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Editorial

After the publication of the special issue of the SEDOS Bulletin with the proceedings of the 2003 SEDOS Open Seminar on Interreligious Dialogue with Muslims, we are happy to present you with four (4) articles we thought would be of interest to our readers.

Earlier this year (cf. Vol. 35, nn. 5/6, pp. 67-73), we published Fr Felix Wilfred's study on the question of the relation between globalization and religions, from an Asian perspective. The first article in this issue, written by Fr **L. Stanislaus, S.V.D.**, studies the relation between globalization and inculturation. The author analyses the cultural overtones that are interwoven in the globalization process. He suggests ways to preserve the indigenous cultures and how the Gospel's transforming message can be spread through these local cultures.

In a second contribution (in French), Fr **S.M. Michael, S.V.D.**, probes the issue of evangelisation as dialogue, as it is endorsed by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*. In the actual Asian context the proclamation of the Good News is challenged and this makes the acceptance of Christianity difficult in Asia today. Therefore, evangelization as dialogue is an important strategy to be adopted by the Church in Asia. In order to deal with these developments it is necessary to create an acceptable climate for Christianity and to eliminate the existing prejudices.

The next article is by Fr **L. Ratnasekera, O.M.I.**. Our subscribers may have already read the author's insights on the profound, shared intuitions that may enable bridges to be built between Christianity and Buddhism (cf. Vol. 35, nn. 5/6, pp. 85-88). At the heart of Buddhist ethics, that govern personal conduct and collective social behaviour, is the so-called Eight-Fold Path which leads to liberation and the enhancement of people's dignity. The author argues that this ethical discipline could be adapted in Christian asceticism and spirituality as a path of purification in mind and body, disposing a devout Christian to receive God's grace and the Spirit's action.

The publication in our Bulletin of the article *Abraham – A blessing for All Nations* was suggested by the SEDOS Working Group "Bible and Mission". During the 16th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (Beirut - Lebanon), Fr **Adel Theodore Khoury** presented his reflections on the Patriarch Abraham and his role in the faith traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The figure of Abraham, to whom God granted his blessing, which was entrusted to him for all the nations, can initiate and guarantee a serious dialogue and cooperation between the three Abrahamic religions.

Enjoy reading this SEDOS Bulletin.

In the name of the Executive Committee of SEDOS,

Fr Pierre-Paul Walraet, O.S.C.

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Globalization and Inculturation

– L. Stanislaus, S.V.D. –

After colonialism and neo-colonialism, globalisation has emerged as a world system. It stands for liberalisation and open market policies. But these policies are formulated towards controlling the global market by the rich nations and its consequences on the poor nations are enormous: debt crisis, ecological degradation, urbanisation, unemployment, and rise in crime. Globalisation can imply the very denial of the diversity of civilisations and cultures, resulting in cultural homogenization and a monocultural world. Economic and cultural imperialism continue as the political life of poor nations are manipulated by the rich nations which use this new-found phenomena as a tool to continue their domination. What is the Church's role in bringing about the Kingdom of God in this context? How can the Church counter the pervasive monopolised market system in order to bring about the Reign of God? In this article I would like to analyse the cultural overtones that are interwoven in this process of globalisation and to suggest some ways how the local cultures can be preserved and the Gospel's message spread through these local cultures to transform society.

1. Dominance of Materialism

Globalisation can be looked at from different points of view. Its basis is economic globalisation that seeks to bring the whole world under one market system with free movement of capital and products. Typical of this phase is the free-market in which the *World Bank*, the *International Monetary Fund*, the *World Trade Organizations* dictate to Modern States to what extent governments can engage in, should refrain from, setting up socially protective measures, and coercing them to comply with *Structural Adjustment Programmes* (De Schryver, 1999:172-73). Trans-National Companies influence the major economic decisions of the world. This process of market and monopoly is a form of economic colonialism that operates to exploit and marginalise the Asian countries.

Economic globalisation is supported by political

globalisation, the richer countries use their political power to support and promote their own economic agendas in poor countries. In this way, the poor countries' resources are used or manipulated in order to serve the wants of the rich countries. A political *élite* is formed whereby the rulers of the poor nations benefit and the poor are relegated to the margins. Cultural globalisation seeks to spread modern culture to underpin economic and political globalisation.

In this process, not only monopoly counts, but money also plays a vital role in the transactions, and the market has a pivotal role in such a society (Amaladoss, 1999: 220-21). Thus ethical and moral values are not respected; the poor countries and the poor are victimised in this process (Anthuvan, 2000:18). Today, the mass media and technological advancements are exploited only for money, market and monopoly. The social consequences of globalisation are: the debt trap, the internationalisation of dominant markets, the exploitation of the environment, the increasing number of the poor, homogenisation of a consumer culture, the apparent absence of alternatives, and a sense of powerlessness. Today, globalisation has become a magical *mantra*. It is just a new name for the dominant capitalism. With globalisation, we are experiencing today simply a *non-revolutionary situation* (Stanislaus, 2001:1-2).

2. Characteristics and Aim of Globalization

Its first ideological orientation is capitalism. The value of individualism is promoted as it champions self-reliance and self-sufficiency so as to become the master of one's destiny. Michael Amaladoss describes this modern culture in terms of a materialistic outlook on life and reality as: a spirit of individualism and competition; an approach of autonomy in the name of science rather than the ethical and religious perspective; a consumer attitude; a profit-oriented commercial activity; an ideal of unity as uniformity and intolerance of pluralism; life is mechanized; and finally, there is no sense of the common good and people are ex-

pendable (Amaladoss, 1997:1).

Its ultimate concern is the free market and not free people. It is an economic system which grows without the poor. Globalization as it takes place today tends to forget the local: *the local is called upon to be sacrificed on the altar of the global*. Finally, economy, technology, capital and market constitute the linchpin of globalization. Globalization leads to fragmentation of the human community owing to the utterly faceless profit-oriented competition and rivalry in the dynamics of the market economy.

The hopes and aspirations of people in this process appear to be fundamentally determined by a liberal humanist vision of humanity. The emphasis of this vision is on radical individualism, personal autonomy and privatized morality; the uncritical faith in enterprise capitalism and the ideal of economic self-sufficiency, a divorce of business, law, science, medicine and politics from ethics; the decline of faith in the common, or use of our common, wealth for the commonweal; faith in science, medicine, and technology to provide a technological fix for everything; the individualistic pattern of religious faith and pietistic devotion; and finally, the increasing secularization of society despite nominal belief in God.

The mono-culture, propagated by the values of consumerism and market economy, silently and subtly displaces the root-paradigms and belief systems of the indigenous people of the Third World and make them rootless and alienated from their cultural heritages and archetypes. It creates a cultural and ethical void in their own lives, values, and vision. *Ecclesia in Asia* pointedly says, "there is also the aspect of a *cultural* globalisation, made possible by the modern communications media, which is quickly drawing Asian societies into a global consumer culture that is both secularist and materialistic. The result is an eroding of traditional family and social values which until now had sustained peoples and societies" (n. 39).

"However, if globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot be negative. These are, for example, the absolutizing of the economy, unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between rich and poor, unfair competition which puts the poor nations in a situation of ever increasing inferiority" (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 20).

In *Conclusions of the Colloquium* (2001), it says, "Chaotic global capitalism is creating a society where 'to be is to

consume' where the great majority of citizens is being disenfranchised politically and disempowered economically, where everybody and everything, including religion, is being turned into a commodity to be bought and sold or treated as an object of private entertainment. Even as the rhetoric of empowerment goes on in full swing, all around us we see demographic imbalances and destructive cultural shifts. In all this we see a direct co-relation between market forces, political instability and the rise of religious and cultural fanaticism. Social frustration is creating an angry generation and a culture of violence, fear and hate" (n. 8).

Globalization has become a way of life. There is indeed the tendency to force all the peoples of our planet into a single paradigm, into one single world culture and economy. The social and cultural changes brought about by globalization are, however, often so incisive that they cannot but provoke serious tensions and stir up hostile resistance (Scheuerer, 2001:16).

3. Globalization and Culture

Culture appears to be an arena in which the multinational organizations are particularly active. An attempt to establish cultural imperialism goes on in globalization. Through the imposition of the culture of capitalism, the Third World countries are trained to prepare the ground for, to use Theodore Adorno's phrase, an "administered world", to which corporate capital would have easy access. The cultural imperialism provides the groundwork for exploiting the market potential of Third World countries and tries to sell anything ranging from pornography to pizza without a moral conscience.

The current cultural invasion has two definite dimensions: hegemonization, and instrumentality.

(i) *Hegemonization*: The culture of capitalism is shown in the Third World countries as an ideal form to operate. Antonio Gramsci in his analysis of culture and politics says the concept of "common sense" i.e. "the uncritical and largely unconscious way in which a person perceived the world", influences the pattern of life of an individual. Gramsci argues that dominant groups in society try "to transcend a particular form of common sense and to create another which is close to the conception of the world of the leading groups" (See Panikkar, 1997:53). The forces of globalization and their comrades in Asia are precisely engaged in such a task. Globalization affords the opportunity to internalize the universal culture and the active collaboration of the bourgeoisie facilitates its realization. In turn, bourgeois culture dominates society and its hegemony is being established.

(ii) *Instrumentality*: Globalization not only brings forth cultural imperialism, but also it makes culture into an instrument of imperialism. In other words cul-

ture acts as a sword and as a mask. In the universal culture paradigm the freedom of choice is illusion and people make additional choices only out of compulsion. The electronic media tends to create an impression that it broadcasts new healthy cultures. But in actuality the global forces are working through the Asian cultures by appropriating indigenous cultural forms and practices and robbing them of their own ability to respond to new changes. The indigenous culture is used to market the MNCs goods. Indigenous culture become passive receivers more like a sponge than proactive agents.

The appropriation of culture has two important dimensions: construction and commodification.

(i) *Construction*: Many global agencies are probing the popular cultural forms, and imparting their own meaning to the people. Similarly, the efforts of the deconstructionists and post-modernists to decontextualize and dehistoricize culture are directly contributing to the hegemony of cultural imperialism. These processes lead to the creation of a space for the global forces to operate in imposing their new cultural patterns.

(ii) *Commodification*: The cultural operators have been slowly but steadily moving into the terrain of popular culture to satisfy their cultural curiosity. The dances of the Tribals, the harvest songs of the peasants, the martial arts of rural folk and innumerable other art forms are enacted in studios and presented as exotic practices. Ultimately, it is likely that they will exist only in their commodified incarnation, thereby losing their original form, content and context. Given the proliferation of the electronic media, artificial production of culture would replace original meaning and the culture would be divorced from its social milieu, and popular culture would be transformed into a popularized culture. The ensuing cultural fossilization would be difficult to stem (Panikkar, 1997: 55-56).

The context of globalization gives rise to two theoretical constructs: global flows and cultural logics (see Schreiter, 1996:369-79).¹

(i) *Global flows*: are theological discourses which offer intelligible discourses that address the contradictions or failures of global systems. Looking at contemporary theologies, one would suggest that there are at least four such global flows — chains of mutually intelligible discourse that address the contradictions or failures of global systems. These are theologies of (i) liberation, (ii) feminists, (iii) ecology, and (iv) human rights. The globalization process privatizes religion, as does the modernization process, which means that religion does not function as a global system as such. However, it can mobilize antisystemic feeling in cultures, and give a religious answer to economic or political problems;

(ii) *Cultural logics*: Even as globalising processes homogenize the world, they result also at the same time in

a heightened sense of the particular. This particularization, which could be called cultural logics, chooses to respond to the pressures of globalization. One can speak of three kinds of cultural logic at work in theology today: *antiglobalism*, *ethnification* and *primitivism*.

Antiglobalism is an attempt to retreat from the onslaught of the globalising forces. The retreat is not a total withdrawal, but selected values or icons become significant. *Antiglobalism* is manifested in theology in two forms: fundamentalism and revanchism. Fundamentalism has been in many countries a response to imperial intrusion. Often, it is called a “private refuge”. In revanchism, “modernity is not rejected wholesale, but certain items become signposts at the boundaries of who is truly in and who is clearly out” (Schreiter, 1996: 376). Unlike fundamentalism, there is no attempt to retreat from the world; rather the impulse is to retake it.

The second type of cultural logic is *ethnification*, it may be either a process of rediscovery of a forgotten identity or ethnogenesis, the birth of an identity for the first time. While the logic of ethnification will continue to drive contextual theologies concerned with culture, it needs to be situated in the larger scheme of things, lest it become antiquarian in nature.

The third type of cultural logic is *primitivism*, which may be defined as an attempt to go back to an earlier, pre-modern period to find a frame of reference and meaning in order to engage the present. Primitivism might also be called revitalization, that is a use of an earlier period of history to give focus and direction to the present. The period chosen is one that represents cultural or social identity at its strongest or its purest.

In this process of globalization, first, the context has become increasingly deterritorialized, the cultures cannot remain in a given territory. The compression of space in globalization has affected different cultures’ territory. “Boundaries today are increasingly not boundaries of territory, but boundaries of difference. Often, these boundaries intersect and crisscross in bewildering fashion, the space along boundaries is often a space of great cultural change or creativity, this has importance for understanding how cultures are being reshaped . . .” (Schreiter, 1997: 79-80).

Second, contexts are becoming hyerdifferentiated. The compression of time, the world of cyberspace, the variety of choices in the market, the intermix of cultural overtones in society, and the movement of peoples mean that people are now participating in different realities at the same time — there is multiple belonging. This has an impact on any single culture within a multicultural society.

