

sedos

Bulletin 2006

Vol. 38, No. 3/4 - March/April

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Editorial

A Blessed Easter to all our readers!

We have once more reached the time to celebrate the joy of being part of the Kingdom, the Paschal mystery that makes us full members of God's family. As brothers and sisters we work together as equal partners in our endeavour to sow the seeds of Justice, Peace and Love to the ends of the World. May the Grace of the Risen Christ fill us with the strength to dare to break the chains.

We begin our reflection with an article by **Yvette Chabert** challenging us to "*Oser une alliance pour la mission*". She compares men and women as equal partners to two knitting-needles the beautiful fabric of the Kingdom.

Antoinette Gutzler, MM, alerts us in her article "*Journeying to the Other Side: Beyond Previously Accepted Boundaries*" of the perils of 'clericalism and colonialism' to our Church and suggests 'humility and courage' as antidotes to foil the dangerous hidden agents.

Mary John, SSPS, calls to our attention the importance of interconnection in our relationships to "enhance mission and foster positive action". In her paper, "*Mission: A Call to Reach out in Relationship*" she reminds us that mission is first and foremost the constant flux of communication between God and Creation.

In "*La transformation missionnaire de l'Église latino-américaine*" **Juan F. Gorski** analyses, in the light of the document *Ad Gentes*, the awakening of the missionary conscience in the Church of Latin-America during the last 40 years and its transformation into an active missionary Church.

Pierre-François de Béthune, OSB, affirms that 'Interreligious dialogue is a grace for our time. It is a way of evangelical conversion'. In his reflection: "*The Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue*" he discusses some of the pitfalls menacing the dialogue and the contribution of monastic interreligious dialogue as a way to open the door to conversion.

Penelope Johnstone and Rabiatu Ammah contribute another important aspect of interreligious dialogue by focusing on the role women play and must play in this dialogue. In: "*On the Straight Path. Women in Islam*", **Penelope** speaks of what makes conversion to Islam such an attractive proposition for many young Western women. **Rabiatu** discusses, in "*Building God's Peace and Justice Together*" the situation of the non-Muslims living in and facing a Muslim society, in some African countries.

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N.B. Please, note that the page numbers of the January/February issue continued the 2005 numbering, instead of starting again from 1-49. Please, excuse this oversight.

Oser une alliance pour la mission

* Yvette Chabert

Une parole située

Je suis femme et crois l'être joyeusement. Féminine, non féministe, quoique heureuse des combats visant l'explosion des modèles de domination/soumission.

Rebelle au sexisme de certains politiques, au machisme ou relents cléricaux de certains prêtres. Accompagnatrice d'hommes et femmes blessés dans leur affectivité, et de groupes loin de l'Église, en quête d'une étoile pour revivre. Écoutante — émerveillée ou douloureuse — de relectures de conduites pastorales vécues en partenariat *ministres ordonnés-laïcs*.

Résistante, par toute cette vie, à une anthropologie de la "nature" féminine/masculine, inscrite par Dieu en la femme et l'homme. Un événement anodin fut pour moi déclic. Notre petit quatrième de quelques mois venait de dire ses premiers « *ma.. ma.. ma.. mama* » à mon époux qui avait pris un temps partiel pour le garder. Petit pincement au coeur de la maman, grand bonheur du père. Alors ? Qui est père, qui est mère? Serions-nous tous pareils ? En fait, je continue de découvrir qu'il n'est pas si facile à la femme que je suis de savoir en quoi je suis femme, comment je me sens femme et mère, ni à l'homme qu'il est, de définir ses charismes propres. Dans l'amour ou l'amitié, c'est l'autre qui vient peu à peu me le révéler !¹ La vie conjugale et parentale extirpe souvent du schéma dualiste meurtrier qui campe nos individualités dans des tâches et rôles stéréotypés.

Autre découverte née de la vie d'épouse et maman : notre vocation n'est pas d'être un clone homme ou une clone femme, mais cet homme et cette femme, dans son mystère.

Notre être sexué colore bien sûr nos engagements d'Église, ainsi que notre rapport intime à Dieu. C'est partout qu'on est homme ou femme et qu'on le devient.... C'est donc avec mon histoire de femme que je reçois aujourd'hui ce que l'Église me confie, un peu par surcroît, sans mérite, et sans combat autre que de rester moi : une collaboration, pour une petite part, aux trois tâches de l'Église, celles de l'annonce, du gouvernement et de la sanctification (celle-ci étant située dans la charge donnée à tout le peuple sacerdotal de Dieu d'aider son frère à répondre au mieux à l'appel de la sainteté).

Voilà ce qui, venu de l'expérience conjugale et ecclésiale, va colorer mon propos.

Deux aiguilles pour un tricot

L'advenue de femmes aux responsabilités ecclésiales me réjouit : avant d'être une fécondité pour la mission, elle est une réhabilitation de la double unité, de création et de vocation, qui lie les hommes et les femmes en Christ. Pour autant, soutenir qu'à ce titre, elles doivent "conquérir" quelques "postes-clés", me semble ecclésiologiquement mal posé. Enfin, tenter d'évaluer si cette "montée" aux responsabilités va faire advenir une Église plus féminine n'est pas ma question ! Je la voudrais plus virile (en nombre déjà !) marquée par un style, un langage, des choix, nés, non d'un clan majoritaire, mais de la saine et réelle "jointure" masculin/féminin, clercs/laïcs et laïques, célibataires et en couple.

Alors, ma question ? Elle est dans le "et" de "*hommes et femmes en mission d'Église*". Quelle signification théologique, ecclésiologique et pastorale est-il permis de donner à ce "et" ? Est-ce un "et" de circonstance (la pénurie de prêtres), un "et" de survie pour l'avenir de l'Église ? Dans ce cas, le laïc et laïque y sont appelés ni pour ce qu'ils sont, ce qu'ils signifient et permettent, mais comme bouche-trous fonctionnels.

Ou bien est-ce un “*et*” vocationnel, comme l’on parle de cette réalité fondatrice de la manière d’être humain, dans la vocation d’un couple marié, qu’est la “séparation” homme/femme, à vivre comme “*unité des deux*”. Pour dire autrement, est-ce que notre manière de nous tenir en Église, dans une altérité masculin/féminin, clercs/laïques, délibérément choisie et institutionnellement articulée, peut être lieu de réévangélisation de notre propre Maison : nous permettre de toucher de manière neuve au mystère de l’autre, habité par un Autre. En cela, nous ouvrir à une expérience renouvelée du mystère de Dieu dans son Altérité.²

Enfin, est-ce que cette expérience renouvelée du Salut — par un Autre et les autres — peut avoir quelque visibilité en notre société et y réouvrir le goût de Jésus-Christ ?

Car telle est notre vocation pour ce monde de vieille chrétienté happé par son désir d’émancipation du Christ : nous redonner envie de porter le sac-à-dos de la vie, non en héros de l’amour, dans la fascination de notre propre auto-crédation et auto-libération, mais en humains, limités mais beaux, car sauvés par grâce.

Alors ? Pourquoi “planter” résolument et visiblement ce “*et*” (hommes et femmes en mission) au sein de nos pratiques ? Pas pour survivre, ou par principe de réalité. Car on meurt toujours de vouloir seulement survivre... Mais pour risquer la vie : en Église, nous convertir de manière plus brûlante au goût d’un Autre, par l’altérité humaine masculin/féminin vraiment risquée ; et, en ce monde, nous en rendre témoins.

L’image du tricot me vient alors. Pas de tricot sans laine et sans aiguilles. Pas de maille possible sans chacune des aiguilles, respectivement à sa place, pour sa fonction propre. Pas de focalisation stérile sur la longueur ou la couleur de chaque aiguille puisque l’important est ailleurs : qu’une première maille, puis une autre, et encore une autre, fassent un bout de tricot ! “Point mousse” ou “point de riz” ? Arthrose à l’une ou l’autre main et quelques cassures du fil possibles ? Des mailles sautées et des trous disgracieux ? Peu importe ! On peut avoir chaud et donner chaud avec n’importe quel point et par un tricot “ajouré”... Ce qui importe, c’est l’articulation active des deux aiguilles, dans leur mouvement respectif et conjoint.

En clair, ce qui doit inciter l’Église à risquer davantage la mixité d’acteurs en responsabilité (mixité sexuelle et d’états de vie), c’est bien le “tricot” à tricoter, la mission dans ses deux visages : notre conversion à l’interne et notre témoignage à l’externe. Par fidélité aux “laines” reçues : la “laine” du Christ et celle des hommes du temps et du lieu, à relier.

Quant au coordinateur des aiguilles, n’oublions pas, c’est l’Esprit Saint... C’est pourquoi nous pouvons entrer en espérance : l’expérience âpre d’un christianisme fragile³ et sans éclat proche de celui des origines, va nous extirper du mur des lamentations et nous redonner un dynamisme inventif !

