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## *Editorial*

The last issue of the 35<sup>th</sup> volume of SEDOS Bulletin opens with an article by Fr **Angelo S. Lazzarotto**, PIME, updating us on the complex and difficult situation of the mission of the Catholic Church in China. Even though there are positive signs, the Catholic Christian community continues to suffer from various problems, mainly caused by the political situation and the religious legislation. This leaves little room for pastoral initiatives within the Catholic Church community of China. [See also Fr Lazzarotto's observations under the title *Progress on religious freedom in China?* posted on the SEDOS webpage (<http://www.sedos.org>)].

Interreligious Dialogue is a key dimension of the mission of our contemporary universal Church, which is called to be a Community of Dialogue. SEDOS continues to be mindful of this dimension. We publish the article offered by Fr **Ray Irudaya**, SJ, India, in which he analyses the dialogue of Jesus, an eminent dialogue partner, with the Samaritan woman. Fr Irudaya studies the relevance and challenges to interreligious dialogue of the adopted (and not adopted) dialogue-methods, attitudes and approaches in John Ch. 4. Learning from and applying the features and characteristics of Jesus' way of sharing and dialoguing could make interreligious dialogue (and any form of dialogue) more meaningful, effective, and life-promoting, and lead to fruitful collaboration and harmonious community building.

"Where is Your Sister?" ... is the title of our third contribution. The worldwide traffick in women and children for sex exploitation is growing and alarming. It violates the fundamental rights and dignity of human beings. The phenomenon challenges the mission of consecrated life. Last October, SEDOS invited Sr **Eugenia Bonetti**, MC, Rome, to give a conference on the issue. Sr Bonetti works with immigrant women, many of whom come from Nigeria, caught in the chain of prostitution, and chairs the office "Trafficking in human beings" of the Italian National Union for Woman Major Superiors (USMI). Many women religious are already involved in the fight against human trafficking, mainly in the areas of prevention, the rehabilitation of the victims and political action. All religious are challenged to commit themselves to helping the women (exploited human beings) and men (clients/consumers) escape from this deplorable situation, and to counteract prostitution.

In this issue, we offer to our readers the 2003 SEDOS Annual Report, prepared by the **SEDOS Secretariat**. Our appreciation goes to Ms **Ilaria Iadeluca**, Mrs **Margarita Lofthouse** and Mrs **Federica Pupilli**, for their work. The Annual Report highlights the major SEDOS activities and events that took place over the last 12 months.

We hope you will enjoy reading this last issue of the SEDOS Bulletin for 2003. *Best wishes for a Blessed Advent and Christmas Season.* Also in 2004, we hope we can count on your interest in, and support for, SEDOS' publications and activities.

Pierre-Paul Walraet, OSC  
SEDOS Executive Committee Member

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visit our Home Page  
Articles in 4 languages  
<http://www.sedos.org>*

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*Please note  
Our E-Mail address:  
[sedos@pcn.net](mailto:sedos@pcn.net)*

**Secretaries:**

**Publications:**

Ms. Ilaria Iadeluca ([redactionседos@pcn.net](mailto:redactionседos@pcn.net))

**Subscriptions and Accounting:**

Mrs. Margarita Lofthouse ([accountingsедos@pcn.net](mailto:accountingsедos@pcn.net))

**Documentation Centre:**

Mrs. Federica Pupilli ([documentationsедos@pcn.net](mailto:documentationsедos@pcn.net))

**Proof-readers:**

English: Ms. Philippa Wooldridge

French: Fr. André Notelaers, OSC

# La mision dans la faiblesse

## — Le cas de la Chine —

– Angelo Lazzarotto, PIME –

[NDLR – Le texte ci-dessous a été rédigé par le P. Angelo Lazzarotto, de l'Institut Pontifical des Missions Etrangères (PIME). Le P. Lazzarotto, observateur de longue date de l'Eglise en Chine, a écrit cet article pour le numéro de janvier 2003 d'Asia News, le supplément de la revue italienne Mondo e Missione. La traduction française de ce texte est de la rédaction d'Eglises d'Asie].

«Lorsque je suis faible, c'est alors que je suis fort» (2 Co 12, 10). Saint Paul a exprimé cette conviction après en avoir fait l'expérience dans sa vie et dans son engagement pour l'évangélisation. Du reste, la vie de l'Eglise primitive s'est développée dans un contexte d'oppression et de persécution, dans lequel le sens de la faiblesse et de la précarité était à l'ordre du jour pour tous les croyants. Et ces derniers ne s'en étonnaient pas, car ils savaient que Jésus, qui a vaincu le monde et a promis de rester avec ses fils jusqu'à la fin des temps, a ajouté également qu'ils allaient à la rencontre de persécutions et d'oppositions.

Cela reste vrai encore aujourd'hui. L'Eglise en Chine en fait l'expérience au quotidien, et depuis de longues années, notamment depuis le 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 1949 lorsque Mao Zedong proclama la victoire de la Révolution communiste. Devant affronter des épreuves qui avaient le goût amer de la mort (comme en particulier lors des années sombres de la Révolution culturelle), non seulement l'Eglise a survécu, mais elle continue de grandir, sans pouvoir avoir le soutien d'une structure ni d'une aide extérieure. Cette croissance est également liée à des facteurs externes, pour ne citer que la libéralisation économique introduite par Deng Xiaoping en 1978 qui a eu des répercussions positives au sein du tissu social chinois dans son ensemble. Il est important, sans toutefois perdre l'espérance, de reconnaître les limitations qui continuent à être imposées à la religion. Un journal américain titrait récemment sur les espoirs que l'on peut nourrir aujourd'hui en Chine dans le domaine religieux, à savoir une situation « *de plus grande liberté et en même temps de plus grande persécution* ». Et d'expliquer : « *Le paradoxe de fond réside dans le fait qu'il semble y avoir actuellement en Chine une liberté plus grande et, en même temps, une plus lourde répression.* »

### Ombres et lumières en 2002

Pour essayer d'y voir plus clair sur cette réalité complexe, faisons mémoire de certains événements de l'an-

née 2002. Parmi les nouveautés les plus importantes introduites par le 16<sup>ème</sup> Congrès du Parti communiste chinois qui s'est conclu mi-novembre 2002, il faut signaler l'approbation de la ligne pour laquelle a combattu le président sortant Jiang Zemin avec la théorie de la Triple représentation. Le parti révolutionnaire, né comme expression du prolétariat paysan et ouvrier, devrait, avec cette théorie, s'adapter à la réalité sociale en pleine mutation, en promouvant également la nouvelle classe que constituent les entrepreneurs et les néo-capitalistes, et en favorisant « *la culture chinoise la plus avancée et les intérêts fondamentaux de la majorité* ».

La Chine, qui vient d'entrer dans l'Organisation mondiale du commerce (OMC) et qui se prépare à accueillir les Jeux olympiques de 2008, ne cesse de se déclarer un pays « *socialiste aux caractéristiques chinoises* » alors qu'elle présente des convergences évidentes avec le monde capitaliste. Pour le Parti communiste, qui n'hésite pas à se réserver le droit exclusif de gouverner le pays, les conséquences pratiques pourraient avec le temps être considérables, malgré la fidélité réaffirmée aux principes traditionnels du marxisme.

Dans un avenir proche, la politique à l'égard des religions et de l'Eglise catholique en particulier ne devrait pas s'éloigner de la ligne mise en place il y a un an au cours de la conférence nationale convoquée de manière exceptionnelle par le Bureau politique (à laquelle participèrent les sept membres du Comité permanent), en ce qui concerne le personnel du Parti et du gouvernement chargé de la gestion de la « *politique de liberté religieuse* ». Les rares informations que les médias officiels ont données suite aux discours prononcés par le président Jiang Zemin et par le premier ministre Zhu Rongji confirmeront la détermination du pouvoir à maintenir un contrôle étroit sur toutes les manifestations extérieures dans l'exercice de la « *croyance religieuse* » (Cf. *Asia News* d'octobre 2002). Depuis plus de deux ans, le mouvement spirituel *Falungong*, déclaré hors la loi car « *secte pernicieuse* », en-

de dure une lourde persécution. Divers groupes, dont certains chrétiens (protestants), ont également été assimilés à ce mouvement spirituel et ont à leur tour été bannis pour la même raison (Cf. *Asia News* d'avril 2002). Frank Ching, un analyste attentif, souligne cet équivoque habituel : «*Un parti athée décide quelles religions sont à considérer comme légitimes et lesquelles sont à classer parmi les 'cultes pernicioseux', alors qu'il de-mande aux chefs religieux de soutenir une politique de dirigeants athées.*»

Dans un tel climat, même des groupes religieux en aucun cas subversifs sont souvent tyrannisés par les forces de sécurité, par le simple fait qu'ils n'acceptent pas d'être supervisés par les «*associations patriotiques*» respectives. Ce problème touche de près les chrétiens et en particulier les catholiques. Mais il peut y avoir des exceptions. C'est dans la nuit de Noël 2001 que mourait l'évêque «clandestin» de Pékin, Mgr Mathias Pei Shangde à l'âge de 83 ans. Selon la police, qui avait autorisé que l'évêque soit inhumé dans son village natal de Zhangjiapu, dans «*la plus grande discrétion*», pas plus de 200 ou 300 personnes ont participé aux funérailles. En réalité, des témoins oculaires affirment qu'au moins 5 000 fidèles venus de différentes provinces de Chine ont participé aux obsèques célébrées par quatre prêtres dont trois dits «clandestins». Dans l'homélie, le prêtre «officiel» souligna l'engagement de Mgr Pei à promouvoir le rapprochement des deux parties de la communauté catholique chinoise. Pour leur part, les forces de l'ordre eurent un comportement discret, même si elles s'efforcèrent d'empêcher l'accès de toute personne étrangère.

Malheureusement, il n'est pas rare de voir que, dans l'Eglise catholique, des membres de communautés dites «clandestines», c'est-à-dire non reconnues officiellement, subissent des arrestations et des chantages, même si la situation varie selon les lieux. En février dernier, l'agence *Fides* donnait la liste de cinq évêques arrêtés et de huit autres interdits d'exercer leur ministère, auxquels s'ajoutent plus de douze prêtres arrêtés et huit interdits de ministère. En avril dernier, dans le diocèse de Zhenging (Hebei) dont l'évêque non reconnu officiellement, Mgr Julius Jia Zhiguo, a été plusieurs fois arrêté par la police, un gros contingent de la Sécurité publique a démolé au bulldozer une église en phase de construction dans le village de Xiaozhao. Il semble que l'ordre ait été donné par les autorités supérieures, car les 700 catholiques du village avaient bien obtenu, de la part des autorités locales, le terrain et le permis de construire. La construction, financée par des bienfaiteurs pour un montant total de 60 000 US\$, était sur le point d'être terminée. De même, dans le Fujian, sur la côte méridionale, deux chapelles où se réunissaient des groupes de catholiques non enregistrés auprès de l'Association patriotique ont été démo-

liées par la police en mai, dans des villages situés non loin de la ville de Changle. Déjà, l'année précédente, cinq autres églises (pouvant contenir jusqu'à 2 500 fidèles pour les messes dominicales) avaient été détruites par la police aux alentours de Changle et de Fuqing. Dans ces lieux, la communauté «clandestine» est particulièrement active. Pendant l'été, des cours de catéchèse sont organisés dans de nombreuses églises pour les enfants des familles catholiques, et ceci avec l'assentiment tacite des autorités locales (même si le règlement interdit tout enseignement de la religion aux personnes de moins de 18 ans). Pour les communautés non reconnues officiellement, ces catéchèses sont toujours à risque : une religieuse ainsi que quatre laïcs catholiques ont été arrêtés par la police alors qu'ils enseignaient à 29 enfants dans une maison privée du village de Dongan, dans le comté de Lianjiang, toujours dans le Fujian. En septembre, un autre évêque, Mgr Wei Jingyi, a également été arrêté dans la ville de Qiqihar, dans le Heilongjiang.

### **On minimise, mais les préoccupations sont bel et bien justifiées**

Les autorités minimisent ces faits, les considérant comme de simples «*incidents*» administratifs qui punissent les transgressions des normes en vigueur. La presse continentale n'en touche mot. Lors de la conférence de presse qui a suivi la rencontre du 21 février 2002 entre Georges Bush et Jiang Zemin, ce dernier a même soutenu que certains évêques catholiques ont été arrêtés car ils avaient enfreint la loi. Les autorités justifient ainsi la méfiance à l'encontre de l'Eglise catholique avec l'accusation que Rome interfère dans les affaires internes chinoises par le biais des communautés «clandestines».

L'Administration d'Etat des Affaires religieuses est l'organe suprême chargé d'appliquer les décisions du Parti communiste et de l'appareil gouvernemental dans la «*gestion*» des religions, par le biais du Bureau des Affaires religieuses, dont le directeur Ye Xiaowen a rang de vice-ministre. Selon Kie Cheng, chercheur à l'Académie des Sciences sociales de la province du Hebei, le gouvernement ressent le besoin de réviser les critères pesants adoptés jusqu'à présent. Et même le n° 2 de l'Administration, Wang Zuonan, assure que cette administration exerce une fonction modératrice, du fait qu'elle reste vigilante à ce que les divers organes exécutifs n'appliquent pas les normes en vigueur selon leur bon plaisir. Dans un entretien accordé en mars dernier, il reconnaissait que le monde religieux chinois est en pleine mutation, car, outre les cinq religions reconnues officiellement, il existe de plus en plus d'expressions de dévotion populaire, parmi lesquelles justement le *Falungong* et des cultes plus ou moins su-

perstitieux dont il est difficile de discerner la légitimité. Cela montre ainsi l'urgence, admet Wang, de formuler une nouvelle norme nationale pour se substituer à toutes les normes locales qui se sont multipliées ces dernières années ; pour cela, il faudra au moins un ou deux ans de travail. En référence à la polémique sur la canonisation des 120 martyrs de Chine (qui a eu lieu le 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 2000), Wang soutient que les missionnaires étrangers proposés à la vénération de l'Église chinoise sont en réalité de mauvais modèles et il n'hésite pas à affirmer que *«l'histoire a démontré que le Vatican a poursuivi une ligne constante d'hostilité envers la Chine»*. La polémique sans fin avec *«le Vatican»* a certes des incidences diplomatiques (la question de Taiwan), mais elle dénote à la racine une compréhension différente du fait religieux et du rôle du Saint-Siège pour les catholiques du monde entier. Elle semble s'être atténuée ces derniers mois, de par l'invitation qu'a reçue le cardinal japonais Shirayamagi Seiichi, archevêque émérite de Tokyo, à se rendre en Chine avec une délégation de la Conférence mondiale 'Religions et Paix' au mois d'octobre dernier.