Third context is more clearly hybridized. The purity of culture and the preservation of culture are probably always more an aspiration than a reality, but in a globalized world they become increasingly difficult and complex. From the intermix of global flows and cultural

logics, there is intense interaction that changes the original pattern of any culture (Schreier, 1997: 379-80). The purity of form is questioned or modified quickly or the values of culture are questioned.

The correlation between globalisation and culture can be seen in three paradigms:

(i) There is a widespread understanding that growing global interdependence may tend towards increasing cultural standardisation or uniformisation, in the global sweep of consumerism. A shorthand version of this movement is *McDonaldization, or Pizzalization*.

(ii) Various forms of difference have come to the fore, for instance in relation to identity politics, gender, minority rights, indigenous peoples, and ethnic and religious movements. There seem to be cultural revivals in the poor countries as a response to globalisation, as a consequence, we are experiencing a 'clash of civilisations'.

(iii) What is taking place is a process of trans-local cultural mixing or hybridization.

The questions that need to be discussed are: Who are the *élite* people controlling the economy and forming a globalised culture? How can one preserve cultural identity in the context of cultural imperialism? How is one's culture being excluded in the globalizing world?

Globalization is not identical with a *new world order*. It is first of all an economic reality advocating the expansion of the liberal market economy all over the earth. Globalization has to be seen not only as an economic process but also as an attitude and a way of life. Its uniform economic mechanisms go hand in hand with a trend to a uniform cultural leveling. Its ideological foundations are based on the *enlightenment worldview*.

4. Inculturation

Inculturation is a matter of fidelity to our reality, principle, economy, truth and grace of the incarnation of God's Word. It is neither an escape from our reality and context nor is it a world of illusion. In attempting to define it, Arij A. Roest Crolius says, "The inculturation of the Church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal" (Roest Crolius, 1984: 15-16).

Underlining the encounter between culture and Gospel, *Redemptoris Missio* says, "It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation 'means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures'" (RM, n. 52). Explaining the importance of the process of inculturation, *Ecclesia in Asia* says, "In the process of

encountering the world's cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them ..." (EA, n. 21).

5. Agents of Inculturation

"The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission (RM, Ch. III, n. 21).² The Spirit's presence is everywhere, in history, peoples, cultures and religions. While acknowledging his activities, the Church has the responsibility to discern his presence in the cosmos.

When people hear the Gospel and respond to it in their way of life, reflection and celebration, this response is expressed in their language and culture. The people who respond to the Gospel in terms of their culture and traditions are the agents of inculturation (ITA, n. 28). The local people become the agents of inculturation. The Bishops take care to ensure fidelity and to provide discernment in the process of inculturation. They guide the people. The role of the Church is to facilitate the articulation of the local Church's experience and expression of the Gospel message. Inculturation must be guided by two principles: "compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church" (RM, n. 54). Basic Christian Communities, Basic Communities or Basic Human Communities "are ways of experiencing and expressing the being of the Church in a unique way in the multi-cultural and multi-religious society of our country. Here, the faithful encounter the different world-views, faith-experiences and spiritualities and discover the wonderful work of God in the histories of all peoples. In these communities, one can encounter the unfolding of human values that all humans cherish and promote" (ITA, n. 31). Women can play a vital role in promoting inculturation, since they become carriers of culture. Dalits, Tribals, fisherfolk and all the subaltern groups can express their self-identity and promote the life of the Church expressing and living the faith in their own culture (ITA, n. 30).

6. Globalization and Inculturation

The proclamation and the reception of the Gospel are always a call to conversion. The life, teaching and the practice of Jesus point to the various manifestations of Satan and Mammon in his time and call for a change of life towards God (cf. Mt 6:24). He loves all persons but shows his preference the poor and the neglected and looks at society from the perspective of the oppressed (Lk 10:29-37). He is prophetically critical of the domination of the political and religious rulers who impose their culture and pattern of life (Mt 23:13-30).

He looks at society apart from ritualism and legalism. He shows the boundless mercy of the divine through his life to the poor and he gives a new commandment of loving and serving the other (Mt 22:37-40). He proclaims a Kingdom characterized by freedom, fellowship, justice and peace. He commanded everyone to spread this Kingdom where everyone is equal without exploitation, everyone enjoys freedom without any compulsion from outside, and everyone is treated justly without any domination.

Our mission is to preach Jesus Christ, the giver of life and to spread the Kingdom of God and actualize it in an effective and efficient manner. Seeing the reality of society, Archbishop Oscar Romero asserted that fully actualizing the Reign of God, not only is beyond our efforts, it can only be done with the efforts of the divine. Although this vision of the Reign of God is too high, there is a sense of liberation in participating in that project. This enables us to do something worthwhile. This calls for an incarnate spirituality and this mission demands that we be incarnated in the cultures and contexts. As Christians, we are committed to Christ who brought this Kingdom and we are at the service of the Kingdom. A missionary with true faith, is conscious of being merely a steward or servant and never its owner or master.

If the Church is in mission, it is by its very nature an agent of transformation of culture. In human terms, the realization of the Kingdom of God is through culture. Then, the way of life, the pattern of living, the customs, and the structures incorporate the values of the Kingdom, thus there is internal change in the culture expressing and living the Reign of God in society. This change can be slow and superficial; that is, there can be a change merely in style that gives the Church time to adjust. But change can be deep and sudden — revolutionary. Only a century ago, speed was judged by the clip-clop of hoofs; today, speed is calculated to one billionth of a second. Revolutionary approaches are needed in revolutionary times. Is our society ready for such a revolutionary change? Can we create a mindset or atmosphere to plunge into the revolutionary missionary endeavour? If not, the Church will be left behind because speed is calculated to one billionth of a second. But the challenge to the Church is how to filter and to preserve the values that are in accordance with the Gospel from the globalized values of comfort, profit, consumerism, etc.

Discerning the signs of the times, as the Second Vatican Council affirms, must be done in the light of the Gospel, so as to respond to the challenges of society with the prompting of the Holy Spirit. *Vita Consecrata* says, “consecrated life will not be limited to reading the signs of the times but will also contribute to elaborating and putting into effect new initiatives of evangelization for present-day situations” (n. 73). The local people who are agents of inculturation, the indigenous cultures, and

the little traditions should be given importance. These cultures pose a challenge not only to our missionary endeavours, but to our commitment to the marginalized and the poor.

Emphasizing the importance of culture, Luzbetak in his monumental work *The Church and Cultures*, says as a conclusion: “*We are concerned about cultures so that the Church may be as perfect a channel of Grace as possible, as worthy an instrument in the hands of God as possible, as good, wise, and faithful a servant as is humanly possible*” (1988: 397). The Church in mission challenges the cultural pattern or way of globalizing the world and should give importance to the local cultures so they can be transformed in the light of the Gospel. Its vision is to protect the local culture from the onslaught of cultural imperialism from outside.

The *Conclusions of the Research Seminar* (2000) stated, “What it envisages is a continuous dialogue with religions and civil society in general leading to the creation of wider human communities that transcend local and limited identities yet having their roots in them. Such mission will indeed render them worthy inheritors of the legacy of their master, the Suffering Servant, whose most striking exhortation was that his followers become effective yet totally unpretentious agents of transformation in society in the manner of light, salt, and leaven” (n. 42).

A. Our Struggles and Hope for a Just world

We realize the need for a paradigm shift, alternatives and a counter-culture in the sense of prophetic innovations, initiatives in the light of the Gospel, and thus to view globalization from below, from the standpoint of the poor, subaltern groups in order to promote justice and the common good. The latter points to *sarvodaya* through *antyyodaya*. The Indian Theological Association (*ITA*) articulates the challenge of the Church as follows: “The Indian Church needs to join in concerted efforts to oppose the forces of Globalization that destroy the noble values of our culture by exploiting mass-media communications. We are alarmed at the fact that the so-called champions of nationalism are promoting individualism, consumerism and cut-throat competition by succumbing to the forces of Globalization. We are obliged to conscientize our people about the destructive and dehumanizing forces of Globalization, pointing out how these plunder and rob the livelihood of the poor and the marginalized people of our country. The hidden agenda of these forces must be exposed for they have the sole aim of acquiring maximum profit for their capital investment at any cost, even if it means bleeding our country of its natural resources and making people expendable. In solidarity with courageous men and women who unmask the nefarious designs of Globalization, we must pursue a path where

the poor and the marginalized can live a dignified human life” (*ITA*, n. 26).

In the struggle against the imposition of the market economy, we should be able to say ‘no’ to the idea that *There is No Alternative Syndrome (TINA)* in relation to globalization. Alternative ways are emerging, such as: solidarity between subaltern groups, people’s movements, and NGOs; finding a strategy for participatory democracy and networking among the various groups affected.

Globalization from below calls for ‘structural transformation’, not ‘structural adjustment programmes’ (SAP). Today, globalization without marginalization and globalization in solidarity are seen as the Church’s response to counter the evil effects on the oppressed. Globalization without marginalization demands that globalization be in the rich countries and that they share their riches with the poor. It means that the standpoint of the poor, their dignity, their participation and solidarity with them are taken seriously in shaping the world. We need to work for the globalization of solidarity, not only in solidarity (Arokiasamy, 2000: 64). “The future of humankind does not hang ultimately on the market economy but on humankind’s need to be human. Our future holds no other option than to be human and inter-human, to create a civilization of solidarity. Such civilization can come from below, from the solidarity of the marginalized, the excluded, the *minjung* of every country when they become active subjects participating in the economic, political and civil life of society and responsible agents of humanized development” (Arokiasamy, 2000: 65).

In the era of globalization, the role played by the means of social communication in shaping the world, its cultures and ways of thinking has led to rapid and far-reaching changes in Asian societies. By using modern communications, it is necessary to integrate the message of the Gospel and evaluate the new culture. “To this end, the Church needs to explore ways of thoroughly integrating the mass media into her pastoral planning and activity, so that by their effective use the Gospel’s power can reach out still further to individuals and entire peoples, and infuse Asian cultures with the values of the Kingdom” (*EA*, n. 48).

B. Counter-Cultural Community

To counter the globalizing values and systems, forming counter-cultural communities could be a way to live the Kingdom more effectively at present. It is a challenging task to present a counter-cultural vision, which proposes an alternate world-view and system of values. This can be done effectively, not by talking about them, but by living them. The Church could promote the nuclei of counter-cultural communities that give active witness to the values of the Kingdom of

God. It is not to think of a new way of life but to live a new kind of thinking.

To be counter-cultural is to challenge people in the name of a vision of what they ought to become, by embodying that vision. In this sense it will always have a critical consciousness of the present. It is to be prophetic. The counter-cultural communities should be both ‘models of’ and ‘models for’ the communities of the Reign of God. To opt for the power of truth and love is more than a strategic option. It is the only authentic way for a counter-cultural community.

The prophetic mission of the Church in this context could be rereading the Bible in terms of local, cultural paradigms, giving more importance to form and content so that the message of Christ could be translated directly in local idioms and root-paradigms. The message of the Gospel is to be presented more in terms of forming a servant community than in traditional anthropocentric rationalities and hermeneutics.

To build up the local Church at all levels by promoting autonomy and relevance in reinterpreting tradition is to get attuned to the culture of the place rather than just borrowing other cultural elements. In this context inculturation calls for the interpretation of the gospels in the light of the social, economic and religious context of Asia. Evangelization in Asia calls for “affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation” (*EN*, n. 19).

The counter-cultural communities can live by affirming life and affirming community life.

(i) *Affirm life*

To affirm life is to affirm a life worthy of human beings, who are not machines, but spirits-in-bodies and bodies with spirits. To live humanly means also a life that is not dominated by the urge to consume. To affirm the spirit in the human is also to affirm the divine presence in the human, the transcendent, which is immanent. “One would then reject the materialism and secularism of modernity and seek to humanize science and technology so that they become instruments in human hands to promote life rather than turn the humans themselves into machines” (Amaladoss, 1999: 228).

(ii) *Affirm community*

The experience of community is lived at various levels from the family, to the group, to the nation and to the world. To affirm community is to respect and accept the others with all their differences of caste or creed, sex or ethnicity, culture or social status. “To affirm community is to affirm peace. Real peace in the community

will come only with justice. Otherwise violence in its various forms will continue to plague us. Inequality in whatever form can be maintained only through violence, whether open or hidden" (Amaladoss, 1999: 229).

Building counter-cultural communities is not opposing other cultures or their genuine life situations. The Church can spell out what are the concrete ways in which we can help people to build the new global community based on justice, freedom and fellowship. This demands from us an openness to relate and to network, to dialogue and to collaborate. While rooted in the economic and political reality of life, we may need to concentrate on the personal, cultural and religious dimensions of the people's movements.

The Church needs to be self-critical so as to avoid encouraging and legitimating factors of globalization and to support alternative movements. The eschatological vision of the Kingdom as a global community of freedom, solidarity and justice, calls us to commit ourselves to transforming the local and at the same influencing other communities with the eschatological vision. *Conclusions of the Colloquium* (2001) says, "The all-pervasive onslaught of globalization has little regard for the cause of the deprived and the resourceless, and its impact on urbanization needs to be countered and critiqued. Explosive economic, political, social and religious situations call us to be ever-present at the 'fault-lines' and practice the presence of peace based on justice and truth precisely as a 'little flock' (cf. Lk 12:32)" (n. 45).

