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Editorial

Happy New Year to all our readers!

It is a new year and God gives us a new opportunity to work at building His Kingdom. The Chinese Lunar Calendar brings us the Year of the Dog, a loyal and selfless animal ready to serve and help those in need. As disciples we have been engaged as servants of the People of God to become the instruments of transformation and builders of the Kingdom.

“The Kingdom of God: Jesus’ Principle of Action in the world” by **John Fuellenbach, SVD**. We return to the central message of Jesus to realize that ‘the Gospel as preached by Jesus was first and foremost meant for this world and not just for the world to come’. The Kingdom means the transformation of the world and we are the agents of this transformation.

Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, speaks in a concrete way about the building of the Kingdom: ‘every Christian is a missionary’. In *“A Roman Catholic Perspective on Doing Mission”* he explores the different emphasis we have given the meaning of mission through the ages in order to arrive to the present day’s emphasis in Mission as transforming humanity through promoting human rights, respect for the ‘other’ and respect for other religions.

We are all committed to building the Kingdom and **Susan Smith, RNDM**, reminds us of the active and important role women have in this mission. In *“Catholic Sisters and Mission: what about Matthew 28:19-20?”* she analyses the traditional interpretation of the *Commission* of the Lord which ‘suggests that responsibility for mission was derived from ordination rather than from Baptism’. Could we look and interpret this passage from another perspective so as to remove the dangers of ‘subordination’?

Camilla Martin joins her voice to the importance of women in the building of the Kingdom. In *“Des femmes ‘actrices’ à part entière”* she offers a reflection on the androcentrism in the tradition of the Church and the complicity women have had in the transmission of the exclusive language. ‘How to pass from being an *icon of the Kingdom* to become a real part of a history on the move towards the fulfilment of the Kingdom?’.

In *“Asian Religious Identity in the Context of the Building up of the Local Church”*, **Julma Neo, DC**, encourages us to look at and open our doors to other cultures and to the riches of other religious traditions. We are all engaged in the building of the Kingdom but beginning from our own local area. From the perspective of Asia it could be possible to inculcate every charisma in order to build up a truly ‘Catholic’ and universal Church.

We end with a short reflection on the violence we see daily in our world. **Jean-Paul Marthoz** shares with us his thoughts on *“La violence dans les médias”*. Our vision of reality is deformed by the way the mass media presents the news. It seems that violence and conflicts are the main and natural ingredients to offer society. What can we do to change this?

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The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Principle of Action in the World

Fr John Fuellenbach, SVD

When approached to present this topic to this audience I asked myself: "This message is not new to SEDOS people. What can I possibly say to them that they have not yet heard a hundred times over". Some friends of mine like to tease me by remarking: "John, are you still at it, preaching the Kingdom of God? Don't you have anything else to talk about after so many years of being occupied with the Kingdom theme?". My response is usually: "Well, there is no other topic Jesus was concerned with and it is always overwhelmingly new when you find the treasure of the Kingdom hidden in your own self once again". If I could just blow or stir into flame the fire of the Kingdom which Jesus said he was sent to kindle in the world and that he wanted to see the whole world burning with (Lk 12:49), then it would have been worth while presenting to you once again what you already knew for so long.

The return to the central message of Jesus: The Kingdom of God

What was Jesus all about? What did he want to bring? What was his mission? He expressed his message and his mission with the words: Kingdom of God. A multifaceted concept but in it he enshrined what he wanted to communicate. He called disciples and he chose them to carry on his mission, the message of the Kingdom. "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). Since Jesus' message was the Kingdom because "he was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4:43) our message has to be the same, be it individually or communally. The Second Vatican Council defined the Church on the same lines: the Church must see itself in the service of the Kingdom of God meant for the transformation of the whole world.

The phrase Kingdom of God, the centre of Jesus' message, appears 162 times in the New Testament, 92 times on the lips of Jesus. Yet it disappeared into the background in the post-Easter preaching and gave way to an almost exclusive concentration on the person of Jesus rather than on his message. This is not a distortion of his message yet it certainly obscured the thrust with which Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom as the ultimate fulfilment of God's covenant with his people. The Kingdom message receded so much into the background that for centuries it became almost irrelevant in both Catholic as well as Protestant theology. It was obviously not regarded as the centre of Jesus' preaching and teaching anymore. Only in recent time has it been rediscovered in both Churches. As an example of its neglect and rediscovery it might suffice to remind you that in Vatican I (1870) the phrase did not appear at all, while in Vatican II it can be found at least 75 times.

The main effect of the rediscovery of the Kingdom message of Jesus consists in the realization that the Gospel as preached by Jesus was first and foremost meant for this world and not just for the world to come. To view the message of Jesus from this perspective demands a change in the way salvation is to be envisioned. Since salvation is the most generic term in theology the change in understanding salvation would affect the whole of theology accordingly.

The change from rescue operation to transformation of creation

Salvation is not to be understood in the first place as a rescue operation through which those who are to be saved will be taken out of this world which has no future as it is doomed to disappear at the end. Salvation is envisioned in terms of transformation. To be saved means we are not taken out of this world but that God himself comes into this world to save the world by transforming it

into the fullness of his image. This is the goal of creation: to become the Icon of the Trinity, and in becoming so to express God's very being externally in his creation.

It is a total, global and structural transfiguration and revolution of the reality of human beings; it is the cosmos purified of all evil and full of the reality of God. The Kingdom is not to be in another world but is the old world transformed into a new one (L. Boff).

The Kingdom is not some kind of extra-terrestrial entity that will be superimposed on this world. Nor is it a process of spiritual or internal change that leaves the outer realities looking much the same. It is the liberation of the world we live in, know, touch, smell, suffer, from all that corrupts and destroys it (Elliot, *Praying the Kingdom*).

The six tension points of the Kingdom:

A closer examination of Jesus' Kingdom message will reveal a series of tension points or polarities which are essential. The different view of salvation, of the Church and her mission, ultimately depends on how one accepts or rejects these presuppositions. It is of tantamount importance to recognize these polarities as biblical. Any theology of the Kingdom that dissolves these tensions, by opting only for one side or the other, is to that degree unbiblical. A true Kingdom theology will have to maintain and live with these tensions. They are the following:

- (1) Future versus present (already — not yet); the Kingdom of God as belonging to this world as well as to the world to come;
- (2) Individual versus social; means individual salvation but in the context of a community (we are created in the image of a "Triune God" and therefore community-beings by nature);
- (3) Spirit versus matter (religious — political); the Kingdom is a transcendental and a spiritual reality but concretely present in the midst of this world in order to transform this world into its final design.
- (4) Apocalyptic versus eschatological; the world is sin-permeated and has no future or the world is good and the object of God's transforming power.
- (5) Divine action versus human action (gift and task); the Kingdom as a gift from God and a task for us to be accomplished through human cooperation.
- (6) The Church's relationship to the Kingdom; the tension seeing the Church and the Kingdom as identical and/or seeing the Kingdom as broader than the Church, and present outside the confines of the Church as well.

The Kingdom meant for the transformation of this world:

By putting the whole stress on the first aspects of our six polarities of the Kingdom (future, individual, spiritual, apocalyptic, total gift and identical with the Church) the Kingdom message of Jesus turns into a totally transcendent reality, purely spiritual, beyond this world and totally invisible to the human eye.

The second aspects of the polarities (present, social, earthly, task and, broader than the Church) stress the Kingdom as belonging first to this world and its destiny. Of course, it is equally a distortion of the Kingdom if one only defines it from these polarities. Surprisingly, however, it can be observed: whenever the basic Kingdom message of Jesus is pushed into the background, there salvation brought by Christ is foremostly seen as an unearthly reality that has nothing or little to say about this earth and its relationship to the Kingdom.

This second set of polarities however (too long neglected) show us clearly that Jesus did not envision the Kingdom that he preached as something that belongs totally and exclusively to the world to

come. His Kingdom-vision leaves room for, interpreting it as belonging to this world as well as, proclaiming a future that cannot be deduced from the circumstances of present history. The future, as the Bible understands it, is something qualitatively new. It lies beyond human planning and capability, something we can only allow to be given to us. While this symbol takes the world and human effort in history seriously, it does not surrender openness to a transcendent future in the fullness of God. Only God can ultimately guarantee the fulfilment of humankind's deepest aspirations.

Our engagement in this struggle (to make the Kingdom hope come true) can be without illusions because we know by faith that no human programme by itself will bring in the eschaton. Our engagement can also be without ultimate despair, because we believe that, no matter how great our self-created horror becomes, God is faithful to his promise and he will bring the Kingdom which has already drawn near to us in his Son (Viviano, *The Kingdom of God*).

We must conclude from this: The Kingdom of God is incarnated in history, in human society and in the world. Although it is not purely and simply identical with the world, it is "identifiable" in the world. We could also say that the Kingdom shows itself in society and is encountered in society, but this society is not the Kingdom.

To discover the theme of the Reign of God is to discover the full dimension of the inevitable historical character of Christianity. Our God is a god of history, has entered into history, has a purpose and a plan for history, and has shown these to us in Jesus. God's plan is the Reign of God. The Reign is the dream, the utopia God cherishes for history, God's overall design for the world, the arcane mystery hidden for centuries and now revealed fully in Jesus (Casaldàliga, *Political Holiness*).

The Kingdom is present and future:

If one thing is obvious in the Kingdom message of Jesus, it is his constant insistence that the Kingdom is present now. There are 21 passages (which are regarded as authentic words of Jesus) in the Gospel which with an insistence and an astonishing firmness stress that God's Kingdom has finally come and has become a matter of experience now. These passages indicate that something is happening now. God is entering the present age in a totally new way to bring to fulfilment the promises made to the prophets. The most obvious are the following:

- Now is the time of rejoicing no time of fasting (Mk 2:19)
- The mustard seed is growing (Mk 4:30-32), (Mt 13:31)
- To the poor the Kingdom belongs now, not in the future (Mt 5:3; Lk 6:10)
- From now on the Kingdom will exercise its force (Lk 16:16)
- Satan has fallen from heaven, his power is broken (Lk 10:18)
- The yeast is penetrating the dough (Mt 13:33)
- The banquet is ready (Mt 22:1-9)
- The treasure is ready to be taken (Mt 13:44,45)
- The Kingdom is in your very reach (Lk 17-21)

A particular and unique way to experience the presence of the Kingdom already now is Jesus' common practice of table fellowship. Jesus understood this festive "eating and drinking" as an already present celebration of the banquet of the Kingdom understood as an "active anticipation of banqueting in the fully consummated Kingdom of God". Jesus saw the actualization of this historically present Kingdom in the coming of the Gentiles who will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (*cf.* Mt 8:11).

The fact that the Kingdom of God is a present reality has never been denied in theological writings. But most of the time this "being present" has been so qualified that the future and not the present of the Kingdom seem to be the primary concern, as G. Lohfink puts it:

In order to be fair to Jesus' message and praxis, one must, more than anything else, hammer out the PRESENCE of the BASILEIA that Jesus himself maintained. That God would establish his kingly rule in the future was believed by everyone in Israel during Jesus' time. Generally speaking,

people lived in the end-time hope. Jesus' unmistakable uniqueness lay in the fact that with frightening awareness he could speak of fulfilment: The Kingdom of God is here and now. And he not only said it, but fulfilled it in messianic praxis ("The Exegetical Predicament").

The real issue as Lohfink sees it: Are we able to notice the Kingdom's presence? God does not need us so much to bring about the Kingdom as to notice its presence in our midst. If we are touched by the Kingdom, we will be able to discern its presence in our daily experiences, we will be able to see its presence and to point it out and to witness to its presence in the midst of people's lives.

The Kingdom as a Gift and Task

There is no difficulty in seeing the Kingdom as a gracious gift from a God who comes with unconditional love to seek out humankind and to offer salvation to all. God is coming towards us with unconditional love. He seeks communion and intimacy. Its final coming is totally up to God; it will come as and when he sees fit. It cannot be foretold nor calculated. No human initiative can bring about the coming of the Kingdom. It is God's own powerful and sovereign act.

Yet the Kingdom, once accepted, becomes one's task and demands all of one's abilities. We must avoid the danger of viewing the Kingdom as coming completely without human assistance. This is a perennial temptation in many treatises on the Kingdom of God. Lohfink astutely identifies the pitfall in this way:

There is one sentence in modern exegesis that is constantly repeated: The *basileia* is solely and exclusively God's act. This sentence is then frequently followed by something like this: Human beings must pray for the coming of the *basileia*, they must prepare and be ready for it, orient themselves towards it and asymptotically draw near to it, but they can do absolutely nothing to cause or hasten its coming, nor can they do anything to stop or hinder it.... Now obviously we do not deny that the *basileia* is God's act. However, does that say all that needs saying? (The Exegetical Predicament).

The gratuitousness of the Kingdom should not lead us to regard ourselves as merely passive objects. Ultimately the Kingdom of God is a personal relationship between God and human beings. Any personal relationship is always mutual; it goes two ways. We are challenged to respond, and through this response the Kingdom becomes a reality in our midst.

Jon Sobrino offers a unique way of looking at the Kingdom as gift and task. He sees the Kingdom as establishing first and foremost a filial relationship with God. We are oriented vertically to God and thus we are his children. From this vertical orientation follows the horizontal relationship which makes us brothers and sisters. Both are essential and of equal and primary importance.

Seen from such a perspective, history reveals two aspects. First it is a call to divine filiation by which human persons become God's children. Our vertical vocation, the deepest aspiration of all persons, is complete union with God. Secondly, history is a call to human fellowship by which persons become each other's sisters and brothers. This is our horizontal vocation, the call to attain complete union among ourselves.

These two aspects make it possible to speak of the Kingdom as a GIFT as well as a TASK. In the call to divine filiation, the Kingdom of God is fundamentally God's true gift. But it is a gift that entails by necessity the task of creating an authentic community of brothers and sisters. It is the gift aspect of the Kingdom that demands of us the task in response. The achievement of true human fellowship in history becomes an historical realization of the promise of total communion with God. But, as an historical verification of such a promise, it immediately reveals the partial and incomplete character of the Kingdom now and opens history to the complete and total communion of human persons with God.

The Kingdom of God as a call to action in Paul: Rom 14:17

Jesus never defined the Kingdom of God. He described the Kingdom in parables, in similes (see Mt 13; Mk 4) and in concepts like life, glory, joy and light. Among theologians we still find a

naive helplessness when it comes to defining the Kingdom of God. The best biblical description we can find is given in Paul:

After all, the Kingdom of God is not a matter of whether you get what you like to eat or drink, but the Kingdom of God is a matter of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).

Some authors regard this text as the only definition of the Kingdom ever attempted in the entire New Testament. Albert Schweitzer called Paul's definition "a Creed for all times". The constant danger has been to interpret these words exclusively in a spiritual sense and overlook the fact that its basic concepts like "justice, peace and joy" are equally meant to refer to the life of the Christian in the here and now.

This verse is usually misunderstood to refer exclusively to private, individual, interior, purely spiritual blessings such as a righteous standing of the individual before God, peace of mind and heart due to forgiveness of sins, the joy of the redeemed child. But, while those blessings are not to be excluded, they do not exhaust or even do full justice to the message of these words. After all, peace means primarily the opposite of war, the tranquillity of order, social order; justice means justice, the virtue proper to social relations; and joy, although it has an individual dimension to it, can mean a rejoicing precisely in the blessings brought by peace and justice (Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, p.18).

Justice as the basic Demand of the Covenant means life-giving relationship

The Kingdom, defined in this brief formula, is therefore nothing other than justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are not just feelings or sentiments but realities to be implemented in this world. We might rightly call these three characteristics the fundamental values of the Kingdom.

Justice as a biblical concept could best be translated as RIGHT RELATIONS or even better as LIFE-GIVING RELATIONSHIPS. According to Christian anthropology, to be a human being means essentially to be in the world (meaning having a body) and to be in relationship.

These essential relations extend in four directions: to God, to oneself, to neighbour both as an individual and as part of society, and to creation as a whole. To be just means to live in life-giving relationships with one's fellow human beings, oneself, with nature and ultimately with God. Human identity and authenticity are only achieved when these essentially human relations are "right". Salvation from this point of view means entering into relationships that are God-willed for the fulfilment and happiness of one's very being. Eternal life means living in relationships with God, oneself, one's neighbour and nature that are life-giving and life-receiving. God is a "lover of life" (Wis 11:23ff.) means that, wherever God enters into relationship with human beings, there life is fully given. Those whom God has thus enlivened he expects in turn to enter into life-giving relationships with their fellow human beings and with all of creation as well. Therefore it is correct to say:

In biblical faith, the doing of justice is the primary expectation of God. Everything else by way of ethical norm and Covenantal requirement derives from this, for God is indeed a "lover of justice" (Ps 99 [98]:4). Israel is here commanded to attend to the very thing which God most values, namely, justice (Brueggemann, *To Act Justly*, p. 5).

Jesus' mission was to fulfill the Covenant promises and to restore the broken relationship by calling the whole of Israel back into a justice that had always been the basic norm of Israel since Israel had been called out of an unjust situation in Egypt. His call for basic human solidarity and compassion for those whose lives were marked by the effects of injustice and his demand to restore such relationships which justice demanded, was one of his most urgent pleas. One could call it Jesus' allergy in the sense that he reacted allergically against discrimination of any kind since it was one of the basic requirements of the Kingdom he was sent to bring into the world. If justice was a basic requirement of the Old Testament Jesus insisted even more adamantly on this being the basic norm for any one who would follow him.

What the Old Testament means by 'shalom' is best expressed in a text found twice in the Old

Testament, in Micah and Isaiah. The passage envisions what will happen when God comes to bring his Kingdom into this world and when people are willing to let this reality enter their lives:

And they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken (Mi 4:3-4; see Is 2:4).

Here, Micah presents a vision of what will be when the nations submit to God's Kingdom. In a nutshell there are two fundamental changes that will take place in the individual and in the nations at large: (1) no war anymore and even no training for war and no war industry; and, (2) the return to a simple and peaceful life-style, concerned not with accumulating more and more, but rather with fostering interpersonal relationships. According to the prophet, when this submission takes place, the whole war machine will be dismantled and a new social order will emerge. He envisions a transformed human consciousness and a new public policy. It is the age-old dream of every Israelite: to settle for a simple standard of living, content with vines and fig trees. The peace envisioned here demands a shift in priorities wherein greed will end, exploitation will cease and an entirely new social order will take over. Brueggemann comments on the radicalness of its vision:

It anticipates nothing less than the dismantling of the presently-known world for the sake of an alternative world not yet embodied (To Act Justly, p. 11).

