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Editorial

We begin this collection of articles by accompanying Professor Theo SUNDERMEIER in his reflections on “*Missio Dei Today: On the Identity of Christian Mission*”. This identity is analysed as a four-dimensional network between Mystery, Freedom, Pluralism and Hope. God is the very origin and source of the mission of the Church. It is the mystery of God coming into the World in Jesus and, inasmuch as Christian mission lives and draws its life from this source it has a right to exist and will remain credible... For Professor Sundermeier this is the right and only way to justify the mission of the Church in its goal of establishing the Kingdom of God.

Involved in work of the Kingdom we continue to reflect on mission with the article by Fr Pierre RIOUFFRAIT: *La mission en Amerique Latine à partir de l'expérience des CEB*. Fr Pierre describes how the Ecclesial Base Communities are changing the life of the Christian communities in South America by living among and with the people, by sharing in the life of the people and in their poverty and even ‘thinking like them and from their perspective’. It is a new experience in Evangelizing: a new method, with new enthusiasm and a new expression that brings new life to the communities.

With Frans WIJSEN, SMA, we take on our complex missionary task by looking at the dimension of multiculturalism as spreading migration involves all peoples. *Mission and Multiculturalism. Communication Between Europeans and Africans* invites us to take a serious look at the implications of inculturation and interculturalism and to discard the easy and romantic way of a demagogic approach.

“Leadership plays an essential role in any Christian community” writes Bishop William FRIEND *in Leadership in the Church*. The Spirit has provided the Church with different Charisms for the good of the people, but these Charisms need to be called forth by an effective leadership that reflect the general mystery and mission of Christ and the Church. Christian Leadership is not authority, wealth, power, honour and trivia.

The communities in exile are spread through out Africa and they are a living and dramatic challenge to the missionary life of the Church. In this article, *L'Eglise sur les Routes de L'Exil en Afrique Noire*, Emmanuel BUEYA bu MAKAYA, SJ, calls for a rethinking of our missionary approach; he invites the Church to *Repenser la pastorale de la mobilité humaine*. The missionary life of the Church defines itself by its involvement in the ‘dynamic life of the people in all their existential situations where they think, act, dream and fight’. Shouldn't the Church be in the midst of the refugee camps bringing God to the heart of human distress?

In *Ethics of Pardon and Peace* Thomas MICHEL, SJ, presents daily life from the perspective of the news-lines, rather than from the religious perspective of pardon and peace through justice and forgiveness. Our discussions on peace are usually conducted in the sterilized field of the abstract to avoid coming down to the real details. Thomas Michel compares the thoughts of Pope John Paul II and those of the Muslim spiritual leader Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Peace for both of them *is not only a universal longing, but also a cornerstone of the Message which God has revealed to humans*.

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“*Missio Dei Today: On the Identity of Christian Mission*,”

- Theo Sundermeier* -

We have gathered to reflect on the significance of the Willingen Conference of 1952 for our mission today. Willingen did not set out to be an end in itself. It was conceived as a “milestone”¹ on the road towards an in-depth understanding of mission that, in turn, would lead to a renewed endeavour to establish “faithful obedience” among the nations. The concept of *Missio Dei* was only used in passing at the Conference, and it was only later, through the G. Vicedom’s publication,² that it came to sum up the new approach and message of the Conference so precisely. Willingen 1952 was the first time that mission was so comprehensively anchored in the doctrine of God. That was a source of relief, to start with, since mission was again in crisis after the Second World War, albeit proclaimed the great event of the 20th century at the First World Mission Conference in Edinburgh. Expectations began to crumble. “At Whitby, in 1947, we hoped that the most testing days of the Christian mission, at least for our generation, lay behind us... But here at Willingen clouds and thick darkness surround the city, and we know with complete certainty that the most testing days of the Christian mission in our generation lie just ahead”.³ Vast, promising mission fields were closed (e.g. China). “Mission Under the Cross” characterized the mood that was marked no longer by hope but by concern, if not depression. Anchoring mission in God was a relief. “Die Sach’ ist dein, Herr Jesu Christ” (“The cause is yours, Lord Jesus Christ), had always been a popular hymn in missionary circles, but now this line took on a new theological dimension. God, the triune God, was seen to be the initiator, missionary and fulfiller of mission. Since, however, the question of *missio hominum* was only touched upon at the conference the differences visible beforehand persisted, and to this day still lurk in the background of mission theology debate.

On the one hand, there is the rejection of church-oriented mission by J.Chr. Hoekendijk, who saw the Church as an “appendix” of God’s coming into the world, the actual *missio Dei*.⁴ On the other hand, one can typically quote W. Freytag, who so esteemed the mission of the Church that it became the sign of the last days, and the very meaning of world History.⁵ Even if the two positions indicate extremes, they are

still operative below the surface today, and may be discerned even in the magazines put out by different mission associations. The magazines of church-run mission societies primarily deal with social problems in the countries of the Churches overseas. The evangelical mission magazines, however, focus on the personal experience of faith and conversion, and refer to the relevant social environment at most when their missionaries come under pressure from other religions.

The Hamburg-based association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW) uses a compromise definition: “Of course mission is an invitation to believe, and to talk about the meaning of life. It is the working for liberation, human rights and human dignity. Mission is the struggle against racism and economic exploitation, and works for reconciliation and justice. Mission is connected with the debt issue and about establishing a reconciled global community”.⁶ Even if K. Schäfer clearly states that for him evangelism is the “heart of mission”, and the different accents in understanding mission depend on the respective situations, he, too, still cannot escape the criticism levelled at Hoekendijk and his approach, viz. that of expanding the concept of mission to the point where it becomes imprecise and meaningless. The criteria of differentiation are lacking. Why does the commitment to a more just world come under “mission” when it applies to Latin America (a commitment shared with the Trade Unions) but not when it applies to Germany? Where is the criterion for classifying anti-globalization activists as engaging in missionary activity in one instance, and not in another? Even more simply, when is Christian education connected with mission and when is it not?⁷ Is not this a strategy of cooption that is counter-productive and detracts from the goal of mission intended by K. Schäfer? Is sufficient attention given to the difference in the commitment of other people, whether distant from the church or not?⁸

The World Mission Conference of Willingen, as indicated at following world mission conferences, left us on the horns of a dilemma upon which we are still impaled.⁹ It would be bold to assume now that our conference here could finally solve the problem. I do think, however, that the Willingen conference left

traces that have so far gone unnoticed. It could help us to get out of the *cul-de-sac* of mission theology discussion still conducted in terms of opposites “evangelical” and “ecumenical” — even within the Conference of European Churches (CEC).¹⁰

In looking for clues, I take up insights of recent anthropology that understand the identity of persons (or “coherence of the subject”) not as an intact, ready-made whole but rather as a process, or, more precisely, as a “four-dimensional network”. This network has an “inside” that is something like a “universe”; it has an “outside” because it is essentially interwoven with other people; it is characterized by paths, which are actual or virtual spaces which people go through and are influenced by; and, finally, we are shaped by the times we actively influence or passively endure.¹¹

The cause of mission is such a “coherence network”, constituted by these four dimensions. None of them may be overlooked or omitted, otherwise we will miss the point, or simplify the understanding of mission.

I. Mystery

I would like to describe the “inside” of mission with a concept that appears several times in the texts of the Willingen Conference without being accorded due attention. The concept is “mystery”.

“It is the glory of God to conceal things but the glory of priests is to search things out”. By slightly misquoting one of the proverbs of Solomon (Prov. 25:2),¹² we can describe an essential feature of many religions. Every religion lives through its connection to the “holy”. But the “holy” is mystery itself. What people understand by “holy” and how they deal with it is what distinguishes one religion from another. For some, the holy is simply what is inaccessible. In order for it to remain a mystery it has to be protected from impurity and desecration. However, the understanding of this mystery must not be profaned, either. That is prevented by the mystery remaining the prerogative of an *élite*, and with access to the Holy of Holies restricted precisely to this *élite*, i.e. the priests, who know how to purify themselves and are considered “holy”. The mystery of religion, the mystery of God, of life and the world is here a secret, a mystery.

It is not our assignment here to ask how we receive knowledge about what is mysterious, whether through asceticism, through meditation or through grace, as in India, or whether the *élite* hand it on as arcane knowledge from one generation to another. We only note that Israel possessed this tradition and did not differ here from the surrounding religions of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. Nevertheless, there was a counter-tradition in Israel, viz. the prophetic, by which God becomes accessible in the word. The mystery becomes text and accessible to all. The text is supposed to be clear and comprehensible. It does not speak in code. It is available to everyone who

can read, or can listen to someone read it. The mystery remains a mystery, but it is no longer a “secret”; it is interpreted and espoused.

The Christian religion is in this tradition while differing from it in a double sense. The bearer of revelation is not a text but a person. This person is himself part of the mystery. The mystery differentiates itself; it goes outside itself in order to be recognisable, accessible and comprehensible as a mystery. This self-differentiation of God is called *missio*, or mission, in St John's Gospel. The mission opens our gaze to the divine mystery and allows God to be understood as three-in-one, and defined alone by love. God is love and emanates ever-new *missiones*. The mission of the Spirit, the apostles and the Church is always the same event, and one that arises from the same impulse: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (cf. Jn 17:18, 20, 21). The mystery of mission goes down in history and can be narrated. It is meant to be told; it seeks public attention. It becomes an “open secret”.

Mission does not come to an end with the death of the Son but takes on a new quality through the Resurrection. Now it is unfolded and becomes universally ripe for the telling. Through the sending of the Spirit the mystery becomes accessible to all, the world over, because the mystery has opened itself up to the world to that end, so that the world may partake of it.¹³ The world may, can, should believe. Access to God is open to all. All are promised salvation: Jews, Jewish Christians and pagans. Previous religious affiliation does not count, nor do social or national bonds.

The fact that the disciples at first did not understand this is clear from Acts 10. Peter had to learn through a special revelation that the previous taboos of religion, including those of the Jewish religion, no longer applied. The open secret of God, the mission, in which, dogmatically speaking, the immanent and economic relations of the three persons flow together, evokes from inner necessity the *missio hominum*. The Christian faith cannot but involve mission. The Christian religion is essentially a missionary religion.

II. Freedom

It may be surprising that, of all things, “freedom” is given pride of place as the second dimension of the identity of Christian mission. Mission constantly encounters the prejudice that it disseminates religious coercion, fetters the conscience and paved the way for colonial dependencies. In view of the unquestionable distortions and abuses of missionary undertakings, we should call to mind the actual meaning and context of mission today. And that is: freedom. In a fourfold sense, mission entails the cause and taste of freedom.

1. God comes to the human person as one who loves.¹⁴ A lover creatively seeks a way of attracting the attention of the other. He or she tenderly seeks a way to

the other's heart. The other is, of course, perfectly free to reject or accept the wooing. Freedom enables the loving quest for the way into the heart of the other person. Love can arise and grow only in the space of freedom. Love makes one sensitive to the other's behaviour and stimulates the lover's imagination

That is the way of the *missio Dei*. Jesus, the first missionary, came to people like that. The way of the *missio Jesu* is also the way of the *missio hominum*. Their characteristic is the sensitivity of a lover, inwardly preparing to meet the other, seeking and accompanying this special person with loving eyes. *Ubi amor, ibi oculus* (one's love is one's eyes) to quote St Gregory of Nazianzus.

2. Mission respects the freedom of the other. Without this respect for the dignity of the other person there can be no mission, nor should there be. Does this fit with reality? Does mission not lead to bondage, in that faith calls for subjugation and obedience? Jesus describes the relationship between himself and those who have opened up to his love, by the concept of friendship. "You are my *friends*" (Jn 15:14, my italics). "Friend" is not just the familiar concept used in describing interpersonal relations. Rather, Jesus uses a concept that describes the exclusive relationship between God and Moses in the Old Testament. God spoke to Moses as a friend speaks to a friend (Ex 33:11).¹⁵

Friendship is grounded in freedom. It creates trust and receives trust. It grants the other a "broad place" (Ps 31[30]:8), a space that does not confine but liberates one to develop one's own gifts. Friends enjoy the success, advancement and growth of the other person. They strengthen one another. They are "true helpers for freedom and humanity" (D. Bonhoeffer).¹⁶ Friendship is freedom and loyalty in one.

If Jesus' mission is to make the relation between God and Moses apply now to all human beings, and call them into this relationship with God, then our mission can have no other goal than to spread God's friendship, and that means, at the same time, to extend an invitation to freedom. We have been set free for freedom (Gal 5:1); we are called to friendship.

If we rethink our missionary calling from the angle of freedom and friendship that will have consequences, not just in terms of method but also of the relationship between Churches and congregations that are bound to one another in responsibility for mission. The World Mission Conference in Whitby (1947) coined the phrase "partners in obedience". This key concept has substantially contributed to the new relationship between sending and receiving Churches. It still plays a major role in defining the relationship between partner congregations,¹⁷ yet the essence of partnership has urgently to be redefined. Partnership presupposes that the partners have equal rights and encounter one another on an equal footing. The

concept, which comes from business life, presupposes common interests. Should they not be fulfilled or have become outdated, the partnership is dissolved amicably or by arbitration. Cultural, economic and social differences are rarely taken seriously in business life. Because they are played down or ignored, 70 per cent of joint ventures fail. Ecumenical relations also often fail because cultural, social and spiritual differences are under-estimated. That is why the idea of partnership has to be enriched by that of friendship. Partners must become friends. Only where true friendships rise through and from congregational partnership, be they between single persons, a few families or special church groups, will such partnerships succeed and survive through the years even in spite of difficulties and tensions. Partners seek equality, and depend on the same interests and tasks, but friends enjoy differences and preserve the distance that is the space of freedom. They are able to affirm the other without envy as they "want to acknowledge, thank, enjoy and be invigorated by the other spirit".¹⁸

"So, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8:36) — even for friendship with the person from a foreign culture or the person who lives next door but is culturally far distant.

3. Anyone who speaks out against mission opposes freedom, as mission stands for freedom. In order to back up this, at first sight, daring statement we need briefly to review the history of religion. Primary religions are non-missionary. They only apply in the context of the respective people. There are two reasons for this. There is no truth of faith that applies outside the people. Frequently the very term "human" is not applied to people outside their group. Such people are enemies, potential slaves or, at best, neighbours pacified by alliance.¹⁹

Belonging to a religion is not to be separated from belonging to a particular people. Religion is handed from one generation to the next, like life.²⁰ World (secondary) religions differ from these primary religions. The former are missionary-minded, as they represent a truth that applies to all and not to a specific people. That ultimately implies that all human beings are of equal value, at least in the sense that all are destined to be saved and can share in eternal salvation, however that is defined in detail. Human dignity and freedom are preconditions and part of the truth that these religions proclaim. A person has the dignity and ability to decide for, or against, the truth of the new religion. A certain amount of freedom is needed for such a decision. Mission guarantees that this freedom exists. A short glance at history and the socio-political situation of different countries will substantiate this statement. All dictatorial States negate the elementary human right to be able to decide for or against a religion. Additionally, those religions that strongly attack mission deny freedom, even if they themselves

claim the right to make converts for their own religion. Islam is one example of that, as is orthodox Hinduism. Here, elementary human rights are violated on religious grounds. It is a sign of tolerance, respect for human dignity and elementary human rights when mission is permitted in a country. Anyone arguing against mission, whatever the religion, has decided against freedom.

4. The “outside” of the identity of Protestant mission means its relational character. Mission cannot help relating to the other, to the stranger. Without the other it does not exist. This relationship is part of its being. In a dual sense it is “eccentric”: it has its origins in the inner-trinitarian relationship and mission of God, and relates to the other, unknown person. As it lives entirely from freedom, this relationship is to be defined as dialogical. A dialogue can only be conducted in freedom. It sets no conditions and is “a mutual opening, from the longing to learn from and be enriched by the other”.²¹ Dialogue possesses its own dignity. It does not replace witness nor constitute its first phase. It may neither be used as an instrument of witness nor separated from it. Otherwise, it will flatten into a friendly exchange of thoughts where either party can remain where they are.²² No, anyone entering into dialogue with another in such a way that the other religion in itself becomes a temptation²³ will be changed by dialogue. One leaves a dialogue with a deeper knowledge of matters of faith. Ecumenical experience teaches also that dialogue can only succeed in a “dialogue of life”. Coexistence, in the sense of living together, is the condition by which dialogue is made possible.²⁴

III. Pluralism

Places and paths determine the identity of a person.

Wherever we grow up, the way to school, the classrooms and daydreams, the way to university, and the way to other countries, all this shapes us right into the deepest levels of our thinking and experience. Tell me the paths you have trodden and I will tell you who you are.

Yet the “way” does not just mean overcoming geographical distances. The dynamics of crossing the boundaries of previous experience means entering into and exposing oneself to new fields of culture, and other forms and manners of religious experience. The “way” means discovering our own identity through change.

Just that is what characterizes mission and constitutes its identity. Mission means the force that propels us towards the unknown person, to the religiously alienated person whom God wants to welcome back again. This movement is directed at change but the missionaries themselves change first. They have to change as they enter a close web of social and religious interdependences and become part of them. The missionaries will feel alienated or threatened by what they have to face. At the same

time, their lives will be enriched and deepened by new horizons. Anyone who does not change is dominant and only tries to change the others they meet. That has nothing to do with mission.

The sending of the Son is the example to follow. We should remember the way of Jesus, who most certainly worked as a young carpenter in the thriving town of Sepphoris,²⁵ only 10 km away from Nazareth. Here, he came across financial institutions, the theatre and the diversity of foreign religions. Although he got to know other religions there he did not later attack them. He did not make any use of the “Mosaic distinction” (J. Assmann).²⁶ And how was he changed by his subsequent encounter with the fishermen, who he called to follow him? Did the encounter with the women around not change him? Would he have otherwise ignored the custom and mores of rabbis of his time, and allowed women to come so close to him and allowed them, even as his disciples, to sit at his feet, as Mary did? How the encounter with people of other religions changed him! We know how he took an interest and gave new responses. And then there was the betrayal by his friend, and finally the experience of being God-forsaken on the cross. There can hardly be a deeper change penetrating the very image of God. But the way into the strange land did not lead him away from God; death and Resurrection opened up his, and thereby God’s reality, in an unprecedented way. There is no going back on this. It is the belief of all Christian mission.

As it was Jesus’ way to bring the lost sheep of Israel back to the fold (Mt 15:24), the way of apostolic mission led into the world of the nations, in order to call them back to God.

Is this ultimately aimed at the **unity** of the nations, anticipated by the unity of the Church? It is not just Catholic ecclesiology and mission theology that has often thought so, but also the ecumenical movement. The founding of the League of Nations and the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC) were regarded as parallel, related events. In the Protestant missionary movement the goal was more modest; only the unity of the Churches was the longterm goal. Not just Willingen but all world mission conferences have dealt with the topic of Church unity. Yet, for a long time, also under the influence of Geneva, this primarily meant organizational unity.²⁷ How we deceived ourselves and misunderstood John 17:21. As though even one Muslim would be converted if the Churches were united! When two churches unite, as recent church history has shown, the result is three churches. Unification causes multiplication. This has to do with human sin and striving for power. Unification brings an increase of power, not just in business but also in the church. The Bible understands things differently, as we can see from Gn 11 and Acts 2.

The splitting up of people into different ethnic

groups, languages and cultures was punishment for their *hubris*, but it was also rather “a blessing in disguise”. Although the division led to people being against people, it also prevented a single ruler and dictator growing in power.²⁸ The story of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, often interpreted as the reversal of the story of the tower of Babel, does not cancel out the variety of languages and peoples but, rather, affirms, indeed reinforces, them. In Islam, everyone has to speak Arabic if they want to understand God’s word and speak fittingly to God. By contrast, a multitude of ethnic and (language) groups around Israel is listed in detail in Acts 2, and everyone understands the message in their “native language”. The ethnic pluralism is a source of blessing. The Holy Spirit penetrates the linguistic, cultural and ethnic pluralism. The Holy Spirit does not teach the people Aramaic, but opens up their own language to the mystery of God’s coming in Jesus, the *missio Dei*. No language takes priority over any other, and the social and gender differences are also deprived of their *status* by the Holy Spirit. Men and women, old and young, slave and free, are all imbued with the Holy Spirit in the same way. The differences are not as such removed but no one will now be given priority, and all claim to dominance will lose its justification. Once purified, differences can be put to good use as charisms. The Holy Spirit strengthens creaturely, social and individual pluralism, but in such a way that differences are no longer felt to be divisive and fuelling hostility. Instead, they are brought into a relationship of interdependency that is characterized by hearing, understanding and helping, and that leads to a common praise of God. Foreignness can be overcome, understanding becomes possible, familiarity can grow, and commonalities take root. Strangers can become friends.

In mission we have always known of this pluralism and discussed it at length in the context of indigenization and inculturation. However, more attention should be given than in the past to the fact that unity cannot be pitted against pluralism; rather, diversity is a working of the Spirit. It is the task of missionary action to liberate forces from this diversity for an ever more intense fulfilment of the task to which Jesus called his Church, viz. to be credible in its being the light of the world and salt of the earth.²⁹

What does this pluralist way of *missio Dei* mean for the appraisal of religions? Is the consequence of our reflections a demand for a pluralist theology of religions? Nothing would be more wrong than to draw this conclusion. Without being able to discuss the problem exhaustively here, I would like to name two objections. Firstly, a pluralist theology of religions begins, roughly, from the idea that all religions serve the same goal of the redemption of humanity, i.e. they have a common goal. From this perspective, all religions interpret others in their own terms; differences are not

tolerated and endured. This approach would be typical of and appropriate for certain schools of Hinduism, but contradicts the respect that Christians have to show to the difference of others, out of love for them. Indeed, one must say: a pluralist theology of religion is not pluralist enough!³⁰ The second objection is to be found in both the pluralist and evangelical appraisal of religions, where the mistake consists in taking upon oneself a judgement that is God’s alone. How can I, not even being part of other religions, and not sharing their rites or confessions, judge whether eternal salvation is achieved in this religion or not? “Judge not, that you be not judged”, warns Jesus (Mt 7:1). By contrast, his commission is, “As for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God” (Lk 9:60).

IV. Hope

Mission is not timeless. It is “mission in view of the end”.³¹ The proclamation of the “Kingdom of God” had, from the start, been the motivation behind Protestant missionary undertakings, and is part of the bedrock of Christian mission theology. What does that mean? The Willingen Conference distinguished three meanings: the Kingdom of God means **(1)** The whole inhabited area of the world. That is why Christians are ambassadors to the furthest ends of the earth; **(2)** The Church is sent to every social, political and religious human community, near and far; **(3)** Christ’s rule must be proclaimed “at every moment and in every situation”. Mission comprises both the geographic extension and the intensive penetration of all areas of life.³² With this statement the conference linked up conflicting interpretations of the Kingdom of God. Is it a matter of individual or social salvation? Does the Kingdom of God come through God, or are people responsible for its coming, or do they help to speed it up? The Edinburgh Conference (1910) had stressed the geographic dimension, albeit emphasizing the temporal urgency. The coming of the kingdom, or the second coming of Christ, is generally believed to depend on all people having already heard the Gospel (Mk 13).

Since the World Mission Conference in Jerusalem (1928) the social dimension has come increasingly to the fore. Under the impact of Latin American and South African liberation theologians, the social dimension dominated the conference in Melbourne (1980), with its theme “Your Kingdom Come”. It is a well-known fact, requiring no further explanation, that this socio-political interpretation was the main cause of the split in the world mission conferences, and eventually led to the founding of the Lausanne movement.³³ Suffice it for us to recall that this difference had already resulted in heated theological arguments at the Stockholm Conference on Faith and Order (1925), while the dispute only became relevant

for the world mission conferences after Willingen. This can be seen in the contradictory interpretations of the *missio Dei* idea. Let me cite J. Chr. Hoekendijk by way of example. He understands by mission the whole of God's action in the world, the "totality of what happens at God's behest and initiative in the world". Church and mission are at most something like "an explanatory postscript", an "appendix", that is occasionally necessary owing to the hardening of our hearts. However, soon the time will come when it will be a "platitude" or a "Baalist heresy" to speak of the "special characteristics of mission".³⁴ The *missio Dei* serves the "shalomisation of the whole of life", so that "people can again be people and things can again be things (and no longer idols and material)".³⁵ This interpretation of the *missio Dei* and the Kingdom of God idea was strongly opposed by the pietist and church mission associations, with the opposition hardening as the mission conferences proceeded. W. Freytag had, prior to the Willingen Conference, tried³⁶ to overcome it through the eschatological reorientation of mission. Even if his endeavour was in vain it is worth our while having another look at his argument.

Time, the fourth dimension of missionary identity, must be given central consideration in this context owing to Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Mission happens in space and time. It is integrated into the time events that begin with Jesus of Nazareth, and find their *telos*, their goal and end, in the final epiphany of the kingdom. Time is the actual background of the identity of Christian mission, and the decisive coherence factor that links up the many facets of missionary endeavour. W. Freytag rightly perceived this. However, what are we to understand by "time" in the missionary context? Freytag's own approach was not able to overcome the contradictions since he ultimately shared the same understanding of time as everybody else. This understanding was moulded by the 19th century understanding of history, and contained a concept of "The history of salvation" that possessed a downright canonical dignity in mission circles, and still does.³⁷ This understanding of time and history is post-millenary and occasionally reflects a crass, but mostly subtle, chiliasm.