Quitter nos stéréotypes

L’anthropologie dualiste, sous-jacente à bon nombre de textes du Magistère — très beaux par ailleurs — me pose question. En dressant la “liste” des qualités féminines, au service de la famille, de l’humanité et de l’Église,⁴ elle laisse flotter un sous-entendu regrettable : les hommes ne les ont pas... Or, ces réels charismes des femmes, mère, prophète, sœur, celui de la relecture dans l’intériorité, du goût pour la proximité humaine et la tendresse, celui des petits pas et du pragmatisme sont-ils ceux de toute femme (et d’aucun homme) ? «*On court toujours le risque de transformer la différence des sexes en une différence de rang ou de valeur, en attribuant exclusivement à son propre sexe ce qui se trouve également chez l’autre, mais d’une autre manière*».⁵

À l’inverse, s’il est évident que des femmes subissent des oppressions et vexations, il est évident aussi qu’elles peuvent être, à leur tour, actrices d’oppression et de domination.

Pour autant, quitter les stéréotypes de nature féminine/masculine ne nous fait pas tous semblables ! Et l’affirmer n’enlève rien à la quête égalitaire, justifiée, des combats féministes. Mais, au titre de cette égalité, nier nos différences réelles et sensibilités respectives, c’est refuser l’acte créateur, le

mystère en Dieu, l'altérité à vivre dans la saine articulation de nos richesses et pauvretés. C'est nous priver de ce qui a vraiment saveur dans l'humain, et nous fait "beaux" devant Dieu et devant les hommes.

Inversement, brandir notre différence de nature et formaliser ce que les femmes peuvent apporter de spécifique dans la mission, me semble dangereux : c'est risquer de définir telle ou telle fonction et place ecclésiales en fonction du sexe (dans une histoire ecclésiale à domination masculine).

Enfin, et là est notre cadeau/fardeau : où qu'on soit, dans la conjugalité, l'amitié, ou nos divers lieux de vie, la rencontre homme/femme gardera toujours son caractère heureux mais tragique. Elle appelle la grâce, afin que des douleurs de l'enfantement naisse la joie d'un "bébé". Mais elle appelle aussi la tâche humaine : une volonté de recherche pour une "articulation" sans fusion/confusion, sans piétinement de l'un par l'autre non plus. En Église, par exemple, se risquer hors des stéréotypes, appelle tout un travail spirituel et institutionnel, afin que la "montée" du laïcat ne "tue" ni les prêtres dans leur statut et leur identité fragilisés, ni les laïques dans leur féminité.

Il n'y aura qu'un troupeau, qu'un berger⁶

Alors, comment décliner cette mission à deux aiguilles articulées et en faire une expérience d'Altérité pour nous et nos frères ?

Il nous faut d'abord signifier, de manière claire, l'égalité et l'égal envoi en mission de toute personne. St Paul n'a pas mâché ses mots. Il a prôné une mission de communion sans rapports d'esclavage interne et sans "classe" sauf celle de dépendre ensemble du Christ ! *«Vous tous qui avez été baptisés en Christ, vous avez revêtu Christ. Il n'y a plus ni Juif, ni Grec; ni esclave, ni homme libre; ni l'homme, ni la femme; car tous, vous n'êtes qu'un en Jésus-Christ»*.⁷ Faisons-nous sonner cela dans l'Église et dans le monde ? Il n'y pas de "grandes" places polarisant à elles seules tous les médias, pas de "grands" hommes ni de "grandes" femmes, pas de "Monsieur" le curé ou "le sacristain" pas de "dame fleurs" du service d'autel ou de "Madame" la théologienne, pas de Mlle chef de tel service et de M. l'Abbé "seulement" accompagnateur spirituel de ce service : il y a des serviteurs de l'Amour, d'égal dignité et valeur, d'égal sueur pour la mission, placés par l'Église du Christ à une place signifiante pour tous. Car tel est le génie de l'Église du Christ : la place de chacun doit toujours être signe de ce que l'ensemble du Corps a à être et faire.

Vatican II⁸ a retrouvé la dynamique d'une Église non plus pyramidale mais *«Peuple de Dieu»*, "vissé" à son berger. *«Que tous soient un, Père, comme nous sommes un»*.⁹ Paul VI¹⁰ et Jean-Paul II¹¹ n'ont cessé de rappeler qu'*«être en conversation avec le monde»* et plonger dans la pâte humaine relevaient des sacrements de l'initiation, dans une égale dignité de sexe, d'état de vie et de "ministère".¹²

Si nous réduisons notre question du masculin/féminin à celle du partage des responsabilités, nous oublions l'essentiel : le peuple de Dieu, premier, dans l'annonce du Ressuscité. Car enfin, depuis deux siècles, l'annonce du Christ n'est pas une affaire de cadres d'Église. Elle est bien la tâche de gens ordinaires, *«sans instruction et quelconques»*,¹³ foulant les terres humaines, en masculins et féminins, à l'encontre souvent des habitudes culturelles.

Déjà, au temps de Jésus, les aveugles, les boiteux et les prostituées remis sur pied annoncent une Nouvelle Bonne pour l'homme. Sans Marie et Joseph, sans Elizabeth et Siméon, Marie de Magdala, Pierre, la Samaritaine, Thomas, Marie et Jean, sans les femmes au tombeau pour accueillir l'annonce de la résurrection, et sans les hommes pour les provoquer dans leur "folie", sans ces pieds masculins et féminins, sans ces enfants foulant leurs terres d'enfants, combien d'hommes et de femmes n'auraient jamais rencontré le Christ ? N'oublions pas ces baptisés de terrain, qui savent aujourd'hui mutualiser leurs dons et lieux de proximité : à travers leurs mouvements d'Église (rôlés à l'articulation masculin/féminin dans les responsabilités), lors des Equipes d'Animation Pastorale, dans les lieux scolaires, professionnels ou sur les quartiers, dans les engagements politiques, dans la prière commune vers l'Esprit Saint.

Aujourd'hui, au nom de ses baptême et confirmation, la femme, trop longtemps figurante dans

des rôles “strapontin” sous l’autorité des clercs, reçoit des responsabilités de conduite, articulées à celle du pasteur ordonné. Un partenariat s’esquisse dans les douleurs et joies de l’enfantement. Comment en faire un signe visible d’alliance, lieu d’ouverture au Dieu Amour de toutes nos alliances humaines ?

Décliner l’agapè à tous les temps ! ...

Des propos de table laissent émerger malgré eux quelques vérités pensées, quelques souffrances et peurs enfouies, quelques “places” d’acteurs pastoraux — prêtres ou laïcs — non clarifiées.

On entend : «Je *ne vais pas y arriver*. J’ai demandé une animatrice laïque pour *‘me’ ‘seconder’* — *‘Mes’ ‘femmes’ se sont mises aux funérailles*.

‘Et bien moi, je vais garder les clés du placard’. *Le curé ne veut rien entendre. L’unanimité avait un avis différent au conseil. A toutes, faut le faire ‘plier’*».

Comment passer d’une altérité de vis-à-vis égocentrée, aigrie ou revancharde et inféconde, à une *“dualité relationnelle”*,¹⁴ douloureuse et conflictuelle parfois, mais portée par l’agapè ?

L’Évangile rappelle deux choses. On ne met pas de vin nouveau dans une vieille outre. Quant au vin nouveau, il est tâche humaine, mais d’abord don de Dieu. En effet, Celui qui transfigure nos espaces et abolit nos rapports de domination toujours latents, c’est le Christ.¹⁵ Il est bon de relire St Paul : *«Que l’amour soit sincère.... Qu’il vous lie d’une mutuelle affection. Rivalisez d’estime réciproque. Servez le Seigneur. Soyez joyeux dans l’espérance, patients dans la détresse, persévérants dans la prière... Soyez bien d’accord entre vous...»*.¹⁶

Mais comment “accorder” nos cordes quand les uns semblent “perdre” et les autres “gagner” ? Par l’agapè ! A décliner à temps, à contre temps et à tous les temps.

- L’agapè au présent appelle la “lucidité” critique : effort de regard juste sur la complexité du réel. Effort de regard juste sur ce que je deviens, moi.

«Il s’agit d’opérer une véritable révolution copernicienne, explique Mgr. Rouet. Nos structures ont été pensées par des prêtres, faites pour les prêtres, assumées par les prêtres, dirigées par les prêtres (...) avec cette image sous-jacente du responsable d’Église : le prêtre, célibataire, à temps plein pour l’Église». Il nous faut *«passer de l’état de laïcs qui “tournent” autour du prêtre, placé au centre, et l’aident en adjoints dévoués et effacés, au statut de communautés réelles et responsables, avec un prêtre à leur service (...) qui, lui, “tourne” autour d’elles»*.¹⁷

Dans un christianisme de la Parole, l’effort de lucidité appelle des paroles humaines mises au-dessus de la table, en “je”. En des temps spécifiques de prêtres, pour une recherche commune de leur identité et autorité de pasteur, bousculées ; des temps d’animateurs laïcs pour une clarification du champ de leurs responsabilités en lien avec le ministère ordonné ; lors des rencontres d’équipes de conduites, en mixité de paroles. Car il importe que la communion cherchée n’étiole personne !

