirits of the people. It is possible that no monarch or leader has had such control over a people or has been able to achieve such a level of planning over the lives of people and society. Radio and television gives them an indirect and sophisticated control that “programmes” awareness from within without the people knowing they are being programmed. All of this makes the totalitarian system diabolically efficient for controlling people.

The syndrome of learned defencelessness or “nothing can be done”

It is necessary to analyze the consequences prolonged exposure to the policies of a totalitarian government has on human beings. We call it the “syndrome of learned defencelessness” or “induced hopelessness.” As a starting point, we have the experiments carried out by Martin Seligman, a North American psychologist. Dr Seligman researched the behaviour of two groups of dogs. One group was subjected to a completely distressful situation. The animals, regardless of what they did, received electrical shocks and could not escape from their cages. The other group, which received the same treatment, could escape from the torture centre by learning how to move a few mechanisms. The dogs learned what to do and got out. When the dogs were all brought together under similar conditions, which allowed for all of them to escape, the animals from the first group were resigned to their condition and did not even try to escape even though the possibility existed. The dogs from the second group found the new door to escape their torture.

Dr Seligman’s research has been applied to human psychology and psycho-sociology. The results were important when applied to the totalitarian reality. Totalitarianism is presented as a situation without hope and becomes a paradigm of defencelessness. The propaganda spread by the government tries to convince us that change is impossible, that there is no possible way out of this situation.

A phrase from journalist Soledad Cruz expresses this sentiment: “No one can topple it, but no one can fix it”. This idea reinforces the sayings of the old proverbs, such as “the evil we know is better than the good we don’t know”. The perfect state of defencelessness is that which leads us to believe change is impossible. A state of defencelessness only functions if the people accept the ideas, experiences and attitudes that lead to it.

As we saw with the animals subjected to a prolonged period of defencelessness, even if the conditions change they are still unable to respond. Defencelessness discourages imagination and creativity. The syndrome of learned defencelessness is a clear mechanism to explain the apathy of the people in a totalitarian or post-totalitarian regime. The system itself has operated like a giant machine generating defencelessness. Control over the different aspects of people’s lives (political, administrative, economic, sociocultural), information and the centres for educating people in media, and mechanisms for defence and repression are aimed at showing the population that nothing escapes the omnipresent State. All of it is geared toward imposing defencelessness.

Live the truth: A way out of defencelessness

“The truth will set you free”, (Jn 8:32) “They married us to lies and they forced us to live with them, which is why we think the world is ending when we hear the truth. It would be better for the world to end than to live a lie” (José Martí).

What a totalitarian system fears the most is the seed of truth. The system cannot stand a critical spirit that questions the false truths spoken from the absolute throne of power. The totalitarian system functions like an immense generator of virtual reality that substitutes the real world. It only operates, however, when people decide to live in it or passively accept it.

Those people who decide to live the truth and refuse to collaborate with the conventional elements that maintain the system become an example to others and a danger to the system itself. Vaclav Havel has analyzed this reality using the example of a vendor who hangs a sign on his vegetable cart. This sign reads, “true democracy only exists in socialism”, but neither the vendor nor his customers believe this and most people do not even read what the sign says. It does not express what the vendor thinks, but is meant to send a sign of loyalty to the government. The true message is: “I, Juan, the grocer, do not want problems so I obey by hanging up my sign. The only thing I ask is to be left in peace”. If we were to translate Juan’s sign into real terms, it would read “I am afraid and that is why I obey”. The vendor would reject this; he would be embarrassed publicly to hang up a sign that so explicitly expressed his level of degradation. That is how this ideology operates, hiding the truth with phrases that only humble the people before power.

The distance between words and life reveals the distance that separates the abject lie of a false life and an honest life lived in truth. Unmasking the lie is the primary mission of people who want to be faithful to themselves and who want to live in truth. On the contrary, people who share the lie or pretend that they believe it support the regime and help prolong it. This is what “accepting the rules of the game” means. People do not decide life, but life, ritualized through ideology, receives their loyalty and imposes a destiny on them.

People sign their own death warrant and that of other people when they accept this ideology. They become accomplices in enslaving the brothers and sisters. Only through an act of liberty and rebellion can they recover their repressed identity and dignity. When people decide “to live the truth” and show that it is possible, they embarrass those who continue to live the lie and become the principal threat to the omnipresent power.