Genuine inculturation indicates the link between Faith and the struggle for justice. "An understanding of Faith, active and revolutionary, is essential if the Christian communities mean to help the country march to liberation. When the authentic human values of truth and service, love and compassion are being thrown to the winds, a cultural revolution constantly engendered by the Faith may well be the enduring response inculturation offers to the human situation. In a context imbued with social sin Faith ought to be a subversive force, precisely because it is a re-creative force" (Varaprasadam, 1986: 59).

"The Church ... is called not only to promote greater integration between nations, thus helping to create an authentic globalized culture of solidarity, but also to cooperate with every legitimate means in reducing the negative effects of globalization, such as the domination of the powerful over the weak, especially in the economic sphere, and the loss of the values of local cultures in favour of a misconstrued homogenization..." (*Ecclesia in America*, n. 55).

Building the Kingdom demands us to work against Satan and Mammon (profit-oriented market, hegemonization of universal culture, dominance of political power by the powerful over small nations) rather than against other religions and cultures. It calls for promoting and networking with the prophetic movements in every religion. For building a just society, "the ethical and moral aspects of globalisation need to be more directly addressed by the leaders of nations and by organisations concerned with human promotion" (*EA*, n. 39).

When there is a Gospel and culture encounter, we need to attend to the transformative dimension of the culture. If the society is unjust with caste discrimination, oppression of women, child marriage, etc., the Gospel would demand a serious and sustained effort at promoting equality and community. "While integrating the richness of diversity and the creativity of the people, we stand committed to promote universal reconciliation among all cultural groupings and communities. This will be our answer to the evil forces of Globalization which seek to impose a dominant mono-culture that will serve their own interests and capture economic and political benefits at the society of the marginalized" (*ITA*, n. 44).

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Notes

¹ Schreiter takes the concept *global flow* from Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, London, Sage, 1994; and the concept *cultural logic* from Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994.

² Susan Smith summarises in her article the various currents of Theology of Mission and Holy Spirit, see "The Holy Spirit and Mission in Some Contemporary Theologies of Mission" *SEDOS*, 34 (2002) pp. 98-110.

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L'Évangélisation comme dialogue Vue dans *Ecclesia in Asia*

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I. La vision d'*Ecclesia in Asia* sur l'évangélisation comme dialogue

I. 1. Introduction

L'exhortation apostolique post-synodale *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA) est placée dans le contexte de l'Eglise en Asie au seuil du Troisième Millénaire chrétien. C'est l'espérance de l'Eglise que «de même que dans le premier millénaire la Croix fut plantée sur le sol de l'Europe et dans le second sur celui des Amériques et de l'Afrique, nous pouvons prier pour que dans le Troisième Millénaire chrétien une grande moisson de foi soit récoltée dans le continent vaste et vital (de l'Asie)» (*Ecclesia in Asia*, nn. 1,4). L'Eglise en Asie est appelée à réfléchir sur le mystère selon lequel bien que le Sauveur soit né en Asie, cependant jusqu'à maintenant il est resté largement inconnu pour les peuples de ce vaste continent. L'Eglise en Asie a besoin de se consacrer de façon renouvelée à la mission de rendre Jésus mieux connu par tous. Cela devrait être sa priorité absolue.

I. 2. Les défis du dialogue sur l'Évangélisation

Tout de même, les défis d'une nouvelle évangélisation au cours du Troisième Millénaire du christianisme en Asie sont marqués par «la question de la rencontre du christianisme avec les cultures et les religions locales très anciennes. Il y a là un grand défi pour l'évangélisation, car des systèmes religieux comme le bouddhisme ou l'hindouisme se présentent comme ayant un caractère clairement sotériologique» (EA, n. 2). L'Asie est caractérisée par ses anciennes traditions et civilisations, ses profondes philosophies et sa sagesse qui ont fait l'Asie comme elle est aujourd'hui (EA, n. 4). Ses valeurs religieuses et culturelles comme «l'amour du silence et de la contemplation, la simplicité, l'harmonie, le détachement, la non-violence, l'esprit de travail assidu, de discipline, de vie frugale, la soif d'apprendre et la recherche philosophique,

sont profonds. Elle tient en grande estime les valeurs de respect de la vie, de compassion pour tous les êtres, de proximité avec la nature, de piété filiale envers les parents, les anciens et les ancêtres et un sens de la communauté très développé. En particulier, l'Asie estime que la famille est une source vitale de force, une communauté solide dotée d'un sentiment puissant de solidarité. Les peuples d'Asie sont connus pour leur esprit de tolérance religieuse et de coexistence pacifique.... En dépit de l'influence de la modernisation et de la sécularisation, les religions asiatiques montrent des signes d'une grande vitalité et de capacité de renouvellement.... Tout cela indique un sens spirituel inné et une sagesse morale dans l'âme asiatique» (EA, n. 6).

Tout en affirmant les valeurs asiatiques ci-dessus avec un grand respect, *Ecclesia in Asia* cherche à s'engager dans un dialogue sincère pour communiquer le Christ comme l'accomplissement de ces valeurs. La tâche de l'Eglise en Asie est d'«illustrer et d'expliquer plus pleinement que le Christ est le seul médiateur entre Dieu et l'homme et le seul rédempteur du monde et qu'il doit être distingué des fondateurs des autres grandes religions» (cf. EA, n. 2). Ainsi, l'Eglise se dirige vers un dialogue harmonieux, de telle manière qu'elle soit fidèle à la fois à ses propres traditions et à l'âme asiatique (cf. EA, n. 6).

I. 3. Le Saint Esprit, Source du dialogue

Ecclesia in Asia comprend que le salut apporté par Jésus-Christ fait partie de la révélation du plan de la Trinité pour le salut. D'où il ressort que le Saint Esprit est une part absolument vitale du mystère de Jésus. L'Esprit de Dieu, avec une merveilleuse perspicacité, dirige le cours du temps et renouvelle la face de la terre. D'où il ressort que l'Esprit de Dieu est le premier agent du dialogue de l'Eglise avec tous les peuples, cultures et religions (cf. EA, n. 15).

Cependant, les Pères du Synode ont exprimé leur

inquiétude au sujet de la tendance à séparer l'activité du Saint Esprit et celle du Sauveur. Répondant à cette inquiétude, le Saint-Père rappelle à l'Eglise d'Asie que l'«[Esprit] ne se substitue pas au Christ, et il ne remplit pas une sorte de vide ; comme, suivant une hypothèse parfois avancée, il en existerait entre le Christ et le Logos. Ce que le Christ fait dans le cœur des hommes et dans l'histoire des peuples, dans les cultures et les religions, remplit une fonction de préparation évangélique et cela ne peut pas être sans relation au Christ, le Verbe fait chair par l'action de l'Esprit, «afin que, homme parfait, il sauve tous les hommes et récapitule toutes choses en lui» (EA, n. 16).

De plus, le Saint-Père affirme que *par conséquent, «la présence universelle de l'Esprit Saint ne peut donc pas servir d'excuse pour omettre de proclamer explicitement Jésus-Christ comme seul et unique Sauveur. À l'inverse, la présence universelle de l'Esprit Saint est inséparable du salut universel en Jésus. La présence de l'Esprit dans la création et dans l'histoire conduit à Jésus Christ, en qui la création et l'histoire sont rachetées et trouvent leur accomplissement»* (EA, n. 16).

«Tout cela montre que la mission salvifique de Jésus porte la marque de la présence de l'Esprit : la vie, *la vie nouvelle*. Ente l'envoi du Fils par le Père et l'envoi de l'Esprit par le Père et le Fils, il y a un lien étroit et vital. L'action de l'Esprit dans la création et dans l'histoire humaine acquiert une signification totalement nouvelle en regard de son action dans la vie et dans la mission de Jésus. Les 'semences du Verbe' semées par l'Esprit preparent toute la creation, l'histoire et l'homme à la pleine maturité dans le Christ» (EA, n. 16, cf. RM, n. 28).

I. 4. Dialogue et Nouvelle Evangélisation

La Nouvelle Evangélisation est le contexte de la mission de dialogue. La Nouvelle Evangélisation est importante comme le seuil du Nouveau Millénaire juste commencé car **i)** après deux millénaires, une majeure partie de la famille humaine ne reconnaît pas encore le Christ, **ii)** la situation dans laquelle se trouvent l'Eglise et le monde est un défi particulièrement pour les croyances religieuses et les vérités morales qui en découlent. Il existe presque partout une tendance à construire le progrès et la prospérité sans référence à Dieu, et à réduire la dimension religieuse de la personne à l'atmosphère privée.

Le dialogue pour une nouvelle évangélisation est un

appel à changer et à transformer la présente vision du monde moderne vers une vraie sagesse et une plénitude de vie pour le genre humain tout entier. Cela implique que le dialogue soit dirigé vers une nouvelle vision d'un développement intégral. La nouvelle évangélisation est un appel à la conversion. Le défi du dialogue pour une nouvelle évangélisation est que «*la question n'est pas de savoir si l'Eglise a quelque chose d'essentiel à dire aux hommes et aux femmes de notre temps, mais comment elle peut le dire avec clarté et de façon convaincante*» (EA, n. 29).

I. 5. Deux niveaux de dialogue

Les efforts de l'Eglise pour s'engager dans le dialogue sont dirigés vers a) ceux qui partagent sa foi en Jésus-Christ notre Maître et notre Sauveur, b) ceux qui suivent d'autres traditions religieuses, sur la base des aspirations religieuses que l'on trouve dans tout cœur humain. Le dialogue œcuménique et le dialogue interreligieux constituent une véritable vocation pour l'Eglise.

II. Réflexions sur la mise en œuvre de *Ecclesia in Asia*

II. 1. Le dialogue existe pour gommer les préjugés contre le christianisme en Asie

a) *Le christianisme est occidental et il est une force épuisée*

Alors que *Ecclesia in Asia* a proposé plusieurs champs de dialogue, leur mise en œuvre est empêchée par les préjugés et la fausse information contre le christianisme en Asie. C'est donc un aspect important du dialogue est donc de libérer le christianisme des préjugés et de la fausse information dans les esprits des Asiatiques. Les préjugés contre le christianisme ont été accumulés à cause des circonstances historiques auxquelles il est mêlé et dans lesquelles il existe et intervient dans les affaires du monde. Donc l'évangélisation en Asie est liée à ce qui arrive dans l'Eglise universelle et aux événements dans d'autres parties du monde.

L'Occident devient de plus en plus sécularisé aujourd'hui et il y a une tendance croissante à bâtir le progrès et la prospérité sans référence à Dieu et à réduire la dimension religieuse de la personne humaine à l'atmosphère privée. Beaucoup de parties de l'Asie sont caractérisées par une montée religieuse, culturelle et nationaliste. Y a-t-il un lien plus profond entre ces phénomènes ou bien le fait qu'ils surviennent dans le même espace de temps est-il une simple coïncidence ?

Je pense qu'il peut y avoir un lien dans cette situation du monde. Les mouvements nationalistes, religieux, culturels et idéologiques (communisme) sont liés à la croissance et à l'affirmation de l'identité asiatique dans le contexte de la mondialisation occidentale économique, politique et culturelle. Dans quelques cas, surtout au Moyen Orient, cela pourrait être une opposition à la modernisation imposée par l'Ouest, matérialiste, orientée vers le marché, et impersonnelle. Ces phénomènes ont été appelés par certains le «*Choc des Civilisations*». Donc, l'évangélisation de l'Asie ne peut pas être vue comme isolée des affaires du monde. Pour mettre en œuvre la vision de *Ecclesia in Asia*, le dialogue de l'évangélisation doit donc faire un effort sur beaucoup de fronts — culturel, idéologique, politique, social, économique et religieux.

L'Ouest, qui est traditionnellement considéré comme chrétien, semble aujourd'hui moins intéressé par son orientation religieuse traditionnelle. Le nombre d'Occidentaux qui cherchent sens et consolation dans les religions et cultures asiatiques va croissant. Les propagandistes hindous comme le RSS et le VHP (Organisation mondiale hindoue) ont répandu l'idée que le christianisme est une force épuisée en Occident et que l'hindouisme est l'avenir du monde. Ils citent le nombre croissant d'Occidentaux qui visitent les gourous et les ashrams (ascètes religieux et leurs centres en Asie). L'impact des mouvements du Nouvel Age en Europe et en Amérique ont donné une nouvelle confiance aux chefs des religions asiatiques pour leur travail missionnaire. Tout ceci affecte l'image du christianisme en Asie. Aujourd'hui, nous voyons le renouveau religieux de l'islam, de l'hindouisme, du bouddhisme en Asie comme une alternative au christianisme. Les efforts chrétiens d'évangélisation en Asie sont vus avec suspicion.

