

Editorial	126
Missionnaires de demain <i>Michael McCabe, SMA</i>	127
Dieu de la prospérité ou Dieu des Béatitudes ? <i>Sidbé Semporé, OP</i>	133
Les Églises d'Afrique et le défi de promouvoir des médias responsables <i>Jean-Pierre Bodjoko Lilembu, SJ</i>	138
The Formation Process as a Project of "Missionary Initiation" <i>Judette Gallares, RC</i>	145
Called to be Mission of God in OurWorld — The Missionary and Affectivity <i>Linda Lizada, RC</i>	151
Personal Reflections on Mission Animation <i>Oscar Ante, OFM</i>	158
Integration into an Intercultural World: Christian Proposal for a United Society <i>Prof. Vincenzo Cesareo</i>	161
Theology of Liberation in the Dialogue of Religions — A New Development in Latin America <i>Dr. Stefan Silber</i>	168
Coming Events	172

Editorial

October brings with it fresh air and the reminder that we all are called to Mission. It is not a call to go oversees so much as to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is among us, an announcement that has to be made not only with words but by our example of living the faith.

What is the role of the missionary in our day? **Michael McCabe, SMA**, in *'Missionnaires de demain'* explores the challenges of 'making the presence of God be felt in our daily life'. It is not a continuation of the mission of God but our participation in His Work of Salvation.

Bible, Faith and personal success. Is this how the faithful should measure his/her true relationship with God? In *'Dieu de la prospérité ou Dieu des Béatitudes?'* **Sidbé Semporé, OP**, presents an analysis of the dangers of proclaiming the God of Victory, the God of Success and the establishment of a powerful and successful Kingdom of God as a way out of the misery and poverty of Africa as some Churches do.

In treating Mission and the Media **Jean-Pierre Bodjoko Lilembu, SJ**, reflects on the way to build a Christian model of mass media. In *'Les Églises d'Afrique et le défi de promouvoir des médias responsables'* Jean-Pierre reminds us that 'the mass media is not only an instrument of communication but a World that needs to be evangelised' and is thus confronting the Church with a huge missionary challenge.

An appropriate formation of our religious for mission is a difficult but necessary endeavour. **Judette Gallares, RC**, in her paper *"The Formation Process as a Project of 'Missionary Initiation'"* asserts that 'it is mission that must order the life and formation of any religious or committed Christian'. Since Mission is the central core of the Church's existence, it must be integrated into the formative itinerary of candidates to consecrated life.

Linda Lizada, RC, calls us back to the reality of our humanity in *'Called to be Mission of God in Our World: The Missionary and Affectivity'*. Mission means encounter and it is through our experiences and our encounters that we come into contact with that affective part of ourselves which makes us react and interact. 'It is our affectivity which will enable us to respond to the calls of today's challenging realities, to listen with a disciples' ear and to speak with a disciples' tongue'.

Oscar Ante, OFM, shares with us some important points in understanding and appreciating our mission responsibility. In *'Personal Reflections on Mission Animation'* he reminds us of the methodology of mission, and advises not go into mission with a hidden and pre-packaged agenda but to adopt a receptive attitude as we listen to the agenda of the World.

'Integration into an Intercultural World: Christian Proposal or a United Society'. Migration on a world scale is challenging us with the phenomenon of immigrants and **Prof. Vincenzo Cesareo** helps us to understand the fears, challenges and opportunities that bring us to encounter these people as well as our mission to help build a way of co-existence: unity in multiplicity.

Dr Stefan Silber is the author of this short reflection: *'Theology of Liberation in the Dialogue of Religions. A New Development in Latin America'*. For S. Silbert there is no possibility of liberation for the poor without dialogue between all religions, 'for religions not only bear a great responsibility for the emergence of poverty but also harbour a substantial potential for its conquest'.

SEDOS Staff:

Publications:

Mrs. Ilaria Iadeluca
(redactionsedos@pcn.net)

Subscriptions and Accounting:

Mrs. Margarita Lofthouse (accountingsedos@pcn.net)

Documentation Centre:

Mrs. Federica Pupilli (documentationsedos@pcn.net)

Proof-reader:

English and French: Ms. Philippa Wooldridge

Fr Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP
SEDOS Executive Director

Missionnaires de demain

- Michael McCabe, SMA -

Introduction

Dans sa célèbre encyclique sur la mission, *Redemptoris Missio*, le Pape Jean Paul II a affirmé la validité permanente de la mission de l'Église *ad gentes* et la continuelle pertinence d'une «vocation spéciale» au service de cette mission (cf. *RM*, n. 65). Les paroles du Pape, pourtant, n'ont pas fait grand-chose pour empêcher le déclin dramatique — en de nombreux cas la disparition complète — des vocations pour les Congrégations et Instituts missionnaires du monde occidental, ni pour contrebalancer la critique radicale et la mise en question du mouvement missionnaire et de ses hypothèses théologiques. Durant un cours sur la théologie de la mission que je donnais à l'Institut Missionnaire Kimmage de Dublin, les étudiants m'ont souvent demandé pourquoi, vu ses accents inacceptables d'arrogance intellectuelle et de supériorité spirituelle, je n'abandonnais pas entièrement le concept de mission. J'ai répondu qu'abandonner la mission serait détruire l'identité de l'Église et saper sa raison d'être. Ce qui s'imposait aujourd'hui, ai-je tenu à dire, n'était pas d'abandonner la notion de mission mais de la recentrer et de redéfinir le rôle du missionnaire. C'est exactement ce que je me propose de faire dans cette brève réflexion sur les missionnaires de demain.

Recentrer la mission

Selon Carl Braaten, «la mission est le processus qui explore le sens universel de l'Évangile dans l'histoire».¹ Je ne connais pas de meilleure définition de la mission que celle-là. La mission se base sur la conviction que l'Évangile du Christ est valable pour tous les peuples, conviction qui se manifeste par un effort constant pour rejoindre les autres, réalisant ainsi concrètement cette pertinence universelle. Dans la mission, l'Église est appelée à découvrir et à exprimer toujours plus parfaitement et pleinement le trésor qui lui a été confié. Dans la mission, l'Église est appelée à devenir quelque chose qu'elle n'est pas encore, et à développer tout son potentiel d'Évangile. Quand l'Église est vraiment missionnaire elle est décentrée, elle regarde et se déplace vers l'extérieur, elle explore et découvre ce qu'elle n'est pas encore devenue.

La mission, par conséquent, ne consiste pas en premier lieu à faire grandir l'Église dans le temps et l'espace. Sa visée n'est pas le développement de l'institution ni l'augmentation numérique de ses membres. Son but est fondamentalement théologique, c'est-à-dire réaliser pleinement la connaissance et l'amour de Dieu qui est illimité et universel. Lorsque l'Église naissante et en grande partie juive a pénétré le monde grec, c'est avec cette compréhension de sa vocation missionnaire qu'elle a œuvré. Ainsi, par un dialogue profond et transformateur avec la culture et la philosophie grecques, l'Église a été amenée à découvrir quelque chose de la signification universelle de l'Évangile du Christ qui l'avait fait naître. De plus, c'est dans ce processus d'expansion, de dialogue et de découverte qu'est née la théologie. Martin Kahler a exprimé cette vérité importante dans son remarquable et bref énoncé : « La mission est mère de la théologie ».²

La relation entre mission et théologie est un signe indicateur de la santé de l'Église. Lorsque c'est la mission qui établit les plans de la théologie, l'Église est fidèle à sa vocation fondamentale et réalise sa nature qui est d'être catholique et apostolique. Quand la théologie est séparée de la mission, comme c'est fréquemment arrivé dans l'histoire de l'Église, spécialement dans les derniers siècles, l'Église comme la théologie se font défensives, polémiques et apologetiques. La mission, elle aussi, souffre du divorce. Privée de l'accompagnement critique de la théologie, la mission tend à devenir réductionniste et idéologique, elle se fait conquête de l'Église plutôt qu'exploration et découverte de ce que l'Église est appelée à devenir.

Tandis que ces quarante dernières années ont connu une surabondance de livres et d'articles sur la mission, je crois que pour beaucoup de missionnaires le sens de la mission est loin d'être clair. Le récent élargissement du domaine de la mission a, dans une grande mesure, conduit à une expansion du programme missionnaire sans donner en compensation un éclaircissement du but à viser. La mission se conçoit toujours en termes de porter l'Évangile aux autres plutôt que de laisser l'Évangile nous conduire aux autres. C'est toujours quelque chose que nous avons à faire, plutôt que quelque chose que nous sommes appelés à devenir. De fait, le programme missionnaire de l'après-Vatican II, avec sa large conception de l'évangélisation, peut trop facilement donner lieu à un activisme accéléré et à un complexe de sauveur de la part des missionnaires.

Les missionnaires aujourd'hui sont mis au défi d'abandonner l'esprit de croisade du siècle des Lumières avec son complexe de supériorité arrogante, d'optimisme naïf, et d'activisme pragmatique, et de poursuivre leur mission de témoigner du Christ sur une note plus humble, contemplative et dialogale. L'Église n'est pas la source, l'agent principal ni la fin de la mission. L'Église est appelée à participer à une activité qui vient de Dieu, qui appartient à Dieu, et dont l'Esprit Saint est le principal acteur.

Missio Dei

La mission, c'est, en premier et en dernier lieu, la présence de Dieu et son activité dans le monde. Dieu est la source et la fin de la mission, le rôle des missionnaires est subordonné au rôle de Dieu et à son service. Le rôle de Dieu est évoqué de diverses manières dans la Bible. L'Évangile de Jean parle du Verbe par lequel tout existe, le Verbe qui éclaire tout homme et donne vie et grâce, le Verbe qui se fait chair en Jésus Christ. St Paul parle du mystère du dessein de Dieu pour le salut de tous (I Tim 2,4), le dessein d'unir toutes choses au ciel et sur la terre en Christ (Eph 1,10) ou de tout réconcilier dans le Christ (Col 1,20). L'Apocalypse parle des «nouveaux cieux et de la nouvelle terre», où Dieu viendra demeurer avec son peuple. «Voici la demeure de Dieu avec les hommes. Il aura sa demeure avec eux et ils seront son peuple (Ap 21,3)».

Ce qui est significatif dans ces images qui évoquent la mission de Dieu dans le monde, c'est leur universalité. Elles embrassent toute la race humaine et toute la création. On admet volontiers aujourd'hui cet élargissement du plan de salut de Dieu et son intérêt plein d'amour pour tous les peuples, pour tous les aspects de leur vie. La mission, c'est Dieu qui se tourne vers le monde avec un amour créatif, un pouvoir rédempteur de guérison et de transformation. Cela a lieu dans l'histoire ordinaire et n'est pas restreint à l'activité de l'Église. *Redemptoris Missio* parle de la présence et de l'activité de l'Esprit qui «sont universelles, sans limite d'espace ni de temps» (RM, n. 28). De plus, cette présence et cette action de l'Esprit de Dieu «concernent non seulement les individus mais aussi la société et l'histoire, les peuples, les cultures et les religions» (*ibid.*).

Participer à la mission de Dieu

Cette extension universelle de la mission de Dieu (par la Parole et l'Esprit) est le contexte dans lequel nous devons situer la mission. L'Église, et nous tous qui lui appartenons, sommes appelés à participer à un projet qui vient de Dieu et appartient à Dieu. Notre mission n'enlève donc rien à la mission divine. Nous sommes appelés et envoyés pour la seconder et contribuer à sa réalisation. De plus, participant à la mission de Dieu, nous ne partons jamais d'une table rase. Nous rencontrons des êtres humains et un monde où l'Esprit de Dieu est déjà à l'oeuvre. Réaliser cela place la mission dans une nouvelle perspective d'ensemble et lui retire beaucoup de son angoisse et de son agressivité. Nous ne sommes pas seuls à porter un salut qui serait exclusif, à des gens qui n'ont aucune relation de salut avec Dieu. Dieu est présent partout et avant nous, actif dans le sens du salut par des voies qui nous sont inconnues. Notre tâche consiste donc à découvrir et renforcer cette présence et cette action.

Rôle des missionnaires

Lorsque nous reconnaissons que notre mission ne consiste pas à prendre la suite de la mission de Dieu, mais à y participer, nous commençons à comprendre que notre premier défi est essentiellement celui de la contemplation. La mission est une rencontre avec un mystère : mystère d'un Dieu missionnaire dont l'amour embrasse le monde et tous ses habitants ; mystère de la

puissance de l'Esprit présent en des lieux inattendus, de manières imprévues; mystère de la participation du peuple au mystère pascal de façons que nous n'avons ni connues ni imaginées. Pour rencontrer ce mystère nous avons besoin de regarder, de contempler, de discerner, d'écouter, d'apprendre, de répondre, de collaborer.

Notre première tâche de missionnaires est de rechercher et de discerner où et comment l'Esprit de Dieu est présent et actif parmi ceux à qui nous sommes envoyés, et il s'agit là essentiellement d'un exercice contemplatif. Seul un esprit contemplatif nous permettra de ne pas imposer notre propre programme au dialogue qui existe déjà entre Dieu et le peuple, mais plutôt d'entrer dans ce dialogue avec le cœur et l'esprit du Christ, afin de découvrir le dessein de Dieu. C'est seulement dans la prière que nous pouvons apprendre à respecter la liberté de Dieu présent et actif dans son peuple avant notre arrivée, et à respecter la liberté des gens qui répondent à Dieu à leur manière.

Le mouvement missionnaire moderne a été marqué par un divorce tragique entre contemplation et mission. On a dit, peut-être par plaisanterie, que les missionnaires demandaient aux contemplatifs de s'acquitter pour eux de la prière, tandis qu'ils prenaient la tâche de prêcher l'Évangile et d'établir l'Église. Mais la prière est une dimension intrinsèque, non extrinsèque, de la mission. C'est seulement dans une contemplation priante que les missionnaires peuvent s'accorder au plan missionnaire de Dieu. En dehors de la prière, il y a un risque grave que les missionnaires deviennent les propagateurs d'un Évangile qui n'est pas celui du Christ, et bâtisseurs d'un Royaume qui n'a rien à voir avec le Règne de Dieu. Le dessein missionnaire de Dieu ne peut se glaner qu'à partir d'une écoute profonde de l'Esprit qui a sondé la profondeur de Dieu et connaît les voies de Dieu.

Un missiologue japonais contemporain, Kusuke Koyoma, accuse les missionnaires occidentaux de déformer l'Évangile du Christ par leur «esprit de croisade» et leur «complexe de professeurs», il leur demande de développer ce qu'il appelle un «esprit crucifié».³ Mais qu'est-ce qu'un esprit «crucifié»? Pour Koyoma, c'est «un esprit de renoncement qui s'appuie sur le renoncement du Christ... C'est l'esprit qui ne recherche pas le profit pour le profit. C'est l'esprit heureux de devenir rebut de l'humanité, puisque cela apportera un mieux pour les autres».⁴ Je suis assez d'accord avec Koyoma et j'ajouterais que sans une profonde vie de prière nous ne pourrions jamais espérer développer l'esprit crucifié du Christ.

Il est très urgent que les missionnaires aujourd'hui recouvrent quelque chose de cette unité entre contemplation et action apostolique qui a marqué le mouvement missionnaire monastique du Moyen-Âge. Selon Bosch, c'est «grâce au monachisme que tant de christianisme authentique s'est développé au cours des périodes sombres de l'Europe et au-delà... Au milieu d'un monde gouverné par l'amour de soi, les communautés monastiques étaient un signe visible et une première réalisation d'un monde gouverné par l'amour de Dieu».⁵ Heureusement, *Redemptoris Missio* a fait un certain chemin pour corriger le divorce entre les apostolats missionnaire et contemplatif, en décrivant le missionnaire comme un «contemplatif en action» (RM, n. 91), soulignant ainsi le rapport intime entre l'action et la contemplation de la vie du missionnaire. S'il est vrai que «le chrétien de demain sera un mystique ou n'existera pas du tout», comme a, paraît-il, dit Karl Rahner, il est encore plus vrai que le missionnaire de demain sera un mystique ou n'existera pas du tout.

Mais que doivent faire les missionnaires de demain ?

Jusqu'ici j'ai insisté sur la façon dont les missionnaires de demain devraient vivre leur vocation, j'ai très peu parlé du genre d'activité où ils devraient s'investir. Pourtant, la question : que doit faire le missionnaire de demain ? a encore sa valeur. Je vais essayer d'y répondre en mettant l'accent sur certains défis, anciens et nouveaux.

1 - La proclamation

Dès l'aube de l'histoire chrétienne, la proclamation de l'Évangile a été un aspect de la mission de l'Église et demeure une exigence qui s'impose aussi bien à notre époque qu'autrefois. Comme le Pape Jean-Paul II l'a affirmé : «l'Église ne peut se soustraire au mandat explicite du Christ; elle ne peut pas priver les hommes et les femmes de la "Bonne Nouvelle" qu'ils sont aimés de Dieu et

sauvés par lui (RM, n. 44)». Rejoindre de nouveaux groupes humains demeure toujours une priorité pour les missionnaires. Dans le passé, on identifiait ces groupes en les localisant géographiquement. Le critère géographique peut rester encore un indicateur utile des régions où l'Évangile doit toujours être proclamé, mais il faut aussi d'autres critères (RM, n. 37). Dans le monde changeant où nous vivons, de nouveaux contextes sociologiques et culturels surgissent vers lesquels il faut diriger la lumière et la puissance de l'Évangile du Christ, peut-être pour la première fois. Il y a, par exemple, comme *Redemptoris Missio* le mentionne, la nouvelle culture créée par les médias, et le monde de la jeunesse de notre temps, le monde instable des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées, et le monde anonyme des mégapoles. Le Pape demande aux missionnaires de prendre spécialement pour but les grandes villes du monde, «les centres où naît, pour ainsi dire, une humanité nouvelle avec de nouveaux modèles de développement» (RM, n. 37 b).

2 - Le dialogue avec les croyants des autres religions

C'est un défi relativement nouveau. Les missionnaires du passé ont été accusés d'adopter une attitude plutôt hostile envers les traditions religieuses des peuples qu'on les envoyait évangéliser. Cette critique est en majeure partie injuste, parfois anachronique. Il s'est trouvé de nombreux missionnaires qui montraient un profond respect pour les cultures et les croyances religieuses des peuples où ils étaient envoyés. Mais, enfants de leur temps, ils ne considéraient pas les autres religions comme des véhicules de la Parole de Dieu et des médiations de la grâce pour ceux qui les suivent. Les missionnaires formés à l'école de l'Église d'après Vatican II sont appelés à dépasser les perspectives limitées de leurs prédécesseurs et à voir le visage du Christ en ceux auprès de qui ils portent témoignage de l'Évangile.

Les missionnaires de demain devront développer une théologie de la reconnaissance fondée sur leur propre expérience d'avoir trouvé «le Christ» parmi ceux à qui ils sont envoyés. Ce genre de théologie de base donnera aux missionnaires un fondement solide pour s'engager dans un dialogue fructueux avec les croyants des autres religions. De plus, il ne faut pas regarder ce dialogue comme une simple préparation à la proclamation de l'Évangile. C'est, selon l'enseignement récent de l'Église, une partie essentielle du processus d'évangélisation. C'est une manière de proclamer l'Évangile.

3 - L'inculturation et le développement des Églises indigènes

Les missionnaires ont un rôle important à jouer dans le processus d'inculturation et le développement des Églises indigènes. Alors que le concept d'inculturation (incarnation de l'Évangile dans une culture particulière) est relativement nouveau, nous en connaissons la réalité depuis le début du Christianisme. La proclamation et l'accueil de l'Évangile dans le monde gréco-romain a été un exemple frappant du processus d'inculturation. Dans ce processus, l'Évangile a trouvé un nouveau langage et la culture en a été transformée.