The major confirmation of this was seen in the collapse of the post-totalitarian communist world in 1989. This power structure, which was believed to be monolithic, collapsed like a house of cards in only a few days without anyone defending “the old regime”.

This awareness that we are talking about is not political but moral. The totalitarian system classifies any move toward “living the truth” as a political action. Any actions taken by people to recover their responsibility and exercise the right to make a decision is seen as a direct threat to the system, provoking a violent response from the authorities. Fear is the system’s most solid support mechanism. This is key for people to accept their virtual reality. As can easily be seen, fear discourages people from assuming their own responsibility. The increase in the number of police officers helps to discourage the population from expressing their thoughts and feelings. Then there is the economy. You do not have to be an economist to figure out that more and more people are just trying to survive. There is no attempt at long-term development with a vision of the future for the country. People and the State are living day to day. The country’s infrastructure is being destroyed and there are no repair jobs that can stop it.

Liberalizing measures that would allow recuperation in agricultural and industry are not being adopted because the government fears it will lose economic control and then political control. This is why the government has moved one step ahead and then backpedaled with measures allowing private initiatives in agriculture and trade.

A similar thing is happening in the areas that were once held up as indisputable triumphs of the revolution — education and health care. In a recent article, Ignacio Sotelo wrote that everyone in Cuba knows how to read and that there were more and more “functional literates”, because there is nothing to read or books are too expensive. The same thing is true with health care. The physi-

cal and psychological deterioration of the people has reached such extremes that progress based on statistical arguments can no longer be used.

The totalitarian regime in Cuba became a post-totalitarian government during the 1970s. A totalitarian regime is based on absolute control of the situation and mobilizing the masses to drum up active support. The post-totalitarian system tries to maintain control not through mobilizing but paralyzing the people and avoiding the growth of civil society.

The Church at the crossroads of present and future

When the communist experience began in the country 40 years ago, the Church raised its voice and confronted this new reality. Totalitarianism in Cuba began with the heroic aura of fighting for liberty and justice. The progressive implantation of communism on the revolution accelerated the process of consolidating absolute power. The revolutionary power invested with a redemptive authority swept away all the institutions of the past, wiping away the good as well as the bad. The consequence was a “year zero”, an absolute power that controlled all spheres of life.

The Church’s condemnation of a communist presence in the revolution and its increasingly radical actions led to the dismantling of the Church, its methods and its actions. The short and intense period of confrontation was accompanied by a “policy” of voluntary and involuntary ejection from the country. There were exceptions among the laity, religious men and women and priests, but those who remained were barely allowed to survive by the government.

When the situation got particularly difficult at different times over the past 40 years, caused by “the internal contradictions of the system”, the government’s solution was to open the doors and let the “disaffected” leave. The Church saw its membership shrink and its pastoral work compromised during each of these exoduses. The Church has had to improvise its plans because our people left.

The Church called on the faithful to remain, to commit themselves to the country and its people, but there were strong arguments against this, including reuniting with family, a tranquil life, the chance of freedom, economic prosperity. The exodus and the existence of a community of more than two million Cubans living permanently outside the country is a key problem in the nation’s life and weighs heavily on the present and future of Cuba. This fact involves too many people for it not to be taken into account.

As we know, in 1980 the Church began a process of internal renovation with the Ecclesial Reflection. This process, which culminated with the National Cuban Encounter, was characterized by the search for our identity

and historic vocation in the light of the Gospel and service to our people.

The reflection process included dialogue as a fundamental element of our existence and work as a Church. This process coincided with the beginning of changes in the USSR and Eastern Europe (*perestroika* and *glasnost*). The Church proposed dialogue as the most effective way of dealing with the country's problems. As part of the internal renovation the Church opened a new pastoral action that sprang from its renewed evangelizing conviction, which coincided with the Mission of the Cross and the celebration of 500 years of the faith in Latin America. The phase is ending with the celebration of Jubilee and had as its high point Pope John Paul II's visit in January 1998. The proposal to the people, of walking in faith through mission, coincided with the crisis of world communism, the break up of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the Eastern Bloc, which had a serious repercussion on Cuba, its people and government.

All of the People of God, through the final document of the national encounter and the Bishops, as pastors of the Church, proposed a "National Dialogue" directly to the government as a way of addressing the crisis caused by the collapse of Marxism. The dialogue, which would include Cubans in exile, would look for far-reaching and effective solutions to mobilize the nation's moral and material forces. It was an effort to give both sides a vote of confidence in steering the boat toward the future.