I should like to insert here an observation that I have made over the years in talking to people about justice and peace in the Bible. What is asked for is first a justice and peace mentality. Are justice and peace fundamental values or even the ultimate values for me that determine whether or not I am really a disciple of Jesus? Do these values determine and direct all my behaviour and actions? How far am I concerned with life-giving and life affirming relationships which the Kingdom demands? The same could be said about peace. How much do I want to get rid of my war-mentality and am I a reconciling person?

The relationship between Kingdom and Church

Vatican II starts off by describing the Church as the mystery of Christ. In her the "eternal plan of the Father is realized and manifested in Jesus Christ: to bring humanity to its eternal glory". Here the Church is seen in connection with "bringing about the secret hidden for ages in God" (Col 1:16; see Eph 3:3-9; I Cor 2:6-10). Therefore, the Church has to be seen in this broad perspective of God's plan of salvation, which includes all human beings and creation as a whole (see I Tim 2:4; Rom 8:22 ff).

Did the Council identify the Kingdom of God in history with the pilgrim Church? or did it consider the Kingdom of God in history to be a reality that is broader than the Church?

The majority of theologians (although not all) today hold that the Catholic Church in Vatican II did distance herself from any identification with the Kingdom in history now. The theological basis for doing so is seen in the Council's definition of the Church as a "Sacrament of the Kingdom" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 9). Since God's saving grace can never be bound exclusively to a sacrament, one has to accept that the Kingdom is still broader than the Church. Such a separation is indirectly expressed in article 5 of *Lumen Gentium* and in article 45 of *Gaudium et Spes*. While one can still argue as to whether or not Vatican II really made this distinction, it is clear that in *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) and in the Document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP), a joint statement of the Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, this distinction is clearly made. Both documents confess that the Kingdom of God is a broader reality than the Church.

RM and DP appear to be the first two documents of the recent central doctrinal authority to distinguish the pilgrim Church from the reality of the Reign of God in history; both documents profess that the Reign of God is a broader reality than the Church which is present and operative

beyond her boundaries among the members of other religious traditions” (Dupuis “Dialogue and Proclamation”, p. 150).

Equally significant is the fact that these documents not only clearly distinguish Church and Kingdom, recognizing that the one larger reality of the Kingdom cannot be encompassed by and contained within the Church, but the documents also unambiguously subordinate the Church to the Kingdom by affirming that the Church is meant to be a servant of the broader and more important Kingdom of God.

“It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument” (*RM*, n. 18).

“The Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom” (*ibid.*, n. 20).

The Church’s mission is to foster the “Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rv 11:15) at whose service she is placed (*DP*, n. 35; see also n. 59).

The threefold mission of the Church

Once the Church is no longer seen as the sole holder of the Kingdom, the Church does not have to define herself anymore as “the Kingdom of God under siege” by the powers of this world. Since Vatican II she sees herself more as leaven of the Kingdom or in the service of the Kingdom that is broader than herself. In other words, a theology of transcendence gives way to a theology of transformation. Out of such a view of Church and Kingdom the mission of the Church has been outlined as follows:

1. To proclaim in Word and Sacrament that the Kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In celebrating the presence of the Kingdom the Church brings people effectively into communion with the Kingdom.

The Church is not the Kingdom of God, but bears symbolic witness to the Kingdom through word and sacrament, and her praxis effectively anticipates that Kingdom. She does so by doing for men and women here and now, in new situations (different from those in Jesus’ time), what Jesus did in his time: raising them up for the coming Kingdom of God; opening up communication between them; caring for the poor and outcast; establishing communal ties within the household of faith and serving all men and women in solidarity (cf. Church: The Human Face of God, p. 157).

2. To create Church communities everywhere and to offer its own life as a test-case which demonstrates that the Kingdom is present and operative in the world today. By concretizing, in the Church’s own life justice, peace, freedom and respect for human rights. The Church should offer herself as a “contrast” or a countersign to society at large.

3. To challenge society as a whole to transform itself along the basic principles of the Kingdom now present: justice, peace, brotherhood/sisterhood and human rights. Interreligious dialogue, as the second element of evangelization, must be added to this. These are “constitutive elements of proclaiming the Gospel” since the ultimate goal of the Kingdom is the transformation of the hole of creation. The Church must, therefore, understand her mission in the service of the imminent Kingdom.

This threefold mission found its expression in the document *Redemptoris Missio*.

The Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom. This is seen especially in her preaching, which is a call to conversion. Preaching constitutes the Church’s first and fundamental way of serving the coming of the Kingdom in individuals and in human society...

The Church, then, serves the Kingdom by establishing communities and founding new particular

Churches and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness towards others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institutions.

“The Church serves the Kingdom by spreading throughout the world the ‘Gospel values’ which are an expression of the Kingdom and which help people to accept God’s plan. It is true that the inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live ‘Gospel values’ and are open to the working of the Spirit, who breathes when and where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8)” (RM, n. 20).

RM regards interreligious dialogue as a constitutive element of the Church’s evangelizing task as well. It is “part of the Church’s evangelizing mission” (*ibid.*, n. 55); it is one of its expressions and, moreover, “dialogue is a path toward the Kingdom” (*ibid.*, n. 57). The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* adds:

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are related but not interchangeable (DP, n. 77).

Church - world - other religious traditions

The distinction made by the Council between the Kingdom and the Church bore immediate fruits in the development of a post-conciliar theology, at least in two theological fields: in the theology of Liberation and in the theology of Religions. The Kingdom of God symbol provides the horizon for a solution of two theological problems.

First, in the context of work for justice, liberation and peace, it provides the bridge between the historical achievement of justice and liberation of the oppressed in this world and the eschatological Kingdom still to come in fullness at the end of time. It shows how work for justice and liberation inside and outside the Church is intrinsically linked with the Kingdom present now, since the ultimate goal of the Kingdom of God is the transformation of all reality.

Second, in inter-religious dialogue, the Kingdom symbol furnishes theologians with a broader perspective for entering into dialogue with other religious traditions. If the Kingdom is the ultimate goal of God’s intentionality with all of humanity, then the question no longer is how these other religious traditions are linked to the Church but rather how the Kingdom of God was and is concretely present in these religions.

The distinction between Kingdom and Church can help us relate to this world and its destiny more fruitfully and enter into a more open and creative dialogue with other religious traditions and ideologies.

The Kingdom that Jesus brought has cosmic dimensions that go beyond the confines of the Church. It demands the transformation of all religious and socio-political structures and institutions. Consequently, the Christian community has no other choice than to engage in dialogue with the world and other religious traditions for the sake of the Kingdom present. The teaching office of the Church in “Dialogue and Proclamation” takes up this challenge by stating that dialogue constitutes an integral and essential part of the Church’s mission. The Church must dialogue with other religions in order to carry out her mission and realize her identity (*ibid.*, n. 2). Some theologians regard this as another milestone in the Catholic Church’s view of other religious traditions.

Kingdom consciousness

The identity of the Church depends ultimately on her Kingdom consciousness based on Scripture. She is to reveal this through her sensitivity to the priority of the Kingdom. H.A. Snyder describes such Kingdom consciousness as including the following five aspects:

1. Kingdom consciousness means living and working in the firm hope of the final triumph of God’s reign. In the face of contrary evidence, Kingdom Christians hold on to the conviction that God will eventually swallow up all evil, hate, and injustice. It is their firm belief that the leaven of the Kingdom is

already at work in the dough of creation, to use Jesus' own parable. This gives Christians an unworldly, audacious confidence that enables them to carry on doing what others say is impossible or futile.

2. Understanding God's Kingdom means that the line between "sacred" and "secular" does not exist in concrete reality. God's Kingdom means that all things are in the sphere of God's sovereignty and, therefore, are God's concern. All spheres of life are Kingdom foci.

3. Kingdom awareness means that ministry is much broader than Church work. Christians who understand the meaning of God's reign know they are in the Kingdom business, not just Church business. They see all activity as ultimately having Kingdom significance.

4. In the Kingdom perspective, concern for justice and concrete commitment to the Word of God are necessarily conjoined. An awareness of God's Kingdom, biblically understood, resolves the tension between these two vital concerns. Those committed to the Kingdom want to win people to personal faith in Jesus Christ, since the Kingdom is the ultimate longing of every human heart. They are also committed to peace, justice, and righteousness at every level of society because the Kingdom includes "all things in heaven and on earth" (Eph 1:10) and the welfare of every person and everything God has made.

5. The reality of the Kingdom of God can be experienced now through the Spirit who gives the believer the first fruits of the fullness of the Kingdom in the here and now. Kingdom people, particularly in their liturgy, anticipate the joy of the Kingdom. The different charisms, given by the Holy Spirit witness concretely to the Kingdom present, are appreciated by all as clear manifestations of the powerful presence of the Kingdom in the midst of their daily life (Models of the Kingdom, pp. 154-155).

Looking at the world of today, we have reason to doubt whether the human species has the requisite capacity to change. Many view the present world situation with despair. Christian faith has been one important way in which people have lived with hope in the midst of apparently hopeless conditions. Those who open themselves to the Kingdom will discover that there is a power at work in us which can transform even our distorted wills. This transformation is not subject to our control but comes as a gift. We call it grace, and we can place no limits on the extent to which grace can make us into new men and new women. The Kingdom remains new never stale. If it hits us it will always carry a great surprise like the farmer who in his uneventful hard life one day hit on a treasure and then had suddenly only one interest to pursue, to retain this treasure with all he had.

Ref.: Conference held in Rome during the SEDOS Annual General Assembly. Rome, 6 December 2005.

JPIC Commission Public Meeting

*Promises Made, Promises to Keep:
The Millennium Development Goals
and
Catholic Social Teaching*

Tuesday, 21 February 2006
15:00 - 18:00 hrs

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

A Roman Catholic Perspective On Doing Mission

Jacob Kavunkal, SVD

To speak on the Roman Catholic perspective of mission can be misleading in so far as there is no one exclusive perspective of mission in the Catholic Church. As the late Pope John Paul II taught, though the “mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose, but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity”.¹ If one scans through the Catholic literature on mission one would be overwhelmed by the diversity of understanding of mission, varying according to the context. True, the Second Vatican Council gave a specific understanding of mission.

1. Mission *Ad Gentes*

Since the Second Vatican Council mission is generally understood in the sense of the mission *Ad Gentes*, i.e., mission to non-Christians. The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity of Vatican II is known as *Ad Gentes* and it defines mission as a process whereby the heralds of the Gospel are sent to proclaim “the Gospel and implant the Church among people who do not believe in Christ” (n. 6). This understanding of mission as being directed to non-Christian areas is further spelt out in Chapter IV of the mission Encyclical of John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*.

The term “*gentes*” is derived from the Hebrew *goy* (nations) which meant people who do not acknowledge Yahweh as their God, as opposed to the Jews whose only God was Yahweh. Thus, at the root of the phrase “mission *ad gentes*” are people who do not have the Christian faith, i.e., the non-Christians. This understanding is bolted by a reading of Mt 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (*ethne*)”.

This perception of mission associated with geographical areas populated by non-Christians is derived from a particular history. It was not there from the beginning, nor has it to survive always though the Church’s universal mission will continue till the end of time.

2. The Colonial Mission

The understanding of mission as directed to the non-Christian regions is the product of colonialism. The inherent ideology of colonialism was conquest and expansion. This influenced the missionaries who accompanied the colonizers. They saw mission as the process of conquering the non-Christian savages for Jesus Christ and thereby expanding the Church, parallel to the activity of the colonizers. It was also a process of winning souls from the grip of the devil and his worship. Interestingly, colonialism itself had its starting point in winning trade.

When the Crusades suffered a crushing defeat with the fall of Constantinople, modern Istanbul (1453), the Europeans had to find a backdoor entry to the East via the sea, avoiding the Muslims who controlled the land-route to India and to the Far East, to trade the much needed spices. The expeditions under Christopher Columbus (1492) and Vasco da Gama (1498) were the result of this search for trade routes which also marked the beginning of the colonial expeditions, with the idea that the missions lay in far away countries, across the seas, in the lands of the non-Christians. Incidentally, the very term ‘mission’ with the current meaning as going to distant lands to propagate the faith and to expand the Church had its birth along with colonialism.

3. Original Understanding

Initially mission was the sharing of an experience of the “New Age” inaugurated by the ministry,

death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Jn 1:1-4). The early Church's understanding of mission is conceptually expressed in different forms in the four Gospels. Frequently the Matthean form was quoted as the justification for an expansionistic mission "out there". A closer examination of the original text shows how the command is not on *go*, but on making disciples (*mathetousate*), going (*poρευentes*) into all cultural blocks (*ethne*). The process involves baptizing and teaching all that the Lord has taught. The context of the Risen Lord's instruction (in Galilee on the mountain, Mt 28:16) shows the connection to the original teaching of the Lord, the Sermon on the Mount, in Galilee (Mt 5:1ff), the core of which is the role of the disciples to serve as the salt and light (5:13-16). The disciples are to give rise to communities of disciples to serve as the salt, light and leaven in each culture. Thus, witnessing to the Gospel for transforming the world is the role of the community of disciples in every culture. This witnessing role is emphasized also by the Lucan and Johannine forms of the mission mandate. "You are witness of these things", instructs the Risen Lord in Luke (24:48), repeated again in the Acts of the Apostles, before the Ascension of the Lord (1:8). In the Johannine Gospel the risen Lord, having imparted the Holy Spirit upon the Disciples, tells them how they are sent even as he himself was sent by the Father (20:21). Their mission is an extension of his own mission of manifesting the Father and the Father's love (12:45 and 14:9). Even as Jesus' mission was based on his experience of God as his intimate 'abba', so did the mission of the disciples spring from their experience (I Jn 1:1-4).

The early Church was intensely aware of its minority status as the salt, light and leaven, on the one hand, and the transforming impact it should have on society. It did not try to convert the whole of the Roman Empire to Christianity. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, who claimed that he had proclaimed the Word till the end of the world, i.e., the Roman world (Rom 15:19) and that he had no more room for work in those regions (Rom 15:23), only gave rise to a few communities in the cultural centres of the Empire. However, he instructed them how they were to be the "fragrance of Jesus Christ" (II Cor 2:14) and "the letter of Jesus Christ" (II Cor 3:2). They are to be the reflections of the light that shines on the face of Jesus Christ (II Cor 4:6). St Thomas, in India, only gave rise to a few communities, according to the tradition.

However, these early communities never forgot about the impact they should have on society. Hence the *Didaché*, an early second century Christian work, reminds Christians how they are to be to the world, like the soul to the body. Another early Christian document, *Epistle to Diognetus* (c. 129 CE), presents Christianity as what brings vitality, grace and love to a world full of hate. All these show how the early Christians understood their mission as a transforming presence rather than displacing other religions or as an activity directed against other religions. In fact the early Church Fathers had an open approach to other religions. Justin spoke of the seeds of the Word present in other religions while Clement of Alexandria held that the followers of other religions lived according to reason. They had partial truth while in the Incarnation the Full Truth becomes incarnate. St Augustine spoke of the church from Abel, including all the good people in the world.

4. Imperial Imposition

The picture changes with the conversion of Constantine. Three succeeding Edicts of Milan, that of Constantine in 313, allotting privileges to Christianity, and the two Edicts of Theodosius, declaring Christianity to be the official religion of the Empire (380) and proscribing any other religion in the Empire (390), firmly established Christianity as the unchallenged religion of the Roman Empire, paving the way for Christendom. The Church becomes the only perfect and valid religion, outside of which there is no salvation, officially declared at the Council of Florence (1442). Constantine's example was followed by other Kings and Conquerors in Europe, making the whole of Europe Christian. The disintegration of the Græco-Roman religions and the absence of any world religion, hastened the process. Even the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula was crushed by the middle of the fifteenth century by Portugal and Spain who became the trailblazers of colonialism and colonial mission.

Mission becomes an activity of saving souls by bringing them into the Church along with the ideas of expansion and conquest. Mission was one sided as it was directed to non-Christians, taken to be savages or uncivilized and thus having nothing to offer. The missionary had everything to give: truth, salvation, knowledge, civilization, money and power. Another aspect of the colonial

mission was that mission was the responsibility of the White races. The people, to whom mission was directed, had no missionary obligation. They remained in Christian infancy, hanging on to the umbilical cord of the respective mother churches in the West. Collectively they were described as 'the missions' or sometimes with the more paternalistic expression, Young Churches.

5. New Directions

Progress in biblical studies as well as the birth of sciences like ethnology, and the study of other religions, paved the way for the development of mission theology. Gustav Warnack, a Protestant theologian who taught at the Halle University in Germany, is considered to be the initiator of mission theology. He inspired a fellow German Catholic theologian, Josef Schmidline, teaching at Muenster University, to introduce mission theology in Catholic circles. Since, for the Protestants the Institutional aspect of the Church is not that terribly important, the proclamation of the Gospel and the saving of souls was the corner stone of Protestant mission theology. Schmidline too was influenced by this ideology. Catholic missiologists in Louvain, the second Catholic University to start mission studies, however, stressed the salvation of souls by giving rise to the institutional Church with faith, sacraments and hierarchy.

The Second Vatican Council's description of mission in *Ad Gentes*, n. 6, is a combination of these two schools. It has to be pointed out that although Vatican II affirmed the possibility of salvation for the followers of other religions in several documents,² at the insistence of the Bishops from the so-called mission countries, *Ad Gentes* declared salvation as the motive for mission. These bishops feared that a mention of the possibility of salvation for non-Christians would endanger missionary interest in their home countries, and curtail financial and personnel resources. "Though God in ways known to himself alone can lead people ignorant of the Gospel to salvation ... the Church is necessary for salvation", *Ad Gentes* said (*cf.* n. 7). Into the Church, the Body of Christ, people are to be incorporated through Baptism, it asserted.

6. Developments since Vatican II

Biblical research and theological developments have pointed out how Jesus' own mission was centred on the Kingdom of God. Jesus began his mission by proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom (Mk 1:14; Mt 4:23; Lk 8:1; 4:16-18). The Kingdom was the focus of most of the parables, the main form of Jesus' teachings, as well as that of the prayer that he taught. The miracles were a sign that God's reign in fact had come. A major symbolic act of his ministry, the many table fellowships, was the projection of the Kingdom as an all-inclusive communion without marginalization.