Plus récemment, beaucoup de missionnaires très connus se sont opposés à toute transplantation artificielle des formes occidentales du Christianisme en terre étrangère. Ils voulaient que le message chrétien fondamental prenne de nouvelles formes en venant demeurer chez des peuples nouveaux qui possédaient leur propre et unique culture. La Mission, insistaient-ils, ne devait pas cloner un produit mûr, mais apporter à ce qui naissait quelque chose de nouveau. Pratiquement, il semble pourtant que l'Église primitive ait bien mieux réussi à inculturer l'Évangile que l'Église moderne.

L'Église locale doit porter la responsabilité première d'une inculturation progressive de l'Évangile. Le rôle des missionnaires est secondaire, mais cependant d'importance vitale. Ils sont, pour ainsi dire, les «sages-femmes» contribuant à la naissance de nouvelles communautés de disciples du Christ — communautés dotées des richesses culturelles de leur propre terrain et assistées par leurs propres ministres. Ce rôle réclame à la fois humilité et sensibilité. Les missionnaires trop sûrs d'eux-mêmes ou trop préoccupés d'ériger et d'entretenir des structures, peuvent, peut-être sans le vouloir, devenir des obstacles au développement spontané d'une nouvelle vie chrétienne.

4 - Renouveler la vigueur de l'Église d'origine

Si les missionnaires peuvent être considérées comme des «sages-femmes» aidant la naissance de

nouvelles Églises, ils sont aussi appelés à catalyser le renouvellement continu de leurs «Églises d'origine». Dans le passé, les missionnaires tendaient à se voir comme engagés dans une circulation à sens unique. À eux d'enseigner la vérité de l'Évangile, et aux soi-disant «païens» de le recevoir; à eux de convertir, aux païens de se laisser convertir. Les missionnaires d'aujourd'hui voient leurs tâches beaucoup plus comme une circulation à double sens, un échange vivifiant entre Églises anciennes et Églises jeunes, lançant des programmes de conscientisation pour aider leurs Églises d'origine à s'engager davantage dans la mission *ad gentes*.

Autrefois, les programmes de conscientisation missionnaire ont eu le défaut de proposer une image trop héroïque et même romantique du missionnaire, opposée à une image négative des peuples et des cultures où ils travaillaient. Nous ne devrions pas nous étonner de découvrir que, dans nos Églises d'origine, sous la tendre sympathie de surface pour les pauvres âmes abandonnées d'Afrique et d'Asie, il demeure des attitudes très obstinées d'intolérance et de préjugés raciaux. Les sociétés missionnaires sont appelées à participer à l'effort missionnaire interne de leurs Églises d'origine et à leur apporter la richesse de leur expérience interculturelle.

Les missionnaires sont donc appelés à être des catalyseurs dans un double sens : catalyseurs dans la rencontre entre l'Évangile et un peuple nouveau avec sa culture, menant à une nouvelle incarnation du Christ; et catalyseurs pour la croissance et le renouvellement de leurs Églises d'origine. Les missionnaires doivent interpeller leurs Églises d'origine pour confronter leurs attitudes et leurs valeurs avec celles des peuples à qui ils sont envoyés, parmi lesquels ils travaillent. C'est uniquement de cette façon qu'ils peuvent aider leurs Églises d'origine à développer et faire mûrir leur foi.

5 - Libération

Finalement, les missionnaires de demain sont mis au défi de donner une expression concrète à la victoire du Christ sur le mal, et à l'avancée du Règne de Dieu dans le monde. La mission de Jésus sur terre préparait la venue du règne eschatologique de Dieu, événement vraiment révolutionnaire en ce sens qu'il entraînait une transformation radicale de l'ordre social, politique et religieux. Cette mission était Bonne Nouvelle pour les pauvres et les exclus, premiers bénéficiaires des bénédictions du Règne de Dieu.

Aujourd'hui, les missionnaires sont appelés à re-saisir la nature prophétique de la proclamation par Jésus du Règne de Dieu dans notre mission, en tant qu'Église. La réflexion missionnaire récente et sa pratique font ressortir à juste titre que la mission concerne les gens dans la totalité de leurs besoins, qu'elle touche les individus et la société, l'âme et le corps, le présent et l'avenir. Le Règne de Dieu ne signifie rien de moins que la transformation intégrale de l'humanité et du monde. Il entraîne une nouvelle création du monde tel que nous le connaissons, la libération des hommes et des femmes de toute forme de servitude et d'oppression, personnelle et sociale. Il signifie la manifestation et l'accomplissement du plan de Dieu dans toute sa plénitude.

Le caractère intégral du Règne de Dieu exige que la mission de l'Église embrasse un champ plus vaste qu'auparavant. La mission, par conséquent, vise à une libération intégrale des êtres humains, l'Église en est signe et instrument. L'Église n'est fidèle à sa mission que lorsqu'elle rejoint tous les peuples et embrasse toutes les dimensions de la vie, lorsqu'elle s'efforce de renverser les barrières de races, de couleurs, de croyances et de religions, transformant les relations humaines par la puissance bienfaisante de l'Évangile de Jésus-Christ.

Ces cinq défis montrent bien dans quel genre de travail les missionnaires sont appelés à s'investir aujourd'hui. Il est clair que les missionnaires dans un avenir prévisible ne seront pas sans travail. Pourtant, pour en revenir à la remarque faite au début de cet article, la manière dont les missionnaires s'acquittent de leurs diverses tâches est peut-être plus important que ce qu'ils font. Si la mission doit être une proposition qui attire les jeunes de notre temps, elle nécessite un meilleur fondement théologique et une nouvelle approche. Un style plus contemplatif de présence missionnaire, entraînant patience, endurance, connaissance de ses limites, et parfois même retrait, s'impose de nos jours plus que jamais. Une telle manière de faire créera le temps et l'espace nécessaires pour permettre à la semence de la Parole de Dieu «de croître dans son propre terrain».⁶

Notes

* Michael Mac Cabe fait partie du Conseil Général de la Société des Missions Africaines (Via della Nocetta 3, 00164 Rome) ; il est responsable de la formation initiale et continue. Il a été missionnaire en Zambie et au Liberia pendant de longues années, puis président de l'institut de Théologie et Culture KMI à Dublin de 1999 à 2001. Il écrit dans le Bulletin de *SEDOS*, *les Cahiers Eudistes*, *The Indian Missiological Review* et d'autres périodiques.

¹ *The Flaming Centre (A Theology of the Christian Mission)*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1977, p. 2.

² Cité in Braaten, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³ «What Makes a Missionary? Towards Crucified Mind not Crusading Mind» in *Mission Trends*, n. 1, *Critical Issues in Mission Today*, ed. by G.H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stansky, C.S.P., Paulist Press, New York, 1974, p. 117ff.

⁴ *Art. cit.*, p. 131.

⁵ *Transforming Mission*, Orbis Books, New York, 1991, p. 230.

⁶ John Vijnngaards, «New Ways for Mission» in *The Tablet*, 22 Oct 1988, p. 1208.

Ref.: *Spiritus (Expériences et Recherches Missionnaires)*, n. 176, septembre 2004, pp. 332-343.

SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 2006

– ARICCIA –

(Tuesday, 3 May — Saturday, 7 May)

Theme:

**“Preaching the Kingdom of God:
Mission and Money”**

More details will follow

Dieu de la prospérité ou Dieu des Béatitudes ?

- Sidbé Semporé, OP* -

Sur fond de misère, de calamités, d'épidémies et de guerres fratricides, la Parole de Dieu est proposée et marchandée aux Africains sous des formes contradictoires par les Églises et les mouvements messianiques. Tel recrute une *Armée du Seigneur* pour un retour aux Dix Commandements, seule garantie d'un Salut pour l'Afrique. Tel proclame le *Royaume de l'Esprit* et convie les fidèles à une foire aux miracles. Tel encore suscite une *Société des Limoudim (Disciples)* de Rabbi Yehoshuah pour lutter contre les Églises établies, y compris par l'épée, et rétablir le règne du Prophète de Nazareth. Tel enfin intronise l'*Église des Vainqueurs* en dehors de laquelle il n'y a que des vaincus, des perdants, de malheureux damnés.

Depuis une vingtaine d'années particulièrement, c'est-à-dire depuis l'entrée fracassante de l'Afrique dans l'oeil des cyclones Démocratisation et Mondialisation, les nouveaux messies par milliers parcourent les cités et les campagnes et assiègent les immeubles et les chaumières en démarchant à qui mieux mieux l'Évangile de la Prospérité : «*Le temps est accompli et le Royaume de Dieu est tout proche : repentez-vous et croyez à l'Évangile*» (Mc 1,15) — i.e. à l'Évangile de la Résurrection de l'Afrique, de la Réhabilitation et de la Revanche de l'Afrique, de la Prospérité de l'Afrique. Sans complexes, des Églises nouvelles prêchent dans les stades et sur la place publique l'irruption d'une ère de prospérité et de richesse pour les adeptes de la Foi conquérante. La Montagne des Béatitudes résonne d'une étrange proclamation de Valeurs nouvelles, censées avoir été jusqu'ici occultées par la tradition timorée et minimaliste des Églises classiques.

Les Eglises de la Prospérité

En vogue dans une trentaine de pays d'Afrique, l'*Église des Vainqueurs* (The Winners' Chapel), fondée en 1983 par le Nigérian David OYEDEPO, est une des incarnations les plus triomphalistes de la théologie de la Prospérité véhiculée par les sectes néo-fondamentalistes inspirées et issues des courants nord-américains. Le Credo de ces Églises de la Prospérité ne s'embarrasse pas de nuances byzantines : Dieu est le Dieu des *Vainqueurs*, des *Triomphateurs*, c'est-à-dire de tous ceux qui, en cette vie, échappent, grâce à la Foi conquérante, au sort peu enviable de la grande majorité des Africains. Ce Salut Glorieux est acquis aux chrétiens renés par la Victoire du Ressuscité et en vertu d'une «*élection divine*» qui prédestine les membres de ces Églises à *régner* (pouvoir politique et social), à *prosperer* (pouvoir économique), à *vaincre* la maladie et les forces occultes (pouvoir mystique). Ces Églises, structurées de façon classique et peu originale, dépendent d'un Pasteur-Fondateur, lui-même directement inspiré d'En Haut et garant, par son autorité et ses écrits, de la croissance et de la pérennité de l'entreprise. Les pasteurs locaux (*pasteurs résidents*) et leurs subalternes orchestrent les directives et dirigent les congregations selon les normes établies. De leur zèle et de leur savoir-faire dépendent la puissance attractive des communautés et la prospérité matérielle et sociale de l'Église.

Tout comme le Sud-Coréen Paul Yonggi Cho, fondateur de l'*Église Centrale du Plein Évangile*, Oyedepo revendique pour son Église un développement fulgurant et une réussite foudroyante : le sanctuaire principal de l'Église, situé à Ota au Nigéria, constitue, à ses dires, le plus grand édifice chrétien au monde, capable d'offrir jusqu'à 50,000 places assises ; en 1999, l'Église se vantait d'avoir formé une troupe d'élite de 48.000 hauts fonctionnaires, hommes de loi, hommes d'affaires, diplomates, ingénieurs, médecins et autres cadres de la société ; elle multiplie les universités, les hôpitaux, les forages et toutes sortes de réalisations socio-culturelles. Les jeunes en grand nombre obtiennent des bourses d'études pour des formations diplômantes. L'Église est fière de présenter une vitrine d'activités valorisantes et de réalisations grandioses, comme fruit de la Bénédiction divine et de la Foi conquérante.

L'activité missionnaire est menée tambour battant par des centaines de recrues, selon les méthodes et avec les moyens d'une entreprise moderne. Elle est d'ailleurs organisée sous le label d'*Agence Missionnaire Mondiale*, et recourt à tous les moyens modernes et technologiques de communication pour atteindre ses buts.

Le groupe de prédicateurs s'installe en bordure d'une avenue avec une puissante sonorisation et quelques hommes et femmes assurent l'animation par des chants et des danses, tandis que les prédicateurs accostent les passants pour les inviter à participer à la joyeuse manifestation. Au «*venez et voyez*» qui sert de parole de salutation succède le kérygme audacieusement adapté de Mt 11, 28-29 : «*Venez à nous, vous tous qui peinez et ployez sous le fardeau des traditions ancestrales, de la maladie, de la pauvreté ... , et vous serez soulagés.... Mettez-vous à l'école du Grand Vainqueur, Jésus-Christ, Libérateur de tous les maux. ... , et vous trouverez santé, richesse et bonheur...* ».

Bientôt la flèche acérée du kérygme de ces Églises-Entreprises atteint aux points névralgiques du cœur des milliers d'Africains sans visage et sans identité qui s'entassent dans les quartiers précaires des cités et dans les faubourgs-cloaques des agglomérations. Au bruit des chants et au fracas des tam-tam, au rythme du Reggae pour Dieu et du Makossa pour Christ, les foules accourues comme au matin de la Pentecôte écoutent les prêches haletants du pasteur scandés des inévitables «*Alleluia ! — Amen !*» et, irrésistiblement subjuguées par le crescendo des invectives et le poids des maux, des malheurs et des malédictions dont elles sont pressées de se libérer, finissent par éclater en sanglot. Ainsi se répète inlassablement l'histoire des adhésions enthousiastes et ambiguës au Jésus de l'Histoire : «*D'entendre cela, ils eurent le cœur transpercé, et ils dirent à Pierre et aux apôtres : "Frères, que devons nous faire ?"*» (Ac 2, 37).

D'emblée, l'invité est mis à l'aise, rassuré et conforté par les propos pleins de conviction du prédicateur. Voici un extrait d'une exhortation — type publiée dans les feuillets de l'*Église des Vainqueurs* :

Choisi pour le SOMMET

«Vous, par contre, vous êtes une race élue, un sacerdoce royal, une nation sainte, un peuple racheté, afin d'annoncer les vertus de celui qui vous a appelés des ténèbres à son admirable lumière » (1 P 2, 9).

*Dieu avait un but en vous créant. L'ultime objectif de ce but est de vous **faire marcher sur les hauteurs ici sur terre, de faire de vous un succès remarquable. Réussir veut dire sortir du lot, être distingué parmi tant d'autres.***

«Vous êtes le sel de la terre, la lumière du monde, une ville située sur une montagne ne peut être cachée».

*Pour marcher sur les hauteurs, votre volonté doit être forte. C'est votre volonté qui vous fait passer à travers et au-dessus des oppositions de la vie. Avec cette volonté bien établie, aucune opposition ne pourra vous arrêter. Exercez votre volonté pour **réussir** et elle vous conduira à travers les obstacles jusqu'à votre **palais**.*¹

Un autre passage, tiré d'un livre du Pasteur Yonggi Cho, résume les directives que le chrétien, membre des Églises de la Prospérité, doit appliquer dans sa recherche du Bonheur plein :

*«Vous devez faire pénétrer dans votre esprit l'idée de la **victoire** et de **l'abondance**. Dieu **n'échoue jamais**. Si donc vous recevez les pensées qui viennent de Dieu, vous connaîtrez toujours le **succès**. Dieu ne **perd jamais** la bataille, car il est l'éternel vainqueur. Vous devriez toujours être conscients de la **victoire**. Dieu ne **manque jamais de rien**. Habituez-vous également à penser en terme **d'abondance**».*²

Les chrétiens constituent l'élite de l'humanité, un peuple de rois promis à la prospérité, à la domination, à la victoire. C'est la réalisation sur terre des promesses apocalyptiques : Ap 5, 10 : «*Tu as fait d'eux pour notre Dieu une Royauté de Prêtres régnant sur la terre*».

Critique des Églises de la Prospérité

La critique du Credo des Églises de la prospérité et de la théologie sous-jacente à leur pratique missionnaire est aisée : on y décèle une mise en sourdine, sinon entre parenthèses, du Mystère de la

Croix du Serviteur Souffrant. L'invitation du *Christ* à prendre sa croix pour le suivre (Mt 10, 38 et 16, 24), la profession de Foi de *Paul* pour qui la Croix du Christ constitue le seul motif de fierté (Gal 6, 14), et l'exhortation de la Lettre aux Hébreux à «fixer les yeux sur le chef de notre foi, qui la mène à la perfection, Jésus, qui, au lieu de la **joie** qui lui était proposée, endura une **croix** dont il méprisa l'infamie, et qui est assis désormais à la droite du trône de Dieu» (He 12, 2) ne semblent pas trouver d'écho dans la prédication et l'enseignement des *Vainqueurs* et des *Prospères*. D'autre part, le Dieu du silence, de la douceur et de la tendresse, Celui qui privilégie les pauvres et prend la défense des faibles et des laissés-pour-compte, Celui qui proclame : «Je suis haut et saint dans ma demeure, mais je suis avec l'homme contrit et humilié, pour ranimer les esprits humiliés, pour ranimer les cœurs contrits» (Is 57, 15), l'Emmanuel, est absorbé par le Dieu des villas luxueuses et des voitures rutilantes, Celui qui claironne sa victoire sur le péché et sur Satan en déployant comme trophées et butins la réussite sociale et le pouvoir multiforme de ses adorateurs. On peut légitimement critiquer l'«Évangile temporel» de ces nouveaux missionnaires et leur vision réductrice du Mystère pascal, l'insistance sur les miracles et les guérisons, la recherche immodérée de la réussite personnelle et la poursuite angoissée du salut individuel.

Questions aux Églises d'Afrique

Cependant, la croissance constante des effectifs des Églises de la Prospérité en Afrique interroge et interpelle les Églises classiques.

Quelle vision du Salut ?

La première question qui vient à l'esprit de qui observe l'*Église des Vainqueurs* ou toute autre Église de la Prospérité est celle-ci : quelle est la vision du Salut en Christ que nos propres Églises présentent et enseignent à leurs fidèles ? N'est-elle pas elle aussi, quelque part, tronquée et incomplète ?

La catéchèse enseignée aux catéchumènes et aux néophytes fait-elle de ceux-ci des convertis ? N'est-elle pas conçue de façon trop occidentale, cartésienne et désincarnée ? Les trois années de catéchuménat exigées par la plupart de nos Églises pour le Baptême produisent-elles des chrétiens plus convaincus et libérés que ne le font les six mois d'enseignement pré-baptismal des Églises pentecôtistes ? L'œuvre de Salut et de Libération du Christ n'est-elle pas présentée de façon désincarnée et réduite à un enseignement notionnel qui n'éclaire pas l'esprit et ne réchauffe pas le cœur ? L'essentiel de l'Évangile et du Kérygme n'est-il pas noyé dans un fatras de définitions et d'articles qui finissent par diluer le ferment du Credo ? La pédagogie de la Foi prend-elle assez appui sur la situation et le vécu du catéchumène et tient-elle assez compte de ses aspirations et de ses angoisses pour une démarche de conversion, de libération et d'engagement ? Il faut se poser sérieusement la question de l'annonce et de la transmission de la Foi aux Africains d'aujourd'hui, et tenir davantage compte des situations complexes et variées où le Christ les rejoint, pour les mener plus loin et en faire un *Peuple de rois* — et non de serviteurs résignés. Nos Églises devraient, à l'instar des Églises de la Prospérité, redonner au baptisé sa fierté de chrétien, paré de l'onction royale grâce au don (baptême) de l'Esprit : «Il nous a en effet arrachés à l'empire des ténèbres et nous a transférés dans le **Royaume** de son Fils bien-aimé» (1, 13).

Plus que jamais résonne pour le chrétien d'Afrique la joyeuse interpellation de Léon le Grand : «Reconnais, ô Chrétien, ta dignité ! Souviens-toi de quelle Tête et de quel Corps tu es membre !». Le baptême — d'eau et d'Esprit — devrait être précédé d'une initiation aux moeurs royales de futurs princes qui s'entraînent à leur futur rôle dans le monde et qui vivent de la certitude qu'une page de leur vie est définitivement tournée par l'onction baptismale : «Tu fus égorgé et tu rachetas pour Dieu, au prix de ton sang, des hommes de toute race, langue, peuple et nation ; tu as fait d'eux pour notre Dieu une Royauté de Prêtres régnant sur la terre» (Ap 5, 9-10). Et le chrétien africain comprendra alors que se réalise pour lui ce que chantait le Psalmiste : «A la place de tes pères te viendront des fils ; tu en feras des **princes** par toute la terre» (Ps 45, 17). Plus de visages résignés, plus de chrétiens serviles, mais des êtres nouveaux, régénérés et promus à la royauté pascalle.