Cuban communists, faced with the serious choice of "conserving power or saving the nation", chose the first option, reinforcing the totalitarian behaviour of living a lie and maintaining paralysis.

At that time, the Bishops, after a long and reflective wait, decided to publish their Pastoral Letter, "Everything waits for love". The reception of the Letter by the Cuban people marked an important change in the Church's recent history. A considerable part of the population saw their problems, hopes and anguish reflected in the Bishops' Letter.

The government turned a deaf ear to the cries of the people prophetically expressed by the Bishops. The Church continued its efforts to find a peaceful and negotiated solution that did not exclude any sectors. For many, the most difficult problem for moving ahead with their proposal is not the government's lack of will but that lack of a counterpart organization — civil society, social movements, political groups — that can dialogue with the State.

The government maintains this theory, highlighting the weakness of dissident factions and saying that they depend on foreign support to survive.

Dissidence, which is eminently peaceful, does not have the firm recognition or support from the hierarchy. This is our opinion. The Church's major effort to open Cuban society was with the Pope's visit. No one inside

or outside Cuba denies the success of the papal visit. The question we need to ask, however, is what happened after the visit?

The Five wounds of the Church

More than 150 years ago, an Italian priest, the Rev. Antonio Rosmini, published a polemical book called "The Five Wounds of the Church". We are borrowing Rosmini's title to refer to the five wounds of our Church.

The meaning of the phrase for us is not exactly like the one used by Rosmini. The wounds we talk about have a particular meaning. These wounds are the challenges faced by this Church because they are tied to its passion and its past and are sources of its commitment and its action.

The new and the old Christians

During his participation in the Twenty-seventh Inter-American Bishops' Meeting, Bishop Adolfo Rodríguez spoke like the wise pastor he is. Among the important things he said, we want to highlight one refrain: in Cuba we have discovered that "the atheists are not that atheistic and that we Christians are not that Christian". The challenge of our faith, of serious commitment and living our lives according to the Gospel, is here and demands reflection and sincerity.

A variant of this is seen by the presence of new and old Christians in the Church. The Church cannot lose sight of the support of the first group and the weight of the second. It needs to strengthen the commitment of both groups.

Foreign clergy, Cuban clergy

The increase in the number of priests and religious men and women is seen as one of the principal fruits of the Pope's visit, which is undoubtedly true. But the appearance of new pastoral agents is also an element that must be analysed. The new-old, secular-regular, foreign-national dialectic is present and causes both tensions and positive reactions.

First, it is important to recall that there are no "foreigners" in the Church. The recently arrived must be welcomed. They bring to our Church new methods, enthusiasm, energy and imagination. We have a lot to learn from each other.

We need to apply "a healthy division of work" with respect to the country's problems. Cubans need to take on a greater level of responsibility and initiative, because we are Cubans and because we are less vulnerable to "certain administrative actions" that could be used against foreigners. There needs to be dialogue and sincerity for us to walk together even though we have different styles.

Improvising as a way of doing things and paternalism

Improvising has become an integral part of “being Cuban” and has infiltrated the Church and our pastoral work. This situation has marked us with its seal without us being aware of it. This is, however, inevitable in the situation in which we live — we live in a country without a future.

This is why the Church must insist on identifying with objectives. We may have to improvise at the moment, but this should not cause us to lose sight of the long-term vision. What should we respond to? What do we want? What do we want to save and what do we need to change? These are questions that we must ask continuously without forgetting the fragility of the people with whom we work, who have been permeated by a “learned defencelessness”.

Building the Church and service to the people

We do not think that anyone wants to return to 1961, to the time of confrontations. At the same time, however, we cannot abandon our commitment to the country and keep quiet with our arms crossed.

For those who oppress the people, any action by the Church in defence of human rights, justice and freedom will be seen as “getting involved in politics”. We know that the Church carries out an unparalleled contribution when it exercises its triple mission of evangelization, worship and charity, but we cannot avoid dealing with injustice, oppression and defenselessness like the man in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Church’s responsibility becomes much greater when the people suffer so many injustices and limitations.