This praxis of Jesus in the Gospel narratives made Paul VI affirm, "only the Kingdom is absolute, and it makes everything else relative" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 8). John Paul II too taught how "[T]he proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom are the purpose of his mission: 'I was sent for this purpose' (Lk 4:43)" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 13). Thus, mission theory and practice began to shift from an ecclesio-centric mission to that of the Kingdom centred approach. Other developments like the spread of the theology of liberation and the universal recognition of the dignity of the human person along with the rights that this dignity demands, strengthened the Kingdom centred approach to mission. Another reason for the shift from the Church to the Kingdom was the progress of the theology of religions initiated by Vatican II, rather than just the possibility of salvation for the followers of other religions.

7. Mission Today

7.1. Transformation of Humanity

A turning point in the understanding of mission in modern times was Pope Paul VI's assertion that as mission is a complex and dynamic process it cannot be expressed in one or two elements, however important they are, without the risk of impoverishing and even distorting the rich reality of mission as it is contained in the different documents of the Council like *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Ad Gentes* (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 17). The Pope went on to say, "evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming

humanity from within and making it new” (*ibid.*, 18). This, I believe, is the most influential statement on the understanding of mission in modern times. We come across this understanding of mission, more than anywhere else, in the Council document, *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*).

As it is commonly acknowledged, *GS* was a God-inspired document that was born on the floor of the Council capturing the concerns of John XXIII, the architect of the Council, such as, “bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel” (Constitution of Convocation), the Church’s responsibilities and obligations bearing on every phase of modern life: human need for daily bread, the administration and distribution of the goods of the world, underdeveloped nations, civil society and the new political order, war, peace, private property, a more profound application of brotherhood/sisterhood, evils of killing, adultery and fornication, the sacred nature of matrimony, the use of science and technology, the raising of the economic and spiritual standard of the nations, etc. In his opening Address on 11 October 1962, Pope John passionately appealed to the Council that the Church approach the whole human community as a positive partner. The Pope reminded the Council how God is leading the Church to a new order of human relationships. Further, the then Cardinal Montini of Milan, later Pope Paul VI, wrote to his priests in 1963, “At the Council the Church is seeking herself.... In this the Church also examines the world, trying to enter into contact with contemporary society; it means entering into dialogue with the world; discerning the needs of the society in which it acts; observing the short comings, the needs, the aspirations, the suffering, the hopes that lie within human hearts”. All these ideas found their place in *GS*. The approach of *GS* is basically evangelical, based on the goodness of creation, with the thrust to the new creation. What permeates the entire document is the Church’s prophetic service to the world.

GS offered a challenging vision of the human person as created in God’s image and capable of knowing and loving God, placed by God as the caretaker of creation. Christians have the bonds of connectedness with the rest of humanity. This vibrant vision of anthropology makes the church consider every individual with due respect. *GS* rejects the utter ruin of humans and shows how they are called to be in communion with God. Mission is situated in the context of this basic goodness and connectedness of human beings, as a service to the human family rather than placing the Church as the perfect society standing apart from the rest of humanity. Rather than converting the world into itself the Church is asked to exercise its mission in the world and for the world, by entering into dialogue with it. In all this, the Church is motivated by one aim: that God’s reign may be realized and thus the salvation of the human race may take effect (n. 44). The Church is no more an inward looking triumphalistic community, but it exists at the service of the contemporary world with a prophetic spirit.

It is this spirit of the Second Vatican Council that prompted Paul VI to describe mission as a transformation of cultures from within, “affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humankind’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 19).

God who anointed his Son and sent him into the world is sending the Church on the same mission. This means we need ecclesial communities in every culture and thus giving rise to communities is part of the mission. However, these communities are for apostolic initiative, for service to the world, to become signs and instruments of the Kingdom.

We need to know the preoccupations, concerns, problems and aspirations of the people with whom we are living and working. We have to be familiar with the realities of their world. We have to be in close contact and dialogue with them. In particular, we have to be in solidarity with those who are on the periphery of society. Mission becomes a transforming and compassionate service to contemporary culture, understood integrally, i.e., not only as a meaning system, but including their lived history.

7.2. Promoting Human Rights

Ecclesial communities are to become signs of hope for our cultures, in which many are tortured, raped, imprisoned without trial, discriminated against, kept in permanent poverty by the motivated

policy makers and the corrupt practices of the administration. Though we do not have any verifiable data, based on the sex ratio, an estimated three million unborn baby girls are aborted every year in India. The curse of caste practice continues to condemn a sizable portion of the Indian population to a dehumanized existence. Basically it is a question of the denial of human rights. On the contrary, at its core, Jesus' own mission was restoration of the dignity of the human person. Hence, the concern of the Church is the conversion of cultures from the non-Kingdom situation to the Kingdom situation of justice, peace and reconciliation. Respect for the rights of the least of society such as, the Dalits, the tribal people, discriminated and battered women, street children, leprosy patients, aid affected persons, people dying on the roads, the elderly who have no one to care for them, etc., all merit the Church's service. Mission means solidarity with the suffering. It is a participation in the brokenness of people, in their hopes, disappointments and anxieties. The Church's voice raised against the teachings of the University of Salamanca in the sixteenth century that the Blacks and the inhabitants of the 'Indies' were not really human persons, must become ever more vibrant in the contemporary cultures which manifest little concern for the dignity of the human person.

The God of Jesus Christ is looking at this world. The God who anointed and sent His Son is sending the Church with the same mission. Mission today is feeling with God and looking at the world with God's perspective. The Church must become contemporaneous with God participating in God's concerns and God's plans for the world. God's reign, the realization of the Kingdom of God, must become its only priority.

The social fabric of modern humanity is interwoven with two realms of existence: politics and religions. We must collaborate with both. A real concern and genuine care for the weak, the poor and the oppressed cannot be achieved fully without associating ourselves with political life. The empowerment of the weak and the dispossessed cannot be attained without political collaboration. Today we need a sort of political spirituality as shown by Gandhi. We have to ask ourselves how we can bring hope to cultures. The actualization of that hope for millions of our fellowmen and fellow women is a matter of grave concern. In the light of the praxis of Jesus we cannot push that hope to a sheer eschatological level, something that happens when we die. Christianity is not an alternative to this world. It is a guide to live well in this world so that this world itself is transformed into the pre-figuration of the world to come. We have to insist on the salvific character of history. Our historical involvement must make God's presence effective.

7.3. *Respect for the other*

Respect for the other person is the foundational characteristic of the Christian community due to its faith in the Trinitarian God, who is respect and relationship, as manifested in Jesus Christ. Jesus addressed God as "abba", thereby manifesting relationship. Hence Thomas Aquinas defined Trinity as subsisting relationship. For the Church, 'the other' can mean different things. First it refers to every human person, created in God's image and with whom God has entered into covenant partnership.

We require a greater sense of the individual. The modern massification of people tends to anonymity, leaving little room for the individual. As opposed to mass movements and mega media projects the Church must remind itself how Jesus' approach was personal, directed to the individual. The Church seeks to express this concern for the individual, laying emphasis on the dignity of the person.

In the midst of injustice and oppression, condemning millions to a dehumanized existence, God, as we have experienced in Jesus Christ, is not thinking of the embellishments of the liturgy or the niceties of the doctrinal formulations, but the elimination of the inhuman conditions in which the poor are entrenched. Theology must express itself in a humanology, grappling with the human problems that we face today. As Jonathan Sacks reminds us, "the ultimate value we should be convened to maximize is human dignity – the dignity of all human beings, equally, as the children of the creative, redeeming God".³

7.4. *Respect for other Religions*

The 'other' can also mean other religions, which are the social and historical expressions of the divine revelation that they have received in the creating and enlightening activity of God through God's Word in the Spirit. The Christian faith in the One God and one Mediator (I Tim 2:5) does

not belittle the individuality and place of other religions in God's salvific plan. This faith in one God and in the one mediation through the Mystery of the Word that we Christians identify as Jesus Christ, makes us turn to the followers of other religions, with the conviction that we have a common origin and a common destiny (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 1). Hence John Paul II invited Catholics, in his Address during the General Audience of 21 April 1999, to enter into dialogue with the followers of other religions. Quoting Ephesians 4:6, "One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all", he reminded Christians that "the conviction that God is really preparing all people for salvation is the basis of Christian dialogue with the followers of other religious beliefs" (n. 3).⁴ In his Homily during the Eucharist in Delhi on Sunday, 7 November 1999, John Paul expressed his "hope and dream that the next century will be a time of fruitful dialogue, leading to a new relationship of understanding and solidarity among the followers of all religions" (n. 2).⁵ He went on to insist that since men and women by inward instinct are deeply oriented to God and seek God from the depths of their being, "together we can successfully take the path of understanding and dialogue" (*cf.* n.6).

These religions have salvific values, as John Paul II has taught in *Ecclesia in Asia* (n. 2). Therefore, the Church enters into dialogue with them in the spirit of complementarity and harmony (*ibid.*, n. 6). This is a re-affirmation of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Statement at Calcutta in 1978: "Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvellous variety of ways".⁶ The Asian Church must insert its mission in the context of the openness to enrichment and renewal that the religions of Asia manifest. This is best explained in terms of complementarity. The term implies also that the Church itself is open to learn from Asia's religions. The Church's service is no longer to be seen as one sided, as teaching, imparting, proclaiming, converting, etc. It is also a matter of listening, accepting, being enriched and converted. Elsewhere in *Ecclesia in Asia* John Paul II describes mission in terms of a gift-giving (Chapter II). The language of gift, once again, reminds us of mutuality. It is a matter of giving and receiving. There is no question of one party being superior or inferior to the other. But it is desiring the well-being of each other and establishing a relationship of bondedness with one another.

Inter-Religious Dialogue is imperative in the context of a Kingdom centred mission in so far as the Kingdom reality can be achieved better by collaboration with others rather than by conquest or competition. Inter-Religious Dialogue becomes a means for transformation of the non-Kingdom realities like the caste practice, exploitation, discrimination, etc., into Kingdom realities of participation, respect and recognition of the rights of all.

In his Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (n. 55), John Paul II teaches how there is no opposition between proclaiming Jesus Christ and dialogue: "Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions". He continues: "in the light of the economy of salvation ... that comes from Christ [in the Spirit] the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in inter-religious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*" (*ibid.*).

John Paul II, however, insists that dialogue is not a tactical move of self-interest, but "it is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills" (*ibid.*, n. 56). Due to this activity of the Spirit, other religions "constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and to acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all" (*ibid.*).

Now some of the Western Churches, especially in Europe, are experiencing an alarming decline shown by the ever-tapering percentage of church attendance, the Church in these places, as elsewhere, may have to leave the ivory towers of superiority and triumphalism, the armour of Goliath, and vest itself, like David, with the simple vest of service and compassion, the fragrance of Jesus Christ and thus, make manifest the Divine goodness in history. God is no more an abstract power, up there, but a Person who walks with the people today, by acting in their history, in their cultures. Mission includes church planting where it is not present, but mission, primarily is the Church becoming a liberating and inculturated presence among peoples (*ethne*).

7.5. Respect for other cultures

The 'other' can be another culture. There was a time, when it was thought, wrongly though, that Christianity have a specific culture, that of the Mediterranean culture. The Lord instructed that there have to be communities of disciples in every culture (Mt 28:18ff) and the early Church came to the conclusion that people from non-Jewish cultures would not have to adopt Jewish culture to become believers (Acts 15:6ff). Each culture has autonomy in so far as it gives the people concerned their identity and rootedness, enabling them to unfold fully through that culture. Hence each people has a right to its culture and its becoming Christian means that community will become a transforming agent within the core of the very same culture, by identifying with all life-giving elements of the culture and contesting all the dehumanizing elements of the culture. This is the primary meaning of inculturation today. It is the process of the birth of a genuine local church parallel to the concept of enculturation in social anthropology. Enculturation is the process of a baby born into a culture growing up to be a full member of that culture. Inculturation can also be described as a process of transforming the cultures from within, as Paul VI put it. Thus mission becomes inculturation. Jesus through his incarnation not only identified himself with the Jewish culture but became counter-cultural by contesting whatever was dehumanizing in the Jewish culture of the times. This in turn led him to the Cross. Thus, the Cross becomes the perfect paradigm of inculturation today.

Incultruation is not, as it is generally taken to be, primarily a matter of worship or art alone, but it includes many things. In one word it is a question of the Church's mission of presence from within a culture. The Church becomes a transforming presence in the core of the culture, as the salt, light and leaven. Life-style, worship, art and architecture, are all important. Even more important is the theology of the local church as it is the conceptual interpretation of the Christian faith within a specific cultural context. This implies we cannot have a universal theology valid for all cultures and contexts. Every theology is local in so far as every theology is an interpretation of the faith in one particular context. In *Ecclesia in Asia* John Paul II points out how the historical and geographical context of Palestine influenced the mission of Jesus Christ. Similarly "the Church lives and fulfils her mission in the actual circumstances of time and place" (*EA*, n. 5). This has constitutive relevance for the local church's theology and mission.

Two areas of theology that have significance for mission in Asia are the understanding of Jesus Christ and the role of the Church, in the context of religious pluralism. The New Testament justifies different ways of understanding and interpreting Jesus Christ. No doubt, the Christian has to confess Jesus Christ as the only Mediator (I Tim 2:5). However, based on the Bible, this confession need not be at the expense of the value of other religions. The Johannine prologue clearly shows how the pre-existent Word creates and enlightens every one coming into the world (*cf.* Jn 1:1-9). This is a reassertion of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The Mystery of the pre-existent Word became a human person to manifest God's love as a perfect human being (Jn 12: 45 and 14:9) and to become God-with-us (Mt 1:23). That is the mission that he has bequeathed to the community of his disciples. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that the Church is the mystery of God's presence on earth (*LG*, n. 5). It has to be exactly that and serve the world as we have explained earlier, rather than claiming to be the exclusive body of the saved or as the only God-intended religion.

Inculturation, from the Kingdom perspective, is a matter of having the mind of Jesus Christ who admonishes his disciples: "If then I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:15). This role of service must permeate every ministry in the Church individually and collectively. Collectively the Church will abandon the colonial triumphalism as being the only saved community, with the monopoly of Truth and Revelation. It is the community at the service of the world, a world with its culture of globalization, drugs, HIV/AIDS, gender discrimination, child labour, violence, fear and lack of space for God-encounter. Thus the ramifications of inculturation for mission become self-articulated.

Conclusion: Every Christian a Missionary

In summary, whether we are giving rise to new ecclesial communities, or involved in any ministry associated with human rights, or in Inter-Religious Dialogue, or in inculturation, etc., we

are serving human beings by manifesting the love of God made present in Jesus Christ. Thus, we are witnessing to Jesus Christ. Through all such ministries we become the community of the sacrament of the Kingdom, God's presence, Emmanuel in our time (Mt 1:23). What is imperative is the realization of every Christian that through his/her Baptism he/she is baptized into the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3), which was the culmination of Jesus' Baptism (Lk 12:50). And Baptism for Jesus was the initiation of his ministry. Hence, through Baptism, a Christian becomes a public person, sent by God in Jesus Christ, so that the life of the Christian has an impact on the world as the salt, light and leaven (Mt 5:13-15).

Notes

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¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 31.

² *Lumen Gentium*, n. 16; *Gaudium et Spes* n. 22; *Nostra Aetate*, n. 2; etc.

³ Jonathan Sacks, *Dignity of Difference*, (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 195.

⁴ *Pro Dialogo* 102 (1999/3), p. 295.

⁵ *Pro Dialogo* 103 (2000/1), p. 48.

⁶ *For All Peoples of Asia*, Vol. 1, (Manila: IMC Publications, 1984), p. 61.

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***“Christianity is not
an alternative to this world”***

Catholic Sisters and Mission: What about Matthew 28:19-20?

Susan Smith, RNDM

Today growing numbers of Catholic sisters are concerned about missionary theologies and practices on at least two counts. First, there is a concern about christological emphases that prioritise the preaching and sacramental ministries of ordained ministers over other ministries. Second, and flowing from the first concern, there are questions about ecclesiologies that have as their goal the foundation and growth of the Church in places where it has not yet been established. It is believed that such emphases encourage the growth of patriarchal church structures, attitudes of cultural superiority, and clericalised decision-making processes that effectively exclude the non-ordained. These concerns have been partially addressed in at least two ways, one of which is the invitation offered by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) to religious women and men to reclaim and reappropriate the vision and dream of their respective Founders, and the second is the invitation to return to the sources of Christian life, the Scriptures. In this paper, I will refer briefly to the first of these calls as it has been treated extensively elsewhere. I will discuss in greater detail, some of the missionary challenges to traditional theologies of mission involved when Catholic sisters return to the Scriptures.

The Challenge of Vatican II

One of the most important and first ways occurred when Catholic sisters responded enthusiastically and generously to Vatican II's call to reclaim their Founder's charism or original vision. Historically throughout the 19th century, and well into the 20th century, Catholic sisters had left European countries to work as missionaries in the colonies of the different European imperial and colonising powers. Normally their mission involved them in care of the indigenous peoples in the lands in which they worked, or in the care of the different migrant communities who were establishing themselves in the "new world". The works in which they were involved, usually education or nursing type activities, were regarded as secondary in the grand scheme of things, and as extensions of women's biologically determined roles of caring for and nurturing children. They were not regarded as professions, and certainly were ancillary to the main missionary task of ensuring the growth of the institutional Church. As the institutional Church grew so too did the works associated with it and Catholic sisters soon found themselves responsible for large educational and health institutions that gradually led to their being absorbed in work with middle class and established Catholic communities rather than with the indigenous and poor migrant communities for whom they were founded.

The call of Vatican II to reclaim their Founder's vision provided Catholic sisters with an opportunity to reassess the works in which they were involved, and to redefine their missionary roles and goals. In many instances, this meant a withdrawal from institutions in favour of "grassroots" activities. This de-institutionalisation of mission was not only driven by the imperative of responding to Vatican II. The decline in membership of most congregations of religious women also played a significant role in determining new mission priorities.

Returning to the Scriptures

Prior to Vatican II, in the Catholic tradition, responsibility for interpreting the Scriptures had belonged almost exclusively to ordained, White, middle class men. Though there was a certain reluctance among such interpreters ever to admit, let alone to critique, the influence of their social location on their interpretations, "third world" and feminist interpreters have expended energy on showing just how important that social location has proved on biblical interpretation. They claim that it has led to interpretations that have encouraged paternalistic attitudes toward people of

colour, and to interpretations that militated against women who sought to assume roles other than that of being humble handmaids at the service of the institutional Church. The picture of Mary that Lk 1:38 (“Then Mary said: ‘Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word’”), represented a more appropriate model for Catholic sisters than did Mary whose song of praise (Lk 1:46-55) was recognised as a call to challenge oppressive structures.