Tout en appréciant et en absorbant ce qu'il y a de bon de tous côtés, le dialogue d'évangélisation en Asie doit être une épée à deux tranchants, à la fois critiquant les processus mondiaux de matérialisme et aussi communiquant le vrai sens de Jésus dans le monde moderne. Cela implique que nous devons faire une distinction entre les valeurs chrétiennes et les valeurs matérialistes et consuméristes basées sur un marché changeant, valeurs qui affectent l'Ouest aussi bien que le reste du monde. Cela doit être fait par une intervention dans la vie de chaque jour, dirigée vers la transformation de la conscience sociale allant vers un sens plus élevé de la vie, de la justice sociale et du souci écologique.

b) *Dialogue dans le contexte de la montée du nationalisme religieux et culturel*

Les derniers siècles ont été une phase très turbu-

lente dans l'histoire du monde. D'une part, nous avons vu le pouvoir du co-lonialisme et aussi l'esprit de liberté dans les mouvements nationalistes qui ouvrirent une grande partie de l'Asie à la révolution nationaliste et souvent communiste. Dans les années 1940, eurent lieu plusieurs luttes nationalistes qui résultèrent dans la formation de beaucoup d'Etats-nations en Asie. Pour affermir l'identité de ces nations, des orientations culturelles, religieuses et idéologiques (communistes) sont au travail en Asie aujourd'hui. Et là, le christianisme est souvent associé à l'Occident et cela amène une approche moins neutre pour apprécier et embrasser le christianisme sur son seul mérite.

Une impression a été créée selon laquelle chaque pays a sa propre religion et les religions asiatiques comme l'hindouisme, le bouddhisme et l'islam sont les religions de ces pays en Asie et alors la conversion au christianisme est considérée comme anti-nationale. Ainsi, l'opinion publique s'est répandue contre le christianisme et des lois anti-conversions ont été promulguées. Dans ce contexte, un dialogue pour l'évangélisation doit s'employer à clarifier ces préjugés, qui mettent obstacle à l'acceptation du christianisme en Asie.

Le dialogue d'évangélisation en Asie devrait se concentrer sur une clarification et une définition du nationalisme en termes inclusifs en faisant place à une neutralité qui accepte n'importe quelle religion selon ses propres mérites. Le dialogue d'évangélisation devrait créer les conditions pour accepter le Christ comme la plénitude de la vie qu'il donne aux peuples d'Asie. Donc, le dialogue d'évangélisation confronte et défie les mouvements politiques qui définissent une nation en termes exclusifs. Par exemple, la politique de l'*hindutva* (hindouité) en Inde s'efforce de définir l'Inde comme une *Rashtra* (nation) hindoue. Elle fait de la propagande pour affirmer que les chrétiens indiens sont anti-nationaux et étrangers. Contre un tel nationalisme étroit, le dialogue d'évangélisation doit confronter l'*hindutva* pour sa position anti-historique de nationalisme exclusif. Ce dialogue doit se faire en collaboration avec les mouvements populaires pour définir l'Inde en termes pluralistes. En termes concrets, cela signifie que «*les catholiques asiatiques prennent leur caractère d'Asiatiques sérieusement comme le contexte de leur existence de chrétiens*». En pratique, cela signifie que les chefs des Eglises d'Asie doivent répondre aux défis des contextes sociaux, politiques, économiques et religieux d'Asie et qu'ils aident effectivement les chrétiens à vivre leur foi dans la fidélité à l'Évangile et à la tradition chrétienne vivante aujourd'hui en Asie. La première priorité pour le christianisme asiatique dans cette ère post-synodale devrait être de déterminer ce caractère asiatique (cette

«*asianité*») et faire d'elle la perspective à travers laquelle la foi chrétienne est constamment exprimée et vécue (voir Peter C. Phan, *Ecclesia in Asia: Challenges for Asian Christianity*, <http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr00/pcphan.htm>).

II. 2. Dialogue dans le contexte du choc des civilisations

La montée et le déclin des économies socialistes et le triomphe sans précédent de l'économie capitaliste (au moins pour le temps présent), et l'influence grandissante de la mondialisation occidentale matérialiste, consumériste, impersonnelle, tournée vers le plaisir, orientée vers le marché, est mal ressentie par beaucoup de chefs religieux d'Asie et ils essayent de s'opposer à l'Ouest, qui est l'épicentre de cette mondialisation. La culture que crée cette mondialisation détruit le social, peut-être par l'esprit de compétition encouragé par le capitalisme. Les problèmes sociaux deviennent de plus en plus étrangers aux soucis de l'individu, la société n'est plus dans l'esprit de l'individu. Le personnel a remplacé le public et en conséquence le problème personnel est devenu la préoccupation la plus sérieuse. L'individu est de plus en plus occupé à chercher une solution à sa propre crise si bien qu'il devient insensible au bien social. Cela contraste avec l'esprit et la culture asiatique.

La crise de l'individu est approfondie encore par les changements dans la vie matérielle au cours des dernières années. Le caractère du marché a dramatiquement changé et la mondialisation a ouvert une possibilité d'accès sans précédent aux biens de consommation. Le capital transnational a créé un nouveau marché et en même temps une nouvelle culture que l'individu absorbe non par choix mais parce qu'elle lui est imposée. Comme dans les sociétés capitalistes avancées, le marché est devenu si irrésistiblement puissant que le consumérisme tend à devenir l'idéologie et la culture des masses, créant des aspirations sans commune mesure avec leur situation réelle.

Les cultures et religions asiatiques, qui insistent sur l'importance de la famille, de la communauté, des traditions et de la société trouvent extrêmement difficile de faire face à ces nouveaux développements. Il y a aussi la peur que leurs valeurs religieuses soient minées et détruites par les forces de l'occidentalisation et de la mondialisation. Les anxiétés engendrées par cette contradiction constituent le terrain sur lequel la religiosité et le communautarisme prospèrent en Asie.

Il semble que la source de conflit fondamentale dans le nouveau monde émergent ne sera pas d'abord idéologique ni économique. Comme le dit Samuel Huntington, les grandes divisions du monde et la source dominante de conflit seront culturelles. Donc, le dialogue d'évangélisation devrait porter sur la «*culture*».

Le dialogue d'évangélisation devrait critiquer la culture du consumérisme, de l'individualisme excessif, de la surexploitation de l'environnement, et ramener la dignité de la personne humaine au centre du développement. Pour cela, le dialogue d'évangélisation devrait être un dialogue portant sur la culture en interaction et collaboration avec les mouvements sociaux qui sont engagés dans l'action culturelle pour ramener l'individu, qui est de plus en plus aliéné, dans la société. Le trait principal de l'action culturelle est la création de communautés culturelles. Les communautés locales fonctionnent à un niveau entièrement différent. Au niveau de la sensibilisation sociale et pour élaborer des stratégies alternatives, les communautés locales peuvent être construites autour de questions locales. Ce qui est local suscitera probablement un plus grand intérêt auprès du peuple que ce qui est distant.

En fait, il existe en Asie une attitude ambivalente envers la modernisation. Pendant que beaucoup de ces pays sont très affectés par le processus de modernisation, cependant une large section du peuple a du ressentiment contre les changements culturels amenés par ce processus. L'impact de ce ressentiment est aussi ressenti au sujet du christianisme, qui est considéré comme amenant des ruptures dans les sociétés et les cultures.

Il est vrai que l'impact du christianisme affecte les cultures dans les sociétés traditionnelles : par exemple, en Inde, l'ordre social des castes a été défié par les valeurs chrétiennes, bien que les chrétiens eux-mêmes soient victimes de préjugés de caste. Cependant, l'Église d'Asie doit porter attention à célébrer les valeurs positives des cultures asiatiques. Pour créer un climat acceptable pour le christianisme en Asie, le dialogue doit faire un effort pour à la fois célébrer les valeurs positives de l'Asie, et aussi pour critiquer la présente culture orientée vers le marché, consumériste et hédoniste. Cela implique que le processus d'inculturation soit plus créatif et imaginaire. L'inculturation ne devrait pas consister simplement à copier les religions et cultures en Asie ; elle devrait être une intégration créative des valeurs et traditions de l'Église dans la culture populaire asiatique. Le dialogue d'évangélisation devrait être concerné par ce processus d'inculturation créative en Asie.

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II. 3. Dialogue dans le contexte de la perception de l'injustice et dans le but de créer un Nouvel Ordre mondial

Dans la situation socio-économique d'aujourd'hui, beaucoup de pays d'Asie sont pauvres. Ils voient une injustice dans l'ordre du monde. Les termes du commerce sont déséquilibrés et ils vont contre les intérêts des nations plus faibles. Si le christianisme doit créer un impact en Asie, le dialogue devrait s'atteler à cette question. Le christianisme devrait travailler à la création d'un Nouvel Ordre du monde dans lequel règne davantage de justice pour tous les peuples du monde. C'est là une tâche importante de l'Eglise en Asie. En vérité, depuis la première assemblée plénière à Taipei en 1974, la FABC a répété avec insistance qu'il devrait y avoir un triple dialogue : avec les cultures d'Asie, les religions d'Asie, les pauvres d'Asie. L'exhortation réitère la nécessité de ce triple dialogue. Pour mettre en œuvre la vision d'*Ecclesia in Asia*, nous devons nous engager sans cesse et de tout cœur dans ce triple «dialogue de vie et de cœur» pour créer un nouvel ordre du monde et ainsi remplir notre droit et devoir inaliénables de proclamer Jésus à nos frères d'Asie. Pour cela, nous devons former des communautés chrétiennes de base mais aussi des communautés humaines de base. Ce genre de communauté élargit les intérêts des chrétiens au-delà des murs étroits de leurs Eglises, les mettant en constant dialogue de vie et de cœur avec les fidèles des autres religions et avec les non-croyants.

II. 4. Conclusion

Pour étendre le christianisme en Asie, l'Eglise doit gommer les préjugés qui ont été créés intentionnellement ou non contre le christianisme au cours des derniers siècles. La montée du nationalisme dans le contexte de l'anti-colonialisme et de la liberté de se gouverner soi-même a donné naissance à de spécifiques identités religieuses, culturelles et idéologiques des différents Etats et nations en Asie. Cela est une des raisons importantes qui ont entravé l'expansion du christianisme en Asie. Cependant, une importante section des pauvres et des marginalisés en Asie devinrent chrétiens à cause de son action et de son message libérateurs. Le dialogue d'évangélisation devrait clarifier le concept inclusif d'une nation dans laquelle les chrétiens possèdent le droit légitime de propager leur religion ; et dans laquelle les citoyens d'une nation ont le droit de choisir une religion de leur choix.

Aujourd'hui, le dialogue des chrétiens en Asie devrait être comme venant de l'intérieur (*as an insider*). Nous prenons sérieusement notre caractère d'Asiatiques comme le contexte de notre vie chrétienne, étant pleinement partie prenante des joies, des peines et des luttes de nos peuples dans la construction de nos nations à la lumière des valeurs de l'Evangile. Le dialogue d'évangélisation doit se sentir concerné par la culture consumériste ambiante. Les chrétiens en Asie doivent participer activement à la création d'un monde nouveau de civilisation où les valeurs positives de l'Asie défient les valeurs du capital, consuméristes et orientées vers le marché. Pour cela, les chrétiens d'Asie doivent être enracinés dans leur foi aussi bien que dans leur culture (*EDA, UCAN, février 2003*).

Réf. : EDA, N° 369, Dossiers et documents, N° 2/2003, Février 2003.

The Eight-Fold Path of Buddhist Liberation Seen in a Christian Perspective

– Fr Leopold Ratnasekera, O.M.I. –

Introduction

The infallible dogma of Buddhist teaching is found in the Four Noble Truths (*Cattari-ariya-sacca*) that the Buddha taught in the very first discourse he gave to his first five disciples and referred to as the teaching that turned the wheel of the True Doctrine – *Dhammacakka-pavattana-sutta*. These truths acquire their dogmatic and infallible quality due to the fact that they can never be changed, altered or modified. They remain eternal and universally valid transcending time, civilization and cultures. As the Law of Reality, it was there long before its discovery by the Buddha and not even he was able to change it. In fact, this is the doctrine that creates the state of Buddhahood, that is, the state of a person who attains enlightenment or awakening. It reveals existence as a state of suffering and shows the path to purification and liberation from that multiple state of suffering, teaching us that suffering (*dukkha*) is an inevitable fact of life, that greed or desire (*tanha*) is at the root of that suffering and that there is a way out of this web of affliction that leads to the condition of release and liberation, referred to as “*Nibbana*”. One must be committed incessantly and genuinely to this personal discipline that leads to liberation consisting of a Noble Eight-fold Path (*Ariya-Atthangika-Magga*) that touches the mind, consciousness and ethical conduct. The monks who give themselves totally to the discipline of Buddhist spirituality can tell us about the experiences that are involved in this eight-fold spirituality. It is presented as the way leading to the Cessation of Dukka (*Dukkhanirodhagaminipatipada-ariyasacca*). It is also open to ordinary lay Buddhists,¹ though their condition of life might create obstacles in their commitment to the discipline. In fact, it is a major part of the second “refuge” — one of three that all Buddhists have to confess, namely the *Dhamma*.²

PART I

The Eight-fold Path: A Synthesis

This article wishes to consider in detail the Eight-fold path and to see it in a Christian sense as a basic ethical discipline that is needed even for the practice of a Christian spirituality. Of course, Christian spiritual-

ity goes beyond the Eight-fold path which appears to a Christian as a natural discipline of character-building in a person. It makes him fully self-possessed, in command of his faculties and well-equipped to lead a life of personal integrity and truthfulness — an immanent type of spiritual enlightenment. Though Christian spirituality is based on God and is interpreted as one’s journey to Him under the influence of grace and the Holy Spirit, the predisposing of oneself to good ethical behaviour is needed, since without this ethical component, no spiritual experience is ever possible. Could one imagine a “spiritual life or life in the spirit” in a person who, blinded by ignorance, does not know what is good and what evil, is given to lust and greed, is constantly inclined to violence and other evil habits and who basically leads a selfish, introverted life? These are the very areas that need cleansing and purification ... areas that touch mental activity, freedom and free-will, urges, appetites and inclinations. As a result of these things getting the better of people in today’s pleasure-bound culture that is hedonistic and consumer to the core, civilization is becoming less and less spiritual, not to mention the hallowedness of human dignity being violated. The Eight-fold path is a gateway to preserving and enhancing human dignity. Submission to these precepts of ethical and mental discipline can certainly vouch for a better human community emerging in our civilization!