Poverty in the Church and the exodus of Christians

The Church’s economic possibilities have improved in recent years thanks to the aid we have received from different parts of the world. We have gone from being a poor Church to a Church that “has and gives” and which runs the danger of “remaining with the lion’s share”. Our way of living, our homes, our cars should be at the service of the people and modest. We only need enough to ensure that we can efficiently carry out our work. Modesty in means and simplicity of attitude, above all in the spirit of service, is something we should guard jealously.

The Bishops should discuss with priests how money is spent, and priests should consult with their congregations. Maximum clarity in this issue is necessary to guarantee administrative transparency. At times we have the impression that the concern for material things, including churches, makes us forget the essential issue that

should concern us: Building a Church that is completely at the service of the Kingdom of God.

One issue that we cannot avoid addressing is the exodus, which once again threatens to empty our communities and decimate our people. In the exodus we see the traditional individualistic response that we Cubans have offered our country. The Church must have the courage to eliminate what is not committed to the people.

A Church without this spirit of sacrifice will never leave the darkness of totalitarianism.

Finally ... dialogue

Dialogue has been a recurring theme in our Church in the past 20 years. Since the beginning of the Ecclesial Reflection in the early 1980s, we have been proposing dialogue as the way to leave the current situation behind. Bishop Adolfo Rodríguez brought up the issue again at the Twenty-seventh Inter-American Bishops’ Meeting.

There is, however, an essential contradiction in the proclamation of “National Dialogue” as a way out of the crisis, because it implicitly leaves this dialogue in the hands of the government. The proposal for dialogue, then, becomes a trap from which there is no way out.

It is time for us to ask about the possibility and necessity of a national dialogue that would include the participation of civil society that is organized (churches, fraternal organizations, and autonomous groups).

Pope John Paul II, despite his health problems, came to Cuba and gave us a message that would allow the Church and the people to retake the reins of their destiny. Our Church knew how to prepare for the visit, with missions and reaching people by going from door to door. The people responded to the Church’s call and showed that it has the ability to convoke people.

But after the visit we did not know what to do. We have the impression that we did not have an answer to what may have happened and what, in fact, did happen: That the government used the visit as a propaganda tool outside the country and to defend the *status quo* within it. What is sad is that we could have prevented this, but we were incapable of searching for alternatives.

The silence of our Church in the face of new, repressive laws and the troubles of the four dissidents who wrote, “A Homeland for All”, is troubling to say the least. The message we offer of commitment, hope and optimism in a patient and constant struggle must come from our commitment to our people, an analysis of our reality and a liberating teaching. There is no liberating truth that does not pass through the mystery of the incarnation and the experience of the cross. We are all responsible.

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Jacob Kavunkal, SVD

Church and Mission in Asia In the light of *Ecclesia in Asia* — A Critical Study —

At the very outset, it has to be clarified that the following reflections are evolved out of encouragement given by the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*: “theologizing is to be carried out with courage, in faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Church’s Tradition, in sincere adherence to the Magisterium and with an awareness of pastoral realities” (n. 22). It is also to be mentioned that my comments are specifically from an Indian context.

Rightly, the entire document is geared to the Church’s mission in Asia. This is done in the context of the fact that the biblical account of salvation has its beginnings in the Asian soil and Christianity has its roots in Asia. The document celebrates the fact that Jesus Christ took flesh as an Asian. The proclamation of this Jesus Christ to Asia is the Church’s “unique contribution to the peoples of the continent” (n. 10). The first part of the document paints the doctrinal perspectives, in the line of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. This is followed up by a description of the practical consequences for mission and its concrete expressions in Asia.

Jesus Christ the one and only Saviour

According to *Ecclesia in Asia*, the Church’s mission is not just a proclamation of Jesus or witnessing to the Gospel (Lk 24:48-49; Acts 1:80); it is proclaiming Jesus Christ “as the one and only Saviour for all peoples” (n.10). In fact a careful reading of the first part of the document makes it clear that this proclamation of Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour is the chief concern of the document. Within the first 21 numbers nearly 30 times Jesus Christ is qualified as the “only Saviour” or “the Redeemer”. This requires some further explanation.

Ever since the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Cardinal Jozef Tomko’s description of India as “the epicentre of (certain theological) tendencies and Asia their main territory”, there has been a sort of mistrust of the Indian/Asian theologians on the part of the Vatican.¹ According to the Vatican these theologians do not believe the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour. Hence we

come across the curial concern to emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus Christ at every instance. This in turn has caused a tension between the curial concern and the pastoral requirements of Asia. This tension is manifested in the very title of the Asian Synod, “Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia”. One comes across this tension both in the Orientation Paper (*Lineamenta*) as well as the Working Paper (*Instrumentum Laboris*) of the Asian Synod.