In most instances, Catholic sisters responded with alacrity to contemporary feminist biblical scholarship which claimed that the biblical text could be transformative for women who sought to move beyond androcentric interpretations. The tools of historical criticism, literary criticism and sociological analysis all played their part in alerting women to the transformative power of the word in their contemporary context. Historical criticism, concerned with the pre-history of a particular text, led women to recognise the role of patriarchal culture on the formation of a particular text. Literary criticism is concerned with the study of language, and the transformative possibilities contained within the word when the interpreter was not unduly distracted by research into the sources, background and intention of the historical author. Sociological analysis concerns itself with exploring the social, political and economic contexts of the first Christian communities so as to discern the relationship between context and text.

There is little doubt that the utilisation of such methodologies has enabled feminists to reveal the androcentric biases contained both in the text and in subsequent interpretations.

Perhaps an example could illuminate what I mean. There is little doubt that Gn 2-3 have been formative in canonising and legitimating negative attitudes toward women in the Christian tradition. Gn 1:27 “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (NRSV), rarely seems to have informed a patriarchal church’s attitude toward women. What is even more concerning is that even within the New Testament texts, Gn 1:27 seems to have assumed less significance than decidedly androcentric rewritings of Gn 2-3. For example, after insisting that “a woman learn in silence with full submission” the author of I Timothy writes that “Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness and modesty” (I Timothy 2:13-15 NRSV).

Given such texts, it is not surprising that Catholic feminist theologian Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the Canon represents not only the religious traditions of a kyriarchal Church, but also exemplifies its political and ideological goals. One of those goals was, and still is, to ensure the subordinate status of women within the Church.

Matthew 28:19-20: the “Great Commission”

Within the Catholic tradition, Matthew’s “Great Commission” perhaps could be more properly called the “Apostolic Commission”. Jesus commissions the Eleven with responsibility for mission for baptising and for teaching, a mission which devolved on the bishops, the successors of the apostles. This suggested that responsibility for mission was derived from ordination rather than from Baptism. Such interpretations of Matthew 28 have led to women and lay people in general being assigned a subordinate status in the Church’s mission.

Matthew 28:19-20 has been used to justify missionary strategies and policies that now are recognized as having little scriptural authorization. As Bellagamba states:

Mission in its traditional dress included going to non-Christian lands to convert their inhabitants to Christianity by preaching the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, works of charity, relief, education and development, and implanting the Church as it existed in the Western world.¹

Such a strategy situated power in the sending Church, and its ordained ministers. Responsibility for the missionary task belonged to the Pope and his delegates, bishops. It was a situation whereby women were regarded as loyal troops, not expected to reason why, but expected to render obedience to their clerical commanders. Catholic sisters surely resonate with 20th century missiologist David Bosch’s insight that though Mt 28:19-20 “has traditionally been utilized in providing a biblical basis for mission, [it] has to be challenged or at least modified”²

Such scriptural interpretations of Mt 28:19-20 have negatively affected the place of religious women in the Church's missionary activity. However, as I intend to show Mt 28:1-10 can serve as a corrective to the androcentric and clericalised approaches to mission that traditional interpretations of Mt 28:16-20 have permitted.

First, we need to recognize that Matthew's Gospel reflects the reality of a community that grappled with problems of inclusion and exclusion along religious, ethnic and gender lines. Matthean commentators hold that Matthew's community had probably separated from the synagogue by the time the Gospel was written, around 85 CE, and that Gentiles were becoming increasingly significant, with all the ethnic and cultural tensions this meant. Though the identity of the author of Matthew is still debated, he was probably a member of a Jewish Christian community living in Syria, perhaps Antioch. Matthew's sources were "Q", Mark, and traditions peculiar to his own community, designated as "M". Redaction criticism suggests that the author of Matthew exercised significant and creative control over his sources.

Matthew 28:16 describes the Eleven disciples, obedient to the message of the women (Mt 28:10), gathering on the mountain in Galilee where the Risen Jesus meets them. The words "when they saw Jesus, they worshipped him, but some doubted", suggests that the faith of the Disciples lacks the generosity of spirit that characterises the women's earlier response to the Risen Jesus (28:10). The Greek verb *distazo* can be translated as either "hesitate" or "doubt", and the text does not indicate why their response lacked the women's spontaneity. The risen Jesus approaches the disciples, revealing that all authority on heaven and earth has been given to him. This is Matthew's last and climatic reference to the authority given to Jesus (*cf.* Mt 7:29; 9:6; 9:8; 21:24; 21:27). It is this authoritative word of Jesus that is "the ultimate criterion of what *is* the will of the Father".³ The emphasis in Matthew's Christology on Jesus' authority is certainly intended to contrast Jesus the teacher with the Pharisaical teachers, but more importantly it is to enable the reader to see that Jesus is indeed from God. In particular the Emmanuel-motif points to the continuing presence of the Risen Jesus within the community.

And so the Matthean Jesus, after having set out his claims to speak with authority, commissions the Eleven to make disciples of all nations. There is division among biblical scholars as to the precise meaning of "nations". Does "nations", *ethne*, refer to the Gentiles only or Jews and Gentiles?⁴ I understand it as referring to "nations". Jesus then commands his disciples to baptize all according to a trinitarian formula probably shaped by liturgical usage. The disciples are entrusted with the task that had belonged to the earthly Jesus — to teach authoritatively, and yet the final great Matthean Christological affirmation: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" emphasises the continuing presence of the Risen Lord within the Christian community. God has delegated to the risen Jesus "responsibility for leading and protecting the new people of God (*cf.* Is 41:10)".⁵

There are two basic and related questions with which we need to concern ourselves in looking at Matthew 28 for insights regarding mission. First, did the author of Matthew intend the subsequent clericalised, hierarchical, and centralised nature of missionary activity with its emphasis on the soteriological dimension within the Catholic tradition, particularly after the establishment of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1622? Second, how is it possible to move beyond the dominant androcentric interpretations and attempt to recover "positive images of women and attitudes toward women in the texts along with revisions of previous androcentric exegesis?"⁶

I believe that the development of a hierarchically directed, centralised and androcentric understanding of mission that his Gospel has legitimated would have surprised the author of the first Gospel. Such interpretations are manifested in the subordinate positions assigned to women religious in the Church's mission. Traditionally, nuns were contemplative and cloistered, and although attempts were made in the late Middle Ages to break out of this pattern, any successful efforts were thwarted by the Council of Trent's Decree which prescribed that violations of the cloister were to be punished by excommunication. O'Murchu claims that it becomes clear that the relationship between Religious and the official Church has rarely risen above a functional level. This seems to be particularly true of post-Reformation times when the Church sought to exert strict control over all movements within its ranks.⁷

Matthew 28:1-10 affirms that the first people to be commissioned by the risen Jesus were the women who had remained faithful to Jesus in his hour of need (cf. Mt 27:55-56). However, some contemporary male scholarship seems unaware of the importance of Mt 28:1-10 for women and ministry. Thus Harrington includes Mt 28:1-10 in a larger section, 28:1-15 which he entitles “The Empty Tomb”, as does Hare.⁸ Neither author critically analyses the role of “Mary Magdalen and the other Mary”. After briefly comparing the Matthean account with the Markan and the Johannine texts, Harrington appears to simply see the text as a prelude to the important appearance of Jesus to the Eleven disciples.⁹ Hare sees the women as witnesses to the crucifixion, burial and Resurrection of Jesus, and so they function as principles of continuity.¹⁰ Brown is more nuanced in his criticism noting that although the women are not called “disciples”, nevertheless they are “rewarded for their initiative in coming to see the sepulchre by being made the first human proclaimers of the Resurrection and the intermediaries through whom the faith of the Disciples will be rekindled”.¹¹

In his study of the Matthean passion and resurrection narrative, Heil alludes to the positive role attributed to the women as witnesses, unlike the male guards who become “as if dead” (Mt 28:4). Furthermore the women are no longer to be regarded as passive witnesses, (Mt 27:55-56, 61), but rather as active messengers of the Good News. The former passivity is to be resolved and transformed:

The Angel commissions the women with the divinely authorized activity of “going” and “telling” the Disciples that Jesus “has been raised from the dead”, and that in fulfilment of his previous promise, (Mt 26:32), he is going before them to Galilee, where they will see him. As substitutes for the Disciples who have been absent, the faithful Galilean women serve as the reliable intermediaries who are to link the Disciples with the reality of Jesus’ death, burial and Resurrection. Empowered by the divine authority of the Angel, the previously passive women actively begin to fulfil their role as authentic messengers of Jesus’ Resurrection.¹²

The text emphasises the women’s movement away from passivity: they left “the tomb *quickly* with fear and great joy and *ran* to tell his disciples” (Mt 28:8, italics mine). The risen Jesus whom they meet, “reinforces the commission of these faithful women to direct the disciples back to Galilee in order to see him (Mt 28:10)”.¹³ Unlike Harrington, who sees the women’s primary importance in the fact that they understood the correct stance toward the Risen Lord, namely to do homage to him, Heil emphasises the missionary task entrusted to the women. Meier appears uncertain as to how understand the appearance to the women. He links Mt 28:1-10 back to the burial of Jesus (Mt 27:57-61), noting how both these texts lead up the appearance of Jesus in Mt 28:16-20.¹⁴ But he then writes that the women “hasten from the tomb to fulfil their commission”.¹⁵

Writing more recently, Carter argues that Mt 28:1-10 “makes an important contribution to the resurrection narrative as well as to the Gospel’s presentation of discipleship and of women”.¹⁶ Unlike Mark, Matthew plays down the anointing dimension found in the Markan text. Anointing is connected with burial. Instead Matthew is more interested in the witnessing of the women to the Risen Jesus. They go “to see the tomb” (Mt 28:1). Carter notes that “to see” is to be understood in both a literal and a metaphorical sense, and that it is used metaphorically to denote “people’s insight into and comprehension of God’s purpose”.¹⁷ Matthew’s decision to use “to see” then suggests that he intends the women to be more than witnesses. It indicates that they are blessed with insight and comprehension as to the true meaning of the events that have taken place. The fact that the two women do not come to the tomb to anoint Jesus suggests that they have learned from Jesus’ teaching that “God’s purposes do not end with Jesus’ death but continue through the Resurrection on the third day”.¹⁸ Their coming to the tomb is not primarily expressive of grief but signifies their faith in the reality of Emmanuel — “God-with-us”. Their faith in Emmanuel means it is fitting that they be commissioned as the bearers of Good News to the male Disciples. Furthermore it is appropriate that such a role should be entrusted to the two women for Matthew has earlier indicated that women have a significant role in his Gospel in crossing gender and ethnic boundaries as we see in the story of the Canaanite woman, (Mt 15:21-28). Carter concludes that the women did not come with grief or to ensure that premature burial has not taken place. They come because of their insight and expectation that, as with Jesus’ death, his words about resurrection will also be reliable. This statement of the purpose in 28:1, then, denotes their comprehension and contributes

an integral element to the resurrection narrative's presentation of the women as models of comprehending, faithful and active discipleship at the close of the Gospel (*cf.* 7:24-27; 12:46:50).¹⁹

Feminists too, are revisiting Mt 28:1-10 in order to identify its life-giving elements for women in respect of discipleship and ministry. American Janice Capel Anderson, noting that the women are "last at the Cross and first at the tomb",²⁰ believes the women's fidelity means they are the first commissioned to bring the Good News of the Resurrection to the male Disciples. But she believes that the gendered culture of the Matthean community does not allow women more than "subordinate and auxiliary positions".²¹ Yet Mt 28:1-10 reveals the women as important faith models for the Christian community, something that Matthew has already alluded to earlier in his Gospel (*cf.* Mt 9:20-22, the woman suffering from the haemorrhage; and Mt 15:21-28, the Canaanite women. Both women, transgressors of Jewish cultural mores, exhibit initiative and faith, and therefore "see" Jesus as Lord and Messiah).

Australian NT scholar, Elaine Wainwright, is probably one of the more significant feminist scholars concerned with freeing Matthew's Gospel from its androcentric accretions, so that it can begin to be read as a subversive text. Her use of a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion means that the subversive story "can function deconstructively in relation to the androcentric perspective and patriarchal structures within the text".²² For Wainwright, Matthew's Gospel ends as it begins. "Female power and female presence function to subvert the patriarchal constructs and androcentric worldviews that both frame the narrative and find expression throughout".²³

Structurally, Mt 28:1-10 can be divided into two sections, vv. 1-8 and vv. 9-10, both of which conclude with the two women being commissioned to go the male disciples with the Good News of the Resurrection. The Matthean redaction of Mark specifically identifies the two women, "Mary Magdalen and the other Mary" who sit at the tomb in Mt 27:61 with the women in Mt 28:1. The emphasis on the women coming "to see the tomb" points to their role as witnesses, a theme begun in Mt 27:55. Unlike the guards who become "like dead men" (Mt 28:4), the women, fearful in view of the apocalyptic nature of the events which they are witnessing, are also filled with "great joy" (Mt 28:8), as they run to tell the Disciples what they have witnessed. The Matthean language, "left quickly," "ran," contrasts the women to the guards who are "like dead men". Not only do they proclaim life. They are also filled with life. The first proclamation of the Angel to the women is to prepare "the readers for the divine origin of the resurrection proclamation to follow with Matthew specifying that this divine revelation is given specifically to women".²⁴ The women are told by both the Angel and Jesus to go to Galilee where the Risen Jesus, in fulfilment of the earlier prophecies (Mt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19), will be found.

The words of commission given to the women to go to the Disciples (Mt 28:7) are paralleled in the commission given to the Disciples to go to all nations (Mt 28:19). As Wainwright notes, Matthew, like Mark, restricts the women's role to bringing the Good News of the Resurrection to the Disciples. She asks if such a limitation reflects a later tradition and in fact might there not be an earlier tradition "which linked the ancient Easter kerygma to the Angel's commissioning of the women".²⁵

It is important to note that in Matthew, the women do not fail to recognize Jesus (*cf.* Lk 24:16; Jn 20:14, 21:4). They approach Jesus, take hold of his feet and worship him. In this, they model what discipleship means: faith in the Risen Jesus, unlike some of the male Disciples who doubted (Mt 28:17). Their fidelity to the crucified Jesus, and their faith in the Risen Christ allow them to be ministers of reconciliation between "the risen Jesus and his unfaithful disciples".²⁶ Wainwright concludes that the story of the two women represents an early tradition hinting at a more egalitarian and inclusive understanding of community in which women, like men, were called to discipleship and apostleship (*cf.* Rom 16:1-15). The final redaction represents an attempt by Matthew's community to forsake the radicality of the earlier traditions in favour of those that reflected a subsequent patriarchal rehabilitation of the male disciples. It is this patriarchal interpretation that has subsequently prevailed within the Catholic tradition.

But today, feminists who are engaged in reinterpreting Mt 28 find much in it that is not only liberating for them, but which also may reflect a fidelity to an earlier tradition. So what insights can religious women gain from Matthew 28?

First, the importance of fidelity to both the crucified one, and the Risen Jesus. At a time where there is uncertainty about mission and ministry, “Mary Magdalen and the other Mary” exemplify such fidelity. They are there at the crucifixion, the burial, and the Resurrection. Such a capacity to remain faithful in times of darkness enables them to be witnesses to the light that comes from the darkness. Second, mission belongs to the community, not to individuals. The presence of the two women means the Risen Jesus is among them, fulfilling his earlier promise (cf: Mt 18:20). Third, the two women are called to a ministry of reconciliation. Both the Angel and the Risen Jesus commission them to go and tell the male Disciples who had earlier fled to come and be reconciled to their Lord. Fourth, the women are called to be missionary in their own right; they are not simply assistants to the male Disciples. Fifth, their missionary task means that they transgress the patriarchal parameters that circumscribed women’s roles in society. They become the bearers of Good News to the reconciled male Disciples. Sixth, as Wainwright notes the two women’s actions stand at the very centre of the ethos of the communities. Their stories affirm the centrality of women among the clientele of Jesus, the patron, around whom the groups that formed the Matthean community coalesced in their struggle against an often hostile environment.²⁷

Seventh, after Vatican II, mission as liberation from oppression, mission as working for justice, came to be regarded as an essential way by which mission was to be exercised. Increasingly, feminists began to utilize liberationist methodologies which encourage their practitioners to become “doers” of theology rather than “receivers” of the theological conclusions of an educated, ordained, Western, celibate, male *élite*. While women religious had responded both seriously and generously to the call to work for economic justice, they became increasingly aware of gender injustice. They are now asking that gender discrimination within the Catholic tradition be recognized as a justice issue, and as a barrier to a faithful continuation of the mission of Risen Jesus who commissioned women as the first missionaries in the Christian community. Religious women can indeed be heartened by interpretations of Mt 28 that affirm they are called to mission in their own right.

In conclusion therefore, Christian feminists are right to revisit and revision Mt 28:16-20 in the light of other Matthean texts. It has customarily been interpreted as a text that legitimates a clericalised and centralised understanding of mission, one which ensured that the role of the institutional Church was enhanced at all levels. As Bosch notes “mission” meant the activities by which the Western ecclesiastical system was extended into the rest of the world. The word “missionary” was irrevocably tied to an institution in Europe, from which he or she derived the mandate and power to confer salvation on those who accept certain tenets of the faith.²⁸

Unlike the Lukan and Johannine resurrection texts, Mt 28 does not identify Peter as a privileged recipient of the Good News of the Resurrection, (cf: Lk 24:12, 34; Jn 20:6; 21). Responsibility for mission belongs to the community of faithful disciples, who include women, not just to the Eleven, not just to Peter.

Within the Catholic tradition, the relationship between missionary activity and sacramental activity ensured that the role of religious women was seen as secondary to that of the ordained ministers. This understanding of mission became the accepted way in which Catholic missionary activity has been understood. Through their careful revisiting and revisioning of biblical texts, feminist scholars are revealing that the proclamation of the Good News can have a new meaning for women religious active in mission today.

Notes

¹ Anthony Bellagamba, *Mission and Ministry in the Global Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 49.