- L’agapè à tous les temps s’appelle “Christ” ! Prière, Parole de Dieu et Eucharistie partagées ponctuellement en équipe doivent faire partie du “travail” d’équipe, avant la gestion des affaires courantes. *«Il s’agit de donner à voir que les possibles que je porte en moi ont besoin d’être fécondés par la rencontre avec d’autres, un ou une autre, les autres et le Tout Autre»*.¹⁸ Je pense à une Maison diocésaine où tous les services ferment leurs portes et téléphones chaque matin à 11 h 15, afin que tous puissent aller célébrer et s’exprimer sur le texte du jour. Le déjeuner commun proposé dans la maison a quitté les papotages ecclésiocentrés, pas toujours charitables. Je suis témoin d’oxygène dans cette maison et de goût d’Altérité donné à ceux qui passent. Ces face-à-face, non dans le blanc des yeux, mais en Christ *«ouvrent la dualité de la rencontre en ‘dualité relationnelle’, qui permet à chacun de découvrir la relation interpersonnelle et réciproque comme un don»*.¹⁹

- L’agapè enfin, tournée vers le futur, s’appelle “désir” ! Il est bon d’enraciner un partenariat dans ce qui nous est commun avant ce qui nous distingue : désir commun du Christ et des hommes, entraîné par l’amour de Dieu offert, et nous entraînant les uns vers les autres, hommes et femmes, les uns par les autres, vers un Autre. Quand une équipe est soudée par ce désir commun, elle est apte à *« promouvoir une pastorale du désir, proposer un chemin de foi et une vie ecclésiale dont le désir de Dieu est moteur »*.²⁰

Quelques fruits...

«*Ce que je suis devenu, c'est grâce à vous, mesdames. Je vous dis un profond merci*». Ce beau mot de prêtre, suivi de celui de la femme responsable du service, furent si “forts” d'action de grâce respective, que Saint Paul dut être comblé : «*Dans le Seigneur, l'homme ne va pas sans la femme, ni la femme sans l'homme*» !²¹

L'action de grâce toutefois ne peut faire oublier d'autres tandems, clercs/femmes, aux aiguilles rivales, d'où aucune maille ne peut sortir. Cependant, sans oublier les craintes et questions pour l'avenir, il est chrétien d'eucharistier les chemins de Pâques quand ils sont là.

Pour les acteurs pastoraux et l'Église

Quelle joie, lors d'animation de retraites, d'entendre des prêtres oser partager leur “je” profond devant les collègues (comme le font des femmes) ; évoquer quelques grandissements, venus du sérieux de leurs collaboratrices dans leur foi, leur vie de femme et leur responsabilité reçue. Nouveauté dans leur être croyant : voilà que Dieu se fait question personnelle, après quelques mises sous boisseau dues, disent-ils, à leur “fonction” en représentation permanente. Pour d'autres, nouveauté dans leur humanité : après une virilité mise en hivernage, voilà que les femmes ont débloqué les choses et permis quelques retrouvailles avec cette masculinité piétinée. Apprentissage d'une juste distance dans un juste proximité avec elles, mieux être dans le corps et la tête, joie de pouvoir apporter une certaine distanciation et effort de raison lors des stress missionnaires, et d'en être remerciés. Pour d'autres enfin, repositionnement de leur place de pasteur : voilà qu'après avoir reçu cette place du Christ, elle semble leur être redonnée par le partenariat, en figure identique de sens mais nouvelle de forme. Une autorité de berger, pas de chef d'entreprise, une place de frère dans le peuple, ni au-dessus, ni au centre, une fonction de ligament humble entre Christ signifier et les personnes à voir s'épanouir, en communion, dans leurs dons respectifs. Le laïc attend ces prêtres, plus masculins dans leur humanité, plus croyants, dans leur quête personnelle de Dieu, et plus assurés dans leur réelle autorité de pasteur, fraternelle.

Quelle joie aussi, quand des collaboratrices disent avoir bagarré intérieurement pour ne pas devenir de petits clercs et garder souci premier des personnes, dans une vie de proximité sauvegardée, hors champ ecclésial. Joie, quand elle se savent vraiment appelées pour ce qu'elles sont et signifient, pour l'Église et le monde, et non à cause de la pénurie ; quand elles parlent de leurs entrailles de femme enfantant les projets communs, les portant en silence dans la prière, comme Marie.

L'Église est fécondée par ces alliances. Elle fait là, malgré elle, une expérience renouvelée de “l'excès” venu du Christ : une mission qui n'a de sens que dans le don de soi en nomades, à la boussole ; sans bien savoir où cela va, sauf que c'est par amour des hommes et du Christ que cela va ; en se laissant déplacer de ses habitudes séculaires.

Quels appels pour demain ? Dans un esprit de synodalité un peu continu, l'Église se doit de repérer les lieux où l'articulation masculin-féminin est attendue : élaboration commune des paroles publiques du magistère (clérical, épiscopal ou pontifical), en matière de sexualité, de couple, de famille, de respect de la vie, de logement, de pauvreté, d'écologie, dans un langage fécondé par l'alliance. Appel de laïcs masculins pour un visage d'Église plus viril. Appel de couples là où les gens sont en pleine structuration humaine ou croyante : jeunes, séminaristes, couples, blessés de la vie affective, catéchumènes, gens aux seuils de nos communautés.... Reprise de la recherche théologique et pastorale en vue éventuellement d'un ministère diaconal de couples, d'un ministère ordonné féminin, s'ils apparaissent pertinents pour une fécondité de mission. Efforts de clarification sur la question de l'autorité : travailler l'interférence possible entre autorité pastorale (venue du sacerdoce ministériel) et pouvoir de juridiction donné à des laïcs (de plus en plus souvent chefs de services où des prêtres “dépendent” de leur autorité).

Pour notre société ?

Les alliances missionnaires féminins-masculins, à rendre visibles, par leur nombre et leur fécondité, ne peuvent que contribuer à intérioriser une culture de la différence sexuelle (mise à mal aujourd'hui)

et à un goût de fraternité. Le goût du Christ, comme Altérité nécessaire à nos stations debout, peut-il renaître de notre témoignage ? Laisser le point d'interrogation ouvert fait partie de notre mission. Nous avons à gratter la terre des hommes, à la labourer avec persévérance afin que l'Esprit du Ressuscité puisse semer, mais c'est à Lui de semer.

Pour conclure : la fragilité comme force !

Vatican II avait exprimé le désir d'être une Église pauvre. Voilà qui n'est pas fait, malgré les pénuries humaines et matérielles. Qu'est-ce que la pauvreté, quand on se raidit dans une nostalgie des temps de chrétienté ? Quand on réitère des fonctionnements de riches très ecclésiocentrés ?

Puisse l'alliance masculin-féminin, risquée de manière pragmatique, avec de pauvres moyens, nous lancer dans une dynamique où Christ en croix va bien parvenir à nous apprendre qu'on n'aime et féconde que dans la fragilité consentie.

Notes

* Mariée, mère de quatre enfants. Au service de « L'Intelligence de la foi », membre du comité épiscopal de Lyon.

¹ « L'homme se trouve toujours "à l'extérieur" du processus de la gestation et de la naissance de l'enfant et, à bien des égards, il lui faut apprendre de la mère sa propre "paternité" » Jean Paul II, "Mulieris dignitatem", n. 18.

« Devenir un homme ou une femme implique autre chose que ce que la nature nous octroie et que la culture transmet, de valeurs, de signes, de modes d'être, propres à l'homme et à la femme » X. Lacroix, "Hommes et femmes à l'image de Dieu", Laboratoire de recherche 2001-2004, Faculté de théologie de Lyon, p. 80.

² « Être une personne à l'image et ressemblance de Dieu implique donc aussi le fait d'exister en relation, en rapport avec l'autre "moi". C'est un prélude de la révélation ultime que Dieu fait de lui-même », Jean Paul II, "Mulieris Dignitatem", n. 7.

³ Titre d'un livre de Mgr. A. Rouet, *La chance d'un christianisme fragile*, Bayard, 2004.

⁴ « La vocation de la femme est orientée de près ou de loin par la maternité et par tout ce qui est oeuvre d'amour, de don, d'accueil, de disponibilité aux autres, de service désintéressé », Jean XXIII, "Pacem in terris", n. 14, Paris, Centurion, 1963. — « La femme a pour expression particulière des capacités d'amour, de don de soi, de sensibilité, d'attention au concret », Synode des évêques de 1987, D. C. n. 1950, Novembre 1987, p. 1039. — « La femme est plus apte que l'homme à répandre, dans notre civilisation de péché et de violence, les germes de l'amour », Jean Paul II, audience du 6-12-1995, "Le rôle de la femme à la lumière de Marie".