Naturally the tension found its way to the Synod hall as well. Asian Bishops in their interventions emphasized the need for taking a more “practical” approach to mission as Jesus himself did and called for a “gospel that is embodied in our lives which can carry much more credibility and power of conviction than a Gospel that has only been wrapped up in beautiful words, teachings and moral injunctions”.² This conflict of interests is continued in the Post-Synodal document as well.

According to the traditional understanding what makes Jesus Christ the unique Saviour is his redeeming Death and Resurrection. In the words of *Ecclesia in Asia*, “God took upon himself our human nature and endured suffering and death to win salvation for all people” (n.12). Hence for the Church in Asia to fulfil its mission the “preaching of the saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be [its] absolute priority” (n. 2). This in turn makes the Church as the community of the saved, into which all are to be incorporated, as the body of Jesus Christ. Hence the document hopes: “just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent.” (n.1).

It is precisely this claim of uniqueness for Jesus Christ and the Church, denying the salvific value of other religions, which makes the Church’s mission objectionable to the followers of other religions in Asia. This insistence on the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the unique Redeemer and the desire to make the fruits of the Paschal Mystery available to all in the Church,

makes mission a laughing stock in a pluri-religious context. Reacting sharply to the papal hope for the third millennium that we quoted earlier, Narendra Mohan, Member of Parliament and the editor of many *Bharatiya Janata Party* publications, wrote: "If we implement the belief of the great religious leader Pope John Paul II for the next millennium we will divide the world and will invite conflict. The views of the Pope to convert the world only to Christianity is contrary to the concept of Universal Brotherhood. It is contrary to the "Freedom of Conscience".³

Ecclesia in Asia is aware how the proclamation of "Jesus as the only Saviour is fraught with philosophical, cultural and theological difficulties, especially in light of the beliefs of Asia's great religions, deeply intertwined with cultural values and specific world views" (n. 20). However instead of understanding these problems, the Document presents these challenges as "as an even greater incentive in striving to transmit 'the faith that the Church in Asia has inherited from the Apostles and holds with the Church of all generations and places'" (n.10). For committed followers of Asian religions it amounts to outright arrogance and blind superiority. No wonder *Ecclesia in Asia* was described by them as "a chauvinistic, offensive and presumptuous document".⁴

The Mission of Jesus

Recent Scripture scholars have shown how the death of Jesus Christ was both caused by his ministry and the logical consequence of it. Jesus invested the time of his public life for a ministry of "going about doing good" (Peter's summary of the ministry, Acts 10:38) and forming a group of disciples, the Church, to continue his ministry (Jn 20:18-20). It was a ministry of compassion, love, justice and other-centredness. He showed how the God whom he experienced as the "Abba" (intimate parent) was other-centred and hence the Sabbath laws and similar rules of purity and observances are to be interpreted in terms of the human beings and not in terms of the laws themselves. For God is concerned about the well-being of the humans, especially of the lost, the broken hearted, the marginalized, etc. *Ecclesia in Asia* too describes beautifully this ministry in number 11.

However, the protagonists of Judaism took him to be a threat to their religion and to themselves. Therefore, as *Ecclesia in Asia* also puts it, "he was accused of being a blasphemer, a violator of the sacred Law, a public nuisance to be eliminated". In fact this plotting to destroy him had its beginning already from the start of his ministry (Mk 3:6). His death was seen as a failure of

his ministry. But God intervened and raised him up from the dead as an approval of his ministry (Acts 2;24, 32, 36). Thus, the ministry that he accomplished from the time of his baptism becomes crucial. Hence Peter laying down the qualification for the one to replace Judas says: "one who has accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us" (Acts 1:21-22).

Whatever was his metaphysical identity, an issue that became acute only during the Greek inculturation, Jesus' own self perception was that of a prophet (Mk 6:4; Mt 13:57). He contrasts himself with Elijah and Elisha (Lk 4:24-27). Jesus stood in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, finally represented by John the Baptist, though different from him. His contemporaries too perceived him as the prophet from Nazareth (Mt 21:11; Mk 8:28; Mt 16:14; Lk 7:39). It is unfortunate that *Ecclesia in Asia* did not pay much heed to this aspect of the mission of Jesus, especially since it is very vital in the context of Asia that the Document paints in the first chapter. The concern of Jesus is not so much with Christian doctrines as with the enduring elements that can actively direct or influence human lives of any time.