One expects a social and pedagogical improvement of the human race (Comenius). With regard to spirituality and the Church, one is inspired by "the hope for better times" (Spener), one hopes with providential aid to achieve the education of humankind for maturity (Lessing), and expects its "education for humanity" (Herder).³⁸ All missions since the 18th century have been committed to the idea of progress.³⁹ Using other terminology, the ideas of the Enlightenment persist in the mission movement: mission serves to spread the Kingdom of God. The spreading of the Gospel brings the spread of Christ's rule, ending, one way or another, in the millennium (according to many evangelical missions). Missionaries

are co-workers in building the Kingdom of God, in that: they build churches all over the world (according to denominational missions); they serve to improve the social and cultural situation of the different peoples by leavening the lump with the Gospel (e.g. G. Warneck); they are allowed to work hand in hand with the colonial spreading of the West because they contribute to bringing civilization and progress to underdeveloped peoples; mission serves to "humanize", is peace service, and serves to "shalomise" the world (Hoekendijk). In the 1980s, development aid became the new name for mission. I will stop here; each of you will have your own associations with the various keywords.

True, no one really believed that the Kingdom of God would be finally built by human hand, but the signs of the Kingdom of God had to be set up. The point of mission was to prepare for its coming. Yet, at the same time, it is mission, according to O. Cullmann's interpretation of II Thes 2:6, that delays the coming of the Kingdom and thereby enables history. History, in terms of the time between the first and second coming of Christ, according to W. Freytag, only exists because God has patiently granted time for mission. Mission is the meaning of the "pause in salvation history".⁴⁰

This understanding of time and history does not do justice to the complex biblical ideas of time. It is oriented to the simple division of time in the Roman language, or the Indo-Germanic language family, which defines time as "past, present and future", and regards it as flowing in linear fashion. Such a division makes people into the masters of time. Thus, pre-Christian and Christian Rome can determine when to begin counting the years, what is the middle of time, and that time will continue with a linear forward movement from year 1 to the end. Anyone who knows how to divide up time rules over it, subjects it to themselves, their ideology or religion, and determines other people's rhythms of life.

Mohammed was aware of this when, on his last pilgrimage, he forbade his supporters to follow the Christian division of the year, and imposed on them the lunar calendar as a divine command. In that way he created a deep gulf between Muslims and Christians. Despite this difference, Mohammed, who was substantially influenced by the Christianity of his environment, followed the linear concept of time of West-Roman origin.

Anyone who has ever travelled in a non-Western language area will know how reductionist this concept of time is. What are we to make of the fact that in some Asian languages verbs are not conjugated, e.g. in Chinese? Is it the reader of classical Chinese texts who determines how actions relate to each other from the point of view of time. Time does not exist without people. They are the ones to "make" time. Time creates them and they create time. In Asia it only becomes clear through language that history, as expressed one day by Japanese theologian and

philosopher Takizawa Katsumi, is a “human construct” with no ontological quality.

Yet, what is time? In primary societies time is always the time of people. There is a time for milking, a time to drive out the cows, a time to sow and a time to reap. The years are called by the events in the life of the ethnic group or by natural phenomena. “Progress” is just as unknown as in Ancient Egypt. There, too, people had no idea of linear time construction but were convinced that time made claims on them through ritual, and that they kept time in motion.⁴¹ All this reflects the understanding of wisdom time. Wisdom patterns itself on the past.⁴² It lives from the experience of past generations, and is distilled into proverbial expressions. The elders and nature are the teachers. That is why members of primary societies and religions move forward like rowers with their backs facing forward.⁴³ This understanding of time in primary religions also underlies the Old Testament (OT). Other concepts of time are not excluded in the OT, but they supplement each other, and overlap with respect to the religious and everyday coping with the world.⁴⁴ I have not succeeded in finding a linear understanding of time in the OT comparable to that of Western thought.

The New Testament reflects different understandings of time. In Luke and Paul the linear understanding of time may occasionally be found, since they only write for Roman citizens. Yet, Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God is more complex. OT apocalyptic concepts of time are perceptible but remarkably refracted. The past does not play a role in Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God. That precludes a linear understanding of time and history. Jesus’ proclamation is influenced by wisdom writings, yet their understanding of time is refracted from the centre: “Whoever puts a hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God” (Lk 9:62). Jesus’ way of talking points, like the wisdom literature, to now, the present. Yet the actual teacher is not the past but the future. It must determine life if this life is to flourish and cause joy. The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who found a costly pearl and sold all that he had to be able to buy it (Mt 13:46). The Prodigal Son looks to the future, and sets his hopes on finding an open door to his father’s house (Lk 15:11-31).

Repentance means facing forward, according to Jesus.⁴⁵ It gives joy, hope and lightens the way. Yet it is no vague, uncertain hope; it is tangible and has a goal in sight that is already present. It compacts time-space future into the present, and constitutes a deep hope.

What does that mean? The exegetic literature has spoken of present and future eschatology being intertwined in Jesus’ proclamation. The presence of the kingdom is occasionally described as a “fragment”, and the experience of it as “fragmentary”.⁴⁶ Yet, neither do justice to the matter. How the times fit

together is something that has to be defined more precisely.⁴⁷ The grain of mustard to which Jesus compares the Kingdom of God is not a fragment but a nucleus. It contains the whole of the tree (Mt 13:31f). You cannot be “a bit” pregnant, you either are pregnant or are not. The pregnancy has a goal and an end. That is announced through labour pains. So it is with the Kingdom of God. It is not just “fragmentary”, partial and vaguely present. Nor does it come in the sense of, “The future has already begun”. Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven in the “*futurum praeveniens*” (“prevenient” future tense). “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come to you” (Lk 11:20). The future comes in such a way that it shines as the present! It comes such that it interrupts time and disaster, and salvation becomes “nuclear” present: as the forgiveness of sins, the healing of disease, the reintegration into the community, as the experience of justice, as the call to discipleship, as freedom from the bonds of wealth, as the friendship meal with Jesus, as rebirth, as festive joy. It is always very specifically there and is experienced very specifically. It is “in you” (Lk 17:21). This spatial translation of the *entos hymin* is linguistically more fitting, even if the social dimension (“in the midst of you”) is not thereby excluded.⁴⁸ With a phrase from the Qur’an one could say, “The Kingdom of God is nearer to you than your jugular vein”. Paul understood it this way, at least, when he wrote that the Kingdom of God is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).⁴⁹ The kingdom “depends on power” (I Cor 4:20) and is expected immediately as the future. Every moment can become a door as it breaks in; every place can become the epiphany of its presence.

The Kingdom is present but it is experienced in different ways. The post-Easter stories telling of the presence of the risen Christ are like a coda to the rich concerto of Jesus’ proclamation of the closeness and imminent future of the Kingdom of God: the risen Christ (Lk 24) is close to the disciples of Emmaus in the interpretation of Scripture (and will remain so in future); the earthly, risen, the “whole” Jesus is near to them in the breaking of bread (and will be so in future at the Lord’s supper); his closeness makes their hearts burn for joy, even when, like the Kingdom of God, he goes unnoticed and unrecognized (this experience compels them not to keep it to themselves but to blaze it abroad).

None of the disciples is called upon to build the Kingdom of God. They cannot even set up a “sign” of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God can neither be enlarged nor spread by the disciples. However, they can pray for its coming as the final epiphany still lies before. It will bring the last great change. Present and future will be brought into the fullness of times. Heaven and earth, and the elect from everywhere will

be united (Mk 13:27).⁵⁰ When that will happen cannot be of concern to the disciples. The infinitely close interweaving of present and future, the close network of experiences of the whole in individual events in life, plus the intense expectation of the One who is to come, render this question unimportant. Any attempt to unravel this network into a linear scheme of time, and be it one of the salvation of history, is doomed to fail⁵¹ and misses the point of Jesus' proclamation. In the light of the Kingdom of God, there is no place for the shadows of the past. Its closeness makes our hearts burn within us. Anyone who has experienced it has no choice but to set off and tell others — in Jerusalem and everywhere in the world. However, like the Disciples of Emmaus, he or she will find that the risen Christ has hastened ahead, was long since there first and that, at the other place, the Kingdom had always been close to the other people. Because the kingdom is so close, looking to the future cannot inspire fear in the hearts of Christians. The great closeness of the Kingdom of God gives us great hope.

The goal: friendship with God

What are the practical conclusions we can draw from the renewed reflection on our topic of *missio Dei* today.

1. The identity of Christian mission has presented itself to us as a dense, four-dimensional, coherent network. The fact that we can actually only envisage three-dimensional bodies reminds us that in mission we are dealing with something that we human beings have not given ourselves, and that also cannot be explained and justified internally, sociologically, psychologically or anthropologically. Its origins lie outside itself. God is the very *origo et fons* of mission, the origin and constant source of its power. That is its most internal mystery, from which it draws its life. That is why it exists, so that it can pass on this mystery of God's coming into the world in Jesus. Everything depends on whether mission lives from this source, and draws from it its life, strength and vision. Only then will mission have a right to exist, only then will it find the rightness of its tasks, only then will it remain credible. As soon as it begins to justify its *raison d'être* differently, i.e. socio-politically, culturally or denominationally, it loses its authenticity. This mystery of *missio Dei* is a crystallization point of the many-faceted ways into the world. At the same time, the mystery is the criterion by which missionary endeavour is measured worldwide. If it loses this centre its light will go out and it will become insipid; it will be like salt that is good for nothing and has to be thrown out.

2. Mission is the invitation to open up to this divine mystery and entrust oneself to it. It is the invitation to become friends with God, and, because it is an invitation, there is no obligation to accept.⁵² The indwelling of the Son in the world enhances the

freedom of mission. God respects human freedom. People are meant to be free. Hence, the respect for the freedom of the other is the basis of any encounter with people of other faiths. Such encounter is therefore essentially dialogical. Preconditions and a lack of freedom make dialogue impossible.

The coherence of missionary identity involves a multitude of perspectives. In dialogue, Christian faith learns to see itself from outside and from another angle; it also learns how to perceive the other from its own perspective. Both of these things overcome strangeness and enable understanding. The space of freedom enables people to come closer.

Since God is "the inexhaustible freedom of those he has created",⁵³ the other side of encounter with persons of another faith is the proclamation, and to let oneself be liberated from bondage to the status of a child of God. In that way, strangers can become friends. This applies with respect to people of other faiths, but much more regarding "those of the family of faith" (Gal 6:10). Through Jesus, who gave his life for his friends (Jn 15:13f), we humans become God's friends. That changes our relationship to people in the same way as it changes our relationship to God. As free persons, we speak to God. In prayer the gift of freedom is fulfilled. God listens to God's friends. Prayer and intercession are a central part of the coherence network of mission.⁵⁴

3. In God's garden many colourful flowers grow, so my father used to say. As a layman, he was thinking of the different forms of pietism and revival movements in his home church alone, the church of Westphalia. How much more does *missio Dei* apply worldwide? No, not everything is mission but the number of instruments God needs for *missio Dei* cannot be limited by us. God's Spirit, so we learned from Acts 2, makes itself understood in different languages and cultures. The Spirit fills men, women, slaves and free, the old and young, and makes them different, not just regarding their social position but in their respective situation, and turns them into his instruments in different ways. The resultant pluralism is not a burden or even a curse. Rather, it is God's Spirit that brings about this "creative pluralism". The little differences make up the living wealth of the gifts of grace that correspond to "God's liveliness".⁵⁵

What does all this mean in practice? There is a norm by which we are measured, namely the relation to the first dimension, i.e. the link to the inner-trinitarian mystery of God, from which *missio* springs. Yet this norm does not call for homogeneous structures and a homogenizing unity; it expects of us that we make room for a "creative complexity" (M. Welker). It is the space for freedom that accepts the difference of the other and does not apply the same yardstick to all (Zinzendorf). We must learn that not all differences are differences in matters of faith. In most cases, they are about differences in lifestyle, in

aesthetics (music, art or clothing), in *praxis pietatis*. God goes in very different ways with us in our respective lives, in our different circumstances, and in our various cultural or national characters. That is part of identity. We must learn to behold others with the eyes of friends. Only in that way will we learn what we need so urgently: a culture of mutual recognition. It will make coherence deeper and stronger.

4. Christians are “swimmers in the present”.⁵⁶ The past does not weigh upon them. God’s depth of readiness to forgive frees them for the present. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow...” (Mt 6:28). Christians can turn from past errors to the ‘Now’, without the weight of the past, because they do not need to create the future. The “*futurum praeveniens*” in the *basileia* (Kingdom) proclamation of Jesus means: the future comes to meet us. More precisely, the future of the Kingdom of God precedes us. We can completely devote ourselves to the tasks God puts before us every day. This means that the nearer we are to Christ, the nearer we are to our neighbour. And, is it not also true that the more closely and selflessly we stand by our neighbour, the closer we are to the Kingdom of God? How does our action then relate to it? Must we not at least set up “signs of the Kingdom”? The concept of “sign” is unquestionably more suitable than that of “fragment” because it does not look back to the past, as the latter does, but is more forward looking. Nevertheless, I hesitate to use it again in this context. There are three reasons for this: (1) In no dogmatics have I found convincing arguments for showing the inner connection between the Kingdom of God and the signs we put up. Do they lead to the kingdom and even help to build it? Do they need confirmation on God’s part? How is the connection to be understood? (2) Experience precisely from mission history should make us sceptical. How often was social, civilizing, churchly and pious commitment declared to be working for the Kingdom of God, and signs that the Kingdom of God was being set up in dark continents? But how often were these things signs of something quite different and most human, and did more harm than good to the proclamation of the Gospel. (3) The concept of sign, as one can see particularly in St John’s Gospel, merely denotes an action after the event, and places such an action in a theological context when it is over, and not beforehand.

The last point is crucial. Whether an event has the character of a sign of the Kingdom of God can always only be a judgement after the fact. The disciples come into a house and bring peace. If it is not accepted, we are told, only afterwards could they say that the kingdom “had come near” (Lk 10:11). The disciples heal in the name of Jesus; healed persons can assert that God’s Kingdom has “come near to them” in all its strength. And today? At the Eucharist, someone suddenly knows with overwhelming certainty, “I am healed!”. Another prays the Eucharistic prayer, “Say but a word and my

soul shall be healed”, and hears unmistakably deep down in his/her heart the voice of the Good Shepherd replying, “Know that I love you”. In these examples taken from pastoral care, the holy communion becomes the sign of God’s kingdom and people know in a flash that it is “at hand”. Such realization may come through other, more everyday events and occasions. It is always the kingdom itself that chooses which of our actions to turn into a sign of its closeness and coming, *ubi et quandum visum est deo* (where and when it pleases God). Pressure is taken off us when we know that we do not need to give our action any transcendental weight. We are relieved and made free to be guided by love alone, to do what is necessary for the enhancement and maintenance of life, and to leave it up to God to turn it into a sign of the kingdom. In all of this we learn with happy certainty that it is not we who build the Kingdom of God; it builds us.⁵⁷

Notes

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¹ According to N. Goodall in his foreword, as editor, to *Missions Under the Cross: Addresses delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Wellingen, in Germany 1952; with Statement Issued by the Council*, London, 1953, p. 9ff.

² G. Vicedom, *Missio Dei*, München, 1958. On the history of the term see, H.H. Rosin, G. van Winsen, *missio Dei, term en functie in de zendingstheologische discussie*, Leiden, 1971.

³ M. Warren, in N. Goodall, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁴ See J.Chr. Hoekendijk, *Kirche und Volk in der deutschen Missionswissenschaft*, München 1967; and also his article published before the conference, “Die Kirche im Missionsdenken”, *EMZ*, 1952 and *IRM*, July 1952.

⁵ See the article, “The Meaning and Purpose of the Christian Mission”, *IRM*, 1950.

⁶ K. Schäfer, “Mission als Aufbruch zu den Menschen”, in K. Schäfer, ed., *Plädoyer für Mission. Beiträge zum Verständnis von Mission heute*, Hamburg, 1998, p. 8. See also K. Schäfer, “Mission im Zeitalter der Globalisierung”, in B. Mensen, ed., *Globalisierung und ihre Auswirkungen auf religiösem und kulturellem Gebiet*, Nettetal, 2001, pp. 75-99. I have picked out Klaus Schäfer by way of example in this context due to his prominent position as general secretary of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS). (Ed: Klaus Schäfer has since finished his term as General Secretary of IAMS.)

⁷ On this question, see e.g. Ch. Schwindt, “Glaube und lebe”, *Pastoraltheologie*, 2002, pp. 168-182, esp. p. 181f.

⁸ The objection then raised about Hoekendijk and his students was, “If everything is mission then nothing is mission any more”. This objection was occasionally termed illogical, but wrongly so: identities are defined by differences. If everybody were German the concept of “German” would lose its meaning.

⁹ See L.A. Hoedemaker, “Het volk van God en de einden der aarde”, in *Oecumenische Inleiding in de Missiologie. Teksten en Konteksten van het wereldchristendom*, Kampen, 1988, pp. 167-80.

¹⁰ This discussion was carefully outlined by F. Walldorf in his dissertation, *Die Neuevangelisierung Europas. Missionstheologien im europäischen Kontext*, Gießen, Basel, 2002.

¹¹ W. Schmid, *Philosophie der Lebenskunst*, Frankfurt a.M. 1999, 3rd ed., pp. 250-258.

¹² On what follows, see A. and J. Assmann, eds., *Schleier und Schwelle*, Vol. 2., *Geheimnis und Offenbarung*, Munich, 1998, esp. p. 7ff.

¹³ Whether is here a matter of an *ut finale* or an *ut consecutivum* (Jn 3:16) is answered differently in the exegesis. Probably the double meaning is really the point.

¹⁴ Paul Gerhardt expressed this with incomparable precision in a Christmas hymn: "Eh ich durch deine Hand gemacht, da hast du schon bei dir bedacht, wie du mein wolltest werden" ("Before I was made by your hand, you had already decided how you would become mine"). If the final phrase ran: "...wie ich dein sollte werden" ("how I should become yours"), we would find ourselves in the world of other religions and the quest for the right way to salvation would begin.

¹⁵ In the apocryphal literature Abraham is also called a friend of God, who has every freedom in dealing with God, as friends have. See the *Testament of Abraham*. Cf. Jas 2:23.

¹⁶ See D. Bonhoeffer's poem. "The Friend", in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 3rd edn, London, SCM, 1967.

¹⁷ Cf. L. Bauerochse, *Learning to Live Together, Interchurch Partnerships as Ecumenical Communities of Learning*, Geneva, 2001.

¹⁸ D. Bonhoeffer, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ See T. Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen*, Göttingen, 1996.

²⁰ On the whole section, see A. Feldtkeller, "Mission aus der Perspektive der Religions-wissenschaft", *ZMR*, 2001, pp. 83-98.

²¹ U. Schoen, *Dialog, Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe*, Berlin, 1987, p. 65.

²² In this sense, J. Moltmann criticizes dialogue as being "conservative" because it only serves to reassure us of our own standpoint. J. Moltmann, "Dialog oder Mission?", in R. Weth, ed. *Bekennnis zu den einen Gott? Christen und Muslime zwischen Mission und Dialog*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2000, pp. 36-49.

²³ W. Freytag was convinced that one only begins to understand another religion when it becomes a temptation.

²⁴ See U. Bergen and M. Mildenerger, *Keiner glaubt für sich allein. Theologische Entdeckungen im interreligiösen Dialog*, Frankfurt a. M., 1986; T. Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz*, Erlangen, 1995, p. 43ff.

²⁵ Zippori, also known as Sepphoris in Greek, lies in the heart of the Lower Galilee midway between the Mediterranean and the Sea of Galilee. For long periods during antiquity, Zippori was the capital of the Galilee with a vibrant religious, commercial, and social community. Today, Zippori is an antiquities park extending over 16 square km that was opened to the public in 1992, run by the Israel National Park Authority (quoted from: www.hum.huji.ac.il/archaeology/zippori/ Sepphoris Hebrew University Excavation Project) (Ed.).

²⁶ See J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Harvard University Press, 1999.

²⁷ Yet the Church of South India was considered a model and a sign of hope.

²⁸ J. Ebach has rightly pointed this out in "Rettung, der Vielfalt", in D. Becker, ed. *Mit dem Fremden Leben, Vol. 2 (Festschrift für Theo Sundermeier)*, Erlangen, 2000, pp. 259-268.

On Acts 2, see M. Welker, *Gottes Geist. Theologie des Heiligen Geistes*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1992, p. 214ff.

²⁹ I have pointed out elsewhere that these phrases from Mt 5, in which Jesus promises the disciples that they will be the Church, rather than Mt 28, constitute the first real "missionary command". The conclusions to be drawn from this reorientation need to be taken further, however.

³⁰ See A. Feldtkeller, "Verlangt der gesellschaftliche Pluralismus nach einer 'pluralistischen' Religionstheologie?", *Ev.Theol.* 1998, pp. 445-460.

³¹ The translated title of a notable 1942 essay by W. Freytag, *Reden und Aufsätze, Teil II*, Munich 1961, pp. 186-98.

³² Willingen. A statement of the missionary calling of the Church, 19 July 1952. N. Goodall, ed., *Missions Under the Cross, op.cit.*

³³ A useful survey is given by W. Weiße, *Reich Gottes. Hoffnung gegen Hoffnungslosigkeit*, Göttingen, 1997.

³⁴ J. Chr. Hoekendijk, *Kirche und Volk in der deutschen Missionswissenschaft*, Munich, 1967, p. 136f.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

³⁶ See his essay, "Vom Sinn der Weltmission" (1950), in *Reden und Aufsätze, Teil II, op. cit.*, pp. 207-217.

³⁷ Examples are the mission theology of D. Bosch. *Transforming Mission*, New York, 1992, and P. Beyerhaus, *Er sandte sein Wort*, Wuppertal, Bad Liebenzell, 1996, Bd.1.

³⁸ References quoted from W. Sparr, "Reich Gottes: Reich der Freundschaft. Für eine trinitarische Bestimmung des Begriffs der Gottesherrschaft", in W. Härle, R. Preul, *Reich Gottes*, Marburg, 1999, p. 36.

³⁹ This concept of progress also characterized the Western ideas of reincarnation and thereby gives them a highly optimistic character today, thus showing the difference compared to the Asian belief in reincarnation. See R. Hummel, *Reinkarnation*, Stuttgart, 1988, pp. 99ff.

⁴⁰ W. Freytag, *op. cit.*, p. 213f. "Without mission history is nothing but human history, whose progress consists at most in the heightening of its catastrophe. But if we know of the coming kingdom we cannot rejoice in the promise without proclaiming it", *ibid.* p. 216. Even an apocalyptically pessimistic chiliasm cannot shake off the idea of progress albeit *sub contrario*.

⁴¹ See J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, London, 1969; T. Sundermeier, *The Individual and Community in African Traditional Religions*, Hamburg, 1998, p. 24ff.; W.A. Wienecke, *Die Bedeutung der Zeit in Afrika*, Frankfurt a. M., 1992; J. Assmann, "Recht und Gerechtigkeit als Generatoren von Geschichte", in R. Bubner, W. Mesch, eds, *Die Weltgeschichte — das Weltgericht?*, Stuttgart, 2001, pp. 296-311; J. Assmann, *Stein und Zeit*, Munich, 1991, p. 35ff.

⁴² In Egyptian there is only the choice between the perfect and the imperfect tense. See J. Assmann, *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴³ Regarding Melanesian time perception, T. Ahrens expresses it as follows: "The past lies before them ... metaphorically speaking, standing in the flow of the ages they look at the current of the past that has flowed on, while the future, the coming current, lies behind them". T. Ahrens, *Mission nachdenken*, Frankfurt, a.M., 2002, p. 78.

⁴⁴ Besides the wisdom understanding of time, which in my view is wrongly understood as "cyclical", there is the "promise-

history” understanding of the prophets, plus the apocalyptic understanding. It seems to me that there is also a priestly understanding of time oriented to the ritual course of the year. However, the orientation to the past in the ‘Now’ predominates. “As we know, the Jews were not allowed to explore the future. They were instructed in recollection by the Torah and prayer. This disenchanting the future for them”, commented W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I/2, p. 704, quoted here in J. Ebach, *Vergangene Zeit und Jetztzeit*. Walter Benjamin’s “Reflexionen als Anfragen an die biblische Exegese und Hermeneutik”, *Ev. Theol.*, 1992, p. 304.

⁴⁵. The mission-theology significance of this perspective was reflected on by W. Kohler at various times. See Kohler, *Umkehr und Umdenken. Grundzüge einer Theologie der Mission*, Frankfurt, 1988.

⁴⁶. See W. Härle referring to H. Weder and W. Härle, “Die Basilea-Verkündigung Jesu als implizite Gotteslehre”, in *Reich Gottes*, *op. cit.* (note 38), p. 24. See also the opinion of the Theological Committee of the Protestant Church of the Union: *Die Bedeutung der Reich-Gottes-Erwartung für das Zeugnis der christlichen Gemeinde*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1986.