Quelle vision de l'Église ?

Il faut également se demander quelle vision de l'Église est enseignée et propagée chez les chrétiens, particulièrement chez les catholiques. On doit reconnaître qu'en Afrique, malgré le choix du terme

symbolique de «*Famille*» pour caractériser l'Église et la restructuration des paroisses en communautés de base, l'image qui prévaut et la pratique qui perdure sont celles d'une Église pyramidale fortement structurée et hiérarchisée. Cette vision finit par déresponsabiliser le chrétien et par créer chez lui un complexe de sujet télécommandé, contraint de garder sa place au bas d'une échelle qui conduit à Dieu en passant par les religieuses, les prêtres, les évêques et enfin le Pape. Une telle conception induit la «masse» à la passivité, le chrétien catholique n'étant pas éduqué à prendre l'initiative, mais plutôt à obéir aux directives de l'Église assimilée à la Hiérarchie, à ouvrir la bouche pour *consommer* ou tendre la main pour *recevoir*. Il est contrôlé de toute part, mis en garde et constamment enjoint à se mettre en règle.

Quelle vision du monde ?

L'enseignement de l'Église à travers la catéchèse et les prédications véhicule une vision quelque peu négative ou péjorative du monde et du temporel. Vision qui risque de détourner les chrétiens de l'engagement socio-politique et des combats pour les enjeux vitaux et cruciaux des sociétés africaines. Les catéchismes ont beau gommer les assertions négatives du passé concernant la politique, le commerce, l'argent, la sexualité ..., le mal est fait et il est aujourd'hui difficile de remonter la pente des mentalités conditionnées par la vision janséniste du passé. La diabolisation du pouvoir et de la réussite humaine, ainsi que la culpabilisation de ceux qui s'investissent dans les affaires publiques, les normes restrictives qui enserrant l'institution du mariage et le peu de soutien dont bénéficient les combattants de la liberté et de la justice, tout cela révèle une vision peu enthousiasmante du monde et du temporel, bien en deçà de celle prônée par *Gaudium et Spes*. En résulte la peur que le chrétien ressent de s'aventurer dans des domaines et de s'engager dans des activités où il ne se sent pas soutenu par son Église. L'œuvre de gestion et de transformation du monde et de la société comme mission principale des laïcs n'est pas suffisamment entamée, faute de motivation et de conviction.

Quelle conception de l'Eschatologie ?

L'Église est la construction du Royaume ici-bas qui trouvera son achèvement et son accomplissement dans le Royaume eschatologique. La marche vers le Terme est typifiée par l'Exode du Peuple hébreu vers la Terre Promise. La recherche du Bonheur pour des millions d'Africains aujourd'hui emprunte les mêmes chemins et explore les mêmes voies que suivit l'aspiration millénaire de tous les peuples de la terre, à commencer par celui de la Bible. La libération d'Égypte est devenue une typologie de la libération à laquelle aspirent aujourd'hui les peuples-esclaves de tous les Continents.

Tenir les yeux fixés sur le Terme ne doit pas faire mépriser ou négliger les tâches du présent. La marche « vers une terre *plantureuse et vaste, vers une terre qui ruisselle de lait et de miel ...* » (Ex 3,8), vers «*la nouvelle Jérusalem qui descend du Ciel* » (Ap 3,12 ; 21,2 ; 21,10) est celle d'un peuple préoccupé du bien-être minimal de tous ses membres ici-bas, tel que le recommandent Mt 25,31-46 et la Prière du Notre-Père.

Il n'est pas normal que des communautés chrétiennes de vieille souche croupissent dans la misère après des décennies de tradition et de pratique chrétiennes, tandis que de nouvelles Oumma musulmanes émergent de-ci de-là comme des forces sociales montantes. L'enseignement du Christ et l'acceptation de la Croix visent à fixer solidement le cœur du chrétien aux «*Choses d'En-Haut, là où se trouve le Christ...* » (Col 3, 1-2) et à le détourner de l'enlèvement dans les biens et les valeurs transitoires.

Quelles recommandations et quels encouragements la «*Doctrine sociale de l'Église*» dispense-t-elle au chrétien dans sa recherche légitime de bien-être ? Ne devrait-on pas l'adapter et l'intégrer à la catéchèse ? Devenir chrétienne signifie-t-il pas, véritablement, devenir plus homme, être investi de valeurs-guides et de valeurs-forces pour une vie humaine plus harmonieuse et pour la construction de ce monde selon Dieu ? Toutes les questions que nos Églises continuent de soulever (religion et développement, foi et politique, santé et guérison, foi et promotion sociale...) montrent que la tension eschatologique de la Foi incite à une plus grande prise en charge du bien-être de l'homme

et oriente la nouvelle évangélisation de l'Afrique, soucieuse de constituer des communautés pilotes dans la société. Ainsi les chrétiens en solidarité constitueront le fer de lance du combat pour un monde meilleur pour s'assurer que « *parmi eux nul ne soit dans le besoin* » (Ac 4, 34).

Dieu de la prospérité : une panacée pour l'Afrique ? Manipulé comme un nouveau Fétiche aux pouvoirs magiques de guérison, de réussite, de protection et de prospérité, un tel Dieu ne saurait conduire le chrétien à se conformer au Christ dans sa Mort et sa Résurrection. La Bible est une fois de plus transformée en un recueil de sublimes recettes pour la réussite personnelle.

Il est temps que nos Églises montrent aux chrétiens que le Dieu de Jésus-Christ est un Dieu ami de la vraie Prospérité de l'homme, celle qui résulte du désir et de la possession des Biens prioritaires du Royaume, qui habilite à transformer l'épreuve et l'échec en Croix victorieuse, qui arme pour le don de soi au service des autres, qui fixe sur le chemin d'un Bonheur que ne peut produire aucun système, aucune idéologie, aucune église forgée de main d'homme : la Béatitude chèrement acquise par le Serviteur Souffrant et Glorifié.

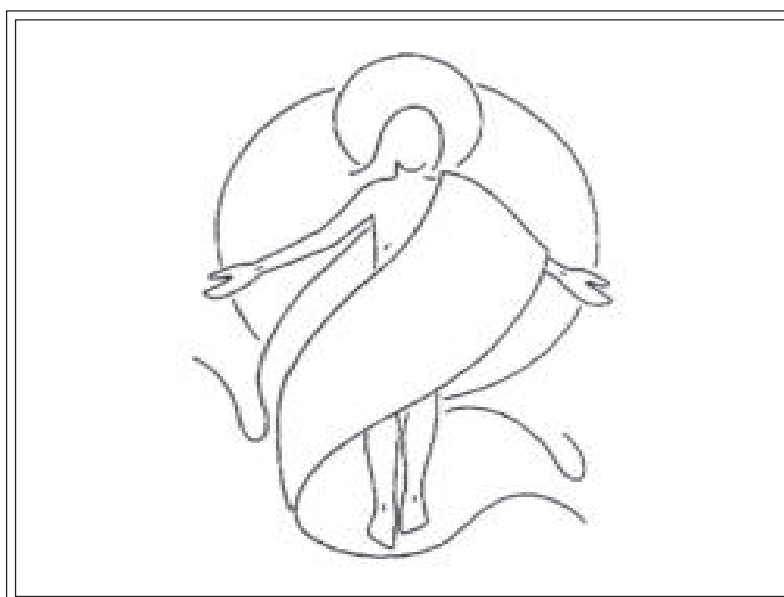
Notes

* Courriel de l'auteur : sempore@yahoo.fr

¹ «Vous aussi vous pouvez réussir » in *Signes et Merveilles aujourd'hui*, Abidjan, mars 2003, p. 3.

² Yonggi Cho, P., *La quatrième dimension. Comment mettre sa foi en action et réussir dans sa vie*, Miami, Vida, 1987, p. 126.

Réf. : *Mission de l'Église*, supplément du n. 146, Janvier-Mars 2005, pp. 34-40.



Les Églises d'Afrique et le défi de promouvoir des médias responsables

- Jean-Pierre Bodjoko Lilembu, SJ -

Kinshasa-Gombé

Introduction

De plus en plus, les médias servent des balises pour contrecarrer les maux de notre société, en plus de leur rôle communicatif. Cependant, un danger les guette de manière permanente : celui de banaliser l'information livrée et d'abuser de lecteurs, de spectateurs et des auditeurs. Un des premiers ministres de la longue «transition» qu'a connue la République Démocratique du Congo à l'époque de Mobutu avait fustigé la presse zaïroise de l'époque en la taxant de présenter «*des titres pompeux au contenu creux et sablonneux*».

Notre but dans ces lignes n'est pas de faire un procès aux médias. Au contraire. En soulevant les points sombres qui les tirent vers le bas et le vulgaire, nous essayons de proposer les voies qui peuvent les ramener à leur objectif premier : être le loyal censeur du vrai. Notre réflexion s'inspire du modèle chrétien d'user de moyens de communication sociale.

Les faiblesses des medias

La pertinence des moyens de communication sociale pour notre société moderne n'a plus besoin d'être démontrée. L'Église qui, pour manifester son attachement aux médias et dans le cadre du *Jubilé 2000*, a honoré les journalistes le 4 juin 2000, a pour sa part intégré les moyens de communication sociale dans son action pastorale depuis bien de décennies. Cependant, il est impératif qu'elle connaisse davantage son langage, ses symboles, ses forces et ses faiblesses, car, comme la fait remarquer l'instruction pastorale *Aetatis novae*,

«les médias ont la capacité de peser non seulement sur les modes de pensée mais encore sur les contenus de la pensée. Pour beaucoup de personnes, la réalité correspond à ce que les médias définissent comme tel ; ce que les médias ne reconnaissent pas explicitement paraît insignifiant » (n. 4).

Waswandi Ngoliko abonde aussi dans le même sens, en faisant apparaître l'obligation pour l'Église d'actualiser son enseignement dans un monde en perpétuelle mutation exercée par les médias. Selon lui,

*«à cet âge médiatique, d'aucuns n'ignorent l'influence toujours croissante des médias, et tout homme en parle longuement de telle sorte qu'ils exercent sur le système politique, l'éducation, les attitudes religieuses et morales, une force inconsciente que personne n'est arrivée à décrire. Cette situation incontournable appelle l'Église à être présente dans ce domaine prépondérant, avec une théologie dynamique pour inculturer l'évangile dans le cœur des hommes, dans cette nouvelle culture en perpétuel dynamisme.»*¹

Si dans notre société médiatisée, l'Église veut présenter sa propre vision du monde et sa lecture personnelle des événements de notre temps, l'exigence professionnelle nous pousse à soulever certains aspects faibles qui font que les médias deviennent à un certain point un danger pour la société. En effet, les médias ne constituent pas seulement un moyen de communication. Ils sont aussi un problème pour les communicateurs et pour la société. Personne, en effet, ne doute de l'influence — bonne ou mauvaise — que les hommes des médias exercent sur la société. C'est ainsi d'ailleurs que les médias sont appelés *quatrième pouvoir*.

Bien souvent, les hommes des médias se laissent doubler par la vitesse des événements. Or, cette vitesse transforme la réalité et empêche souvent l'esprit critique, la vérification, la mise à distance de l'information. *On fait alors de l'information un spectacle et on la dénature à son gré. Il faudrait ajouter à cela certains problèmes liés à la situation socio-économique, surtout pour une certaine catégorie d'hommes des médias : fréquentation, connivence, corruption, gain facile, pressions diverses ...*

Nous voudrions épingler ici quelques-uns des points faibles qui, malheureusement contribuent au «dysfonctionnement» des médias :

1. Abus d'influence

Certains hommes des médias, sachant qu'ils jouissent d'un prestige par l'influence qu'ils exercent sur la société, se laissent souvent aller dans la complaisance. Michel Souchon décrit avec justesse cette situation :

« Parce qu'ils ont la possibilité de faire sortir de l'ombre et de l'anonymat qui ils veulent, et d'une manière bien souvent arbitraire (ou aléatoire), les journalistes et, plus généralement, les gens des médias sont puissants, craints, respectés, courtisés. De plus en plus, ils créent l'événement, ils fabriquent des vedettes : ils le savent et ont la tentation d'en abuser. »²

2. La partialité

Fréquemment, les hommes des médias imposent aux informations leur taille; leur goût, avec bien souvent des omissions volontaires. Parfois, les différentes tendances se font sentir dans leur façon de présenter les nouvelles ou les titres. Pour un semblant d'objectivité, ils se cachent derrière des expressions de genre : «selon des sources dignes de foi», «selon une certaine opinion», «selon X qui a requis l'anonymat».... Cette situation expose les agents de la communication à la corruption, à la dépendance, à la manipulation.

3. Connivence et abus de fréquentation

Comme dans tout autre secteur de la vie sociale ou professionnelle, le travail des médias, au fil des ans, fait que les amitiés se nouent. Ces amitiés peuvent créer ou créent des complicités inconscientes et altèrent le jugement et le regard.³ Isabelle Veyrat-Masson exprime bien cette situation quand elle soutient qu' «à trop se fréquenter — les journalistes entre eux, les journalistes et les élites politiques, économiques, etc. — les différences s'amenuisent. Les échanges deviennent relation, les relations se transforment en amitiés ou en copinages. La capacité critique s'émousse. Tous en viennent à penser la même chose au même moment. Les mêmes erreurs d'analyse émergent simultanément en des lieux qu'on pensait opposés».⁴

4. Dissocier les droits des devoirs

Quelques fois, *les communicateurs* s'imaginent qu'ils n'ont que des droits. Pourtant, ils ont aussi beaucoup de devoirs : l'honnêteté, l'impartialité, l'intégrité, la conscience professionnelle, le respect de la vie privée.... Quand un homme de médias ne remplit pas (ou plus) bien ses devoirs, il ne mérite aucune crédibilité de la société.

5. Vouloir tout connaître

Ce défaut est un des dangers qui touchent la communication. A ce sujet, le Cardinal Martini fait remarquer qu'«il faut savoir respecter les secrets et qu'on ne peut prétendre tout connaître, parce que ce serait détruire l'autre. Il faut faire la part de l'obscurité, du silence, du temps. Dieu a pris du temps pour communiquer, des milliers d'années. Il faut accorder du temps à la communication».⁵

6. L'instrumentalisation des médias :

Cette faille est surtout perçue dans les médias de l'Église. Michel Souchon estime que «la première et grande tentation des hommes d'Église, lorsqu'ils interviennent, est celle de l'utilisation purement instrumentale des médias. Souvent, dans l'Église, on dit qu'il faut utiliser les médias pour annoncer la Bonne Nouvelle, comme on se servirait d'un porte-voix pour être bien entendu et par plus de monde».⁶

Cette instrumentalisation donne l'impression d'une certaine avidité de posséder les médias.

Pourtant le Cardinal Martini pense que «*quand l'usage des médias devient avidité de les posséder, c'est l'ébec. Si, en effet, les médias ne sont pas employés comme service, mais comme richesse et ostentation, ils sont inefficaces pour la communication*». ⁷

Il n'est pas possible de faire une énumération exhaustive de tous les côtés sombres des médias. Les quelques points soulevés constituent juste un repère qui nous met sur la piste afin de savoir ce qu'il faudrait éviter quand nous faisons usage des médias.

Les défis pour les médias de l'Église

«*Les médias modernes ne sont pas seulement des instruments de communication, mais aussi un monde à évangéliser. En termes de contenu, il faut s'assurer que les médias propagent le bien, le vrai et le beau*». ⁸ Ces propos de Jean Paul II pourraient en eux-mêmes constituer un défi à relever pour l'Église. Il est ainsi clair que le communicateur chrétien doit satisfaire à deux exigences majeures. Il y a d'abord les exigences de son métier qui imposent une documentation bien fournie, un discernement équilibré, honnêteté intellectuelle et force de caractère. Il y a ensuite, et c'est capital, les exigences de sa foi qui présument un attachement au message de Jésus-Christ et de son Église. ⁹ Ce deuxième aspect est pour nous la base même de toute communication dans l'Église. Toutes les autres facettes des médias en découlent.

Le document initial du Concile Vatican II, *Inter mirifica*, soulignait déjà que «*pour qu'il soit fait un usage correct des moyens (de communication), il est absolument nécessaire que tous ceux qui les utilisent connaissent les principes de l'ordre moral et les appliquent fidèlement*». ¹⁰ Epousant ce point de vue de Vatican II, les évêques d'Afrique lient aussi les exigences professionnelles aux exigences de la foi quand ils déclarent :

«*Vu la complexité de cet apostolat des moyens de communication sociale), les évêques n'affecteront que des personnes dûment formées tant du point de vue doctrinal qu'au plan professionnel*». ¹¹

Nous nous trouvons ainsi face à une réalité justifiée qui voudrait qu'aucune pratique des médias dans l'Église ne puisse se faire sans une référence à l'éthique chrétienne. Il s'agit ici, d'une part, de soulever la question de normes éthiques, et d'autre part, de parler de déontologie de l'agent de communication chrétien. A ce sujet *Aetatis novae* insiste sur la nécessité d'une évaluation critique des médias. Ce document soutient que l'Église doit chercher à *fournir une aide véritable en indiquant les critères éthiques et moraux applicables à ce domaine, critères que l'on trouvera dans les valeurs à la fois humaines et chrétiennes* (n. 12).

Emboîtant le pas à *Aetatis novae*, l'Union Catholique Internationale de la Presse (UCIP), propose dix normes pour une éthique de l'information. ¹² Ces normes peuvent constituer un point de repère pour tout communicateur consciencieux et responsable. Les voici :

- *Le droit du peuple à une information véridique*
- *L'engagement du journaliste au respect de l'objectivité : promouvoir le droit de chaque personne et de chaque peuple à une information objective.*
- *La responsabilité sociale du journaliste : l'information est un objet social et non un simple produit.*
- *L'intégrité professionnelle du journaliste.*
- *Les journalistes et leur public : favoriser l'accès du public à l'information.*
- *Le respect de la vie privée et de la dignité de la personne.*
- *Le respect de l'intérêt public.*
- *Le respect de la personne, des droits de l'homme et de la diversité des cultures.*
- *La lutte contre les grands fléaux de notre temps: s'interdire toute complaisance à l'égard de toute forme de violence, de haine ou de discrimination.*
- *Promotion d'un nouvel ordre mondial de l'information et de la communication.*

A notre avis, ces dix normes englobent d'une manière complémentaire les principes éthiques que l'Église fournit comme aide aux usagers de la communication. Nous pouvons encore relever quelques éléments de déontologie professionnelle de l'allocution du Pape Paul VI à l'Association

de la presse française en Italie.¹³ Paul VI invite les hommes des médias à *se soumettre au réel*, qu'il s'agisse de faits, de situations, de mentalités ; avec une documentation honnête, précise, aussi complète que possible qui permette de juger en responsable. Il (les) appelle aussi à résister à la tentation du sensationnel à tout prix et à ne pas mettre en relief un seul aspect de la réalité. Un devoir s'impose aussi aux communicateurs de ne pas négliger *les laissés pour-compte*, blessés souvent dans leur dignité humaine, dans leur liberté et leurs exigences spirituelles.