Asia needs the prophetic ministry as the synodal interventions also emphasized. What Asia encounters frequently is the poor whose humanity is assaulted, despoiled and left half dead on the edges of Asian societies. Upholding their humanity is the primary Christian commitment in Asia. Though the document showed very well how the historical and geographical context of Jesus exercised an important influence on his mission (n. 5), when it comes to the Church's mission in Asia, this is not followed up. This, in spite of the fact that the Synod Fathers had insisted on the Church's mission of love and service in Asia in the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia (n. 5). The dispossessed indigenous peoples of Asia, the marginalized Dalits, the ill-treated women of Asia, the children of Asia who file away their tender childhood years working hard, the victims of terrorization and violence, all wait to hear the prophetic voice of the Asian Church.

The Salvation Motive

As we have seen, according to *Ecclesia in Asia*, mission in Asia is the proclamation of Salvation that comes only through Jesus Christ. Even if other religions have authentic values, these "find their fullness and realization [in Jesus Christ]" (n.14). Even the presence of the Holy Spirit "in human hearts and in

the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ” (nn.15,20).

One wonders if we can go beyond this position, based on the biblical narratives. In the Bible God’s redemptive action in the world begins already with creation and continues all through history including the Christ event. The Incarnation, as we saw earlier, was geared to the ministry of manifesting God’s fullest form as far as human beings can grasp it (*RM*, n. 5).

Based on the biblical revelation a Christian believes that the Mystery of Jesus Christ is the only mediation between God and humans. At the same time based on the same revelation, one cannot restrict that mediation, that salvation, to Christianity alone, for the Mystery that is identified as Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition, is operative in all creation (Jn 1:1-3; Col 1:14-20) and in all religions in so far as that Mystery is “enlightening every human being coming into the world” (Jn 1:9). We prefer to speak in terms of the “Mystery” for two reasons. For one thing, in spite of the revelation in Jesus Christ, on earth we can never fully grasp all the workings of that Mystery. On the other hand “Mystery” will be more acceptable to the followers of other religions. In a pluri-religious context what we speak must be understandable also to the followers of other religions.

Mission in Asia

In the light of what we have been saying it is clear that though according to the New Testament a Christian can and must believe that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator, in so far as all are participants in that Mystery identified as Jesus Christ, we must refrain from making claims of uniqueness in a religiously pluralistic context. What the Gospels describe is the ministry of the Incarnate Lord. The community’s mission is the continuation of that ministry. In this way we preserve the true missionary vocation of the Church without in any way denying the value of other religions. This does not mean that all religions are the same or equal. For the perception and response to the Mystery need not be same in all religions. The former head-hunting Naga religion cannot be equated with a religion like Buddhism. The response to the Mystery is mixed with human selfishness and frailty, which can be true also of Christianity. Yet the Church is called “to serve human beings by manifesting to them the love of God made present in Jesus Christ” (*RM*, n. 2). The Church, thus, “remains an icon of the service to life in Asia, in courageous contrast to the many dark forces at work in [Asian] society” (n.7).

It follows from what we have been saying that it does not make sense to claim that the values in other religions or the “intense yearnings for God, experienced in Asia, are to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They are the result of the presence of the Mystery of Jesus Christ and it would only be presumptuous to say that it “can only be fully satisfied by Jesus Christ”, or to make this yearning as the justification “to proclaim with vigour in word and deed that Jesus Christ is the Saviour” (n.9). Or else we should also be prepared to accept that the yearning for God in Christianity has to be fulfilled in the Asian Religions! In fact the current exodus from the West to the East in search of spiritual experience, makes such a conclusion even more logical.

Similarly it would be better to refrain from expressions like: “the heart of the Church in Asia will be restless until the whole of Asia finds its rest in the peace of Christ, the risen Lord” (n.10). They can only be damaging the cause of the Church’s mission in Asia. As the Bishops of Japan wrote in their response to the *Lineamenta*, “If we stress too much that ‘Jesus Christ is the one and only Saviour’, we can have no dialogue, common living or solidarity with other religions”.⁵

It is only right that the Church in Asia distances itself from this sort of expansionistic mission which is a hangover from colonial thinking. We have to become reconciled to the fact that salvation is the work of God who makes it available to humans through his “Vak” (Word), and that the mission of the Church is to continue the mission of Jesus of Nazareth. Then we will realize that it is a tremendous obligation than any claim of superiority or arrogant monopoly. Such a mission of service is more demanding though less romantic.