⁴⁷. “Fragment” or “fragmentary” are too backward-looking, and imply there used to be a whole fresco but now we see only a fragment.

⁴⁸. The apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, Logion 3, reads: “The Kingdom is in you and it is outside you”.

⁴⁹. It appears evident to me that Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God contains an implicit teaching of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore legitimately replaced by the latter in the writings of John and Paul. The talk of the Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels has the same status in John and Paul as their talk of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Kingdom of God *in actu*! It is clear that the differing orientation (in one case stressing the space-time dimension, in the other the dynamism of life-giving, creative power) must not be levelled out. See I Cor 4:20.

⁵⁰. “The eschatological raising up and bringing together of the fullness of times and the fullness of realities must of necessity dissolve and transform the creaturely and historical texture of the world”, M. Welker, “Die Weltgeschichte als Weltgericht? Philosophische und außerphilosophische Eschatologien”, in R. Bubner and W. Mesch, *Die Weltgeschichte als Weltgericht?*, Stuttgart, 2001. pp. 291-295. See M. Welker/M. Wolter, “Die Unscheinbarkeit des Reiches Gottes”, in: W. Härle and R. Preul, eds, *Reich Gottes*, *op. cit.*, (note 38), pp. 103-116, esp. p. 109 ff.

⁵¹. We should reflect that it has so far not been possible convincingly to show the internal, complex structure of the Apocalypse of Mark (Mk 13) and John in their complex ramifications and thematic variations. A linear timeframe does not do justice to the texts.

⁵². Despite Luke 14:23.

⁵³. J. Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993.

⁵⁴. “Besides obedience and faith ... prayer is the highest level of human freedom. As God’s friend, human beings share in God’s rule in prayer. As we bring the sighing and groaning from the misery of the world to God we appeal to God’s friendship for those who sigh and groan. God shows his friendship in listening to people.... Prayer and listening characterize human friendship with God and God’s friendship with human persons”.

J. Moltmann, *ibid.*, p. 138. On the feminist reception of the topic “Friendship with God”, see Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, “Die Wiederkehr der Gottesfreundschaft. Freundschaft als gesellschaftliche und theologische Herausforderung” (“Rediscovering friendship with God. Friendship as a social and theological challenge”), *Ev. Theol.*, 2001, pp. 428-440.

⁵⁵. M. Welker, *Kirche im Pluralismus*, Gütersloh, 1995, p. 28f. On the following, compare the whole chapter “Der Pluralismus des Geistes und seine Orientierungskraft”, pp. 24-36.

⁵⁶. “Gegenwartsschwimmer” (in German), the title of a book by M. Arki, Hildesheim, 1992.

⁵⁷. Cf. M. Luther in his lecture on the Letter to the Romans: “Regnum enim non paratur, sed paratum est. Filii vero regni parantur, non parant regnum, hoc est, regnum meretur filios, non filii regnum” (The Kingdom of God is not being prepared; it is ready. The children of God are prepared, they do not prepare the Kingdom, that is, the Kingdom of God inherits the children, not the children the kingdom), WA 18, 694, p. 26 (WA=“Weimaraner Ausgabe”, i.e.. the edition of all of Luther’s writings that was published in Weimar). The meaning of the Latin is in the last sentence of the article. “... that it is not we who build the Kingdom of God; it builds us”. This free translation hints at the popular conviction that in mission one “builds” the Kingdom of God worldwide.

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“
***La mission en Amérique latine à partir
de l'expérience des CEB,,***
”

- Pierre Riouffrait -
(Prêtre sans frontières)

Nous sommes en Équateur dans la ville de Guayaquil, près de l'Océan Pacifique. Les Communautés ecclésiales de Base (CEB) y sont très actives depuis de nombreuses années dans une dizaine de quartiers populaires. Elles cherchent à construire la fraternité et la solidarité dans le quartier à partir de la réalité de vie et de la foi. Pour ce faire, leurs animateurs se réunissent chaque semaine pour partager leurs expériences et préparer thèmes de rencontres et réunions à réaliser avec les voisins.

**UNE EXPÉRIENCE
A LA MANIÈRE DES CEB**

La voisine Mercedes

Mercédes a 47 ans et est équatorienne. Elie habite un secteur populaire de Guayaquil où elle est couturière-modiste. Elie est célibataire, mais elle a élevé, depuis sa naissance, une nièce qui a aujourd'hui 15 ans. Elle est la 4^e enfant d'une famille de 10 enfants. Il y a 25 ans, elle faisait partie de la *JOC (Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne)*, mouvement chrétien qui réunit les jeunes des quartiers populaires qui travaillent ou cherchent un emploi. Elle a conservé des liens avec les anciens «jocistes», pour continuer de nourrir sa foi, maintenir des activités au service des autres et célébrer cette expérience entre chrétiens.

Des relations de voisinages difficiles

Lorsque Mercedes est arrivée dans son nouveau quartier il y a 3 ans, elle a décidé d'aider ses voisins à vivre plus humainement en partant de leur réalité et de leur religiosité. Dans ce secteur de plus de 5,000 familles, il n'y a pas d'église ni de prêtre résident. Les relations de voisinage sont assez conflictuelles ; beaucoup de mamans avec enfants ont été abandonnées par leur compagnon. Il est difficile de trouver du travail et les salaires sont très bas : 100 euros de moyenne pas mois. Avoir à manger un

peu tous les jours relève de la prouesse pour la majorité des familles.

La chance de la religiosité populaire

Comme on approche de Noël, Mercedes décide de réunir les enfants autour de la crèche qu'elle a faite dans sa maison. On chantera des chants de Noël que tout le monde sait, on fera une petite lecture de la Parole de Dieu, on se dira ce qui a frappé les uns et les autres, on verra ensemble le message qu'on peut en retirer, on fera de brèves prières à partir de ce que l'on a partagé et on terminera par boire joyeusement un lait au chocolat avec de petits gâteaux. Avant de se séparer, elle demandera quels sont les enfants qui ont fait une crèche dans leur maison et à qui l'on va rendre visite le lendemain en reprenant le même schéma de réunion, si les parents sont d'accord. Dans le cas des enfants qui n'ont pas de crèche, elle leur montre plusieurs personnages : Marie, Joseph et Jésus ; elle en fera même cadeau à ceux qui ne pourraient pas se les acheter.

Autour de la crèche

Comme toutes les semaines, le mercredi précédent, Mercedes a participé à une réunion des animateurs des Communautés ecclésiales de base de la ville. On s'y est distribué une neuvaine de Noël faite avec le prêtre qui accompagne ces groupes. Chaque soir donc, le thème des rencontres est différent, la lecture biblique aussi et le sujet de vie également. C'est un succès : à chaque nouvelle veillée il y a plus de monde, non seulement la famille mais aussi des voisins qui ont déjà eu chez eux une réunion. Pour la nuit de Noël, on a su que le prêtre allait dire la messe de minuit en plein air : on va la préparer avec lui et tout le quartier ira en procession avec quelques personnages de la crèche. Dans le quartier l'ambiance est différente : on commence à se connaître, à se parler, on rend visite à Mercedes pour prendre un café ou parler un moment. Le jour

de Noël, on a même fait une petite fête où chacun a apporté quelque chose à boire ou à manger. On se promet de recommencer à une prochaine occasion.

Nouvelles activités

La prochaine occasion sera le temps de Carême où il y aura des réunions dans les maisons au moins 2 fois par semaine pour y faire le chemin de croix, avec des lectures bibliques en lien avec chaque station et avec la réalité du quartier. Mercedes aura photocopié auparavant les 14 scènes, selon une reproduction Latino-américaine du chemin de croix actualisé. Ensuite, le vendredi saint, ce même chemin de croix se fera dans les rues du quartier avec tous les voisins. Le jour de la résurrection, il y aura une fête pour se dire, après avoir vu souffrir le Christ aujourd'hui, quels sont les signes de sa résurrection existant entre nous.

Entre temps, toujours à partir des enfants, il y aura eu un nettoyage du secteur avec la collaboration de plusieurs voisins, on aura planté des fleurs devant les maisons et même des arbres. Également, on aura commencé à célébrer les anniversaires de certains des enfants.

Au cours de l'année, il y aura aussi des jours marquants que l'on célébrera ensemble: le 8 mars pour la femme, le 1^{er} juin pour les enfants, le 12 octobre l'invasion européenne, la dernière semaine d'octobre pour fêter le Christ roi et la construction (ou destruction) de son royaume, le 10 décembre pour les Droits de l'homme, le 12 pour Notre Dame de Guadalupe du Mexique, etc. Mercedes ne manquera pas de rendre visite aux malades, accompagnée de quelques voisines, aux mamans qui viennent d'avoir un enfant ; on l'invitera pour qu'elle prie à l'occasion d'un décès. On lui demandera même d'organiser le catéchisme : elle le fera avec les parents, puis elle ira voir le prêtre.

Une maison communautaire pour le quartier

Des groupes d'amis français ont aidé Mercedes à acheter une petite maison dans le quartier. C'est ainsi plus facile pour se réunir, passer un moment de dialogue, s'entraider les uns les autres. Depuis plus d'un an, c'est un lieu de rencontre et d'animation du quartier. On y parle de beaucoup de problèmes, on en résout certains. Les femmes apprennent à cuisiner, à coudre, à couper les cheveux, à procurer les premiers soins dans les petites maladies. Les hommes viennent pour écouter un alcoolique qui a changé de vie grâce aux Groupes «Alcooliques Anonymes». Une psychologue du quartier se réunit avec les familles en difficulté : problèmes de couple, de violence contre les enfants, de manque d'estime de soi, etc. Une

infirmière aide les mamans à avoir une meilleure alimentation, à prendre soin des nouveau-nés, à résoudre quelques problèmes de santé. Des jeunes apprennent à jouer de la guitare, regardent des cassettes vidéo éducatives. Mercedes fait des réunions sur la Bible à partir de la réalité.

QUELQUES RÉFLEXIONS SUR LA MISSION

Dans leurs réunions latino-américaines, les évêques ont toujours insisté sur les bienfaits des CEB parce qu'elles sont «moteur d'évangélisation et source de libération» : elles sont «le plus petit noyau ecclésial» et représente une «grande espérance pour le futur de l'Église et la transformation de la société». La mission doit toucher ces deux objectifs. L'expérience de Mercedes dans son quartier en est un exemple. Pour les CEB, la Nouvelle Évangélisation est un défi si on la conçoit comme l'engagement à évangéliser à partir des pauvres et des cultures opprimées pour avancer vers une transformation de l'Église et un changement social.

Les CEB ont marqué l'Église d'Amérique latine et celle-ci a aidé l'Église universelle à retourner à la source de l'Évangile par «le choix prioritaire pour la cause des pauvres, qui est notre cause et la cause de Jésus-Christ» (Message des évêques réunis à Puebla, au Mexique, en 1979). Actuellement, trois mots peuvent nous aider à ouvrir de nouveaux chemins de vie, de foi, de joie. Ce sont ceux que le Pape a utilisés pour résumer le Synode des évêques des Amériques en 1998 : *conversion*, *communion* et *solidarité*.

La Conversion au choix prioritaire des pauvres

Le mot «conversion» veut dire changement, dans le sens de *se convertir à la pauvreté et aux pauvres* pour pouvoir nous dire chrétiens, disciples de Jésus-Christ. Rappelons ici que le choix prioritaire pour les pauvres comprend trois étapes complémentaires :

- Le choix **d'être «avec»** les pauvres, dont on partage la vie de temps à autre. Cette attitude ne permet pas aux pauvres d'être les acteurs de leur propre changement de situation ni de détruire les structures qui la provoquent, encore moins de créer les alternatives aux actuelles inégalités. Cette première préoccupation, paternaliste, doit faire des progrès significatifs afin de cesser d'humilier les pauvres et de les enfoncer dans leur pauvreté.

- L'option de **vivre «au milieu»** des pauvres. En allant vivre au milieu des pauvres, on fait un pas de

plus vers la véritable option pour les pauvres. On peut difficilement rester les bras croisés et ne rien faire pour qu'ils sortent de cette situation insupportable. La parole de Jésus interpelle fortement : «*Si vous ne l'avez pas fait à l'un de ces petits, c'est à moi que vous ne l'avez pas fait*» (Mt 25,45). Cette présence solidaire au milieu des pauvres n'est toutefois pas suffisante : c'est beaucoup, mais il s'agit de nous laisser convertir et évangéliser par les pauvres eux-mêmes.

- L'option de **penser «à partir»** des pauvres et de **lutter «selon»** eux. C'est l'exemple de Jésus qui doit nous guider : se faire pauvre avec les pauvres. Lui est né, a vécu, travaillé, est mort comme eux ; il parlait à tous, mais à partir de son identification avec les pauvres. Si les pauvres sont les premiers héritiers du Royaume, il s'agit de s'identifier à eux, de faire nôtres les causes pour lesquelles ils vivent et donnent leur vie, de se laisser instruire par leur sagesse et évangéliser par leur sens de Dieu : vivre le plus possible comme eux et devenir les mendiants de leurs richesses. C'est sans doute cela la conversion à Jésus-Christ : «Nous demandons comme une nécessité la conversion de toute l'Église à l'option prioritaire des pauvres dans le but de leur libération intégrale» (*Document de Puebla*, n. 1134). «Cette option éclairera toute notre action évangélistique» (*Document de Saint Domingue*, n. 296).

Si la mission est l'annonce d'un salut, ce salut doit commencer aujourd'hui, et cela veut dire que les pauvres ont le droit de vivre. Or la pauvreté est la première menace pour la vie des pauvres. La conversion chrétienne doit montrer des signes efficaces pour avancer vers plus de justice, d'égalité et de paix, à partir de ce que les pauvres eux-mêmes décident pour changer leur situation. Ce sont eux également les premiers responsables de la mission et, prêtres et religieuses, nous sommes au service de leurs initiatives, comme «serviteurs des serviteurs de Dieu».

La Communion ecclésiale dans le sens de la Nouvelle Évangélisation

En Amérique latine, parler de Nouvelle Évangélisation, c'est dénoncer ce qu'il y a eu de mauvais dans la première évangélisation : son imposition de formules, rites et symboles européens, l'anéantissement des civilisations indigènes, la destruction des signes religieux des peuples autochtones, le pouvoir concentré dans les mains du clergé, la marginalisation de la femme, etc., réalités encore très présentes aujourd'hui. Quant à la Nouvelle Évangélisation, ses trois caractéristiques, selon le Pape, sont les suivantes :

- Elle doit être **«nouvelle dans son ardeur»**. Ceci

est une invitation à retrouver la *mystique et l'enthousiasme* qui caractérisent la vie chrétienne, un peu comme un retour aux sources de notre identité, à la manière de Jésus, des premiers chrétiens et évangélistes comme Bartolomé de Las Casas. Plus que jamais, notre continent doit «boire à son propre puits» (Gustavo Gutiérrez), c'est-à-dire, puiser dans sa religiosité et ses cultures populaires un nouvel élan pour redonner à l'Évangile toute sa force transformatrice.

- Elle doit être **«nouvelle dans sa méthode»**. Le plus grand document pastoral du Concile a confirmé la méthode classique de l'Action catholique : «voir, juger, agir». Ce même schéma de travail a été repris dans les trois Conférences générales de l'épiscopat Latino-américain (Medellin, Puebla et Saint-Domingue). L'expérience des Communautés ecclésiales de base d'Amérique latine y a ajouté une quatrième caractéristique : «célébrer». À Saint-Domingue, les évêques Latino-américains ont repris ces quatre étapes à partir de l'épisode évangélique des «disciples d'Emmaüs» (Lc 24,13-35) : d'abord *l'écoute* et *l'amitié*, ensuite la *parole qui éclaire*, puis *le partage* et enfin *la célébration*. La Nouvelle Évangélisation assume cette méthode pastorale.

- Elle doit être **«nouvelle dans son expression»**. Dans le cas de l'Amérique latine, pour évangéliser d'une manière nouvelle, il faut arriver à réexprimer tout le message chrétien à partir de la réalité, de l'histoire et des religions du continent. Nous avons à apprendre des pauvres le chemin d'une nouvelle évangélisation : il s'agit de renaître, comme Nicodème en son temps, à une nouvelle expérience spirituelle à partir des cultures indigènes, noires et, populaires. A Saint-Domingue, les évêques Latino-américains ont invité tous les chrétiens à entreprendre un effort d'inculturation de l'Évangile, de la liturgie, de *l'Église et des dogmes*. L'inculturation est certainement le maître mot à l'heure actuelle pour notre continent : arriver à une fécondation de la foi chrétienne par les différentes cultures — post-modernes pour l'Europe — afin de trouver de nouveaux chemins de vie, d'espérance et de convivialité planétaires.

Comme on le voit, la communion ecclésiale est bien plus qu'un changement superficiel sans lendemain.

La Solidarité pour un changement de société

Nous avons à être solidaires avec tous ceux qui luttent pour une vie meilleure pour tous. Entre nous, les frontières ne peuvent être que celles du mal, de la souffrance et de la mort, à faire reculer et à supprimer. C'est ensemble que notre vie prend forme et saveur,

par delà les religions, les races et les idéologies. «Tout homme est mon frère» : il a quelque chose à me donner pour que je grandisse ; et j'ai quelque chose à lui donner pour que nous avançons ensemble vers plus de liberté, d'égalité et d'alliance avec Dieu. La mission nous engage à faire triompher le droit de tous et de tous les peuples : c'est l'union dans la diversité, contre un système de corruption, d'esclavage des pauvres, de faim de plus en plus généralisée, de mort. Il s'agit non seulement de se scandaliser devant les réalités inhumaines de notre monde, mais surtout d'en dénoncer les causes pour mieux les combattre. Et les causes de l'appauvrissement sont des structures et des institutions de dimension internationale. Alors :

- Il faut *arrêter* cet enrichissement pervers, et donc détruire les structures économiques qui le produisent — c'est le cas du système néo-libéral.

- Il faut *renverser la vapeur* : c'est-à-dire se mettre à rendre ce qu'on vole et ce qu'on a volé, pour l'Amérique latine, depuis 500 ans ; il s'agit là d'une option de vie afin que cela soit possible.

- Il faut s'engager à *multiplier* les initiatives des pauvres organisés et de ceux qui font le choix prioritaire de promouvoir jusque dans ses ultimes conséquences les causes que les pauvres eux-mêmes ont décidées et décident pour construire un monde économiquement plus égalitaire, politiquement plus participatif, culturellement plus créatif et éthiquement plus respectueux des différences et des richesses de chacun.

Pour nous ouvrir à une plus grande conversion, communion et solidarité, je terminerai par quelques mots de Georges Bernanos, écrits au Brésil en 1945 : «Je dis que le monde sera sauvé par les pauvres, ceux que la société moderne élimine, parce qu'ils ne sont plus capables de s'y adapter et parce qu'elle n'est pas en mesure de les assimiler, jusqu'à ce que leur ingénieuse patience ait, tôt ou tard, raison de sa férocité. Je dis que les pauvres sauveront le monde : ils feront cette colossale affaire» (*Les enfants humiliés*, NRF, p. 898).

La parole de l'apôtre Paul renouvelle notre espérance au milieu de tant de difficultés pour rendre possible la mission des chrétiens, en particulier des chrétiens pauvres : «En effet, nous savons que la création toute entière gémit et souffre les douleurs de l'enfantement. Et non seulement elle, nous aussi qui possédons en premier les dons de l'Esprit Saint, nous gémissons au fond de nous-mêmes dans l'attente de nos droits de fils et de la rédemption de notre corps» (Rm 8,22-24). «Les chrétiens sont appelés à se préparer

au commencement du 3^e millénaire en renouvelant leur espérance de la venue du Royaume de Dieu, en le préparant jour après jour dans leur cœur, dans la communauté à laquelle ils appartiennent, dans le contexte social où ils vivent et aussi dans l'histoire du monde» (Jean Paul II, *À l'aube du 3^e millénaire*, n. 46).

La mission n'est-ce pas se mettre au service de «cette colossale affaire», un nouvel enfantement, pour avancer vers le salut ? Par notre témoignage missionnaire, rendons cela encore plus évident.

Réf. : *Mission de l'Église*, supplément du n. 138, janvier-mars 2003, pp. 27-31.

“Mission and Multiculturalism Communication Between Europeans and Africans,,

- Frans Wijzen, SMA -
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The debate on multiculturalism has been raging in The Netherlands for some ten years.¹ By and large it centres on the question whether ours is, or ought to be, a multicultural society and whether new migrants must adapt to our lifestyle, or whether they can and may retain their distinctive character. The discussions we are hearing currently in the course of election campaigns clearly demonstrate how unprepared The Netherlands is for a multicultural society. Whether it is a matter of head scarves, female circumcision, arranged marriages, Islamic primary education, acceptance of homosexuality or separation of Church and State: on the whole the Dutch are completely at a loss what to do about it or, even worse, believe they know best.

The thesis I want to defend in this public forum is that missionaries and missionary institutions have considerable expertise in dealing with cultural differences. Often they have worked for many years in non-Western societies abroad and nowadays they are increasingly working in multicultural communities in The Netherlands. As an empirical study and theological reflection on missionary practice,² missiology can not only contribute to a theory of intercultural (religious) communication but also help to reduce conflict in a multicultural society.

Between 1800 and 1940 some 7,500 Dutch missionaries left for overseas countries. Around 1950 one out of every 550 Dutch Catholics was working as a missionary in a remote part of the world and one out of every nine missionaries operating in the world was Dutch! In 1963 another 1,029 Dutch missionaries left for foreign parts. This made The Netherlands the country with the largest number of missionaries in the world.

Today there are still some 1,800 Dutch missionaries operative in the world, not counting development workers in missionary-related organisations. Although this is a much smaller number than the 10,000 Dutch missionaries who were working abroad in 1968 admittedly a disproportionately high figure it is still a respectable number, certainly compared with the 1,600 parish pastors ministering in The Netherlands.³

And even though the membership of missionary institutions in The Netherlands is declining, they are

still part of global networks which perpetuate the missionary experience, for instance in new provinces or congregations overseas and local lay movements or missionary organisations. The Catholic co-funding organisation *Cordaid* alone employs 285 people and the Central Mission Commissariat, the umbrella organisation of the missionary institutions of religious orders, another 50 people. These people maintain close daily contact with partners in the southern hemisphere and non-Westerners in our own society. They strive for equal relations and reciprocity.

But is it really true that missionaries and missiologists have special expertise in dealing with, and reflecting on, cultural differences? And if so, what is the nature of this expertise? In answering this question I confine myself to communication between Europeans and Africans, firstly in Africa (more particularly East Africa) but also, because of the growing influx of African migrants, increasingly in Europe as well. I also confine myself to the intercultural communication of religious meanings that has occurred in the missionary movement since the 19th century.

1. The ‘African Myth’

Let me say at once that there are some grounds for claiming the exact opposite, namely that missionaries, as propagandists of the one true faith and collaborators of colonial administrative officialdom, have destroyed local cultures and contributed to ‘anthropological poverty’ in Africa and the ‘cultural death’ of Africans, as some African theologians maintain.⁴

After the conversion of Constantine the Church inherited the imperialist perception of the Roman Empire, which regarded its own culture as the only civilised one and everything else as ‘barbaric’, but assimilable. In the eastern Roman Empire at any rate, the Church was subordinate to the State. In the West the Church became the guardian of classical culture for many centuries. ‘Secular’ authorities had only nominal power over Christian subjects. Mission was imperial mission. At an imperial level other forms of religion were not to be tolerated. This is in fact the difference between Christianising and conversion. Christianising

entails making the public arena 'Christian'. Conversion is aimed at personal access to faith.

The doctrine of 'no salvation outside the church' also represented a revolutionary development in Western history: recognition of individuals' personal responsibility for their salvation. This required the sacraments, which were available only in the church. To put it in present-day terms: conversion was 'above' culture; Christianising meant public submission to 'Christian' culture. As a result conversion was a monastic preserve for many centuries. In addition the missionaries that were sent to Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries knew next to nothing about mission in earlier centuries. The doctrine of 'no salvation outside the church' legitimised an expansionist mission practice.⁵

In his study of Dutch missionaries' conceptions of Africans a former colleague, Albert de Jong, said "that the average missionary, up to the Second Vatican Council, had a negative and destructive approach to African culture".⁶ The 'average missionary' regarded Africans as primitive, irreligious, stupid and lazy. In his recently published memoirs a Dutch missionary who worked for many years in Sukumaland in northwestern Tanzania, a region where I myself lived and worked for some time, writes that round about 1950 elderly people often said, "We are living in darkness", echoing the eulogy of Zacheus in Luke's Gospel which they had learnt from an earlier generation of missionaries.