² David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* vol. no. 16 American Society of Missiology Series, ed. ASM Series Editorial Committee (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), and 57. Later, Bosch contends that Matthew’s “Great Commission” has never impacted so significantly on the Western Catholic understanding of mission as it has on the Reform traditions. Bellagamba disagrees and suggests that the proponents of the conversion model of mission find biblical support in the “Great Commission”. Bosch claims that Augustine’s response to the Pelagian and Donatist heresies was a more formative influence

on Catholic understanding of mission. Augustine argued forcibly against an optimistic Pelagian anthropology by emphasising humankind's sinfulness, and thus the importance of a soteriological understanding of mission. The institutional Church thus became the guarantor of salvation, moral arbiter and judge. In response to the Donatists, Augustine argued that authority and holiness were present in the Church as institution irrespective of the personal failings of individual ministers. It was not a big step to then claim that the Church founded by the Apostles was the only true Church, so therefore those who cut their ties with it, or who were not baptised, risked damnation. Mission could easily become reduced in such an understanding to the "self-realisation of the Church" (cf. Rutti 1974: 229-230). Such an "ecclesiasticization of theology and mission" eventually led Thomas Aquinas to define the missionary task as ensuring "a simple obedient acknowledgement of that which the Church has always taught, even if any more precise knowledge of this teaching is lacking". 218-219.

³ John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1978), 65.

⁴ See Hare and Harrington, "Make disciples of all the Gentiles (Mt 28:19)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975): 359-69, for arguments favouring "Gentile". Harrington reaffirms this in *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series vol. 1 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 416. John A. Meier, "Nations or Gentiles in Matt 28:19?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 94-102 argues that "nations" refers to Gentiles and Jews. I intend to follow Meier's interpretation. Raymond Brown also seems to argue in favour of "nations" meaning Jews and Gentiles (cf: See "The Resurrection in Matthew (27:62-28:20)", *Worship*, (March 1990), 169-170.

⁵ Douglas Hare, *Matthew Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 335.

⁶ Janice Capel Anderson, "Matthew: Gender and Reading", *Semeia* 28, 1983, 3.

⁷ Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life* (London: Excalibur Press of London, 1989), 78.

⁸ See Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* vol. 1 Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991; Douglas Hare, *Matthew Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993).

⁹ See Harrington, 409-11.

¹⁰ See Hare, 330-331.

¹¹ Brown, "The Resurrection in Matthew", 164.

¹² John Paul Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-critical Reading of Matthew 26-28* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 101.

¹³ Heil, 102.

¹⁴ See Meier, *The Vision of Matthew*, 206.

¹⁵ Meier, 208.

¹⁶ Warren Carter, "'To see the tomb' Matthew's Women at the Tomb", *The Expository Times* 107/7 (April 1996), 201.

¹⁷ Carter, 202. "'Seeing' the star (2:2) means insight into more profound realities since it activates a search for the one who is 'King of the Jews', (2:2) and Christ (2:4-6), for the purpose of worshipping him, (2:2)". Other texts that point to Matthew's metaphorical use of seeing include 4:16; 5:8; 5:16; 9: 27-31; 13:13-17; 27:54. The opponents of Jesus are referred to as "blind" 15:14; 23:16.

¹⁸ Carter, 204.

¹⁹ Carter, 205.

²⁰ Anderson, "Matthew: Gender and Reading", 18.

²¹ Anderson, 21.

²² Elaine Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew" in *Searching the Scriptures: Vol 2: A Feminist Commentary*, (ed.) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Crossroad: New York, 1994), 667.

²³ Wainwright, 665-666.

²⁴ Elaine Mary Wainwright *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Berlin/ New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 305.

²⁵ Wainwright, 307.

²⁶ Wainwright, 312.

²⁷ Wainwright, 330.

²⁸ Wainwright, 228.

Des femmes «actrices» à part entière

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Femme-apôtre du Québec, engagée depuis 1967 dans l'Institut missionnaire des Sœurs Notre-Dame des Apôtres, a vécu 12 ans au Togo, au Niger et au Tchad. Elle œuvra 10 ans au service de son Institut comme membre de l'équipe générale : 1988-1998. Actuellement, elle travaille en pastorale sociale, et est coordinatrice du Réseau Justice et Foi du quartier et de l'ARPF (Association des religieuses pour la promotion des femmes, région de Montréal).

La présente réflexion a été élaborée dans le cadre d'un cours que j'ai suivi récemment sur l'ecclésiologie. C'est en parcourant le livre de Christian Duquoc *«Je crois en l'Église, Précarité institutionnelle et Règne de Dieu»* que j'ai ressenti un profond malaise pour ne pas dire un «mal-être» en constatant une fois de plus que les femmes sont totalement absentes du discours, des lieux de prise de parole, de l'histoire de l'Église dans son ensemble. Dans ce livre, la violence institutionnelle est présentée comme résultant du dysfonctionnement entre l'institution et le peuple de Dieu. Mais là encore, on peut se demander si les femmes sont incluses dans ce peuple ? Pourquoi l'Église les enferme-t-elle dans leur fonction de reproduction et dans une symbolique figée ne laissant place à aucune créativité ? Comment comme femmes passer «d'icône du Règne à venir» selon l'expression développée par Jean Paul II dans sa Lettre *Mulieris Dignitatem*, à «actrices» à part entière d'une histoire en marche vers son accomplissement ?

La violence telle qu'elle se manifeste dans la société civile et ecclésiale est systémique et nous en sommes tous et toutes tributaires. Je parlerai donc de quelques-unes de ses manifestations dans le concret de la vie. Pour éclairer cette problématique, je demanderai à des théologiennes féministes contemporaines d'élargir nos horizons obscurs afin de nous aider à percer des brèches dans les murs du silence et des certitudes ecclésiales. Ainsi, par la médiation du genre, Ivone Gebara nous donne une clef pour comprendre la dynamique des injustices sociales, spécialement celles qui reposent sur les relations hommes et femmes. Cela me conduira à parler du discours androcentrique et de la violence qui le sous-tend. Avec Fiorenza E. Schüssler, je ferai une brève relecture de la praxis de Jésus et de sa résistance aux injustices de son temps car c'est là le fondement d'une nouvelle vision de l'humain susceptible d'inspirer notre manière de faire communauté. En conclusion, j'aimerais rêver l'Église autrement, une Église vécue non plus sur le modèle hiérarchique et pyramidal mais sur le mode communionnel et circulaire permettant l'émergence d'une culture partenariale où hommes et femmes trouvent leur place autour de la table commune.

Une violence historique

La violence institutionnelle dont parle Duquoc touche tout particulièrement les femmes en Église car elle s'enracine dans une culture patriarcale présente dès les premiers siècles du christianisme et se déploie jusqu'à nos jours. Dans l'histoire du mouvement chrétien, les femmes ont été très tôt reléguées à des rôles de second plan, et ainsi le pouvoir «mâle» a occupé tout l'espace sacré. Les Constitutions Apostoliques du IV^e siècle déclarent: *«Nous n'autorisons pas nos femmes à enseigner dans l'Église, mais seulement à prier et à écouter ceux qui enseignent»*.¹ Par ailleurs, ces mêmes Constitutions limitent les fonctions de diaconesse à surveiller les portes et à assister les presbytres lors du baptême des femmes pour des raisons de décence.

Le mouvement féministe du dernier siècle a commencé à secouer les assises de la maison patriarcale. Dans la société civile, des femmes disent NON à l'ordre patriarcal et à son pouvoir d'oppression. Comme leur faisant écho, les théologiennes féministes ont entrepris un travail de

déconstruction du discours classique et immuable de l'institution ecclésiale, elles ont semé le doute face aux déclarations du magistère s'appuyant sur une certaine tradition pour légitimer leur refus d'admettre les femmes au ministère ordonné. Comment continuer d'accepter leur absence ou une présence simplement figurative dans les lieux de décision que sont les synodes et les conseils entourant les évêques ?

Le quotidien me ramène à la persistance de cette violence dans notre Église locale de Montréal. Chaque année, à l'occasion du dimanche du Bon Pasteur, la communauté chrétienne est invitée à prier pour les vocations et à participer généreusement à une collecte spéciale pour soutenir les séminaires. Une prière pour les vocations a été remise à chaque fidèle afin de supplier Dieu de nous donner des prêtres sans aucune mention des autres vocations. Le besoin est urgent, nous rappelle le prédicateur : dans les « Unités pastorales » les prêtres sont âgés et ne peuvent se permettre d'être malades, car en leur absence les gens sont privés de l'Eucharistie et du pardon. Comment notre Église peut-elle continuer à penser à un sacerdoce uniquement masculin compte tenu du vieillissement du clergé, du phénomène de dénatalité et de déchristianisation de la population au Québec, sans oublier la présence majoritaire et active des femmes engagées en Église ? Il y a lieu de se demander pourquoi « les Églises orthodoxe et catholique apparaissent défendre une symbolique anthropologique désuète : l'advenue du Règne et son annonce sacramentelle semblent s'y définir à partir de détermination biologique ». ²

En Église, la violence est subtile et a pour nom « cléricisme ». Certes, les temps ont changé mais la non-reconnaissance des femmes persiste toujours. Si unanimement, elles osaient un geste prophétique comme « faire la grève » durant la Semaine Sainte, par exemple, nos Églises seraient pratiquement vides et plus rien ne fonctionnerait au niveau des services à la communauté. Toute l'institution serait paralysée. Dans cet horizon, je constate qu'il m'est de plus en plus difficile de penser Dieu, l'Église, le monde selon les seules références traditionnelles : androcentriques et patriarcales.

La médiation du genre et l'approche de la différence

Les analyses du genre ³ apparaissent au sein du féminisme des années 1980 comme moyen de valoriser la différence entre les sexes et de dénoncer ainsi certains pouvoirs, car c'est elle qui nous introduit dans une approche plurielle de la question du mal, qu'il soit subi ou accompli. En effet, la médiation du genre nous conduit au cœur de l'approche de la différence et ce au niveau même du contenu. Cela signifie que les valeurs et vertus proposées par le christianisme n'ont pas été vécues de la même manière par les hommes et les femmes dans les différentes cultures. Les théologues féministes s'engagent dans un travail de déconstruction de la théologie patriarcale et de construction d'une théologie qui se veut plus inclusive. En outre, le genre est un outil important pour montrer l'inadéquation des différentes théories explicatives de l'inégalité entre hommes et femmes par le moyen de la seule nature biologique.

Pour Ivone Gebara, la violence contre les femmes n'est pas seulement un acte de violence particulier, mais il est partie intégrante d'une organisation sociale et d'une construction culturelle qui tend à diminuer un pôle de l'humanité et en exalter l'autre. Nous devons reconnaître à partir de notre propre expérience de femme qu'une maladie existe dans nos rapports sociaux et ecclésiaux. Une histoire qui occulte la participation des femmes et va parfois jusqu'à mépriser ou taire leur contribution spécifique, est non seulement une connaissance limitée et partielle, elle est porteuse de violence car elle comporte un caractère d'exclusion. Comment récupérer notre histoire et trouver des chemins de salut pour sortir enfin de la reproduction de ce féminicide ? Ainsi, dans la vie courante et dans la production symbolique de notre culture, on observe que les femmes ne sont pas reconnues comme sujets mais sont l'objet du désir des hommes, leur propriété et ce jusqu'à s'arroger le droit de vie ou de mort sur elles.

Pour expliquer la dévaluation des femmes dans l'histoire, le genre nous amène à réfléchir sur la relation entre nature et culture. L'identification de la femme à la nature ou de la nature à la femme n'est pas une nouveauté car dans les différentes cultures, il était courant de parler de la nature comme une mère qui nourrit ses enfants. Et les indigènes des Amériques parlent encore de la Terre-

Mère comme d'une divinité porteuse de vie. Tout en associant la nature à une image maternelle, on l'évoquait également comme une réalité incontrôlable, source de désordre. De ces deux projections qui ont prévalu dans nombre de cultures anciennes, c'est la seconde image qui a inspiré la révolution scientifique dans son projet de dominer la nature. D'où l'idée de pouvoir sur la nature et, indirectement, de pouvoir sur les femmes.

La proximité symbolique des femmes avec la nature physique dans leur rôle biologique de reproduction a certainement contribué à mettre en relief la primauté de la culture sur la nature. Par contre, les hommes étaient considérés comme producteurs de culture en référence à leurs activités de chasse, de pêche, de guerre. Ainsi, la nature sauvage devient plus belle et nécessaire dans la mesure où la culture intervient, c'est-à-dire, à mesure que la raison masculine la transforme pour son utilité. Dès lors, la nature, le corps des femmes sont définis par les hommes et contrôlés par eux. On retrouve cette même assimilation dans la pensée théologique chrétienne. Ainsi, dans les documents officiels du Magistère, on parle de la vocation de la femme à la maternité, alors qu'on mentionne rarement la vocation de l'homme à la paternité. De même, le processus de culpabilisation et de pénalisation des femmes en tout ce qui touche aux droits reproductifs est plus sévère pour les femmes que pour les hommes.

Il est important, nous dit Ivone Gebara, de comprendre la conception patriarcale de l'être humain pour «déconstruire» une théorie qui entretient l'injustice envers les êtres et a besoin de cultiver la culpabilité chez les femmes. Il s'agit d'une culpabilité qui n'est pas fondée sur le réel de notre existence ni sur le réel de notre responsabilité mais c'est une culpabilité souvent stéréotypée, pré-fabriquée, idéologisée qui se forme bien souvent à partir d'un moi idéal ou d'une situation idéale à laquelle il est difficile de correspondre dans le concret de notre existence. D'ailleurs le christianisme lui-même a légué une conception de l'existence humaine marquée par le devoir de toujours se dépasser et de se conformer à l'image idéale et parfaite de l'humain. Il exhorte à suivre des modèles, à copier des images déjà présentes dans la culture, et celles-ci apparaissent comme les seules pouvant structurer une personne et l'aider à se situer dans sa vie relationnelle.

En introduisant la catégorie du genre dans le concept de Dieu, nous constatons combien la théologie patriarcale a limité ce concept à un point de vue masculin prétendant ainsi atteindre une vision plus universaliste et, dès lors, plus englobante de toute l'humanité. Nous avons appris et intégré que tout pouvoir vient de Dieu. Aussi, le pouvoir des dirigeants masculins a été présenté comme tenant d'une délégation de Dieu et exercé en vertu d'un mandat divin. Avec l'analyse du genre, nous sommes invités à sortir d'un certain simplisme de la science théologique pour nous placer de façon critique dans la construction d'une théorie inclusive de la foi chrétienne. Par ailleurs, c'est un outil d'auto-construction féminine et d'essai de construction des rapports sociaux plus ancrés dans la justice, l'égalité à partir du respect des différences. C'est également une façon d'être au monde, une façon aussi d'être perçue, qui conditionne notre être et notre agir. Grâce à cette construction socioculturelle, celles qui étaient silencieuses retrouvent leur voix, celles qui étaient marginalisées en dehors du processus social et politique plus large essaient de trouver leur place et de mieux comprendre leur situation.

Un point essentiel dans la vie de foi est de construire des symboles religieux. Or, les symboles anthropologiques du christianisme sont prioritairement masculins et pour la théologienne allemande, Dorothee Sölle : «La vertu cardinale d'une religion patriarcale est l'obéissance». Cette religion autoritaire véhicule une vision pessimiste de la femme en particulier et de la personne humaine. Nous ne sommes pas capables d'aimer et d'être heureux sinon qu'en adoptant sans nous poser de questions le chemin de l'obéissance à travers une soumission qualifiée de libre. L'obéissance comme vertu est le symbole d'un monde autoritaire et masculin où le pouvoir de Dieu semble plus important que sa tendresse et son amour. Il faut dire que ces symboles sont offerts également aux hommes comme références de comportement. Tandis que les hommes trouvent dans ces symboles des images qui rejoignent leur expérience d'homme, les femmes sont obligées d'aliéner leur propre expérience pour s'ajuster aux idéaux masculins.

Le langage androcentrique et sa vision de l'humain

Pour la conception occidentale et son expression linguistique de la réalité, l'existence mâle est le modèle de l'existence humaine. *«L'humanité est mâle et l'homme définit la femme non en elle-même mais*

relativement à lui. Elle n'est pas considérée comme un être autonome. Il est le sujet, l'absolu; elle est l'autre.⁴ Cette définition androcentrique de ce que c'est que « être humain » a influencé non seulement la perception scientifique des hommes mais aussi celle des femmes. Dans une telle vision du monde, la femme est vouée à rester historiquement marginale. Ce paradigme androcentrique peut considérer le rôle des femmes comme un problème sociétal, historique, philosophique et théologique mais ne peut remettre en question son propre horizon.

En théologie, « l'androcentrisme établit l'homme dirigeant comme la norme du langage qui concerne non seulement la nature humaine, mais aussi Dieu, le péché, la rédemption, l'Église et sa mission ». ⁵ Étant donné que l'expérience des femmes a été longtemps méprisée ou écartée par une tradition androcentrique, Elizabeth Johnson croit que l'éveil des femmes à leur valeur humaine propre peut être interprété comme une expérience nouvelle de Dieu. Cela suppose de leur part une conversion s'accompagnant d'un jugement au sujet de la valeur morale positive de la corporéité féminine, d'un désir de relations valorisantes et d'autres caractéristiques spécifiques de l'existence historique des femmes. En s'appropriant ainsi leurs qualités d'être et d'agir, les femmes se découvrent dans leur identité humaine comme *imago Dei* et *imago Christi* d'une manière différente mais non moins valable que les hommes.

Comme femmes, nous sommes bien souvent complices de la transmission de ce langage excluant. Paulo Freire dans « *Pédagogie des opprimés* » parle d'une « culture du silence » pour qualifier la culture des groupes dominés dont les groupes dominants ont refoulé les mots, les modes d'expression en les dépossédant de la parole et leur silence est parfois interprété comme signe d'adhésion totale. Convaincues que c'est par le langage et la prise de parole que nous affirmons notre identité propre et que nous pouvons établir des relations plus équitables entre les femmes et les hommes, lors de notre Chapitre Général de 1993, nous avons décidé d'introduire le langage inclusif dans nos Constitutions et de l'adopter dans la vie courante. Cette option n'a pas fait l'unanimité dans la Congrégation et ce, malgré les formations données pour permettre d'intégrer ce nouveau concept. Après les efforts fournis lors de la réception de cette orientation, nous constatons douze ans plus tard une persistance à utiliser le masculin car nous avons appris que « le masculin l'emporte toujours sur le féminin » et le mot « homme » inclut la femme. Nous continuons également à qualifier nos communautés de vie et nos salutations de « fraternelles » n'ayant pas encore intégré le néologisme « sororal ». ⁶

Dans l'histoire, le langage androcentrique tout en disant inclure les femmes ne les mentionne pas explicitement sauf s'il s'agit de femmes ayant un comportement qui présente un problème ou encore s'il s'agit de femmes exceptionnelles. Les exégètes reconnaissent que le christianisme primitif s'adressait aux femmes et aux hommes et il était en cela différent du culte de Mithra uniquement masculin, ce fait ne les empêche pas d'utiliser des termes masculins tels : appelés — saints — frères — fils, comme langage générique désignant tous les membres de la communauté chrétienne.