Il est donc impérieux que le communicateur chrétien se distingue dans son métier par des vertus chrétiennes fondées sur sa foi en Jésus-Christ. Les participants au *Séminaire catholique sur les mass média* qui s'est tenu à Nsowan, le 2 avril 1976, avaient sans doute saisi la portée de leur responsabilité et de leur devoir de communicateurs quand ils demandent avec conviction

«*que les catholiques, chargés de communication, aient une forte influence dans leur entourage professionnel et dans la société, qu'ils s'efforcent de défendre les droits de l'homme, de promouvoir la justice sociale et de participer aux efforts constructifs de développement*». ¹⁴

Le Cardinal Michael Otunga porte le même regard sur le communicateur chrétien et il emploie des termes bien précis pour présenter un idéal-type :

«*Le communicateur chrétien est là pour faire passer à travers les médias un message qui unit les gens plutôt qu'un message qui les divise. Il s'efforcera chaque fois d'appuyer ce qui promeut la vérité, la justice, la paix, la fraternité et l'égalité dans le peuple ; de mettre en œuvre l'honnêteté qui construit la crédibilité et l'interdépendance, ce qui apporte l'authentique changement des cœurs et le développement humain : d'exprimer les besoins et les aspirations des gens et de suggérer des solutions à leurs problèmes*». ¹⁵

Les dimensions morales ou éthiques que l'Église prône visent à donner un cachet spécial aux médias et aident à faire face aux défis que lancent ces outils de communication qui sont très souvent utilisés pour des idéologies diverses, surtout pour la manipulation de la société.

Un autre défi à relever pour le communicateur est celui de l'information à sens unique (émetteur-récepteur) ou l'information du haut en bas. Les médias qui privilégient ce genre de communication sont inadaptés à la société de notre temps. Une nouvelle manière de communiquer s'avère alors nécessaire : la *communication participative*. Celle-ci nous invite instamment au dialogue, et en même temps, elle nous presse à éviter *des communications susceptibles d'engendrer la domination, la manipulation ou le profit personnel*.¹⁶ Afin de mieux intégrer les médias dans la vie quotidienne de la communauté, la *communication participative* doit favoriser l'échange réciproque, l'interaction entre partenaires de communication : émetteur-récepteur ; récepteur-émetteur.

N'étant pas un simple instrument de communication, les médias ont aussi une vocation d'ouverture aux autres, une vocation de rassembler, de faire vivre ensemble tout le peuple dans un *grand village*.¹⁷ Il s'agit ici, comme le soutient Waswandi, de s'intéresser à des hommes qui ne sont pas seulement des récepteurs passifs, prêts à enregistrer des messages, mais des forces agissantes pouvant répercuter ces messages, les renvoyer sur l'émetteur, les modifier à leur tour par un 'feedback'. Dans ce sens, tout chrétien est un relais du Christ quand il met en pratique sa parole et la partage avec les autres. Dans sa plénitude, l'acte communicationnel est d'essence divine. Quand, une production n'en tient pas compte, l'homme est diminué dans sa dignité.¹⁸

On pourrait encore ajouter que par extension, le **feed-back** s'identifie à la 'boucle informationnelle' et désigne tout retour d'information du destinataire 'vers la source', y compris l'effet dit 'boomerang' (parce que l'émetteur méconnaît les réactions du récepteur, son message lui revient sur la tête).¹⁹

Sous une autre dimension, nous apprécions la façon dont Waswandi comprend la communication dans sa vision communautaire. A cet effet, il se réfère, entre autres, au dialogue trinitaire. Il écrit :

«*La théologie de la communication est fondée sur l'esprit anthropologique chrétien du 'vivre-ensemble-en-communauté' que nous révèlent le dialogue entre les Trois Personnes divines de la Trinité (1 Jn 4,8) et le mystère de la création, de l'Incarnation et de la mission de l'Église*». ²⁰

Ouverture, rassemblement, unité, relation, ... autant de mots qui doivent caractériser la communication chrétienne. Mais il est important, pour nous chrétiens, dans l'usage des moyens de

communication sociale, de tourner notre regard vers Celui qui est à la base de notre foi : le Christ Jésus. En effet, l'honnêteté, la sincérité, la vérité qui doivent caractériser le communicateur chrétien se réfèrent à lui, car il est le fondement de la médiéthique chrétienne.²¹ Pareillement, pour compléter notre regard vers le Christ, nous sommes appelés à communiquer *pour* et *avec* l'autre. Dans ce sens, nous devons, dans notre communication, écouter l'autre et répondre à ses attentes. L'instruction ne nous dit-elle pas que

*«de par sa nature, la communication sociale tend à réaliser des échanges entre les hommes. Ils découvriront ainsi un sens plus approfondi de la vie communautaire. De la sorte, l'homme concourt au 'dessein de Dieu' dans l'histoire, conduit qu'il est par la main de Dieu. Selon la foi chrétienne, l'union entre les hommes, en tant que fin principale de toute communication, trouve son origine, et déjà sa préfiguration, dans le mystère fondamental de l'éternelle société de Dieu, Père, Fils et Saint-Esprit, qui vivent une seule vie divine».*²²

Nous pourrions encore compléter cette affirmation de *Communio et Progressio* en prenant au mot l'intitulé même de ce document pour soutenir que c'est dans la communion que nous améliorerons la communication dans notre communauté.

Inculturer les moyens de communication sociale

Il est vrai que l'annonce de l'Évangile ne peut se passer aujourd'hui de l'appui des moyens de communication sociale. Il est tout aussi vrai que les médias chrétiens doivent satisfaire à deux exigences : exigences du métier (professionnalisme) et exigences de la foi (surtout de l'éthique chrétienne). Devant cette évidence ou ces évidences, le communicateur africain est confronté à un double défi : inculturer l'Évangile d'une part, et d'autre part, inculturer les moyens de communication sociale dans l'Évangélisation.

Le Pape Jean Paul II, dans son exhortation post-synodale, *Ecclesia in Africa*, voit dans l'inculturation une urgence et une nécessité. Il écrit :

«Le synode considère l'inculturation comme une priorité et une urgence dans la vie des Églises particulières pour un enracinement réel de l'Évangile en Afrique, 'une exigence de l'Évangélisation', un 'cheminement vers une pleine évangélisation', l'un des enjeux majeurs pour l'Église dans le continent à l'approche du troisième millénaire» (n. 59).

Nous savons qu'il n'est pas chose aisée d'inculturer l'Évangile en Afrique, à cause de la multiplicité de cultures. Cependant, cette multiplicité ne peut en aucun cas être un obstacle majeure à l'inculturation. Elle en constitue au contraire une richesse. Une autre difficulté de l'inculturation pourrait bien se situer dans le fait que *cette tâche est difficile et délicate, car elle met en jeu la fidélité de l'Église à l'Évangile et à la Tradition apostolique dans une évolution constante des cultures* (*ibidem*, n. 62).

Nous comprenons l'inculturation dans le sens que lui confère le père Pedro Arrupe, celui de *«l'incarnation de la vie et du message chrétien dans une aire culturelle concrète, en sorte que non seulement cette expérience s'exprime avec les éléments propres à la culture en question (ce ne serait alors qu'une adaptation), mais encore que cette même expérience se transforme et recrée cette culture, étant ainsi à l'origine d'une 'nouvelle création'»*.²⁴

Dans ce sens, on ne doit pas craindre d'affirmer que l'Église africaine est en train de s'inculturer et que réellement l'Évangile s'enracine de plus en plus dans les cultures africaines, avec leurs diversités, que ce soit dans la manière de célébrer l'eucharistie ou de vivre la chrétienté. Il y a comme une nouvelle naissance culturelle marquée à la fois par la culture africaine et par le message chrétien. En effet,

«c'est le sublime mystère de l'Incarnation du Verbe, qui a eu dans l'histoire : dans des circonstances de temps et de lieu bien définies, au milieu d'un peuple avec sa culture, peuple que Dieu avait élu et accompagné tout au long de l'histoire du salut, afin de montrer par lui ce qu'il entendait faire pour tout le genre humain».²⁵

On doit cependant noter que la culture seule ne peut constituer l'inculturation. Il y a aussi cette vie quotidienne qui marque de nos jours le continent africain : la pauvreté et la misère, les maladies sans nombre, les guerres ethno-tribales, les calamités naturelles, les crises politiques sans fin, l'isolement de l'Afrique sur l'échiquier international.... C'est cette Afrique-là qu'il faut évangéliser et inculturer.

Il serait par conséquent illusoire de croire qu'inculturer l'évangélisation par les médias c'est tout juste revaloriser les instruments de communication traditionnels tels que contes, proverbes, palabre, danse, mimes, théâtres, tamtam, saynètes, musique, fête, fumée, tambour, xylophone, légendes, devinettes, statue, masque, tatouage, gong, cornes de vache, peinture sur le corps...

Inculturer les moyens de communication sociale dans l'évangélisation tient à la fois compte de réalités et expériences quotidiennes des africains telles qu'elles s'enracinent dans leur histoire. Et une des priorités à viser serait probablement le développement. Pierre de Charentenay renforce ce lien entre moyens de communication et développement lorsqu'il écrit :

«Dans l'avenir du développement, l'information tient un rôle de premier ordre. Elle permet aux habitants du Nord de prendre conscience de la réalité des pays du Tiers monde : leur pauvreté, les problèmes politiques qui y règnent, les influences économiques ou culturelles qu'ils subissent. [...] Une bonne information des citoyens des pays du Nord sur leur rapport au Tiers monde produirait certainement des changements de la part des gouvernements, parce qu'elle ferait apparaître les vraies raisons de ces politiques.»²⁶

Pour être plus efficaces et utiles, les médias de l'Église doivent promouvoir des analyses basées sur la situation quotidienne de la population. Ces analyses seront à même de faire reculer les injustices, les conflits tribo-ethniques, et de ramener les peuples à ce qui est harmonie, fraternité, communion et développement. C'est là une façon d'ancrer les médias dans l'existence humaine. En effet,

«la communication est une forme d'existence humaine voulue par Dieu dans laquelle l'usager ne se contente pas de recevoir des nouvelles, de s'installer dans le confort et de jouir de la vie médiatique. Il s'y exprime des valeurs de liberté et d'humanité que les théologiens et les philosophes inquiets du sens du monde médiatique et de l'existence humaine rappellent au communicateur souvent cantonné dans la logique commerciale pour qu'il soit artisan de la justice et de paix (Mt 5,9-11)».²⁷

Dans le contexte africain actuel, le communicateur chrétien, assumant la fonction de *sentinelle* et nourri de l'espérance, doit s'engager à dénoncer, à travers tout ce qu'il produit, tous les maux qui rongent notre société : la violence, la corruption, les injustices...

Conclusion

A la lumière de ce que nous venons de développer dans cette réflexion, se dessine la nécessité de mener la vie dure à des médias mesquins, irresponsables. Il en va de la crédibilité de la profession et du message transmis. La déontologie marquée par un haut sens de vertu de l'esprit sincère doit chaperonner les hommes de médias. Aussi, une certaine éducation au sens du vrai doit-elle s'accompagner toute entreprise médiatique crédible.

Les hommes de médias ne doivent pas se prendre pour des *supermen* qui imposent leur point de vue d'une manière subjective. Avant d'informer, de former la société, les hommes de médias doivent eux-mêmes être bien formés et informés. Les modalités de cette formation ou information peuvent être différentes mais elles doivent toutes mener à un sens de responsabilité, au-delà de simples capacités intellectuelles. Je crains qu'il n'y ait aucune autre alternative.

Notes

¹ N. Waswandi, «Évangélisation et communication sociale», in *Famille et Télévision. Actes de la 28^{ème} journée Mondiale des communications sociales*, Kinshasa, 1996, pp. 45-46.

² M. Souchon, «L'Église au filtre des médias», in *Études*, avril 1994, p. 484.

³ On peut lire à ce sujet Cl. Sales, «L'information dans la tourmente», in *Études*, mars 1992, pp. 319-328.

⁴ I. Veyrat-Masson, «Les journalistes. Liberté et contraintes», in *Études*, mai 1992, p. 622.

⁵ Cardinal C.M. Martini, «Le défi des médias dans l'Église», in *Études*, mars 1992, p. 331.

⁶ M. Souchon, *Op.cit.*, p. 486.

⁷ Cardinal C.M. Martini, *Op. cit.*, pp. 330-331.

⁸ Jean Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 124.

⁹ Lire à ce sujet la Déclaration de Radio Vatican (du 27/7/1956), in *La Documentation Catholique*, n. 1233, p. 1956.

¹⁰ Vatican II, *Inter mirifica*, n. 4.

¹¹ *Les moyens de communication sociale, outil moderne d'évangélisation. Résolution et recommandation de l'assemblée plénière du SCEAM*, 28 juillet 1990, cité dans M. CHEZA, *Les évêques d'Afrique parlent*, p. 405.

¹² Cf. *Les principes internationaux de l'éthique professionnelle des journalistes*, Genève, UCIP, 1998, cités dans *L'Église intervient* (Introduction et notes de Aldo Falconi, SSP), Kinshasa, Médiaspaul, 1995, pp. 209-210.

¹³ Cf. «Allocution du Pape Paul VI à l'Association de la presse française en Italie, le 24 janvier 1973», in *La Documentation Catholique*, n. 1626. Voir aussi *L'Église intervient*, pp. 162-163.

¹⁴ *Les Apôtres modernes doivent utiliser les médias modernes*, communiqué final du séminaire catholique sur les mass média, Nsowan, le 23 avril 1976, extrait tiré dans *Les évêques d'Afrique nous parlent*, p. 417.

¹⁵ Cardinal Michael Otunga, «Profil du communicateur chrétien», 19^{ème} rencontre des Centres nationaux de la communication de l'AMECEA, 1988, in *Les évêques d'Afrique nous parlent*, pp. 420-421.

¹⁶ *Aetatis novae*, n. 18.

¹⁷ Au sujet du *grand village* on peut lire avec intérêt, Jean Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, n. 37.

¹⁸ N. Waswandi, «Théologie de la communication, fondement d'une médiéthique chrétienne», in *Revue africaine de communication sociale*, vol. 1, n. 1, janvier-juin 1996, Kinshasa, FCK, p. 47.

¹⁹ F. Jaluum Weci Banga, *Les moyens de communication sociale et leurs enjeux éthiques. Préalables d'une éthique chrétienne de l'information*. Mémoire de Diplôme d'études supérieures en Théologie, Inédit, Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, juin 1994, p. 40.

²⁰ N. Waswandi Kakule, *Op.cit.*, pp. 40-41.

²¹ Waswandi et Banga utilisent cette expression «médiéthique» pour parler de l'éthique des médias. Cf. N. Waswandi, «La théologie de la communication, fondement de la médiéthique chrétienne» et Banga Jaluum'Weci, «Essai d'une «médiéthique chrétienne», in *Revue de communication sociale*, vol. 1, n. 1, janvier-juin 1996, pp. 31-52 et pp. 53-74.

²² *Communio et Progressio*, n. 8.

²³ P. Arrupe, «Lettres sur l'inculturation», in *Écrits pour évangéliser*, Paris, DDB 1985, pp. 169-170.

²⁴ Jean Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 6.

²⁵ P. de Charenrenay, *Le développement de l'homme et des peuples. Une tâche pour la foi*, Paris, Centurion, p. 138.

²⁶ N. Waswandi Kakule, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

Réf. : *Telema (lève-toi et marche !)*, n. 114, Avril-Septembre 2003, pp. 84-94.

The Formation Process as a Project of “Missionary Initiation”

- **Judette Gallares, RC*** -

There is greater awareness in religious life today that initial formation is crucial in the task of initiating a person into mission, which is the call of the Gospel and the *raison d'être* of the Church. It is mission that must order the life and formation of any religious or committed Christian. By formation, it is understood primarily as the shaping of a person's self-image and vocation in accordance to that of Christ's. Religious formation according to Directives #35, is the invitation to locate one's personal growth and journey of faith within religious life. It provides a framework within which persons are immersed in the experience of God, an immersion, which is gradually perfected in their life. It is inclusive of all processes that would help a person understand, realize and live his/her basic vocation to be a human being, which forms the foundation of his/her call to be a Christian, and gradually to actualize and deepen his/her call to be a consecrated or committed Christian.

If mission is the purpose of the Church's existence, how is it understood from a biblical perspective? How is it integrated into the whole formative itinerary of candidates to consecrated life? A brief look at the meaning of mission from a biblical perspective will give us some answers to these questions.

I. A brief biblical perspective of Mission

Scripture gives us some insights into the meaning of mission. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the phrase “I am sending you” is at the heart of the entire prophetic calling, which awakens those called to a sense of personal mission. In the Christian Testament, the notion of mission is centred on the very vocation of Jesus as it was foretold by the prophets. The redemptive work he accomplished is allied to the mission he received from God, from the preaching in Galilee to the sacrifice of the cross. It is therefore not surprising to see the apostolic writings giving a central place to the mission of Jesus.

Preaching the Good News to all nations was Jesus' injunction to his Disciples (cf. Mk 13:10). Preaching is not merely understood as speaking, sermonizing or lecturing, but includes the dimension of witness, of how the Gospel is shaping and transforming the person according to the pattern of Jesus' life. Even Paul himself asserted that he has been entrusted with such a commission that has shaped and ordered his life, making him feel under great constraint to preach the Good News (I Cor 9:16-23) not just with words but by the way he lives his life. This self-image is confirmed by the early Christian traditions not just about Paul but also about other women and men missionaries to the Gentiles.¹ The Acts of the Apostles mentions a number of brave individuals who travelled widely in those years to tell both Jews and Gentiles the Good News,² giving witness by their very lives. Leaving the familiarity of home and country, they were willing to bring the Gospel to people who did not yet know Jesus Christ, even if this meant having to suffer the consequences of such an endeavour. This was the transforming effect of the Gospel to the early Christians.

Like the early Christians, we come to know Jesus more intimately not only by contemplating him in the Gospels but also by doing what he did. Religious life has always been aware of having a mission for the Church and for the world. The cries of the poor and the songs of hope of people on the margins of society have always called forth new visions of discipleship in the hearts of religious. It is the call to mission that prevents an individual or community from being too self-centred. The diversity of ministries simply manifests the diversity of charisms the Holy Spirit continues to give to the Church to continue the mission of Christ in our world.

Yet over the centuries until the era of the Second Vatican Council, the idea of mission that was operative in many people's minds was to have a few chosen people (e.g. priests and religious) doing something heroic in distant lands. The Post-Conciliar understanding veers away from this traditional image.

However, it is unavoidable that in our increasingly pluralistic post-modern world the traditional theology of mission is put under strain. Sandra Schneiders asserts that for our theology of mission to be valid and relevant to our post-modern times, it has to affirm simultaneously the following realities: (1) that the riches brought to the human family in Jesus are meant to be shared by all; (2) that the religious traditions which know nothing of Jesus but which have proved their efficacy in bringing people to spiritual maturity and fulfillment are genuine paths to salvation not meant for extinction.³ This is particularly true of Asia which is home to the major world religions.

Today, mission points to what all members of the Church, the People of God, should be: witnesses to the Good News wherever they are.⁴ In fact this was the emphasis in the Asian Synod of 1998. The synodal document asserts that the Churches of Asia must strive to be credible witnesses, because "people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories".⁵ Thus, in the Asian context "people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument".⁶ Loving God therefore entails giving oneself to and for the neighbour unto death as Jesus did. Mission therefore is a full-time commitment to the prophetic mission of Jesus.⁷ Jesus is the prophet *par excellence*; the one who announced that the time is now and what it is time for is the Reign of God.

What are the implications of our present understanding of mission on the initial formation of consecrated persons? What are the experiences and processes that would help formands develop a missionary heart and grow in their sense of mission? These are but a few of the challenging questions confronting present-day religious formators.

I believe that a formand's authentic sense of mission can only grow when a more personal encounter with the person of Jesus happens, otherwise there is danger of a person falling into a messianic ego trip. In this encounter, the formand experiences God's transforming love and begins to learn how to respond to God in love. However, a certain degree of human and spiritual maturity is necessary before the formand is able to respond freely to God's call. From the biblical insights we have gathered, mission cannot be understood apart from the very person of Jesus. Thus, the reality of Jesus' mission and vocation and how each one is constantly invited to participate in this mission is the reference point and task of formation.