This missionary added, however, that even at that time, twelve years before the start of Vatican II, he felt that "the distance [between Christianity and African culture] is being maintained artificially" and that "Africans have a worthwhile culture of their own".⁷ As early as 1946 the Flemish missionary Placide Tempels indicated in his *Bantu Philosophy* that Africans are by no means primitive but are perfectly capable of logical thought, thus laying the foundation for 'adaptation' theology. In his *Bantu Philosophy* Tempels demolished some previously accepted anthropological theories.⁸

The cultural destruction wrought by missionaries is often exaggerated and missionaries' influence on Africans is overestimated. Nowadays this is acknowledged by historians and anthropologists.⁹ Besides, practice often differed from theory, and in the field there was often a great deal more construction (schools, hospitals) and dialogue than is evident in the accounts of missionaries, something which Theo Salemink does not allow for sufficiently in his *Afrikaanse Mythe*.¹⁰

2. 'Christianity' and 'cultures'

Thus practice was more advanced than theory. But gradually the theory improved: missiologists like John Taylor (former missionary in Uganda), Adrian Hastings (former missionary in Uganda and Tanzania)

and Aylward Shorter (former missionary in Tanzania, currently working in Kenya) no longer thought in terms of 'adaptation' but of 'incarnation'. Local culture does not have to disappear, because Christ was already present in that culture. Christ was there before the missionaries arrived. The missionaries' task was not to bring Christ to Africa but to discover and identify Christ in Africa. This was a reversion to the old missionary ideal of 'pilgrimage to God'. In 1963 John Taylor wrote in his *The Primal Vision*:

It is the lordship of Christ which is in question. Either he is the Lord of all possible worlds and of all human cultures, or he is the Lord of one world and one culture only. Either we must think of the Christian Mission in terms of bringing the Muslim, the Hindu, the Animist into Christendom, or we must go with Christ as he stands in the midst of Islam, of Hinduism, of the primal world-view, and watch with him, fearfully and wonderingly, as he becomes dare we say it? Muslim or Hindu or Animist.¹¹

After Pope Paul VI's solemn declaration at the end of the first gathering of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar at Kampala in 1969 that Africans are entitled to an African Christianity, the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar stated, in their preparation for the Synod on Evangelisation in the Modern World in 1974, that they regarded the 'theology of adaptation' as completely outdated. In its place they embraced the 'theology of incarnation'.¹²

But this theory, too, obstructed justice to Africa culture, since truth and goodness in African cultures were related to Christ. As a result a theory was developed which posited that African religions contained truth and goodness independently of Christ. This notion was substantiated in Christian terms on the basis of the work of the Holy Spirit as an independent line running throughout salvation history.¹³

Some missiologists also maintain that the abolition of Africa's indigenous cultures, as practised by the first missionaries to the continent, should now be followed by the abolition of Christianity in Africa and a reversion to 'the ways of the ancestors'. In my view this theory is inadequate and cannot be justified theologically. Still, missiological theory is increasingly accommodating and valuing African cultures and the missionary movement, itself an age-old catalyst of universality and uniformity, is coming to appreciate the particularity of Africa and Africans. This transition occurred at a time when anthropologists were still speaking about Africans in semi-evolutionist terms. Okot p'Bitek recalls:

I first met a number of Western scholars at Oxford University in 1960. During the very first lecture in the Institute of Social Anthropology, the teacher kept referring to Africans or non-Western peoples as barbarians, savages, primitives, tribes, etc. I protested; but to no avail. All the professors and lecturers in the

institute, and those who came from outside to read papers, spoke the same insulting language.¹⁴

In this respect Dutch people can learn a lot from missionaries and missiologists. For in everyday speech 'non-Western' and 'African' often still connote 'barbarian' or 'primitive', as witness the horror stories that keep cropping up. Recently it was suggested that the 'young girl of Nulde' might have been the victim of ritual murder, which, according to a police spokesperson, is 'quite customary in Africa'. This actually led to the dispatch of a research team to Africa.¹⁵

3. From inculturation to interculturalism

In missiological terms we are dealing with the problem of inculturation, a term derived from the anthropological concept of acculturation which takes us to the border area between missiology and anthropology. Missiological literature on inculturation distinguishes between two aspects: the indigenisation of Christianity, and the insertion of the missionary in the local culture, which may be rendered more aptly by the anthropological concept of inculturation.¹⁶

Many missionaries have first hand experience of what it means to live in another culture; most have had to learn wisdom the hard way; some were trained for it in missionary induction centres for the study of languages and culture. Missionaries have also contributed greatly to the study and preservation of cultures and languages, a point made by Lamin Sanneh when he described mission as a translation movement.¹⁷ It is not surprising, then, that missionaries who have returned to The Netherlands are often to be found in places where large numbers of foreigners and refugees congregate, that they exert themselves on behalf of asylum seekers who have been turned down or migrant women who have been commodified.

Missiology abounds in theories on the question whether, and if so, how and how far, missionaries can and should adapt to local cultures.¹⁸ Missiology anthropology in particular dwells on such issues, encouraged by such agencies as Missionaries of the Divine Word and the Anthropos Institute.¹⁹ The American journal *Missiology* still carries the subtitle, 'continuing practical anthropology' and the renowned German *Zeitschrift für Missions — und Religionswissenschaft* retains this title to this day, even though elsewhere missiology and religious studies have long been separated.

Gradually missiologists have come to realise that in the missionary enterprise there are no senders and recipients of messages, only participants in a process, hence that inculturation is an interactive affair. This led Joseph Blomjous, former Bishop of Mwanza in Sukumaland, to speak of 'interculturalism' rather than inculturation, a term which, alas, has not (yet) found its way into missiological discussions.²⁰

While the principle of reciprocity may be commonly accepted in the theory of intercultural communication, that has certainly not happened in practice in multicultural society in The Netherlands. In fact, the prime grievance of African migrants against European societies is that the 'integration' required of them actually amounts to 'adaption'.²¹ Missionaries who have learnt from the errors of the past are increasingly emphasising that communication between Africans and Europeans is a two-way traffic, not propaganda but dialogue.

The paradigm of 'mutual missionary assistance' is rapidly making way for the paradigm of 'reverse mission', though we should guard against simply putting up a one-way traffic sign the other way round. As far back as 1974 Richard Friedli (former missionary in Rwanda) said in his reflection on the phenomenon of cultural circulation that the evangelisation of non-Christians by Christians should be amplified by evangelisation of Christians by non-Christians.²²

4. All religion is inculturated

Missionaries are often amazed at the ease with which people in The Netherlands speak about interreligious dialogue when they have seldom if ever met a person of another faith in the flesh. Missionaries who have lived and worked in countries like Nigeria and the Sudan for lengthy periods know that the encounter between cultures and religions is complex and that in practice it is often more a matter of confrontation than of dialogue or cooperation.

In the first place we rarely deal directly with people of other faiths. Interreligious dialogue, in The Netherlands and elsewhere — apart from the discussions of religious specialists — is conducted with unskilled farm workers, Berbers, peasant farmers, migrants, refugees. We sometimes act as if people were believers first and foremost, but in most cases this does not apply. To most people religion is not something they do but something they are. That is why folk religion — which in the case of, for instance, Islam is based on local custom rather than on the *shari'a* — is so important and why apparently 'religious' conflicts often have little to do with religion.

Missiologists have discovered that religion is always inculturated or, as anthropologists put it, that religion is a cultural system. Although the chair I now occupy carries the specific rider of 'theology of interreligious dialogue', I prefer to speak of intercultural religious dialogue.²³ It should also be noted that 'religion' is a Western concept, based on a division between the secular and sacred domains. To most people in Africa, and in the world for that matter, this is not the case. To them the material and the spiritual are one, something which 'modern' Europeans manifestly find hard to grasp, considering the debate on secularisation.²⁴

It is an illusion to think that if one strips away all the cultural overlays, one will be left with pure religion and that this will enable one to compile a list of key concepts of religion that can then be operationalised and measured by means of questionnaire research. This is not to deny — on the contrary, it is roundly accepted — that religions and cultures have certain essential characteristics. But these are always *spatiotemporally* determined, or they become so generalised as to be practically meaningless. This is in fact the problem with the *Projekt Welthethos* and the human rights debate.²⁵

There is another reason why the conjunction of the teaching tasks of missiology and the theology of interreligious dialogue needs clarification. In certain settings it is better not to use the word 'mission'. Certainly the qualification, 'more particularly dialogue between Christianity and Islam', which appeared in the advertisement for the vacancy for a professor of missiology, is extremely loaded. While some Muslims are still prepared to consider dialogue, mission is of the devil.

Does that mean that we should forget the word 'mission' and replace it with something else — development, liberation, dialogue, presence — as did sometimes happen in the past? Personally I see no need for this. If businesses, universities, NGOs and governments can refer to their 'mission', why can churches not do the same? Besides, over time every alternative comes up against the same objections.

I also think that Catholic doctrine on dialogue is often misconstrued. Mission and dialogue are different things, as Pope John Paul II and Francis, Cardinal Arinze, Prefect of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, repeatedly insisted. Mission is preeminently witness, accounting for the hope that is in you (I Pt 3:15). Dialogue is aimed at understanding and cooperating with others.²⁶ The distinctive quality of mission is in fact that it maintains the tension between full commitment to one's own faith and complete openness to the faith of others.

In the present-day pluralistic society, each religion must evangelize as if it were the only carrier of the only fully-saving revelation, as indeed it is for those predestined (through the peculiar circumstances of their birth, history and idiosyncrasy) to be saved through that Way. However, in its continuing dialogue and cooperation with other religions, every religion must acknowledge and accept the claim of uniqueness and ultimacy or finality in every other genuine religion.²⁷

5. No dialogue without liberation

The reference to interreligious dialogue needs one further clarification. Since the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001, calls for interreligious encounter in The Netherlands have increased. After being marginalised as socially irrelevant

in earlier social democratic and liberal cabinets, religion is suddenly the centre of political interest. "No integration without religion" and "religion as cement" have become slogans overnight. The prime minister and mayors visit mosques and the minister of metropolitan and integration policy is organising interreligious conferences. While these initiatives are estimable, they should not be overrated.

In the 1960s many people thought, on the lines of critical theory and the Frankfurt school, that all problems were economic and political, hence that the solution lay in economic and political progress. That was a reduction. But now many people seem to have gone to the other extreme, maintaining that all problems are cultural and religious.²⁸ What has emerged from most of the wars and conflicts in Africa is that they are not caused by religious and ethnic differences, as is commonly believed, but by a struggle for fertile land, clean water and control over natural resources such as oil, gas, diamonds, gold and tropical hardwood.²⁹

What the events of 11 September 2001 and subsequent developments have made clear is that there is widespread protest against Western expansionism in the world. This was pointed out long ago by Max Warren, former missionary in Nigeria, in his introduction to John Taylor's *The Primal Vision*,³⁰ but it is obviously hard for Westerners to understand. The 'global coalition against terror' certainly does not mean that the world has suddenly embraced the Western notions of human beings and society. Anybody who engages in intercultural and interreligious dialogue knows that in this regard 'the West' is often diametrically opposed to 'the Rest'. Africans like to remind their European dialogue partners of the history of slavery, imperialism and colonialism. "You brought the Bible but you took our country". Intercultural religious communication alone cannot resolve the conflicts.³¹

Mission, then, cannot confine itself to the problem of pluralism, but must always consider the problem of poverty as well. This implies, furthermore, that a theology of interreligious dialogue cannot exist without a theology of integral liberation. That is what African theologians mean when they advocate a theology of reconstruction which does away with the Western distinction between inculturation and liberation.³² In terms of such a 'comprehensive approach' (a concept from Anglo-Saxon mission of the 1920s) it is extremely unwise to banish liberation theology from the curricula of theological faculties as 'no longer applicable' and replace it with intercultural and interreligious theology.

6. From technique to hermeneutics?

It has been the experience of many missionaries that the longer you live in another culture and the more you learn about it, the less you understand it.

Unlike tourists and businesspeople, who often conclude, from a very superficial knowledge of the other culture, that it is much the same as their own culture, missionaries know that it is very different. Hence at the moment missiological reflection on the experience of missionaries is contributing greatly to an intercultural hermeneutics.

Anthropologists generally accept these days that human potential is universal, which is not to say that all people are the same. One cannot deny that notions about people and society and ways of consorting with others differ, as scholars like Geert Hofstede and David Pinto have shown, even though one cannot treat their dichotomies as absolute.³³ But the main difference lies in the style of reasoning. Africans are constantly pointing out to their European dialogue partners that African rationality differs from Western rationality and that the Aristotelian 'principle of contradiction' and Cartesian 'pure concepts' are too easily universalised.³⁴

It is against this notion that 'all people are like us' that many Africans in The Netherlands are objecting. And it is on the same grounds that African theologians have problems with 'universal', 'global' and 'cross-cultural' theology, because they harmonise the differences between people.³⁵ They, together with many missionaries, defend the 'right to be different'. Hence intercultural hermeneutics is a balance between universality and particularity. In this regard missiology stresses the differentness of people and views every claim to universality with a hermeneutics of suspicion, whether the claim is that of central doctrinal authority or of modern rationality.³⁶

What we have here is a paradigm shift in missionary and missiological thinking. Many missionaries working abroad today were still trained in a missiology that was firmly convinced of the malleability of the world. This applies to both the evangelical movement and liberation theology. In Africa and elsewhere there arose a missionary science of liberation operating on the borderline between missiology and pedagogics.³⁷ Given the right techniques, 'the world' could be improved. Recent experience has taught that the world has not improved.

For a long time mission was understood mainly in terms of communication and the science of communication was embraced as a major ancillary science of missiology. Given the right packaging of the contents and using the correct channels, the 'message' was sure to reach the 'recipient'.³⁸ Studies of and reflections on intercultural and interreligious dialogue have revealed a 'communication crisis'. It is to the credit of Theo Sundermeier (former missionary in South Africa) that he made this point and advocated the return of hermeneutics to missiology.³⁹

Like Heinrich Balz (former missionary in Cameroon, now in Tanzania) and Richard Friedli, I believe that the return of hermeneutics should not be exaggerated and that hermeneutics can find a place

in a broader conception of communication science. After all, mission is not just a matter of understanding the other but also of transmitting the faith.⁴⁰ Communication relates to faith from the perspective of the sender, hermeneutics relates to faith from the perspective of the recipient. As mentioned already, however, communication is not concerned with senders and recipients but with participants in a process. Hence communication and hermeneutics refer to two sides of the same coin.⁴¹

7. Integration or adaptation?

It remains a question whether, and if so, for how long migrants can and may maintain their 'differentness' in their new environment. Here there are diverse theories. One is that migrants worldwide need three generations to adapt. The first generation maintains the values and norms of their country of origin; the second generation lives in two worlds; and the third has largely adapted to their new country. Another theory is that adaptation starts with a phase of confusion, followed by a spell of acculturation, whereafter there is a swing back to earlier norms and values.

From missiological research into the position of African Christians in The Netherlands we know that both theories contain some truth, and that it matters a great deal which group is under discussion, in which place and at what time. Are we talking about Cape Verdians in Rotterdam, Ghanaians in Amsterdam, or Somalis — at present the fastest growing group of migrants in The Netherlands — here in the east of the country? Apart from the size of the group and the duration of their residence, religion is another important factor, something that is often overlooked in studies of new migrants in The Netherlands. Cape Verdians and Ghanaians are usually Christians. They prefer to present themselves as such. By so doing they want to promote their integration (without forfeiting their identity) into Dutch society. But the Dutch see them as primarily African, thus stigmatising them and keeping them at arm's length. In reaction to this condemnatory attitude on the part of the Dutch, and not out of choice, African Christians isolate themselves in their own communities.⁴²

Studies based on extensive field research contradict each other on fundamental points, for example the research into the integration and secularisation of migrants, especially Islamic youths. For this reason many missiologists have serious problems with quantitative studies of migrants in The Netherlands and their religious experience. Often these studies are so general that they no longer come to grips with anything and hence contradict each other when it comes to concrete issues.⁴³ It is only through solidarity in a common cause, the abundance of life (Jn 10:10), that one gains the kind of knowledge that

missiology is about. That is why missiology prefers presence and participation to observation and intervention. That is also why missiologists have problems with the methodological atheism or agnosticism in (religious) anthropology.

Many Africans in The Netherlands ask themselves despairingly what the Dutch expect of them when they say that 'foreigners' have to integrate. In effect integration usually means adaptation. This exposes the much vaunted 'tolerance' of the Dutch to criticism. Recently it has been stated by various candidates of political parties — albeit in the heat of their election campaigns — that the Dutch are 'far too tolerant'. Several studies, including ones conducted at this university, call such statements into question.⁴⁴ The same candidates also hold that foreigners simply have to adapt to our way of life. This is strongly reminiscent of the combatting of maladjusted behaviour of antisocial and socially deficient families and their religious upliftment in 'social planning' and 'folk missions' in the 1950s. Of course, these 'folk missions' did have the advantage that they took the religious factor seriously, something which has disappeared from modern welfare work, with the result that it fails to strike a chord with many Africans in The Netherlands.⁴⁵

Missionaries who have worked in Africa can teach us a great deal in this regard. They have seen that people can cooperate very well even though they do not agree in every respect. Of course Africa is not paradise and is having its share of bloody conflicts. But these conflicts are not caused by ethnic and religious differences, as is commonly thought. In fact, there are signs pointing the other way: the greater the ethnic and religious diversity in a country, the smaller the chance of conflict. 'Integration without loss of identity' is perfectly feasible.⁴⁶

8. There is no 'culture in between'

As we all know, anthropologists and missionaries had and still have a love-hate relationship.⁴⁷ Hence it is remarkable to see anthropologists starting to behave like a new kind of missionary. Thus Wim van Binsbergen sees himself as a bridge builder between cultural orientations and advocates a 'metaculture'. Wouter van Beek, again, advocates a 'culture in between'.⁴⁸

By and large there are four strategies for dealing with inculturation. Some missionaries continue to identify with home and adhere rigidly to their familiar norms and values. Others try to 'go native' by identifying with the culture of the country where they are working. Yet others go for a dual identification, taking the best from their own culture and the best of African culture. Finally there are missionaries who identify with neither of the two cultures, thus creating a kind of cultural no-man's land.

I have seen many missionaries who have gone native, but this is not what their African dialogue partners expect of them. 'Why do you make fun of us?', they say when they see a European walking around in sandals made

from old car tyres or living in a mud hut. Missionaries who adhere rigidly to their own values and norms will get along well with Africans with 'white hearts', but they never manage to get intercultural communication going. What they end up with is monologue rather than dialogue. The attitude of settling for the trouble-free zone of a cultural no-man's land is considered untrustworthy, neither fish, flesh nor good red herring. Only a few missionaries have been tempted to adopt Jürgen Habermas' theory of exchanging perspectives, in which the I-perspective and the you-perspective converge in a he-perspective, a theory which was hailed as a panacea in early forms of dialogic catechesis.

The best approach to intercultural (religious) communication is a dual identification: an attitude in which missionaries are not ashamed of having a (religious) culture of their own whose limitations they are aware of, and are able to appreciate what is good and beautiful in Africa and Africans without glorifying all things African.⁴⁹ It strikes me that some anthropologists are too much inclined to put the spiritual traditions of Africa on a pedestal. Missionary participation goes hand in hand with confrontation, as Max Warren aptly put it in his introduction to John Taylor's *The Primal Vision*; and, allowing for the different context, his words apply equally to communication with Africans in The Netherlands:

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. We have then to ask what is the authentic religious content in the experience of the Muslim, the Hindu, the Buddhist, or whoever he may be. We may, if we have asked humbly and respectfully, still reach the conclusion that our brothers have started from a false premise and reached a faulty conclusion. But we must not arrive at our judgement from outside their religious situation.⁵⁰

9. A moderate constructivism

Some anthropologists have said that cultures do not exist. There is a multiplicity of overlapping cultural orientations, with the result that everybody is committed to many orientations, none of which coincide with a particular group or territory, as Wim van Binsbergen put it somewhat provocatively in his inaugural lecture. Cultural orientations are associated with language, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, education, profession and social background. In public life people are situated at the intersection of ever changing cultural orientations with no systematic connection between them. Even in their private lives people have diverse cultural orientations which cannot be integrated. An individual is a fragmented subject. Cultures in a holistic sense are simply an illusion of the participants.⁵¹

I persist in using the terms 'culture' and 'cultural identity', not only because I do not think that dispensing with a problematic term will get us much

further, but also because I believe that some anthropologists take constructivism too far. Many ethnic groups in former colonies strive for liberation by invoking practices and notions that anthropologists describe as essentialist. Dismissing these as 'popular' or 'prescientific' knowledge that should make way for a more profound anthropological insight, namely that any talk of cultural identity is a product of construction, an 'illusion of the participants' with no correlate in the real world, is expressive of scientific self-overestimation which is also not very helpful to the emancipatory strivings of subaltern movements. To a Sukuma the statement, "I am a Sukuma", does not refer merely to his or her inner self, but very definitely to an external reality.

Actors in multicultural societies have various identities at their disposal, each with its own cultural orientation. These are perfectly real. They are what Victor Turner calls root paradigms and what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*, a tendency to behave in a particular way.⁵² A *habitus* is inculcated by education and training, is more or less stable and structured and, up to a point, corporeal. But it depends on the specific time and place, what Bourdieu calls 'the market', which mix of cultural orientations is selected to interpret experience and generate behaviour.

Radical constructivism also ignores the dialectic relation between reality and representation, as Pierre Bourdieu shows in his debunking of 'objective science'. Classifications produce differences and are themselves products of differentiation. Calling the language Sukuma, spoken by people called the Sukuma, and calling the area in which they live Sukumaland was not ineffective. Whereas up to about 1945 the name 'Sukuma' was not used to indicate an ethnic group, there are now eight million people calling themselves Sukuma occupying a territory almost as big as The Netherlands. But the effectiveness of the designation depends on the authority of the people who use it and the extent to which this name for the group corresponds with its reality.⁵³

Epilogue

Van Binsbergen has destroyed several 'sacred cows' of Africanists and anthropologists. In the public debate on 'multicultural drama' and the 'multicultural illusion' Paul Scheffer and Paul Schnabel are doing much the same, by claiming that The Netherlands is far too tolerant and that this tolerance has helped to influence the disadvantaged position of many members of ethnic minorities. They proclaim assimilation as a panacea: down with the ideal of 'integration without forfeiting identity'.

What contribution are missionaries and missiologists who have worked with Africans in Africa making to this debate? There is a false impression that for a theology of dialogue one has to go to Asia

and that Africa has nothing to offer in this field. Africa is the most pluralistic continent on earth and, for all its bloody conflicts in recent times, it has a long tradition of peaceful coexistence.⁵⁴

I have shown that the 'expansionist' paradigm in missiology has gradually made way for a paradigm of 'exploration', modelled on the old missionary ideal of 'pilgrimage to God'. But exploration does not preclude evaluation. Unlike postmodern cultural relativists, missiologists do not hesitate to question norms and values, especially in places where people are being enslaved and human rights are trampled upon. It would seem that in some sectors of society there is a taboo on standing up for one's opinions and, on that basis, judging what cannot be tolerated. In this respect Schnabel and Scheffer are quite right.

But judgements of cultural differences must be based on inside knowledge gained at grassroots level; in the process Africans' anger about European imperialism, past and present, and their desire to be liberated from it, must be taken into account. Participant observation is a method used by both anthropologists and missiologists, but missiologists put more emphasis on participation, including religious participation, than on observation. Those who have striven alongside others and prayed with them for 'abundant life' know that this ideal crystallises in diverse norms and values that simply do not amount to the same thing. This tends to be overlooked by cultural universalists who strive for social consensus and a global ethics. In this respect missiologists remain poised between universalism and particularism, and their preferential option for the poor for now translates into a preferential option for others, for guarding the African-ness of Africa and Africans.

There is still another fundamental question: does cultural particularism also imply moral particularism? I have argued that there is an alternative somewhere between universalism and particularism, namely pluralism. This pluralism is limited by communication, communication in which people not only seek to convert each other but are also prepared to learn from each other and for which the African palaver could serve as a model.⁵⁵ To return to some contentious issues from the election campaigns mentioned earlier in this paper — head scarves, arranged marriages, female circumcision — missiologists insist that there are no simple, uniform answers. In any case the people involved, usually African women, have very different views on the subject. Here, too, the principle of reciprocity, of comment and response, applies.

But there is a more fundamental issue at stake. Many Dutch people choose not to discuss these practices. They are seen merely as assaults on the lessons of modernity, lessons that may, if necessary, be enforced by the judiciary. The criminal case against the Rotterdam imam El-Moumni is a case in point.

Hence the communication between Europeans and Africans that I am speaking about is a battle against modernity, a battle fought not between cultures but within cultures. Ultimately it is a battle about one of the fundamentals of modern society, the separation of rationality and religion. Many Africans, along with many missionaries and missiologists, believe that on this issue Europeans have gone too far. But the matter is still under discussion, also in our faculty, and missiology will be making itself heard.⁵⁶

Endnotes

¹The term multiculturalism was first used in the United States in the early 20th century in contradistinction to the idea of multicultural society as a crucible. In The Netherlands the social debate got under way in 1994 when the then leader of the National Party for Freedom and Democracy, Frits Bolkestein, put the subject of integration without forfeiting identity up for discussion. Within universities the debate has been nourished partly by the brochure 'Multicultural and Pluriform Society in The Netherlands' of The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (The Hague, 1997).

² It is not possible to go into the whole debate on the definition of missiology. You are referred to L. Ramambason, *Missiology: its subject-matter and method. A study of mission-doers in Madagascar*, Frankfurt am Main 1999; F. Verstraelen (ed.), *Oecumenische inleiding in de missiologie*, Kampen 1988, 17-23; D. Bosch, *Transforming mission*, Maryknoll 1991, 8-11; S. Karotemprel (ed.), *Following Christ In Mission*, Nairobi 1995, 21-36; in S. Karotemprel et al., *Promoting mission studies*, Shillong 2000.