Ce qui pourrait jouer en faveur des religions reconnues officiellement est justement le difficile bras de fer qui oppose actuellement le gouvernement et le mouvement spiritualiste *Falungong* ainsi que d'autres groupes religieux qui ont déjà été mis hors-la-loi parce que considérés comme *«sectes pernicieuses»*. Le président Jiang Zemin, lors d'une visite en novembre 2001 au temple bouddhiste de Bailin dans la province du Hebei, aurait même demandé aux moines d'encourager la religion bouddhiste chez les jeunes générations. Cela faisait justement partie de la guerre lancée contre *«l'invasion des sectes pernicieuses»*. Reconnaissant que la religion jouera un rôle toujours plus important en Chine, le président chinois avait montré sa préoccupation de *«gouverner le pays avec vertu»*, selon une maxime de Confucius. C'est peut-être la constatation tardive d'une réalité présente dans le pays depuis longtemps déjà : l'usure progressive des idéaux de la révolution marxiste a fait que le sentiment religieux peut offrir l'inspiration et la force nécessaires pour résister à la tendance à la consommation et à la corruption déferlante. Il est donc légitime de penser que, si l'on diminuait les contrôles qui pèsent lourdement sur les religions reconnues, l'attraction vers les mouvements «clandestins» serait moins forte. Dans la logique du pouvoir, reconnaître l'influence croissante des religions ne contredit en rien la volonté affirmée de les tenir sous contrôle étroit. L'éditorial du *Quotidien du Peuple* n'a donc étonné personne lorsqu'il a exalté les directives sévères de la Conférence de décembre sur les religions, les considérant comme une *«nouvelle phase de travail en ce qui concerne les religions en Chine»*.

Selon le *Wall Street Journal* du 6 février 2002, la Chine serait en réalité en train de revoir sa *«les fonde-*

*ments de sa politique religieuse, avec une ligne plus tolérante envers les principaux groupes religieux»*. Cependant, les spécialistes de la situation religieuse en Chine, en particulier le professeur Richard Madsen, prévoient à l'avenir une attitude encore plus répressive de la part du régime de Pékin, pas tant pour des motifs anti-chrétiens que pour la préoccupation de tenir sous contrôle tous les secteurs de la société animée des forces centrifuges, elles-mêmes suscitées les développements économiques permanents. Et selon Mickey Spiegel, de l'organisation *Human Rights Watch*, de nombreux dirigeants de Pékin n'ont pas abandonné la vision traditionnelle qui prévoit l'élimination éventuelle de la religion : *«Ils reconnaissent que se libérer de la religion sera un processus long et, d'autre part, ayant besoin de leur coopération, ils contrôlent les croyants»*. Des faits inquiétants en ce sens ne manquent pas.

S'adressant en mai dernier aux responsables des comités du Parti qui contrôlent les universités chinoises, le ministre de l'Éducation, Mme Chen Zhili, recommandait d'intensifier la vigilance contre l'infiltration d'idées libérales occidentales et contre l'expansion de la religion parmi les étudiants qu'ils faut décourager de participer aux messes dominicales et à toute autre activité religieuse. Une telle déclaration est non seulement anti-constitutionnelle, et elle est probablement dictée par la frustration de voir que les jeunes intellectuels montrent toujours moins d'intérêt pour l'idéologie officielle, mais encore elle révèle que la vieille mentalité est encore bien enracinée chez ceux qui tiennent les rênes du pouvoir.

### Les médias enflent les signes d'ouverture

Dans un tel climat, il est tout à fait compréhensible que, lorsque les médias dédient un large espace aux affaires religieuses, on suspecte l'existence de motivations intéressées. L'année 2002 a vu par exemple une surabondance d'informations religieuses. En avril, la revue *Beijing Review* consacrait un dossier spécial à rappeler que la liberté de religion est garantie par la législation chinoise et que toutes les activités religieuses en Chine sont gérées indépendamment par les groupes religieux eux-mêmes. Alors que l'on se préoccupe d'éliminer les éventuelles *«interférences étrangères»*, on ne fait pas mystère du fait que la liberté concédée aux *«organisations religieuses, aux rites religieux et à la célébration de festivités religieuses»* est encadrée par la loi et par la politique religieuse mise en œuvre par l'appareil. Pendant l'été, alors que le président Jiang Zemin se préparait à rencontrer George W. Bush dans son ranch au Texas, on annonça d'importantes aides économiques offertes par la Municipalité de Pékin pour la restitution et la restauration de propriétés religieuses qui avaient auparavant été réquisitionnées. A cette oc-

casation, le vice-directeur du Bureau des Affaires Religieuses de Pékin, Ji Wenyuan, a admis que des complications bureaucratiques ont souvent empêché la reconnaissance des droits sur ces propriétés, et a promis que les questions en suspens seraient résolues d'ici l'année prochaine, soulignant que, de telle manière, les groupes religieux pourront ainsi être auto-suffisants et éliminer le besoin de recourir à un soutien étranger. Le problème d'obstruction bureaucratique avait également été soulevé par des membres des structures officielles de l'Eglise, lors d'une réunion au printemps de la section religieuse de l'Assemblée politique consultative populaire, qui se tient en marge des sessions de l'Assemblée nationale populaire. L'évêque (« officiel ») Liu Jinghe, de Tangshan, un des neuf délégués catholiques présents à l'Assemblée, soulignait le 9 mars dernier que, vingt ans après la reprise des activités religieuses, tous les biens de l'Eglise n'ont pas encore été restitués et que « *c'est principalement un problème politique !* »

Au cours de l'année, on a procédé à la restauration de la cathédrale de l'Immaculée Conception (*Nan Tang*) et on travaille à celle du Christ-Sauveur (*Bei Tang*), qui sera dorénavant destinée à devenir le nouveau siège de l'évêque « officiel », Mgr Michel Fu Tieshan, alors que la nouvelle et imposante structure du Séminaire catholique national est presque terminée. De même, l'église protestante de Chongwenmen aussi bien que des temples bouddhistes et taoïstes ont bénéficié de ces contributions financières (des dizaines de millions de yuans). La reconstruction du séminaire protestant de Nankin a également été approuvée. Les médias officiels ont particulièrement porté attention à l'Eglise catholique et à Mgr Fu Tieshan, membre de l'Assemblée nationale populaire, et de son Comité permanent. Entre le 28 juillet et le 8 août, neuf informations religieuses relatives au diocèse de Pékin ont été rapportées par la presse officielle. Une d'entre elles soulignait que Mgr Fu s'engage à assurer aux participants aux Jeux olympiques de 2008 la possibilité d'assister aux offices liturgiques dans les principales langues. Un article du *China Daily* du 6 août 2002 rappelait que presque cent prêtres, séminaristes et religieuses chinoises ont été envoyés dans différents pays occidentaux pour étudier la théologie et obtenir des diplômes académiques. A ce sujet, un éditorial de l'hebdomadaire catholique de Hongkong, *The Sunday Examiner*, du 18 août 2002 faisait remarquer qu'aucune allusion n'a été faite aux bourses d'étude et aux nombreuses initiatives d'hospitalité des Eglises locales de ces pays et exprimait ainsi l'espoir que les autorités chinoises prennent acte du fait que la communion universelle de l'Eglise catholique guidée par le pape ne se fasse pas au détriment de la croissance et de la juste autonomie de l'Eglise chinoise. Le journal espérait également de manière provocatrice que l'Association patriotique des catho-

liques chinois soit reléguée en-fin à une « *simple note à insérer dans les livres d'histoire* ».

### Les racines d'une faiblesse féconde

Plus de cinquante ans après l'expulsion de plus de 5 000 missionnaires étrangers, l'Eglise en Chine démontre qu'elle a pris conscience que l'Evangile n'implique pas des situations privilégiées, mais qu'il est le levain qui fermente de l'intérieur ; il est la semence destinée à croître dans le contexte simple qu'est le jardin d'une maison. D'un point de vue humain, la position de l'Eglise reste particulièrement faible car elle ne peut pas compter sur une protection ou sur des structures qui lui garantissent le libre exercice de sa mission évangélisatrice. Mais elle ne manque pas d'une force intérieure qui ne peut se mesurer avec des paramètres humains, car elle se greffe sur le mystère du Christ crucifié et ressuscité. Actuellement, dans la recherche d'un dialogue avec la Chine, on hésite à parler de persécution ; mais ce serait une trahison à la vérité historique des faits que de survoler les milliers de vrais martyrs qui ont marqué la vie de l'Eglise ces dernières décennies ! (Dans son livre intitulé *Martyrs en Chine*, le P. Giancarlo Politi a rassemblé une première documentation sur plus de 1 600 victimes de l'actuel régime communiste, que ce soient des ecclésiastiques ou des laïcs). Et le témoignage de cette capacité extraordinaire à souffrir sans haine et en pardonnant constitue encore aujourd'hui une lumière pour tous ceux qui cherchent un sens à leur vie. C'est ce qui m'a été confirmé au cours de récentes rencontres lors de ma visite en Chine en octobre dernier. Du fait de la sympathie dont jouissent généralement les chrétiens dans la société chinoise, de nombreuses personnes sont attirées et veulent connaître le message de l'Evangile pour demander ensuite le baptême. Le gouvernement considère les catholiques et les protestants comme deux religions différentes, du fait du nom par lequel elles s'identifient (« *religion du Maître du Ciel* » et « *religion du Christ* »). Outre les communautés protestantes qui font partie officiellement du « *Conseil chrétien de Chine* », divers groupes évangéliques très actifs s'affermissent depuis quelques années et ont un nombre de fidèles assez élevé. Mais, à ce jour, il n'existe pas de statistiques exactes quant au nombre des fidèles. En ce qui concerne les catholiques, des estimations crédibles parlent de dix à douze millions, soit pratiquement le triple par rapport à la situation précédant l'arrivée de Mao au pouvoir. (Il est étrange de constater que les membres des structures officielles continuent à répéter les chiffres de 1949 alors qu'on n'atteignait pas les quatre millions à l'époque, catéchumènes inclus). Il s'agit de toute façon d'une petite communauté (moins d'un pour cent de la population chinoise !) qui souffre de nombreux problèmes générés et conditionnés par la situation politique actuelle. Cela

vaut la peine d'en citer quelques uns. La fracture entre les catholiques dits «clandestins» et ceux qui sont officiellement reconnus, à savoir entre ceux qui refusent et ceux qui acceptent les conditionnements imposés par le pouvoir politique, est toujours aussi douloureusement vive. Les prêtres et les évêques sont également impliqués dans cette fracture. Le problème du vieillissement de l'épiscopat se fait de plus en plus aigu (plus de la moitié des évêques ont dépassé les 70 ans) et plusieurs diocèses sont sans pasteur. Du fait que, pendant trente ans, les séminaires ont été tous fermés et les communautés religieuses dispersées, la nouvelle génération de prêtres et de religieuses, qui date des années 1980, ressent une insuffisance dans leur formation. Et l'interférence des organes présumés «gérer» les religions, même sur des questions typiquement pasto- rales, ne cesse de continuer. En fait, le régime n'admet pas que puissent exister des domaines exclusifs de compétence pastorale. C'est pour cela qu'il n'a jamais été possible, même pour des évêques, d'organiser des réunions entre eux sans la présence encombrante du représentant politique du Bureau des Affaires religieuses et/ou de l'Association patriotique. Un évêque de l'Eglise reconnue officiellement se lamentait récemment du fait que le gouvernement invite des laïcs catholiques à gérer l'Eglise comme une «*démocratie*», afin d'évincer les évêques du pouvoir.

Cependant, en s'insérant dans le peu d'espace laissé par les conditions politiques, les catholiques travaillent à une certaine normalisation de la vie chrétienne. Ainsi, des initiatives pour le renouvellement liturgique des communautés selon le Concile Vatican II ont été mises en place. On imprime des ouvrages de formation ou de dévotion, on tient des cours de catéchuménat et de formation catéchétique, on réalise des parements liturgiques et des objets de culte, etc. Le bimensuel *Shinde* ('Foi') publié dans la province du Hebei est désormais diffusé dans tous les diocèses du pays. Les Eglises commencent à bénéficier de la possibilité de construire même en Chine des structures de leur propre initiative, de type 'organisations non gouvernementales' occidentales (même si elles ont le soutien de bureaux d'Etat ou para-étatiques). C'est ainsi qu'est née, dans le Hebei, la première expérience d'engagement social catholique, avec l'organisme *Beifang Jinde*. S'ajoute en outre la diffusion sans cesse plus large des moyens électroniques de communication, que quelqu'un appelle déjà la «*nouvelle route de la soie*» (on compte plus de 55 millions d'internautes en Chine). Le gouvernement doit favoriser ce phénomène en vue du développement technologique et économique, mais il en a peur car Internet peut devenir un instrument possible de dissension et il érige actuellement un «*rideau de silicium*» avec des filtres et des contrôles sur de nombreux thèmes politiques. Quant aux thématiques religieuses, les Eglises et les fidèles peuvent avoir leurs propres sites et

puiser à des ressources disponibles hors de Chine. On dénombre aujourd'hui quelque 700 sites gérés par des communautés catholiques chinoises dans le monde, avec des informations et de la documentation provenant également des Eglises d'Occident, de *Radio Vatican* et d'autres organismes du Saint-Siège. Dans le secteur de l'éducation et de l'activité sociale, les Eglises ont encore l'interdiction en Chine d'«*interférer*», mais de fait, la présence de jeunes religieuses est généralement acceptée dans les villages ; elles sont au service des handicapés, des personnes âgées, des enfants abandonnés. Et dans certaines communautés locales, des cours scolaires sont également tolérés pour suppléer aux carences de l'éducation d'Etat.

On le voit bien, les Eglises bénéficient de certaines libertés civiles qui sont concédées à la société chinoise sur la base de la logique du libre-échange, sans cependant devenir plus «faibles» du point de vue institutionnel. Mais les problèmes politiques se croisent avec les questions culturelles et autres, plus religieuses et ecclésiales. Aujourd'hui, la vraie faiblesse de l'Eglise en Chine réside bien dans la vulnérabilité de trop d'agents pastoraux (y compris des prêtres et des évêques) soumis aux pressions et aux illusions de la consommation exaspérée qui prévaut dans la société. En outre, les divisions internes qui affligent encore les communautés chinoises sont un contre-témoignage paralysant, même si les positions des «clandestins» et des «officiels» tendent à se rejoindre. Il nous faut nous sentir tous responsables de ces faiblesses et de ces maladies, par le simple fait que nous faisons tous partie de l'unique famille sauvée bien que pécheresse. Prier pour l'Eglise en Chine reste un impératif pour nous tous.