II. *Formative Goals and Processes*

Vita Consecrata (n. 65) is very clear about the primary objective of formation. It says that, "since the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in his *total self-giving*, this must also be the principal objective of formation". Thus, the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission. It adds that to say "yes" to the Lord's call implies the person's inescapable duty to take personal responsibility for maturing in his/her vocation.

How do we achieve the purpose of consecrated life and apply the corresponding injunction into practice? What are these processes that would prepare formands today to give themselves totally in the service of the Church's mission?

In addressing these questions, let me limit my discussion on the first two stages of initial formation: the pre-novitiate and the novitiate. These stages are considered the important formative years of a religious. It is in the pre-novitiate that an initial discernment for religious life is made, while it is in the novitiate where the radical re-orientation of the person's life to God must initially happen.

For each stage of initial formation, there are three criteria that indicate whether the specific goals of each stage is being reached. These criteria correspond to three important dimensions of the formation process: the faith dimension, the apostolic/missionary dimension, and the human development dimension. Obviously in the planning of formative processes, all three must be addressed. However, since my specific topic for this article is more on the Formation Process as a Project of Missionary Initiation, let me thus focus only on the apostolic/missionary dimension of the criteria.

The Pre-Novitiate Process. In the pre-novitiate, the specific goal of discernment is that of decision-

making and the living out of one's initial discernment made as a response to the call. In considering the formand's sense of mission and service, there is a need to look at the following:

1. The human spirit — the dimension that makes the person long to do something important for God, to move away from self-centredness to other-centredness, and to respond to God with generosity and love.
2. Participation in the Church's mission — A realization that religious life is a life of public identification with the Church; that life in this church means an acceptance of flawed reality even as she/he continues Christ's mission of reconciliation and forgiveness.
3. The specific mission of the institute — A sense of how the particular institute understands its charism, mission, and spirituality within the stream of Christian spirituality and in cooperation with other ministries in the Church; a growing conviction and love for that particular mission.

In the area of missionary initiation, processes and activities may be planned to initiate the formand into what it means to participate in Christ's mission. Together with individual conferences (IC's) or spiritual accompaniment, the candidate can be helped to discover and explore his/her sense of call and how s/he is growing in this. The following activities may be programmed, but it must be clear as *Vita Consecrata* emphasizes, that the central process of formation must be individual dialogue. Modules and programmes can provide content, context and framework for the dialogue. However, these have to be integrated into the formand's growing relationship with God. Some of the activities and modules can include the following:

1. Immersion experiences or exposure programmes, which include appropriate orientation, evaluation, integration and prayerful reflection of one's experience, can be planned into this stage of initial formation.
2. Introduction to Church documents and the particular institute's mission and charism.
3. Participation in parish activities, such as BECs.
4. Opportunities to deal with socio-cultural-political-economic concerns through readings, discussion, limited participation and exposure through available seminars and modules, ongoing contact with and presence to the poor.

The Novitiate Process. The Novitiate on the other hand is already the beginning of religious life. The thrust of this period is the formation of the heart and mind of the novice according to the heart and mind of Jesus Christ. The novice at this stage of formation must grow in his/her conviction that for him/her, *Christ is all!* This is also the time to test the suitability of the novice for the life that s/he has initially chosen before entering and in the pre-novitiate period.

With regards to the specific goals of the apostolic dimension, *Renovationis Causam*, n. 13 is quite clear when it says that: "In those institutes where the very nature of the religious life requires apostolic action and service; the novices are to be gradually trained to dedicate themselves to activities in keeping with the purpose of the Institute, while developing that intimate union with Christ whence all their apostolic activity must flow". More specifically, the apostolic goals for this period include the following: (1) to understand service as a call to mission within a particular institute, and (2) to recognize the relationship of service, commitment, and personal spiritual life.

It must be kept in mind that the aim of the novitiate process is to begin the radical re-orientation of the whole person to Christ. It therefore involves a series of atmospheres and experiences that will facilitate this process. The focus of the process is on the person in formation: what is happening to him/her. More concretely, the process aims to help the novice reflect on and integrate his/her experiences, i.e. to help the novice perceive, understand, evaluate, choose and act on his/her conversion experience.

Based on the findings of Gerald Arbuckle who has studied cultural and personal change, there are three phases to this formative process.⁸ These phases are: (1) Separation, (2) Liminality, and (3) Incorporation or Re-structuration. In the following discussion, I will adapt his insights on these three phases as well as add my own reflections based on my years of experience in formation work.

The first two phases are important, the first (Separation) ushers the person into a new life, which would entail a dramatic cutting off from what s/he is used to in his/her previous life style.

The second phase (Liminality) is foundational. Here, facilitating the conversion experience is the heart of the process. This is a time of initiating the novice into new and transforming relationships wherein three significant dimensions of his/her life are touched and transformed. This, I believe, is crucial because it is here that the missionary spirit of the formand is being formed and deepened. These dimensions are:

1. the cognitive side of life: growth in critical consciousness that comes from an experience of God's truth;
2. the affective dimension: the person is drawn more and more into a transforming relationship with Christ and a full range of feelings and emotions are evoked;
3. the dimension of values that lead to commitment and action: when touched by the relationship with God in a deep and lasting way, what one values and prizes is transformed and one's life style is reorganized around these new values and priorities.

To facilitate the ongoing conversion and deepen the missionary spirit of the novice in this second phase, the following are some programmes, processes, and activities that may be planned along with regular spiritual direction and other programmes for the growth of the novice's spiritual life. It is also presupposed that periodic assessments are integrated in these activities:

1. Weekly immersion in a depressed area.
2. Exposure experiences: to provide opportunities to experience and know the reality of life as it is lived by the majority of people to foster the ecclesial dimension of the novice's apostolic/missionary vocation and to insert him/her into the contemporary experience of the Paschal mystery. These are also opportunities for the novice's continued growth in self-knowledge and maturity as his/her capacities and limitations are experienced.
3. Involvement in other services for the community.

The third phase, which I will discuss in greater detail, is where the fruit of the second phase can be seen. The phase of Incorporation or Re-structuration aims: to gradually initiate the novice to the institute's apostolic/missionary activities to challenge the novice to grow continually in self-knowledge and maturity as his/her capacities and limitations are experienced; and to enable him/her to experience continuing union with God in a more active life style.

This stage serves to provide a more realistic dimension to the continuing dialogue between the institute and the novice in relation to his/her vocational call to that institute. This is a crucial formative period where opportunities are given to the novice to reflect on and evaluate his/her experiences. This phase provides the "cooling off" period in which the novice has a chance to evaluate the strength of his/her interiorization of the spirit and values of the Gospels as well as those of the institute through formative and evaluated experiences of apostolic/missionary and community life. This phase is also a time for integrating new attitudes with other aspects of the formand's personality and living this out in old and new situations.

Together with ongoing individual dialogue and spiritual direction, the following are some processes that may be included in this third phase:

1. Continuing immersion in a depressed area.
2. Involvement in the various ministries of the Local Church (e.g. catechesis, recollections, BECs, etc.)
3. Supervised and evaluated apostolic activities. The emphasis of these activities is not so much to develop skills for the ministry but for the novice to discover where ministry flows from and to begin to see the connection between his/her growing relationship with Christ and how his/her mission is born out of this relationship.
4. Exposure to indigenous peoples and those who belong to other faiths.

From first vows onwards. The period of temporary profession, from first vows to final vows is for the strengthening and deepening of what has been started in the initial stages of formation within the context of the life and mission of the Church and of the particular institute to which the formand belongs. The call to transformation must be heeded at every stage of the candidate's life.

It is interesting to note that in a survey conducted in the United States (LCWR — Leadership Conference of Women Religious) in the late 1990's, respondents were asked to name the elements that they thought would characterize religious in 2010. I want to mention these now because they express the deep desire of today's religious to be transformed in Christ by participating in his mission.

III. Transformative Elements

What are these elements that would transform religious life in the future, but beginning with us today? The formation process must touch these following transformative elements⁹ for the future of religious life:

1. Prophetic witness. Being converted by the example of Jesus and the values of the Gospel, religious in the future will serve a prophetic role in Church and society. Living this prophetic witness will include critiquing societal and ecclesial values and structures, call for systemic change and being converted by the marginalized with whom we serve.

2. Contemplative Attitudes. Religious must be attentive to the presence of the sacred in their own inner journeys, in the lives of others, and throughout creation. Recognizing contemplation as a way of life for the whole Church, they will see themselves and their communities as centres of spirituality and the experiences of God.

3. Focus of Ministry: the poor and marginalised. Religious must invest their spiritual and material resources in service for the poor/marginalised as well as for structural change on behalf of these people. They are called to minister where others will not go. Their own listening and leaning from the poor and marginalised will shape all aspects of their lives.

4. Spirituality of wholeness and global interconnectedness. Animated by their deep conviction of the oneness of Creation, religious must live and work in a manner which fosters: (1) participation and harmony among all peoples; (2) healthy personal and interpersonal relationships, (3) reverence for the earth, and (4) integration of spirituality and technology on behalf of the Gospel.

5. Charism and mission as sources of identity. An essential element of religious life is our ability to accept the concept that "we are church". As People of God, we assume our priestly role of shared leadership in the life and worship of the Local Church. We support all members of the Church as equals in diverse ministries.

There is a call in our times for formation to consecrated life to be integrated, contextualized and inculturated. Thus, the transformative elements we have just mentioned must take into account the various contexts of Asia where the Church's key attitude and approach in doing mission is dialogue. This attitudinal change must begin in initial formation and lived continually in witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ all throughout the person's life

Conclusion

We began this discussion by looking at mission from the biblical perspective and by tracing the shift in our present understanding of mission today. The formation process of missionary initiation must take into consideration the present demands and needs of the Church and the world, especially within the Asian context. The discussion implies that the formation process must aim to help candidates to consecrated life grow towards human and religious maturity and a deep sense of mission and service. It will always be a challenge to the formation process to develop women and men of God who can share with others God's vision of the world, consecrated women and men whose hearts are always on fire for the mission, consecrated men and women whose spirituality for the mission gives witness to an integration of contemplation and action in their lives.

Notes

¹ Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 93.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁴ Susan Smith, "A Rethinking of 'Mission' since Vatican II", in Tui Motu InterIslands, October 2000, p. 22.

⁵ James H. Kroeger, MM, "Asian Synod — Asian Pentecost, Introducing 'Ecclesia in Asia'", in *SEDOS Bulletin* 2000, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 10; *EA*, n. 42; Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 41, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses".

⁶ *EA*, n. 42; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 76, "Without this mark of holiness, our word will have difficulty in touching the heart of modern man. It risks being vain and sterile".

⁷ Sandra Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press: 2000), 319-320.

⁸ Gerald Arbuckle, "Planning the Novitiate Process: Reflections of an Anthropologist", *Review for Religious*, July/August 1984.

⁹ Based on the LCWR survey conducted in the early 1990s. Respondents were asked to name the elements that they thought would characterize religious in 2010. These elements should serve as a guide in planning formation and renewal programmes. (Information gathered from the internet). St Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the Word. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus ... the witness of sanctity" (*EN*, Ch IV, n. 14).

* Sr Judette Gallares, RC, is a member of the Philippines-Singapore Region of the Religious of the Cenacle. She finished her undergraduate studies at St. Theresa's College (Manila) and took her graduate studies in biblical spirituality and religious studies at the Catholic Theological Union (Chicago) and at Fordham University (New York). She did her doctoral studies in biblical theology and in ministry at the University of Oxford Summer Programme in Theology (England) through the Graduate Theological Foundation (USA). She is professor of Spirituality at the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (The Philippines) and author of *Images of Faith: Spirituality of Women in the Old Testament* and *Images of Courage: Spirituality of Women in the Gospels from a Third World and an Asian Perspective*.

St Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the Word. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the World, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus ... the witness of sanctity" (EN, Ch. IV, n. 14).

Ref.: *Religious Life in Asia*, Vol. 6, n. 3, 2004.

Called to be Mission of God in Our World

The Missionary and Affectivity

- Linda Lizada, RC* -

The Missionary and the Libertine is the title of a collection of essays I have yet to read. But the title has fascinated me since I first saw it, and it came back to me again when I was writing this article because I would have wanted something similar as a title. I started out thinking that this piece of writing would be about the affective life of a missionary. I decided instead to skirt around the edges of our spontaneous and habitual impressions of what a missionary is, and write about mission and affectivity as they inhabit the same person called and sent to live the Good News. There is definitely the need to go more deeply into the subject of this article. It is my hope that questions will arise to prompt further exploration and continued seeking.

Affectivity and Mission

I thank Virginia and Wendell Kingsolver, especially for being different in every way from the parents I created for the narrators of this tale. I was the fortunate child of medical and public-health workers, whose compassion and curiosity led them to the Congo. They took me to a place of wonders, taught me to pay attention, and set me early on a path of exploring the great, shifting terrain between righteousness and what's right.¹

If I were to be asked for a primer on how to be a missionary, I would suggest reading Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*. (This primer would also be useful in learning what a missionary is *not*!) To use this primer, I would begin by asking each one — after having lived through the stories told by the five members of the Reverend Price's family, excepting the missionary himself — to name things which happened to them while they read the book. This initial naming will be for the simple purpose of finding out who the real missionary was, and why. Exploration of these inner movements will follow — allowing feelings, reactions, affirmations, resistances, and wonderings to reveal insights for growing self-awareness.

However, if we were to do just this simple exercise, we would not be doing justice to this powerful book about the *engagement* that is at the heart of the call to being “missioned”, an engagement that will inevitably “take a toll on the spirit”. For this and many other reasons, *The Poisonwood Bible* cannot remain merely on the level of exercise. This profound narrative from five different tellings must serve as ‘an examen’ of our affective response to this call to be “missionaries” of the Good News of a living, loving God, a God who feels for and accompanies people.

Imagine what it would be like to witness the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. This exercise is to be encouraged as an entry into the many levels of interaction present in the accounts of Jesus encountering people in *their* space. Or take the other Samaritan who could have allowed the many “rules of engagement” of his context, to overcome the compassion which ultimately has made him one of the icons offered for religious life in today's world. Not only the icons but the theme of this year's congress on religious life point to the dynamism of the human heart and the power of human relating that must impel all the activities which flow from apostolic zeal: *A Passion* for Christ, a *Passion* for Humanity.

Whether we are speaking of a surge of emotion, a disorienting moment of confusion, a heart-wrenching experience of helplessness, a crossing of cultural divides, a sudden explosion of freedom from stereotypic thinking, an awesome realization of new or different insights — any of these movements which populate our areas of relationship — we are getting in touch with that affective part of ourselves that is constantly at play whenever we go through an experience. An experience is an encounter with concrete reality, giving birth to ripples within inner reality, about which we will

make choices, engage in action, or encounter reactions. Experience is always affective in nature inasmuch as it opens up possibilities, favourable or otherwise, for a person to respond in relationship. Our affective self, one of the aspects of who we are in our embodiment, is concerned with feelings and intuitions, where we locate non-cognitively our perceptions of reality, which can influence, impress, touch, or move us. In the context of being called to mission, it is our affectivity which will make of us “no longer bystanders [but] creators of peace in violent times” (2004 CMSM-LCWR Assembly theme).² It is our affectivity which will enable us to respond to the calls of today’s challenging realities, to listen with a disciple’s ear and to speak with a disciple’s tongue

To Sing a Song of the Lord on Alien Soil

The heading of this section is borrowed from Psalm 137:4, and the reflection inspired by a book with a very similar title: Vivian Ligo’s *Singing the Lord’s Song in a Foreign Land*. While the Psalm is a song of exile, and the book is about immigrants’ re-appropriation of faith in a profoundly new life and homeland, the imagery is applicable to the experience of being called to mission.

“To immigrate to another country is to move into a geography of loss, disorientation and hope for a homecoming in a foreign land. Letting go of a familiar way of life in anticipation of the unknown shapes such a landscape. Vulnerability alternating with numbness heightens the contrasts in the terrain. Traversing this place requires a certain openness that trembles with insecurity. The immigrant anticipates great things but remains naïve about the toll this will take on the spirit...”.³

To take part in the missionary role of the Church is to find ourselves on alien soil, not necessarily because we are sent to foreign parts but simply because any place where people are unable to grow into fullness as children of God and heirs of the Kingdom is territory where we are not at home. This presupposition is implicit in the objectives put forth by the USG General Congress 2004 as they call us anew to respond to the challenges of our times and build the reign of God. In asking us to consider the “reality that challenges us”, what the Congress working document paints is a landscape filled with “the exuberance of life, as well as the terrible signs of death”.⁴

Finding ourselves on alien soil, do we just hang up our harps, sit and weep? Or are we those who will be able to sing the Lord’s song in this alien land?

One way of addressing this question is by looking at our affective responses to being on alien soil. One series of responses I call the six **A**’s: awareness, admission, articulation, appraisal, adoption, action.

Awareness

Vivian Ligo’s portrayal of the immigrant experience is a complex layer of movements difficult, at times, to grasp and name. It is, however, a very accurate depiction in answer to the puzzle: What is happening? But more important is the question which must follow this first one: What is happening to *me*? Awareness brings to the forefront of our consciousness feelings which might first register in our stomachs or our chests, or express themselves in a heaviness of spirit or an explosion of wonder at the new and different. Even when one has lived for a long time on alien soil every so often there is a reminder that this was not one’s birthplace. Memories frequently intrude to emphasize this displacement, no matter how welcome or longed-for. Nothing will alter the fact that feelings will alert us to what might be happening and what could be happening to us. Feelings become messengers knocking on the door of our consciousness calling our attention to what is going on.

Admission

In acknowledging our feelings, we give them a hearing so that they can find their proper place in whatever happens when change takes place. We recognize that *something indeed is going on*. Any major change brings disruption, upheavals, novelty and confusion in its wake. Acknowledging what is going on is a way of making our feelings and bodily responses our dialogue partners in seeking how we are called to make our home in this foreign land. They become our allies in

forging the new alliances that will be called for as we adjust and adapt and make significant compromises in this new territory of our life.

Articulation

Naming that something which might indeed be going on allows us to call our dialogue partners by name so that we can converse, listen to each other and respond. This is also helpful for the self-disclosure so essential on our way to learning how to sing the Lord's song on alien soil. As we tell another about our inner landscape, the horizon becomes more pronounced and visible, and we begin to make sense out of what we might be undergoing. This tentative attempt to give words to what we are experiencing is the fragile beginnings of what we might later be able to express in clearer conclusions.

Appraisal

Slowly it becomes apparent that not everything about our experience is equally significant. Some considerations will be weightier in the matter of discerning the meaning behind an experience. We begin to assess its different parts in an effort to test our intuitions and conclusions. And we try out interpretations that will either confirm or contradict, or not quite fit, the situation under scrutiny. Finally, we come to some realization or insight, or discovery, which clarifies and puts things together in a way that is understandable.

Adoption

Appropriation of what I have come to realize takes me deeper into *knowing* that I am on alien soil, but this knowledge helps me to comprehend that no matter how alien or painful, or disorienting, this displacement *is* meaningful. Yes, it takes its toll on the human spirit, but it also more than makes up for what is lost in what the heart gains in liberty and truth.

The words of Fr Paul Robb, S.J., reveal to us an itinerary that can lead us more firmly and surely and make us want to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land:

“It is difficult to endure conversion because it seems to put into jeopardy our very lifestyle and ministry, but even more so because we sense that it touches the very roots of our life. It reaches deep into our being — in our personality, our choices, our very self. It touches us in places that are unknown, places where we are strangers. To begin a journey into an unfamiliar, haunting land is frightening; but not to know whether we will find life or death, blessing or curse, at the end can be terrifying. To enter the journey with all its uncertainties proves the possibility of finding life and life in abundance. Not to begin the journey, but to harden and steel oneself against it, is already death”.⁵

Action

In writing about parenting the child with special needs, a young mother entitled her article “Blessed: A mother's grateful word for a life-changing gift”. In the article, she speaks of her own heart's itinerary until she came to embrace the reality of her special child, and when she finally made some very significant changes in her life and priorities:

“... I seriously had to rearrange my priorities to see to it that his needs were met, to help him realize the fullest potential of his gifts and talents... Through God's grace, Jamie has, and continues, to grow and develop beautifully — and I, have since become a full-time mother, a passionate teacher, a home-schooling parent, and a happier, more balanced person all around. By deciding to give more of myself and my time to my son, I've actually found the true gift that he gave my life back to me”.⁶

In this example, the ability to sing the Lord's song on alien soil took the form of very concrete and conscious action — choices which flowed from integrating the experience of moving into unknown territory.