³ Cf. A. van den Eerenbeemt, *De missie-actie in Nederland. 1600 - 1940*, Nijmegen 1945; A. Freitag (ed.), *Emigranten voor God: wereldbetekenis van het Nederlandse missiewerk*. Parts 1 and 2, Steijl Tegelen 1949. The number of missionaries abroad is taken from the review, 'Mensen met een missie' of the 'Centraal Missie Commissariaat', 1 August 2000. The number of parish pastors, excluding pastors working in care institutions, is taken from J. Massaar, L. Spruit, 'Kerncijfers uit de kerkelijke statistiek 2000 van het R.K. Kerkgenootschap in Nederland', KASKI memorandum no. 321, October 2001.

⁴ Cf. E. Mveng, *L'Afrique dans l'église*, Paris 1985, 199; L. Magesa, Overview of 100 Years of Catholicism in Kenya, in: *African Ecclesial Review* 32(1990)1, 42-50. Also see A. Ngindu Mushete, *Les thèmes majeurs de la théologie Africaine*, Paris 1989, 102-105.

⁵ Cf. D. Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 214-238; A. Bredero, *De ontkerstening der Middeleeuwen*, Baarn 2000; T. Schäfer, P. Schallenberg, U. Zzelinka (Hg.), *Zur Mission herausgefordert*, Paderborn 1999.

⁶ Cf. A. de JONG, Africans viewed in the missionary mirror, in: *Exchange* 30(2001)1, 49-77. Also see J. Heijke et al., *in elkaars spiegel. Westers Christendom in Afrika*, Baarn 1993.

⁷ Cf. N. de Bekker, *Hand in hand met Afrika*, Tilburg 2000, 35. Similar views can be found in the memoirs of

another Dutch missionary who worked in Sukumaland earlier. Cf. J. Hendriks, *Brieven uit Afrika* [Boxtel 1948], 53, in which he describes mission as (our translation) "getting the heathen to cross from darkness into Light".

⁸ Cf. P. Tempels, *Bantoe-filosofie*, Antwerp 1946. For arguments for and against Tempels see M. Nkufu Nkemnkia, *African vitality: a step forward in African thinking* Nairobi 1999, 38-106; H. Kimmerle, *Mazungunzo. Dialogen tussen Afrikaanse en Westerse filosofieën*, Amsterdam 1995; T. Sundermeier, *Nur gemeinsam können wir leben. Das Menschenbild schwarzafrikanischer Religionen*, Gütersloh 1988.

⁹ Writing on 15th and 16th century Portuguese mission in the Congo A. Hastings claims that missionaries and Africans communicated on an equal footing. A. Hastings, *The Church in Africa. 1450 - 1950*, Oxford 1994, 73-75; D. Petersen, J. Aallman (eds), *Africans meeting missionaries: rethinking colonial encounters. Journal of Religious History*, 23(1999)1. U. Bitterli, *Die 'Wilden' und die 'Zivilisierten'*, Munich 1976, 106-130, who is highly critical of Western expansionism, is very mild in his judgement of missionaries.

¹⁰ Cf. T. Salemink, *De Afrikaanse mythe*, Kampen 1997. In his scientific appendix (218-226) the author does not ask whether the missionaries' stories correspond with the historical facts of mission in Africa, nor what aims the editors of the missionary journals he studied had in mind.

¹¹ J. Taylor, *The Primal Vision. Christian Presence and African Religion*, London 1963, 113. Also see A. Hastings, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, London 1967, 15-32; A. Shorter, *Priest in the village: experiences of African community*, London 1979, 3; V. Donavan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, Notre Dame 1978; J. Healey, *A Fifth Gospel. The Experience of Black Christian Values*, Maryknoll 1981, 4-5.

¹² Cf. Pope Paul VI, Address at the closing ceremony of the All African Bishops' Symposium, in: *African Ecclesial Review* 11(1969)4, 402-405; Statement of the Bishops of Africa, in: *African Ecclesial Review* 17(1975)1, 56-59.

¹³ Cf. J. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: the Holy Spirit and Christian Mission*, London 1972, 25-41; S. Kibicho, *The Kikuyu Conception of God*, Nashville 1972, 309-324.

¹⁴ O. p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Nairobi 1970, vii. Also see D. Westerlund, The study of African religions in retrospect from 'Westernization' to 'Africanization', in: J. Olupona, S. Nnyang (eds), *Religious plurality in Africa*, Berlin New York 1993, 43-66.

¹⁵ The 'young girl of Nulde' was the name given to a young girl whose torso was found on Nulde beach. She was a victim of crime. Similar stories did the rounds about mummified children's bodies found in The Netherlands, which are said to relate to Nigerian voodoo practices; similarly single minor asylum seekers from Nigeria who end up as prostitutes is attributed to voodoo practices.

¹⁶ By now there is a vast literature on inculturation. You are referred to A. Roest Crolius and T. Nnkeramihigo, *What is so new about inculturation?* Rome 1984; A. Shorter, *Toward a theology of inculturation*, London 1988; J. Waliggo et al., *Inculturation: its meaning and urgency*, Nairobi 1986; A. Gittins (ed.), *Life and death matters: the*

practice of inculturation in Africa, Nettetel 2000.

^{17.} See A. De Jong, *De missionaire opleiding van Nederlandse missionarissen*, Kampen 1995, 96-99. B. Joinet, I am a stranger in my father's house: the insertion of the missionary into a local community, in: *Pastoral Orientation Service*, nn. 8-9, 1972, 17-28 remains a gem. Also noteworthy is the paper 'Adaptation' (1962) that Father Jan Hendriks uses in his course at the Pastoral Formation Centre at Kipalapala, Tanzania. For mission as a translation movement see L. Sanneh, *Translating the message. Missionary impact on culture*, Maryknoll 1989.

^{18.} Cf. E. Nida, *Customs, Culture and Christianity*, London 1954; L. Reed, *Preparing missionaries for intercultural communication*, Pasadena 1985; W. Smally (ed.), *Readings in Missionary Anthropology*, New York 1967; A. Shorter, *African Culture and the Christian Church*, London 1973, and the totally revised edition: *African Culture. An Overview*, Nairobi 1998; Ch. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll 1996; L. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, Maryknoll 1988.

^{19.} Well-known names are Wilhelm Schmidt, founder and later director of the Anthropos Institute, Louis Luzbetak, author of the previously cited book *The Church and Cultures*, the anthropological journal *Anthropos* and the missiological journal *Verbum SVD*. See J. Piepke (ed.), *Anthropology and mission*, Nettetel 1988; H. Bettscheider (ed.), *Reflecting mission, practising mission*, Nettetel 2001.

^{20.} Cf. J. Blomjous, Development in mission thinking and practice 1959-1980: inculturation and intercultural, in: *African Ecclesial Review* 22(1980)6, 293-298. Also see D. Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 455-457; J. Waliggo, *Inculturation*, 12; A. Shorter, *Toward a theology of inculturation*, 13-14.

^{21.} Cf. G. ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise. African Christians in Europe*, Cardiff 1998; G. ter Haar (ed.), *Strangers and sojourners. Religious Communities in the Diaspora*, Leuven 1998; I. van Kessel, N. Tellegen (ed.), *Afrikanen in Nederland*, Leiden - Amsterdam 2000; R. Gerloff (ed.), *Open Space. The African Diaspora in Europe and the Quest for a Human Community*. *International Review of Mission*, No. 354, July 2000.

^{22.} Cf. R. Friedli, *Fremdheit als Heimat: auf dem Suche nach einem Kriterium für den Dialog zwischen den Religionen*, Zürich 1974, 26, 203. With his inversion of the traditional concept of mission Friedli relates closely to the Dutch missiologist J. Hoekendijk, *De kerk binnenste buiten*, Amsterdam 1964. See the warning of G. Collet, *Mission und Kommunikation*, in: *Zeitschrift für Missions- und Religionswissenschaft* 74(1990)1, 1-18.

^{23.} This is also the name of the interdisciplinary workgroup in our faculty in which we research the construction of religious identity through intercultural interaction. See W. Valkenberg, F. Wijzen (eds), *The polemical dialogue: research into dialogue, truth and truthfulness*, Saarbrücken 1997.

^{24.} Cf. B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African ethic beyond the universal claims of Western morality*, New York 2001, 95-102. For holistic thought in Africa see L. Magesa, *African religion: the moral traditions of abundant life*, Maryknoll 1997, 35-76; G. ter Haar, *The spirit of Africa*, London 1992; A. Shorter, *Jesus and*

the witchdoctor, London 1985.

^{25.} Cf. H. Küng, *Projekt Weltethos*, Munich - Zurich 1990; B. Bujo, *The ethical dimension of community: the African model and the dialogue between North and South*, Nairobi 1997, 143-156.

^{26.} In his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* Pope John Paul II acknowledges that God's Spirit is also active in other cultures and religions (No. 28). For this reason alone interreligious dialogue is necessary, which can enrich both parties and which is aimed at mutual growth (No. 56). Also see F. Arinze, *Meeting other believers*, Nairobi 1997; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, in: *Bulletin of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* 26 (1991) 2, 210-250; Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions, attitudes of the Church toward the followers of other religions, in: *Bulletin of the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions* 19 (1984) 2, 126-241.

^{27.} S. Kibicho, The mission of the church of Jesus Christ today from the perspective of the younger churches, in: A. Ngindu Mushete (ed.), *The mission of the church today: reports of the Yaoundé meeting* Kinshasa 1984, 24-25.

^{28.} Cf. S. Huntington, *The dash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order*, New York 1996. He modifies his theory in S. Huntington, L. Harrison (eds.), *Culture matters: how values shape human progress*, New York 2001.

^{29.} Cf. I. Elbadawi, N. Sambanis, Why are there so many civil wars in Africa? Understanding and preventing violent conflict, in: *Journal of African Economies* 9(2000)3, 224-269; M. Klare, *Recourse wars. The new landscape of global conflict*, New York 2001.

^{30.} "What we are called upon to recognize is that in the world of our time there is a widespread revolt against any form of domination by the West," writes M. Warren, General introduction, in: J. Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, 6. For an even earlier view see H. Kraemer, *The Christian message in a non-Christian world*, Edinburgh 1947, 1-30.

^{31.} Cf. Chinweizu, *The West and the rest of us: White predators, Black slaves and the African elite*, Lagos 1987; L. Magesa, "Am I not a Human Being ...", in: *African Ecclesial Review* 34(1992)1, 95-114.

^{32.} See e.g. J. Chipenda, *The church of Africa: towards a theology of reconstruction*, Nairobi 1991; C. Villa-Vicencio, *A theology of reconstruction*, Cambridge 1992; Kä Mana, *Foi Chrétienne, crise africaine et reconstruction de l'Afrique*, Nairobi 1992; J. Mugambi, *From liberation to reconstruction*, Nairobi 1995; M. Getui et al., *Theology of reconstruction*, Nairobi 1999.

^{33.} Cf. G. Hofstede, *Allemaal andersdenkenden: omgaan met cultuurverschillen*, Amsterdam 1991; D. Pinto, *Interculturele communicatie*, Houten 1990; W. Shadid, *Grondslagen van interculturele communicatie*, Houten Diegem 1998.

^{34.} Cf. M. Kirwen, *The missionary and the diviner: contending theologies of Christian and African religions*, Maryknoll 1987; B. Bujo, *The ethical dimension of community*, 225; L. Magesa, *African religion*, 14; M. Nkufu Nkemnkia, *African vitality*, 104-106. Universalists like K. Wiredu, K. Anthony Appiah and P. Houtondji relativise the difference between African and Western philosophies.

^{35.} See e.g. Magesa's criticism of R. Schreiter, *The*

new catholicity. Theology between the global and the local, Maryknoll 1998, in: L. Magesa, The global and the local: an African view, in: M. Amaladoss (ed.), *Globalization and its victims*, Delhi 1999, 188-189.

³⁶. Cf. W. Eggen, R. van Rossum, *Waken bij de eigenheid van de ander: evangelisering in hedendaags perspectief*, Aalsmeer 1992; P. Turkson & F. Wijsen (eds.), *Inculturation. Abide by the otherness of Africa and the Africans*, Kampen 1994.

³⁷. Cf. J. Nyerere, *Education for self-reliance*, Dar-es-Salaam 1967; P. Freire, *Pedagogy in process: the letters to Guinea-Bissau*, New York 1978; E. Mock, *Afrikanische Pedagogik*, Wuppertal - Aachen 1979; A. Hope, S. Timmel, C. Hodzi, *Training for transformation*, Gweru 1985; J. Crowley, *Go to the people*, Eldoret 1985; F. Wambua, *Participation of the poor*, Eldoret 1987; J. Kronenburg, *Empowerment of the poor*, Amsterdam - Nijmegen 1986; D. Kyeyune (ed.), *New trends for the empowerment of the poor*, Nairobi 1997.

³⁸. The Dutch missiologist H. Kraemer was the first scholar to reflect systematically on mission as communication. But it was mainly Eugene Nida and his pupils David Hesselgrave and Charles Kraft who cast this reflection in a technical mould. See H. Kraemer, *The communication of the Christian faith*, Philadelphia 1956; E. Nida, *Message and mission: the communication of the Christian faith*, New York 1960; D. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ cross-culturally*, Grand Rapids 1978; C. Kraft, *Communicating the Gospel in God's way*, Pasadena 1979.

³⁹. Cf. T. Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz: Studien zu einer verstehende Missionswissenschaft*, Erlangen 1995; id., *Den Fremden verstehen: eine praktische Hermeneutik*, Göttingen 1996; T. Sundermeier, W. Ustorff (Hrg.), *Die Begegnung mit dem Anderen: Plädoyer für eine interkulturelle Hermeneutik*, Gütersloh 1991; D. Becker (Hrsg.), *Mit dem Fremden leben: Perspektiven einer Theologie der Konvivenz*, Erlangen 2000.

⁴⁰. Zie H. Balz, *Theologische Modelle der Kommunikation*, Gütersloh 1978, 98-124; id., *Krise der Kommunikation Wiederkehr der Hermeneutik?*, in: Th. Sundermeier (Hrg.), *Die Begegnung mit dem Anderen*, 39-65, R. Friedli, *Kultur und kulturelle Vielfalt*, in: Th. Sundermeier (Hrg.), *Die Begegnung mit dem Anderen*, 29-38. Also see G. Collet, *Bekehrung, Vergleich, Anerkennung: die Stellung des Anderen im Selbstverständnis der Missionswissenschaft*, in: *Zeitschrift für Missions- und Religionswissenschaft* 77(1993)3, 205-251.

⁴¹. That is why in the department of empirical practical theology at Nijmegen, where the chair of missiology is at present located, we speak of 'hermeneutic communication' as the broad function of ministry. The distinctive feature of missionary communication is that it is always intercultural and interreligious. See J. van der Ven, *Education for reflective ministry*, Louvain 1998, 123 - 132.

⁴². Cf. J. Maaskant, *Afrika en katholiek in Rotterdam*, Nijmegen 1999; F. Wijsen, "Een vreemdeling is twee dagen gast ...". Afrikaanse Katholieken in Nederland en hun uitdaging aan theologie en pastoraat, in: L. Boeve, J. Haers (eds), *God ondergronds*, Averbode 2001, 161-174. Also see J. Cohen, *Grenzen: over de verhouding van autochtonen en*

migranten, Amsterdam 2001.

⁴³. A report of the Social Cultural Planning Bureau, J. Becker, J. de Wit, *Secularisatie in de jaren negentig*, Den Haag 2000, claims that secularisation is also happening among minority groups. In the same year a report of the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations, K. Phalet, C. van Lotringen & H. Entzinger, *Islam in de multiculturele samenleving*, Utrecht 2000, indicates that nearly 100% of Islamic youths call themselves Muslim and that 90% of them attach great value to it. A report of the Verwey-Jonker Institute, also based on research in Rotterdam, claims that migrants are less active religiously and that there are signs of extensive assimilation especially among second generation Turks and Moroccans. See H. van Daal, *Het middenveld als smeltkroes*, Utrecht 2001. The discrepancies in diagnoses and prognoses is partly a result of different definitions of religion and religious institutions.

⁴⁴. Cf. M. Lubbers, *Nationalistic attitudes and ethnic exclusionism in a comparative perspective*, Nijmegen 2001; M. Coenders, *Exclusionistic electorates*, Nijmegen 2001; P. Essed, *Everyday racism*, Claremont 1990; G. Verberk, *Attitudes towards ethnic minorities*, Amsterdam 1999; H. Ghorashi, *Ways to survive, battles to win*, Nijmegen 2001; W. Shadid & P. van Koningsveld (eds), *Beeldvorming en interculturele communicatie*, Tilburg 2000; W. Shadid, P. van Koningsveld (eds), *Religie, cultuur en minderheden*, Tilburg 2000.

⁴⁵. Cf. F. Wijsen, *Geloven bij het leven: missionaire presentie in een volkswijk*, Baarn 1997, 146-148. Also see J. Jacobs et al., Vier ijkpunten geijkt, in: *Trajecta* 10(2001)4, 273-309, especially the contribution by L. Winkeler, Welvaart in zwart-wit, 302-309. For an African conception of welfare work see A. Shorter, *Jesus and the witchdoctor*, 125-136.

⁴⁶. Zie I. Elbadawi & N. Sambanis, *Why are there so many civil wars in Africa?*, 254, 265. That Africans can cooperate even when they are not in agreement is evident in the recently published diaries of two Dutch missionaries: T. Haumann, *Vrede langs het oorlogspad: ontmoetingen in Zuid-Sudan*, Heeswijk, Utrecht 1998; H. Tullemans, *Tussen twee werelden: brieven uit Afrika*, Nijmegen 2002.

⁴⁷. Cf. R. Bensen, H. Marks & J. Miedema (eds), *The ambiguity of rapprochement: reflections of anthropologists on their controversial relationship with missionaries*, Nijmegen 1990; A. Borsboom & J. Kommers (eds), *Anthropologists and the missionary endeavour*, Saarbrücken 2001.

⁴⁸. Cf. Van Binsbergen, "Culturen bestaan niet". *Het onderzoek van interculturaliteit als een openbreken van zelfsprekendheden*, Rotterdam 1999, 34; W. van Beek, The 'culture-in-between'. Anthropologist and missionary as partners, in: R. Bensen et al., *The ambiguity of rapprochement*, 109.

⁴⁹. "Nur wo beides da ist, die tiefe Faszination durch eine andere Religion und die feste Verwurzelung in der eigenen, kommt es zum Verstehen," according to T. Sundermeier, *Was ist Religion?*, Gütersloh 1999, 204-205. W. van Binsbergen struggles with his dual identification. See W. van Binsbergen, *Sangoma in Nederland*, in: M. Elias & R. Reis (eds), *Getuigen ondanks zichzelf*, Maastricht 1998, 14.

⁵⁰. Cf. M. Warren, General Introduction, 10-11. This

typically Anglican approach is inspired by the Frech worker-priests. See A. Lande, W. Ustorf (eds), *Mission in a pluralist world*, Frankfurt am Main 1996, 28.

^{51.} Cf. W. van Binsbergen, "Culturen bestaan niet", 12-14. Also see R. Keesing, Theories of culture revisited, in: R. Borofsky (ed.), *Assessing cultural anthropology*, New York 1994, 301-312; R. Brightman, Forget culture: replacement, transcendence, relexification, in: *Cultural Anthropology* 10(1995)4, 509-546.

^{52.} See V. Turner, *Dramas, fields, metaphors*, Ithaca 1974; P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris 1980. A proper balance between structure perspective and actor perspective, of which essentialism and constructivism are reflections is worked out in U. Hannerz, *Cultural complexity: studies in the social organization of meaning*, New York 1992.

^{53.} Cf. P. Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire*, Paris 1992, 135-148; F. Wijsen, R. Tanner, "I am just a Sukuma". *Globalization and identity construction in northwest Tanzania*, Amsterdam - New York 2002. To my mind the famous Africanist Terence Ranger goes too far in his constructivism. See T. Ranger, The invention of tradition in colonial Africa, in: E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (eds), *The invention of tradition*, Cambridge 1983, 216-254; id., The invention of tradition revisited, in: T. Ranger & O. Vaughan (eds), *Legitimacy and State in twentieth-century Africa*, London 1993, 62-111.

^{54.} Cf. C. van 't Leven, Africa's tradition of peaceful co-existence, in: G. Speelman, J. van Lin & D. Mulder (eds), *Muslims and Christians in Europe*, Kampen 1993, 14-27; A. Byaruhanga Akiiki, African traditional values for human development, in: J. Agbasiere & B. Zabajungu (eds), *Church contribution to integral development*, Eldoret 1989, 45-62; J. Olupona et al., *Religious plurality in Africa*.

^{55.} Cf. B. Bujo, *Foundations of an African ethic*, 45-71. An example of such a communication is M. Kirwen, *The missionary and the diviner*. For the debate on particularism and religion see G. ter Haar, *Rats, cockroaches and people like us*, Den Haag 2000; A. de Jong (ed.), *Ethnicity: blessing or curse?*, Nairobi 1999.

^{56.} To people like Paul Cliteur and Pim Fortuyn 'Yemenisation' and 'Islamisation' constitute a threat to 'modern' society. See P. Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur*, Utrecht 1997; P. Cliteur, Jemen in Nederland, in: P. Cliteur & V. van den Eeckhout (eds), *Multiculturalisme, cultuurrelativisme en sociale cohesie*, Den Haag 2001, 17-64. For a missiological reflection on miscommunication see L. Hoedemaker, Reflecties over contextualiteit, in: L. Hoedemaker (ed.), *Theologiseren in context*, Kampen 1997, 263-319.

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“Leadership in the Church,,

- Bishop William Friend -

Bishop William Friend of Shreveport gave the following address to the Annual Diocesan Education/Catechetical Leadership Institute, on 4 December 2002, in Baltimore, Md.

“There is no more powerful engine driving a ministry or organization toward excellence, and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile and achievable vision of the future, widely shared”.

Leadership plays an essential role in any Christian community. Effective leadership helps to call forth the God-given charisms of believers. It helps believers to coordinate their activities, and to integrate what they do with the life and teachings of the Church.

You have been called recently to serve as a leader in the Church. I congratulate you. I feel privileged to have been asked to share with you a few reflections on leadership and the diversity which exists in today’s Church.

Given the time allotted, I will approach our topic by touching briefly on leadership from the theological, pastoral and practical perspectives.

Theological Reflections

The overriding doctrinal principle of leadership in the Church is founded in the fact that the Church is a *communio*,¹ the People of God.

It is through Baptism that people are formed in the likeness of Christ² and incorporated into the one body of Christ.³ Through this same sacrament, and strengthened by confirmation,⁴ we are also incorporated into the Church as members of the People of God.⁵ In addition to the juridical aspects of baptism, i.e., incorporation, there exists the even more important dimension of faith in Christ.⁶

It is by incorporation into Christ and into his Church that the faithful share in the threefold mission of Christ’s priestly, prophetic and kingly office.⁷ A particular mission flows from this reality, i.e., to bear witness to Christ everywhere, to teach and to give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them⁸ and to serve others. In other words, all the faithful share in the mission of the Church by helping to proclaim the Good News of salvation by building community in the Holy Spirit, by offering service (ministry) to people in the church and outside the church, and by worshipping God.⁹

Everyone shares in the responsibility of putting this mission into action. The art of leadership is “liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible”.¹⁰

At times in the biblical stories of Israel and the early church, leadership exercised a legitimate conserving function, e.g. Solomon, Ezra and Nehemiah. The more expansive voices are also heard, such as in Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah, for example.

The Gospels portray Jesus not as an agent of stability but rather as an explosive prophetic presence who calls his people to new visions of God and humanity.

This spirit is caught by the Apostles and early Disciples, as for example Peter shedding his caution to receive Cornelius (Acts 10) or as witnessed in the revolutionary mission of St Paul or in the calling of the first seven deacons.

The New Testament questions for leaders and ministers are: What kind of virtues should a person with church responsibility possess? How should a leader/minister reflect the general mystery and mission of Christ and the church? And how can a person avoid focusing attention on authority, wealth, power, honour and trivia?¹¹

Challenges to Catholic leadership today

Today, Church leadership is still hierarchical theologically, legally, structurally and functionally. At the same time, however, we must observe that a recent trend, post Vatican II, has been to operate this model in a consultative and interactive mode. We are still in the process of learning how to live out this dimension of church leadership and life better.

In the year 1999 the Church in America was asked for “a commitment not to a re-evangelization but to a new evangelization — new in ardour, methods and expression”.¹² I wonder what kind of leadership style

will accomplish this mission best. This new invitation to evangelization will need, in the words of Pope John Paul II, to be “a clearly conceived, serious and well-organized effort to evangelize culture”. Addressing such a need will require imaginative and effective leadership. It seems that the constant in the church’s ministry of leadership has always been found to be in specific, historically changing forms. We will in our times all have to adjust our leadership approaches in order to remain effective and helpful. The diverse and ever-changing cultural phenomena will demand such change for the purpose of introducing a more successful evangelization.