The Eight-fold path concentrates on three specific areas³ where conscious human activity is involved and through which human beings accomplish both good and evil. In Buddhism, they are called wholesome, unwholesome and neutral actions and thoughts. This applies to activities on all three areas of mind, consciousness and conduct. They contribute either: to lessen suffering or to aggravate it, reinforce its causes or neutralize them. It is good to observe that a person walking in the path of liberation is bound to pay attention to all these eight-fold commitments “conjunctim” (together). They are also known as “links”.⁴ They must eventually become habitual qualities in his personality and way of life. When this complex of qualities, mental and ethical are permanently ensured in practice, a Buddhist is well on his way to liberation or release from

suffering, cutting off all roots of evil that poison his mind, consciousness and conduct. It is specifically the Buddhist approach to a moral philosophy. This Eight-fold path enables a person to avoid two extremes of involvement in which human beings are often trapped while searching for happiness either through the pleasure of the senses or self-indulgence (*kamasukhallikanuyoga*) which is habitual hedonism and/or that of pain, self-mortification or self-torture or severe asceticism (*attakilamathanuyoga*).⁵ Thus, the former is low, vulgar, ignoble and thus retards spiritual progress and harmful, while the latter is painful, ignoble and weakens one's intellect — both profitless. The Buddha tried these and failed and finally discovered through personal effort the path which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to Calm, Insight, Enlightenment, Nirvana — the state of release from all suffering that leads to bliss. This Eightfold-path, which opens a middle-way to practising a liberative spirituality known therefore as “*Majjhima Patipada*”),⁶ leads to righteous living — which in Christian and biblical terminology would come closer to righteousness, to what is “right” in the sense that it is mid-way between extremes and thus close to the idea of “*virtus stat in medio*”, virtue stands in the middle. It is worth remembering that the middle-path taught by the Buddha is a reaction both to the hedonism propounded by the materialists of his time and to the others defending a transcendental self or soul bound to a material body which should be annihilated by severe ascetic practices in order to release the true self.⁷

The Eight-fold path is divided in the following manner:

1. Right understanding (*samma ditthi*)
Both these lead to “Pañña”
2. Right Thought (*samma sankappa*)
which is Wisdom or highest knowledge
3. Right Speech (*samma vaca*)
These three lead to “Sila”
4. Right Action (*samma kammanta*)
(virtuous conduct or morality)
5. Right Livelihood (*samma ajiva*)
6. Right Effort (*samma vayama*)
These three lead to “Samadhi”
7. Right Mindfulness (*samma sati*)
(mental discipline or mental health)
8. Right Concentration (*samma samadhi*)

We could now look at these in detail taking links 3-4-5, the ‘Sila’ component first, since it is the easiest to understand.

SILA

Right Action (*Samma kammanta*): Honourable and peaceful conduct which also helps others to do so. This in general consists in observing the Five Precepts (generally known to all as the *Pancha-Sila*).⁸ They have positive and negative demands. **First**, do not kill or abstain from destroying life in all forms and instead practise loving kindness (*metta*) and *karuna* (compassion). These are readily understood as the virtue of “*ahimsa*” or non-violence;⁹ **second**, refrain from stealing and taking that which is not given, practise instead charity and generosity; **third**, refrain from committing sexual misconduct, illegitimate sexual intercourse and instead practise purity of mind, chastity of body and self-control. This amounts to avoiding all abnormal or illegal practices in addition to any practice or pursuit tending to over-stimulate the senses. This is a condemnation of lust. **Fourth**, abstain from indulging in lying and dishonest dealings, cheating and false witnessing: instead practise sincerity, honesty and truthfulness. **Fifth**, abstain from intoxicating drinks or drugs which cause heedlessness and the correct use of mental faculties: instead, practise restraint and prudence in matters of eating and drinking. There is in all these a pointer to greed (*tanha*), that appears in all forms, and a warning to destroy this root-cause of evil in one's behaviour.

Right Livelihood (*Samma ajiva*): earning one's living or pursuing a profession that does not hurt or bring harm to others. This is another way of non-violence. In this category are forbidden all forms of injustice. Special emphasis is laid on not engaging in the arms trade,¹⁰ trafficking in human beings, sex and the drug trade, prostitution, intoxicating drinks, killing animals, cheating, etc. One's occupation should be entirely honourable. There must be a sense of duty and service in life. It is clear that Buddhism is anti-war.

This path may also embrace the idea of vocation, for example, the ideal state of a “homeless-life”. The layman though encumbered with a family and business responsibilities, should simplify his needs and devote more time to meditation (*Bhavana*).

Right Speech (*Samma vaca*): Discipline of the tongue and use of language. There is the obligation to avoid lying, back-biting, harsh talk and idle gossip. Through this we link up thought and action. Right speech is marked by wisdom, gentleness, and should be free from dogmatic assertions and a discriminatory tone. We should not incite passion by our talk. Speech is for expressing the truth and such language will naturally be gentle, kind, understanding, meaningful and useful; or else, it is better to guard a ‘noble silence’.

SAMADHI

This practice concerns the mental discipline and hence includes: right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Right Effort (*Samma vayama*): This is simply the energetic will. It involves four systematic steps such as not allowing evil and unwholesome thoughts to arise in the mind, if arisen already to expel them as soon as possible, to induce or produce good states not yet arisen and to cultivate or perfect the good states that are already present in the mind. Constant exercise of these mental activities makes one capable of cultivating the higher spiritual ideals which are formulated as the Ten perfections: generosity (*dana*), morality (*sila*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), wisdom (*pañña*), energy (*viriya*), patience (*khamti*), honesty and truthfulness (*sacca*), determination (*adhitthana*), loving kindness (*metta*) and equanimity (*upekkha*).¹¹ Some of these remind us of the four moral virtues of Christian ethics. There is an indication that right effort is not in the order of simple exterior action. It is basically a mental activity: a pure state of the mind.

Right Mindfulness (*samma sati*): This implies a constant, diligent and attentive awareness to the activities of the body, emotion, brain and ideas engendered in the mind and in fact, it is the sixth sense in Buddhist psychology. Much emphasis is given to this activity in the important discourse called “*Satipaththana Sutta*”,¹² where the Buddha taught on how to “establish or set up the state of awareness”. This subject is a treatise by itself. But, here some essential things cannot be bypassed.

1) There is the concentration on breathing exercises connected with the body that help mental development. A definite still posture is needed for this. But, this is not meditation. It is a kind of yoga that helps the mind to relax psychologically 2) This capacity is essential to transit from the intellectual process to the intuitive process which helps getting insight into reality (*Vipassana* meditation) 3) This too differs entirely from mental concentration called *samatha bhanvana* which is the discipline of the mind. The real mental culture consists in *Vipassana bhavana* (insight-meditation) that reveals the nature of things and opens the way to liberation of the mind, the realization of the Ultimate Truth, which is Nirvana (state of bliss and release from all illusion).¹³ There is however an ongoing link between these exercises. The mindfulness of breathing is meant to develop concentration leading up to very high mystic attainments leading to Nirvana.

The above four-fold forms of concentration (body,

emotion, mind, ideas), will bring in fact the seven factors of enlightenment. This is just to show how important meditation is in the Buddhist way of spirituality. Hence the usefulness of detachment, living the life of a recluse as a monk, control of the senses, feelings, ideas and desires which are conducive to meditation.

Right Concentration (*samma samadhi*): this is the third component in mental discipline — enabling one to concentrate undisturbed by any distraction that might come from the body, from sensations or from the mind itself. It is therefore helpful and important to fix the mind in a single, wholesome object. This will enable a person to realize that everything in and around him is impermanent, unsatisfactory and without substance. The practice of meditation brings the realization of these truths.

PAÑÑĀ (Wisdom)

According to Buddhism, two great qualities are needed and should be developed in order to be perfect: compassion (*karuna*) and wisdom (*pañña*). The former ennobles emotional life or the qualities of the heart, while wisdom represents the intellectual life or those qualities of the mind. As modern psychology has shown both the EQ (emotional) and the IQ (intellectual) must synchronize well for a balanced way of life and to create an integrated personality. That is also the aim of the Buddhist way of life. Hence, we now look at the two factors or links that constitute Wisdom in a person.

Right Thought (*samma sankappa*): in order to have correct and wholesome thoughts and to exercise the right way of thinking — thoughts free from lust, ill-will, cruelty or violence — welcome those of selfless renunciation, of love and non-violence. It is to be appreciated that thoughts of selflessness and non-violence are grouped within wisdom. This is proof that true wisdom is endowed with noble qualities and that selfishness, hatred and violence result from a lack of wisdom. It applies in all spheres of life whether personal, social or political. This is the Buddhist image of a wise person.

Right Understanding (*samma ditthi*) or correct vision: It simply boils down to the understanding of the four great noble truths, the infallible dogma, of Buddhist philosophy. This was the first discourse that Buddha made to his first five disciples immediately following the experience of Enlightenment as stated above. In sum, it is stated as follows: 1) existence is full of sorrow (*Dukkha*); 2) the arising or root of dukkha (*Samudaya*); 3) the cessation of suffering (*Nirodha*)

which in reality is the state of bliss, that is “*Nibbana*”; 4) the path to attain it is the Eight-fold discipline that this article is discussing (*Magga*).¹⁴ If these things are experientially known, we know the way things are. It is not a mere intellectual grasping but a deeper understanding called “penetration” (*pativeda*). It can be attained only when the mind is free from all impurities and is fully developed through meditation. This part of wisdom includes also knowing the three characteristics of life, namely, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and soul-lessness, ego-lessness, impersonality (*an-atta*), and the very complicated process of the 12 factors that condition existence in the long cycle of rebirths (*Paticca-samuppada* or Conditioned genesis). Breaking this chain by killing greed is the key to liberation. We begin to see why these last two ways really lead to “wisdom” as understood by Buddhism. It constitutes wisdom realized.

This Eightfold path is therefore: “a way of life to be followed, practised and developed by each individual. It is self-discipline in body, word and mind, self-development and self-purification. It has nothing to do with belief, prayer, worship or ceremony. In that sense, it has none of what may popularly be called ‘religious’. It is a Path leading to the realization of Ultimate Reality, to complete freedom, happiness and peace through moral, spiritual and intellectual perfection”.¹⁵ *Nibbana* is that realm beyond space-time and causation which is the ultimate Good that all should attain and without which it would not be possible to transcend the conditioned existence of suffering and rebirth.

PART II A Christian Evaluation

A. Initial observations

1. The above three components should not be thought of as consecutive in the sense that one passes from *sila* to *Samadhi* and finally to *Pañña*. Often one state of perfection cannot be attained without the other, for example right action and the rest cannot be had without right understanding. Hence, these are not separate, but inter-dependent, and mutual steps though as perfections they are distinctly understood. It is easier to understand that *Samadhi* influences the practice of *sila* and the highest mental state is to achieve the perfections of wisdom. Through interaction, these perfections should ultimately lead to that purity of mind devoid of bodily defilement into which wisdom can flow. It is an integral and total discipline of the spirituality that is proposed which in summary is mental culture with *sila*

subordinated and ordained to this level — call it if you will, a spiritual anthropology, leading to a supra-mundane experience.¹⁶

2. The entire path leads to illumination from within. There is no reference to an outside source that reveals a truth of liberation to a mind that is open to its influence. The transcendence of the spiritual experience emerges from within the immanence. They seem to be identical in the spiritual journey of the mind and in the achievement of the state of liberation which is called “*Nibbana*”. The experience of suffering with its root which is greed and the resources for liberation from suffering which are identified as the capabilities of the Eighth-fold path lie within the same suffering subject — the individual.¹⁷ In fact, the individual, him/herself is the biggest ILLUSION.¹⁸

3. There is no such thing as an “I” or “Me”. This is a basic principle of Buddhist Metaphysics. The individual is nothing but a non-substantial and impermanent composite of FIVE aggregates of phenomenal existence surrounding the individual and the cosmic phenomena around him which we refer to ordinarily as the “world”. The five aggregates consist of: 1) matter (the four great elements), with the five senses as its derivatives 2) sensations of six kinds (traditional five senses and the mind, which is the sixth sense, with its mind-objects, i.e. ideas and thoughts). This is unfamiliar to Western philosophy as a material sense). But it must be remembered that mind is not spirit as opposed to matter. It is just one other organ like the eye, the ear, etc. 3) Perceptions derived from the six senses. 4) Mental formations (all volitional activities both good and bad: also identical with the classical Buddhist concept of “*Karma*” and, 5) Consciousness: a reaction or response which has one of the six faculties as its basis. It is a sort of awareness. These aggregates form what we call “*being*”.¹⁹ But, the Buddha has said: “There is mere suffering, but no sufferer is found; the deeds are, but no doer is found”.²⁰ Such is Buddhist psychology. Besides “*Nibbana*” presupposes the extinction of the five aggregates (*pañcaskhandha*), which constitutes what is *conventionally* called ‘person’.²¹

4. The Eight-fold path enables a person to reach the ultimate good, the *summum bonum* — the purpose of any code of ethics. This is defined as a state of *Nibbana*. Coming from Sanskrit roots it is a combination of “*ni*” (negation) and “*vana*” (craving). The path is the infallible means to destroy this craving appearing in many forms of greed with its roots in delusion/ignorance, hatred and attachment. It is the state of utter release that is blissful, beyond which there is no other state of happiness. Two classical examples are presented to visualize the state of libera-

tion: 1) once the supply of wood is curtailed, there cannot be fire 2) once the supply of oil is curtailed, the flame in the wick fizzles out.