N'est-ce pas dans ce même esprit que nous parvenons régulièrement des déclarations du Magistère de l'Église catholique romaine sous prétexte de corriger des abus. Sous les auspices du Cardinal Ratzinger, jadis préfet de la Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la foi et dans la foulée du 40^e anniversaire de la Constitution conciliaire « *Sacrosanctum Concilium* » promulguée par le Pape Paul VI, ce texte est actuellement remis à l'honneur et traduit du Latin dans différentes langues. Il a été approuvé par Jean Paul II pour corriger les abus liturgiques et remettre en cause le rôle des laïcs, notamment celui des femmes durant les liturgies et en dehors d'elles car tout cela risquerait de diminuer le rôle des prêtres ordonnés. Fort heureusement, la prédication de Jésus annonce le Royaume comme germant dans les réalités quotidiennes, ce Règne advient autrement que par le culte, il est don de l'Esprit dans le quotidien de la vie, il se situe en dehors des clôtures et des enceintes sacrées. C'est pourquoi, le silence sur l'implication des femmes qui nous ont précédées n'est pas le signe de leur absence de l'histoire de l'Église. Les essais de reconstruction des origines chrétiennes par des théologues féministes partent de l'hypothèse que si le lieu de la révélation n'est pas le texte androcentrique mais la vie et le ministère de Jésus et le mouvement des femmes et des hommes appelés à le suivre, alors nous devons trouver le moyen de rompre le silence des textes pour redécouvrir qu'un « fil » de salut traverse toute histoire humaine. Les actes de salut mentionnés dans l'Évangile sont des pratiques de résurrection, de restauration de la vie, de rétablissement de la

justice. Ces actions simples de Jésus nous rendent plus proches de ce que nous vivons comme femmes dans le quotidien de notre existence.

Retour aux sources : le message et la praxis de Jésus

Le mouvement de Jésus était un mouvement parmi d'autres mouvements juifs de l'époque et se situait à l'intérieur de structures religieuses et culturelles patriarcales. Sa vision religieuse et sa pratique allaient à l'encontre de la culture ambiante. Il a été sensible à l'oppression imposée à son peuple par l'occupation romaine qui avait l'appui de l'aristocratie juive. Non seulement il dénonce les lois civiles et religieuses qui marginalisent le peuple mais, dans le Sermon sur la Montagne (reconnu par Mahatma Gandhi comme étant la charte de la non-violence), il annonce la création d'une autre société basée sur l'amour, la justice et la paix.

Les exégètes sont d'accord pour affirmer que ce qui caractérise la prédication de Jésus et de son ministère c'est l'annonce de la *basileia* de Dieu comme une vision eschatologique, à la fois future et présente, et comme une réalité vérifiable par l'expérience. Le mouvement de Jésus se distingue encore des autres, en désignant le peuple lui-même, et non le Temple et la Torah, comme lieu de la puissance et de la présence de Dieu. Ainsi, la quotidienneté telle que vécue par chaque être humain peut devenir révélatrice de cette présence agissante de Dieu. Le pouvoir de la *basileia* de Dieu se réalise dans la communauté de table de Jésus avec les pauvres, les pécheurs, les prostituées, avec tous ceux qui pour diverses raisons n'appartiennent pas au « peuple saint » et qui sont de quelque manière que ce soit en faute aux yeux des justes.

Incontestablement, la praxis de Jésus et sa vision de la *basileia* sert de médiation à l'avenir de Dieu qui s'insère dans les structures et les expériences de son peuple. Cet avenir est annoncé et promis à tous les membres d'Israël y compris aux femmes et à la situation d'infériorité que leur donnent les structures patriarcales. Ce renversement eschatologique est annoncé dans le Magnificat et les Béatitudes car la vision du Royaume, telle que Jésus la porte en lui, redonne aux gens leur intégrité, leur santé, leur pureté, leur force, elle restaure l'humanité et la vie des gens. Cette universalité inclusive mettant la *basileia* à la portée de l'expérience de tous allait contre une conception dualiste et tout ce qui avait été considéré antérieurement comme étant la volonté de Dieu révélée dans la Torah et le Temple. Le mouvement de Jésus propose une conception de Dieu tout à fait différente, un Dieu Tout-Autre qui appelait, non pas « les justes et les dévots d'Israël », mais les membres non-religieux, ceux et celles qui étaient à la périphérie de la société, les sans-statuts, les sans-noms.

Conclusion : Vers une culture partenariale

Il faut bien dire ici que l'institution, qu'elle soit religieuse ou civile incarne toujours une certaine violence et cela est en partie dû à l'écart existant entre le droit qu'elle définit et l'agir qui en découle, par conséquent, « une part du tragique humain d'écoule de cet écart entre l'expression d'une éthique universelle de l'égalité des individus en droit et l'exploitation répandue à l'échelle mondiale ». ⁷ Dans cette optique, si une conversion s'impose, elle n'est pas d'abord liée aux religions mais elle est avant tout une exigence structurelle que les sociétés ont à relever pour répondre aux aspirations des peuples à une coexistence non-violente et pacifique au nom d'une commune humanité.

Les changements qui s'imposent ne peuvent s'opérer que par en bas, sur le terrain de nos engagements et en solidarité avec ceux et celles qui souffrent. Aussi, avec Christian Duquoc, je serais plutôt pour « la délocalisation de Dieu » afin de le découvrir ailleurs que là où on a tenté de l'enfermer des siècles durant. Une nouvelle « *ekklesia* » ne deviendra possible que par une conversion véritable des personnes individuelles et des structures ecclésiastiques.

Je crois également que « les femmes doivent reprendre possession de leurs pouvoirs spirituels et se libérer par l'exorcisme de l'idolâtrie mâle pour que la réciprocité soit rendue possible ». ⁸ Dans le mouvement chrétien primitif, l'égalité était un des principaux critères pour faire-communauté. Le don et l'élection de Dieu ne dépendaient pas de l'origine religieuse, du statut sociétal, du sexe ou de la race de l'appelée. Tous les membres de la communauté faisaient partie du peuple de Dieu et

comme tels, ils avaient reçu le pouvoir et les dons de l'Esprit Saint, non comme un privilège personnel conférant un pouvoir sur les autres, mais comme un charisme spécifique en vue de la construction de la communauté. Tous les membres de la communauté avaient accès au pouvoir spirituel et à des rôles et responsabilités communautaires.

C'est pourquoi je me permets de rêver à une Église-communion à partir d'en-bas, mais comment y parvenir ? Il y a un passage obligé de la culture patriarcale à la culture partenariale, quitter la normativité définie par l'institution pour risquer l'aventure avec le Dieu de Jésus. Je rêve d'une « *ekklesia* » hors les murs de l'institution empruntant le modèle des Églises domestiques des origines et répondant aux besoins d'humanité de notre temps.

Je pense à une «tribu de sens»⁹ citoyenne, basée sur l'égalité de ses membres et une spiritualité de la non-violence. Sa préoccupation première serait de développer des relations guérissantes et libératrices avec le milieu dans lequel elle est insérée tout en étant ouverte et solidaire des luttes ailleurs dans le monde. En fait, je crois en une diversité de « tribus de sens » qui pourraient se retrouver périodiquement pour célébrer et partager leurs expériences du Dieu de la Vie. C'est «l'*ekklesia*» immergée, en pleine pâte humaine et qui serait comme « la rumeur » en notre temps de la *basileia* de Jésus. «Elle ne peut se répandre par des évidences éclatantes, elle se murmure par des actes qui brisent la logique dominante : celle d'un monde où la déraison et la violence semblent régir les rapports politiques et sociaux. Le Règne advient dès maintenant là où l'agir n'a plus besoin des lois pour obéir au droit, exercer la justice et susciter le respect».¹⁰

Comment rêver un avenir heureux pour l'humanité sans prendre en compte cette déraison et cette violence dans nos lieux de vie ? Pour ce faire, il nous faut récupérer la dimension éthique du christianisme, le message de la *basileia* de Jésus qui pourrait inspirer nos «tribus de sens» et se dire comme une tradition soucieuse du bien-être des gens à partir de leur quotidien. Oui, la *basileia* de Jésus se rend présente là où des hommes et des femmes agissent solidairement pour faire reculer le mal, l'injustice, l'intolérance, telle une «clairière» au cœur de l'opacité de l'histoire.

Notes

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¹ Constitutions Apostoliques 3, 6, 1-2. 88 cité par Fiorenza E. Schüssler, *En mémoire d'elle, Essai de reconstruction des origines chrétiennes selon la théologie féministe*, Paris, Cerf, 1986, p. 421.

² Christian Duquoc, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

³ Réflexion sur le genre inspirée du Chapitre II du livre d'Ivone Gebara, *Le mal au féminin*, p. 91-132.

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe*, Paris, Gallimard, 1949.

⁵ Elizabeth Johnson, *Dieu au-delà du masculin et du féminin*, p. 42 et 101.

⁶ Néologisme qui concerne la soeur, les sœurs, dans le *Dictionnaire Larousse 2001*.

⁷ Duquoc, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁸ E. Schüssler Fiorenza, p. 473.

⁹ Expression utilisée par Ivone Gebara lors d'une conférence donnée à Ottawa en 1998.

¹⁰ Christian Duquoc, *Je crois en l'Église*, p. 274.

Réf. : *Spiritus*, n. 180, September 2005, pp. 292-303.

Asian Religious Identity in the Context of the Building up of the Local Church

Julma Neo, DC

Daughter of Charity of St Vincent de Paul

I. Introduction

A man found an eagle's egg and put it in the nest of a backyard hen. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them. All his life the eagle did what the chicks did, thinking he was a chicken. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. And he would thrash his wings and fly a few feet into the air.

Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. It glided in graceful majesty among the powerful wind currents, with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings.

The old eagle looked up in awe. "Who's that?" he asked.

"That's the eagle, the king of the birds", said his neighbour. "He belongs to the sky. We're chickens — we belong to the earth".

So the eagle lived and died a chicken. That's what he thought he was.

Identity questions are always important. They condition how people live and die.

This presentation will presume that Asian religious know and live their religious identity notwithstanding the many difficulties that threaten it today. It will focus on the Asian-ness of this religious identity in the context of the local Church.

There are several ways of approaching this question. This paper will consider it from the perspective of the inculturation of charisms, which was one of the major strands in the discussions at the 1994 Synod on Consecrated Life and the 1998 Synod on Asia. A workshop was devoted to it at the 2004 Congress on Consecrated Life. John Paul II dealt with it in *Vita Consecrata* and *Ecclesia in Asia*.

II. Historical Context

Reflection on inculturation is at a nascent stage.¹ When one tries to know more about the inculturation of charisms, one finds it mentioned often enough during meetings and in written materials. Its importance and its urgency are always stressed. But there is hardly anything beyond this mention. One gets the impression that talking of the inculturation of charisms is like running after a mirage in the desert! As someone said, it has been "slow to begin, remains timid while the challenges are tremendous".² Given the historical development of the Church, this is understandable.

We are heirs of a monocultural Church that for centuries was rooted in European soil and that continued to be so even when it crossed the oceans with colonization in the 16th and 19th centuries.³ With this transplantation of the Church, religious congregations and the European model of religious life that they embodied were similarly transplanted from their European Motherhouses, resulting in ways of living religious life that were often foreign to their new cultural contexts.

The prevailing theology of religious life until Vatican II further reinforced this "foreign-ness" by advocating flight from the world and detachment from all that is of the world and from what is human —

including cultures — as the ideal of religious life. For many Asian religious, entering religious life signified complete rupture with the religious and cultural traditions they grew up with. The result was the formation of religious who were totally dedicated to religious ideals but indifferent to human and secular concerns.

For the past decades, however, a different wind that is friendlier to cultures and cultural diversity has been blowing in the Church and in religious congregations.

The decolonization of many nations after World War II contributed a great deal to this new breath. Technology, advanced social communications, migration, tourism and the global movements of peoples reinforced it. Sociologically, the profile of the Church and that of religious congregations has experienced radical changes. The growth of Christian populations and religious membership in the southern hemisphere and their diminution in the north has given the Church and religious congregations a “face of many colours” and “a new geography of vocations”. The new theologies of the Church and of mission elaborated during and after the Second Vatican Council have opened more doors for this fresh wind to enter.

This changed consciousness provides the context for this reflection. This presentation does not presume to give an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but will simply try to open up some possibilities that can be explored more adequately by others.

III. Inculturation of Charisms: a Hope for the Future?

The Working Document for the 1994 Synod on Consecrated Life identified inculturation of charisms as one of the seeds of hope for the future.⁴ It is not, however, an easy task.

Inculturation of charisms involves an ongoing dialogue between charism and culture.⁵ On the one hand, it entails incarnating a religious charism in a particular cultural context in such a way that the charism renews the culture from within while expressing itself through elements proper to the culture. On the other hand, it involves taking from the culture the positive elements (“seeds of the Word”) already present there and that are compatible with the charism. The result of this dialogical process is a mutual enrichment. For real inculturation to take place, this mutuality has to happen.

Historically, however, this did not always happen in Asia. Due to the prevalent ecclesiological and theological conditions at the time, the cultural expressions of the charism were either imposed by, or borrowed from, the dominant cultures that introduced the charism to our Asian countries. Thus, many Asian religious congregations had a “foreign face” right from their origins.⁶

True inculturation of charisms goes much deeper than adaptation. It touches the “Asian soul” that the charism then tries to bring to its fullness. When charisms have finally taken root in our Asian soul, then an Asian religious identity can be born.

Both charisms and cultures lay claim to the totality of the lives of religious. They either form a harmonious unity or they exist side by side separately. Without this harmonious integration of culture and charism, religious life will somehow always remain “foreign”. On the contrary, where authentic inculturation has taken place, this harmony between culture and charism permeates all areas of religious life.

IV. Letting the Lotus Bloom

Forming an Asian religious identity through inculturation of charisms is like letting the lotus bloom. The lotus always carries its roots with it, wherever. Inculturation asks that Asian religious stay with their cultural roots, and that they let the charism water these roots so that their Asian religious identity can bloom.

Inculturation entails the following elements:

1. Understanding Asian cultures and religious charisms

For inculturation, it is important that Asian religious understand cultures, in some general way, and Asian cultures in particular and regard them as dynamic, complex realities. Inculturation does not mean

simplistically going back to the cultures of the past and reliving them today. Religious likewise need a lived understanding of their religious charisms and of the various ways in which charisms are dynamically related to cultures. Knowing this will make them freer for the discernment needed in inculturation. Charisms are *cultural* in that their externalization is always mediated by culture. At the same time, they are *transcultural*, i.e. they transcend cultures. Their embodiment should not be permanently identified with any culture, not even that of the founders. To do so would be to weaken the dynamism of the charism. Charisms, like the Gospel where they are rooted, are *counter cultural*. They provide criteria against which cultures can be judged.

2. Discernment with regard to Asian cultures and charisms

When they reflect on their religious identity, Asian religious will come realize that to some extent, they are losing some of their characteristic Asian values.⁷ They have surrendered them in the course of their pre-Vatican religious formation. For example, they have set aside a healthy devotion to the family in the name of detachment, celebration for the sake of a simple lifestyle. And they continue to do so now with even more serious consequences. They are sacrificing at the altar of modernity and post-modernity, their Asian value of care for persons in exchange for efficiency. Their sense of community is being corroded by individualism and absorption in media. Contemplation is threatened by activism, asceticism by hedonism, and simplicity of life by consumerism. These examples can be multiplied.

Many values in religious life are also Asian values. For example, compassion, love of wisdom, silence, contemplation, hospitality, asceticism, primacy of the things of the spirit, unrelenting search for God and thirst for the supernatural.⁸ But somehow in their religious formation, Asian religious do not always consciously build on these foundations. They try to develop a spirituality and a lifestyle as though this foundation were not already there.

These Asian values are the gifts of Asian cultures to religious life. But unfortunately Asian religious are either exchanging these precious gifts for others or are setting them aside.

A critical reflection on their religious identity will also reveal that some cultural expressions of the charism that they hold on to are not the most appropriate for Asians. They are the results of acculturation in the past, considered normal then. But should these expressions be kept today?

All these point to the need for critical discernment when inculturating charisms. This discernment is an important moment for identity formation as Asian religious.

3. Integration of charism and Asian cultural values in our daily life

The most difficult part of inculturation is choosing in favour of the charism rather than the culture, when there is a question of different priorities or conflict between charism values and cultural counter values. Asian religious know from experience how the value of peaceful interpersonal relations coupled with a fear of conflict can obstruct free and open dialogue, how an excessive deference to age and authority or an equally exaggerated stress on personal freedom can make obedience difficult. Superiors have experienced how difficult it is today to move some sisters or priests or brothers from one community to another!

Inculturation is not possible without a deep and passionate commitment to Jesus and His way of life. Only when religious have kept this passion — or recovered it — can they have the courage to embrace the Paschal mystery inherent in inculturation.

4. Creative expression of religious identity

It is at this creative moment when the Asian-ness of their religious identity becomes visible in terms of apostolates, lifestyle, community living, celebrations, governance and structures. These expressions will be truly creative and new, not simply the result of adaptation but of an encounter between new cultural situations and the dynamism inherent in the charism. The culture then “feels at home” with the charism and the charism “finds a home” in the culture. When this happens, then Asian religious life can become a “new cultural model”, an “innovative cultural proposal”⁹ for Asian peoples.

V. An Example: Inculturation and Hospitality ... Opening Hearts, Opening Doors

To concretize these reflections, let me take one example.

Hospitality: an Asian and a Christian value

Hospitality is one of the cultural values often mentioned in Church documents and in articles on religious life in relation to inculturation of charisms.¹⁰

Asia is well known for its proverbial hospitality, whose roots are profoundly religious. Today its practice is being adversely affected by modernization, migration, changes in family structures, and the corresponding attitudes that these create. In some places in Asia, where it is more and more associated with tourism and commerce, hospitality has taken on a meaning that is in fact a distortion of its traditional meaning and practice. (When I searched the internet for entries regarding hospitality, I was struck by the fact that most of the entries related to tourism and the hotel business!). A new vocabulary has even been invented to describe this new understanding e.g. hospitality girls, hospitality trade, hospitality management and hospitality industry.