We need to remember that evangelizing culture was addressed clearly in the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et Spes*) when the church recognized that a dramatic gap had established itself between the church and culture. As a result of this recognition, the Council committed the whole Church to listen to people of the day in order to understand them and to invent a new kind of dialogue which would permit the originality of the Gospel message to be carried to the heart of contemporary mentalities. Indeed, leaders today are asked to rediscover the apostolic creativity and the prophetic power of the first Disciples in order to face contemporary cultures.

Leadership and effective evangelization must, therefore, adopt resolutely an attitude of exchange and of comprehension in order to sympathize with the cultural identity of nationalities, of ethnic groups and of varied sectors of modern societies. Moreover, it is necessary to work for a greater closeness between cultures so that the universal values of people will be accepted everywhere in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity.¹³

As a leader for today, you will encounter massive accelerated change, a diversity of cultures, high expectations of Church members and an ever-continuing challenge regarding resources, both human and financial. External to the life of the church you will be challenged by a rhythm of life, or culture, which could be called the power of *now*. This power of now is an intense energy of an unconditional present, a present uncompromised by any other dimension of time.¹⁴ In this phenomenon, people’s lives cease to be what they once were, not so much because life itself has changed but because the way people see it has. The power of now replaces the long term with the short term, duration with immediacy, permanence with transience, memory with sensation and insight with impulse. Wisdom loses out to information unreflected, uncritiqued and undervalued.

Unlike the desert mystics, who once attained a transcendent perspective by withdrawing from the world, today’s realm of here and now is an environment of pervasive sensory stimulation and swift flux, a continuous altered cosmos that offers no fixed horizon.¹⁵

Our contemporary challenges intensify when we

realize that religion is rooted in the past as well as in the present. It directs the individual to a set of beliefs, ethical standards and ritual practices hallowed by history, and invites individuals to have their behaviour conform to teachings and praxis. In the now society’s electronic eyes, no truth is eternal and unchanging. The now culture deals not in commitment but in sensation; not in eternity or the “yet to be”, but in evanescence, the ephemeral.

Effective Church leadership

Given the emerging cultural trends which emphasize the now, the global, the self and material products, what can effective Church leadership do to become more effective?

There are many different ways to become more effective in leadership for today and tomorrow. One of my favourite authors who writes on leadership, Max DePree,¹⁶ makes the point that leadership is more a weaving of relationships than an amassing of information.

Today’s effective Christian leaders endorse a concept of persons. They begin with an understanding of the diversity of people’s gift, talents and skill. People need to be seen as valued, needed, and included in such a way that they begin to think about surrendering some of their autonomy to the strength of others in order to join in working for the common good of all.

Effective leaders help to develop the connections of gifts and services. They point out opportunity, equity and identity in an organization and in society at large. They show a way to meaning, fulfillment and purpose. They foster understanding about the fundamental differences between a vision (goal) and rewards. Effective leaders help to polish and harmonize people’s gifts.

Writing in concert with Robert Greenleaf’s seminal work, *Servant Leadership*,¹⁷ DePree says that leadership is a concept of owing certain things to the institution and to the people. It is a way of thinking about heirs, a way of thinking about stewardship as contrasted with personal ownership. Leaders owe the institution vital financial health and the relationships and reputation that enable continuity of that health, for example.

Leadership needs to be concerned with a value system that points to the principles and standards which are serving to guide the faithful. This need invites a clear statement of the values of the organization, broadly understood and agreed to so that both corporate and individual types of behaviour can be shared and are accountable.

Leaders work for the development of other emergent and future leaders. Christian leadership is called to expand human life, making power more abundant. Leadership succeeds by nurturing spiritual

growth in, with and through Jesus Christ. This kind of leadership promotes and nourishes stronger bonds of communion, mutual esteem and cordiality in the Church. It is inclusive and comprehensive in what is offered to and with the faithful, i.e., “a communion of life, love and truth” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 9).

There are admittedly all kinds of attitudes about leaders and leadership in the Church. Some who occupy a leadership role see it as a cross to endure, becoming thus the victim of “patient martyrdom”. Others wonder why there have to be leaders at all. They want everything decided by consensus, by ballot or by feelings. Yes, there remain a few top-down tyrants, sometimes benevolent and at other times not so. Among followers there exists a realm of high expectation of the people in leadership positions. They have expectations that can be unreasonable, to say the least. Attitudes about leadership and leaders can truly affect events.

St Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (12:6-8) reminds us that the office of leader for a Christian is a vocation, a gift from the Holy Spirit to be used for the community’s benefit. Admittedly, leadership (*ho proistamenos*, “the one who is at the head” of the community) is listed as the sixth gift, following faith, service, teaching, exhortation and almsgiving. Such a placement in this particular list might tend to keep us a little more humble, but in actuality its placement could be seen as the office for unity that helps coordinate the previously mentioned gifts, and so is listed just before mercy. Paul exhorted and insisted on the ideal of holiness to which all Christians are called and toward which everyone is enabled through the gifts assured by the Holy Spirit. It is interesting to note that Paul acknowledged leadership as one of the gifts (*charismata*) which point to holiness.

Practical aspects of leadership

Joseph C. Rost¹⁸ sees leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes”.

There are four practical notes to this viewpoint that he offers: **1)** The influence is based on relationships which are multidirectional and non-coercive; **2)** leaders and followers are the people (agents) in this relationship in which all participants are active; **3)** leaders and followers intend real changes which are substantive and transforming; **4)** leaders and followers develop mutual purposes. The mutuality of these purposes is forged in the non-coercive influence relationship, and the intended changes effect, not necessarily realize, their purposes.

Serving as a leader you may sometimes wonder about the issue of power. Will you lose power if you empower others to translate intention into reality and sustain them? Power does amount to a unit of

exchange in such an interaction of leader-followers. But the end results amount to the simple action of reciprocal lower, which is empowerment.¹⁹ Besides, our ministry of leadership is rooted in Christ, for whom we serve and by whom we are blessed.

Sometimes Catholic leaders might be tempted to function as transactional leaders rather than transformational. The first, *transactional leaders*, are basically managers who “react to immediate situations and pressures, strike bargains with allies and adversaries, follow limited and short-run goals, and seek to maintain equilibrium in what they wish to achieve. On the other hand, *transforming leaders* serve as moral agents. They elevate and cause people to rise above their narrow interests. Such leaders tap the best motive and power bases of their constituency for that which will enable and empower those they serve to become their better selves in working for a community of trust and common effort.²⁰

One of the more disconcerting realities addresses the measure of leadership. The deepest measure has to do not with the quality of the head but with the tone of the body. Signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving? Do they achieve good results? Do they change with grace? Do they manage conflict gracefully?

The ancient Philosopher Lao-Tse (c. 565 B.C.) observed well the nature of effective leadership when he said:

A leader is best when people barely know he exists.
Not so good, when people obey and acclaim him.
Worse, when they despise him.
But a good leader talks little.
When his work is done,
His aim fulfilled,
They will say, “We did it ourselves”.

Conclusion

During the course of your continued study and evaluation of your leadership role, you will undoubtedly gain many new and helpful insights. Your consideration will have to address a wide range of topics and specialized areas. There are literally hundreds of published works on the topic of leadership that can be of assistance to you.

I suggest one particular priority for your personal consideration, i.e. that the most productive agent to effective leadership in the Church today is the work of developing and sustaining a compelling vision for the ministry to which you have been assigned.

There is no more powerful engine driving a ministry or organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile and achievable vision of the future, widely shared.

A vision, quite simply, is a realistic, credible, attractive future for your ministry or organization. It is your articulation of a destination toward which your organization should aim, a future that in important ways is better of more desirable than in the present state. Vision is a signpost pointing the way for all who need to understand what you and they are about and where you intend to go together. Henry Ford sought to offer an affordable automobile. Steve Jobs sought a desktop computer. What will our ministry's vision be?

The fashioning of a vision requires you to be a concerned listener who reads the signs of the times and learns from people and their experiences. A vision can be little more than an empty dream until it is widely articulated, shared and accepted.

Two authors, James M. Kouzes and Barry M. Posner,²¹ put the value of listening and collective reflection this way:

“Leaders find that common thread that weaves together the fabric of human needs into a colourful tapestry. They seek out the brewing consensus among those they would lead. In order to do this, they develop a deep understanding of the collective yearnings. They listen carefully for whispering in dark corners. They attend to the subtle cues. They sniff the air to get the scent. They watch the faces. They get a sense of what people want, what they value, what they dream about”.

Effective Church leaders are “results oriented” while at the same time they remain open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit dynamically present and active among the faithful. Often leaders ask the questions no one else thinks to ask. They search for what it is that people do not know about a certain issue, project, programme, or understanding. Leaders help to formulate the question that initiates a dream, a vision capable of leading to action. One might say leaders are pioneers in that they are willing to risk and venture into unexplored territory. They risk guiding others beyond the usual and the routine maintenance activities of living to new and often unfamiliar destinations. Yes, leaders call others to move and to open up into what God calls for in the way of action. Warren Bennis (1989) says that, “leaders master the context rather than surrender to it”.

Winston Churchill observed, “It is no use saying ‘we are doing our best’, you have got to succeed in doing what it is necessary”. It is necessary for you as a Church leader to fashion a vision for the people whom you serve and to communicate interactively with them. This twofold dynamic will lead to shared purpose. Shared purpose added to empowered people, added to appropriate organizational changes and strategic thinking

amount to successful visionary leadership.

“Leadership”, according to James MacGregor Burns,²² can act as an inciting and triggering force in the conversion of competing demands, values and goods into significant behaviour” for what is good, truthful and beautiful in life.

You have the privilege of being invited to be a leader. May you be a leader after the heart of Christ, acting with the Holy Spirit and doing all for God.

Footnotes

¹ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 13.

² *Ibid.*, n. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, n. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 10.

⁹ U.S. Bishops, “To Teach as Jesus Did”, 1972, 14.

¹⁰ Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art*, New York, Dell Publishing, 1989.

¹¹ Quentin Quesnell, SJ, 1971.

¹² Pope John Paul II, “*Ecclesia in America*”, 1999, n. 6.

¹³ Pope John Paul II Decree Establishing Pontifical Council for Culture, 1982.

¹⁴ Stephen Bertman, *Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishing, 1998).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, DePree.

¹⁷ Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York, Paulist Press, 1977).

¹⁸ Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, (New York, Praeger Publishing, 1991).

¹⁹ Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders* (New York, Harper and Row Publishing, 1985).

²⁰ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York, Harper and Row Publishing, 1979).

²¹ James A. Kouzes and Barry M. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1987).

²² *Op. cit.*, Burns.

Ref.: *Origins*, 9 January 2003, Vol. 32, n. 30, pp. 490- 494.

“L’Église sur le route de l’exil en Afrique noire ,, Repenser la pastorale de la mobilité humaine ?

- Emmanuel Bueya bu Makaya, SJ -

Introduction

Les statistiques précises ou inexactes sur le nombre de réfugiés dans le monde attestent que l’Afrique détient le record le plus élevé. Le rapport annuel de JRS (*Jesuit Refugee Service*) de l’année 2001 recense les réfugiés et les déplacés internes dans différents pays africains. Il y est écrit par exemple que la Zambie héberge 258.000 réfugiés et l’Angola détient 3 millions de déplacés internes. Ces chiffres montrent que le phénomène de mobilité humaine n’est pas un fait divers dans la condition humaine en Afrique ; il semble devenir permanent et structurel à cause de plusieurs facteurs politiques, économiques, idéologiques, culturels internes et externes au continent.¹ Confrontée à ce drame, l’Église voit sa configuration se modifier. Elle est invitée à élaborer une nouvelle pastorale pour ces chrétiens parqués hors des cadres normaux de la vie ecclésiale. Car, comme le rappelle Jean-Marc Ela, «l’Église ne se définit pas à partir des questions cléricales, mais dans sa relation dynamique à des situations décisives de l’existence où les hommes pensent, luttent et rêvent».² Avec l’appui de la Commission Pontificale pour les déplacés, les touristes et les exilés, les responsables de l’Église en Afrique ont réfléchi et produit des textes sur les modes de présence ecclésiale efficiente dans les espaces de vie aléatoires des réfugiés.

Pourtant, en marge de ces textes officiels, la réalité se passe autrement. La présente réflexion a été suscitée par cet écart observé durant notre séjour dans le camp des réfugiés de Tongogara au Zimbabwe. Nous avons constaté, pendant presque tout le mois de juin, la relative absence d’activité ecclésiale ; plus spécifiquement les réfugiés du camp ne reçoivent pas régulièrement les sacrements, plus précisément l’Eucharistie.³ Toutes proportions gardées, cette situation semble être générale dans tous les camps. Dans la fournaise de ces campements de fortune, quelle peut bien être la dynamique de la vie chrétienne de ces hommes et femmes exilés hors de leur village ou ville, hors de leur Eglise locale et hors de leur culture ? Dans la déréliction de ce déracinement violent, comment vivre l’éthique chrétienne et affirmer sa foi en un Dieu d’Amour et de Providence ? Ce genre de question vrille la conscience de ces chrétiens ainsi abandonnés à leur triste sort et amène à s’interroger

sur le genre approprié de pastorale pour la mobilité humaine sévissant en Afrique Noire.

Le texte comprend trois parties. La première est une description générale de la tragédie des réfugiés faite d’errance, de dénuement et de détresse spirituelle. La seconde est une relecture de quelques propositions de réponse de l’Église africaine à ce défi de l’insécurité ontologique (perte du sens de la vie, présence-absence de Dieu, incertitude de l’avenir, écroulement de l’univers des valeurs, des symboles, de la foi, etc.). La dernière partie est une proposition spéculative sur la théologie de la souffrance de l’homme confronté au silence de Dieu.

Le drame de l’errance et l’urgence de l’assistance spirituelle

Sur les routes de l’Exil

Durant notre stage pastoral (*Pastoral Fieldwork*) au camp des réfugiés de Tongogara, nous avons eu des rencontres parfois pathétiques avec les réfugiés. Au cours de ces rencontres, nous avons entendu maints récits sur les circonstances de déplacement. En dépit de la diversité des motifs de ce départ précipité, il y a un point commun : ils ont fui le pays à cause de l’insécurité. Certes les raisons économiques et les causes naturelles peuvent justifier ou expliquer la migration des peuples infortunés. Cependant les hommes et les femmes auprès de qui nous avons séjourné à Tongogara viennent pour la plupart du Rwanda, du Burundi, de la République Démocratique du Congo, de l’Angola, du Congo-Brazzaville. La plupart de ces pays ne connaissent pas la paix à cause des rivalités ethniques et des conflits politiques qui dégénèrent en guerre. Dans l’ambiance infernale de pillage et de massacre, ils quittent précipitamment leur ville ou leur village pour chercher refuge ailleurs. Beaucoup partent avec des souvenirs hallucinants : ils ont vu leur maison et tous leurs biens incendiés ; elles ont vu les soldats tuer leur mari et leurs enfants... Ils partent les yeux brûlés par tant de cauchemars et le coeur ployant sous le fardeau du malheur. Au cours de leur fuite, ils tentent d’échapper à des soldats cruels et presque bestiaux ; ils dorment dans la forêt, exposés à toutes les intempéries, anxieux et incertains du lendemain. Lorsqu’ils atteignent le pays de refuge, ils

sont placés dans le camp pour une durée indéterminée.⁴ Ils reçoivent la bêche pour dresser leur tente (ou carrément ils occupent la maison comme à Tongogara), puis bénéficient de couvertures, de couverts et de marmites. L'assistance médicale ne manque pas. Bref, il existe des structures d'accueil et d'assistance permanente mises sur pied par des organismes internationaux lesquels, avec l'hospitalité plus ou moins forcée des autochtones, offrent aux réfugiés les moyens pouvant rendre l'espace vital plus clément que le milieu de provenance à feu et à sang.

Pourtant ces structures les maintiennent dans la vulnérabilité et les incitent à monnayer de quelque façon les services auxquels ils ont droit. Ainsi s'expliquent les harcèlements et les abus sexuels qui font alors du camp un terroir d'immoralité ou d'amoralisme ; aucune éthique, aucune ambiance religieuse ni règles juridiques ne norment cette vie sociale désormais clochardisante. Tous tentent de survivre pour échapper à l'insécurité ontologique, physique, psychologique, sociale, matérielle (la faim, le froid, la maladie, la mort). On voit donc que l'assistance matérielle semble être une priorité qui non seulement crée d'autres problèmes⁵ mais surtout occulte certains besoins profonds (traumatisme psychologique, sécheresse spirituelle, ténèbres de foi, etc.). Mis à part les maux engendrés par le fonctionnement et dysfonctionnement de ces structures, on pourrait croire, à première vue, que la vie dans le camp semble plus ou moins heureuse. Cependant dans les familles, chaque personne porte dans le secret de son cœur le poids de sa détresse humaine. Telle maman souffre d'hypertension à force de ruminer les souvenirs douloureux du décès de son mari et de ses enfants. Telle fille est seule : elle n'a aucune nouvelle de ses parents ni des membres de sa famine élargie. Sur la route d'exil, elle a été prise en otage par une bande des militaires qui en ont fait une esclave sexuelle. Miraculeusement sauvée, elle tente d'oublier ce cauchemar qui a brisé sa vie affective. Tel jeune homme n'a plus aucun support familial ; souvent on le rencontre ivre ou hors de lui. Il souffre de rester seul dans un monde par conséquent dépeuplé. Ainsi tous et chacun portent le drame de la violence subie et ne cessent de se questionner *'pourquoi moi', 'qu'est-ce que j'ai fait à Dieu pour subir pareil sort ?'* Dans cette situation de déroute et d'angoisse, le comportement du réfugié semble parfois incompréhensible et inexplicable. Le déracinement et le dénuement matériel, aggravés par les circonstances dramatiques qui l'entourent, traumatisent la personnalité spirituelle et psychologique. Ainsi, c'est parfois un être humain halluciné et hagard qui atterrit au camp. Cette personne traumatisée a alors besoin d'une thérapie psychologique, d'un soutien affectif et d'un accompagnement pastoral où elle essaye

d'accepter ces épreuves. Car face à ces aléas de la vie, la foi en Dieu est soit ballottée soit gelée, le temps de lutter pour s'assurer une stabilité matérielle.⁶

Le silence de Dieu dans la détresse humaine

Il y a une vision de la situation des réfugiés que nous appellerons *'romantisme spirituel'*. Il consiste à interpréter toute la volonté de vivre des réfugiés et des déplacés et leur religiosité comme le signe d'une foi robuste, de l'espoir des jours nouveaux, de la générosité infaillible, bref des vertus chrétiennes à l'œuvre même dans la nuit des souffrances humaines. Cette vision d'âmes généreuses et souvent en quête de miracles, bien que valable, n'exclut pas de prendre en compte le drame qui se déroule dans le phénomène complexe de la mobilité humaine.

Nous avons évoqué le cas des réfugiés qui ont fui leur terre dévastée en laissant derrière eux des êtres chers tués, sans avoir eu la consolation de les pleurer et de les enterrer décentement. Ces souvenirs douloureux hantent leur mémoire et les silhouettes de ces disparus tourbillonnent en fantômes squelettiques dans les nuits tourmentées de ces personnes inconsolables. A celles-ci, le Dieu d'amour paraît si loin et le soleil radieux qui se lève chaque matin ne vient que pour prolonger leur agonie interminable. On a beau évoquer des messages de consolation, des paroles de paix, de confiance et d'espérance, l'âme perforée de part en part, exhale la douleur bien semblable à l'agonie de Golgotha.

Dans les situations pareilles, non seulement on en vient à penser à la théologie du silence de Dieu développée après Auschwitz et à présent redécouverte après les catastrophes contemporaines mais aussi on réapprend à prier avec Jésus à Gethsemani. Le fils de Dieu sue sang et eau ; il ressent la frayeur et angoisse. Le marteau de l'épreuve brise sa volonté et le néantise à mort. Ce Dieu auquel il a tout fait confiance et qu'il appelait *'Père'*, dans une affection filiale inimitable, s'est retiré. La divinité se cache, dira Ignace de Loyola. Jésus a beau lever les yeux au ciel ; il ne rencontre que nuage et étoile indifférentes. Il a beau chercher consolation auprès de ses apôtres, mais ceux-ci, comme des sacs flasques, dorment d'un sommeil de plomb. Dans cette solitude mortelle et cette dérégulation d'une existence ébranlée, le Messie crie, hurle de terreur et pleure. C'est la prière d'un homme qui finit sa vie apparemment dans l'échec total. Abandonné de tous, menacé par la haine abjecte d'une populace à qui il n'a fait que du bien.

Le mystère de cette iniquité de la race humaine n'est pas l'enjeu important à présent. Car on le voit encore dans les violences ethniques, les harcèlements sexuels, les viols, les assassinats, l'exploitation dont

les réfugiés sont les victimes innocentes ou les témoins involontaires. Ce qui retient notre attention c'est le silence de Dieu, voire son apparente absence qui peut troubler la foi du chrétien, qui dépasse ses ressources de patience et de force morale, et qui peut l'acculer au découragement, à la révolte, voire au cynisme. Dans ce contexte, il faut mettre ses pas dans les pas de Jésus pour prier fidèlement. Cette prière ainsi recommandée n'est point l'opium du peuple qui échappe au drame ni l'évasion hors de l'enfer non encore vaincu, mais l'élévation de l'âme meurtrie vers les hauteurs salvatrices. On ne bénit point Dieu pour les atrocités qui meurtrissent les coeurs mais on hurle, on pleure et on offre à Dieu tout ce qu'on vit. L'insistance porte dès lors sur la souffrance vécue, sur la vie quotidienne comme sacrement d'incarnation de Dieu, lieu de la révélation ou de la rencontre avec ce Dieu venu sauver le genre humain. On est bien loin de ce romantisme qui voit le ciel là où tout s'écroule, loin de ces consolations faciles et trompeuses face au mystère de la souffrance.

En Afrique Noire, les sectes répandent du baume sur les coeurs des réfugiés, occultent les conflits qui ravagent leurs vies et prétendent offrir une paix sans processus d'analyse objective des problèmes vécus. Elles empêchent ainsi de faire face au drame de l'existence humaine. Pourtant la prière de Jésus agonisant montre comment, en dépit de la répugnance ou de la peur qui le tourmente, le Christ adhère à la réalité jusque dans ses ombres les plus terrifiantes. D'une part son humanité crie l'angoisse de la Passion à venir et d'autre part, il y a la soumission non pas aveugle mais obéissante à la volonté de son Père, ce Dieu caché. Cette scène peut éclairer et reconforter les réfugiés confrontés souvent au drame similaire : la prière peut être le lieu d'expression de notre humanité blessée et douloureuse et en même temps elle nous offre la grâce d'accepter l'inacceptable tout en gardant l'espoir que Dieu souffre avec nous et nous ressuscitera avec son fils. Une prière qui accepte le silence de Dieu, comme écrit Sylvie Germaine : «Rien extraordinairement rien : une tentative de se mettre au diapason du silence de Dieu. Une prière qui ne s'est pas tue et ne se taira jamais, qui ne s'est pas perdue dans le néant, qui continue à sonder le silence, à irradier, à faire sens, appel, urgence, à effleurer notre conscience, à ranimer notre mémoire, à attiser notre attention, pour que sans fin se poursuive l'ineffable dialogue entre l'humanité et Dieu».⁷

Pourtant, il faut bien se méfier de ce romantisme suspect qui consiste à voir le reflorissement de la vie sur les cadavres envahis par les charognes. N'est-ce pas souvent étonnant voire troublant d'entendre célébrer la joie, la générosité, le courage des Africains confrontés à la famine, à la répression politique et à la mort soudaine ?

Nous ne nions pas la réalité des miracles. Car Dieu est Dieu malgré tout. Nous voulons seulement prendre en compte les misères vécues par ces chrétiens mis à l'épreuve et nous orienter vers une attitude de prière humaine, très humaine, dont Jésus paraît être le modèle parfait dans la dramaturgie de l'agonie de Gethsemani. Car les récits de bon nombre des réfugiés sont des drames plutôt que des romans à l'eau de rose. Le «counseling» aura beau apaiser et aider à apprivoiser la douleur, on en vient toujours à dépasser la sphère psychologique pour s'établir à ce niveau de foi où notre vie humaine retrouve sa source et sa destination : Dieu dans notre histoire personnelle et communautaire. Son silence qui semble refléter une absence est plutôt une invitation à l'espérance. Car pour le chrétien, «le clair — obscur d'une réponse n'est donné que dans le regard sur le Christ, Jésus Crucifié, abandonné de tous, y compris de Dieu, son Père. Bienheureux ceux et celles qui, telles les femmes au Calvaire, ne cherchent pas à remplir ce silence, mais tiennent le temps qu'il faut (trois jours : une éternité) avec l'angoisse au ventre ! C'est l'heure de l'espérance».⁸ Jésus devient la seule icône parfaite à contempler dans cette caverne de la douleur. Sa victoire sur le mal et la mort est une 'garantie' qui soutient notre espérance.

L'Église au milieu du camp ?