B. Comparison with Christian Ethics

1. We see from the above that the Eight-fold path which defines the path to liberation (salvation in the Christian sense), is man-centred and is immanent in nature. It begins within man's awareness and fructifies within the same. It is radically a man-centred ethic with no references to an extrinsic reference point as a principle of morality. Buddhism believes that within man there is the potential for self-liberation. It therefore, while conceding the unsatisfactory condition of human existence, still maintains there is a basic ability for good and virtue in man. There might be a touch of stoicism here, in the sense that virtue is pursued for the sake of virtue and its inner goodness.

2. Christian anthropology has as its first principle the identity of the individual and the lofty concept of the person, endowed with intelligence to understand and the will to opt and choose freely. We hold that the law of morality written in human nature is a reflection and participation of the Law of God, which guarantees to the human being the basic criterion of morality: whatever is in accordance with the demands and dignity of human nature is declared to be morally good and *vice-versa*. Conscience is considered to be that inner voice that discerns between good and bad. The classical Buddhist concept of awareness or consciousness (*Viññāna*) also operates as part of the process of voluntary action. It is only when one with full understanding, awareness and free-will performs an act without any hindrance, such as fear, inculpable ignorance, force and the like, that a person can be held responsible for an action voluntarily done.

3. Christian Psychology considers mind, the mental faculty and the human intelligence as different from the sense-faculties corresponding to the five external senses. The human person is a composite of the senses, intelligence and will, in the tradition of Aristotelian philosophy. The mind contains awareness and that makes a person conscious that the sense faculties are at work, that the mind is thinking and understanding and that the will is making a morally good or bad choice. The criterion of morality is founded on human nature but it has a reference to the eternal law that is rooted in God, which is the transcendental principle and is located in the inner sanctum of the human conscience.

4. In recent years much has been said about human nature as the ultimate point of reference in devel-

opment, in economics, in democracy, in scientific inquiry and medical ethics.²² Anything that contravenes human dignity is looked upon as failing in justice towards the human being. In fine: man is object of nothing, but is the subject as, for example, capital is for labour and not *vice-versa*, or technology is at the service of man and not *vice-versa*. A human being could never be used or manipulated as an object. All these result from the high value that is given to the human personality and indeed to every individual person. It would be difficult to place such high demands on the person if individuals are considered a complex of aggregates in a world of becoming that is without any finality in a compounded series of phenomena. However, it is significant that Buddhism attaches great importance to the precept of non-violence to life and especially to human life, given such a philosophical background to the understanding of being.

5. In the light of the above, the categorical denial of a permanent and substantial reality called the "SOUL" places Buddhism in diametrical opposition to Christianity.²³ Basic psychology teaches that the soul is the substantial form of the body and that each person has his own incommunicable individual personality which cannot be cloned. It is difficult to define the person as understood in the Christian sense in terms of Buddhist metaphysics. On the contrary, the five aggregates of attachment that come together to form the "wrong-self" in reality is Suffering (*Dukkha*). It is even in contradiction to the Cartesian formula: "I think, therefore I am"²⁴

PART III The Eight-Fold Path and Christian Spirituality

1. Could the Eight-fold path of Buddhist ethics and the spirituality embedded therein be adapted to Christian spirituality? It is an interesting question. Because once again we have to compound a non-theistic philosophical system with its philosophy of life and spirituality with another, where God and the human person stand as two great pillars. No-God and No-soul (*An-atta*) are part and parcel of the Buddhist dogma. No god can assist in the salvation of a person and there is no soul that needs purification to attain salvation. The purificatory process is within the chain of births that are conditioned on the good or bad actions that a person does. It is the law of the deed. Recompense is within the structure of the deed itself. A good deed bears good effects and a bad one, evil effects. It is simply the principle of cause and effect (*hētu-phala vada*) work-

ing in a dialectical manner with every effect becoming in turn a cause. We could call this a natural morality based on reason.

2. In Christian spirituality, self-mastery is emphasized in the experience of salvation and is seen as a preparatory phase. Hardly any spiritual experience can be had without this personal discipline of the self. A man given to selfishness, or lust of some kind, or quick tempered or violent, habitually acting out of anger and given to alcoholism, with a mind filled with unwholesome images and constantly taking pleasure in evil could never acquire any spiritual quality, unless through the painful process of committed personal discipline he rediscovers his virtuous-self. Here we see how the Eight-fold path serves positively in the exercise of self-denial or self-mastery.

3. The mind plays an important role both in Christian and Buddhist spirituality. All evil and good thoughts that prompt the will to action arise first in the mind. The mind has to be cleansed of defilement. Your mind is what you are, as it is said. Buddhist ethics is primarily an ethics of the mind. Words and deeds flow from the mind and therefore the realization of the right mind or thought is the root-challenge of ethics. However, this ethic is not only individual but has a collective aspect. It is not a passive ethic of the mind. The practice of the four great virtues such as compassion, loving kindness, altruistic joy and equanimity requires an out-going attitude towards others. The "Sila" component is clearly other-centred and helps a person to relate well to others and avoid being a cause of harm to them, such as making use of others as objects to achieve one's selfish desires. Would it not be the Buddhist way of saying; "Love thy neighbour as thyself". Neighbourliness is thus part of personal discipline.

4. This point leads us to discuss the social implications of the Eight-fold path. Both Buddhism and Christianity embody a social ethic since inter-relatedness is part of our human existence. Wisdom and *Samadhi* drive a person to open him/herself to the outer beings. *Sila* helps in disciplining one's relationships to others and to the world outside, including nature, for it says that we must not harm any form of life and wish that all beings be happy (*Sabbé satta bhavantu nidukkhā*). Today we speak of structures and institutions of evil that cause social sin and create social injustices wherein there is collective oppression that causes collective suffering. They can be ideologies or actual oppressive structures. Buddhism condemns these evils or social "akusala". Justice and peace issues too are involved in this dimension. If there is no social "sila" especially on the part of those who exercise social responsibility, suf-

fering is inevitable in society. For example, a sense of collective responsibility that comprises the exercise of social virtues should be part and parcel of those who exercise public office. More than anyone else they need wholesome thinking patterns and a spirit of altruism so that the common good can be achieved in the exercise of their responsibilities.

Often socio-political and economic woes are caused by collective selfishness or greed and at times accompanied by hatred and violence. The social implications of the Eight-fold path come in here as a pedagogy and school of justice. The ignorance, greed and hatred that are clearly at the bottom of so much of the misery, conflict, war and oppression of today's world can only be overcome by collectivizing the discipline inculcated by the Eight-fold path. In this effort, Buddhism and Christianity could be active partners in the dialogue of life and social cooperation for the transformation of society through globalizing those social values.

Conclusion

The Buddhist ethic propounded by the Eight-fold Path is a code of discipline at the heart of the way of life and spirituality that is absolutely mandatory for achieving liberation. There is no other alternative that Buddhism can offer to those who desire to follow its teaching. It is within the radical dogma of what the Buddha taught, being the fourth Noble Truth of the *Dhamma*. We can say that the Eight-fold path is at the core of Buddhist ethics that govern both personal conduct and collective social behaviour. The social implication of this path is very clear when the virtues involved in its practice are transferred to the social demands of the Buddhist ideal. It could well be the criteria for a more just economic or for that matter political order.

The emphasis on the Eight-fold path as mental culture has to be appreciated. It is when the mind is purified that the mystery of human existence is understood and one acquires skills to attack the inclination to greed and thus root out the cause of all suffering. In a system of religiosity that denies God and the influence of divine intervention, Buddhism is left with having to rely on an immanent philosophy of life that begins with the human condition and ends with the emancipation of that human condition. Both sin and grace, if one could use the Christian terms are within man and man is capable of self-redemption. Both the cause of suffering and the way out of it has to be found within man.

Some would like to deny that Buddhism is a religion. On many counts it is so. It is basically a philoso-

phy of life where living is seen as wholesome existence where there is inner harmony and harmony with others and the cosmos. One who practises the Eight-fold path is in reality an enlightened person and even if he still has an earthly existence, he would never act in a way that involves him in forms of greed. He is an “*arahant*” — a noble one.

To the extent the Eight-fold path is an ethical discipline both of the mind and the body, it can be adapted to Christian spirituality as a path of purification disposing a devout Christian to the reception of grace and the action of the Spirit. No less a person than St Paul has dealt severely with ethical indiscipline that brings with it terrible woes of which he speaks in Romans I and II, categorizing it all as the law of the flesh (*sarx*) which rebels against that of the spirit (*pneuma*). The life in the spirit that he advocates in his Christian catechesis presupposed precisely this purity of mind and body. The openness to the Word of God and the action of the spirit help in this purification together with one's effort to respond to it. In the terminology of the Christian tradition, the Eight-fold path would be placed in the context of asceticism which is a prelude to a further deep spiritual experience. But unlike the Christian way of understanding salvation and spiritual fruitfulness in God's initiative in us, but not without our co-operation and participation.

Notes

¹ WALPOLA, Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Gordon Fraser, UK, 1967, p. 76. SADDHATISSA, H., *Buddhist Ethics: Essence of Buddhism*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1970, pp. 64, 185.

² The other two refuges being the *Buddha* and the *Saṅgha*. These three are qualified as the *Tri-Ratna*, the triple Gem of Buddhism, something that could be compared with the Trinity of Christianity, the Christian Triple-Gem. This is a justified thesis, for we speak today of the Trinitarian foundations of the mystery of salvation, of the Church, of the mission of the Church, the whole spirituality of communion and dialogue.

³ *Opus Cit.*, pp. 45-50; SADDHATISSA, H., *Opus Cit.*, pp. 69-74; Narada (Thero), *A Manual of Buddhism*, Buddhist Cultural Centre, Colombo, Sri Lanka, Year 2000 Print, pp. 132-134

⁴ SADDHATISSA, H., *loc. cit.*, p. 74.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69; WALPOLA, R., *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁶ WALPOLA, R., *loc. cit.*

⁷ SADDHATISSA, H., *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁸ Cf. NYANATILOKA (Mahathera), *Buddhist Dictionary*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy (Sri Lanka), 4th rev. edition), pp. 143 and 199; SADDHATISSA H., *op. cit.*, Chapter 4 (pp. 87-110), explains all these 5 precepts basic to all

Buddhist devotion. On special festival days, monks recite these 5 precepts to all devotees gathered in temples. It is also recited in the ritual of blessings for any occasion.

⁹ Non-violence has also been used as a tool of prophetic denunciation of unjust social oppression. The movement of non-violence (*a-himsa*), was Mahatma Gandhi's tool to raise the cry of political liberation based on the sovereign dignity of the people of India. Another form of non-violent prophetism is “Satyagraha” (peaceful protest) coupled with fasting.

¹⁰ In the context of nuclear proliferation, this applies as a clear condemnation of the production, deployment, trade and use of all types of weaponry. In the same vein: trafficking of women, prostitution and child-abuse.

¹¹ SADDHATISSA, H., *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹² Buddha's most important teaching on mental development “Setting up of Mindfulness”, is found in two places in the Buddhist Scriptures of the Dhamma: No 22 of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (Longer sayings) and No. 10 of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (Medium-size sayings).

¹³ RAHULA, W., *op. cit.*, p. 68; NYANATILOKA, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-232.

¹⁴ Cf. JAYATILLEKE, K. N., *The Message of the Buddha*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1975, p. 47. All liberation depends on how in depth these truths are understood and realized. In Buddhist epistemology what is emphasized is experiential knowledge. What the Buddha taught in these four noble truths, if it is to be of any use, has to be personally experienced by individuals and collectively realized by society. Only truths discovered in practice and tested in experience are liberative. The Buddha discovered these truths this way. Verifiability in the light of reason and experience is characteristic of the truths of Buddhism.

¹⁵ RAHULA, W., *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁹ Cf. NYANATILOKA, *Buddhist Dictionary (Opus Cit.)*, for this basic and very important category in Buddhist Philosophy, under title KHANDHA, pp. 98-102.

²⁰ *Visuddhimagga* (cited by Rahula, W., *op. cit.*, p. 26), 4 A.D. Buddhist classic written by Thera Buddhagosa.

²¹ See Dialogue, New Series, Vol. II, No. 3, Review, Study Centre for Religion and Society, Colombo 4, Sri Lanka, reporting on Buddhist-Christian Encounter 7, as reporting a statement made by Dr Gunapala Dharmasiri, author of ‘A Buddhist critique of the Christian Concept of God’, pp. 97-98.

²² For example most writings and speeches made by John Paul II and the basic premise of the Church's Social Doctrine defend clearly and distinctly the irreplaceable value of the human person, indeed every individual person. Most theological and philosophy faculties in Christian institutions have a number of courses bordering on this theme. In addition in the secular world there is so much insistence on human rights.