How important it is for all of us, sent and missioned, finding ourselves on alien soil, to engage

in an examination of our affective responses, perhaps using the six A's, and coming to the conclusion that yes, we might hang up our harps, we will certainly sit and weep, but we will also want and be able to sing the song of the Lord on alien soil.

Another Name for God?

“Eros is another name for God”.⁷ So began a section of an article written about the sacramentality of human relationships. Described as the natural force which opens up one human being to another, *eros* is also credited with enabling us to transcend our isolation, calling attention to the creative power of human love.

Could it be that this description of *eros* is a way of imagining God's passion for humanity, and an inherent longing in our souls for union? Might it explain our own passion for wanting to make known to others God's dream of fullness of life and love for all of us? Would it be enough to offer the poetry of Jessica Powers, a Carmelite contemplative, as an “explanation” for the important part that our affective capacity plays in making God's dream known?

The Master Beggar

*Worse than the poorest mendicant alive,
the pencil man, the blind man with his breath
of music shaming all who do not give,
are You to me, Jesus of Nazareth.*

*Must You take up Your post on every block
of every street? Do I have no release?
Is there no room on earth that I can lock
to Your sad face, Your pitiful whisper, “Please”?*

*I seek the counters of time's gleaming store
but make no purchases, for You are there.
How can I waste one coin while you implore
with tear-soiled cheeks and dark blood-matted hair?*

*And when I offer You in charity
pennies minted by love, still, still You stand
fixing Your sorrowful wide eyes on me.
Must all my purse be emptied in Your hand?*

*Jesus, my beggar, what would You have of me?
Father and mother? the lover I longed to know?
The child I would have cherished tenderly?
Even the blood that through my heart's valves flows?*

*I too would be a beggar. Long tormented,
I dream to grant You all and stand apart
with You on some bleak corner, tear-frequented,
And trouble mankind for its human heart.*

Jessica Powers (1937)

Missionaries must be lovers — this is not optional! Father Arrupe, former Superior General of the Jesuits, and ardent social crusader, had this to say about love (and mission as well):

Nothing is more practical than finding God,
that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,
 what you will do with your evenings,
 how you spend your weekends,
 what you read, what you know that breaks your heart,
 and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
 Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

These two very different sources of reflections on love and passion invite us look at our capacity and willingness to enter into friendship and engagement. In May 2004, the theme of the Plenary of the International Union of Superiors General of Women's Religious Congregations (UISG) was: "Women Disciples of Jesus Christ: Bearers of Reconciliation in our World". In the Declaration which came out of this gathering, there was a call to a very specific mission:

We live in a time of extreme violence, a time when lights of hope and reconciliation are desperately needed. We are nearly 800 women leaders from 69 countries and five continents. The International Union of Superiors General represents members of Catholic religious institutes in 98 countries throughout the world. We believe that no more important mission exists at this time than to be bearers of the reconciling hope for which the world cries.⁸

In the Declaration is included a reference to an article by Robert Schreiter, a member of the General Council of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, theologian and author of articles and books on reconciliation:

Reconciliation is something our world cries out for today. And for it to happen, we must become deeply rooted in a spirituality that will sustain us in this arduous work. An important way to enter into that spirituality is through our own wounds, that we might come to the healing wounds of Christ. Two of the spiritual practices that will get us there are the disciplines of contemplative prayer and the creating of safe, hospitable spaces for others.⁹

I would like to suggest that another name for these two disciplines he mentions are friendship and engagement. Contemplative prayer *is* friendship — with Jesus Christ who will show us how to love with the heart of God. It is to *know* and *be known* by a God whose heart is moved in compassion and healing. It is to be given that *sensus Christi* that can only come with long and deep relating. It is also to be taught how to relate to others. Thus, one's whole self is engaged in this enterprise of making Jesus known and loved, using the language of witness and solidarity. Once again we turn to Pedro Arrupe for some description of this dynamic:

"Lord ... I have discovered that the ideal of our way of acting is your way of acting.
 For this reason, I fix my eyes on you...
 Give me that *sensus Christi* about which St Paul speaks:
 that I may feel with your feelings, with the sentiments of your heart,
 which basically are love for your Father and love for humankind.
 No one has shown more charity than you, giving your life for your friends.
 May I learn from you and from your ways ... how to eat and drink; how to attend
 banquets; how to act when hungry or thirsty, when tired from the ministry,
 when in need of rest and sleep. Teach me how to be compassionate to the
 suffering, to the poor, the blind, the lame, and the lepers; show me how you
 revealed your deepest emotions, as when you shed tears, or when you felt
 sorrow and anguish You were in constant contact with your Father in prayer
 Teach me your way of looking at people: as you glanced at Peter after his
 denial, as you penetrated the heart of the rich young man and the hearts of
 your disciples. Give me that grace, that *sensus Christi*, your very heartbeat,
 that I may live all of life, interiorly and exteriorly, proceeding and discerning
 with your mortal life. Teach us your way that it becomes our way today
 I beg Mary, your most Holy Mother, who contributed much to your formation
 and way of acting, to help me and all ... to become her children, just like you,
 born of, and living with, her all the days of our life".

Mission and Affectivity

In the Letters to the Churches of Asia in the Book of Revelation, there is a poignant refrain which follows an affirmation of all the good that the Churches have done and continue to do: “You have less love now than before ...” (Rv 2:4). And in the Gospel of Luke there seems to be an echo of God’s plaint: “And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8) These two passages remind us of the danger of identifying mission only with apostolic activity. They also alert us to a certain erosion of engagement, when we might experience only the doing and feeling we are still not doing enough; and at the same time we forget the One for whom and with whom we are doing all the activities we are involved in. We also tend to forget that essential to hearing the call to mission is an experience of the nature of God as love, a love which impels and compels this same love to be shared with others — this is the Good News we are sent to proclaim and live, with God’s people!

While it is true that for most of us this experience of God as love was the first impulsion that sent us on mission, the shifting sands of our affectivity can confirm what the Spirit might be saying to the Churches: “You have less love now than before”. We might be doing good things, important things; but do we love — love not as a feeling, but love as a choice, conscious and concrete? Do we take the time just to be with the One who will tell us what to do, who will show us how to act, and who will teach us what to say? Nothing can take the place of personal prayer, which is the love life of one who is sent to bring good news. And very few things can match the giftedness of friends and loved ones who keep passion alive.

Years ago, I read something about Easter which has remained with me all this time. As Christians we are encouraged to have so warm a caring and so alive a love that those who meet us can truly say that Christ is risen from the dead. Now, that is good news!

Conclusion

When each sister in our region is missioned, she hears these words:

“In the name of the community, I call you, my dear Sister, to make Jesus known and loved, there where you are sent, to share your strengths and weaknesses, your gifts and limitations, and to open the ears of your heart to hear the cries of God’s people. Make the Gospel known so that it may become a source of life for everyone. Never do anything except out of love for Christ and concern for a world in need of his message. Live with confidence in the abiding and transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in our world, and allow God to transform your heart and life even as you struggle to walk with others in their transforming journey with God. Be open and obedient to grace, no matter how costly it may be”.

Costly it will be, but how can it be otherwise?

Notes

¹ Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible – a novel* (HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., New York, 1998), p. x.

² 2004 CMSM-LCWR Assembly, Forth Worth, Texas — 20 August 2004. Mary Robinson, Former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her keynote address “What Can Religious Bring to a Globalizing World?” referred to this theme and cited one example in her experience of being involved in justice and human rights: “Justice and peace groups were part of a global network of human rights ‘eyes and ears’, drawing attention to hidden conflicts. I often found, with pride, that where there was deep trauma after conflict there were priests, nuns and other aid workers with Irish accents and a practical sense of humour working with communities to protect them and to begin the process of rebuilding fragile lives”.

³ Vivian Ligo, *Singing the Lord’s Song in a Foreign Land – Reclaiming Faith in a New Culture* (Novalis, St. Paul’s University, Ottawa, Canada, 2002), p. 9.

⁴ USG General Congress 2004 – Working Document “With a Passion for Christ and Passion for Humanity”.

⁵ Paul Robb, S.J., “Conversion as a Human Experience” in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 14 (May, 1982), p. 7.

⁶ Jeannie Castillo, “Blessed: A mother’s grateful words for a life-changing gift” in ME magazine, August 2004.

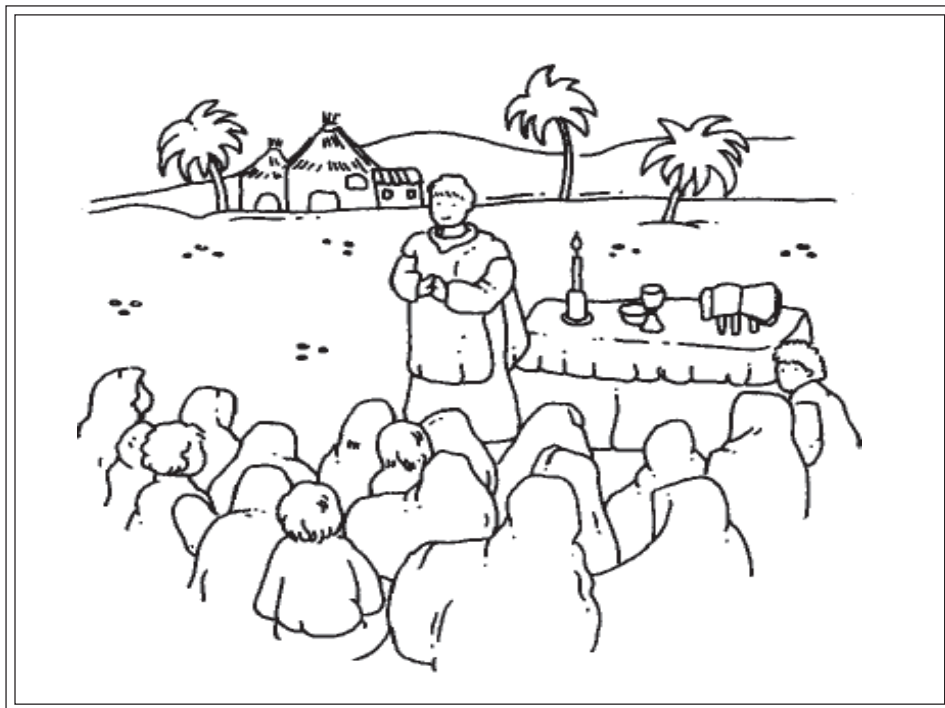
⁷ Joan H. Timmerman, “The Sacramentality of Human Relationships” in *The Way Supplement*, 1999, p. 13.

⁸ Declaration of the Women Religious Leaders, Members of the International Union of Superiors General, Plenary of May 9-13, 2004.

⁹ Robert Schreiter, CPPS, “A Spirituality of Reconciliation”, in *UISG Bulletin Number 123*, 2003, p. 32.

*Sr Linda Lizada, RC, is one of the General Councilors for the Religious of the Cenacle in Rome and has served as a member of the General Team since 1998. Previous to her present assignment, she has been involved in the formation ministry as novice directress and in leadership as regional superior for the Philippine-Singapore Cenacle. She has been part of the ICLA Faculty of Spirituality since 1999, occasionally teaching in the summer programme of the Institute and at other times during the school year whenever her schedule permits it. She also teaches at Regina Mundi in Rome.

Ref.: *Religious Life in Asia*, Vol. 6, n. 2, 2004.



Personal Reflections on Mission Animation

- Oscar Ante, OFM* -

Introduction

For the past few years, I have been giving formal classes on missiology in some theological schools and giving conferences to our OFM novices as well as other members of our Franciscan Family (contemplative nuns as well as Secular Franciscans and Third Order Regular Sisters) and lay partners. This shows the fact that many of us nowadays see, and are convinced of, the importance of mission in our life as Christians, whether religious or lay. And a number of us are interested in volunteering for mission *ad extra*. From time to time, some religious and lay partners are referred to me by their ministers or directors to give them mission orientation as a direct preparation for their mission to places such as Sri Lanka, China, Libya, Papua New Guinea, Lebanon, Japan, Thailand, and, even Europe and the USA).

The objective of this paper is to write down in a few pages what I think are the important and essential elements in understanding and appreciating our mission responsibility. Let me begin by describing what Christian mission is for me. *Christian mission is the response of the Christian community to the challenges of the context in the light of our faith in Jesus Christ.* In this description, we have the important elements of mission: the challenges of the situation (context), the resources of our Christian faith (text), the mission response, and the Christian community or the Church (the missionary).

The elements are listed in the given order to emphasize an important element: the hermeneutical approach in missiology, or the methodology of doing mission. We do not go to mission with a hidden and pre-packaged agenda. The starting point of mission is looking at the agenda of the world (SEE — dialogue with realities). Then, as Christians, we consciously reflect on the agenda of the world in the light of our Christian faith, the agenda of Word (JUDGE — discernment in the light of the Spirit of Jesus). Finally, the dialogue and discernment should lead us to work, towards personal conversion (before thinking of converting others!) and to work for ecclesial renewal and social transformation (ACT — translation into deeds).

The Agenda of the World

The agenda of the world, whether local, regional or global, form the starting point of our Christian mission. We need to know the preoccupations, concerns, problems and aspirations of the people with whom we are living and working. We are to be familiar with the realities of their world. To help us achieve this, we need to be in close contact, to be in dialogue with them. In particular, we need to be in close solidarity with the majority of the people. And most often, they are the poor, the women, the young, and not so-involved in the official church and society. To know them, missionaries need to learn the local language, which is the window to their culture and world. We will be aided if we try to learn context analysis, involving the processes of doing structural analysis (economic and political) and historical-cultural analysis. In these forms of analysis, we need to be attentive not only to the problems but also to the many positive realities in life. Social realities are ambiguous. There are both shadows and lights in the situation. There are sinful realities as well as grace-filled realities.

In this age of information and communication, the so-called post-modern period, the aspirations and concerns that would promote a better humanity would generally revolve around the following issues that form the challenges posed to us by the world: more equitable distribution of economic and political resources (question of justice), a more humane climate free from conflicts in the form of criminality, war (peace), a more sustainable and cleaner society (ecology), respect for others with different ways of believing, behaving and acting (inter-religious dialogue and cross-or inter-cultural relationship).

The Agenda of the Word: *Missio Dei*

We Christians, whether religious or lay, share with non-believers and believers of other faiths common human concerns for a better life, humanity, and world. Our Judaeo-Christian faith resources give us deeper motivation in this quest for fullness of life. We believe in the biblical God who revealed himself as a gracious and compassionate redeemer: “The Lord, the Lord is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6). Our God is a God whose mission agenda is the agenda of the world. We see ourselves as heirs of the people of God chosen or elected to be an instrument of God’s project: “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). Jesus understood this very well. He came to bring us life: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). The central message of Jesus of Nazareth is the kingdom/reign of God (Mk 1:15). His message is Gospel, announcing salvation to the poor and sinners and demanding conversion to those who desire to belong to it. He was oriented to God, a loving Father who provocatively associated himself with the poor and sinners. His commitment manifests an expansive image of God, an inclusive view of humanity, and a positive view of human history.

In the crucified and risen Jesus, the early Christian community experienced the dawning of God’s Kingdom and saw themselves as Church, a community assembled by God to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. Today we understand the Church as the People of God, whose reason for being is to be holy and whose goal is to journey towards the fullness of life, of God’s kingdom (Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*). And most important, our reason for being Church is to proclaim the Good News of God’s salvation and liberation in Jesus Christ.

Since we are religious, and in particular Franciscans, we also look at the mission experiences of our Religious Order. In the life and example of our Founder, Francis of Assisi, we find a very good inspiration for our mission commitment. He was a true follower of Jesus. In his own context and times, he lived and preached the Gospel of Jesus. In his life, we see his preferential option to be poor and to be with the poor people. He extended his mission in an exemplary way by taking the Good News to the Muslims, preferring to be among them at a time when it was normal to conduct crusades against them. Later on, he would write down his reflections on the method of doing mission: “Indeed the friars, who go [among the Saracens], can conduct themselves spiritually among them in two manners. One manner is, that they cause no arguments, nor strife but be subject ‘to every human creature for God’s sake’ (I Pt 2:13) and acknowledge that they are Christians. Another way is to proclaim the Word of God openly, when they see that it is God’s will, calling on their hearers to believe in God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, and in the Son, the Redeemer and Saviour, that they may be baptized and become Christians” (1221 *Rule Non bullata*, Ch. XVI).

Mission Response

Our mission response as a Church, in the Philippine context, is renewed integral evangelization, announcing a message of salvation and a message of liberation (*Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of The Philippines*, 1991). In the continent of Asia, the focus of our evangelization, as first articulated by our church leaders through the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (Taipei, 1974), is to build a truly local Church, in dialogue with the vast majority of peoples who are poor (option for the poor, promotion of justice, peace and integrity of creation), who adhere to different major religions (inter-religious dialogue) and have different cultures (inculturation). The face of the Church in Asia is to be servants of the Lord and of humanity, living in companionship as true partners with all Asians, serving in compassion (Bandung 1990). Paraphrasing the words of a former Minister General of our Order, our mission is to proclaim the Gospel by being witnesses of God, living in the fraternal relationship, promoting life, and continually discerning God’s Spirit in the world through continuing formation and studies (H. Schalueck, *To Fill the Whole Earth with the Gospel of Christ*, 1996).

The Missionary

We are now more conscious of the principle that it is the whole community, the Church, which is missionary (Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 1965). Hence, every missionary should see himself

or herself as a member of this missionary Church. It is this community which sends or receives missionaries. In the case of mission *ad extra*, it is very important for the sending community and its members to be clear about the expectations of the receiving community. I usually make a point of asking those interested in going on mission to write a kind of contract or terms of reference (covenant perhaps is a better term), noting down very clearly how he or she sees mission in terms of vision, mission, and objectives.

Because volunteers for mission *ad extra* are entering different cultures, they are advised that they would normally not be able to adjust easily to the new cultures. They will most probably experience some kind of culture shock, which comes in stages (fascination, rejection and recovery).

Finally, volunteers usually ask what kind of qualities they must possess in order to be prepared for mission. I return the question to them and they usually give good responses: deep spirituality, readiness and capacity to sacrifice, openness to others. I usually point out some elementary qualities. One is human maturity, which includes among others the ability to be comfortable with one's self, the ability to listen to, and relate with, others in their differences, and fidelity to one's responsibilities ("if one is responsible and committed in one's past and present assignments, then he or she is ready for future responsibilities"). The other is one's fidelity to his or her Christian and religious vocation. When one is at home with his or her relationship with God, with Jesus and is able to share this experience with others, then one is deeply spiritual and missionary. Mission spirituality is simply being able to love and serve the great Other and others.

Note

* Fr Oscar Ante, OFM, was born in Legazpi City on 12 November, 1951. He gained a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Comparative Religion and Philosophy in 1973 at the Our Lady of the Angels Franciscan Seminary, Quezon City. He obtained his Master's degree, majoring in Sociology at the Ateneo de Manila in 1981 and in 1991 he finished his doctorate in Missiology at the Catholic University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

He made his religious profession as a member of the Order of Friars Minor (OFM) in 1974 and was ordained priest in 1977. Fr Oscar served as administrator and professor at the Franciscan College and Theology programmes, and afterwards worked in a parish and in a shrine in Metro Manila (Manila 1992-1995). After taking Missiology, he then served as mission director and coordinator of the Office for Evangelization. Among other things, his work entailed animating the Franciscans in their pastoral as well as missionary activities.