### Des nouveautés attendues sur le plan culturel

Nous parlions de questions culturelles. Les foules qui fréquentent les temples qui ont été rouverts ces dernières années confirment le retour aux valeurs religieuses caractéristiques de la tradition chinoise. Les religions chinoises antiques convergent dans la construction de «voies sapientiales» dont il faut tenir compte lorsqu'on propose la Bonne Nouvelle du Christ. L'Eglise en Chine présente aujourd'hui un visage totalement chinois et donc compatible avec la culture locale. Mais pour qu'elle puisse irradier efficacement le message évangélique et proposer le visage du Christ de manière crédible, elle a besoin d'une réflexion théologique renouvelée, du même ordre que celle produite par Matteo Ricci il y a 400 ans, et d'un effort de conversion profonde aux valeurs de l'Evangile, comme cela a été rappelé au Synode des évêques pour l'Asie. Il n'y a aucun doute : «*Le visage du Christ attirera les peuples de l'Asie vers et à travers le visage de l'Eglise*».

On observe qu'il est difficile d'évaluer l'importance des initiatives promotionnelles en faveur des religions

proposées l'été dernier. Une d'entre elles mérite cependant une attention particulière car elle représente une nouveauté absolue dans le domaine culturel et elle semble se greffer justement sur ce que nous sommes en train de dire. Le 6 août 2002, Mgr Fu Tieshan annonçait la constitution à Pékin d'un Institut pour l'Etude du Christianisme et des Cultures, en souvenir du grand missionnaire italien Matteo Ricci ; le *Quotidien du Peuple* faisait également écho à cette information. Le P. Pierre Zhao Jianmin, à qui la direction de l'institut a été confiée, vient juste d'obtenir une maîtrise en droit canonique à l'université de Louvain la Neuve en Belgique et se propose d'explorer les rapports entre catholicisme, moralité, culture et art. Jusqu'à aujourd'hui, étaient étrangement exclus de la recherche scientifique et de l'échange interdisciplinaire dans le domaine religieux et sur le christianisme tous les organismes religieux ; les études et les publications produits par eux ne pouvaient sortir des communautés respectives. Ce nouvel Institut pourra désormais collaborer avec de nombreux centres d'études sur la religion et sur le christianisme qui sont nés ces dernières années dans différentes universités chinoises, valorisant ainsi la contribution positive que le christianisme a apporté à la Chine. Un des premiers projets devrait être la publication d'une série de livres sur les *Echanges culturels entre la Chine et l'Occident dans l'histoire du catholicisme chinois du XV<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*. Le P. Zhao se dit satisfait car ces études pourront être publiées par des éditeurs officiels, et pas seulement au sein des circuits limités de l'Eglise.

Il n'est pas anodin de constater que ces ouvertures ont été annoncées alors que la Municipalité de Pékin décidait de mettre à jour les normes sur la «*gestion des affaires religieuses*» dans la capitale chinoise, en publiant un nouveau document qui a été discuté et approuvé par l'Assemblée populaire locale, en juillet. L'agence de presse officielle *Xinhua* citait pour l'occasion le vice-directeur de la Commission législative de l'Assemblée populaire de la Municipalité, Zhang Zhijian, qui soulignait que cette étude, à l'origine, concernait également des pratiques normalement abolies, mais très populaires, comme la divination, etc. Seront également concernés la possibilité pour les groupes religieux de proposer leurs propres publications, leurs objets de dévotion et leurs travaux artistiques, au-delà des lieux respectifs de culte. Dans le nouveau texte en vigueur depuis début novembre 2002, certains paragraphes restent assez imprécis ; c'est pourquoi il faudra voir si, dans la pratique, ce document sera appliqué et dépassera les restrictions existantes.

Il est trop tôt pour dire si le 16<sup>ème</sup> Congrès du Parti communiste chinois qui s'est terminé mi-novembre marquera une évolution positive dans les choix de la politique des autorités envers la religion. On ignore

même si la question de la gestion des religions a émergé lors du Congrès dont les débats sont restés rigoureusement secrets. Avant le Congrès, malgré quelques voix isolées (Cf. *Asia News* d'octobre 2002), ce thème avait été pratiquement éliminé d'une discussion publique telle que répercutée dans les médias. Mais certains pensent que la sensibilité inédite et l'attention démontrées par Jiang Zemin envers le problème religieux durant ses dernières années au pouvoir pourraient, avec le temps, avoir des répercussions sur les orientations de la politique religieuse. Même s'il se retire de la charge suprême du Parti et de l'Etat, Jiang Zemin s'est assuré de tenir les rênes de la ligne politique du Parti pour les prochaines années, par le biais de proches nommés au sein du très puissant Comité permanent du Bureau politique (désormais composé de neuf membres, contre sept auparavant). Parmi eux, il y a un grand ami de Jiang Zemin en la personne de l'ex-secrétaire du Comité du Parti à Pékin, Jia Qinglin, qui a mis en place la nouvelle législation de la Municipalité sur la gestion des activités religieuses. On peut espérer que l'expérience de Pékin aura des résultats positifs, marquant ainsi une étape vers une plus grande libéralisation. Ce document signé par la Municipalité de Pékin pourrait en effet servir de ligne d'orientation pour la nouvelle législation nationale qui est à l'étude depuis longtemps.

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# *Attitudes and Approaches Employed in the Dialogue of Jesus With the Samaritan Woman Their Relevance to Interreligious Dialogue Today*

– Ray Irudaya, SJ\* –

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The world of today includes pluralism of various kinds: ethnic, cultural, ideological and religious. The pluralism of cultures and religions is obvious in most countries. No country today can claim to be only homogeneous i.e. no country can assert today that it consists of just one race or one ethnic group, one culture, one language and one religion. People move and settle in different countries and continents for various reasons, helped by modern transportation and communication facilities. Migration into all parts of the world is on the increase due to economic, political and cultural factors. Human life has become essentially intercultural and interreligious and so dialogical too. A cohesive intercultural living and harmonious interreligious existence are not merely a fact of life but also a challenge to humanity.<sup>1</sup> Interreligious engagement is today a universal concern. “There can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions”.<sup>2</sup>

India in particular has been a cradle of manifold cultures, religions and ethnicities and it has been hailed for its prodigiously rich variety of peoples, cultures and religions. Cultural diversities, religious pluralities and ethnic varieties form the mosaic of India. Unity in diversity has become the breath of life in India. The peace and harmony of these diverse ethnic, cultural and religious groups is inextricably linked to their mutual respect, relationship and dialogical living. The wider and deeper one’s fellowship with others is, the richer and more wholesome the person’s life becomes.<sup>3</sup>

Religious bigotry, communal violence, caste and terrorist atrocities of the recent past in India have jeopardised the very legacy of its pluralism.<sup>4</sup> Growing intolerance and cultivated hatred among various ethnic and religious groups are spreading like the virus that corrodes and endangers Indian polity. Communalism, religious fundamentalism and caste hegemony are breaking the very fabric of India’s pluralism. The spread of the majoritarian communalism, growth of aggressive *Hindutva* which aims at the supremacy of the Hindu religion, headed and monopolised by the Brahmin caste, cultural nationalism which works towards mak-

ing India a Hindu *Rashtra* have begun to attack and axe the very roots of pluralism in our country. Today religion is politicised and used to divide people. Culture is communalised and well-engineered attempts are made to usher in a dominating monoculture. Hatred and hostility of other cultures and religions are provoked and propagated.

In this state of affairs only dialogue between religions and cultures can re-establish the respect for the value of pluralism and hold India together. Because our country is a cradle of religions and as religiosity is part and parcel of the Indian ethos, interreligious dialogue is for us a historical mandate. Against this background I attempt to study some of the attitudes and approaches found in this dialogue of Jesus with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42) and to highlight their relevance and challenges to our interreligious dialogue today. At the outset we will briefly deal with the Johannine discourses and dialogues in general.

## 1. Discourses and Dialogue in John

The use of speech in the Fourth Gospel is abundant.<sup>5</sup> Discourses and dialogues are a special stylistic feature in the Gospel of John.<sup>6</sup> C.H. Dodd says, “Among the various forms in which the Church’s witness and saving work of Christ is presented in the Gospels, the one most characteristic of the Fourth Gospel is the elaborately wrought dramatic dialogue”.<sup>7</sup> Scholars believe that a discourse source has contributed to the composition of the Gospel of John. R. Bultmann suggested that behind the Fourth Gospel there exists a source from which John derived the discourses that he assigns to Jesus.<sup>8</sup> The form and manner in which the fourth evangelist has presented the teaching of Jesus is significantly different from that of the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus’ teaching is rendered in a series of long, elaborate, well-developed discourses that consist partly of dialogues and partly of monologues. By and large the dialogues tend to move on to monologues that explicate and expound their themes at greater length.<sup>9</sup> Most of the dialogues in John can be seen in the broader framework of Johannine discourses.<sup>10</sup> John has used

and interconnected discourse and dialogue in presenting the teaching of Jesus. A broad classification of the Johannine dialogues can be presented as follows: dialogue with individuals (2:1-8; 1:35-39; 1:47-51; 3:1-21; 4:4-26; 4:46-50; 6:5-10; 7:1-9; 11:1-44; 12:4-8; 12:20-26; 13:6-11; 14:1-7; 14:8-14; 20:11-17; 20:24-29; 21:15-23), dialogue with the sick and the sinner (5:2-14; 8:2-11), dialogue with hostile persons (5:17-47; 6:25-65; 7:14-30(36); 8:12-59; 10:22-39), dialogue with those in authority (18:19-24; 18:28-19:16), and dialogue with the disciples (13:6-11; 36-38; 14:5-7; 8-14; 16:29-33).

## 2. Attitudes and approaches employed in the dialogue

The various types of Johannine dialogue present Jesus as an eminent dialogue partner. The different methods, approaches and attitudes employed in these dialogues are enlightening and Kingdom-building. We shall presently study the attitudes, approaches and methods employed in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman and try to draw their relevance and challenges for our interreligious dialogue today.

### 2.1. Openness to Reach Out to Others

What is striking about this dialogue is Jesus' attitude of openness to reach out to others. The dialogue proper in John 4:7-26 is preceded by a fitting introduction (vv.1-6). Verses 1-3 present the transition of Jesus' ministry from Jerusalem (2:12 - 3:21) and Judaea (3:22ff) to a Samaritan city called Sychar (4:4-42). The awareness of the Pharisees about the baptizing activity and growing popularity of Jesus (v.1) and a possible threat of their unleashing a persecution against Jesus might have been the reason for Jesus' move from Judaea to Galilee. Jesus chose to go to Galilee via Samaria.<sup>11</sup> The use of *e'dei* (*edei*) highlights the necessity of Jesus to pass through Samaria. This necessity is described by some<sup>12</sup> as 'geographical necessity' and by others<sup>13</sup> as 'divine necessity'. Though this journey was not pre-planned by Jesus, God had willed it.<sup>14</sup> In the Fourth Gospel *edei* is usually associated with God's plan (3:14.30; 9:4). Though his journey through Samaria was necessitated by geographical expediency, his stay in Samaria was guided by divine necessity.<sup>15</sup> Jesus' undertaking of this journey showed his openness and readiness to follow the will of God. As a Jew, Jesus was also quite aware that the route via Samaria would take him through the land of the Samaritans who were held in contempt by the Jews. But this journey of Jesus through Samaria shows his attitude of openness and readiness to reach out to people like the Samaritans. This attitude and approach is a good preparation for his dialogue with the Samaritan woman.

With this open attitude Jesus began the conversation with her by asking for a drink (v. 7). Jesus was fully

aware that he was asking for a drink from a Samaritan woman, which was not expected of any respectable Jew. In spite of his awareness of the prohibitory social conventions of his own Jewish community, Jesus did ask for a drink and opened his dialogue with her. Had not Jesus opened the conversation, probably the Samaritan woman would have gone away in silence. An enlightening and fruitful dialogue would not have entered the pages of the Gospel either and the God-given opportunity of the mission of Jesus with the Samaritans would have been probably lost at that time. Jesus' attitude of openness to reach out to others and his approach of taking the first step to open the dialogue led him to a wider horizon of his mission and also to his first mission with non-Jews.

### 2.2. Freedom to Go Beyond Cultural and Gender Biases

Jesus' freedom to go beyond cultural blocks and gender biases is brought out well by the fourth evangelist in this dialogue. Jesus in his Samaritan mission adopted an approach that enabled him to go beyond cultural and gender prejudices. Since the deportation of the Israelites from the North in 721 BCE, the Jews had been looking down upon the Samaritans as a mixed race of semi-pagans whom the Assyrian conquerors brought and settled in Samaria from Babylonia and Media (II Kgs 17:24-41). Since then opposition and hostility arose between the Jews and the Samaritans.<sup>16</sup> The Jews began to treat the Samaritans as ritually impure people. This opinion was prevalent even in the time of Jesus as the parenthesis in v. 4 indicates: "... Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans". D. Daube translates this, as "The Jews do not use vessels together with Samaritans" suggesting the general assumption that the Samaritans were ritually impure and any association with them would also render others impure.<sup>17</sup> The Jews' fear of ritual contamination developed into a prohibition of all social interaction with the Samaritans.<sup>18</sup> The surprise of the Samaritan woman echoes this attitude, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jn 4:9). But Jesus' resolve to converse with her and to stay with the other Samaritans transcends such cultural biases. Basically Jesus respects them as humans and as children of God (Jn 1:12).

Jesus transcends not only cultural barriers but also gender biases in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman. The position of women in Jewish society was inferior, oppressed and deplorable.<sup>19</sup> Talking to a woman in public was taboo and considered a disgrace.<sup>20</sup> Under these discouraging and censorious circumstances Jesus not merely dared to talk to a woman, but a Samaritan woman. A regulation enacted around 65 CE declared that Samaritan women were unclean since they were considered to be menstruants from their cradle.<sup>21</sup> Since this rabbinic view held that Samaritan women were

menstruous from birth, they were considered as a perpetual source of uncleanness and contamination. Therefore all food and drink handled by them were also considered unclean and polluting.