⁵ Karl Rahner, *Mission et grâce*, tome II, Paris. Mame, p. 264.

⁶ Jn 10, 16.

⁷ Ga 3,28.

⁸ *Lumen Gentium* et *Gaudium et Spes*.

⁹ Jn 17, 11, 21-23.

¹⁰ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, septembre 1975.

¹¹ *Christifideles laici* – « Il faut que L'Église, par sa vie et par sa mission, reconnaisse tous les dons des femmes et des hommes (...) pour que sa mission soit plus efficace », n. 49.

¹² Terme employé par Paul VI dans *Evangelii Nuntiandi* pour les "ministères" laïcs.

¹³ Ac 4, 13.

¹⁴ Expression de Jean Paul II, *Lettre aux femmes*, 1995.

¹⁵ Ga 3,28.

¹⁶ Rm 12,4-21.

¹⁷ Mgr. Rouet, ouvrage cité, p. 35 et suivantes.

¹⁸ Bernard Badaud, *Hommes et femmes à l'image de Dieu*, p. 129, Laboratoire de recherche, déjà cité.

¹⁹ Jean Paul II, *Lettre aux femmes*, 1995.

²⁰ "Vers une pastorale du désir", contribution de Bernard Badaud, p. 130, *Hommes et femmes à l'image de Dieu*, Laboratoire de recherche, déjà cité.

²¹ I Co 1,11.

Journeying to the Other Side: Beyond Previously Accepted Boundaries

Antoinette Gutzler, M.M.

Virus Alert! Scan for Viruses! These are words that have become part of everyday computer life and they strike fear in the hearts of computer users everywhere. Viruses are dangerous; they harm computer programmes and wreak havoc wherever they are placed. Ignoring a “virus alert” can result in the loss of the work of a day, month, or year in just the twinkling of an eye. One may be oblivious to the presence of an infection until an intended task is rendered impossible due to the presence of a virus. Applying the proper “patch” — computer language for “antidote” — rids the computer of the contaminant and guards against future infections. I propose that the ever present danger of computer viruses is a useful analogy from which to reflect on the situation of women — and by extension, the Church as a whole — 40 years after the Second Vatican Council.

This essay suggests that the fresh air breathed into the Church by the Holy Spirit at Vatican II and which bestowed the courage to act, the courage to think, and the courage to speak (Rynne 1996:53) on the Council Fathers is tainted with viruses that paralyze renewal and inhibit the emergence of new models of Church. It gives a “virus alert!”. I will scan for two particular viruses in our Church — clericalism and colonialism — and suggest the “patches” of humility and courage as antidotes to ward off future infection. This is not an easy task. These viruses come hidden in “attachments”, that is, in long-accepted interpretations of Scripture, tradition, and models of being Church and are therefore difficult to locate. The inability to find them and assess their damage to the community of faith may be due to the presence of what Bernard Lonergan calls scotosis.¹ “Scotosis” prevents communities and the Church from receiving the gift of a new question, engaging in new experiences and entering a process of conversion. Acknowledging its presence enables the Church to take an honest look at the harm that viruses such as clericalism and colonialism do to our faith communities.

Clericalism

O’Collins and Farrugia define clericalism as “an approach to pastoral and theological problems that seeks to concentrate everything in the hands of the clergy”.² It minimizes active participation of the laity in the life and governance of the Church, silences women and relegates them to be passive observers of life in the Church. The current struggle against clericalism that the Church faces today is a continuation of the struggles that were part of the deliberations of the Council itself. Those familiar with the beginnings of Vatican II remember well the opposition that greeted John XXIII’s announcement of a coming Council. “Behind the scenes at the Vatican, the Council was looked upon with mixed feelings, ranging from passive acquiescence to outright alarm” (Rynne, 30). Cardinal Lienart’s courageous intervention at the first session of the Council called the assembled Bishops to take ownership of the Council by choosing their own candidates for the various commissions. As the Council progressed, new understandings of Church emerged and stirred the hearts of the faithful. The changing situation and role of women as one of the “signs of the times”, first voiced in John XXIII’s Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, was but one example of the changing world in which the Church sought to be relevant and preach the Gospel.³ As *Gaudium et Spes* perceptively noted,

“It is regrettable that these basic personal rights are not yet being respected everywhere, as is the case with women who are denied the chance freely to chose a husband, or a state of life, or to have access to the same educational and cultural benefits as are available to men” (n. 29).

A new day dawned for the Church when, after Vatican II, the doors of academia opened to admit women as doctoral students of theology and scripture.⁴ Through these studies, women discovered both their discipleship rooted in the Gospels and their leadership role in the house churches and the early Christian communities. Those first women disciples were not passive recipients of God's grace but rather active participants in the story of "God-with-us". Women became awakened to what had been denied them over the centuries in terms of their value, dignity, creation as "image of God", and rightful role in and responsibility for the community of faith and realized the staggering ecclesiological implications this would have for a clerical church. However, 40 years after Vatican II, it is painfully clear that women's call to discipleship and leadership roles in the Church continue to be actively resisted and the way of "being Church" remains basically the same.

This resistance, a symptom of the virus of clericalism, can be illustrated by the story of a university professor, a well-known scholar in Church history, who was asked by some of his female students why women were not included in his lectures on early Christianity and the formation of the Christian churches. After giving some thought to their question, he replied quite simply: "Well, the answer is that there are no women to include in this part of history. They were not there. If they were there they would have been included in my course; but there were none, so they are not included!". This story brings an unsettling question to the fore: what of this professorial response? Is it accurate? Or is it an example of the virus of clericalism which tells the Christian story from the perspective of male leadership. What implications does this type of thinking have for the future education and formation of young people in the Church? Forty years of advanced Scripture research and study renders such a response unacceptable and yet it still survives within our educational institutions.

Another example is found in the Roman document *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, dated 31 May 2004.⁵ While discussion of this Document is not within the scope of this essay, some responses to its perspective on women, given from a clerical point of view, need to be noted. Beginning with the declaration: "The Church, expert in humanity, has a perennial interest in whatever concerns men and women", the document speaks with great authority about the situation of women — one-half of the world's population — without, it seems, any consultation with that half of the world! It reflects on the roles of women and men from the perspective of a "dual anthropology"⁶ — an anthropology challenged by many feminist writers — and addresses a form of feminism, popular in the early days of the movement, but not a guiding principle for feminist thought and theology today.

Among various feminist responses to the document, Regina Schulte claims that this Document :

"consigns women ... to the role of a passive partner, who does not initiate activity, but waits to be acted upon... Thus, as has been argued by John Paul II, women cannot be granted significant leadership roles in the Church... The document states that women, faced with the abuse of power, seek power... This is not what women in the Church seek; they seek a share of leadership" (Allen, 2004).

One Christian activist in India argues that, "Women are subjected to abuse of power, be it in a religious, social or a political institution. Women do not want to dominate here, but to dissolve the abuse. And that Church has failed to see that",⁷ while Joan Chittister claims that "the real problem with the Document is that its sweeping condemnation of the rising tide of women's claims to fullness of humanity, now clear in every part of the world, is that it will simply be dismissed for lack of insight, academic understanding and relevance" (Chittister, 2004). The post-Vatican II Church desired to be one of insight and relevance to the world. It proclaimed that: "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1). It is a matter for deep soul-searching if at this distance from Vatican II the Church risks being dismissed as irrelevant by the very world it wishes to be part of.

Other examples of the virus are too numerous to name here. The current sexual abuse scandal in the US Church is an especially powerful case in point⁸ as is the general silence concerning the sexual abuse of sisters in many areas of the Church world.⁹ Conversations with various groups of laity indicate the degree to which many Catholics — women in particular — are deeply offended by

the way they are treated by the clergy — as “second-class” citizens and not as those who share the equality and dignity of Baptism in Christ.

The “patches” needed to discover and root out the virus of clericalism and become the kind of Church envisioned by Vatican II are those of courage and humility: humility to ask the difficult questions and courage to act on the answers. It is the courage to acknowledge that the hierarchical culture of the Church with its own system of caste is antithetical to the Gospel; it is the humility to seek advice on how to remedy this situation if the Gospel is to speak a word that is truly “good news” for its hearers. What kind of Church do we wish to be, or as one current author has put it, how do we wish to be Church?

In a 2003 essay on America, John O’Malley proposes five points of a new style of Church which give direction for a movement beyond clericalism. This new style of Church is one of true partnership and collaboration “between pope and bishops, bishops and priests, priests and parishioners — bishops and laity”. The approach of those in leadership roles is to be “more consonant with serving than with controlling”, it is to be inclusive, inviting all to active engagement in Church matters. O’Malley maintains that the Council imparted a style to the Church which is “oriented to the future and open to it” (2003:2). Women are a vital part of this future. Their equal inclusion in the Church demands an openness to the “signs of the times” and a willingness to live with the implications. This is the beginning of declericalization.