²³ Cf. the clear stand of Buddhism defended by

RAHULA, Walpola, *op. cit.*, Chapter 6 on the doctrine of No-Soul: Anatta, pp. 51-66. *Anatta*, one of the three basic characteristics of existence, is not only human but cosmic as well. Only that which is without self is real: “Sabbé DHAMMÁ anattâ”.

²⁴ WALPOLA, R., *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²⁵ As for example the emphasis given in classical works on spirituality with the first stage being the Purgative Way. The Eight-fold path could easily be compounded with this stage while the illuminative experience of Buddhism cannot be annexed since it is from within the meditating subject that all insight and illumination comes. In Christian spirituality the source of illumination is through the action of the Holy Spirit and intervention of Grace — God acting in the person who is open to him in asceticism, prayer and meditation.

²⁶ Today one speaks about Buddhism for peace, justice and reconciliation. It speaks about Peace meditation that helps a person to radiate thoughts and cosmic forces of peace spiraling around him to the outer atmosphere. They want to be a force for peace spreading the spirit of non-violence. In the context of inter-religious dialogue Christians and Buddhists find in these peace activities a profound level of dialogue of life.

²⁷ Many Buddhist scholars today use the three roots of evil, namely, ignorance, greed and hatred as tools of social analysis to show how these evil tendencies are at the bottom of much of global evil in the contemporary world. On the contrary they advocate recourse to education, training in other-centredness and spirit of non-violence and loving kindness to be impacting social forces that can bring about a new world order. When the Day of Vesak (Celebration of the Birth-Enlightenment and Death of the Buddha), was declared a Day of universal significance at the UN in the year 2000, the Ven. Bhikku Bodhi of Sri Lanka (An American Christian by nationality and convert to Buddhism), was invited to address the UN in which he clearly spoke on these lines of the root-causes of all the social ills of today's world.

²⁸ Here comes the whole question of a person's freedom and free will. Buddhism states that no one needs to feel hopeless in the sea of suffering in which existence is immersed. Every individual and culture has the freedom to reverse the cycle of suffering and free itself from the fetters of conditioned existence. The basic need is to kill the overwhelming intrusion of greed and further the practice of detachment and practice noble qualities of the mind and heart.

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Abraham – A Blessing for All Nations according to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic Traditions

– Adel Theodore Khoury –

Jews, Christians and Moslems all lay claim to the patriarch Abraham. For different reasons, they consider themselves the legitimate heirs of Abraham, heirs of the divine covenant made with him, of the promises made by God on behalf of his descendants and of the blessing bestowed in him on all the nations of the world. But in varying degrees the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions have managed to go beyond the horizons of their particular communities to discover in their long histories the universal dimensions of the promises of salvation which God pronounced in the blessing accorded to Abraham and through him to all his descendants and to all peoples.

In the following presentation we intend to set forth the data of the three traditions concerning the blessing of Abraham, its conditions, its effects and its various dimensions. In the conclusion we will make a few comments on the role the figure of Abraham can play in the context of the relations between the three religions which are commonly referred to today as “the Abrahamic religions”, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The Blessing of Abraham in the Jewish Tradition

The figure of Abraham plays a predominant role in Jewish tradition. At each period of the peoples’ history Abraham appears as the guarantor of identity, of prosperity or, in times of crisis, of the people’s survival. Various speculations formed around his figure. These ideas, taken as a whole, oscillate between an exclusive particularism and an open universalism, in which the Jewish people, conscious of belonging to Abraham, occupies an important position.

We cannot here expound every detail of this development. We will concentrate on the traits that concern the blessing Abraham received on behalf of the nations. We will begin with the data of the Bible, in the Old Testament; then we will consult the texts of the late Jewish tradition and occasionally of certain Jewish thinkers down through history.

1. Data of the Old Testament

1.1. The texts of Genesis

The principal text is the one we read in Genesis. This passage links the blessings of God to the command he gave Abraham to leave his country and his family to go and encounter the designs of God....

The Lord said to Abraham: “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you” (Gn 12:1-3).

Nothing had prepared Abraham for the call God addresses to him or the blessing he generously bestows on him. The patriarch was living in a pagan environment; he did not yet know the law of God and had not yet shown absolute obedience to God’s commands. It becomes clear that because of this the blessing and the promises of God to Abraham are in the first place a sign of God’s free will and cannot be seen as conditioned by the faith and obedience of Abraham. Abraham’s future and that of his descendants is in the hands of God who is at work in his life by virtue of his all-powerful might and his gratuitous goodness. But God expects Abraham to respond to this divine grace through an unshakable faith and an obedience ready for sacrifice.

God promises Abraham that he will be the father of numerous descendants. “I will make of you a great people” (Gn 12:2). This promise is the foundation of the story of the Hebrew people under the direction of God.

The belonging of the Jewish people to the poster-

ity of Abraham will signify for this people at once a privilege and a duty down through history and in its relations with other nations. Abraham's descendants draw inspiration from what the Word of God affirms in the text cited above, namely, that God blesses those who bless Abraham's name, and curses those who curse it. If then Abraham is the mediator of the blessing and if his descendants inherit its benefits, then they too will perform the role of mediator between the nations and the blessings of God. (We will see a little further on in what sense the tradition understood this role).

Finally, God promises Abraham that he will be a blessing for all the nations. A new era of the history of humanity is thus inaugurated, a history of blessing with reference to Abraham. This passage which comes from the Yahwist source of Genesis is located within the history of the people, in the context of a kingdom ruled by highly successful Jewish kings. Thus this people had truly become a powerful nation, showing that its royal rule could become a blessing and a promise of prosperity for the peoples who lived within its domain or within the remote reaches of its territory. Thus, the blessing of the Jewish people signified a blessing for all the nations. So God insists, after the story of the sacrifice of Isaac:

I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing—all this because you obeyed my command (Gn 22:17-18).

And the text sees all of this as linked to the original promise of God to bless Abraham in his direct descendants and in all the nations of the earth.

The role of Abraham as a blessing for the nations reveals itself in the story of the destruction of the sinful towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the introduction to the story of the destruction of Sodom the text features the scene of Abraham's intercession on behalf of the inhabitants of that town. This intercession is expressly linked by the Bible to the blessing of Abraham for the nations:

The Lord reflected: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, now that he is to become a great and populous nation, and all the nations of the earth are to find blessing in him?..." (Gn 18:17).

Abraham receives the blessing from God for himself, for his immediate descendants, and for the people who will constitute his posterity. This blessing is granted to him through a free act of divine initiative,

but Abraham proved capable of receiving it, in view of his faith and his obedience to the will and to the designs of God. And so we read: "Abraham put his faith in God, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness" (Gn 15:6).

The texts cited here already reveal the tension between two poles: Abraham-Israel and Abraham-the nations. The consequences of this tension will be seen throughout the history of the Jewish tradition, as we will demonstrate shortly.

1.2. Various Old Testament texts

The posterity of Abraham is occasionally seen as identical with belonging to the Jewish people. Psalm 47:10 names the Jews "the people of the God of Abraham".

This posterity assumes the function of mediating the blessings of God for the nations and at the same time it acquires a very extensive dominion.

For this reason, God promised him (Abraham) with an oath that in his descendants the nations would be blessed; that he would make him numerous as the grains of dust and exalt his posterity like the stars; that he would give them an inheritance from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Sir 44:21).

It is in this perspective that one should place the vision of deutero-Isaiah (60:3-7), which describes the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem, come to worship the God of Israel:

Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: Your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses....

If the terms "your sons" and "your daughters" are taken as referring to members of the various peoples mentioned in the text, one can conclude that the passage has in view the non-Israelites, who belong to the posterity of Abraham no less than do his other descendants, those gathered in Jerusalem.

Moreover, one finds in Isaiah a passage in which two foreign nations, Egypt and Assyria, are mentioned as receiving the blessing of God together with Israel (Is 19:24-25).

Finally, the story of the prophet Jonah, sent to

Niniveh to convert its non-Jewish inhabitants, shows that alongside the Jewish people another people is sometimes the object of God's mercy and salvation.

1.3. *Data of the Jewish tradition*

The Jewish tradition oscillates between two poles. Sometimes it accentuates the close, particular — and exclusive — relationship between Abraham and the Jewish people, and sometimes it emphasizes rather the universalist relationship between Abraham and the nations of the earth.

— The particularist line

The struggle of the Maccabees against the rule of the Seleucids (from the middle of the second century before Christ) and against the temptation to assimilate to pagan culture illustrates the particularist line. The same can be said, at another level, of the ideology of the Qumran community, which withdraws from the contaminated society and seeks to preserve the identity of the Jewish people against the attractions of Greek culture. In the *Book of Jubilees* (chapter 18:16), the importance of Abraham for the other nations is mentioned, but the concern of the work is entirely directed toward the exclusivity of the blessings granted by God to Abraham and transmitted exclusively to Jacob.

After the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E., the Jewish tradition becomes concretized in an ever more exclusivist way in the Rabbinic tradition, which focuses on the Torah and the law. In this tradition Abraham appears as the almost exclusive property of the Jewish people. His legitimate descendants, heirs of the divine covenant and of the blessings of God, are the descendants of Jacob and of the tribes, to the exclusion of other children and descendants of Abraham.

— The universalist line

Abraham is considered by Philo of Alexandria, for example, as the model of all converts. This is because he acknowledged the Creator and followed his commandments. This way is open to all non-Jews in the world. The Prophet Isaiah had already announced concerning Jacob and his posterity: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (49:6).

Abraham "the first convert" is viewed as the spiritual father of all men of good will who are in search of the one God. Salvation is therefore possible to non-Jews, because all human beings are creatures of the one God. In the vision of God's messianic rule, his

word addressed to the Jewish people is the same as that which is addressed to all peoples (Is 2:2-5; Mi 4:1-2).

Conclusion: The Jewish tradition thus views Abraham as a blessing for all peoples, but above all for the Jewish people who are the direct heirs of the covenant and of the promises of God. Descent from Abraham according to the flesh and in the line of Jacob plays a decisive role.

The Blessing of Abraham in the Christian Tradition

1. *Fundamental Data*

Christian reflection centres around two main points: Who is the true descendant of Abraham, heir of his blessing? And what makes it possible for the pagan nations to receive this blessing?

1.1. *The true posterity of Abraham*

Searching through the texts of the Bible, the Apostle Paul discovers the indispensable condition that accounts for the predestination of the Jews and, by the same token, transforms pagans, too, into members of Abraham's posterity.

Descent according to the flesh is not decisive. It is the faith of Abraham which was credited to him as righteousness (Gn 15:6; Gal 3:6). So, it is faith which is the foundation of the true belonging to the posterity of Abraham.

So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In thee shall all the nations be blessed". So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith (Gal 3:7-9).

This faith of Abraham is manifested in his works, in his obedience to God's commands even when he is in the dark concerning God's designs for him and for his future. The Epistle to the Hebrews enumerates Abraham's acts of obedience: his departure for an unknown country; the birth of Isaac; the sacrifice of Isaac (11:8-19).

It is not sufficient then to claim carnal descent from Abraham, in the way that the Jews make this their boast. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came out to be baptized by him: "Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able

from these stones to raise up children to Abraham (Mt 3:8-9; cf. Lk 3:8). And Jesus in his turn, when confronted with Jews who refused to believe and who would confidently assert: "Abraham is our father", reproached them with the words: "If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did" (Jn 8:39).

Saint Paul argues on this point that Abraham received the blessing in view of his faith and before circumcision, that is to say, before he received the covenantal promise of God that made him in particular the father of the Jewish people. For this reason, Abraham became the father of the uncircumcised, pagan peoples in view of his faith (Rom 4:9-12).

1.2. The Jewish people are not excluded, but they no longer have exclusive privileges

Belonging to the Jewish people, whose father is Abraham, confers on its members the right granted by God to participate in his salvation.

Even the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, however, are in danger of possible exclusion from the blessing of Abraham, if they do not fulfill the conditions for receiving this blessing. In the passage of Saint John, cited above, Jesus responds to his adversaries, who were boasting of having Abraham for their father, that this did not prevent them from becoming children of the devil, because they are willing to fulfill his desires (cf. Jn 8:44).

Still more severe is the warning directed against Jews who are sluggish in faith: After the healing of a Roman centurion's servant, Jesus proclaims: "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness..." (Mt 8:10-12).

1.3. Universal salvation through Jesus Christ

The Christian witness centres around the person of Jesus Christ the Lord. All the promises of God once given to Abraham and to the Fathers are realized in him; the new and eternal covenant is sealed in his blood and confirmed by his resurrection from the dead; the blessings of Abraham for the Jewish people and for all the nations of the earth now rest on a direct or indirect belonging to Jesus Christ.

One can thus read in the Epistle to the Galatians:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to

his offspring. It does not say, "And to his offsprings", referring to many; but, referring to one, "And to your offspring," which is Christ (Gal 3:16).

And again, shortly before this passage: "that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal 3:14).

The whole of Abraham's hope is realized in Jesus Christ.

All who have been baptized in the name of Christ are one in Christ. There is no difference between Jews and Greeks, between men and women, slaves and free. "For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:28-29).

2. Consequences

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit the Christian community learned not only that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4), but also that the ways God chooses to effect this salvation harbour many surprises. Although the Jewish Christians were insisting that pagans would first have to become Jews in order to be able to become Christians and so to take part in the salvation of Christ, God showed them that his free will does not allow itself to be bound by human constraints and that Israel is no longer, as some thought, the necessary mediator of the salvation of the pagans. The story of the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius shows this in an extraordinarily instructive way. The Acts of the Apostles describes the event in chapter 10, and concludes:

While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the Word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.... Then Peter declared: "Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:44-48).