Jesus opened a dialogue not only with a woman who was a Samaritan but also a Samaritan woman of ill repute. She had had five husbands and the one she had then was not her husband either (vv.17-18). She was treated as socially deviant and the very fact that she came to fetch water at midday, an unusual time for women to draw water, shows that she had been shunned by other women in the village. She had to avoid the company of other women who used to fetch water either in the cool of the morning or the evening (Gn 24:11; 1Sm 9:11). Her coming at midday is generally explained by her desire, as a notorious sinner, not to have to meet other women.<sup>22</sup> This dialogue shows that Jesus went beyond all the gender biases of his community and the personal deviances of the woman in order to enter into a dialogue with others. Neither cultural barriers nor gender biases could ever stop his dialogue mission.

### 2.3. *Human Issue as a Starting Point*

The starting point of the dialogue here is a human issue: need for water. Jesus, exhausted by the journey at midday was in need of water to slake his thirst. The Samaritan woman who came to the well, was also in need of water for her domestic chores. An ordinary daily need became the starting point of a meaningful dialogue. Their dialogue began not with theological problems or doctrinal discussions or hair-splitting philosophical arguments, but with the Samaritan woman coming to the well and Jesus asking for water.

Jesus' method of reaching out to others through daily events and ordinary human issues and concerns is a down-to-earth approach that is quite evident in this dialogue. For Jesus, a human experience can serve also as a medium for conveying a reality of the spiritual order.<sup>23</sup> Though the dialogue led Jesus and the Samaritan woman later on to the realms of theological revelation and social interaction, one should not forget that the starting point of the dialogue was notably a human issue. Human need could become a point of communion among people.

### 2.4. *Jesus' Optimistic Approach*

Jesus in his dialogue was optimistic in spite of the initial misunderstanding or inability of the Samaritan woman to comprehend him. His request for water extended into a sublime dialogue on living water. Jesus wanted to lead the woman from the physical need of thirst and water into a revelation of living water as the gift of God. But the woman only understood the material meaning of water and she was not able to recognize

the symbolic meaning of *living water* that Jesus wished to share with her.

The Samaritan woman expressed a series of misunderstandings of the message of Jesus on living water.<sup>24</sup> When Jesus offered to give her living water as the gift of God (v. 10), the woman was not able to perceive it from the standpoint of Jesus; but she answered him from the material or physical sense of water, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" (v. 11). 'Living water' was a common expression for running or spring water that was distinct from still water, as in a cistern or well.<sup>25</sup> So her understanding of living water was something just more than well water. How could Jesus give her that type of water without a bucket to draw such water? So she expressed her protests of logical and material impossibility. Again her misunderstanding of living water went only along the line of its physical meaning when she started comparing Jesus with Jacob, "Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" (v. 12). The Samaritan woman was quite familiar with her Jacob tradition of the well from which Jacob, his family and his entourage drank.<sup>26</sup> But she was limited to her own traditions and was not able to see what Jesus was trying to reveal. Her comparison of Jesus to Jacob indicated that according to her Jesus could not be greater than her ancestor Jacob.

In spite of her persistent misunderstanding, Jesus went ahead to expatiate upon the qualities of living water and wanted to enlighten her further, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (vv. 13-14). Jesus discoursed about water of life that would become a spring gushing up to everlasting life.<sup>27</sup> But again understanding it just from the plane of the physical meaning of living water, she asked Jesus to give her that water so that she would never be thirsty again and would never have to keep coming to the well to draw water (v. 15).

One easily discovers the persistent misunderstanding of the woman to all that Jesus endeavoured to reveal to her. But Jesus was never discouraged or annoyed at her inability to understand the truth he was revealing. Jesus did not show disrespect when she dialogued from her own traditions and beliefs. Nor did Jesus give up his hope of continuing the dialogue. He was optimistic about the progress of her understanding and hoped that the dialogue would eventually enlighten her because he respected her as an equal partner in dialogue and the very process of dialogue itself. Jesus did not expect sudden, immediate results from the dialogue, but was rather patient and persevering in his dialogue. He believed that the process and dynamics of dialogue would basically enable dialogue partners to meet, to respect, to

exchange and to understand each other. Therefore no misunderstanding of the Samaritan woman was able to deter the optimistic approach of Jesus in his dialogue.

### *2.5. Hostility-Free and Person-Oriented Approaches*

John has also presented Jesus very well as one who is hostility-free and person-oriented in his dialogue. The Samaritan woman was quite aware of the prevalent hostility between the Jews and Samaritans. To Jesus' asking for water, her immediate response (v. 7) "How is it that you, a Jew,<sup>28</sup> ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria (v. 9) seemed to have sprung from the age-old enmity between the Samaritans and Jews, a hostility to which the Jews had given a socio-religious expression by not "co-using with the Samaritans".<sup>29</sup> The curt rejoinder appeared to tell Jesus that he, as a Jew, should not ask of her, a Samaritan, a drink of water. Perhaps she responded first from her socio-cultural background of hostility. Even though Jesus was also aware of the long-standing enmity of the Jews and Samaritans, his approach was friendly. He rose above the widespread societal hostility and cultural prejudices and approached the woman with a friendly attitude, instead of simply responding from the hostility attitude. Jesus engaged the woman in a discussion on living water as the gift of God (vv. 10-15).

Jesus was hostility-free in his dialogue because he was basically person-oriented in his relationship towards others. In spite of his dialogue partner being a Samaritan, and a Samaritan woman at that, with a scandalous marriage background, Jesus could enter into a meaningful and fruitful dialogue with her. For Jesus, the personhood of the dialogue partner surpassed all her personal background and other prohibitive societal factors. The woman's initially hostile attitude, her inability to understand him properly, her proud talk about their ancestor Jacob, her unwarranted comparison of Jesus with Jacob, her argumentative approach, her different beliefs and opinions could not dampen Jesus' commitment to dialogue with her because Jesus valued the person much more than all her dispositions, weaknesses and behaviour. It is because of Jesus' person-orientedness that the Samaritan woman's inquiries, even her objections, were responded to with integrity. Jesus basically respected the dialogue partner in his or her otherness. Thus Jesus' hostility-free and person-oriented approach enabled and encouraged his dialogue partner to enter into a meaningful relationship with him and thus into a profound discovery of the truths of life.

### *2.6. A Non-Judgemental Attitude*

Jesus was neither judgemental nor moralistic in his approach to the woman in dialogue. When the Sa-

maritan woman asked Jesus to give her that water which would never make her thirsty and for which she would not have to come to the well, he told her to go and call her husband. This intervention of Jesus during the dialogue has intrigued many scholars. Why did Jesus ask her to call her husband at this juncture? What is the relevance of his discussion on her married life in this dialogue? Did Jesus dialogue like a moralist? Many exegetes have attempted to explain the meaning of the five husbands of the woman through allegorical and symbolic interpretations<sup>30</sup> that have brought the personal and moral life of the woman into the dialogue. But the intention of Jesus was not to probe further into her personal and marital life moralistically. Scholars such as E. Haenchen holds that whoever asserts that Jesus wished to lay bare the morals of the Samaritan woman in this dialogue, have misunderstood the text.<sup>31</sup> Basically Jesus appreciated her for telling the truth and he did not go into a moralistic discussion of her personal married life. Jesus passed no decisive and judgemental opinion on her married life. Jesus was not interested in exaggerating and criticising her personal life in dialogue. He did not indulge in a 'pointing-the-finger-at' approach to judge and condemn her for her immoral or irregular married life. Such an approach would have alienated the woman from continuing the dialogue. Jesus' non-judgemental attitude enabled her to continue the dialogue at a deeper level recognising him as a prophet (v. 19) and discussing the important matters of worship and the Messiah (vv. 19-26). A non-judgemental approach does help dialogue partners to enter into deeper levels of dialogue.

### *2.7. Solidarity Method in Dialogue*

We could also recognise a solidarity method in this dialogue wherein Jesus and the Samaritan woman are engaged in their joint search for truth. One of the objectives of the Johannine dialogues is to search for the truth. This search for truth is not merely an individual and personal effort but also a corporate endeavour. Dialogue partners search for truth together and in solidarity with one another.

Once the Samaritan woman had recognised Jesus as a prophet, she believed that such a person would be able to enlighten her on certain religious and theological issues of theirs. Therefore she entered into a deeper dialogue with Jesus in discussing the true place of worship (v. 20). They began searching together and exchanged their own opinions and beliefs as regards the place of worship. They shared from their own deep faith experience. Jesus from his all-encompassing Abba experience was able to enlighten her in her search for truth. He led her not merely from the issue of the place of worship, which was indeed a long-standing contentious matter between Jews and Samaritans, but also to

the object and manner of worship. “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (vv. 23-24). Jesus enlightened her on the very core of worship i.e., the worship of the Father and the right manner to worship the Father — in spirit and truth. Enlightened by the truth revealed by Jesus, she felt encouraged to dialogue on another religious issue i.e., the coming of the Messiah (v. 25). Jesus was gracious enough to reveal to her another important truth, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you” (v. 26).

The dialogue that had started on an ordinary day-to-day issue of human thirst and need for water culminated in the revelation of great truths. What is impressive here is the solidarity method of Jesus in his dialogue. Jesus’ own profound faith experience had not made him behave like a superiority-conscious, condescending and presumptuous dialogue partner. Nor did Jesus attempt to relegate and denigrate the belief of the Samaritan woman. Jesus considered her as an equal partner in dialogue, respected her faith experience and journeyed with her in respectful solidarity to search and find the truth. He had the conviction and courage to reveal to her the truths they were seeking together. Probably the Samaritan woman was also enlightened on such truths and so she rushed to announce to her people and said in great amazement, “Come, see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” (v. 29).

Jesus’ solidarity method in dialogue not only helped the woman to discover the truth of right worship but also to recognise him as the Messiah, it helped the woman to move from a hostile, unfriendly attitude (v. 9) to an open and candid one. There is also a progression in the discovery of the identity of Jesus by the woman. Highlighting the process of growth which the Samaritan woman underwent, J. Kuttianmattathil rightly says: “In the process she moves from a rather disrespectful and hostile reference to Jesus as “you, a Jew” (v. 8), through considering him as sir, lord (*kyrios* v. 11), wondering whether he is greater than Jacob (v. 12), affirming that he is a prophet (v. 19) to the climactic through hesitant acknowledgement that he may be the long-awaited messiah (vv. 25,29).<sup>32</sup> Solidarity in dialogue helps partners to build a relationship with one another and to discover the truths of life together.

### *2.8. Not Divisive But Unitive*

The method Jesus used in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman has a number of unitive approaches. For Jesus, dialogue is to unite and not to divide people. Through his dialogue with her, Jesus united himself to a large number of Samaritans too.<sup>33</sup> In the context of

the prevalent hostility between Jews and Samaritans at that time, Jesus reached out to the Samaritans through his unitive methods in dialogue.

Jesus’ mission was always to unite all people as ‘children of God’ irrespective of their race, nationality, religion and culture. “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God...” (Jn 1:12). In the view of John, belief in Jesus unites and makes us all children of God’s family. Through his dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus extended his mission to non-Jews for the first time according to the Gospel of John.

For Jesus, dialogue was not just a question and answer encounter. He did not adopt argumentative and debating methods, nor did he wield aggressive and forceful approaches on his dialogue partners. The winner or loser approach was not part of Jesus’ dialoguing process. Therefore he used unitive methods in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman. Jesus dialogued with her more on the points of communion than on the points of conflict. To the woman who took a hostile approach right at the outset of the dialogue “How is it that you, a Jew ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”, Jesus did not adopt a confrontational method but a friendly one. Jesus did not continue her discussion of the longstanding enmity between Samaritans and Jews but proceeded to share with her living water as the gift of God. When the woman tried to question Jesus whether he was greater than their ancestor Jacob, Jesus did not enter into an argumentative debate on that issue to prove or defend himself, but he shared with her the importance of living water. When she acknowledged her irregular married life, Jesus did not exploit it to embarrass or alienate her. When she raised the common issues of worship and Messiah, which concerned both Jews and Samaritans, Jesus entered enthusiastically into a more profound dialogue on such points of communion. Jesus’ unitive method enabled them to enter dialogue at a deeper level.

### *2.9. A Critiquing Method*

The method of Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman also entailed a critiquing approach. His dialogue method did indeed respect the opinions, beliefs and experiences of the dialogue partner. But Jesus did not shy away from constructively critiquing them. He had the courage to critique the religions of both the Jews and the Samaritans. When the woman raised a question about the right place of worship, Jesus would not have hesitated to critique the hostility and opposition that the Jews and Samaritans had built up against each other on account of their respective place of worship in Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim. Jesus criticised their religions, which had forgotten the very core and essence of worship and which had been merely fight-

ing with aggression and enmity over the place of worship by forgetting the very manner of worship also. Jesus' critique of their religions led them to the real core and the very manner of worship. "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him" (v. 23). Worshipping God, as Father would not divide and fragment people, but would unite them all as children of God. Jesus' critique called for cleansing the religions of their aggressive, inimical and oppressive elements and emphasized the following of the very core and spirit of religions.

### 2.10. A Method of Action

Actions within a dialogue constitute the comprehensive nature of dialogue. Dialogue is not merely talking and exchanging our opinions, beliefs and experiences with others but also acting together in the common interests and goals of humanity. "Religious dialogue does not mean that two persons speak about their religious experiences, but rather that they speak as religiously committed persons, with their ultimate commitments and religious outlook, on subjects of common interest".<sup>34</sup> An action in a dialogue is not to be seen merely as the fruit of a dialogue. But actions within a dialogue can be seen also as part of the process of a dialogue. John has presented such methods of action in this dialogue.

The mission and goal of Jesus' dialogue was to make the Samaritan woman and the other Samaritans the children of God (1:12). Through dialogue Jesus entered into this mission with certain methods of action. Jesus did accept an action of passing through Samaria *en route* to Galilee from Jerusalem (v. 4). When he saw the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well to draw water, he decided to ask her for water — an action of taking the initiative to open the dialogue. This action not only started the dialogue but also led Jesus to his enlightening theological exchange on living water and worship and also to his own revelation to her as the Messiah. As a continuation or a consequence of his dialogue with the woman, Jesus, on the invitation of the Samaritans, moved to their city and staying with them for two days — an action of association and solidarity that had been forbidden to the Jews. All these actions of Jesus are found within the context of his dialogue with the Samaritan woman and many other Samaritans.