This does not mean that the Church is not interested in giving rise to communities. Asia always had appreciation for Jesus Christ. Many will be attracted by our Christian life and will want to commit themselves fully to the Lord in the community. Such a mission takes place in the climate of good will and collaboration. It does not share the language and spirit of *Ecclesia in Asia*. As Pope John Paul II told the leaders of the non-Christian religions at Delhi on 7 November, 1999, “Religion is not and must not become a pretext for conflict particularly when religious, cultural and ethnic identities are involved. Religion and peace go together”. He went on to say “Religion is the source of goodness, respect, harmony and peace. This is the only way to honour God”.⁶ The Pope concentrated on the love of God and stressed “our common origin and common destiny and the shared re-

sponsibility for peoples' well-being and progress, our need of the light and strength that seek in our religious convictions". As the *Vidyajyoti* "Editorial" has shown, though the Pope did not mention Jesus Christ, "it was an announcement of good news that set a pattern for the mission of the Church in Asia".⁷

One does not come across this sensitivity that the Pope exercised while addressing the leaders of non-Christian religions, in the document *Ecclesia in Asia*. True, in the first chapter it portrays the Asian context, especially the religious context. However it has no impact on the document's prescription for proclamation. Here one finds the typically Western triumphalism and exclusivism.

The proclamation of Jesus Christ must take place primarily through the life-style of the Christians. It is not a frantic effort to save Jesus Christ from other saviours by trumpeting truths about Jesus Christ. The Church must stand for what Jesus Christ stood for and work for the realization of God's reign on earth, which was the foundational theme of Jesus' work. A sheer proclamation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ will turn out to be a religious competition which in the Asian context can only lead to fanaticism and religious violence, the opposite of the divine reign! The "new life in Jesus Christ" is the quality of the lives of the Christians and not a claim made over the followers of other religions. Christian mission in Asia must become a love affair and not a Truth-affair.

There is great wisdom in the document's recommendation of the value of personal contact. It was the methodology of Jesus himself and that of the early Church. It was also the method of sharing religious experience in India in its classical periods as can be known from the very name *Upanishads*. Literally it means the teaching, experience transmitted by sitting close by. Today too it has relevance in India and would be more effective than megaphonic proclamations.

Inculturation: a Means or Mission?

In the context of the Proclamation of Jesus Christ *Ecclesia in Asia* advocates the need for inculturation. "The presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour needs to follow a *pedagogy* which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery" (n. 20). For this purpose the Document cites the examples of John of Montecorvino, Matteo Ricci and Robert de Nobili.

This type of inculturation becomes peripheral and self-centred. The justification for inculturation is getting the message across. However praiseworthy the experiments of Matteo Ricci and Robert de Nobili

were, it cannot be denied that what inspired them to cultural adaptation was not so much the love of the respective cultures or the right of these cultures, but to make Christianity acceptable to the upper and aristocratic classes. This is not the true principle of inculturation. The point of departure for inculturation is the autonomy of the given culture, in so far as it is the God-intended means of unfolding the capabilities of a given group (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 53), giving them identity and rootedness. Culture, taken integrally, is the fundamental givenness in mission. That is the reason why the first Jerusalem Council decided that no unnecessary burden is to be imposed on the gentile cultures (Acts 15:28). The question is not so much how best the message can be conveyed, but how the culture can be transformed so that it becomes more humane and life-giving. Hence, Paul VI defined evangelization in terms of evangelizing cultures (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 20).

Thus inculturation becomes an other-centred process. It is a process through which the Gospel becomes a life-giving element for each culture, especially for the victim of the selfishness of the respective cultures. Hence it is a process of making the message of Jesus Christ a Good News to the people, especially those on the periphery. The parable of the Good Samaritan verifies inculturation today (Lk 10:25ff). In a way the entire ministry of Jesus was a transformation of the Jewish culture. It was identification, identifying with the poor and contestation, challenging whatever was dehumanizing in the Jewish culture. This led him to the cross. In this sense the cross becomes the sublime paradigm for inculturation today.