He was Provincial Minister of the OFM in The Philippines (1995-2001) and served as co-chair of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in The Philippines (1998-2001).

At present, he is programme director of the Inter-Congregational Theological Center (ICTC) in Quezon City. He is the current chairman of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA). He resides at the chaplain's house at the Monasterio de Sta, Clara, Katipunan Road, Quezon City.

Ref.: *Religious Life in Asia*, Vol. 6, n. 3, 2004.

Integration into an Intercultural World: Christian Proposal for a United Society

- Prof. Vincenzo Cesareo -

Introduction

The conviction is already widespread that our respective countries' reality will become increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, as within them there will be ever more numerous and consistent ethnic groups with different cultures that are becoming increasingly important not only numerically but in the social, cultural, economic and political contexts as well.

This observation generates fear and preoccupation, especially in the face of the phenomena due to globalization, the migration flows on a world scale and a closed attitude based on race, nationality, religion of groups and communities and not least because of the recent international events that seem to confirm the prediction of a "violent clash of civilizations". In brief, we can say that there are conditions — global and local — that have altered and changed the axis of society (the presence of differences within it) undermining many of its certitudes.

Far from disappearing — as was all too hastily presumed recently — ethnic differences are assuming an important role in life today so that, more and more often in ordinary parlance the expression "multiethnic society" is used to designate the typical historical-social make-up of the contemporary world, although counter pressures should not be underestimated, meaning those in favour of the birth of basically mono-ethnic States.

It should also be said that ethnicity has taken on a new role. It has become a cultural vehicle through which to project needs, demands and requirements linked to widely differing patterns of life. Ethnic identity no longer refers exclusively to traditional elements of an ascribed type, but accentuates the cultural dimension and is often used to furnish the group with idioms and symbols in order to claim rights, in a context in which the need for identity (and for the recognition of different identities) erupts in a crisis of meaning in a general process of social atomism. Identity and differences are interwoven with interests and polemical constructs capable of causing political mobilization.

Much research into the migration phenomenon confirms the continuance of an ambivalent attitude toward the *other* person, that derives from stereotypes and prejudice, often exacerbated by false projections and generalized objectivation. Although pluralism in contemporary society has become an unavoidable principle, the relations of alterity continue to be a problem, as clearly shown by ethnic, national, religious, conflicts, as well as by waves of xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism that also sweep over the Old Continent.

The question of the encounter with what is different — is often based on the idea that it represents the arrival of disorder within order, the inhomogeneous in the homogeneous — certainly interests not only scholars of the human and social sciences, but every single individual who, more than in the past, personally experiences the growth in the number of ethnic groups and has a greater awareness of living in a context marked by these characteristics. This context presents new relational problems, awakening fears and hopes, withdrawal and openness with respect to the other person, calling for the search for modalities to manage inter-ethnic co-existence, that finds in multiculturalism — or rather in multiple multiculturalism — the most recent but also the most controversial answer.

Before examining a series of issues, with the clear awareness of only being able to offer limited and provisional suggestions, I should like briefly to explain the meaning of a few terms used in the debate.

Multiethnicity describes a situation where, in a certain physical or relational space, there are different ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds. Multiethnicity and multiculturality, however are not only objective factors, they are also the result of the process of the social construction of differences. The

origin, in fact, of those features that are defined as objective (common geographical origin, shared language, scale of values and behaviour patterns) is the result of the type of social interaction that has built up over time between populations of different provenience. It is through such interaction that specific somatic features, behavioural or cultural patterns come to be defined as ethnically important and assume a significant role in the process of social differentiation that concerns the allocation of social resources and may result in forms of inequality. In addition, it must be said that human civilization itself is the result of hybridization, an infinite series of exchanges and cultural syncretism that took place as different groups met.

In its turn the concept of *multiculturalism*, like all the “isms”, refers to the field of political options and serves to indicate the solution to the problem of managing multi-ethnic and multicultural coexistence oriented to the public evaluation of diversity. It is still an extremely fluid concept with multiple meanings, since different conceptions of the relationships between cultures converge in it.

Monoculturalism, cultural pluralism, multiculturalism

If the term multiethnicity is descriptive, in so far as it describes a fact, multiculturalism is prescriptive, as it outlines a project to be realized. Between the two terms, however, there is a close connection since multiculturalism constitutes one of the principle answers to multiethnicity. Still it is not the only one; in fact there are two different perspectives of multiculturalism. On the one hand, a *monoculturalism*, founded on the idea that there exists, and above all that there should be, a single unifying culture that therefore tends to be homogeneous, that identifies a territorially limited society. Monoculturalism leaves no room for ethno-cultural differences that are eliminated by recourse to systematic assimilation or expulsion or a ghetto-like enclosure. Such a stance must not be ignored, since it is still widely shared, even though not always openly admitted. On the other, there is *cultural pluralism*, in which different cultures exist within the same social reality, at the same time as it postulates a rigid separation between the public and the private spheres of life. The public sphere is regulated by universally accepted common laws, whereas the private one allows for the free expression of differences.

As in the case of monoculturalism, pluralism is not concerned with the question of ethnic rights but stresses the essentiality of individual rights. Were that to come about cultural pluralism would give way to multiculturalism.

In fact *multiculturalism*, must be distinguished from the previous projects inasmuch as it is based on the demand to recognize the cultural differences: it therefore upholds the equal dignity of the single cultural identities, that is the equal value of the different cultures. In its turn multiculturalism may be expressed in a moderate or radical form. The *moderate* form is based on the presupposition of the equal dignity of all cultures, which nevertheless must be empirically verified and lead to a selection of them, based on some universal principle. The *radical* approach contests this and claims the right to recognize each culture for what it is, rejecting the possibility to carry out any selection or evaluation in terms of value. Such a stance is strengthened by the return of ethnocentrism, as a source of collective identification and as a motive for particularistic claims.

The proposed distinction between monoculturalism, cultural pluralism and multiculturalism makes it possible to identify three profoundly different modalities to tackle the question of ethnic difference respectively, in the form of rejection, limited acceptance and appreciation.

In its turn the proposed distinction between moderate and radical multiculturalism shows a substantial difference on which to base and bring into focus the different aspects of multiculturalism; therefore more than *multiculturalism* it would seem correct to speak of multiculturalisms.

The different types of multiculturalism

Briefly returning to the above-mentioned distinction between moderate and radical forms of multiculturalism. In the first case, the ethnic rights may be introduced only on condition they are reconcilable with the safeguard of the person's fundamental rights. Therefore, it is a question of finding a balance between the rights of the collectivity and of the individual. A balance that must in no way prejudice the full actuation of the latter's rights. So let us define these proposals as *moderate neo-liberal* to distinguish them from the classical liberal form that denies any possible recognition of minority groups.

Both the *differentialist* and *communitarist* perspective are directly ascribable to the *radical* model. In fact, they both share the idea of a primacy of ethnic rights. More precisely, the differentialists question the

principle of the unity of the human species, therefore the licence to affirm the universality of individual rights, in so far as they hold that there are substantial differences between the diverse ethnic groups, that should certainly be preserved. Differentialist multiculturalism presents a decidedly static approach, because of its essentialist view of culture and identity, in so far as it does not take into consideration the modifying dynamics caused by the interaction with other groups and with different cultures.

The communitarist version represents the second declension of the radical model which maintains the irreducibility of communitary interests to the individual ones. The communitarists do not deny human rights, but subordinate them to those of the ethnic group, conceived of — here too — as an “essential” reference for the formation of the personality of each single human being, in need of secure and solid anchorage within his/her own community. The latter’s identity therefore must be defended as well as the territorial or symbolic borders, also with recourse to pervasive and repressive forms of social control of its members. Besides these three models of multiculturalism (moderate neo-liberal, differentialist, communitarist) two more examples should be considered: *critical multiculturalism* and *neo-mercantile* (corporate).

Critical multiculturalism does not stop at recognizing the importance of differences, but starts from here to promote greater social justice and solid democracy founded on equality for all. In this perspective the promotion of ethnic rights is not an end in itself, but to some extent becomes instrumental for a wider-scale political action that draws attention to the contradictions present in society: by strengthening support for minorities every form of authoritarianism is strongly resisted, especially wherever this takes the form of the supremacy of Western culture: White, male, middle-upper class. Critical multiculturalism is committed to understanding and reporting how domination processes take place. In particular, it seeks to show up not only the falsity of the image of a social system that facilitates vertical mobility for everyone, in a situation of presumed equality between the various ethnic groups, but also by contextualizing the different inequalities, highlights the way power has always worked in human history to legitimize forms of social discrimination in everyday life.

The fifth model of multiculturalism, neo-mercantile (*corporate multiculturalism*), is decidedly different from the others. It originates in the process of economic globalization, from the ever more important role of communications, the exponential increase in information, the emergence of a new world-wide socio-cultural space that takes shape by making use of, old and new symbolic, identity factors (not least, even invented). In this context, such a form of multiculturalism assumes the ethnic differences as a new opportunity to sell products, in the sense that they are rated in terms of the market. The exclusive and pervasive economic focus leads one to consider the ethnic groups both as a specific section of consumers, and as an inspiration to create new products, appropriately elaborated, in terms of *marketing*.

In synthesis, the various ways of conceiving and realizing multiculturalism highlights the question of ethnic rights, assumed as essential, can be expressed in different formulae namely: I) in **moderate neo-liberal multiculturalism**, they are allowed on condition that they do not jeopardize the individual ones, always and anyway considered as primary; II) in **radical differentialist multiculturalism**, the priority ascribed to ethnic rights leads to the denial of individual rights; III) in **radical communitarist multiculturalism** ethnic rights are subordinated to individual rights; IV) in **critical multiculturalism**, the emphasis on ethnic rights is instrumental in freeing the human being from every form of submission; V) in **corporate multiculturalism**, the question of the ethnic rights basically assumes a rhetorical character.

Doubts on multiculturalism

Although multiculturalism has undoubtedly awakened increasing interest over the past 30 years among scholars, the policy-makers and the mass-media in its various forms, it is now exposed to not a little criticism and poses significant problems that assume a different slant according to the model of multiculturalism being referred to.

It is possible to identify the following *risks*:

- 1) To *exasperate the differences*, that derive from excessive emphasis on the latter and from the more or less manifest contrast between the different cultures. In its turn such exaggeration can trigger processes of social disintegration with regression of a ‘neo-tribal’ nature, or degenerate into the phenomenon of ‘balkanization’;
- 2) To *privilege some groups* rather than others, that can give rise to a marked distinction between strong groups and weak ones and the outbreak of internal conflict;
- 3) To *create prevarication within a group*: in this case the freedom of the group may jeopardize the freedom within the group, and be expressed in acts of discrimination against the sub-group but also of individual members;

4) *Stagnation*: usually the policies to stabilize inter-ethnic coexistence tend to privilege the minority groups that are already consolidated, in this way assuring cultural reproduction rather than the production of new cultures;

5) Forming a *stereotyped opinion of the others*: which serves to create a monolithic image of the different cultures, overlooking both the cultural heterogeneity that may be expressed within the same ethnic reality, and the multiple relational network existing between the members of different ethnic groups.

Over recent years much criticism has been levelled at multiculturalism, particularly its communitarian model which can be summed up here in three basic trends:

- a) A tendentially static perspective that fosters the repetition of consolidated cultures and ignores the production of new cultural expressions;
- b) The stress on differences often turns into real community closure, with the result that the single culture isolates itself in its own fortress and does not promote exchanges and communication with the others;
- c) Frequently multiculturalism stands for a radical relativistic outlook which prevents any research into universal values.

Added to these three, a fourth criticism regards the deep ambiguity contained within this very concept. The five models listed, namely (neo-liberal, moderate differentialist, communitarian, critical and neo-mercantile (corporate) clearly prove that they stand for profoundly divergent perspectives, which only have in common the centrality and evaluation of the ethnic and cultural differences.

In general enquiries about the future of a multicultural society are clearly linked to the fate of the broadest model of society that took shape with the advent of the modern era, in which the convergence of State and nation has become more and more meaningful. Up to now this has enabled the economic reality and cultural elements to stay together thanks to the action of political institutions.

Now, one must realize that the economy and culture are moving increasingly on a scale that transcends the national State one. The profound changes taking place affect in particular the role of the institutions and the values they are recognized for as well as the meanings attributed to the concept of culture. As regards the latter, it is a reductive concept of culture according to which it is a conglomerate with unchangeable features, fixed once and for all, as for example the national culture, compared with a progressive, dynamic conception that sees culture as an unceasing effort to adapt to historical conditions, a congenial encounter of new ways of conceiving of, and facing, reality.

Towards interculturalism: open questions

The basic problem is the need to reconcile the need to have a common code of co-existence with the demand for the recognition of cultural differences. As mentioned above, the proposals advanced so far to achieve such an aim present, on the one hand, the monoculturalist Scylla, that carries the risk of imperialism by the dominant culture and, on the other, the multiculturalist Charybdis and the inherent risk of cultural relativism and of the Balkanization of society. The way out of these turbid waters might be intercultural integration that tends to reconcile universal rights with cultural differences.

The quest for new perspectives therefore leads to the examination of *interculturalism*. Derived from the rib of multiculturalism, its distinguishing feature is open and attentive dialogue between the different cultures to dynamic cultural transformation.

Whereas multiculturalism, in its many expressions, places the accent on *cultural differences*, interculturalism accentuates the *relationship between different cultures*, grounded in bi-directional exchange, symmetrical and personal, on the basis of the principle of acculturation (reciprocal assumption of cultural differences with respect to the individual identities). Analogously, while multiethnic society presents within the same social framework many distinct and separate single cultures, interethnic society also includes in the same social framework a plurality of contacts, relationships and exchanges between the different cultures bringing intense rhythms of change. The indispensable premise to start an intercultural project requires the participants in such a project to be able to give valid reasons for their requests; not only, but these reasons must be framed in terms that the people of a different faith or culture can understand and accept as reasonable and therefore tolerate. This logic hinges on the primacy of the person's status as an individual and in the community. The subjectivity of the person is the foundation of the community relationship. In this perspective the different cultures are called to share and assume a nucleus of inalienable values which as such are valid for all human beings, like freedom, human dignity and respect for life.

Among the different modalities to manage multiethnicity one can hypothesize interculturalism. However

even this latter is not without risks. Apart from the stated principle, exchange can actually cause the disintegration of the individual and collective identity. Besides, if not well managed, interculturalism could contribute to the spread of indifferentism and ethical relativism, just like syncretism especially in the moral and religious fields.

The proposals ascribed to multiculturalism and interculturalism necessarily study how an ever more culturally and ethnically differentiated society can be held together. That is, how a growing cultural heterogeneity can coexist with commonly held values. Excepting the communitarists, the most authoritative scholars on multiethnic society agree that the existence of a common cultural nucleus is essential, though minimal: some maintain that this nucleus must centre on values; others that it should be based on procedures, that is, on rules that possess a universalistic character, and yet others limit it entirely to the primacy of the person.

The primacy of the person and the hermeneutic of the other person

At this point other pressing questions arise: Is it possible that the adhesive which holds society together consists solely of procedures? How can an individual develop independently of the social context in which he/she must fulfil him/herself objectively? On what basis are the values termed universal to be defined? And again: if the common culture constitutes the essential element of modern society, to the extent that the said modernity is entering a crisis, as seems to be the case at the present historical moment, does this crisis drag the common culture down with it? There are numerous and significant indicators which highlight the magmatic character of contemporary cultural systems, their internal fragmentation as well as the emergence of new trans-national subsystems.

As regards the open-ended questions, and indeed, they are increasing precisely because society is more and more individualized and marked by numerous cultural and other differences, it is evident that a series of important challenges must be faced, which require new types of reflection to be undertaken to match the new forms of social coexistence. We shall only try to mention a few of these questions, aware of the fact that there is an on-going need to re-think these topics.

In the first place, one of the crucial challenges is certainly human rights. They uphold the centrality of the person and the universality of belonging to a single human species. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [1948] makes explicit reference to this. One reads in the Preamble: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". These concepts are reaffirmed in Article 1 which states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". These values constitute besides a goal to be continually reaffirmed and tenaciously proposed, in so far as they have not yet been fully achieved even in the Western World. The intercultural perspective is based, out of respect for particularities, on a common ethic of rights, and in particular of the fundamental rights of man.

Therefore, the reference to values and universal rights derives from the primacy of the human person: they constitute an inalienable necessity, a sort of pre-requisite in a world in which contacts, relations between peoples and single individuals from the different continents, are bound to become more and more frequent and intense. Indeed it concerns a question that goes far beyond cultures and actually demands and constrains them, so to speak, to a reflexive self-estimation based on their capacity (or otherwise) to place the human person at the centre and, in a still more radical way, the human person considered as unique, singular and alterity. This important reflection cannot be taken for granted and presents a further challenge to be accepted. Intercultural encounters and the recognition of differences — aspects which some hoped would overcome the risks inherent in multiculturalism — that involves the elaboration of a sort of hermeneutic of the other person, that excludes the logic of inclusion or exclusion.

In the second place, in fact, the centrality of the Other person must be brought into focus. The end of spatial separation and the increase of differences obliges us to think of a *more relational individuality*, less self-centred compared with the widespread radical individualism. Whether we wish to or not, we are forced to come out of ourselves and to measure ourselves against the Other here, with what is different, in so far as we find ourselves, necessarily, to be dealing with differences the institutional element has hardly filtered. Due to the smaller number of common experiences and shared filters, the other person can always be recognized, independently of the fact that his/her ethnic identity is different from ours. This is even more valid for that radical difference the stranger presents, a figure — whether we like it or not — increasingly difficult to keep at a distance, separate from our territory, in an epoch in which mobility and communications easily cross space and frontiers.

Thirdly, another crucial question is identity. It places squarely in the centre the issue of social co-existence and cohesion since it confronts the re-definition of the relationship between the 'I' and the 'We', between the self and the social contexts. With reference to the present strong upsurge of individualism, one must admit that it is no longer possible to base the meaning of life in common *only* on the reconstruction — more or less forced or abstract — of institutional frameworks that impose rules and common values on the single subject, and consequently rigid, stable, collective identities.

Rather, one must ask oneself whether and on what conditions the personal subjectivity might recognize its own limitations, so as to create the premise to sustain a relationship that is not merely opportunist or outright destructive between the single individual, his/her need to find roots, and recognition of the obligations that stem from life with others. Current transformations lead us to think that today no authority or institution can impose on the subject such auto-control. Self-determination undoubtedly constitutes one of the most lasting results of our recent history, being societal modernity. But in the face of so many real problems it is possible to recognize that more than ever we even need a pinch of "self-denial" to counter the widespread radical individualism that merely considers other people in terms of instrumentalisation. This does not mean under-valuing the importance of identity, as each person's identity is essential and without it, it would actually be impossible to recognize the other. In order for the encounter with the other person to take place in a dialogically constructive way, it is necessary to start with a clear and mature identity.

If the various identities were to be (as, seems to be the case today) extremely weak and fragile, the encounter with the other might be sterile and merely lead to forms of defence. If, again, one identity were to be strong and the other weak, the encounter might lead to phenomena of domination. Instead, when two strong identities meet the outcome could be entirely different. It could be that in one case the encounter is a clash, whereas in the other it is dialogical and constructive. If strong identities meet of an authoritative stamp (fundamentalist at the limit) they will in all probability clash. If, instead, two strong identities meet that have been educated to respect others and to recognize the unity of the human species, then the outcome could be a positive encounter between differences. As John Paul II stated, "This gives rise to that atmosphere of 'civic reasonableness' that permits friendly and serene coexistence" (n. 3) as well as to "seek the proper balance between respect for [one's] own identity and recognition of that of others (n. 2) (Annual Message for the 91st World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 24 November 2004).