Au-delà de considérations psychologiques, ce qui nous préoccupe, c'est la vie sacramentelle des réfugiés, leur rapport au Dieu de l'Histoire, à Jésus Sauveur, à l'Esprit d'Amour, à l'Église dans laquelle ils prétendent vivre et enraciner leur appartenance divine. Placé hors des structures ecclésiales normales, le réfugié cherche à maintenir vivante sa foi éprouvée par la souffrance. Comment peut-il vivre en bon chrétien hors de l'Église lorsque l'épreuve qu'il endure le pousse plus que jamais à trouver refuge dans une communauté de foi où il peut écouter la reconfortante Parole de vie et bénéficier du soutien de ses frères chrétiens.⁹ Se pose ainsi la question de la dimension sacramentelle de la vie spirituelle du réfugié.

Nous avons mentionné plus haut que l'assistance matérielle semble l'emporter sur les autres formes d'assistance (médicale, juridique, psychologique). Au-delà de problèmes purement matériels, il y a pourtant la mare psycho-spirituelle dans laquelle se noient bon nombre de réfugiés. Comment peut-on envisager la vie de foi chrétienne dans cet univers de situations limites ? Au camp de Tongogara, le nombre des réfugiés recensés ne dépasse pas six cents. Pourtant plus de six confessions religieuses y régissent la vie religieuse. Beaucoup de réfugiés jadis chrétiens se sont convertis à l'Islam pour, dit-on, jouir des avantages offerts par ce groupe des musulmans (nourriture,

soutien moral ou financier). En effet les animateurs de cette religion offrent quelques paniers de maïs aux adeptes. La faim qui rampe dans la plupart des foyers incite les chrétiens ou catholiques affamés et désorientés à embrasser cette doctrine dont souvent ils ne comprennent pas grand chose. Ce prosélytisme parfois agressif ou parfois subtil amène à croire que la pratique chrétienne manque d'enracinement dans le monde flottant des réfugiés.

En effet le réfugié catholique chrétien se trouve en dehors de la communauté ecclésiale qui porte sa culture, sa tradition religieuse et rassure sa marche solitaire et solidaire sur cette terre de pèlerinage. Privé ainsi de ce soutien psycho-social et de la participation sacramentelle, il porte en lui les stigmates d'une foi éprouvée par les tragédies antérieures. En bafouant les droits humains¹⁰ l'environnement immédiat dans lequel il vit accentue ce dépaysement religieux. La situation est pire pour certains réfugiés qui vivent dans le traumatisme de la violence, le tourment de la rage et la hantise de la mort ; ils sortent prisonniers des préjugés ethniques et culturels qui les divisent les uns contre les autres. Enfermés dans les conflits dont ils ne comprennent ni les tenants ni les aboutissants, ils ruminent haine et vengeance qui rendent leur vie psychologiquement et spirituellement intenable. Comment vivre sa foi dans un univers aussi asphyxiant que privé de prêtre disponible pour l'administration des sacrements de réconciliation et de l'Eucharistie, un univers sans réunions ni rencontres de fraternité après le culte du dimanche ? Cette situation incongrue recèle bien d'autres problèmes qui nécessitent l'intervention de l'Église : « Dans la problématique (...) apparaissent des changements de culture et de spiritualité ; des traumatismes psychiques, spécialement pour les réfugiés ; la désagrégation de la famille ; l'écroulement des idéaux, particulièrement chez les exilés ; le contact et la comparaison avec d'autres religions ; les difficultés de langue, de culture, de milieu ; la promiscuité dans le camp d'accueil, la catéchèse des jeunes, le manque de livres religieux dans la langue propre ; les traditions religieuses des groupes ethniques ; les mariages mixtes ; le défaut de lieux sacrés, de liturgies adaptées, etc. ».¹¹ A la lumière de ce qui manque ainsi à la vie de foi des réfugiés, l'Église en Afrique a pensé à l'élaboration d'une pastorale qui les intègre dans la dynamique de communautés ecclésiales locales. Il importe d'examiner certains aspects théoriques et pratiques de cette réponse de l'Église.

Éléments de réponse de l'Église en Afrique

Nous nous proposons maintenant de relire certaines propositions et de les confronter à la réalité quotidienne de l'Église avec une instance particulière sur l'enseignement de la théologie en Afrique noire.

Le mode impératif des résolutions

En 1998 ont eu lieu trois consultations en vue d'une réponse pastorale plus coordonnée de l'Église à la présente situation des réfugiés. Pour la région IMBISA,¹² la consultation a eu lieu à Maputo du 26 janvier au 29 janvier 1998. Les régions de l'Ouest (AECAWA et CERA¹³) et de l'Afrique du Nord¹⁴ (le CERNA,¹⁵ l'AHCE¹⁶) ont eu leur réunion à Yapougon en Côte d'Ivoire du 25 mai au 29 mai 1998. Pour la région de l'Afrique Centrale, de l'Afrique de l'Est, la Conférence Episcopale de Madagascar et des Iles, la rencontre a eu lieu à Nairobi le 28 août 1998. De ces trois consultations se sont dégagées plusieurs propositions importantes du programme de formation d'experts dans la pastorale de la mobilité humaine, la modification du programme de formation de bases,¹⁷ la supervision d'expériences pastorales, le '*pastoral network*', la prévention et le discernement. A la lumière de la situation des réfugiés (telle qu'observée et vécue dans le camp de Tongogara), nous voulons réfléchir sur trois points : d'abord l'intégration de la problématique des réfugiés et déplacés dans le programme d'étude en théologie,¹⁸ ensuite l'intégration de cette même problématique dans la formation des futurs prêtres,¹⁹ enfin l'urgence de faire des camps de réelles petites communautés chrétiennes où la vie coule à flot afin que les réfugiés retrouvent dans leur migration le visage africain de l'Église, le chemin vers Dieu et le soutien dont ils ont besoin.

Modification du programme de base de la formation des futurs prêtres

En ce qui concerne le programme d'étude, les responsables de l'Église estiment qu'il n'est pas question de le changer mais de le modifier en l'adaptant aux questions sociales actuelles telles que la question préoccupante des réfugiés : « Plutôt que de souhaiter la création d'un cours spécial ou d'une discipline auxiliaire, on devrait recommander vivement une coordination et une plus grande sensibilisation des diverses disciplines théologiques plus directement intéressées par le phénomène de la mobilité, conformément à la prescription de la « *Ratio fundamentalis* ».²⁰ Les professeurs de la théologie pastorale sont priés de connaître, de distinguer et de comprendre la nature des réfugiés enregistrés, des déplacés internes, des demandeurs d'asile.... Ils doivent former les agents pastoraux non pas à travailler pour les réfugiés mais avec les réfugiés en les aidant à se prendre eux-mêmes en charge. Ils doivent enseigner leurs cours avec une référence spéciale à la tragédie des réfugiés : « La mobilité humaine devra constituer, en outre, un chapitre à jour et dûment structuré de l'enseignement de la Théologie pastorale, prescrite au

n. 79 de la 'Ratio fundamentalis' pour tous les séminaristes (...) Il est superflu de relever qu'un professeur de théologie pastorale attentif à ces problématiques pourrait et devrait sensibiliser à cet aspect même les enseignants des autres disciplines qui touchent de quelque façon le phénomène de la mobilité humaine, afin de donner aux futurs prêtres le respect absolu de la dignité de la personne humaine de chaque individu». ²¹ De même les Ecritures, la Dogmatique, la Morale, la Systématique tout en étant liés à la théologie catholique devront porter sur les thèmes actuels qui prennent en compte la situation des réfugiés.

La nature à présent structurelle de la mobilité apostolique invite à proposer comme thème pour les séminaires certaines questions sur la réconciliation et l'instauration de la paix, sur les communications (afin de faire tomber les clivages idéologiques et ethniques), sur l'anthropologie sociale. En insérant ces questions nouvelles dans les enseignements traditionnels, on offre l'opportunité de la croissance apostolique à ceux qui sont intéressés par ce genre d'apostolat. Toutefois il est utile de former tous les futurs prêtres à ces problématiques afin de les rendre largement disponibles et plus efficaces face aux situations de cette Afrique de tous les dangers.

Les expériences pastorales supervisées

Pendant les vacances, les séminaristes et les religieux en théologie ont la possibilité d'accomplir le stage pastoral (*pastoral fieldwork*) en maints endroits selon les circonstances et les lieux : il y a ainsi les hôpitaux pour les malades, les centres d'hébergement pour enfants de la rue, les camps pour réfugiés, les communautés ecclésiales vivantes dans les paroisses, les centres de développement rural ou de réflexion théologique etc. Grâce à ces différentes activités, l'étudiant découvre progressivement les tâches, les défis et le fonctionnement ordinaire de l'Eglise.

Dans la problématique de la mobilité humaine, les participants à la consultation de Nairobi recommandent aux séminaristes étudiants en théologie intéressés pendant les cours par la question du déplacement forcé, de fréquenter des camps des réfugiés pour y exercer diverses tâches pastorales et y rendre l'Eglise plus visible et plus active : «Nous faisons appel aux recteurs et aux évêques et aux supérieurs religieux pour trouver des occasions pastorales pour leurs étudiants de travailler avec les populations déracinées». ²² Mais plus encore, ce faisant, ils acquièrent une connaissance pratique des problèmes pastoraux et une compétence pastorale qui les rend plus efficaces et, avec la grâce de l'Esprit, plus féconds dans leur apostolat.

Inscrit dans le camp, le séminariste participera à l'animation de la communauté ecclésiale vivante par

sa présence aux activités religieuses qui font de ce groupe humain un peuple de Dieu, une Eglise-famille. En effet dans les camps, les jeunes semblent délaissés, déscolarisés, désœuvrés, etc. Ils passent ainsi leur temps aux loisirs. Ce désœuvrement les rend perméables aux tentations de l'alcool, de la drogue, du vol, de la dispute, des bagarres, etc. Dans ce contexte où la vie leur semble sans horizon, ils rêvent de quitter le camp. L'agent pastoral pourra aider ces jeunes à trouver dans l'engagement religieux un sens acceptable à leur vie. Dans la même dynamique les mamans pourront se retrouver dans le groupe de partage de l'expérience — heurts et lueurs — de vie à la lumière de l'Evangile.

La connaissance approfondie de la vie de réfugié dans les camps permet de comprendre combien la pratique des sacrements est d'une nécessité salutaire. Plus particulièrement les sacrements de l'eucharistie et de la réconciliation. Le désordre moral, la pression économique et psychologique et bien d'autres troubles qui provoquent haine et rancœur sont une mare au diable pour les réfugiés. Le sacrement de réconciliation précédé de sessions sur les conflits, la paix et la réconciliation, peut aider à débloquer les crises personnelles et, avec l'aide de l'Esprit rénovateur, renouveler la vie de bien des chrétiens enfermés dans les prisons du ressentiment et de l'amertume. L'Eucharistie, ce viatique du pèlerin, pourrait ainsi aider à cheminer sur la route de la perfection chrétienne, dans l'obéissance aux conditions divines, à la pratique de la Parole de vie et de la charité évangélique. A cette condition les camps deviendront ainsi de réelles communautés ecclésiales.

Les camps : communautés ecclésiales vivantes

Nombre de réfugiés vivent avec des blessures intérieures et des frustrations qui rendent leur vie plus difficile. La colère, la rage, le ressentiment, la haine peuvent détruire les personnes humaines et le sentiment de vengeance peut ruiner la vie et oblitérer l'espérance du futur. Dans ce contexte le ministère du pardon et de la réconciliation exercé dans les petites communautés chrétiennes rend les guérisons possibles et effectives. Dans ces milieux, les chrétiens peuvent partager leurs expériences de vie en toute confiance, éclairés par la lumière de la Parole de Dieu. C'est aussi à l'intérieur de ces communautés que peuvent être organisés des séminaires sur la «*formation à la résolution des conflits*», sur «*l'enseignement social de l'Eglise*», sur la «*formation à la paix et à la réconciliation*». C'est alors que la participation des agents pastoraux devient déterminante. ***Avec eux, les réfugiés cessent de se constituer en église en exil pour être des exilés dans l'église locale.*** La communauté de base croît

harmonieusement grâce à l'apport de ces personnes formées à la gestion des conflits, à l'analyse sociale et capables de travailler ensemble.

Dans le document final de la consultation de Lusaka (1993), les participants évoquent l'expression «pasteurs sans frontière» dont ils définissent la fonction. Ils y expriment la volonté de rester présent comme Église au milieu de la communauté des réfugiés, les accompagnant dans leur fuite, durant la période d'exil et leur retour dans leur communauté d'origine ou leur pays d'adoption. Mais il faut d'abord compter sur la formation des prêtres, des religieux et des laïcs : « Prêtres, religieux et agents pastoraux laïcs pourront être formés et équipés de compétences nécessaires pour les rendre capables d'accueillir les réfugiés, de subvenir à leurs besoins — matériels, psychologiques et spirituels — les accompagner au cours de leur situation critique, et les aider à trouver une solution à leurs problèmes, soit temporairement soit de façon permanente, tout en partageant avec eux leurs joies et leurs craintes, et s'enrichissant les uns les autres (...) nous proposons que les séminaristes et les religieux en formation soient compétents et formés dans l'esprit d'ouverture et la volonté de travailler au milieu de telles personnes». ²³ Cette formation devra susciter des types de pastorale qui tiennent compte des stéréotypes dont est affublé le réfugié. Ainsi, par exemple, au stéréotype du réfugié comme personne vulnérable, sans droit et sans défense, doit correspondre une pastorale de 'renforcement' à travers les potentialités qui poussent à la prise en charge personnelle ; au stéréotype de la perte d'identité conviendrait une pastorale d'inculturation ou d'enracinement culturel. Face au stéréotype du traumatisé, on évoquera une spiritualité saine de guérison, du *counseling* et du traitement du traumatisme. Comment se passe la mise en pratique de ces résolutions dans la réalité quotidienne des espaces particuliers ?

L'épreuve des faits

Les responsables de l'Église invitent à intégrer la problématique de la mobilité humaine dans le programme des cours. Cette demande exprime nous amène finalement à nous interroger plus largement sur le lien épistémologique entre l'enseignement théologique et les problèmes pastoraux ou mieux l'enracinement de l'enseignement théologique dans les réalités ecclésiales et sociales. Dans maints théologats en Afrique, l'enseignement de la théologie se déroule à l'ombre de '*l'asile épistémologique*' (Bimwenyi - Kweshi). On se plaît à répéter ce que les maîtres ont dit dans leur contexte culturel et temporel. Leur enseignement a dès lors une vertu d'universalité. Déjà en 1976, le Père Jésuite Meinrad Hebga s'en étonnait avec ironie : «Il ne nous reste qu'à être admirateurs

béats de savants théologiens, des saints, des artistes étrangers. Nous nous querellons même, nous en venons aux mains à propos des mérites respectifs de nos maîtres à penser, des Hans Küng, des Yves Congar, Karl Barth, Oscar Cullmann, Karl Rahner et autres étoiles théologiques de première grandeur». ²⁴ Cette nouvelle approche tente de re-interpréter la tradition catholique à la lumière de l'analyse sociale qui permet de discerner les signes du temps, l'empreinte de Dieu dans la réalité sociale. La fidélité cesse d'être une répétition stérile pour devenir une dynamique créatrice. C'est à cet effort de créativité que professeur et étudiant sont ainsi invités. Cette exigence d'enracinement exige des enseignants et des étudiants de la créativité et de l'audace inventive. Le même Père Hebga soulignait cet effort de créativité attendu du théologien africain : « Le théologien africain ne doit plus être estimé en fonction de sa parfaite connaissance de la pensée de Thomas d'Aquin, de Martin Luther, de Karl Barth ou de Karl Rahner, penseurs européens, mais de son propre effort dans l'approfondissement et l'expression de la Parole de Dieu (...). Notre avenir n'est pas en Occident mais sur notre propre sol, en Afrique Noire». ²⁵ A l'heure actuelle, il convient de souligner que ce défi s'adresse non seulement au théologien africain mais surtout à l'enseignant de la théologie en Afrique. Car la question est davantage pédagogique et méthodologique.

Approfondir et exprimer la parole de Dieu dans le contexte de sa propre situation, c'est finalement élever ses questions personnelles et celles de son temps au niveau de la réflexion théologique. Le Père Jude Odiaka développe davantage cette intuition lorsqu'il demande aux étudiants en théologie de définir et cerner les questions vitales nées de leur environnement existentiel qui les incitent à la réflexion théologique. En effet, il y a — en Afrique — tant de questions qui constituent de véritables défis à la théologie : Dans certains pays le sida est un désastre national ; dans d'autres pays les femmes sont chosifiées, la dictature avilit les personnes humaines pourtant créées à l'image de Dieu ; l'impunité, l'injustice, la pauvreté, la misère, les maladies, l'ignorance, la corruption, le détournement des biens publics ; l'alcoolisme provoque la désintégration des familles ; la crise économique entraîne la prostitution et jette les enfants dans la rue. De telles situations amènent les gens à s'interroger sur la bonté voire la responsabilité et l'existence de Dieu. ²⁶

Par ailleurs, les participants au réseau de l'Imbisa pour les réfugiés s'engagent, dans leurs orientations, à «aider les réfugiés dans leur recherche de stabilité et de communauté à travers le travail pastoral, la formation des capacités personnelles, le soutien à la vie familiale, l'aide aux activités économiques, l'intégration dans la communauté d'accueil ; les réfugiés ont besoin d'avoir quelqu'un qui parle en leur

nom, qui fasse sérieusement entendre leur voix pour faciliter leur protection et rendre consciente la communauté qui les accueille». ²⁷ Ce texte a été présenté aux participants de la Consultation de Youpougon comme exemple de la façon dont une structure régionale d'une Conférence Episcopale peut formuler des priorités en ce qui concerne la charge pastorale des réfugiés. La réalité sur le terrain est très différente ; elle montre qu'il y a toujours sinon souvent un écart entre les textes et les réalités. Par conséquent il y a un effort à faire pour que ces déclarations deviennent réalité. Mais en attendant, le réfugié pour qui tout cela est écrit apprend à se tourner vers ce Dieu à qui rien n'est impossible, pour prier et lui remettre son destin.

Conclusion

Beaucoup a été dit sur les réfugiés et les déplacés internes. En Afrique beaucoup d'activités sont menées pour soulager leur détresse. L'Église, experte en humanité, n'est pas en reste dans cette agitation caritative. Elle a compris l'urgence d'être présente et active au milieu de ce peuple en exil. Elle a élaboré maints projets pour réaliser cet impératif de présence généreuse parmi lesquels un «network » pour communiquer des informations et s'assurer d'une solidarité pastorale organique.

Il y a bien de choses à écrire sur cette problématique de la mobilité humaine, particulièrement à l'heure où les médias s'engraissent de scandales de harcèlements et abus sexuels sur les personnes vulnérables dans les camps. Ces nouveaux problèmes ne rendent que plus urgente la pratique pastorale appropriée aux réfugiés afin de les aider à être à l'abri de ces méfaits. Dans ces camps les réfugiés vivent entassés les uns sur les autres, avec possibilité très réduite de vie personnelle. Cette promiscuité et ce mélange de cultures, de langues, voire de sectes religieuses conduisent à un relativisme moral d'autant plus criant qu'il y manque une structure normative pour juguler les abus, contrôler le comportement social, veiller sur les normes qui rendent possible le vivre en commun. Puisse l'Église tout entière se rendre disponible pour habiter ces lieux privilégiés pour y témoigner de la sollicitude de Dieu pour l'humanité.

Notes

¹ Parmi les causes du phénomène de réfugiés, il y a «les séquelles de la décolonisation, l'absence de démocratie (refus de l'alternance au pouvoir, intolérance idéologique, fréquence des dictatures militaires), intolérance religieuse, rivalités ethniques, interraciales ou interethniques, instabilité des régimes politiques» (CIMADE, INODEP, MINK, Afrique, Terre des réfugiés. Que faire ? Harmattan, Paris 1984, p. 82). Il y a

donc d'une part les tensions et les conflits à l'intérieur des Etats africains et d'autre part entre Etats africains : tensions et conflits frontaliers, tensions et 'subversion' extérieure.

² Jean Marc Ela, *Le Cri de l'homme africain. Question aux chrétiens et aux Églises d'Afrique*, Karthala, Paris, 1980, p. 121.

³ En effet, le camp est sous la juridiction ecclésiastique du Diocèse de Mutare. L'ordinaire du lieu l'a confié au vicaire de la paroisse de Nyayandzi, laquelle comprend vingt-deux succursales animées par le curé et son vicaire. On peut ainsi justifier la relative absence de vie ecclésiale du camp par la carence des agents pastoraux. Un problème bien général, croira-t-on.

⁴ Au Zimbabwe, les réfugiés sont d'abord placés dans un camp de transit pour les formalités administratives. Une fois admis, ils sont finalement envoyés au camp de Tongogara où ils s'installent. Malheureusement, tous les réfugiés d'Afrique ne bénéficient pas du même accueil favorable ni de la même assistance.

⁵ Vivre d'assistance diminue ainsi la confiance en soi et dépotentialise même les meilleurs débrouillards. Pour les personnes les plus vulnérables (femmes, filles et enfants...), l'assistance les expose ainsi à l'exploitation. Des projets initiés par les agents de l'ICMC ont vite transformé les réfugiés en une main d'oeuvre gratuite : des mamans enrôlées dans le 'Woman Club' confectionnaient des habits au profit des agents transformés en vendeurs de fortune.

⁶ L'évêque Paul Ruzoka écrit : «*Il est malheureux de noter que tant de personnes sont non pratiquants, spécialement les intellectuels et les possibles leaders politiques de demain. Souvent, ils disent que si Dieu existait et les aimait, ils n'auraient pas fini leurs vies dans des camps de réfugiés. Ils se demandent de quelle utilité est l'Église devant toutes les injustices qu'ils ont endurées*». Voir *Pastoral consultations for a coordinated pastoral response of the Churches in Africa to the present refugee crisis : A Case Study in Tanzania*, Nairobi, 25-28 august 1998, p. 3.

⁷ Sylvie Germaine citée par Marie-Amélie Le Bourgeois, «La rumeur de Dieu dans notre monde» in *Christus* n. 194, Avril 2002, p. 203

⁸ *Ibidem*

⁹ A Tongorara, ils attendent une fois le mois le prêtre oui vient d'une lointaine paroisse (Nyayandzi) ou par hasard les religieuses d'Imbisa qui atterrissent dans le camp pour une 'visite pastorale'. En Zambie, certains camps disposent d'un prêtre pour l'Eucharistie et les autres sacrements.

¹⁰ Les situations anormales sont courantes dans certains camps : harcèlement sexuel, exploitations, attaque militaire, vol, etc.

¹¹ «*Sacra Congregatio Pro Institutione Catholica* », *La pastorale de la Mobilité humaine dans la formation des futurs prêtres, Lettre à leurs Excellences les*

Ordinaires Diocésains ainsi qu'aux Recteurs de leurs Séminaires, Rome 25 janvier 1986.

¹² Elle comprend les Conférences Episcopales d'Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Sao Tome-Principe et Zimbabwe.

¹³ Comprennent le Bénin, le Burkina Faso, la Côte d'Ivoire, la Guinée, le Mali, la Mauritanie, le Niger, le Sénégal, le Togo.

¹⁴ Elle comprend les Conférences Régionales d'AECAWA : Gambie, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone.

¹⁵ Regional Episcopal Conference of Northern Africa.

¹⁶ Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt.

¹⁷ Voir *Nairobi consultation for a more coordinated response to the crisis of uprooted people in Africa. Final Statement*, Nairobi, 1998, p. 2.

¹⁸ Voir Cardinal Giovanni Cheli, «The task of our consultation» dans *Nairobi Consultation, 25 august 1998*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ William Cardinal Baum, «La Pastorale de Mobilité humaine dans la formation des futurs prêtres», *Lettre à leurs Excellences les Ordinaires Diocésains ainsi qu'aux recteurs de leurs séminaires*, Rome, Janvier 1986.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Voir *Nairobi Consultation for a more coordinated response to the crisis of uprooted people in Africa, Final statement*, 1998, p. 3.

²³ Voir *Consultation for a more coordinated pastoral response to the refugee crisis in Africa. Final Statement*, Youpougon, 1998.

²⁴ Meinrad P. Hebga, *Emancipation d'Églises sous tutelles. Essai sur l'ère post-missionnaire*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1976, p. 153.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

²⁶ Jude Odiaka, *Theology in the Context of Hekima College, Interpersonal Relationship and Faith*. An address at the Inaugural Session of the 2002-2003 Academic year of Hekima College, Jesuit School of Theology, Nairobi, Kenya, Saturday, 24 August 2002.

²⁷ Voir le Document de travail final de la Conférence des Coordinations nationales et diocésaines de l'Imbisa, 11-15 mai 1997.

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“The Ethics of Pardon and Peace,,

(A Dialogue of Ideas Between the Thought of Pope John Paul II

and the *Risale-i Nur* of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi)

- Thomas Michel, SJ -

Introduction

At international congresses around the world, there are always many papers and speeches about peace. We hear the speakers of each religious group profess that their religion wants peace, teaches peace, builds peace. The leaders of various nations say how they are committed to peace among nations, peace in their regions, civil peace within their societies. There is a human paradox here that we must face. It seems that everyone is in favour of peace, no one ever admits to being against peace, and yet there is very little peace in the world. The problem, I believe, lies in the fact that we are all in favour of peace in *the abstract*, but without saying in what peace consists, and without examining what is involved in building peace.