In this dialogue the Samaritan woman was also engaged in action along with Jesus. As a result of her dialogue with Jesus, she began to recognise him as a prophet and the Messiah. She could not keep this revelation to herself and so went in haste to her city, leaving even her water jar, to announce to her fellow-Samaritans what she had experienced. Even though her action is seen as the fruit of her dialogue with Jesus, it could be also seen as part of the dialogue of Jesus with other Samaritans. Note that it was her action of rush-

ing to announce the news to her fellow-Samaritans, which brought them to Jesus. The Samaritan woman by her actions in the process of the dialogue was made an active participant in the establishment of the universalistic reign of the Saviour of the world.<sup>35</sup> An action of evangelisation indeed! Eventually the other Samaritans' own action of meeting and listening to Jesus, their action of inviting him and of staying with him led them to their own proclamation of Jesus as the Saviour of the world (vv. 28-30; 39-42). Thus we encounter a number of methods of action in this dialogue on the part of the dialogue partners who engaged themselves in a fruitful dialogue.

### 3. Relevance and challenges to interreligious dialogue

The world of today is teeming with a rich, ethnic, cultural, ideological and religious pluralism. India in particular has been prodigiously rich with such an amazing pluralism of peoples, ethnicities, cultures and religions. In the present context of India where communalism, terrorism, casteism, cultural nationalism and religious fundamentalism are preying on her pluralism, dialogue becomes a historical imperative to promote peace, unity and harmony among all peoples by safeguarding and upholding pluralism. From our study of the attitudes, approaches and methods employed in Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman, we would present some relevant and challenging features that will make our interreligious dialogue more effective, fruitful and humanising.

- Though we live in a context of pluralism of different peoples, cultures and religions, there is a temptation today to live without even relating or reaching out to others, especially to those who are different from us. Economic independence, self-sufficiency, lack of respect, dislike and hatred of other cultures and religions, tendency to limit and narrow down relationship to one's own homogeneous group, certain groups promoting uniformity and homogeneity to the detriment of unity and pluralism are some of the factors which hamper and hold back people from reaching out to others who are different from them. Jesus' method of reaching out to the Samaritan woman and through her to many more Samaritans who were different and with whom the Jews even had a hostile relationship is both relevant and challenging. In this approach we are inspired to take the initiative like Jesus who took the first step to begin his dialogue with the woman by asking for a drink. It is in reaching out to others that meeting and exchange with others take place, respect and esteem for others grow, and relationship and unity are promoted.

- Prejudices and biases are a common block to dialogue. Cultural prejudices, social biases and pre-conceived religious ideas do not allow anyone to enter freely

and frankly into dialogue with others. They do not bring the dialoguing partners together but divide them and set them against one another. Jesus' method was free to go beyond cultural and gender biases to enter into a fruitful dialogue with the Samaritan woman. Jesus' respect for others was not based upon what they had or what they belonged to. He respected them basically as human persons. More than before we are now faced with a well-orchestrated hatred campaign by some religious fundamentalists against other religions and cultures. Hostility will only jeopardise our dialogue and will destroy the pluralistic human family. Therefore we have all the more compelling need to adopt, in our interreligious dialogue, the attitude of freedom to go beyond cultural, social and religious biases and prejudices and hostility-free approaches.

- In inter-religious dialogues, mistakes, failures, faults and deficiencies of the partners are not to be discussed and exploited. Such an approach will only humiliate and alienate the other from the process of dialogue. Definitely no 'pointing-the-finger-at' approach should be employed. This approach in dialogue demands unconditional acceptance of the other person in spite of what he or she is and it generates positive attitudes like cordiality, friendliness and respect between the partners in dialogue. When there is such an engendering attitude and respectful approach, the dialogue partners will be ready to examine themselves in order to rid themselves of their personal or communitarian hang-ups.

- A person-oriented approach is indispensable to interreligious dialogue today. This approach will transcend the superiority-consciousness and condescending attitude and hegemonic tendencies in dialogue. Jesus' person-oriented approach in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman respected and valued her personhood in spite of the cultural barriers, gender biases and her own scandalous marriage history. This enabled the woman to move from her initial hostile and curious positions to a more enlightening and deeper dialogue with Jesus. Esteeming the personhood of the other, respecting the difference in the other, considering the other as an equal partner<sup>36</sup> in dialogue are some of the basic constituents of a person-oriented approach in dialogue.

- Though efforts had been made on inter-religious dialogue before Vatican II, it was largely after Vatican II, more focussed and organised endeavours and attempts were launched.<sup>37</sup> Vatican II ushered in healthier attitudes, a more conducive and positive approach to other religions. The Post-Conciliar praxis of dialogue in India gave birth to *ashrams* and dialogue centres and groups which promoted interreligious dialogue.<sup>38</sup> In this post-conciliar stage sharing of other religious traditions and faith experiences was encouraged. Sometimes the dialogue was more focussed on the discus-

sion of the doctrines and dogmas of religions which led us to encounter problems like the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, the unique role of the Church in the attainment of salvation, dialogue and proclamation, etc. Though certain clarity has to be obtained on these issues, experience has taught us that dogmatic positions or theological doctrines should not be the starting point of our interreligious dialogue today.

Today, human issues and problems could become the starting point of our dialogue, just as the human needs of thirst and water led both Jesus and the woman into an efficacious and humanising dialogue, many human issues and problems can bring the peoples of all religions together for a meaningful dialogue. Each religion can respond from its faith positions and learn also from those of other religions the ways and means of encountering such human issues. When the starting point of dialogue is a human issue or problem, it will inevitably lead us to a dialogue of action. This will enable each religion to respond from its own religious wealth of beliefs and convictions and which will also help each religion to learn and benefit from the beliefs and convictions of other religions to enter into a corporate and collaborative way of responding to human needs and issues.<sup>39</sup>

- Our religious dialogues today can also learn from the unitive methods used in the dialogue of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. In this unitive method of dialogue, Jesus preferred to dialogue more on the points of communion than on the points of conflict and division. A unitive method brushes aside aggressive and forceful approaches, avoids argumentative and debating ways and keeps clear of a winner-loser approach in dialogue, shies away from hegemonic and dominating attitudes. If there are no proper attitudes and right approaches, dialoguing on points of division will run the risk of widening the gap between religions. Entering into a dialogue from the points of communion will guide religions to discover more and more truths of life and will enable fruitful collaboration with one another.

- Inter-religious dialogue does not dispense with a critique of religions. Jesus' method constructively criticised certain divisive religious and social practices of both the Jewish and Samaritan religions. Jesus' critique of their respective religions led to a new, liberative way of life wherein the Father is worshipped in spirit and truth and which unites all peoples as children of God. Each religion has its own liberative potential and oppressive elements. A method of critiquing religions in inter-religious dialogue will enable each religion to discover more of its liberative and humanising potential and to constructively confront its oppressive elements. With the common goal of building up just and equitable human communities, religions can be purged of their ungodly and oppressive elements and their liberative and life-promoting potentials can be upheld and released.

• **Solidarity method** is of immense importance today to our interreligious dialogue. Dialogue partners search for the truths of life together and in solidarity with each other and so dialogue becomes a corporate endeavour. Jesus and the Samaritan woman were engaged in this solidarity method of dialogue. Jesus respected her search for the right place of worship and the Messiah and was able to share and reveal to her the great truth about right worship. Should any religion claim the monopoly and ownership of the truths of life, it will sabotage the very spirit of dialogue. Imbibing the spirit of Jesus, Vatican II has rightly hinted at the solidarity method in dialogue: "Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture" (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 2). The journey towards the Ultimate Reality becomes more meaningful and fruitful when we make it in solidarity and fellowship with other believers.

### 3.1. Dialogue as a Historical Mandate

This study of the dialogue of Jesus with the Samaritan woman from the viewpoint of its attitude, approach and method has been very enlightening and fruitful because we have been able to identify in it: outreach to others, freedom to go beyond cultural and gender biases, taking the initiative with the human issue as a starting point, hostility-free and person-oriented, non-judgemental in its approach, unitive, solidary and positive in its method of action. To some extent, we have also discussed the value, relevance and usefulness of these methods in our inter-religious dialogue today.

Religious pluralism has become not merely a fact today but also a very relevant issue and a crucial problem which is not merely a theological problem, but a social problem too.<sup>40</sup> Definitely this is one of the most crucial problems confronting India in particular in the Third Millennium. Against the threatening and turbulent waves of communalism, religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, the Church's mission in India is challenged today and called upon to steer its barque with its rudder of interreligious dialogue. The Church therefore is called to be a community of dialogue and this dialogical model is in fact a new way of being Church.<sup>41</sup> Today, therefore dialogue cannot be optional but is an obligatory mission to uphold "the plurality of religions, which is a consequence of the richness of creation itself and of the manifold grace of God".<sup>42</sup> Let the mission of inter-religious dialogue become a historical mandate to us in the Third Millennium. Let us continue to contribute through dialogue our mite to the building up of just, equitable and harmonious human communities and thus promote the Reign of God in the world.

### Notes

E-mail address: [rajirudayasj@yahoo.com](mailto:rajirudayasj@yahoo.com)

<sup>1</sup> M.D. BRYANT, *The Inter-Religious Future: Reflections on the Horizon and Way*, in A. Kalliath (ed.), *Pilgrims in Dialogue: A New Configuration of Religions for Millennium Community*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Hans KÜNG, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, London: SCM Press, 1991, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> G. ROBINSON, "From Apartheid to Dialogical Living in India: The Need of the Hour", *Religion and Society* 46 (1-2, 1999) p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> The Gujarat pogrom and carnage in 2002 orchestrated and executed by the Hindutva forces like Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak and Bajrang Dal with the State-sponsored terrorism under the Hindutva-patronising leadership of Narendra Modi is the most recent and worst communal violence since Independence. For an elaborate study of the Gujarat pogrom, cf. Paul MIKE, *Racial Hegemony: Gujarat Genocide*, Madurai: IDEAS, 2002; John DAYAL, (ed.), *Gujarat 2002: Untold and Retold stories of the Hindutva Lab*, Delhi: Media House, 2002.

Ruthless and well-planned attacks on the minorities like Muslims, Christians are on the increase now. For example, there were just fifty attacks on Christians in the fifty years of India's Independence. But within the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party to political power, there have been about three hundred and seventy five attacks on Christians. See Raj IRUDAYA, "Attacks on Minorities: A Human Rights Issue", *Indian Currents* 22 (51, 2000) pp. 25-26.

For the study of a history of communal riots in India since Independence, cf. N.L. GUPTA, (ed.), *Communal Riots*, Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2000; Satish C. SETH, *Communalism: A Socio-Political Study*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2000; METHA and PATWARDHAN, *The Communal Triangle in India*, Allahabad, Kitabistan, 1942.

<sup>5</sup> It has been tabulated that the evangelist has recorded 6,387 words of Jesus in addition to 2,335 words of others, totalling 8,722 words of speech. 56 per cent of the entire Gospel is in the form of speech. See S. BOOTH, *Selected Peak Marking Features in the Gospel of John*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996, p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> For an elaborate study on the Johannine discourses, cf. J. TAYLOR, "The Johannine Discourse and the Speech of Jesus: Five Views", *Scripture Bulletin* 14 (2, 1984) pp. 33-41; D.F. STRAUSS, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, (Tr. by George Elliot), London: SCM Press, 1973; E. RENAN, *Vie de Jésus*, Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1895; B.F. WESTCOTT, *The Gospel According to John: The Authorised Version with Introduction and Notes*, London: John Murray, 1882; M.J. LAGRANCE, *Evangile Selon Saint Jean*, Paris: Gabalda, 1924; B.H. STREETER, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins*, London: Macmillan, 1924.

<sup>7</sup> C.H. DODD, *More New Testament Studies*, Manchester: University Press, 1968, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Bultmann's theory about the origin of John's Gospel proposed that it grew out of three distinct sources: a signs source, a discourse source and a passion source. See R.

BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Tr. by G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971, pp. 6-7. C.H. DODD, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth gospel*, Cambridge: University Press, 1965, p. 315.

<sup>10</sup> B.H. STREETER characterises the Johannine discourses as 'interpretative transformations' of Dominical sayings. This view is gaining currency among scholars today. See B.H. STREETER, *The Four Gospels*, p. 367. C.H. DODD in *Historical Tradition* continues this trend and suggests that the source of many passages in the discourses lies in a tradition of sayings of Jesus which is independent of the Synoptics.

<sup>11</sup> There were two routes to travel from Judaea to Galilee: one via Samaria and the other, via the other side of the Jordan. The eastern route along the valley of the Jordan through the Bethshan gap avoiding Samaria was a longer one. The Jews who believed that they would be polluted by walking through Samaritan regions, eschewed this route via Samaria. Also the prevalent hostility between the Jews and Samaritans was another reason for them to avoid this route. But the one via Samaria was a shorter route and it was also considered safer as it was under the unified administration of the Romans that time. But according to Josephus (*Ant.* 20.118; *War* 2:232) this route also posed a lot of dangers and difficulties.

<sup>12</sup> C.K. BARRETT, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978, p. 230.

<sup>13</sup> R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, p. 169; G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John*, p. 59; E. HAENCHEN, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, (Tr. by Robert W. FUNK), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 218.

<sup>14</sup> G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> E. KECK, *Luke, John*, The New Interpreter's Bible, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995 p. 565.

<sup>16</sup> There had been a brewing schism between the Jews and Samaritans during the period of restoration in which the Temple and city walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt after the return of the Jews from their exile in Babylonia. There was a strong opposition lodged from the North against the rebuilding of the Temple and city walls of Jerusalem. It is recorded in Ezra 4 that 'the adversaries of the people of Judah and Benjamin' opposed and tried to block the work of rebuilding. The adversaries have been traditionally recognised as the Samaritans. The theological differences of the Samaritans with the Jews led them to change their place of worship from the Temple of Jerusalem to a temple on Mount Gerizim during the Persian period. In 128 BCE the Jewish high priest John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritans' Temple on Mt. Gerizim. From that time onwards the enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans had aggravated further. On the hostility between the Jews and Samaritans see *Str-B* 2:438.

<sup>17</sup> D. DAUBE, "Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: The Meaning of *sugcra, omai*", *JBL* 69 (1950) p. 139.

<sup>18</sup> E. KECK, *op. cit.*, p. 566.

<sup>19</sup> For a condensed and important study of the social position of women in Jewish society, see J. JEREMIAS, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, pp. 359-376.

<sup>20</sup> One of the old scribes Jose b. Johanan of Jerusalem (c. 150 BCE) used to say, "Let thy house be opened wide and let the

needy be members of thy household; and talk not much with womankind" (*M.Ab.* 1.5). They said this of a man's own wife: how much more of his fellow's wife! It was forbidden to be alone with a woman in public (*M.Kidd.* iv.12; *b.Kidd.* 81a). Even to greet a woman in public was also prohibited (*b.Kidd.* 70a-b). It was disgraceful for a scholar to speak to a woman in the street (*b.Ber.* 43b *Bar*). "He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the law and at the last will inherit Gehenna" (*M.Ab.* 1:5) The disciples of Jesus were astonished that he was speaking with a woman (John 4:27b). If a woman were to converse with everyone in the street, she could be even divorced without the payment prescribed in the marriage settlement (*M.Ket.* vii.6).