A new style of Church — courageous and humble — reclaims the right and duty of the laity, especially women who have been silenced for so long, to participate in the theological task. The exclusion of women’s voices and experience in “God-talk” cripples the theological task and renders it incomplete. The “patch” against clericalism wards off “attachments” that convey the message that only the “ordained” are able to speak a credible word about God. A new style of Church unmasks the many hidden faces of those outside the clerical system whose voices are needed for theology — the voices of the poor, destitute, and dispossessed. Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris highlights the importance of the poor in the task of theologizing. He notes that a great number of the Church’s theologians have been educated in an elitist culture and, like the hierarchical Church, speak of the poor in the third person — demonstrating that they, themselves, are not poor. “The Asian dilemma, then, can be summed up as follows: the theologians are not (yet) poor; and the poor are not (yet) theologians” (1982:84). The “patch” against clericalism engenders a spirit of *mutual* learning and teaching and of *mutual* encouragement and correction between the Church of Rome and the local Churches, women and men. It is the “patch” that leads to an inclusive discipleship of equals.

There is Gospel warrant for movement into such a style. One of the most powerful encounters in the Gospels takes place in Matthew’s Gospel (14:13-21) after the feeding of the 5,000 people (Jewish) when Jesus journeys to the “other side” of the Sea of Galilee with his Disciples. There he has an encounter with a Syro-Phoenician woman who begs healing for her daughter (15:21-28). Her request faces Jesus with the disturbing question of who are included in the Reign of God — only Jews or are Gentiles also invited to sit at the table and receive all that God wants to give? This unnamed, non-Jewish woman challenges and shatters an exclusivity present in Jesus’ ministry. Through her persistence Jesus goes beyond his previously accepted boundaries; he truly journeys to “the other side” and meets a new understanding of what God is effecting in the world and seals this new understanding with a second feeding of 4,000 people (Gentiles) [15:32-38]. Seeking the same “patch” that Jesus received would enable the Church to “get into the boat” and “go to the other side” of previous understandings of Church. It is a call to conversion. It is a struggle to see people and situations the way God sees them. It is a call to humility and courage.

Colonialism

The second “virus alert” scans for colonialism. Colonialism is an extremely difficult word to explore in relation to the Church. This may be due to the common understanding of colonialism as the system by which a country maintains control over others mainly for the purpose of exploitation of natural resources, etc. and therefore seems to imply that such a situation does not exist in the 21st century Church. What is important to note is that at the root of colonialism is an attitude of

superiority in which one party has power over and knows what is best for the “other”. This virus is present in our Church and shows itself in forms such as the persistent “Western” face of Christianity, religious superiority in preaching the Gospel, financial assistance from Rome to non-western local Churches which renders those Churches dependent on Rome for their continued existence, etc. The virus is easily detectable but may be denied because of scotosis.

In a 1998 essay “Decolonization of Theology”, Samuel Rayan scanned for this virus within the Asian context. Writing about the situation in India (and by extension the rest of Asia), he argued that Catholic theology has been “colonized” by Western thought patterns and is in need of decolonization so that the Gospel can become truly inculturated in Asian soil. He writes that:

Our situation is that either the theological soil of our Christian existence has been used to grow foreign crops which we do not need or use; or it has been left fallow while theologies raised abroad were imported, and were borne by us as a burden, and not assimilated as nourishment nor welcomed as a force for social change (1998:297).

Rayan’s argument brings to mind Karl Rahner’s observation that Vatican II was “in a rudimentary form still groping for identity, the Church’s first official self-actualization as a world Church” (1979:717). The realization that the faces of those present for the Council deliberations were no longer solely the faces of the West but those of a worldwide indigenous clergy engendered a qualitative leap in the Church’s self-understanding. Rahner argued for the coming of a true world Church — one composed of local Churches of many different areas of the world and not branch offices of Europe or America — and challenged that “either the Church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a world Church and ... draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II” (1979:727).

This challenge is yet to be taken seriously by the West with the result that even many years after Vatican II, the Church still retains a Western “branch office face” which renders it and the Gospel message “foreign” to most of the non-Western world. Despite some cosmetic changes (liturgy in the vernacular, lay women and men as lectors, Eucharistic ministers, etc.) the Church is still Western in style and ways of articulating Christian faith. Forty years after Vatican II, Synods of Bishops continue to be held in Rome rather than in other “centres” of Christianity. The preparation for the Asian Synod of Bishops held in 1998 is one “case in point” that exposes this virus and points the way to the “patch” of humility and courage.

When the Bishops of Japan received the proposed Agenda for the Synod (*Lineamenta*), they rejected it complaining that the tone was offensive and the content not in touch with Asian realities. They sent a list of their own concerns and questions culled from years of working together with other Asian Bishops in the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) which were not adequately represented in the *Lineamenta*. They challenged the suitability of the questions of the *Lineamenta* which were composed in a Western context and proposed a “study of evangelization that includes a look at the limits of the ‘Western-type’ of missionary activity used up to now”.¹⁰

The need for the Church to shed its image of a Western religion and purify itself of its colonial heritage was articulated clearly at the Asian Synod. In the Post-Synodal document *Ecclesia in Asia*, John Paul II acknowledged that “despite her centuries-long presence and her many apostolic endeavours, the Church in many places was still considered as foreign to Asia, and indeed was often associated in people’s minds with the colonial powers” (n. 9). However, Peter Phan notes that the document “uses the past tense and fails to recognize that the foreignness of Christianity in Asia and the perception of its association with colonialism are present realities, and this is not simply ‘in many places’ but in all parts of Asia” (Phan 2002:83). Prior to Vatican II, bishops and theologians would not have given such non-complementary feedback to the Vatican. The courage to claim one’s voice is the beginning of a successful “patch” against colonialism.

The virus of colonialism also rears its head in an attitude of “religious superiority”. Forty years after Vatican II, the Church must continue to assess its relationship to/with the religious traditions

of Asia and discover the most effective way to preach the Gospel to those who come from religious traditions that have their own paths to salvation. Paul VI, during his 1970 Visit to The Philippines, encouraged Asia's theologians to:

“... let the seed, which is the word of God, put down deep roots in the fertile soil of Asia. Let the Church draw nourishment from the genuine values of venerable Asian religions and cultures. Her own contribution to Asia will surely be welcomed by your peoples, who are accustomed by centuries of spiritual formation to recognize and acknowledge what is good in others” (1976:570).

When the FABC was formed in 1970, part of its initial work included determining the place of the Christian Church of Asia:

The underlying question was this: what did it mean to be the Church of Jesus Christ in Asia, as a new era in the history of Asian peoples was beginning? What did the Church's mission, seen in the renewed understanding of Vatican II, mean at that particular moment, when the history was being “newly returned” to the Asian people themselves (Arévalo and Rosales, 1992:xviii).

For the past three decades, the various FABC commissions have fostered a spirit of service and dialogue in the local Churches with all the peoples of Asia and with their religious traditions. *Ecclesia in Asia* recognizes Asia as the cradle of the world's major religions. It expresses the Church's deepest respect for these traditions and affirms:

“an innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul, and it is the core around which a growing sense of ‘being Asian’ is built. This ‘being Asian’ is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul” (*EA*, n. 6).

Asia's distinct voice challenges what was a “given” in the past: that Western articulation of the faith is understood universally. At the January 2000 meeting of the FABC, the bishops respectfully acknowledged the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* but did not make it the centerpiece of their discussions. Rather, they continued with their theme: “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service” and wove pertinent points from *Ecclesia in Asia* into their Final Document. They maintain that: “To evangelize, the Church cannot be religiously superior. She has to be a humble companion and partner of all Asians in the common quest for God, in the struggle for justice and harmony, for a better human life”.¹¹

The voices of women that emerge from the heart of Asia 40 years after Vatican II continue to be a “transforming grace” for the Church. These voices — both humble and courageous — form a “patch” to combat the virus which not only takes a people's land but also their minds and hearts giving false memories of who they are as a people and condemning them to live in the shadows of life. This has been the experience of many women in the Church and so it is fitting that women's voices be heard. Notable among these voices are those that come out of the Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious (AMOR) and the Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA).

AMOR was begun in 1972 as a response to the challenge of the 1971 Synod of Bishops that “action on behalf of justice is constitutive of the Gospel”. The priority of AMOR is the promotion of justice and peace of the Reign of God in all involvements and in religious lifestyles. Over the years this meeting of Asian women religious has engaged topics such as the changes in religious life, prophetic discipleship, ecofemism, reconciliation among the peoples of Asia, and new forms of services and ministries to the poor. The theme of the recent AMOR gathering (2003) — “Reweaving the Network of Life: A Dream for Communion of Heaven, Earth and Human Beings” — reflected on the vows as needed elements for reweaving a broken network of life among the peoples of the world. These gatherings are important steps in creating a “style” of religious life that, while grateful for what the West has offered in terms of its tradition of religious life, still grows out of Asian soil and is distinctly Asian.