Of those religious thinkers of modern times who have attempted to study the concept of peace to explore what is involved in establishing and maintaining peace, I want to compare the thought of two men who have made a remarkable contribution to the topic. One is a Christian, Pope John Paul II, leader of the Catholic Church, and the other a Muslim, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, the author of the *Risale-i Nur*. In this paper I hope to bring together the thinking of these two scholars and religious teachers into a kind of dialogue on the theme: “the ethics of peace”. I will do this by summarizing the position of the Pope as the basis or point of view from which I will then read and explain the views of Said Nursi as found in the *Risale-i Nur*.

JOHN PAUL II:

Peace rests on two Pillars: Justice and Forgiveness

As he does every year on 1 January, also this year, 2002, Pope John Paul II sent a Message for the World Day of Peace at the beginning of the New Year.

In this Message, the Pope proposes that true peace must rest on two pillars: *justice* and *forgiveness* (n. 2). Without these, you cannot have real peace. Both justice and pardon are necessary. One element without the other is not enough.

The Pope’s reasoning is like this. Any real peace, if it is to be more than simply a “cease-fire” or temporary cessation of hostilities, has to get to the heart of the conflict and try to heal the breach in human relations which was ruptured. When peoples are at war, when individuals are estranged and alienated from one another, they are angry, suspicious, and resentful of one another. They see the other as an enemy to be overcome, defeated, the object of retaliation, rather than a fellow-human with whom one ought to be reconciled. Thus, no talk about peace can proceed effectively without addressing the issue of broken relationships and without taking positive steps to repair those relations.

If one group or individual is being oppressed or treated unjustly by another, one cannot hope for peace between the two until there is justice. The Pope sees justice in two ways: firstly, as a “moral virtue”, that is, as a human quality which a person can acquire and develop with God’s powerful assistance (which Christians call *grace*), and secondly as a “legal guarantee”, that is, part of the functioning of the national and international rule of law.¹ The aim of justice, both as a personal quality and as an element of the international system of relations between peoples, is to insure “full respect for rights and responsibilities” and to carry out a “just distribution of benefits and burdens”.

Justice is thus a first, indispensable condition for peace. Unless one person treats another justly, that is, with respect for the other’s rights and duties and by giving him/her the proper share of what each is due, there will be no peace between them. The same holds true between social groups, ethnic groups, peoples and nations. Where there is aggression, oppression, occupation, transgression, there can be no peace. First, justice has to be established, then peace can be built.

All of this the Pope has said before. However, in his Day of Prayer for Peace Message, he adds another element that he sees as intrinsic to the peace-making process. This is *Forgiveness*, which goes beyond strict justice to strive to heal the historical burdens brought about by one individual’s or one group’s injustice and wrongdoing towards another.

Every nation, every religious or ethnic group, can draw up a long list of grievances against another; of wrongs that one group has suffered at the hands of the other. This is the human burden of past misdeeds experienced that we bring into our relations with others, that complicate the way we relate to individual members of the other group, that can poison all efforts at co-operation and reconciliation, and that can flare up into violence at the slightest provocation.

Justice alone is not sufficient to heal these wounds; we need to exercise forgiveness. Forgiveness is, as the Pope states, “a personal choice, a decision to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil”. In doing so, it always involves an *apparent* short-term loss, but brings about the possibility of achieving a real long-term gain. “Violence”, the Pope notes, works exactly the opposite: “opting for an apparent short-term gain, but involving a real and permanent loss”.²

“Forgiveness”, the Pope notes, “may seem like weakness, but it demands great spiritual strength and moral courage”.

It should not be surprising to discover that both Christianity and Islam lay great importance on the notions of justice and forgiveness, if these are to be the indispensable pre-conditions of peace.

In the Gospel, Jesus taught his disciples: “You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy’, but I say to you ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’” (Mt 5:43,44). In a similar vein, the Qur’an permits vengeance up to the limits of strict justice but no farther, and then always adds: “But it is better to forgive”.

Social ethics in the *Risale-i Nur*

When we turn to the *Risale-i Nur*, we find that for Said Nursi, as for Pope John Paul II, ethics, as the study of what is good and bad, is primarily oriented toward the social sphere. In the thought of both men, a religiously based ethical system above all must treat questions of right and wrong in society, and only secondarily regards the goodness or evil of acts of private morality. Moreover, both root this primacy of social ethics in the Scriptural teaching of their respective faiths. For Said Nursi, ethical systems drawn up by philosophers and put into practice by public and private welfare associations fail to reach the levels of social commitment demanded by the teaching of the Qur’an. He states: “Together with all its associations for good works, all its establishments for the teaching of ethics, all its severe discipline and regulations, [society] has not been able to reconcile these two classes of mankind [the rich and the poor], nor heal the two fearsome wounds in human life”.

The evils of which he is speaking here are *social complacency* on the part of the wealthy who feel no responsibility to share what they have with the poor

and needy, and class *struggle* on the part of the poor who seek to take by force from the rich what they will not give freely. “The Qur’an, however”, Said Nursi continues, “eradicates the first [social irresponsibility] with its injunction to pay *zakât*, and heals it, and uproots the second [class struggle] by prohibiting usury and interest, and cures that. Indeed, the Qur’an stands at the door of the world and declares usury and interest to be forbidden. It reads out its decree to mankind, saying: ‘In order to close the door of strife, close the door of usury and interest!’ and forbids its students to enter it”³

Instead of the ethics of the jungle where the rich and powerful take what they can and defend what they have by use of force, and that of class struggle in which the poor and oppressed seek to obtain their rights by force, Said Nursi sees the Divinely-guided ethic proposed by Islam as one in which truth, justice and harmony are paramount. “The civilization the *shari’a* of Muhammad (PBUH) comprises and commands is this: its point of support is truth instead of force, the marks of which are justice and harmony. Its goal is virtue in place of [selfish] benefit, and its characteristic marks are love and attraction. Its means of unity are the ties of religion, country, and class, in place of racialism and nationalism, and the mark of these are sincere brotherhood, peace, and only defence against external aggression. In life there is the principle of mutual assistance instead of the principle of conflict, the mark of which is accord and solidarity”.⁴

Said Nursi holds that philosophically-based ethical systems fail to reach the heights of moral teaching proclaimed by the Qur’an because they fail to take into account an essential element of the human reality, that is, human weakness. If an ethical system presumes that people know what they want and will always work to achieve their desired goal, it will miss the point, for in fact people often act against their best interests out of anger, timidity, etc., and for reasons of selfishness, laziness, ignorance, and the like fail to achieve what they desire.

However, a religious outlook, exemplified in Qur’anic teaching, takes into consideration and allows for the reality of human failure by urging believers to return to God in repentance, seeking forgiveness, and making a new start. Thus, he calls on believers to be shaped by a “God-given ethics”, which he holds to be an essential element in the message of all the prophets. “Be distinguished by *God-given morals* and turn towards God Almighty with humility, recognizing your impotence, poverty, and defectiveness, and so be a slave in His presence”. Philosophically-based ethical systems, he holds, tend to ignore this element of human nature and selfishly aim at perfection through human efforts alone.

This Nursi sees as basically self-deception. “The essence of humanity”, he states, “has been kneaded

with infinite impotence, weakness, poverty, and need, while the essence of the Necessarily Existent One is infinitely omnipotent, powerful, self-sufficient, and without need".⁵ He concludes: "The aim of humanity and duty of human beings is to be moulded by God-given ethics and good character, and, by knowing their [own] impotence to seek refuge with Divine power, by seeing their weakness to rely on Divine strength, by realizing their poverty to trust in Divine mercy, by perceiving their need to seek help from Divine riches, by seeing their faults to ask for pardon through Divine forgiveness, and by realizing their deficiency to be glorifiers of Divine perfection".⁶ Thus, if they are to act in an ethical way people need to be informed and guided by God's revelation and to be supported by God's strength or grace. These two elements (Divine guidance and Divine strength) are often ignored in philosophically-based ethical systems that do not take into account elements of God's revealed word.

Inner peace

a. How does the concept of peace fit into Said Nursi's ethical thought? In the *Risale-i Nur*, he treats various aspects and elements of peace, not from a theoretical perspective, but as a practical guide for those who seek to pursue peace. In the first place, he treats of peace in the *eschatological* sense, as the ultimate goal of human life, almost synonymous with salvation. Specifically, it is the final destination of the collective personality of those who study the *Risale-i Nur*. He sees the *Risale-i Nur* students, through their efforts carried out in solidarity and sincerity, as contributing in their diverse activities to the building of an eternal realm of peace and happiness. "O *Risale-i Nur* students and servants of the Qur'an! You and I are members of a collective personality ... like the components of a factory's machinery which produces eternal happiness within eternal life. We are hands working on a dominical boat which will disembark the community of Muhammad (PBUH) at the Realm of Peace, the shore of salvation. So we are surely in need of solidarity and true union, obtained through gaining sincerity".⁷

This concept not only gives meaning and direction to individual acts, but in this way the believer also achieves a kind of conquest over death. "Through the mystery of true brotherhood on the way of Divine pleasure... there are spirits to the number of brothers. If one of them dies, he meets death happily, saying: 'My other spirits remain alive, for they in effect make life continue for me by constantly gaining reward for me, so I am not dying. By means of their spirits, I live in respect of merit; I am only dying in respect of sin.' And he lays down in peace".⁸

b. A second way in which the *Risale-i Nur* looks at peace might be called the *psychological* sense, as tranquillity and peace of mind, an inner confidence

born of faith that enables the religious believer to face adversity without anxiety or despair. Particularly when one is facing the approach of death, the believer can attain a peace of mind which will enable the person to overcome spiritual turmoil and fear.⁹ Reflecting on the long periods of his incarceration, he notes that his close companions, students of the *Risale-i Nur*, who were imprisoned with him did not waste their time or give in to selfish expressions of worry, complaint, or pride, or try to change what cannot be altered, but they achieved a peace of mind and steadfastness that bore witness to the spiritual values and dignity that they had achieved.¹⁰

This interior peace, not only of individuals but of whole societies, he sees as one of the marks of Islamic civilization. Along with justice, harmony, brotherhood, solidarity, human progress and spiritual advancement, peace should characterize the Islamic community.¹¹ It is peace as the basis of societal relations which should be the force that attracts others to Islam,

c. A third aspect of peace studied by Said Nursi is *universal* peace. Particularly in his rewriting of the Damascus Sermon in the years immediately following the Second World War, he reflects the widespread conviction of the time that humankind can sink no lower in criminality towards its own kind¹² and expresses the longing for a time of peace and prosperity for all.¹³ This Said Nursi sees as the specific mission of Islam, that "God willing, through the strength of Islam in the future, the virtues of civilization will prevail, the face of the earth cleaned of filth, and universal peace be secured".¹⁴ He is optimistic that this hope for peace through Islam is no vain desire, but that people may confidently "expect from Divine mercy to see true civilization with universal peace brought about through the sun of the truth of Islam".¹⁵

It is in his analysis of peace, based on truth, as the only viable alternative to the use of brute force that the thought of Said Nursi prefigures that of Pope John Paul II. Said Nursi notes that wars and violence can never resolve ethical conflicts concerning who is in the right. All that wars and violent actions can accomplish is to show which party has access to reserves of force which it can use to coerce others to obey and to punish the recalcitrant.¹⁶ Truth, on the other hand, is characterized by justice and harmony and seeks goodness and virtue instead of selfish gain.¹⁷

He sees a tendency in modern governments and rulers which is relevant for the discussion of globalization as a theme of this symposium. He criticizes modern governments for fomenting a kind of false nationalism, which in reality amounts to a type of racism, by picturing those of another nationality or religion as the enemy against whom war must be waged. Meanwhile, the governments concentrate on providing amusements to gratify the

senses and favour consumerist policies to “create needs”. The result, he states, is “a sort of superficial happiness for about 20 per cent of mankind and casts 80 per cent into distress and poverty”.¹⁸ By contrast, the Qur’an, he states, takes truth rather than force as its starting point. Hence the Qur’an proposes negotiation, compromise and uprightness as alternatives to the use of force in resolving conflicts, rather than the employment of brute force with the very limited aim of “winning”.

Said Nursi’s opposition to war as an inhumane and ultimately useless endeavour was highly controversial in his time, for in any nation all citizens are expected to support whatever wars are decided and carried out by their governments, and anyone opposing war is accused of being disloyal. In fact, ruling parties and cliques have been known to *foment* conflict and war in an attempt to increase their popularity and rally support for unpopular or incompetent government. In the *Flashes* collection, Said Nursi notes that he was often challenged because of his commitment to peace. Critics claimed that war against British and Italian incursions provided an opportunity to revive Islamic zeal and to assert the moral strength of the nation. They charged Said Nursi, who proposed prayers for peace and negotiated settlement as indirectly supporting the invaders’ aims.¹⁹

In response, Said Nursi held that he wanted release from the attacks of aggressors, but not by using the same methods which the attackers were employing. In other words, he rejected the practice of opposing force by force. Religion teaches people to seek truth and uprightness, not to try to achieve their aims by the use of force. Consequently, he felt that the students of the *Risale-i Nur* could better use their time studying the Qur’an than by engaging in military service. Later in his life he was asked whether freely relinquishing one’s rights for the sake of peace could not be considered a form of compromise with wrongdoing. Again reflecting on his prison experiences, he responded that, “A person who is in the right, is fair. He will sacrifice his one *dirhem*’s worth of right for the general peace, which is worth a hundred”.²⁰

In the long run, he concludes, the preoccupation with current events and international crises is of secondary importance to seeking the personal, interior transformation of peace that comes through the study of Scripture. Said Nursi carried this principal to an extreme degree, as he recounts: “For a full two years in Kastamonu and seven years in other places I knew nothing of the conflicts and wars in the world, and whether or not peace had been declared, or who else was involved in the fighting. I was not curious about it and did not ask, — and for nearly three years did not listen to the radio that was playing close by me. But with the *Risale-i Nur* I triumphantly confronted absolute unbelief, which destroys eternal life, and

transforms the life of this world even into compounded pain and suffering”.²¹

This attitude, which places a higher value on interior peace which is based on the study of God’s Word than on current events, presents a challenge to modern people for whom the daily newspapers and evening news on television are fixed appointments in their daily schedules. However, when one reflects on the degree to which the news media is slanted by the prejudices, policies and propaganda, not only of individual journalists but also of those who own and direct the communications industry, one can see in Said Nursi’s practice the freedom of the honest individual who renounces an obsession with transitory events which will be forgotten in a few years in favour of the search for eternal, unchangeable truth presented in the Word of God.

The irony here is that Said Nursi was often accused of being a troublemaker guilty of disturbing the peace and inciting his followers to revolt. He was accused of “working secretly in Emirdag. He poisoned the minds of some people giving them the idea of disturbing the peace”.²² In defending himself against false accusations of fomenting public disorder, he also defends the students of the *Risale-i Nur* against similar charges. “In twenty years, six courts of law and the police of ten provinces ... have not recorded any incident involving the disturbance of public order and breaching of security in connection with the 20,000 or perhaps 100,000 people who enthusiastically read copies of the *Risale-i Nur*.”

He asserts that this reputation of being a troublemaker and rabble-rouser is based on non-religious people’s fear of those who take religious faith seriously. “‘The worldly’ are exceptionally and excessively suspicious of me. Quite simply, they are frightened of me, imagining non-existent things in me, which even if they existed would not constitute a political crime and could not be the basis of accusation, like being a *shaykh*, or of significant rank or family, or being a tribal leader, and influential, and having numerous followers, or meeting with people from my native region, or being connected with the affairs of the world, or even entering politics, or even the opposition. Imagining these things in me, they have been carried away by groundless fears”.²³

He makes clear that his silence must not be interpreted as agreement with all the decisions made by public officials, but should be understood rather in terms of passive resistance. He states: “I support neither intellectually nor on scholarly grounds the arbitrary commands, called laws, of a commander, which have made Aya Sophia into a house of idols and the Shaykh al-Islam’s Office into a girls’ high school. And for myself I do not act in accordance with them. But although for twenty years I have been severely oppressed during my tortuous captivity, I have

not become involved in politics, nor provoked the authorities, nor disturbed public order. And although I have hundreds of thousands of *Risale-i Nur* friends, not a single incident has been recorded involving the disturbance of the peace".²⁴ Along with Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Said Nursi must be seen as one of the Twentieth Century's great exponents of non-violent resistance.

Peace and forgiveness

When we turn to the question of the relationship between peace and forgiveness, the similarity of thought between Said Nursi and the later views of Pope John Paul II becomes even more striking. He analyses the nature of wrongdoing. In the case of a crime such as murder, the killer might derive a momentary satisfaction by having taken revenge on his enemy, but he pays for it over and over by suffering the consequences, not only of imprisonment, but of fear of retaliation by the relatives of the murdered person. The result is fear, anger, anxiety. "There is only one solution for this", states Said Nursi, "and that is reconciliation, which the Qur'an commands, and which truth, reality, benefit humanity, and Islam requires and encourages".²⁵ He notes that Islam commands that "one believer should not be vexed with another believer for more than three days", and that so long as there is no reconciliation, both sides perpetually suffer the torments of fear and revenge". His conclusion is that "it is essential to make peace quickly".

Often a person's unwillingness to forgive arises, according to Said Nursi, from a lack of self-knowledge, a resistance to finding in oneself many of the same qualities that one condemns in the other. If someone is unwilling to confront the defects in one's own attitudes and actions, it is much easier to demonize the other and regard them as an enemy. Said Nursi's advice is to "Look at the defect in your own soul that you do not see or do not wish to see. Deduct a share for that too. As for the small share which then remains, if you respond with forgiveness, pardon, and magnanimity, in such a way as to conquer your enemy swiftly and surely, then you will have escaped all sin and harm".²⁶ Thus, self-awareness should lead to repentance, repentance to forgiveness, forgiveness to reconciliation and the seeds for a lasting peace are laid.

So long as no reconciliation takes place, the wounds to the human relations fester and grow and turn into resentment. Discord produces more discord, violence engenders even greater violence, and the state of conflict is perpetuated. The only way out of a spiraling succession of violent reactions and counter-reactions is for one party to take the initiative to reconcile. Reconciliation heals what force can never heal, the suspicion and resentment caused by wrongdoing one against another. As Said Nursi puts

it, "A minor disaster becomes a large one, and continues. But if they make peace, and the murderer repents and prays continuously for the man he killed, then both sides will gain much and become like brothers. In place of one departed brother, he will gain several religious brothers".

Said Nursi's analysis of peace and reconciliation is very similar to the words of the Pope with which I began this talk: "Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil" (n. 8). In doing so, "it always involves an *apparent* short-term loss, but brings about the possibility of achieving a *real* long-term gain. Violence is the exact opposite: opting as it does for an apparent short-term gain, it involves a real and permanent loss. Forgiveness may seem like weakness, but it demands great spiritual strength and moral courage" (n.10). Here we find a strong convergence between these two great religious teachers.

So important is the element of forgiveness in human relations that Said Nursi commands the students of the *Risale-i Nur* to pardon each other's faults speedily. In fact, mutual forgiveness should be a characteristic mark that identifies students of the *Risale-i Nur*. "It is absolutely essential", he states, "that you completely forgive each other. You are brothers closer to each other than the most devoted blood brother, and a brother conceals his brother's faults, and forgives and forgets. I do not attribute your uncustomary differences and egotism here to your evil-commanding souls, and I cannot reconcile it with the *Risale-i Nur* students. I rather consider it to be a sort of temporary egotism found even in saints who have given up their souls. So on your part, do not spoil my good opinion through obstinacy, and make peace with each other".²⁷

Since the study of the *Risale-i-Nur* creates a relationship even closer than that of blood brothers, there is no offence so serious that it should go unforgiven among its students. Said Nursi goes so far as to state, "I swear that if one of you were to insult me most terribly and entirely trample my honour but not give up serving the Qur'an, belief, and the *Risale-i Nur*, I would forgive him and make peace with him and try not to be offended".²⁸

Said Nursi sees a relationship between God's abundant forgiveness of the faults of humans and the need for believers to forgive one another. Just as God is generous in forgiving any one who repents, so Said Nursi encourages the students of the *Risale-i Nur* to imitate these divine qualities by acting with love and forgiveness toward those who wronged them. "Your sincerity, loyalty, and steadfastness are sufficient reason to disregard one another's faults.... For the powerful brotherhood within the *Risale-i Nur* is such a good thing it causes one to forgive a thousand evils. Since at the Last Judgement when good deeds

will preponderate over evil, Divine justice will forgive, you too, seeing that good deeds preponderate, should act with love and forgiveness”.²⁹

One must even forgive one's enemies and those who have done them wrong. Said Nursi repeatedly expressed his forgiveness for his prison wardens,³⁰ judges,³¹ government officials,³² law officers,³³ and civil authorities,³⁴ who had treated him unjustly during his period of courtroom trials and subsequent imprisonments. His point in forgiving others is that the relationship of enmity created by the wrong done by one person to another can only be overcome and superseded by forgiveness. Otherwise, one becomes a prisoner of circumstances, events, and the deeds of others, and history becomes a string of injustices and retaliations. This chain of evil and violence can only be broken by one who is willing to take the initiative to forgive.

In conclusion, I might mention that according to Said Nursi forgiveness and peace-making should not be limited only to students of the *Risale-i Nur*, more generally, to fellow Muslims. He argues that members of the People of the Book, Jews and Christians, if they want to make peace, should be allowed to do so. “A Christian may”, he states, “accept some sacred matters and may believe in some of the prophets, and may assent to Almighty God in some respects”.³⁵

A convergence of ideas

When I examine the thought of Pope John Paul II and that of Said Nursi, I am struck by the many similarities. Both understand peace to be not only a universal human longing, but also a cornerstone of the Message which God has revealed to humans. It is not only that humans long for peace, but God desires and intends that men live in peace. Both are convinced that the use of violence and force can never be the true path to peace. Both hold that societies can succeed only if they are founded on the principles of justice and harmony. Both agree that the cycle of injury and revenge, wrongdoing and retaliation, violence and counter-violence can be broken when people have recourse to forgiveness and pardon. This act, which seems to be a sign of weakness and to result in a short-term loss, is in fact a courageous effort to move beyond past conflicts and establish reconciliation. Both agree that true forgiveness is beyond humankind's unaided resources and is possible only by the guidance and strength that come from God.

The human race would certainly be facing a better future if people would heed the advice of these two great moral teachers.

Notes

¹ John Paul II, “No Peace without Justice, No Justice without Forgiveness”, *Message of His Holiness Pope John*

Paul II for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2002, n. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³ *The Words*, Twenty-fifth Word, First Light, Third Ray, p. 422.

⁴ *The Damascus Sermon*, Seeds of Reality, p. 106.

⁵ *The Words*, Thirtieth Word, First Aim, p. 564.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 563.

⁷ *The Flashes*, Twenty-first Flash, On Sincerity, p. 214.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁹ *The Rays*, Ninth Ray, p. 203.

¹⁰ *The Rays*, Thirteenth Ray, p. 343.

¹¹ *Letters*, Seeds of Reality, p. 548; *The Damascus Sermon*, p. 106.

¹² *The Damascus Sermon*, p. 29.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 39.

¹⁶ *The Words*, Twenty-fifth Word, First Light, Third Ray, p. 422.

¹⁷ *Letters*, Seeds of Reality, p. 548.

¹⁸ *The Words*, Twenty-fifth Word, First Light, Third Ray, p. 422.

¹⁹ *The Flashes*, Sixteenth Flash, p. 144.

²⁰ *The Rays*, Thirteenth Ray, p. 345; *The Flashes*, Twenty-eighth Flash, p. 362.

²¹ *The Rays*, Fourteenth Ray, p. 373.

²² *Ibid.* p. 447.

²³ *Letters*, Addendum to the Sixteenth Letter, p. 96.

²⁴ *The Rays*, Fourteenth Ray, p. 417.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 484.

²⁶ *Letters*, Twenty-second Letter, First Topic, p. 316.

²⁷ *The Rays*, Thirteenth Ray, p. 369.

²⁸ *The Rays*, Fourteenth Ray, p. 510.

²⁹ *The Rays*, Thirteenth Ray, p. 355.

³⁰ *The Rays*, Fourteenth Ray, p. 487.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 416.

³² *Ibid.* p. 460.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 416.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 395.

³⁵ *Letters*, Twenty-ninth Letter, Seventh Section, p. 512; *The Flashes*, Seventeenth Flash, Seventh Note, p. 168.

Ref.: **Encounter** (*Documents for Muslim-Christian Understanding*), November 2002, n. 289, pp. 3-11.



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Collaborator of Caritas International in Reconciliation and Peace Building

Fr. Leonel Narváez Gómez, IMC

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and Director of 'Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation' in Colombia

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by

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Wednesday, 21 April, 2004

16:00 hrs

Brothers of the Christian Schools,
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Working Groups

Wednesday, 31 March, **China Group** 15:00 hrs at **SEDOS**

Thursday, 13 May, **Bible and Mission Group** 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**