What we have in *Ecclesia in Asia* is a mere "borrowing of elements from human cultures", so that the faith can become "part of a people's cultural heritage", and different cultures can become "expressions of the one Christian faith". The primary concern is to offer the Good News of Redemption to all. To achieve this, certain particular areas, like theological reflection, liturgy, formation of priests and religious, etc., are identified for inculturation. Though they are important they still remain part of the over-all project of presenting Jesus Christ. The key question in genuine inculturation is, does the faith become a transforming prophetic presence from within, as the salt, light and leaven?

Even in the ministry of Jesus the Good News is experienced differently by different people. What the paralytic experienced is different from what Zaccheus or the Samaritan woman at the well experienced. What the woman caught in adultery experienced is different from what the widow who lost her only son experienced. The same is true even today. Inculturation is

the search to respond creatively and relevantly to the context so that the Gospel becomes a Good News to the particular context.

In the context of the theological inculturation, the Document stresses the need for taking the sensibilities of the Christians into consideration. Probably we must stress equally the human right of the Christians for accurate information. Should we allow them to continue in the wrong information? Right catechesis is part of the process of inculturation.

Concluding Remarks

Ecclesia in Asia is very much couched in the Western language of uniqueness and suffers from the preoccupation of saving Jesus Christ from other saviours. Mission is still anchored on salvation. All these are out of tune with the ground realities in Asia. Similarly certain phenomenological and historical considerations would have enabled the document to have a more realistic approach and to articulate a paradigm shift in mission for Asia. One wonders if it were the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour or the political will that eventually made Europe Christian! Was the evangelization of Americas a religious activity of sharing the Good News or a fall out of colonialism causing millions to lose their lives? Why is it that all appreciable inroads Christianity has made, are only among the followers of primal or disintegrating religions? Equally intriguing is the fact of the alarming rate of de-Christianization in the West. It would be interesting to study how far the salvation-oriented teachings of *Redemptoris Missio* helped mission in Asia. Mission in Asia must move away from superiority complexes and claims of paternalism and must anchor itself on the practice of Jesus Christ.

As Cardinal Darmaatmadja highlighted in his response to the Apostolic Exhortation, Asia needs “a new Evangelization which includes within it the attempt to reshape the concrete form of a New Presence of the Churches of Asia, as a constitutive part of the Evangelization of Asia”⁸. He emphasized that this new presence has to take into account how Jesus Christ has always been present and working in the Asian world. What we have outlined is an attempt to paint some of the contours of this new form of presence of the Church in Asia. Confrontational language cannot carry out mission in Asia. Rather “in the framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul” (n.6).

Notes:

1. Cardinal Jozef Tomko, “Proclaiming Christ the

World’s only Saviour”, *L’Osservatore Romano*, (Eng.), 15 April, 1991, p. 4. Partly the description was a misrepresentation. For instance what the Cardinal quoted as an Indian theologian’s views on conversion was in fact only that which the concerned theologian described as the Hindu view of conversion.

2. Cf. *The Examiner*, 16 May, 1998, p. 4.

3. Narendra Mohan, “Religious Harmony in the Third Millennium”, (Paper presented at the World Conference on Religious Freedom, New Delhi, 16-18 November, 1999).

4. Balchandra Rao, “Church Sticks to the Old Goals”, *Indian Express*, 13 November, 1999, p.6. Several writers in the National and Regional Dailies expressed similar sentiments.

5. Cf. Edmund Chia, “ ‘The Absence of Jesus’ in the VII FABC Plenary Assembly”, *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 63/12, 1999, p. 896.

6. Cf. *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 63/12, 1999, p. 885.

7. “Editorial”, *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 63/12, 1999, p.880.

8. Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, “A New Way of Being Church in Asia”, *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 63/12, 1999, p.888.

Ref.: Text from the author.

COMING EVENTS

FOR YOUR AGENDA

SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2000

Tuesday, 5 December, 2000 — Morning
Brothers of the Christian Schools,
Via Aurelia, 476,
00165 Rome.

A FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY FOR MEN AND WOMEN

JOAN CHITTISTER, OSB, USA

A MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY FOR A NEW WORLD

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE, OP, Superior General

WORKING GROUPS

Wednesday, 29 November China Group 15:00 hrs at SEDOS