It is clear that so many years since Vatican II there is yet to be a truly inculturated form of

religious life that springs from the depths of Asian religiosity. This movement into inculturation brings many challenges into formation for religious life such as: requirements and qualities of those seeking admission to our communities, what type of formation programmes are needed and where are they to be located in “sanitized” houses of formation or in living with and sharing the life of the poor, what ways of prayer touch the Asian heart? There is also the question of how to negotiate the diversity and face the racism present in our communities as women and men from different races, cultures, and ethnic groups endeavour to live a Gospel-centred community life.

Another vibrant example is found in the first meeting of the “Ecclesia of Woman in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced” (EWA) held in Bangkok, Thailand, in November 2002. The keynote address, by Sister Evelyn Montiero was a guiding inspiration for the whole conference. She clearly set out the hopes of the conference: to bring together Catholic women doing theology in Asia and to provide space for Catholic women theologians to have their voices heard and their thoughts and reflections articulated. The conference invited Catholic women theologians to develop their potential and articulate a theology from the perspective of Catholic Asian women and be silent no more! The meeting aimed to encourage more Asian Catholic women to become engaged in theological research, reflection, and writing and to create networks with different Asian feminist movements in society, Church, and academy which are Catholic, ecumenical, and inter-faith.¹² These women have the courage to speak; leadership in the Church needs the humility to hear. Both are needed to come together to make a difference in our Church and our world.

As with clericalism, there are Gospel warrants for this decolonization. Samuel Rayan points out that, “Jesus made it a point to decolonize the religion and the theology of the people” by his teaching and actions, by his concern for the poor and widowed, by preaching that it is mercy, not sacrifice, that is required by God, by challenging the priestly class. Rules of purity and pollution, amassed wealth and systematic oppression of the poor are not permitted in the Reign of God. Rayan writes that, “Jesus’ work of decolonizing and revising traditional religion and theology was so far-reaching that, while the liberated people rejoiced, the powers that be decided to rid society of the radical prophet” (Rayan, 304). The work of decolonization is prophetic work with serious consequences.

Conclusion

This essay began with the claim that the Church needs to scan for two viruses — clericalism and colonialism — that are harming its life and impeding the renewal of Vatican II. It also proposed the “patches” of courage and humility as possible antidotes. The truth of this claim has been demonstrated through various examples which show not only the presence of the virus but its invisibility to those who are not sufficiently alert. Gospel warrants for attending to these viruses is the real “patch” needed to confront the different viruses that delude the community of faith so that they no longer see, “as man sees, but as God sees”. I have also brought to the fore the voices of women who courageously speak out in a Church that continues to marginalize their voices.

Forty years after Vatican II, the fresh air of the Holy Spirit that covered the Council has yet to be fully realized. Nevertheless, there have been many positive developments. The voices of women and laity are becoming stronger. Women are becoming more confident of their rights and responsibilities in and for the community of faith. Synods of Bishops are speaking out. Scripture study and research continue and the emerging theologies in the Church witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit and the diverse ways of proclaiming the faith to people in many different parts of the world.

The new faces coming into the light in our Church today are not those of a colonized, male clergy but rather the faces of women and men of different races, nations, cultures, and non-Western local Churches. They have been baptized in Christ and their faith and vision calls for transformation from a clerical and colonial way of being Church to a new model. The need to scan for viruses and the challenge that it brings is clear: Either the Church recognizes the different gifts that these new faces bring to the Church and searches out new models of Church or it will remain forever Western and clerical and thus betray Jesus’ proclamation of the Reign of God for all. The task before us is to pay attention to all “virus alerts!” lest in the twinkling of an eye the new questions and insights brought to the Church as a result of Vatican II be lost forever.

Notes

¹ Elizabeth Johnson maintains that, "It is not uncommon for those whose certitudes and securities may be threatened by women's emerging theological speech to relegate it to the periphery of importance. Such a hardening of the mind against unwanted wisdom can be called a scototis and the resulting blind spot a scotoma, in Bernard Lonergan's pointed terminology". Johnson 1992:12. See Lonergan 1978:191-92, 22-23.

² See O'Collins and Farrugia 2000:45. Although there are many forms of this virus, the one in the forefront of this essay is the form of clericalism that systematically denies women the practical living out and flourishing of their equal dignity in Christ.

³ "Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons". See John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, n. 41, dated 11 April 1963.

⁴ It was only after Vatican II that women were allowed to pursue doctoral studies in Scripture and theology. Before the Council this pursuit was denied to them.

⁵ Document of Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated 31 May 2004, can be found on the website of the Vatican Information Service.

⁶ A "dual anthropology" regards women and men as opposites with their own special characteristics that are denied the other and complementary to the other.

⁷ *India News*, New Delhi, 20 August 2004. Web page: www.newkerala.com.

⁸ The *San Diego Union Tribune* maintains that, "During the scandal, dozens of reports emerged of abusive priests who had been moved from parish to parish rather than being punished. Victims groups accused the Church hierarchy of favouring the protection of priests over their victims, and many faithful were infuriated by the response of Catholic leaders", 11 September 2004.

⁹ See Jane Eisner, "Abused Nuns Get Scant Attention", www.centredaily.com; Wendy McElroy, "Catholic Church Faces New Sex Scandal", sss.zetetics.com; John Allen, Jr. and Pamela Schaeffer, "Reports of Abuse: AIDS Exacerbates Sexual Exploitation of Nuns, Reports Allege", *National Catholic Reporter*, 16 March 2001. On website: www.natcath.com/NCR-Online/archives.

¹⁰ "Official Response of the Japanese Church to the *Lineamenta*" *The Japan Mission Journal*, 51 (1997):198.

¹¹ Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Papers, "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service", The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Samphan, Thailand, 3-12 January 2000 (Hong Kong: FABC, 2000).

¹² More information on the Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA) can be found on their website: www.geocities.com/ecclesiaofwomen. The proceedings of EWA "Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced" will be published in November 2004 by ISPCK, India.

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Mission: A Call to Reach out in Relationship

Sr Mary John, S.Sp.S.

Introduction

I would like to reflect with you on some points the Women Mission Secretaries of various religious congregations in Rome discussed at one of their gatherings in the SEDOS Precincts. Whereas the ideas and insights which appear in this paper are not new or unique to mission or relationship, taken together or separately, the attempt to make a presentation on Mission as Relationship is rather new. Not only did the theme: 'Mission as Relationship' not meet with objection in our circle, but it even appealed to our tastes right from the beginning it was proposed. It would take a great deal of presumption and ignorance to pretend to know what mission is woven of because of our acquaintance with its concepts before and after Vatican II, with the Bishops' Synods, the Mission Encyclicals, or with human promotion, dialogue and development. Today the word 'Mission' is used for almost anything, from a faint little voice of conscience to military action.

If we believe that everything that can be said of mission has not already been said and that further insight is always possible, then the reflections in this paper might prove helpful.

1. The God Who Relates

Mission as relationship has its basis in God who is constantly communicating with human beings and with all creation. The Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*, nn. 1-7) lays down the theological foundation for missionary activity by tracing the origin of mission back to the Trinity in which the Father is the 'Fountainhead of Sending Love'. According to it, the source, essence and prototype of mission is to be found in the life of the Trinity.

1.1 A Few Biblical Types

- If mission means going to the pagans to bring them the light of truth, then we have just one book — the Book of Jonah.

- If by mission is meant universalism — gathering of the people in Jerusalem, then we have it in several prophets particularly in Deutero Isaiah.

- If by mission is meant the pilgrimage of a liberated people, the foundational account is found in Exodus (13:3,14)

- If it is a divine call and a response of total surrender, then Abraham is the prototype of mission.

- If mission is participation in God's Creation and stewardship over the created world then we trace its origin back to Genesis for world and human history.

In other words, the Old Testament does not have one understanding of mission. A number of middle themes emerge. But one recurring and powerful theme is that of a God who relates. The Old Testament is the story of wars and exiles, migrations and occupations, divisions of land and laws governing property, social relations and conflicts, kings and judges, the agony of drought and famine, the ecstasy of rain and harvest. It is the story of extortions and appeals for justice, it is about asses, camels, oxen, goats, sheep, bushels and bins full or empty. It portrays an engaging God, a God who says, *I have seen ... I have heard ... I have felt deeply ...* (Ex 3:7,9) .

Its stories are replete with divine interventions in Israel's history in the Exodus, the Covenant, the Prophets and the Law.

Mission as the conversion of nations is hardly found in the Old Testament. In fact it is not the idea at all. God's call culminates in the formation of a people. It is the mission of the Patriarchs — those immigrant ancestors, as it is of Moses the law-giver, Joshua the warrior, the Judges who liberated, the Kings who organized, the Prophets and the Priests.¹

1.2 Israel's Relationship With Its Neighbours

“The Lord Yahweh says this, By origin and birth you belong to the land of Canaan. Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite” (Ez 16:3).