It should be noted that the gift of the Holy Spirit was granted to Cornelius and to his family before they were baptized, and that the baptism in this case served only to confirm what God had already effected in the lives of these new converts.

Salvation in Christ is not linked to biology, to a descent according to the flesh (Mt 3:9), nor to a geography, that is to say, to particular holy places. Jesus states

this with great clarity in his conversation with the Samaritan woman: “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him” (Jn 4:21, 23).

Salvation is definitively linked to faith, at least in its fundamental form, as the Epistle to the Hebrews formulates it: “And without faith it is impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6).

Salvation is also linked to good works. In the narrative of the conversion of Cornelius, Peter declares: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35).

Hence the necessity for a new orientation in relations with non-Christians.

3. Tension between particularism and universalism

3.1. Overcoming of particularism

In the first phase of the development of the Christian community we find the effort to transcend Jewish particularism. A number of texts and hymns witness to this universal orientation and to the awareness of the cosmic role of Jesus Christ. We cite here a few examples of this.

After the descent of the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost, the Apostle Peter declares before the groups of people gathered in Jerusalem: “The promise is for you, and for your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).

In the Gospel of Saint John, Jesus himself declares: “I have other sheep who are not of this flock; them also must I lead; they will hear my voice; and there will be one sheepfold, one shepherd” (Jn 10:16-17).

Saint Peter defends himself in Jerusalem against the criticisms of the advocates of Jewish Christian particularism. He describes the experience he had at the time of the conversion of Cornelius: “If then God granted them the same gift as he gave to us who have believed in the Lord, Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in the way of God?” (Acts 11:17).

A similar witness was given before the assembly of

the Apostles in Jerusalem, such that the door of salvation was opened wide to the pagans without imposing burdens on them which would have bound them to the Jewish Law (cf. Acts 15:4-19).

3.2. The Cosmic Christ

The universalism of salvation and reconciliation in Christ acquired a cosmic dimension, such that not only Jews and pagans are called to participate directly in Christ’s salvation, but the entire universe, too, is included in the mystery of Christ.

One reads in the hymn that serves as the overture to the Epistle to the Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God, the First Born of every creature, for it is in him that all things were created in heaven and on the earth.... Everything was created by him and for him. He is before all things and all things hold together in him.

For God was pleased to make the whole fulness dwell in him and through him to reconcile all things for him, on earth as well as in heaven, making peace through the blood of his cross (Col 1:15-20).

3.3. The only mediator of salvation is Jesus Christ

The New Testament texts clearly show that the Church of the first generations was convinced that salvation is accomplished in Christ and in him alone. We could cite a few of these texts:

Jesus affirms clearly in the Gospel of Saint John: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6).

Saint Peter declares solemnly before the Sanhedrin: “There is no other name under heaven given to men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Finally, we read in Paul’s first Letter to Timothy: “For God is one, one also is the mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, himself a man” (1 Tm 2:5).

3.4. Necessity of the Church for salvation?

With time, one notes that the Church began to understand itself as the extension of Jesus Christ, as the place where the salvific mediation of Christ is accomplished. This gives rise to the insistence on the necessity of belonging to the Church in order to be able to participate in the salvation of Christ. This is likewise the origin of the formula: *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*; no salvation outside the Church. By in-

interpreting this formula in an absolute way, certain theologians began to deny to non-Christians the possibility of taking part in the salvation of Christ, since they were not baptized and so integrated into the Christian community.

Christian faith affirmed: Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation. Now the statement arises: the Church is absolutely necessary for salvation.

Today people commonly interpret the formula cited above (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) in the following way: where the salvation of Christ is accomplished — and this in the manner in which God wills it and according to his own ways — there the Church is also present.

Thus the way is open to investigate the means God uses to accomplish his salvation, even among non-Christians. This is why Vatican II encourages Christians to seek to uncover among the non-Christian religions the elements of truth and holiness which they contain, to acknowledge and to promote these elements, because they constitute rays of Christ's truth and are an effect of the action of the Holy Spirit in the story of humanity.

Jesus Christ remains the centre and the connecting point of the whole history of the salvation of humanity. But it is not always clear to our human eyes how the links are formed that bind together the saved of all nations, those who participate in the blessing and the promise of Abraham, who are somehow united to Jesus Christ, who has saved them and reconciled them in the blood of his Cross and the glory of his Resurrection.

Abraham in the Islamic Tradition

The data of the Islamic tradition on the role of Abraham in the thought and religious practices of men and nations — above all in the Koran — unfold along lines parallel to those we have already traced in the Jewish and Christian traditions.

1. Abraham, the perfect believer and the perfect obedient servant

Abraham bears in the Koran (4:125) and in Islamic tradition the honorary title “friend of God” (*k̄halil Allah*). In view of his election, of his blessing and of the covenant of God, Abraham is a servant full of God's grace, a servant who, despite all obstacles in the eyes of men, marched forward on the path God had pointed out to him; and he

proved faithful in spite of the great trials he had to endure. By virtue of his unshakable fidelity to faith in God Abraham is an example for Moslems.

Abraham is also the model of the person who is perfectly open to the calling of God. For he was endowed with a “pure heart” (37:84), capable of opening himself to the knowledge of God. And God led him to faith, in virtue of the particular knowledge that his father had not received (19:43). Then he was able to detach himself from the error of his fathers to turn to the One God.

And God did in fact guide him, granted him revelation (2:136; 4:163), and even a Holy Scripture, “the books of Abraham”,¹ cited alongside the Book of Moses (53:36-37; 87:19).

2. Abraham the Moslem

The Koran calls Abraham the first Moslem, the model of the believer who surrenders himself in all confidence to God. His fidelity to the commandments of God led him to observe the religious duties of a devout Moslem: he professed the monotheistic faith; he performed the required prayers; he gave the alms imposed by law (21:73); he fulfilled the pilgrimage obligation, including the entrance into the sacred state, the completion of the tours and the offering (22:26-29); and he also performed good works (21:73).

Finally, Abraham received from God the promise of a blessed posterity: Isaac, Jacob and the long line that extends to Jesus Christ, a posterity chosen by God and guided by him along a right path (6:84-87; cf. 19:49; 21:72; 29:27; 37:112). And God gave this “family of Abraham” “the book and Wisdom”, and he granted it “an immense kingdom” (4:54).

In view of these gifts and the blessing with which God filled Abraham, he became the father of the followers of the true religion. And it is the Koran that gives the order to Mohammed: “Follow the faith of saintly Abraham” (16:123); and also to Moslems: “Allah has declared the truth. Follow the faith of Abraham. He was an upright man, no idolater” (3:95; cf. 4:125; 6:161).

3. Importance of Abraham for Islam

Belonging to the posterity of Abraham gained decisive importance for Islam when the latter undertook to define its identity vis-à-vis Judaism and Christianity. After the emigration from Mecca to Medina in 622, Mohammed, who was conscious of his links with the

biblical tradition, attempted in vain to gain the alliance of the Jews in favour of his cause and of his interests against his Meccan adversaries. When his attempts remained unsuccessful, in 624 he made two moves that would assure Islam its religious independence and that would allow it to gain access to a properly political patrimony.

The first move is of a religious nature. Beyond the exclusive claims of Jews and Christians to be the heirs of Abraham and to possess the only saving faith, Mohammed claimed Abraham father of all believers for himself in a direct and definitive way. The faith of Abraham, he argues, was there before the arrival of Judaism and Christianity. Thus was sealed the independence of Islam with respect to Judaism and Christianity.

The second move is of a politico-religious nature. It was to underscore direct legitimate descent from Abraham and the Arab character of the Koranic revelation. The Koran proclaims that the Kaaba, the central sanctuary of Arabia, was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael, and that it is therefore not a pagan temple, but a sanctuary dedicated to the worship of the one God (2:142-150). This is why the Koran from this time on orders Moslems to pray no longer facing Jerusalem, as they had hitherto done, but facing Kaaba. This helped to confirm the religious independence of Islam and at the same time its belonging to the biblical tradition that stemmed from Abraham. Moreover, Kaaba becomes the place of gathering of all the Arab tribes and the symbol of the religious and political unity of Islam.

On this new foundation, the Moslems were able henceforth to develop a sentiment of a particular belonging to Abraham and to claim him as their own in preference to Jews and Christians. On this subject the Koran expresses itself quite clearly: "Surely the men who are nearest to Abraham are those who follow him, this Prophet (Mohammed), and the true believers" (3:68).

This preferential place in the posterity of Abraham is attested once again by the fact, as the Koran puts it, that Abraham, at the time of the construction of Kaaba, prayed to God with his son Ishmael to send a prophet to his descendants, taken from among them. This prophet is identified by Islamic exegesis as Mohammed (2:127-129).

4. The Importance of Abraham for the nations

Abraham is then the model of all those who submit to God through faith and good works. It is possible then, although the Islamic tradition is less explicit on

this point, to draw certain conclusions regarding the salvation of the nations and the solidarity of Moslems with non-Moslems.

4.1. The salvation of non-Moslems

Most Moslem theologians assert that only Moslems will have access to paradise, while non-Moslems, including Jews and Christians, are destined to hell for all eternity. But the Koran states the following: "Believers, Jews, Christians, Sabaeans — whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does what is right — shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or to regret" (2:62; cf. 5:69). And he confirms that this is true in spite of the reluctance of Moslems and of the people of the Book, Jews and Christians: "It shall not be in accordance with your wishes, nor shall it be as the People of the Book wish. He that does evil shall be requited with evil: there shall be none to protect or help him. But the believers who do good works, whether men or women, shall enter the gardens of Paradise..." (4:123-124). In view of these verses, great Moslem theologians, such as Ghazzali, Mahmud Shaltut and Muhammad 'Abdul, assert that Jews and Christians, for example, can have access to the paradise of God.²

4.2. Solidarity of Moslems

Islam understands its mission as addressed to all peoples. This explains its universalist orientation. But this universality is linked to conversion to Islam and involves in practice no more than a partial and reluctant solidarity with certain religious communities who have a holy Scripture, such as Jews and Christians. The other non-Moslem peoples do have to be treated in accordance with the exigencies of justice, but they do not enjoy the benevolence and solidarity of the Moslems.

Conclusion

Membership in the posterity of Abraham can foster an open encounter between the faithful of the three Abrahamic religions. By relating to his faith and to his obedience to the commands of God, even amidst trials and tribulations, one can find in him a common point of reference which embraces all men of good will, open to faith and disposed to embrace the good. This attitude is capable of broadening the horizons of believers so as to make room for all human beings and all peoples and to make them witnesses of the blessing God granted to Abraham and that he entrusted to him for all the nations of the earth.

Rather than being an object of dispute and wrangling between the three faiths that claim him, Abraham can become the initiator and the guarantor of a serious

dialogue between them and of a fruitful cooperation for the good of all humanity.

For we live today in a world which, in the context of pervasive globalization, is no longer and can no longer be the world that some individuals can confiscate for their profit at the expense of others. Our present is the present of all of us together, and our future is the future of all of us together. We must finally stop treating one other like adversaries; we must succeed in making ourselves partners of one another; and we must strive to create between us an atmosphere of trust that will render us capable of becoming — if God wills it — one another's friends. This will lead us to practice a universal solidarity with each other and all of us together with respect to all human beings, the solidarity of all with respect to all.

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Notes

¹ In the apocryphal literature, several writings attributed to Abraham are known: the Apocalypse of Abraham, a Jewish writing of the first century after Jesus Christ; the Testament of Abraham, a Jewish writing of unknown date. An unknown writing bearing the title Inquisition of Abraham is mentioned in Christian literature. Cf. the article Abraham, in: *Bibel-Lexikon*, ed. Herbert Haag, 3rd edition, Zürich-Einsiedeln-Köln 1982, p. 14, col. 2, p. 15, col. 1.

² See the data of the Koran and of Moslem exegesis and the position of Ghazzali, of Mohammad 'Abdul and of Mahmud Shaltut, in my book: Adel Theodore Khoury, *Der Koran. Übersetzung und wissenschaftlicher Kommentar*, I, Güterslosh 1990, pp. 285-290. I refer there not only to the Moslem commentaries on the Koran, but also the works of Louis Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*, Paris 1967, pp. 301-302, 390-392; Tafsir al-Manar, I, pp. 336-338; Robert Caspar, *Le salut des non musulmans d'après Abu Hamid al-Ghazali*, in: "Islamochristiana", 3, Rome 1977, pp. 47-49; Mahmud Shaltut, *al-Islam, 'aqida wa shari'a*, 8th edition, s.d., pp. 19-20.

Ref.: Text from the Author. Given by e-mail for the SEDOS Bulletin.

Coming Events

SEDOS Annual General Assembly

2 December 2003

15:00/19:00

Brothers of the Christian Schools

– Via Aurelia, 476 –

ROME

- Shortely will follow more detailed information -

Where is Your Sister?

“The New Slave Trade Challenges Religious Life in the Third Millennium”

How Should We React?

by Eugenia Bonetti, M.C.

hrs 16:00

Brothers of the Christian Schools

– Via Aurelia, 476 –

ROME

Working Groups

Thursday, 9 October, **Debt Group** 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**

Monday, 13 October, **Bible and Mission Group** 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**

Wednesday, 3 December, **China Group** 15:00 hrs at **SEDOS**