When one returns to the roots of Christian tradition in the Old Testament and in the early Christian communities, one discovers that hospitality was very much part of it. Extending hospitality to strangers in the Old Testament was integral to the covenant relations between Yahweh and Israel. In the New Testament, this obligation became even weightier since Jesus identified Himself with the stranger and made hospitality one of the criteria against which all shall be judged. “*I was a stranger and you welcomed me*”.¹¹ Throughout the history of the early Church, hospitality covered the physical, social and spiritual dimensions of life.¹² In the Middle Ages, the practice of hospitality started to wane for various sociological reasons. Recently there have been spiritual and theological writings that aim at recovering this very rich Christian tradition and reinterpreting it in our context today.¹³

Let us look at some elements of hospitality as practiced in ancient Christian tradition and in Asian cultures and see what insights they offer as regards inculturating charisms.

Some Elements

1. In early Christian tradition, hospitality was primarily directed to those at the margins of society, the poor and the strangers, without excluding family and friends.¹⁴

2. Christian hospitality personalized the stranger and the poor. It established a new way of relating between the hosts and the guests. Some Church Fathers, like Chrysostom, repeatedly insisted on its personal dimension. Wealthy Christians who played host should personally serve the poor and the strangers that they welcomed.¹⁵ Hospitality in monasteries was personal and face-to-face.¹⁶

3. For the early Church, hospitality was a way of transcending social barriers and counteracting social stratification. Sharing meals at the same table leveled off social differences and was its great symbol.

4. Hospitality flourished when those who played host — households, the Church, institutions — were at the margins of the society of their time e.g. when the Church was poor, persecuted and a minority.

5. Hospitality was a counter cultural and a prophetic proclamation of the Reign of God. It pointed to a different system of valuing and an alternative model of relationships. Far from being a tame practice, “Christian hospitality had a subversive, countercultural dimension”.¹⁷ From this perspective the shared meal offered in hospitality foreshadowed the eschatological condition when all will partake fully of the Messianic banquet.¹⁸

6. Later, however, during the Middle Ages, hospitality became largely identified with the rich even though the poor and the strangers continued to be received in monasteries and ecclesiastical households. With its institutionalization and commercialization, the personal dimension gradually weakened. Then the poor had different tables or food or they were kept at the gate while the interior was reserved for special guests, the wealthy and the socially well connected. Thus exercised, hospitality simply reflected the existing social structures. When the Church and religious orders became associated with temporal power and material prosperity, the practice of hospitality simply reinforced the gap between the rich and the poor and lost much of its vibrancy and spiritual meaning.

7. Reflecting on Asian cultures, one sees that in most of them hospitality has elements similar to those mentioned above. Its practice is not limited to friends and family members but is extended to all, especially the poor and the strangers. In some Asian cultures, hospitality comes as a religious obligation. Guests are sometimes regarded as manifestations of the divine. Hence, they are to be revered and honoured. Only the best should be given them. The best of the harvest is set aside for visitors. Guests are to be treated well, given good food and comfortable accommodation. The welcome given them is characterized by warmth, joy and great personal attention from the moment they come until they leave.

The sharing of meals is part of Asian hospitality and takes various forms: from simple drink and food to lavish banquets. In some cultures, a portion of the meal is reserved for God or for passers by.

Hospitality in most Asian cultures covers a wide network of relationships that are characterized by kindness, warmth, generosity, friendship, brotherhood, neighbourliness and openness of heart symbolized sometimes by the gifts that hosts and guests mutually exchange. A festive atmosphere usually accompanies the welcome of the guests. The joy of the hosts is to see their guests happy and satisfied. When persons from different religions meet together in the context of hospitality, then hospitality becomes a natural setting for inter-religious dialogue.

The practice of hospitality in Asian cultures is not limited to the rich. It is, in fact, sometimes more remarkable among the poor that go out of their way to share their meager resources to whoever comes — whether friends, family, other poor or strangers. And they do so with apparent joy and generosity.

Asian hospitality needs purification in several aspects. In some Asian cultures, space, time and material goods are shared according to a hierarchy dictated by the culture. Thus, certain groups of persons are excluded from this range of hospitality due to differences of socio-economic status between the hosts and the guests. The exploitation of women and children in the hospitality industry needs to be reported.

The practice of hospitality today has been most affected in cities where impersonality, constant insecurity and fast living have taken over. This poses difficulties for inculturation.

Religious Life and the Practice of Hospitality in Asia Today

Today the context for the practice of hospitality has tremendously changed. The concept of households and families has evolved and a new phenomenon — “homelessness” of massive numbers — has developed. The faces of the “strangers” and the poor are very different from those at the time of the early Church.

Given this changed context, how will Asian religious situate themselves *vis-à-vis* the Asian practice of hospitality? How are they to understand “welcoming the poor and the stranger” and “sharing home” with them? How can hospitality and religious life mutually enrich each other? Certainly, it is not a question of a fundamentalist return to the original practice of hospitality in the early Christian communities. Neither is it a matter of an uncritical acceptance of its practice in different Asian cultures. Rather it is a question of recovering some of its elements, reinterpreting them and integrating them in religious life in a way that harmonizes with its values. Let me indicate some possibilities.

1. *Mission among “strangers”*: “Strangers” more and more populate Asian societies, especially in the cities. Even Churches share the same fate. Welcoming “strangers” today means first of all asking: Who are the “strangers” in Asia today? Where are they? It means asking further: What keeps them in their status as “strangers”?

This search for the “strangers” today can lead religious to the “new poor”, the victims of globalization who are often uprooted from their families, countries, cultural or religious groups.¹⁹ It can challenge them to review their priorities in their ministries and their forms of ministry. Ministry among the poor and “strangers” today implies works that not only address the effects of poverty but also its personal and structural causes — socio-economic, political and cultural — that maintain them in their “stranger status”.²⁰ Searching for the “strangers” and welcoming them will encourage religious to greater creativity and imagination in their mission.

This same spirit of welcome for “strangers” will challenge religious to identify attitudes and structures in community living that make them “strangers” to one another and that make some religious houses look like “boarding houses” or “transient homes”. Such communities do not witness to the communion asked of religious as “experts of communion”. The first beneficiaries of their hospitality should be their brothers and sisters with whom they live.

2. *Recovery of the personal dimension in mission*: Welcoming the poor and the “stranger” in the spirit of hospitality means attentiveness to them as persons. The person is the subject and the goal of all human development. But the market-driven economy of many Asian societies with its emphasis on production has obliterated the person in favour of economic gain. Unfortunately this orientation has also affected religious making them overly conscious of efficiency and competence to the detriment of people.

The spirit of hospitality invites religious to refocus on the primacy of the person in their mission and relationships, to strike a balance between the global, the local and the personal. Sometimes in relating to those who are poor, they only see their needs and not who they are. The poor are more than their needs. To

welcome them, religious need to be convinced that God's love is for every person, not for an anonymous collectivity. Welcoming the poor and the "stranger" includes opening themselves to the "gift" the poor offer them — the "gift" of who they are. When religious allow the poor to share their gifts with them, they confer on them a dignity in a way that cannot be replaced by the material help they give or the service they render them.

The practice of hospitality will challenge religious to develop more personal relationships in community, to have time for one another and not to allow the media or technology to replace personal encounters with their brothers and sisters (I was told that some religious now send text messages to their fellow religious in the same house instead of knocking on their doors!). It calls into question business-like relationships, communications that are overly time-conscious, a mode of governance that veers more towards corporate management rather than a Christian service to one's brothers and sisters.

3. *Mission, multiculturalism and religious pluralism.* Asians claim harmony as a core value. The "new way of being Church" in Asia is a communion of communities. The triple dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with other religious traditions to which the Asian Church has committed herself, asks Asian Christians and religious to stretch their capacities for relationships that are more inclusive.

At the same time one witnesses in many Asian societies a spirit of ruthless competition and of deeply entrenched prejudices and conflicts related to caste, gender, ethnicity or religion that effectively eliminate the weak from harmonious social integration. Religious, too, experience obstacles to establishing inclusive relationships. Specialization in ministries can narrow one's outreach. The historical origins of congregations that identify their members with particular cultural or social groups sometimes make it difficult for them to break free from these constraints.

To practice hospitality today, religious need to ask: What does it mean to share "home" with "strangers"? "Home" means relationships that give people a sense of connectedness and belonging. "Home" can be as large as one's religious congregations, the local Church and the world. The earth, too, is "home" for the entire human family, a "home" that people need to preserve for future generations.

Sharing one's "home" with the poor and "strangers" means including them in one's network of relationships. Welcoming them to one's "home" implies "opening hearts" before "opening doors". It entails developing relationships devoid of prejudices, ethnocentrism, superiority and inferiority complexes and feeling comfortable sitting down with those who are "different" from oneself.

This sharing can lead religious to ask: What place does ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue have in our mission projects? In the allocation of our personnel, do we think of mission beyond our traditional borders, even beyond our continent? With whom do we collaborate in our mission? It also implies building religious communities where no one feels cut off from friendships and participation in community decisions. It demands building "open communities" and developing a spirituality of crossing borders. Such a spirituality implies a committed following of Jesus who crossed the divine-human border to become one of us.²¹

4. *Religious life, solidarity with and proximity to the poor.* The situation of religious life and of our Church in Asia is paradoxical. In one sense, they are at the margins, suffering from a "minority complex". In another sense, they are at the centre. They may be small in number but they have a radius of influence that can be quite extensive. Their institutional base, their connections whether domestic or international, give them access to resources and influence that constitute no little power.

For years, Asian religious have been talking about solidarity, the "preferential option for the poor", and living in proximity to them.²² Many have attempted to live close to the poor, to be "inserted" in poor milieus. Immersion programmes in formation tried to develop the conviction that sharing in the marginality of the poor is essential for solidarity. In some instances, these initiatives gave birth to "creative compassion" that translated itself in significant transformations in the life and mission of religious.

On the other hand, they are still encumbered by much "excess luggage" — institutional, traditional or psychological — that makes proximity to those who are poor an anxiety-provoking project. Fear, preoccupation with security, and attachment to traditions hinder their refounding efforts.

To recover the vibrancy that characterized hospitality among the early Christian communities, religious need to experience in some way the marginality of the poor and the “strangers” in Asia today. Being hospitable means not only opening their doors to the poor and “strangers” but also geographically moving some of their houses closer to where the poor live so that they can more easily come to them. The physical, psychological and spiritual closeness that this creates will help religious re-read their life from the optic of those at the margins. Proximity to them means encountering them directly in their situations of vulnerability. For this, the virtual proximity provided by the media will not suffice. It is when one has looked into the eyes of the poor and related to them as persons that one will be moved to share their world and be transformed.

5. *Religious and prophetic witnessing*: It has often been said that Asian peoples are looking for prophetic witnesses, for holy guides rather than learned teachers (or eloquent preachers).²³ Asian religious need to take this search of Asian peoples more seriously.

Asian peoples challenge religious to be prophetic witnesses by their “being”, by who they are and not simply by what they do or say. To be prophetic, their witnessing must be radical, visible, effective and credible. Radical because it reaches to the roots of their being: their desires, their affections, their values, their attitudes and their relationships. Visible because it can be seen by those around them. Visibility in today’s context implies the witness of communities and institutions, not only of individuals. Effective because it presents alternatives to ways of living that do not promote fullness of life. Credibility calls for consistency, integrity and harmony between words and deeds, proclamation and life.

Asian peoples must be able to “read” the witnessing of religious. This “readability” will depend on religious’ sharing their language, symbols, meanings, their hopes, struggles and dreams for a better life. In this connection, it is worth reflecting on the two areas singled out by FABC 3 for inculturation of charism: lifestyle and dealing with the poor.²⁴

After 40 years of Vatican II renewal, Asian religious are in a better position to assess their prophetic impact. It seems that they have created for themselves an image of very competent and dedicated professionals but not so much an image of poor, simple spiritual leaders. In their attempt to adapt to the modern world and to recover the incarnational dimension of religious life — neglected for so long before the Second Vatican Council — perhaps they have compromised the counter cultural character of religious life by indiscriminately accepting what modernity and post-modernity offer. Some may have also absolutized an ideal Asian culture of the past to which they hold on to ignoring all demands for change. Both these situations call them to a prophetic response.

If Asian religious practise hospitality in the sense described earlier, they can be prophetic witnesses to Asian peoples and to the world. They will announce and make visible to them the Reign of God and the new order it inaugurates, an alternative order to the present where those who welcome the “stranger” and the poor in Jesus’ name will be called “blessed”. At the same time, they will denounce the false values of societies that dehumanize persons in the so-called hospitality industry, that close their doors to migrants and refugees, denying them basic human rights while taking advantage of their cheap labour to develop their own economies.

This prophetic witnessing through the practice of hospitality will require fidelity to Christ and the Gospel, to the Church and its mission, to their charism and to the men and women of our time.²⁵ This fidelity will help them develop an integral spirituality that harmonizes the individual and the social, the immanent and the transcendent, contemplation and action, community and mission.

I hope that this reflection on hospitality in relation to inculturation, though inadequate, will have contributed to making Asian religious more aware of the gifts that Asian cultures can bring to charisms and of the unexplored possibilities that inculturation holds for all. It is not without reason that the Synod on Consecrated Life has identified inculturation of charisms as one of the great challenges for the future of religious life in the world.²⁶

VI. Asian Religious Identity and the Local Church

Finally, how is an Asian religious identity related to the building up of the local Church?

In 1974, FABC 1 described the local Church as one that “*is incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated... concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the*

religions...in brief, with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own".²⁷ In a word, the local Churches in Asia will eventually become Churches of Asia, Churches that are "Asian in their way of thinking, living and sharing their own Christ-experience with others"²⁸ when they will have become inculturated. This implies a "new way of being Church".²⁹

The ecclesial dimension, constitutive of religious life and consecrated life, "belongs undeniably to the life and holiness of the Church".³⁰ Thus, the reality of one's Asian religious identity cannot be separated from that of the local Church. A truly inculturated local Church will be an ideal context for the growth of an Asian religious identity. In the same way, the presence of religious that are truly Asian and truly religious will contribute to the building up of an authentic local Church. Asian religious who are perceived as "foreign" will make the realization of a truly inculturated local Church difficult. Similarly, a Church that remains "*foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structure, in its worship, in its Western trained leadership and in its theology*" will not help religious to be serious about their Asian identity.³¹

The following are some areas where religious and local Churches can work together to grow in the Asian-ness of their identities.

1. Creating an atmosphere conducive to creativity. Inculturation is a creative process that will not happen unless there is an atmosphere of freedom to create, to take risks, to be open to untried possibilities, to make mistakes and to dare to be different. One needs to be freed from fears in order to let go familiar ways when they no longer help. After much reflection on this subject, I am more and more convinced that the "newness" of the faith/the charism will be stifled unless Christians/religious courageously allow it to be unleashed. Contact with changed cultural contexts provides this necessary provocation.

Ultimately this atmosphere has to be based on a profound respect for and courageous trust in the Spirit at work in cultures, in the world, in the living tradition of our religious congregations and in the Church. The Holy Spirit is the prime agent of the inculturation of the Catholic faith in Asia.³² The Spirit breathes new life but doors need to be opened to let in this new breath. A lack of freedom, courage and creativity can impede this action of the Spirit. Religious can draw strength from the courageous example of many Asian martyrs, when following the lead of the Spirit begins to cost.

2. Fostering dialogue as a permanent posture in religious life and in the life of the local Church. The Church of Asia has adopted dialogue as its preferred mode for evangelization.³³ If inculturation is dialogue, then its members need to help one another to grow in the understanding and practice of dialogue as a permanent attitude not limited to certain moments or activities or to verbal dialogue. Efforts to develop a dialogical posture should stand on four pillars: respect for and acceptance of those who are different from us by reason of charism, culture, social status or religion; humility to recognize the gifts of these "others", openness to receive from them and a deeply contemplative spirit characteristic of Asian spirituality.

3. Collaborating with expatriates in the local Church and in religious congregations. Expatriates can be facilitators and catalysts in the inculturation process, links with other cultures/local Churches to keep Asian Christians/religious from developing a myopic view of reality. The former can reflect back to the latter the liberating truth about them. When spoken with respect and love, such feedback will help them grow in their Asian identity. As in any identity formation, Asian religious grow in their understanding of who they are as Asians by their relationships with non-Asians. Expatriates in religious congregations and in local Churches can render this invaluable service. Offering the wealth of their cultures and of their Churches of origin, as well as their personal experience, while respecting the freedom of those to whom these are offered, and sharing their human and material resources are gestures of humility. Through this sharing, they mediate Communion between local Churches and become irreplaceable symbols of the universality of the Church.

4. Forming religious, clergy and laity for inculturation. Such formation presupposes a solid understanding of the faith/charisms and of their own culture. It will encourage critical and creative reflection, rather than indiscriminate assimilation of external influences. Discernment will be an essential element of this formation to enable them to distinguish the values from the counter values in their cultures and to identify the faith/charism expressions that are not appropriate for Asian cultures. Formation must help them to continually move from awareness to critical reflection to contemplation and finally to creative exploration of alternatives in their encounters with Asian reality. For this, a formation for sensitivity to the Spirit and for dialogue as a permanent attitude is indispensable.

Inculturated formation is rooted in contemporary Asian realities. Therefore formation houses are not built like hothouses that shield those being formed from the realities of Asian peoples, their struggles, their hopes and their dreams for a fuller life. It employs an Asian methodology that is experiential, that uses symbols and stories.

In the context of today's world, formation in cultural settings different from one's own has become more and more common. This has the advantage of giving Asians a more global vision of reality. Inculturation and internationality are not mutually exclusive. At the same time, it needs to be accompanied by critical assimilation. Otherwise, formation in cultural contexts very different from those of Asia will only reinforce their "foreign-ness".

5. Promoting lay and women religious in the local Churches. Asia counts a formidable force of 145,413 women religious³⁴ whose possibilities for contributing to the Asian-ness of the religious identity should not be underestimated. *Vita Consecrata* has underscored the need for a "new feminism" and the irreplaceable contribution of women in the future of the new evangelization.³⁵ FABC meetings in the 1970's and 1980's already anticipated this thinking.³⁶

Fidelity to these orientations can reduce the gap between their proclamation and their life and can transform Asian religious into the prophetic witnesses that Asian peoples are looking for. In many places and in some local Churches in Asia the recognition of the role of women still leaves much to be desired.

VII. Conclusion

The participants at FABC 7 committed themselves to "the emergence of the Asian-ness of the Church in Asia".³⁷ Inculturating religious charisms and building up the local Church as a truly inculturated Church is one small step towards realizing this commitment. The 1977 Asian Colloquium on Ministries said: "*If the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future*".³⁸ One can say the same of Asian religious: If Asian religious do not discover their own identity, they will have no future.