“But as regards the towns of those peoples whom Yahweh your God is giving you as your heritage ... you would sin against Yahweh your God” (Deut 20:16-18).

These two antithetic texts expose the ambivalent attitude of the Israelites toward the land in which they lived. The second text describes an attitude of radical confrontation. On the other hand, the Israelites are reminded of their deep roots in the land, even if those roots may not have always been glorious. It is not easy to account historically for the complex relationship that linked Israel with the native population globally designated as “Canaanites”.²

Mission in the Old Testament is not a purely vertical, spiritual affair between God and the human person; it is lineation and a sharing of human aspirations and struggles. This has important bearings when we talk of relationship. Election as a nation or race does not render the Chosen People blessed introverts. Openness to others remains the hallmark of the people of the utterly other God. It is fundamentally God who is the real agent of the mission of Israel. It is He who makes his glory to shine among the nations. Mission in the Old Testament is the entire history of the People of God.³ It is not the Christian missionary type in general or the modern missiological model. Therefore it is incorrect to search in the Old Testament for missionary figures and types like Sts Francis Xavier or Theresa of the Child Jesus.

The mission of Israel according to the Old Testament is a response to the double summons ‘Come’ and ‘Go’. “Come, join the assemblage of the peoples”. “Go, resume your journey again and again since what defines you as a people is that you seek a God who will always escape your images, your structures, your views and your grasp, a God who will always be beyond you”.

The quality of Israel's relationship with Yahweh is measured against the quality of its relationship with its neighbours. It's as if to say: “If you are the People of God, live and behave like the People of God and thus prove yourself to be the chosen People of God”. The most celebrated text here is Is 60:2-3,6. The whole injunction to Israel about relationship with the strangers and foreigners, and therefore with their God, is to be seen in, *‘Be kind to the foreigner, God loves the foreigner, love the foreigner for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt’* (Deut 10:18-19).

2. Jesus Who Relates

Mission has its origin in God, a God who sends his Son and the Spirit in an act of *kenosis* in establishing relationship with his people in which Incarnation is the reference point (Jn 1:14; Phil 2:6-11). Some of the salient features of Jesus' mission will explicate how relationship played an indispensable part in his mission.

· Jesus' free and open attitude to the frontier and ‘strange’ people is eloquently captured in the episode of his encounter with the Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:7-38) providing us with several aspects of mission as relationship. Mission is basically about who you are with and who you are working for. In this sense every situation is a mission situation. Jesus relates to the Samaritan Woman in a way that breaks all our pre-conceived notions of mission as conversion and incorporation into the Church and takes us to a realm where the situation dictates the nature and type that mission must assume, which in the given case, is one of dialogue and reaching out to the marginalized and those pushed to the periphery of society and religion. We do not go to mission with a set agenda, rather we allow the context to set the agenda and evoke the response and wait for surprises to emerge.

Jesus' intimate relationship with God calling him '*Abba, Father*' (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36) and his compassion to the peripheral people are self explanatory in this regard. He is constantly associating himself with sinners and tax collectors. His table fellowships, '*And as He sat at table...*' (Mt 9:10; 11:19, Mk 2:15-17; Lk 7:31-35), his unbiased approach to women including them in his community, his acceptance of their gestures of love and affection were actions taboo for a religious leader. A large portion of Jesus' teaching puncture unauthentic piety '*for people to see*' (Mt 6:5). He considered hypocrisy the worst sin and a greater evil. Integrity and genuineness are the touchstones of religion for him. In Jesus the merciful nature of God pushes the boundaries of the Kingdom by freely inviting people of all walks and creeds to establish relationship with their God. This is effected not so much through a mission discourse as through the metaphor of the Kingdom which is the heart of Jesus' entire ministry.⁴

Jesus did not make extensive mission journeys, yet he turned nobody away, no illness he closed his eyes to, no suffering went unnoticed, no gender felt neglected, no race felt discriminated, no class felt excluded, no human being walked away without feeling the tremendous impact of Jesus' short but intense life. Mission as relationship, therefore, tells us that it is not the length of life or the frequency of travels that matter but the capacity to touch lives beginning with the immediate vicinity. When we talk about the countries we have covered, the communities we have founded, the institutions we are running, actually we are talking about how we have grown and expanded and not really about mission. On the contrary when we talk about the lives we have touched, the needs we have responded to, the growth we have promoted and in the process how we have grown as persons then we are talking of mission. This is, however, far from undermining the importance or necessity of the most outstanding work that missionaries do out there in the remote and difficult corners of our world.

2.1 How Did Jesus Understand Relationship?

Jesus went beyond the natural, biological way of understanding and defining family or relationship as is evident in his rather upsetting statement, "*Who is my mother, who are my brothers?... Anyone who does the will of my Father is my mother, my sister, my brother*" (Mk 3:33,35). It echoes again in his promise to his followers "*Anyone who has left father or mother, brother, or sister or children or land ... will receive a hundredfold, father and mother ... in this world and eternal life in the world to come*" (Mk 10:29-30).

Jesus' kingdom ministry dissolves alienation and breaks down walls of hostility and exclusion, laying the foundation for a universal mission. He tends to rupture the wall between the sacred and the secular, the chosen and the common as he forces his followers to see God's presence in a Roman Centurion, a Samaritan Woman, a Syro-Phoenecian Mother, an Ethiopian Eunuch, etc.¹ That the human person is created in God's image is the most validating factor about him/her with the inevitable consequence that our relating capacity becomes the measure and testing ground of our God-experience.

3. Mission as Relationship in the SSpS Spirituality and Charism

3.1 The Mission Spirituality of St Arnold Janssen

St Arnold Janssen — the Founder of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit, the Society of the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, nurtured a Trinitarian Mission Spirituality — Trinity as a communion of persons, present in human history and as the driving force of mission. In this he chose the Prologue of St John as the foundational text that explains the inner dynamism of the Trinity which couples the theme of the Trinity and mission. Rooted in the Trinitarian eternity of God, mission occupies a profound theological dominion, prolonging the mission of the Son in the bosom of the Father. At the heart of this broadened perspective we come to God — God perceived as pre-existent transcendence and emerging in an essential *kenosis* to leap into the hazards of a world entrusted to human liberty.

Everything in the Founder's life was viewed in relation to this central frame of reference. Jesus the Divine Word in his sacred humanity, expressed superbly the image of the Father.

Another characteristic note of his spirituality was the relationship between the Incarnate Word

and the Holy Spirit. Glorification of the Blessed Trinity and the participation of all peoples in this mystery is at the root of the Founder's missionary ideal and is expressed in many of his prayers. For the Founder, mission became the one single driving force of his life which made him capable of continually transcending himself and placing all his talents and resources at the service of the Reign of God.² He was fascinated by the dynamic of the Trinitarian reality. Right from the beginning, the Founder insisted on making our communities international in character and missionary in thrust thereby making present in some feeble, human form the life of the Trinity.

3.2 Blessed Maria Helena Stollenwerk and Mother Josepha Stenmanns: Our First Mothers

These two holy women joined the Mission House in Steyl solely to 'go' to the mission, but they became the pioneering models of an International Missionary Congregation just by building a community of love through the quality of their interior lives manifested in kindly acts. It is through their relationships with fellow sisters that they expressed their eloquently feminine qualities of generosity, compassion and gentleness³ without taking a single step in the direction of 'foreign mission'. Although their very entry, initial waiting and preparations were all geared towards going to the missions, they had to content themselves with finding that vocation realized entirely in the context of relating and interacting within the walls of the Founding Mother House. In a deeper sense it meant that the grace of the Spirit which is the innermost principle of all mission, the dynamic force working from within, acted through them as women, revealing in a special way the 'feminine face of God'.

3.3 Growth and Development Through the General Chapters

Through the General Chapters we grew as a Congregation in the understanding and appropriation of mission from self-sanctification attained through faithful religious observance to assisting in the propagation of the faith. We did not stop at that. Subsequent Chapters especially the one of 1960, influenced by the pre-conciliar climate, required us to adapt to the times. While they shook the foundations of traditional piety and observances, they however, opened a door to missionary activity to be explored further in the aftermath of Vatican II. The General Chapter of 1978 for the first time paved the way for a feeble and reluctant appearance of the word *Justice* and *Peace* only to find a prime place in the subsequent ones. Already by then with the decreasing number of membership and increasing number of communities, the question of relationship began to surface.

The 1990 Chapter was a *Kairos* moment in the sense that for the first time the capitulars began to reflect on the outside political, cultural and economic reality of inequality and oppression. But more than that, the capitulars began to reflect on personal vocation which is rooted in our personal and unique God-experience which was to form the nucleus of our missionary spirituality in the years to come. Simultaneously, during these years we grew in the awareness that 'frontier mission was not only to be seen in terms of geographical territory but also as situations of need'. The aspect that emerged clearly was the importance of relationships in community.