<sup>21</sup> BILLERBECK 1:540. This regulation seemed to have canonized an earlier attitude toward Samaritan women. See R.E. BROWN, *op. cit.*, vol.1, p.170; D. DAUBE, "Samaritan Women", in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, University of London: Athlone Press, 1956, p. 375.

<sup>22</sup> R. SCHNACKENBURG, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

<sup>23</sup> T. OKURE, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42*, Tübingen: J.C.B. MOHR, 1988, p. 95.

<sup>24</sup> The Johannine literary technique of misunderstanding or *double-entendre* is well employed here. The style is that Jesus makes a statement which is misunderstood and the misunderstanding is followed by his explanation (see for further examples 3:3ff; 4:31ff; 6:41ff; 8:21ff; 11:1ff; 12:27ff; 14:4ff).

<sup>25</sup> G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>26</sup> J. Ramón DIAZ cites in his article on "Palestinian Targum and the New Testament", *NovT* 6 (1963) pp. 76-77 about the story of Jacob and the well of Haran as recorded in the Palestinian Targum of Gn 28:10. "After our ancestor Jacob had lifted the stone from the mouth of the well, the well rose to its surface and overflowed, and was overflowing twenty years".

<sup>27</sup> Jesus' gift of living water is associated with the gift of the Spirit in John 7:37-39. One can possibly see that meaning here as well. See R.E. BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 171; E. KECK, *op. cit.*, 566.

<sup>28</sup> It is of interest to note that in the Gospel of John it is only in this passage that Jesus is directly designated as a Jew. This is perhaps purported to convey to readers that the explicit mention of Jesus as a Jew is to show that Jesus in spite of his Jewishness was ready to enter into dialogue with the Samaritan woman and to stay in a Samaritan village for two days (v. 40). See E. HAENCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

<sup>29</sup> T. OKURE, *op. cit.*, p.95.

<sup>30</sup> See R. SCHNACKENBURG, *op. cit.*, p. 433; R.E. BROWN, *op. cit.*, p. 171. Some supposed the Samaritan woman as a symbolic figure for the Samaritans and for their religious apostasy. It was then allegorically interpreted that the five husbands represented the five gods brought by the foreign colonists who were settled by the Assyrians in the Northern Kingdom since the exile in 721 BCE. (II Kgs 17:24ff). So it was held that the five husbands symbolised the five pagan gods worshipped in Samaria. But according to E. Haenchen the allegorical interpretation of II Kgs 17:24ff is not in consonance with the reading of the text. Those foreign colonists in Samaria are said to have

worshipped seven deities, not five and these seven not in succession either (p. 221). Origen (in Jo. XIII:8; GCS 10:232) considered the five husbands as a reference to the fact that the Samaritans considered as canonical only the five books of Moses. Jesus' command to the woman to go and call her husband and his knowledge of her five husbands are better understood as evidence of Jesus' uncanny knowledge, i.e., the ability of Jesus to see and know all things. See E. HAENCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 221; E. KECK, *op. cit.*, p. 567. This demonstration of his knowledge made her recognise him as a prophet and continue the dialogue.

<sup>31</sup> E. HAENCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>32</sup> J. KUTTIANMATTATHIL, *op. cit.*, p. 510. See also J. VARICKASSERIL, "The Dialoguing Jesus in the Johannine Gospel", *Mission Today*, 1 (1999) p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> The significant use of polloi. in v. 39 and pollw/ | plei,ouj in v. 41 shows that a large number of Samaritans believed in Jesus and even acclaimed him as 'the Saviour of the world' (v. 42).

<sup>34</sup> "Declaration of the International Theological Conference on Evangelisation and Dialogue in India", no. 24 in *Evangelisation, Dialogue and Development*, (ed.) M. DHAVAMONY, Documenta Missionalia, no. 5, Roma: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1972.

<sup>35</sup> S.M. SCHNEIDERS, "A Case-Study: A Feminist Interpretation of John 4:1-42", in *The Interpretation of John*, John Ashton, (ed.), Edinburgh: T&T, Clark, 1997, p. 256.

<sup>36</sup> M. DHAVAMONY, *Christian Theology of Religions: A Systematic Reflection on the Christian Understanding of World Religions*, Berne: Peter Lang, 19988, p. 202.

<sup>37</sup> For a good study of the historical stages of the journey towards dialogue before Vatican II, see J.

KUTTIANMATTATHIL, *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Study of the Indian Christian Attempts Since Vatican II*, Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1998, pp. 13-74.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-121. The author has also made an interesting study of the post-conciliar practice of dialogue.

<sup>39</sup> B.J. TAYLOR, "Towards Right Living: Interfaith Cooperation for Equitable and Sustainable Development", in *Ecological Responsibility: A Dialogue with Buddhism*, (ed.), Julia Martin, New Delhi: Tibet House & Satguru Publications, 1997, pp. 167-168.

<sup>40</sup> M. AMALADOSS, "Religious Pluralism and Mission", in T. Malipurathu and L. Stanislaus (eds.), *A Vision of Mission in the New Millennium*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2000, p. 64; R. PANIKKAR, *Invisible Harmony: Essays on contemplation and Responsibility*, (ed.), J. Harry, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, p. 56.

<sup>41</sup> BIRA IV/12 Statement of the Assembly, "Dialogue thus calls us into a New Way of Being the Church", in R. Gaudencio and C.G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 - 1991*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, p. 332.

<sup>42</sup> *Guidelines for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Reports of the CBCI Commissions and National Centres and Regional Bishops' Councils for 1987-1987*, no. 25.

Ref.: Text from the Author for SEDOS by E-mail (September 2003).

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# *Where Is Your Sister?*

## *“The New Slave Trade Challenges Religious Life in the Third Millennium” — How Should We React? —*

– Sr Eugenia Bonetti, MC –

### *Foreword*

*I thank the organizers of the SEDOS Meeting for this opportunity to share with other witnesses here, the experience that many other women religious have had, who have reacted to the plight of the “Female Immigrant, who is imported and exploited as a slave on our streets for the ‘sex market’ in order to return to her, her dignity, identity and freedom, not out of charity, but for justice’s sake.*

My paper does not pretend to be a theoretical lecture on the “trade in human beings” but its purpose is to draw attention to the reality of the exploitation and alienation of these stigmatized women who are struggling to recover the meaning of their life and female values which have been either denied or abused. It is the result of my personal experience, lived day and day with many of these victimized women. In addition, I wish to speak about the service 200 women religious carry out in some hundred structures, especially in the fields of the reception and social rehabilitation of these victims.

### **Meeting a women “prostitute”**

It was a cold, rainy evening on the 2 November 1993. I was just leaving the *Caritas* Centre in Turin, where I had been working for several months on my return from Africa, to go to Mass, when an African woman came in with a Doctor’s certificate. The woman appeared to be shy and embarrassed. From her behaviour and dress I knew that she might be one of the many women who, day or night, sell their body on our streets. I felt awkward. I read the letter and asked her some questions to which she gave monosyllabic answers. She was ill, in need of an operation, but as she had no papers she could not be admitted to a public hospital and so had been directed to our Centre.

Maria was a little over 30 and the mother of three children, she had left in Nigeria to come to Italy where she had hoped to find work to help her family, but in-

stead she was on the street, a victim of the new slave trade. She could not talk Italian so we spoke in English. Telling her story brought tears to her eyes and she began to cry saying, “Sister, please, help me, help me”. I was upset, not knowing what to do or say. I was worried about being late for Mass: at that moment Mass was more important to me than Maria’s problems! I asked her to return the next day.

However, Maria wanted to accompany me to church. On the way I noticed people were surprised to see a Consolata Missionary walking beside a “prostitute”! In church Maria knelt in the last pew and I heard her sobbing. I moved away, but I could not pray. The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk 18:9-14) came to mind and I remembered the numerous occasions on which I had acted like the Pharisee. How often had I thought that, being a religious and a missionary, I was better than many other women forced to street-walk!

Besides, I recalled my rebellious attitude when I was asked to leave Kenya after 24 years in mission, to do new work in Italy. I was so happily inserted into the African context, where I was involved in socio-educational-pastoral activities, mainly with women and young groups! The African women I knew had a deep sense of joy, festivity, hospitality, solidarity and sharing. They faced life with courage, perseverance and determination, proud of their role in life and dignity although they still lived in poverty and subjection to men. Sharing in these women’s struggle to improve their standard of living, by promoting education and emancipation, self-awareness and self-determination in the light of the proclamation of hope and freedom brought by Christ, were among the ideals which had attracted me as a young girl in search of a vocation and guided me to choose to do mission work in Africa.

Now, however, all my projects, certainties, dreams, nostalgia for what I had had to leave behind faded. Once again I was in the dark, like Paul on the road to Damascus. “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (*cf.* Acts 9:3-9), Lord where are you leading me?

I spent a sleepless night; I measured myself against

“my” Paschal Mystery: I had to die to my personal interests, to rediscover the new life of Easter, a new way of being a Consolata Missionary, for Christ and his people. This situation was a challenge to me. Maria was putting me to the test and calling into question my life, my vocation, my convictions, my motivation and my values.

These questions re-echoed within me: Eugenia, “Where is your sister?” (cf. Gn 4:9) “Where is Maria?”. “Tonight where are all the ‘Marias’ of the streets?”. My meeting with Maria obliged me to be more radical in my following of Christ. I felt that the Lord, who had previously called me to go to Africa, was now calling me to be a prophetic sign of hope, of compassion and comfort, an instrument of his mercy and of his love for other African women who were being exploited and marginalized, no longer in Africa, but in my own country. He was pointing out a new and unknown frontier to me.

So I gave in. From then on my new missionary service would be Turin’s historical city centre among immigrant women. With this conviction and help I was prepared to accept the new challenge and to pay the price, if necessary, and to risk my own life.

Maria got better, but not only physically. With courage and determination she left the street, entered a welcome community, attended a language school, did a training course, found a job and started a new life. She became my discreet guide as she helped me to enter and understand the “nocturnal world”.

### The Slave-Trade: women and minors for sale

Maria’s story, reminds us of the coerced prostitution of many, too many, women who every day *sacrifice their youth* on our streets. But this problem, which is a challenge and provocation to society and the Church, is all the more so for men and women religious, called by their charisma and vocation to defend the rights of the poor and the voiceless, vulnerable, helpless people, such as women and unprotected minors.

The results of various surveys show that annually 500,000 women are “imported” into, or made to cross, Europe by criminal organizations to be put on the market as wares. In Italy, there are between 50-70.000 from Eastern Europe or the developing countries, who are forced to work as prostitutes and they are easily recognizable on our streets. Of these 40 per cent are underage from 14-18. Despite the invasion of young people from Albania and Eastern Europe a still greater number come from Africa: over 50 per cent, but as they are illegal it is difficult to give the exact figure.

Most of these women, reduced to a state of slavery for the use of millions of Italian clients — 90 per cent Catholics — come from countries that were formally evangelized by missionaries who struggled and suf-

fered to spread the Gospel among these peoples and to communicate the Christian faith, which is the proclamation of hope, freedom, dignity, justice, solidarity and emancipation.

Today, these populations are no longer geographically distant, beyond the ocean, but are among us. Moreover, they are exploited by our style of life and market system. How then, can we justify our aspirations and endeavours to open ourselves to mission, by sending out new evangelizers to distant lands if we do not first discover the presence of thousands of foreign women who are being exploited in our own country and concern ourselves about their plight in order to break their chains? Tricked, enslaved and thrown onto the street pavement, the “prostitute” is the living image of the unjust discrimination imposed by our consumer society. Now in the third millennium, the woman demands that she be granted her rights, that her dignity be restored and her feminine qualities respected.

On the sex market, which is actually very competitive, the African women are further discriminated against. They are considered to be second class. Because they are “black”, they do not speak Italian, are less youthful and slim, and therefore are obliged to ask for a lower figure. For a routine affair in a car they agree to € 10-15,00 whereas the Eastern Europeans will not take less than € 25,00. To pay back their debt of € 40; 50; 60,00 contracted with the new traders who have recruited and brought them to Italy, they are obliged to have at least 4.000 sexual encounters. In addition to the initial debt they have to meet monthly expenses: € 100,00 for board, € 250,00 for lodging, € 250,00 for the work-site, besides clothing, transport and personal commodities. The debt must be repaid within 18-24 months, working every day, or every night, seven days a week.

### Chains and slavery

The symbol of every form of slavery is and continues to be “*the chain*”: the instrument that curtails a person’s freedom and subjects him/her to another’s will. The chain of these new slaves of the twenty-first century is made up of many links. The links have names: the *victims* and their material *poverty*, the *exploiters* with their huge earnings, the *clients* with their frustrations, search for pleasure and escape from their own responsibilities, *society* with its well-being, permissiveness and empty values, the *government* with its corrupt system and connivance, the *Church* and every *Christian*, including *religious*, with their silence and indifference. Our passive and obtuse attitude before the downtrodden dignity and freedom of so many women, is a lack of responsibility.

There is a well-managed organization of unscrupulous *traffickers*, male and female, who get in touch with these victims in their home country, where pov-

erty is extreme, the families large and the young people have no prospect or hope of a better future. By exploiting the socio-economic situation the new *slave-traders* mislead these women and their families by promises of remunerative work, obviously not on the “streets”. Then, as happens to all the victims of the trade, the women are brought into Italy in various unauthorized ways, thanks also to the complicity of corrupt employees and functionaries embassies, airports, customs, the immigration office, travel agents, landlords of flats, hotel proprietors and taxi drivers. Since the earnings are huge and the risk is relatively low, many people grow rich by destroying these women’s lives.

On reaching Italy, after passing through other countries of Europe such as: Greece, Russia, Bulgaria, Holland, Germany, Spain and France to mention some of them, and after weeks or months of travelling by air, more recently overland, across the *Sahara Desert* for Nigerians, these women are immediately *deprived of their documents*, which are nearly always false or recycled. Thus, they lose name, identity and freedom. They simply no longer know who they are. This experience makes it very difficult to restore these women’s true identity!