Today Asian religious have this great opportunity of helping usher a new era in the universal Church "that will make the Catholic Church for the first time really 'Catholic' by introducing into her life the riches of all nations, as the riches of some have been introduced into it in the past".³⁹ Inculturating their charisms and building up truly Asian local Churches is to share with the universal Church and with the world the "riches of Asian nations". May Asian religious not let this **kairos** pass them by.

Footnotes

This paper was presented at a Symposium held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 20 to 22 July, 2005. The symposium was the first official event sponsored by the newly organized Office for Consecrated Life of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). It was attended by Bishops, Chairpersons of National Conferences of Men and Women Religious in Asia and other Major Superiors of women and men.

Sr Julma C. Neo, Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, is serving at present as a General Councillor of her Congregation. She resides at their Motherhouse in Paris. Before her election to their General Council, she was Provincial of her congregation in The Philippines. In that capacity, she also served as Chairperson of the Association of Major Superiors of Women Religious in The Philippines. She has assisted in several meetings of the FABC both as participant and as speaker/resource person.

¹ FABC used it for the first time in an official Church gathering during its First Plenary Assembly in April 1974 (Taipei). It is said to have been used by the Asian Bishops for the first time in an official Church gathering of the universal Church at the 1974 Synod on Evangelization in the Contemporary World. All the subsequent FABC Plenary Assemblies — FABC 2 to 7 — as well as the meetings of its various offices, repeatedly took up this theme. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, considered the "Charter of Inculturation", was written by Paul VI after the 1974 Synod. But it was not until the 1977 Synod that the term found its way into official Church Documents. Cf. Ary Crollius, *What is so New about Inculturation* (Rome, 1984), p. 18.

² Marguerite Letourneau, "Feminine Apostolic Religious Life: New Vitality and New Challenges Summary of Reports," *UISG Bulletin*, Special Number 92 (November 1993), p. 10.

³ Cf. Aylward Shorter, *Towards a Theology of Inculturation* (New York, 1988), pp. 153-190 for an historical overview of the development of inculturation from the 16th century to the period before Vatican II. This identification of Christianity with the West has given the Asian Church a foreign face right from its origin in the continent. See also Peter Phan, *In Our Own Tongues* (New York, 2003), p. 56.

⁴ *Instrumentum Laboris Synod on Consecrated Life*, n. 23.

⁵ Cf. Julma Neo, "Inculturation and Consecrated Life", an article in *Suplemento al Diccionario Teológico de Vida Consagrada* currently being printed by Claretian Publications, Madrid, Spain.

⁶ The charism is never transmitted in a vacuum. Thus, in reality the desired dialogue in inculturation is between

two cultures. When the two cultures are unequal, mutuality does not often happen. Some theologians prefer interculturalization rather than inculturation to stress this dynamics. See for example, Michael Amaladoss, *Becoming Indian: the Process of Inculturation* (Rome, 1992) and Franz Xaver Scheurer, *Interculturality: a Challenge for the Mission* (Bangalore, 2001).

⁷ See *For All the Peoples of Asia*, eds. Gaudencio Rosales, DD and Catalino Arevalo, SJ (Quezon City, 1992), p. 68 and *Ecclesia in Asia*, nn. 6, 23 for some of these values shared in common by Asians. See also *Instrumentum Laboris Synod on Asia*, nn. 8-9.

⁸ *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 6, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, nn. 80, 90.

¹⁰ See for example, *Instrumentum Laboris Synod on Consecrated Life*, n. 94, *Vita Consecrata*, n. 90. Hospitality is identified as one of the seven contemporary virtues needed for consecrated life today. Cf. "What the Spirit Says Today to Consecrated Life: Convictions and Perspectives", an unpublished manuscript from UISG.

¹¹ Mt 25:35.

¹² Cf. Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Michigan, 1999), p. 8 ff. All subsequent remarks in this paper regarding hospitality in early Christian tradition were taken from this book.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-200 for a select bibliography.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 34.

²⁰ We need to transform cultures if we wish to effect socio-economic-political structural change. John Paul II addressed this question of evangelization of cultures with a sense of urgency in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations. See for example *Ecclesia in Europa*, nn. 58-59 and *Ecclesia in America* n. 70. The great drama of our time — the "split between faith and culture"— continues today with even more adverse consequences.

²¹ Phan, *op.cit.*, p. 130 ff.

²² The need to promote the ongoing presence of religious among the poor as well as religious involvement in pressing for social, political and economic change without usurping the role of the laity was one of the four themes presented for consideration by the 1994 Synod. Cf. "1994 Synod Working Paper: Consecrated Life's Role in the Church and the World", *Origins*, XXIV, 7 (June 30, 1994), p. 99.

²³ *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 42.

²⁴ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 48. This lifestyle should correspond to that of the Asian ideal man or woman of God and men and women for others characterized by simplicity, contentment, renunciation and concern for others.

²⁵ *Religious and Human Promotion*, 1980, nn. 13-31.

²⁶ *Instrumentum Laboris Synod on Consecrated Life*, July 1994, n. 93, See also *Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod on Asia*, n. 50 on inculturation as a major missionary challenge for the Church in Asia.

²⁷ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²⁸ *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches*, n. 3, an unpublished manuscript prepared for the Office of Theological Concerns.

²⁹ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

³⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, cf. n. 44.

³¹ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 337. See also *Instrumentum Laboris Synod on Asia*, nn. 13-14, *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 9.

³² *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 21.

³³ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 281 ff.

³⁴ Maximus Fernando, "Present Situation of Consecrated Life in Asia: a Sociological Approach", in *Religious Life in Asia*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (2004), 51-52.

³⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, nn. 57-58.

³⁶ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 83-84, 89-90, 99-100, 182-183.

³⁷ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 3, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD (Quezon City, 2002), p. 8.

³⁸ *For All the Peoples of Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71, *Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod on Asia*, n. 50.

La violence dans les médias

Le refus de penser

Jean-Paul Marthoz*

Du sang à la une, «When it bleeds it leads»¹ : ces expressions collent au journalisme — à une certaine forme de journalisme comme un vieux sparadrap sur une blessure mal cicatrisée. Attentats et assassinats, enlèvements et bombardements : la violence et le conflit semblent être les ingrédients les plus naturels et les plus rentables du monde médiatique. Au point de déformer notre vision de la réalité : sur les chaînes locales américaines, les poursuites en voitures, les crimes et les brutalités absorbent parfois jusqu'à 60% des journaux télévisés... Alors que la délinquance s'est dans l'ensemble atténuée.

La violence s'insère facilement dans l'univers journalistique, car celui-ci considère l'information comme une rupture de l'ordre des choses et il s'est toujours fondé, des feuilles à scandales du XIX^e siècle aux émissions de voyeurisme du XXI^e sur la mise en scène des drames et des conflits. L'info, c'est quand «le train n'arrive pas à l'heure», c'est «quand un homme mord un chien», c'est quand un gouvernement, un peuple ou un groupe déclarent la guerre ou livrent bataille.

Sur les grandes chaînes commerciales, l'information sur les pays du Sud, tout particulièrement, est dominée par la violence, non seulement celle des armes, mais aussi celle qui s'exprime dans la misère et la désespérance, et qui nous demande — au mieux — de panser les plaies plutôt que de penser les solutions aux crises et aux drames. Coups d'État, violations massives des droits de l'homme, massacres et génocide, enfants soldats et bébés affamés, seigneurs de la guerre et réfugiés, envahissent à intervalles réguliers les écrans, entre l'information nationale et les faits divers, entre la poire et le fromage. En 2000, une étude du *TransAfrica Forum*² sur la couverture africaine dans deux des plus influents quotidiens américains, le *New York Times* et le *Washington Post*, démontrait que sur 89 articles parus entre mars et août de cette année, 63 concernaient la guerre, les soulèvements militaires et les rébellions civiles et 12 parlaient de l'épidémie du SIDA. Exit la culture, les initiatives de développement, les actes de solidarité. Exit la vie, bonjour la mort.

Des victimes à l'écran

En 2003, la guerre en Irak a soulevé de multiples questions sur la violence et les médias. Fallait-il montrer la guerre telle qu'elle est : cruelle, écœurante, sanguinaire, au risque de choquer le public et d'être accusé de saper le moral de l'arrière ? Fallait-il au contraire «flouter» les corps déchiquetés et gommer les cadavres putréfiés, au risque de tronquer et de minimiser l'horreur et la souffrance ?

Dans ce type de guerre, en effet, le spectacle de la violence est une arme essentielle de la propagande : le choix de l'occultation n'y est pas toujours inspiré par la décence et la vertu, tout comme celui de l'exhibition ne procède pas nécessairement d'une noble politique de vérité ou de compassion. L'éthique journalistique, cette mère blafarde, s'est faufilée à ses propres risques et périls entre les pudeurs de la télévision américaine et les audaces de la chaîne qatari *Al Jazeera*.

Ce conflit nous a aussi rappelé que le traitement médiatique de la violence est discriminatoire. Les corps des victimes du 11 septembre 2001 ont été gommés des reportages des médias américains, mais ces mêmes médias n'ont pas eu la même réserve pour montrer les morts des «sales petites guerres» africaines ni les blessés irakiens. Dans ces incursions dans les faubourgs du monde, le «porno humanitaire», comme l'appelle Régis Debray,³ a dominé de nombreux reportages. «Ces cadavres nihilistes, sans racines ni alentours, ne jonchent plus un champ de bataille, ne jalonnent plus une marche en avant,

ne ponctuent plus un grand récit. Ils sont tombés là par hasard, déchets abstraits de tueries pour rien ».

Dans ses dérives, le journalisme semble nous dire qu'il y a, d'une certaine manière, des sous-hommes, sur la planète de l'information. Soit parce que l'on ne parle pas d'eux en tant qu'individus, soit parce qu'on expose leurs malheurs, leurs corps mutilés et leurs vies détruites avec moins de respect que pour les victimes qui nous sont proches. «Plus l'endroit est éloigné ou exotique, plus il nous est loisible de regarder les morts et les mourants en face», constatait Susan Sontag dans son essai *Devant la douleur des autres*. «Les représentations les plus franches de la guerre et des corps meurtris par le désastre sont celles où le sujet photographique est un parfait étranger, quelqu'un que nous n'avons aucune chance de connaître».⁴

La presse doit fournir une représentation de la réalité qui soit le reflet le plus fidèle et donc le plus divers possible du monde. Or, trop souvent, dans l'information qui vient des pays du Sud, il n'y a de place que pour la violence. Cet envahissement de brutalité constitue une distorsion de la réalité et il est en soi une violence faite à la dignité des hommes, une atteinte à leur image et à leur humanité.

Une (in)culture de violence

La réflexion sur la violence dans les médias doit sortir du cadre réducteur de l'information pour s'attacher à décrypter les autres écrans de la réalité et de la virtualité. Elle doit porter non seulement sur les diffuseurs de l'information mais aussi sur ses récepteurs. Réfléchissant au débat sur la violence dans les médias, le journaliste philosophe français Jean-Claude Guillebaud écrivait : «Du mal, nous avons fait un spectacle... Nous ne l'avons jamais autant contemplé... À quel besoin obscur répond vraiment cette mise en scène de la violence, du meurtre, du massacre, de l'extermination... Pourquoi l'exhibition du mal est-elle à ce point payante, et dans tous les sens du terme ? De quelle frustration secrète notre goût pour la contemplation de l'abject porte-t-il la marque?».⁵

Les émissions de «divertissement» et le sport sont, en dépit de leur inconsistance, les plats de résistance du menu médiatique. Toutes les études indiquent en effet que le public, surtout le plus jeune, se détourne des émissions d'information pour avaler à larges doses les concours les plus vulgaires et les sports les plus grégaires. Or, les «valeurs» qui s'y expriment sont rarement celles du respect de l'autre. De même, les jeux vidéo, qui absorbent une part croissante du temps de loisir des adolescents, sont gorgés de violence.

Ces programmes promeuvent une (in) culture de la violence qui n'est pas moins pernicieuse et traumatisante que les images chocs des *breaking news*.⁶ Sur l'Ile de la Tentation ou sur les terrains de foot, la brutalité codifiée, le mépris et la triche expriment des pulsions de violence qui, loin de servir d'exutoire, créent des attentes d'adrénaline qui irradient et corrompent l'ensemble du monde des médias.

Les chaînes de télévision commerciales américaines en ont tiré les conséquences en intégrant à leurs émissions d'information les techniques et les mises en scène de l'industrie du divertissement et du sport. C'est ce que les Anglo-Saxons désignent sous l'expression d'*infotainment* (information et divertissement) et que nous pourrions appeler par le même procédé «infortissement». Comme l'explique Matthew A. Baum, auteur de *Soft news goes to war*, les télévisions organisent, «conditionnent», l'information internationale, et en premier lieu la guerre, comme des sujets de divertissement, avec bandes son, graphiques et effets spéciaux. La réalité de la guerre doit correspondre à la virtualité des jeux vidéo. C'est ce que la guerre en Irak a fourni avec le système des *embedded journalists*. Intégrés dans des unités combattantes, les envoyés spéciaux ont donné à leur public ce qu'ils voulaient: des images de combat aussi virtuelles que les scènes des jeux vidéo apparaissent réelles. L'image du monde qui ainsi se dessine, au gré des images d'explosions et de tirs, pousse au cynisme et à la passivité, alimente le mépris et le rejet des peuples victimes.

La violence aveugle

Pris au piège de la déferlante de messages et de clips, le journalisme a besoin de «portes d'entrée» dans l'actualité, c'est-à-dire d'éléments qui permettent d'attirer l'attention d'un public extrêmement sollicité. La violence en est une, mais elle constitue un piètre décodeur de la réalité. Sa visibilité a souvent pour corollaire l'occultation de ses causes. En fait, la violence aveugle, la violence absolue aveugle absolument.

Le terrorisme est dans ce contexte le meilleur allié de la dérive médiatique, non seulement parce qu'il répond à la soif d'action et de rupture, mais aussi parce qu'il permet aux médias de se focaliser sur l'événement en tant que tel et leur fournit, par la saturation d'images choc et par la condamnation morale, une esquivance pour ne pas aborder avec l'audace nécessaire les griefs et les rancœurs qu'il exprime. Au contraire, l'action non violente inverse le «conte moral» de l'actualité et impose aux médias de s'interroger sur les raisons de la protestation. Les images des attentats kamikazes palestiniens, par leur brutalité, occupent tout l'écran et contribuent à ce que soient oubliées ou rejetées les revendications palestiniennes les plus légitimes.

Les icônes de l'Histoire

Ces réflexions sur les distorsions de ce qu'on a appelé le *journalisme bang bang*⁷ n'impliquent pas que les images de violence doivent toutes disparaître des écrans car nombre d'entre elles sont la mémoire du monde, le témoignage de ses ignominies mais aussi de ses héroïsmes. La figure du soldat républicain espagnol fixée sur la pellicule de Robert Capa, le petit enfant juif aux mains levées, le soldat américain traumatisé de la guerre du Vietnam, l'homme debout seul devant les tanks sur la place Tien an Men, la Madone en pleurs lors de la «deuxième guerre d'Algérie» sont des icônes de la dignité et de la tragédie. Car c'est bien vers cette réflexion sur l'humanité des êtres que doit s'acheminer la réflexion journalistique. Il faut évoquer la violence plus que la montrer, sortir de cette brutalisation de l'audience qui, à la fin, l'assomme ou l'engourdit.

L'éthique du journalisme trouve dans cette confrontation avec la violence son test le plus intense : chercher obstinément la vérité, en toute indépendance et en pleine conscience de ses responsabilités à l'égard de tous les acteurs du grand théâtre tragique de l'information. «Dire la vérité, toute la vérité, rien que la vérité, dire bêtement la vérité bête, ennuyeusement la vérité ennuyeuse, tristement la vérité triste». Ainsi écrivait Charles Péguy le 5 janvier 1900 dans le premier numéro des *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. Malgré la prolifération des web-logs, l'obsession du «direct» et le téléphone satellite, l'ordre du jour du journalisme est immuable.

Notes

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¹ Expression utilisée par les journalistes de télévision. Littéralement, «quand ça saigne, ça ouvre le JT».

² *TransAfrica Forum*, Press Coverage of Africa, December, Washington.

³ Régis Debray, *L'œil naïf*, Le Seuil, Paris 1994, pp. 155-16.

⁴ Susan Sontag, *Devant la douleur des autres*, Christian Bourgeois éditeur, Paris 2003.

⁵ Jean Claude Guillebaud, *Le Goût de l'Avenir*, Le Seuil, Collection Points, Paris 2003, p. 42.

⁶ L'information flash qui interrompt une émission en marche.

⁷ Lire à ce sujet Greg Marinovich et Joao Silva, *The Bang-Bang Club*, William Heinemann, London, 2000. Un reportage sur la pratique du photojournalisme lors des dernières années de l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud.

Réf.: *SPIRITUS*, n. 180, Septembre 2005, pp. 267-272.

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Coming Events

SEDOS MAY SEMINAR 2006

**“ECONOMY FOR MISSION:
PERSPECTIVE FROM RELIGIOUS LIFE”**

16-20 May

- Basic structure proposed for the themes to be treated -

Tuesday Afternoon:

Welcome and Presentation of the Theme

Wednesday Morning:

1. Historical-sociological Analysis

- a. Industrial revolution / colonization / mission: sociological origins in the 19th century
- b. Presence of a superiority complex: salvation from Christ / from the West/ mission financed from abroad
- c. Economic imbalance between the missionaries and the local people to whom they were sent to evangelize
- d. Misunderstanding between the Gospel and the wealth of the missionaries.

Wednesday Afternoon:

The structures:

- i. an assistance to the poor / ii. burden for a poor Church?

Thursday:

2. Mission in the Gospel:

- a. The mission of Jesus: to bring the Good News to the poor.
- b. Methodology of Jesus: The Son of Man has no where to lay his head / Sell what you have, then come and follow me.

Thursday Afternoon:

Poverty:

- i. leave everything and follow me or ii. share your bread with the poor?

Friday:

3. The Mission of the Church:

- a. The Church continues the mission of Jesus: preferential option for the poor;
- b. The Church entrusts to religious the mission of:
 - living among the poor,
 - living as the poor,
 - living for the poor.

Friday Afternoon:

The Poor: i. by vocation, or ii. by necessity?

- iii. What resources will be available to religious for tomorrow?

Saturday:

Elements of formation

What things should change in the life of our institute?