As you are well aware such questions concern not only each cultural identity but also the religious sphere.

Moreover — and this is the point to which I feel it is important to draw attention, also within the religious dimension — it is a question of re-thinking identity in dialogue with alterity, so as to discover the identity in its dual role of belonging/similarity — what is the origin of the identity of a group or a collectivity and, at the same time, of individuality/difference — what leads to the recognition of the individual's uniqueness.

The mutations taking place therefore pose vital questions, obliging us to imagine less rigid forms of culture and less autocentric individualism, more relational and dialogical. Culture and identity are forced to move and come into contact with the *other* and with the others, which means that the great challenge consists in succeeding to be oneself without closing oneself to others and to be open to others without denying oneself. Alterity contains this potential, since it constitutes, at the individual level, a limit to the hypertrophy of the 'I' that seems to dog contemporary culture, while, on the collective level, it shows up the intrinsic limitation of every culture and its porosity. The contact between cultures — and above all between the exponents of different cultures — can therefore surmount the limitations of counter opposition and tolerance to reach reciprocal influence: as the history of humanity eloquently teaches. This kind of contact is also able to produce new cultural expressions, given that no culture can survive if it does not dialogue with the others. In this perspective John Paul II indicated that "dialogue between cultures ... is based upon the recognition that: there are values which are common to all cultures because they are rooted in the nature of the person. These values express humanity's most authentic and distinctive features ... [therefore] it is necessary to foster people's awareness of these shared values, in order to nurture that intrinsically universal cultural 'soil' which makes for fruitful and constructive dialogue" (*Message of His Holiness John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2001, n. 16*).

With reference to concrete social co-existence one must recognize the existence of tension between identity and differences that constitutes a real challenge of the contemporary world. It also, and above all, challenges us as Christians. Christianity does not in fact constitute an autonomous culture; rather, it is a point of reference and comparison in respect to any other culture and is called to re-examine itself. To

deepen, as we are wont to say in common parlance, “Our Christian identity”. This means to start a dialogue between it and our cultural, social, biological, historical, etc., heritage. More precisely, it is necessary to strengthen our Christian identity which is the premise to carry on a profitable dialogue with the others.

In this direction, I expect that a further challenge to be accepted consists in learning to live fully one’s own faith, parallel to our commitment to co-exist peacefully *for* and *with* the others. As John Paul II stated during his Visit to India indeed: “Asian Peoples are known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Without denying the existence of bitter tensions and violent conflicts” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 6, 6 November 1999).

In particular, the more the Catholic faith is gathered in its truth, the more it strengthens the identity of the believer and the more it opens him/her to dialogue and to meeting all, particularly the other religions because Jesus Christ, the full revelation of God, gathers man’s entire religious universe, wherever it is manifested.

The Holy Father referred to thus during his Visit to the Diocese of Tunis when he said to the faithful: “You often experience the vulnerability of a small flock and you sometimes endure trials that can lead even to heroism. However you also experience God’s gratuitous gift which, in turn, you desire to live with everyone. What you witness to in faith will thus fortify you for an ever deeper and more spiritual relationship with Muslims, leading you to discover, accept and share God’s blessings with them” (John Paul II’s *Address to the Bishops of the Regional Episcopal Conference of North Africa*, n. 3, 14 April 1996). Therefore, more than others, we Christians are duty bound to convert ourselves first, that is to change our outlook.

To this end, it is enlightening to remember humanity’s origin: actually created in the image of the Creator, who has in himself unity and diversity, that is in itself dialogue between differences, as indicated in the mystery of the Trinity. A “mystery” not because it is totally incomprehensible to man, but because it cannot be reduced to rigid categories that tend to eliminate one of the two polarities (unity or diversity, one or the multiple). Moreover it treats of a reality which, if totally accepted, certainly has important social implications and, I dare to say, disruptive, precisely with reference to our discourse about co-existence among differences. Even in the sociological sphere these topics have not yet been studied in depth as they deserve.

On the basis of what has been treated so far there is reason to believe that the way to co-existence involves not only the encounter with the other, but also responsibility with consideration for the other. In order for this to come about, an effort must be made so that the different cultures, that exist and are also important, may be understood in the context of unity in multiplicity: “Cultural diversity should therefore be understood within the broader horizon of the unity of the human race. In a real way, this unity constitutes the primordial historical and ontological datum in the light of which the profound meaning of cultural diversity can be grasped” (*Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2001: Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace*, n. 7). “In this perspective, dialogue between cultures ... emerges as an intrinsic demand of human nature itself, as well as of culture” (*ibid.*, n. 10).

Ref.: Text given at the SEDOS Residential Seminar in Ariccia: *Mission in Progress. Migration, Proclamation and Witness* (3-7 May 2005).

Theology of Liberation in the Dialogue of Religions

A New Development in Latin America

- Dr Stefan Silber -

At present, the liberation of the poor is no longer conceivable without the dialogue between the members of all religions. For the religions not only bear a great responsibility for the emergence of poverty but also harbour a substantial potential for its conquest. Out of this insight, in the theology of liberation since a few years a new voice is making itself heard that is calling for dialogue with the theology of religions, especially with its pluralistic orientation.

Even if this development is tangible only since the last five years, its roots can be traced back to the beginning of the theology of liberation. Although this theology has always maintained a strong scepticism, nourished by Barth's and Marx's criticism of religions, against religious manifestations and their alienating effects especially on the poor, at the same time its 'option for the poor' immediately attracted huge attention and growing favour for the religious experiences of the poor. Especially in the basic communities and in similar new ecclesial creations there soon arose a new self-confidence which not only tolerated indigenous, Afro-American and syncretistic forms of religiosity but took them seriously and encouraged them as expressions of the religious self-determination of the poor. The openness of liberation theology to the matter the Second Vatican Council termed 'cooperation with all people of good will' (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 52), which has been in force from the beginning, made dialogue with atheists a matter of course in the same way as the dialogue and the cooperation with people of good will who belonged to other religions. Since the 1990's this openness is called 'macro-ecumenicity'¹ — an ecumenicity that goes beyond the cooperation of Christian Churches.

Over and above that there arose in the 1980's, 1990's, out of the openness to the religious experiences of the poor, the theological paradigm of inculturation. Parallel to it and in many respects more radical and clear there arose the theological movement of the 'Teología Indía' (indigenous theology)² with its numerous local and regional contextualisations. In contrast to most of the theologies of inculturation the Teología Indía carries on the dialogue with indigenous religions, thus preparing for the encounter with liberation theology and the theology of religious pluralism.

This encounter had already been demanded quite some time ago by such Asian and North American theologians as Aloysius Pieris and Paul Knitter. As its first milestone, the Congress of the Brazilian Society for Theology and Divinity (SOTER) in July 2000 can be mentioned. The publication of the articles written for that congress³ demonstrates the awakening of the Theology of Liberation to the encounter with religious pluralism. Numerous publications followed in the Nicaraguan periodical "Alternativas",⁴ in "Revista electrónica Latinoamericana de Teología" (RELaT)⁵ published on the web, in *Concilium*,⁶ and in other journals.

The Fifth General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) from 24 September to 1 October, 2002, which took place under the impact of the assaults of September 11th, started an ambitious publication project which intends not only to give proof of the theological encounter between pluralism and liberation but also to advance it. The first two titles⁷ of a series spread over five volumes, in which this encounter is to be pursued to a new synthesis, have already been published. At the "World Forum Theology and Liberation" which took place in Porto Alegre from 20-25 January 2005 immediately before the World Social Forum, and where 200 theologians from all continents took part, the question of interreligious dialogue also played an important part.

Many of the above-mentioned publications show that the encounter with the world of religions is considered something new. On the Latin American continent, that still considers itself Catholic,

the theology of liberation did not seem to need to deal with Non-Christian religions. At the beginning of the new millennium, however, and under the impression of religious motives being claimed for acts of terrorism and war the growing awareness of indigenous and Afro-American religions prepared the theology to recognize the urgency of an encounter with religious pluralism. Hence it is characterized mostly as new, necessary and exciting, and occasionally the question will come up: Why did we not face that subject long ago?

The encounter is necessary not only because of the growing political importance of the religions but also because the theology of liberation, to be faithful to its option for the poor, has to take up the religious experiences of the poor. Outside Latin America, however, the majority of the poor are Non-Christians, and the dialogue with them will necessarily lead to an interreligious dialogue. Considering the global structures of oppression and impoverishment the 'option for the poor' cannot refer to the poor of a single continent but has also to aim at global strategies of liberation.

The representatives of liberation theology do not consider the dialogue with the theology of religious pluralism only as a means of more efficient strategies of liberation but first of all as a sign of the times that, in the shape of a growing poverty and a growing awareness of the religions of the world, is challenging them to adjust their own theology in a new way.

The literature at issue clearly shows that it is not a question of the theology of liberation to work off a forgotten subject. Rather, the challenge of religious pluralism is leading to a review of all the central theological themes, and the question of theology itself. Over and above those taking part in this encounter are important movements which evolved through liberation theology in the last decades: positions from the classical theology of liberation, from feminist theology, indigenous and Afro-American theologies, and from the theology of inculturation enter into a dialogue with the traditional theology of religions and with the developments in the pluralistic theology of religions. The integration of such different perspectives and the reference to the central theological themes suggest that those arguments will really lead to a fundamental new orientation of theology.

According to the theology of religious pluralism not only Christianity but all the religions of the world originate in the dialogue between the revealing God and the listening and answering human being. For the representatives of this theological movement the religions are part of God's plan of revelation and salvation. The liberation theologians who endeavour to dialogue with the pluralistic theology of religion proceed mostly from a similar positive significance of the religions while avoiding the risk of religious relativism. For them the acknowledgment of religions is not a merely tactical measure at the beginning of the dialogue, so that it only counted for their *de facto* existence. On the contrary, the religions are acknowledged *de iure* — as different revelations of God to the members of different regions and epochs. With this the peculiar character of Christian revelation is neither denied nor absolutized, because — and here the heritage of Barth's criticism of religion is apparent — God is greater than every religion, even greater than Christianity.

The acknowledgment of religions has two consequences for Liberation Theology: Firstly, the acknowledgment of the religious experience of the poor is at the centre of interest. Therefore the encounter with indigenous and Afro-American religions has a prominent place in that discussion. Secondly, the acknowledgement of the religions contradicts the policy of the United States and the Western World in general. The reference to the resistance to the isolation policy of the Vatican, and fundamentalist tendencies in other religions is not lacking. The acknowledgment of religions and the search for dialogue and cooperation with them makes a contribution to the liberation of the poor in the world's present condition.

Of course, the acknowledgment of the religious experience of the poor includes syncretic forms of religion and membership in two religions, as they often exist among the poor. Mainly indigenous and Afro-American liberation theologies have impressively emphasized the importance of that acknowledgment in recent years. Hence there will result further interesting points of contact in that area with reflections from the pluralistic theology of religions of Asia.

While unreservedly acknowledging the religions as part of God's plan of salvation, liberation theology does not forget its traditional critique of religion, especially not, where the responsibility of religions for violence, for the rise of poverty, and the prevention of liberation must be discussed. The classical inner church critique of ecclesial structures and theological pretexts, which become a burden for the poor, is widening to a quasi "inner religious" critique. Notwithstanding the benevolence towards Non-Christian religions and their fundamental acknowledgment that is not devaluated by this critique, liberation theology cannot accept any interreligious dialogue that is at

the expense of the poor. On the contrary, the religions are measured with the same measure by which the theology of liberation is also measuring the Christian religion and the Western World: human dignity, justice, and liberation.

This might be considered the most important contribution of liberation theology in its dialogue with the pluralistic theology of religion. For those authors interreligious dialogue is not a value in itself but it serves justice and liberation. Critique of religion in the name of the poor is an integral part of interreligious dialogue. This is not a fundamental criticism of every religious expression but a critique directed at special religious conditions, doctrines, and institutions which create injustice and hinder liberation. The fundamental acknowledgment of all religions remains untouched. On the contrary, the religions are called to guarantee human dignity and solidarity. In view of the necessary critique of religion the theology of liberation is not set on the conquest of religion but on its conversion to the poor.

This conversion is not understood as a conversion of everybody to Christianity or to the Christian idea of God. On the contrary, the religions are expected to be faithful to their own tradition, and to renounce all fundamentalist tendencies. The option for the poor, that has already stood the test of the Inner-Christian criticism of religion, may serve as a criterion to identify unjust religious structures, and to denounce them. This option is at the core of the contribution of Christians to interreligious dialogue.

The encounter between liberation theology and the theology of religious pluralism will have numerous consequences for the most important themes of theology. While in monotheism the question about God up to now has been seen as the guarantor of liberation from idolatry and oppression, now the aspects of the one-sidedness and historic intolerance of monotheism also come into view. Now through openness to religious pluralism other names and appearances of the divinity will achieve importance in the theology of liberation, because it is accepted that the monotheistic idea of God depicted as male, White and dominant, can be misused to oppress women and people of indigenous or Afro-American origin. Nevertheless, to maintain the prophetic criticism of the antihuman idolatry of the neoliberal West is a new challenge to the definition of the monotheistic Christian idea of God. It will be necessary to show that God, who is greater than all religions and has revealed himself under many names, can be identified in this plurality as the advocate of the poor.

There is a similar challenge in Christology, which takes a highly prominent place in the classical theology of liberation. Must Christology — following John Hick — be down rated to some extent to oblige the other religions or can Christianity proclaim a universal liberator without devaluating the possibilities of salvation existing in other religions? In view of the dialogue with other religions the theology of liberation will have to discuss its Christology anew.

It seems that the consequences for Ecclesiology can be drawn more easily. The difference stated by the Second Vatican Council between the Church and the Kingdom of God makes it possible to give the Church a serving function also in interreligious dialogue. The members of other religions are related to the Church not because this is their vocation but because all human beings of good will have to work together with the poor for their deliverance. Hence the doctrine about the church of the poor in liberation theology can develop in the encounter with religious pluralism.

As in these central theological themes, the theology of liberation will in many cases have to reflect anew on the consequences of the encounter with religious pluralism. The revelation, Bible and tradition, the questions of ministry and the sacraments demand a profound discussion not only under the eyes of the poor but of the religions of the world.

The encounter of liberation theology with religious pluralism is — as this short reflection could only give a very general idea — an exciting and promising project. In view of the poor and in the dialogue with the religions new ways into a more humanitarian and just future will emerge. It is to be hoped, that the theologians of Latin America will find that many people of good will from all the continents and all religions will cooperate in this project.

Footnotes

¹ J.M. Vigil, *Macroecumenismo: teología de las religiones latinoamericana*, in: *Alternativas* 11 (2004) 27, 109-126.

² Cf. E.H. López, *Teología Indía*. Antología (Cochabamba 2000).

³ Cf. Sarça Ardente, *Teología na América Latina. Prospectivas*, edited by L.C. Susin (São Paulo 2000); cf. also No. 20/21 (2001) of the journal *Alternativas* under the title “Pluralismo y teologías en diálogo”.

⁴ Cf. especially in No. 27 (2004) under the title: “La teología ante el pluralismo religioso”.

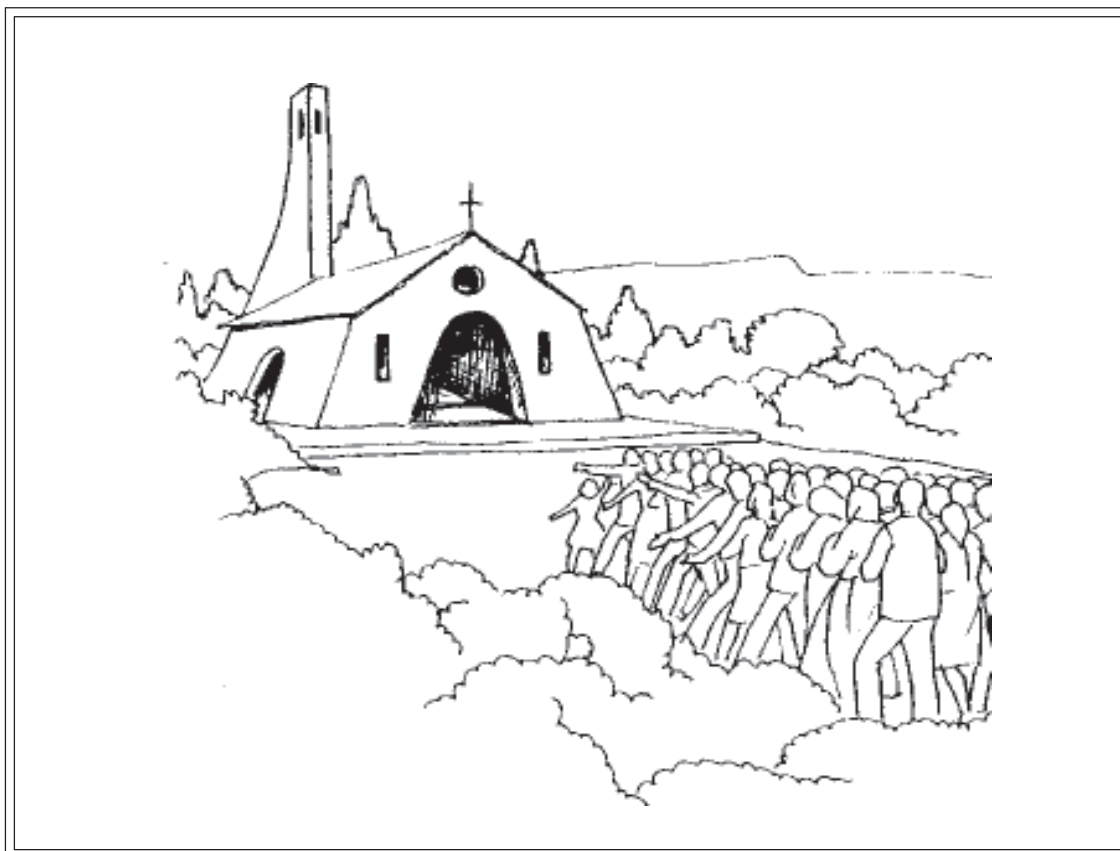
⁵ www.servicioskoinonia.org/relat/; cf. also the other publications of the Servicios Koinonia and the last editions (2002-2005) of the Annual Agenda Latino-Americana-Mundial (www.latinoamericana.org) edited by J.M. Vigil and P. Casaldáliga.

⁶ Cf. esp. the No. 3/2002 under the title “Brazil: People and Church(es)”, edited by J. O. Beozzo and L. C. Susín.

⁷ Por los muchos caminos de Dios. Desafíos del pluralismo religioso a la teología de la liberación, ed. by Asociación Ecuémica de Teólogos y Teólogas del Tercer Mundo (Quito 2003); Por los muchos caminos de Dios II. Hacia una teología cristiana y latinoamericana del pluralismo religioso, edited by Asociación Ecuémica de Teólogos y Teólogas del Tercer Mundo (Zaragoza 2004).

Ref.: Text given by the author for the SEDOS Publication. Translated by P. Ernst Förster, SJ:
<http://www.con-spiration.de/german/dialog.html>.

First published as: Stefan Silber, Theologie der Befreiung im Religionsdialog. Eine neue Entwicklung in Lateinamerika, in: Stimmen der Zeit 130 (2005) 7, 484-488.



Coming Events

- Next SEDOS Conference -

“Mission of the Church: The Kingdom of God”

by
Fr John Fuellenbach, SVD

**Tuesday, 6 December, 2005
17:00 hrs**

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

- SEDOS Annual General Assembly 2005 -

**Tuesday, 6 December, 2005
15:00 hrs**

- For SEDOS Members only -

Joint SEDOS Conference

UISG – USG: Commission for Interreligious Dialogue – SEDOS

‘Religious Fundamentalism’

Thursday, 17 November 2005
at 15:30 hrs
at the *Aula Agustinianum* — Vatican City (Rome)

Working Group

Tuesday, 15 November, **Bible and Mission** 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**