For the girls from the East, the organization usually works via simulated engagements, which involve their emotions, whereas the practical management of the Nigerian prey is entrusted to the *maman*. The latter are Nigerian women who turn from being exploited into exploiters. They show the recruits how to work on the streets, keep them in control, parcel out the stretch of pavement where they are to work, collect the earnings, punish them in case of revolt and above all subject them to *voodoo* (black magic rites) which is a true form of psychological violence.

### The risks of the street

In addition to living in strict obedience to the traffickers and the *maman* in absolute secrecy, these women are liable to the dangers of the street, such as maltreatment, abuse, road accidents and death. Annually, hundreds of girls experience martyrdom on our streets: from the clients, maniacs or the traffickers over the settling of accounts. Who can keep count of the number of these young people who die in the course of the exhausting journey, by land or sea, or disappear? How many families are still waiting for news of them that never comes!

Then there is the risk of *contracting AIDS* — 10-15 per cent of them register HIV seropositive — and that of *unwanted pregnancies* followed by abortion. Usually the girls from the East have an average of three abortions each, while for the African woman who holds maternity to be the highest value, abortion represents not only the destruction of a new life, but also of a cul-

ture. Among them many cases of *mental disturbance* are high, as they are obsessed by *voodoo* rites and threats that reprisal will be taken on their families far away.

On the street the “prostitute” completely loses her psychophysical identity, her personal dignity, her freedom of choice; she experiences what it means to be an object, a thing, an article of merchandise; she has to live as an illegal, social and cultural outcast, with only one option open to her: to demand payment for a sexual encounter even though she can keep none of the earnings.

### The victim: object or person?

How can one help a woman or minor to re-discover her self-esteem, demeaned by trading her own body? What methods can be employed? What forms of assistance are there? What obstacles have to be overcome?

First, to achieve the real objective to restore the true identity of the female prostitute one must compare our and her perception of the “*victim*” and the “*person*”: someone who is unique, free, irreplaceable and inalienable. In this perspective, the various needs which naturally accompany the individuality of every human being, cannot be standardized. However, the solutions which are applied often deal with the “*problem*” rather than the “*person*”.

Sexual abuse detracts from a person, empties her deepest values and destroys her as a woman, her femininity, her self-esteem, her concept of love and gift, her interior beauty, her dream of a peaceful future. On the street a person assumes an attitude of self-defence, expressed by noise, vulgarity, violence and aggression. She lives a contradictory reality: on the one hand she is courted by the “client” and on the other criticized, condemned and rejected by the well-off, consumer society. She lives in isolation and bears within herself a strong sense of guilt and shame. To restore her balance and harmony is not an easy task.

### The offer matches the demand: the consumer

In the slave chain of the third millennium the *consumer/client* is certainly one of the strongest links, because he supports and backs the sex industry.

While the socio-economic evolution of the rich countries has facilitated the remarkable emancipation of the woman in all fields and made her independent, self-sufficient, competent, and no longer passively submissive to the male, man, on the other hand, has not experienced the same growth and liberation, but maintained a strong dominant stance coupled with his search for gratification. Often in the field of relationships and affection the man has opted for a short cut with masculine methods that do not allow for discussion, do not involve him, nor make him feel ill at ease. Paying for

these relationships does not let him mature, because they do not help him to emerge from his self-centred desire to possess the other. Men consciously prefer to pay for sex *because* the partner, female, does not interest him, does not exist, is not considered to be a person, but only an object on whom to vent his personal frustration.

In this manner, sex becomes banal: it is no longer considered to be a reciprocal gift, interpersonal communication, an affectionate relationship, but is turned into a real economic *business*. Therefore, the constant human hetero-sexual attraction, is exploited: *the supply matching the demand*. The fact that there are so many “prostitutes” on our streets, forced to sell their body, shows that there is a high demand, and that the poor, defenceless woman, without identification papers and country, is the answer to this demand.

The customers, whose age ranges from 18 to 65-70, come from all levels and classes of society and they regularly use and abuse these street slaves.

Seventy per cent of these customers are either married people or living with a partner. Unfortunately little is known about the problem and one speaks of people who look for a “prostitute” every night, use and discard her like rubbish, or in the idiom of today’s consumer society: “use and discard”. This phenomenon ought to be addressed as a *male problem* rather than a female one.

### Society’s reaction

How can these women escape from this death trap? What solutions do our society and our legislation offer?

Present legislation provides three alternatives for these exploited women:

- **Repression**, aimed at striking the illegal status of these girls, by rounding them up on the streets, issuing an expulsion order, receiving the victims in temporary Reception Centres prior to *obligatory, mass repatriation*. This is a dramatic and psychologically ..... solution for the girls who return home empty-handed and stigmatized as “prostitutes”. Many of them are sero-positive/AIDS carriers/and have little access to proper treatment in their own countries.

- **Voluntary Repatriation**, of people who choose to go home to begin a normal life. These are offered help: a prepaid air ticket, as well as financial assistance to ensure reintegration into the former context.

- **Reintegration into the social fabric** — through Art. 18 of the Unique Text on the Immigration (D.L. 286/98) which offers a renewable six-month permit, on condition that:

- \* one quits the street

- \* reports the exploiters

- \* agrees to follow a social reintegration programme in the rehabilitation centre.

Government funds have been allocated for projects that counter organized crime, to return to health and

recuperate the victims. The five year period since the implementation of this law, held to be the best in Europe, has produced excellent results: between 600-800 women have been rehabilitated annually into the social and work contexts, besides opposing the international and trans-national criminal organizations.

The victims are contacted in order to offer them alternative options to the street as follows:

- “ **Street Units** – initially streets operators approach the victims to offer information and alternative solutions to obligatory prostitution;

- “ **Free telephone** – a 24 hour service in all the regions of Italy has been set up to answer immediate calls for help: **800.290.290**;

- “ **Listening Centres** – organized by Town Councils, associations, diocesan or parish *Caritas* offices to deal with the problems of the women calling for help;

- “ **Offices** – for health care, statements accusations, requests to escape;

- “ **Communities of first and second acceptance** – throughout the territory there are now many rehabilitation houses and community centres which house 6-8 people to start the long process of psycho-social reintegration. Most of the community centres are run by women religious who, by their continual presence, are a strong reference-point for these young women who have been destroyed by the sad experience of exploitation. The welcoming community becomes the family of those without a family;

- “ **Vocational training** – the communities employ qualified teachers prepared to offer appropriate support to enable the victim to come to terms with the past and a good future; the women attend language and vocational training courses, in order to find work;

- “ **Spiritual uplift** – all the staff working in this sector seek to offer a practical ministry of profound healing in order to restore these people’s self-respect. This is done through professional meetings but contact with the *word of God* is not to be underestimated because this recreates and helps the victims to rediscover the gift of their feminine qualities and their Christian faith blurred by their experience. Nearly all our women, especially the Africans, come from Christian families and the street experience also scars the way they live their faith. On rediscovering their faith they discover their origins and values again.

### Where is your sister? The answer gives religious life

What challenge does the marginalization of these sisters of ours represent for religious life today? What reaction is expected of the woman religious in particular? How can we show “*the epiphany of God’s merciful love*” as he constantly bends over his poor people, over the

excluded and those despised by society?

On various occasions it has been observed that religious life, although now feeling the effects of age and a fall in numbers, has found the strength to renew itself by returning to its own charism and by putting itself in the Church and in society at the *service of the new poor*. The considerable number of women religious engaged in the “trade” section is a concrete proof of the vitality of many communities which in response to this *challenge*, have rediscovered the timeliness of their mission in the Church and in the contemporary world. How would our Founders and Foundresses have reacted to a similar social evil? Despite the shortage of new members, the congregations still have many resources to share that fully express the prophetic intuitions of their founders and positively respond to the new *kairos*. We must boldly *shape* a new form of religious life that is also based on inter-congregational projects with the full co-operation and communication of the countries the victims come from and go back to.

Since the 1990s, when the phenomenon of street prostitution assumed really visible, humiliating proportions in Italy, a growing number of religious congregations, with the diocesan *Caritas* and groups of volunteers, were among the first to perceive the problem and to offer alternative solutions to the street. Many women Religious have discovered and developed a new *Diakonia of Charity* and solidarity and responded by opening their own communities to the “marginalized” people of today. More than ever these new forms of service *qualify* religious life.

### **Challenge calls into question religious life: some practical suggestions**

The “trade in women and minors” is a problem that demands the attention of religious life and urgently calls for appropriate solutions. Below are some considerations, proposals and appeals.

**The mens’ institutes** — In Italy women religious have made a remarkable effort and achieved courageous goals in this service, but we are all well aware that in this field the *mens’ religious congregations* are still almost entirely absent. If much still remains to be done to reestablish the dignity and freedom of the exploited woman, it is also true that much needs to be explored and invented regarding the person whose constant demand maintains and increases the paid sex market. The “customer” himself is a victim of a deep social unease, of a lack of formation in the deepest values of a person, of a consumeristic life-style in which today everything can be bought, from the “poverty” of countless women immigrants to the defenceless body of a child. It is only right that men religious assume their share of the responsibility since the scope of their intervention is immense. There is an urgent need that they become involved in the field of pay-

ing sex consumers who are in need of being formed and informed to recover the values of reciprocal respect, interpersonal and family relationships, to regain balance and harmony, especially in relations between a man and a woman. A policy of repression or punishment is of no avail unless information and formation projects for young people are set in place at school, in the parish, seminaries and religious houses in order to competently and responsibly tackle the problem. Why hasn’t this important matter been the subject of our Sunday sermons? Aren’t we aware that this new “style of life” is corroding the family, society and the Church?

Another issue that I wish to mention is one that challenges male religious life in particular: namely, paedophilia, sex tourism and male prostitution in its various and “justified” forms which, on the sex market, is destroying thousands of individuals, both the paying customer and the compliant partner or one who suffers it. Little or nothing is known or researched in this field in order to avoid addressing it.

**The International and Missionary Institutes** — The male and female religious missionary congregations should be the first to enter the struggle against the trade of women and minors who come from the very countries where their members have worked for many years to spread the “Good News” and to promote justice and fundamental human rights. Their involvement should aim both to provide information and to seek prevent it in the countries of origin, besides welcoming and re-integrating the victims who have been expelled and repatriated. In addition their knowledge and missionary experience, knowledge of languages and cultures, are indispensable tools in the cultural and pastoral apostolate of mediation and in the rehabilitation of those who stay in Italy.

**Women and Women’s Groups** — Every self-respecting woman, including women religious, should feel indignant and hurt at seeing her dignity cheapened by the spreading culture of body, sex and pleasure, the *exploitation* of the woman and her body which the mass-media present as an object, a source of income and diversion. Why not openly protest against this hedonistic mentality or boycott certain television programmes, romantic serials and advertisements that put the women’s role in a poor light? How can we justify our passive attitude?

**The Congregations of the countries of origin** — Our role and our interventions on behalf of the women in the countries of arrival are organized in strict collaboration with the local Churches and the religious communities of the countries they come from. For some years now we have set up a cooperation network with the Conference of Religious Sisters of Nigeria and obtained excellent results. We have not yet been able to establish any contact with the religious sisters in the Eastern European countries. This contact is essential in the work of prevention and recovery.

I should like to mention the Pastoral Letter published by the Nigerian Bishops' Conference under pressure from the Women Religious' Conference last year on "Re-establishing the Dignity of the Nigerian Woman". This is an attempt to draw attention to the problem and its drastic consequences. We hope that other Episcopal Conferences will follow this example.

**Religious Life in a new Europe** – In the context of a Europe in the process becoming united, we hope to be able to create a network with all the religious groups in the countries of Europe working in this sector. The success of this effort depends on co-operation and working in synergy in order to achieve the aim of returning to every woman the place that is her due in the family, society and the Church.

***Conclusion: "DUC IN ALTUM!"***

**For Religious Life the Jubilee continues**

The Pope's invitation "*Duc in altum*", at the end of the Great Jubilee, is addressed to the whole Church and particularly to our religious communities. It is an invitation to put our carismas at the service of *the creativity of Charity*. The Holy Father reminds us that the Jubilee is not yet concluded because many too many people are still enslaved and waiting to be set free. The Jubilee should be for every despairing and humiliated person in history a time of grace and liberation. Unfortunately the thousands of women and minors, enslaved by our unjust system of exploitation and discrimination, are crying out to us to break their deadly chains so that they too may enjoy the true "Year of Mercy" inaugurated by Christ himself, who came:

*"To bring good news to the poor; to proclaim liberty  
to captives and new sight  
To the blind; to free the oppressed"* (Lk 4:18).

The Covenant with Yawheh in the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ, the new Liberator, who proclaimed the "Year of the Lord's Mercy" because,

*"Today these prophetic words come true even as you  
listen"* (Lk 4:19,21).

May this message come true for all our "sisters of the night" who have survived this experience of "death" so that they may rediscover the joy of encountering the Risen Christ, as Magdalene did on Easter morning. May each one of them feel called by name, loved, freed, pardoned and sent to proclaim the great event of his Resurrection which brings peace, justice, equality and new life.

Thank you for your attention.

Ref.: Sister Eugenia Bonetti, MC (Rome, 17 October 2003).

***U.S.M.I. (UNIONE SUPERIORE MAGGIORI D'ITALIA)*** — Via Zanardelli, 32 - 00186 ROMA

Tel. 06/68400555 — Fax 06/68801935 — [migrantes.usmi-n@pcn.net](mailto:migrantes.usmi-n@pcn.net)

Mobile: 339.1934538 — E-Mail: [ebonettimc@pcn.net](mailto:ebonettimc@pcn.net)

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# ***ANNUAL REPORT***

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

As every year the Secretariat would like to conclude the last issue of the SEDOS Bulletin with a short Report and to inform all our readers about the various activities in Rome.

Many of you are aware that SEDOS has had a difficult year due to the absence of an Executive Director. Thus, the Secretariat and the Executive Committee have tried to offer the best services possible, excusing themselves for any inconvenience caused.

We would however like to take this opportunity to say a special 'thank you' to Fr Walter von Holzen, S.V.D., for the generous help he gave us during this time. Although he had started a new job in Paraguay, he agreed to come to Rome for four months to help us to solve some major difficulties and to guide SEDOS' daily activities in the best way.

## **II. STRUCTURE**

### ***1. New SEDOS Members***

SEDOS is happy to announce that one new Congregation has joined this year.

Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame, CND  
 Superior General: Sister Lorraine Caza  
 2330, Rue Sherbrooke Ouest  
 Montreal, Quebec H3H 1G8 - CANADA  
 Tel. (514) 9315891 - Fax (514) 9312915  
 E-mail: [cndsecretariat@cnd-m.com](mailto:cndsecretariat@cnd-m.com)

### ***2. Executive Committee***

The members of the Executive Committee for the year 2002/2003 were:

#### ***President:***

Piero Trabucco, IMC, Superior General of the Consolata Missionaries. Elected to the Executive in 1997.

#### ***Vice-President:***

Mary Wright, IBVM, Superior General of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Elected to the Executive in 2001.

#### ***Treasurer:***

Eric Manhaeghe, CICM, General Councillor of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Elected to the Executive in 2000.

<b>Eileen Cummins</b> , NDA/OLA, Superior General of the Sisters of Our Lady of Africa	Since 1999
<b>Pierre-Paul Walraet</b> , OSC, Canons Regular of the Order of the Holy Cross (Crosiers)	Since 2001
<b>Josephine Olagunju</b> , SHCJ, Society of the Holy Child Jesus	Since 1999
<b>Juan Antonio Flores Osuna</b> , SX, Xaverian Missionaries	Since 2002
<b>Michael McCabe</b> , SMA, Society of African Missions	Since 2002
<b>Maureen McBride</b> , RNDM, Religious of Our Lady of the Missions	Since 2003

### *3. Changes in the Executive Committee*

During the year three members of the Executive completed their work at their Generalates and left our Executive Committee to start new assignments. They were: Sister **Filo Hirota**, MMB, who was a very special blessing for SEDOS during her five years of dedicated work; Father **Enrique Marroquín**, CMF, our representative for South America, was also an appreciated collaborator of the Executive; Sister **Eileen Cummins**, NDA/OLA, left her position as she was elected Superior General of her congregation.

In the name of all the member congregations we take this opportunity to thank all those who have left the Executive Committee, for their generous service and collaboration in the different functions of the Executive. Wherever they go and whatever they do, we shall remember them and hope that SEDOS will always occupy a special place in their hearts.

### *4. SEDOS Secretariat Staff*

The staff has not changed during the year. Many of you have had the opportunity to meet our secretaries at the offices or at the various activities held during the year. The Subscription and Finance Department, are still taken care of by **Mrs. Margarita Lofthouse**. The publication of the SEDOS Bulletin and the preparation of materials for the homepage, continue to be looked after by **Ms. Ilaria Iadeluca**. **Mrs. Federica Pupilli**, who married last September, is still in charge of the Documentation Centre. Although each secretary has her own specific responsibility, all three work together in the organisation and preparation of the many activities offered by SEDOS.

**Ms. Philippa Wooldridge** continues to work as English proof-reader for the Bulletin. The French part has now been taken over by **Fr André Notelaers**, OSC, from **Ms. Sophie Guichard**, whom we would like to thank for the time she dedicated to SEDOS.

**Mr Stefano Cacace** and **Ms. Emanuela Gismondi** still collaborate with us on a part-time basis by programming and updating the SEDOS homepage.

## III. ACTIVITIES OF SEDOS

### A. Seminars and Conferences

#### *1. Annual General Assembly: Morning Conference*

On **Tuesday, 3 December 2002**, the Annual General Assembly, was held at the FSC Generalate. A good lecture has given by **Dr. Peter C. Phan**, Warren-Blanding Professor of Religion and Culture at the Catholic University of America and President of the Catholic Theological Society of America. In the Conference entitled: "*Crossing Borders: A Spirituality for Mission in Our Times*", the speaker described the new borders that missionaries must cross today and delineated some of the dispositions and qualities that would help them achieve such a crossing-over.

#### *2. SEDOS Open Seminar*

The 2003 Seminar of SEDOS, co-sponsored by the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue of the Union of Superiors General (USG), took as its motto: "*Called to a New Vision of Others and of Ourselves Through Interreligious Dialogue: Focused on Islam*". This year's Seminar was an open Seminar instead of the usual Residential one at

Ariccia. It took place in Rome, in the Assembly Hall of the *Augustinianum* from 19 to 23 May.

The Seminar was dedicated to interreligious dialogue, paying special attention to dialogue with Islam. This topic was proposed by the participants of the 2002 SEDOS Seminar who expressed the desire to grow through dialogue with other religions and spiritualities in order to deepen their understanding of other faith traditions through a process of listening and learning. The list of all the Resource Persons follows:

- **Msgr. Khaled Akasheh** (Rome), Secretary Islam Desk – Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Three young Muslim witnesses studying theology in Rome:

- **Lejla Demiri** (Macedonia)
- **Betül Avci** (Turkey)
- **Adnane Mokrani** (Tunisia)

- **Fr Claude Geffré**, OP, Dominican Theologian from Paris.
- **Mrs. Anita Mir**, Journalist – Muslim Women’s Organization.
- **Prof. Donna Orsuto** (Rome), Lecturer in the Institute of Spirituality at the Gregorian University. Consultor Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.
- **Mr Paul Lemarié** (Rome), Focolare Centre for Interreligious Dialogue.
- **Mr David Shaheed** (USA), Imam, Judge and Facilitator of the Islamic Affairs Council of the American Society of Muslims.
- **Mrs. Jo-Ellen Karstens** (USA), Focolare Centre of Chicago.
- **Mr Cemal Usak** (Turkey), Head of the International Relations Department. General Secretary of the Intercultural Dialogue Platform.
- **Fr Thomas Michel**, SJ, (Rome). Director of the Jesuit’s Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue. Consultor of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.
- **Sr Lucie Pruvost** (Algeria), Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa. Responsible for the *Ongoing Formation of Christians Studying Islamology*.
- **Mrs. Yamina Kebir** (Algeria), Lawyer. Particularly dedicated to the rights of the Algerian family.
- **Mr Harald Suermann** (Germany), Foreign Department *Missio Aachen* – Human Rights Expert.

SEDOS, once again, in the name of all those who participated at the Seminar and in the name of the Executive Committee, would like to thank all the speakers for their contribution and the Planning Committee for the time it dedicated before, during and after to the Seminar. Our special appreciation goes to Fr Pierre-Paul Walraet, OSC, member of the SEDOS Executive Committee, who was in charge of all the organization.

### ***3. Where is Your Sister? “The New Slave-Trade Challenges Religious Life in the Third Millennium”. How Should We React?***

On 17 October, SEDOS invited Sr **Eugenia Bonetti**, M.C., to give a Conference. More than a lecture it was Sr Eugenia’s testimony about her work based on helping young women who have been brought to Italy, particularly from Africa, under the illusion of finding good jobs, but who are actually forced to become “prostitutes”. During the second part of this conference, a panel was organized in which intervened: **Sr Rita Giaretta** (Rehabilitation Community “Casa Rut”), **Elisabeth Oghiefa** (once victim of human trafficking), **Sr Sheila McGowan** (Collaborates with other religious in the Temporary Detention Centre at Ponte Galeria, Rome), and **Sr Bernadette Sangma** (JPIC working group and co-editor information and workshop kit “Trafficking in Woman and Children”).

## B. SEDOS Working Groups

### 1. BIBLE AND MISSION

The Working Group “Bible and Mission” met eight times between March 2002 and October 2003. At the Seventh Meeting the group reflected on its journey so far and on its future.

#### A. Looking back:

##### I. The participants:

1. Seven Priests and three Sisters participated. As we knew from the beginning, not everybody could attend every time. Nevertheless, a “core group” attended most of the meetings and ensured the group’s stability and continuity.

2. There were always between six and eight members present.

3. The small number was an advantage in that the members came to know each other rather well and so the “give and take” soon reached a high level of rich and challenging sharing.

4. The number has grown slightly, and there are still one or two people who would like to join.

5. Members have accepted or volunteered to chair the sessions. Hence, the role of the moderator of the group has been reduced to convening the meetings, circulating the relevant texts, as well as writing and sending out the reports.

6. The group met mostly in the SEDOS Meeting Room; once we were invited to the OSC Generalate. The sessions start at 15:30 and end at 18:00, with a break of about 15 minutes, when refreshments are provided by the SEDOS staff.

##### II. The contents:

1. After a first reflection on: “How the Bible Has Functioned in Roman Catholic Mission” (by Tim Lenchak, SVD), we decided to deal with: “Reading the Bible in different contexts”. We soon realized that this topic put us “on the right track”. The reviews *Interpretation* and *International Review of Mission* had each dedicated a recent issue to this topic. We became aware that the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) since 1976 (revived in 1996), has an Interest Group BIBLE STUDIES AND MISSION (BISAM). The coordinator of this group, Sr Teresa Okure, SHJC, from Nigeria, has come out with the book *To Cast Fire upon the Earth*. Doctoral student Fr Ralf Huning, SVD, has published a survey article (in German) on the literature available on the intercultural reading of the Bible in Germany. He has likewise drawn our attention to A Project on Intercultural Reading of the Bible THROUGH THE EYES OF ANOTHER organized by Prof. Hans de Wit of Amsterdam.

2. The contexts we have dealt with so far, always starting with a good article by a knowledgeable person with first-hand experience, have been:

· Latin America (several articles by Carlos Mesters and Sherron Kay George);

· The Middle East (in connection with the CBF Plenary Assembly in Lebanon: “Word of God, Blessing for All Nations”, papers by Martin Harun, OFM, Pablo Richard, Theodore Adel Khoury);

· And Palestine (article by Lance D. Laird and the Pastoral Letter of Patriarch Sabbah, 1993, on “Reading the Bible in the Land of the Bible”).

3. When we set the date for the next meeting, we also choose the topic to be dealt with and the preparatory reading to be done in advance.

#### B. Looking ahead

1. The members of the group find the sessions worth attending and have given a Go-signal for continuing!

2. As we go along, we evaluate our journey by asking questions like: Can we improve matters? Should we continue on the track that we have hit upon? Should we try to enlarge our group and invite more members to join it? If so, how?

3. So far we have studied how the Bible is being read in different contexts, based on articles that we have

chanced upon or that have caught our attention. Is there another way, complementary or even better?

4. In answer to the last question, we have thought of the many students from all the different contexts of the world studying Scripture or related subjects in Rome.

o Could / should we avail ourselves of these “resources” on the contextual reading of the Bible?

o Could / should we find out what is being offered to these students at the Roman institutions in terms of the “contextual reading of the Bible”?

o What could / should the two institutions represented in this Working Group, SEDOS and the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF), “offer” to the Roman students’ preparation for their future involvement in the contextual reading of the Bible in their home countries?

5. Hence, the Working Group is not only interested in becoming acquainted with, and reflecting on, the contextual reading of the Bible, but is also raising questions on how to promote it.

## 2. CHINA

The China Working Group met five times in the course of 2003. It is a small group mostly made up of religious from various generalates interested in China. Our informal meetings provided an exchange of information and experiences regarding the Church and people in the People’s Republic of China. An area of concern and interest was the Christian, religious and ministerial formation of religious, priests and laity. Attention was also given to the procedures and experiences of communities wishing to enter the PROC. The Group finds accounts of experiences and visits very interesting and helpful.

The main source for our exchanges and reflection were selected articles on China. The participants reacted, shared experiences, sought and received information of a practical nature. These get-togethers were of help to those entering the general administration interested in China.

The Working Group will continue to meet four times a year. We hope to establish closer contact with the Chinese community here in Rome. Interested parties are always welcome to join us.

## 3. WORLD DEBT

The cancellation of the unjust foreign debt of the poorest countries in the world continues to be the focus of the SEDOS Working Group on Debt. This is done mainly by activating the Religious Coalition Against the Debt (90 Congregations) each year at the time of the G8 meeting in June. The congregations are asked to have their members send letters to the governments of the G8 countries urging them to cancel the debt. A sample letter is provided by the SEDOS Working Group on Debt. The Group also networks and collaborates with other groups working for debt cancellation. Monthly meetings provide an opportunity for information, sharing and updating.

## C. SEDOS Publications

### 1. SEDOS Bulletin

Since 1965 SEDOS has published a Bulletin in two languages: English and French, which is still one of our main aims. Up to 2002 it was a monthly publication, as from last year it became bi-monthly. We are happy to say that, after so many years, we continue to receive articles from people in all parts of the World requesting us to publish their work in our Bulletin. We also publish material from other publications, as well as papers from our conferences in Rome during the year.

Until now we have had very positive reactions from our readership who continue to support us by subscribing annually. Another major help is the offer to exchange our Bulletin with other important theological and missiological reviews.

### 2. SEDOS Internet Homepage

In 1995 we began to expand our work on the Internet by opening a missionary homepage ([www.sedos.org](http://www.sedos.org)). The homepage has become an important form of contact and a meeting point for all those interested in informa-

tion and helpful contributions on different aspects of mission. The articles are available in: English, French, Spanish and Italian and there is an address list of all our member congregations. Particularly from this year we are able to offer a section of links for our members, and another one for other institutes with the purpose of making them known through SEDOS.

We hope to continue expanding SEDOS' work in this area as we realise it is an important, fast and comprehensive method. We thank our members for their encouragement and contributions.

### *3. Documentation Centre*

Many of you know that SEDOS opened about 40 years ago when our Documentation Centre began. Our aim is to offer help and collaboration to all those interested in missionary research and studies now and in the future. SEDOS still receives books and reviews from all over the World in various languages and, especially from this year, a lot of books in Italian.

Since last year we have been reorganizing the library – not yet completed due to the large number of books, periodicals and reviews we continue to receive. This requires the constant updating of the catalogue, already printed out. We take this opportunity to invite you to consult our Documentation Centre at any time during our office hours: [Monday-Friday, from 9:30 a.m. to 15:30 p.m.].

## *IV. LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE*

### **OPEN SEMINAR 2004 – ROME**

Next Spring 2004 the Annual Residential Seminar will take place. It will be held during the third week of May, from 18 to 24. As usual more details will be provided as soon as possible.

SEDOS Secretarial Staff



*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year*

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## Coming Events

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### ***SEDOS Annual General Assembly***

**Tuesday, 2 December, 2003**

**15:00 - 16:30 hrs**

**Brothers of the Christian Schools  
Via Aurelia, 476 - ROME -**

*\* For SEDOS Members only \**

### ***“A Call to Mission: The Church on the Threshold of the Third Millennium”***

*by Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP*

**Tuesday, 2 December, 2003**

**17:00 hrs**

**The Brothers of the Christian Schools  
Via Aurelia, 476 - Rome**

**- Simultaneous translations -**

### ***Working Groups***

**Thursday, 13 November, Debt Group 15:30 hrs at SEDOS**  
**Monday, 26 January, Bible and Mission Group 15:30 hrs at SEDOS**  
**Wednesday, 3 December, China Group 15:00 hrs at SEDOS**