The Chapter of 1996 spoke of mission as relationship. It involves a calling and a sending. Words that played on our minds were: *calling, sending, sharing, dialogue, contemplation, discernment and authentic witness*. We coined the word, *life-giving relationship* to express what we meant.

'Our affective maturity and best feminine qualities find expression in genuine nurturing relationships. Interacting with a smaller number of persons more intensively, frequently demands patience, understanding and cultural adaptation. Our understanding of mission as relationship with witness of life having primary place, leads us to search for new and more meaningful ways of being in mission — ways that respond to concrete situations and at the same time treat not only the symptoms of poverty and injustice but address the causes as well.'

We do not merely understand mission today as an activity, as what we do, but as our actual being, it is what we are. We are prophetic women, not just privately, but publicly and in recognizable form. Daily community life is where we prove that we are prophetic. An international community of women whose backgrounds, cultures and education differ widely, is a prophetic sign of the unity and diversity of the Kingdom of God.⁴

The General Chapter of 2002 had for its theme: “*Rekindling the Fire in SSPS Communities for Mission Today*” and aptly captured what we were groping to put our fingers on. It spoke of a vibrant, supportive community, one that promotes life-giving relationship with the inevitable consequence of fruitfulness in mission work.

4. The Place of Dialogue in Mission as Relationship

If we can read today the plan of God in the religiously and communally turbulent face of the earth, indeed it is an indication that dialogue is the most suitable answer for today’s reality.

Dialogue is so central to mission as relationship that the two could be used as synonyms. Dialogue is more than holding a prayer service together in which scriptures of different faiths are read or hymns sung. It is taking pains to study and understand the other, it is putting oneself in another’s shoes, it’s feeling within oneself what it means to be poor, a Muslim, a woman, a Jew or a Black. The 15th SVD General Chapter (2000) adopted the term “Prophetic Dialogue” to express their primary missionary commitments as it states: “Dialogue describes our proper attitude toward and relationship with all people”.

“Limited as we are by our personal and cultural viewpoints, none of us has attained the whole truth contained in God and revealed fully in Christ. In dialogue we search together for this truth” (SVD 15th General Chapter Document, 2000, Statement 53).

Today’s forces are not to be overcome with arms and power — military or economic — a fact that we sadly forget; instead with a capacity to be able to sit together giving all parties concerned, a chance to talk and a chance to listen. In the deeply divided world of Christians and Muslims, now made worse by segregation, discrimination and outright war, our mission must increasingly assume a relating, dialoguing role. In the Second Vatican Council, when dialogue as a path to mission was discussed, it was not because we needed to find an alternative to direct proclamation. It was seen rather as an honest and soulful communication with the religious ‘other’ which could lead to a deepening of commitment on both sides by strengthening relationships.

5. So What Is meant by Mission as Relationship ?

There is ample evidence from the discussion above that mission as relationship is neither about forming exclusive, cosy groups of friends with whom I get along well, nor about connections which boost my ego as is often mistakenly taken by the word *Relationship*. It’s not about friendship or relationship in the sense of who I like or relate with and who likes me. It’s not to be reduced to sentimentalism nor is it an easy way out from the highly engaging mission work of proclamation and human promotion.

Mission as relationship invites us to see our interconnectedness, to feel ourselves as part of the whole, as threads in a weaving pattern, as atoms that hold together, as energy that goes around and comes back. It’s the sum total of my responses to persons and situations of need. It’s the extension of my person, transition of my energy, interconnectedness of my being with the rest of humanity and the world through kindness, compassion and sensitivity. Mission as relationship does not replace missionary activity out there with an inward looking, self promoting ideology; instead, it provides the missionary with a perspective and a spirit which will enhance missionary effectiveness and foster positive action.

5.1 Relationship: Positive and Person-Oriented

We cannot touch the human race in general, we cannot save or damage humanity as such. There are only individual human beings. I am more than ever convinced that in the final analysis, our journeys are more individual than communitarian even when we live within a structure, observe and follow a time-table, say prayers together, eat and work together. And as individual pilgrims bound by a common destination, our mission is to attend to fellow travellers even as we journey towards that goal. In other words the journey itself is the *locus* of missionary action.

Mission as relationship is closely linked to, dare I say, synonymous with, 'Making Disciples' (Mt 28:19), but this 'making' is effected first and foremost by being One in the first place. It is the most adequate response to the exhortation: "You will be MY Witnesses" (Acts 1:8b) with emphasis on 'MY'.⁵ It does not exclude anybody, much less excuse the reasons we so readily give for not being able to be 'missionary'. We are only too familiar with the traditional lament: 'Oh! he/she is in the finance office or is tied to administrative service and therefore, is not in mission'. Wherever we are, there are needy people around (Jn 12:8). We can make known the love of God only through our work — work taken in the sense of actions, behaviour, words used or refrained from using and the atmosphere created.

Despite the much acclaimed jargon we hear these days; *it's my being that's important, not my doing or having*, I like to think that one's doing is just as significant as one's person. In fact the distinction itself does not sit comfortably with me. How are we to understand Jesus' statement: 'You shall know them by their fruit' (Mt 7:20), if work is not the definite fruit of one's being? Can we really celebrate our being, if we have no actions or work to sustain and manifest that claim? God makes it very clear that the only way to get close to Him is through fellow human beings, the only way to experience God is through others (Mt 25:31-46). In other words, to think that I can have a pure and direct contact with God without human or created medium is for me, simply an illusion. It is to undermine the great mystery of the Incarnation which is the celebration of the human form. It boils down to the fact then that mission as relationship does not in any way mean a passive recoiling into oneself, instead it is action oriented and is practicable in every situation one finds oneself in.

What will your answers be to the following Questions?

- Do my actions generate and uphold life in the 'other' or are they life-negating? Am I a life-giving person?
- Do people's contacts with me leave them vibrant and happy or do they feel drained of energy and happiness because of having met me?
- Do people generally and easily approach me or do they rather avoid me? Does my presence in a group brighten the spirit or does it weigh heavy on the members?

Conclusion

Today mission animation does not consist so much in strategies by which we encourage members to go to mission as it consists in supporting and accompanying them in their life and work with genuine concern and listening. The future community of human beings will be open to people of all creeds and states of life not so much to talk or worry about God as to engage in common human concerns which a God with a name and face transcends. It will be to relate as human beings by the very fact that we are human beings standing one in relation to the other. Mission as relationship is therefore not in any way an encouragement to withdraw from active mission work out there, but is an invitation to look at every situation as a mission situation and every person as a missionary. It's a caution not to institutionalize mission in animators and coordinators but to explore the ever present mission realities of everyday lives. Going by the signs, it appears to me that the relating, dialoguing role that Missionaries are called to play today will stay with us well into the foreseeable future.

Notes

- ¹ Donald Senior, C.P., Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Orbis Books, 1983 11th Printing 2004, pp 83–89.
- ² Lucien Legrand, *Unity in Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, Orbis books, 1990, p. 23.
- ³ Donald Senior, C.P., Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Orbis Books, 1983 11th Printing 2004, p. 134.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 146 -147.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 324.
- ⁶ "Rekindling The Fire" in *SSpS Communities For Mission Today*, SSpS 12th General Chapter Document, 2002, Para. 6

⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 7.

⁸ *S.Sp.S. 11th General Chapter Document*, 1996. PP. 10, 14, 23, 24.

⁹ Joseph Pathrapankal, CMI, “*Making Disciples*” (Mt 28:16-20) and “*Being Witnesses of Christ*” (Acts 1:8) *A re-reading of the Theology of Mission*, Vidyajyothi, 2005

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La transformation missionnaire de l'Église latino-américaine

* Juan F. Gorski

Depuis la promulgation du décret *Ad Gentes* il y a 40 ans, une transformation significative de l'Église catholique a eu lieu en Amérique Latine. Durant cette période elle a pris une conscience toujours plus claire de sa vocation missionnaire, dans le sens spécifique d'évangéliser ceux qui ne connaissent pas encore le Christ et son Évangile, ou les connaissent à peine. J'ai eu le privilège d'être témoin de ce changement et d'accompagner cette Église dans le développement de sa nouvelle identité et de son activité missionnaire. Je voudrais partager cette expérience avec un public plus large, avec la grande majorité de gens nés après le Concile ou depuis la Conférence de Pueblo. Bien que j'écrive cet article comme une narration descriptive et non comme une investigation scientifique, j'essaierai de faire que ce que je rapporte soit le plus objectif possible.

Pendant presque 500 ans l'Église Catholique en Amérique Latine a été dépendante des ressources missionnaires — personnel, moyens, idées — d'autres Églises, particulièrement de celles d'Europe, et dans la dernière moitié du XX^e siècle, de celles d'Amérique du Nord. Elle était une «Église missionnaire» dans le sens passif ; elle recevait des missionnaires d'autres lieux. Elle dépend encore en grande partie de cet apport, mais progressivement elle est en train de se convertir en une Église missionnaire dans le sens actif. Non seulement elle envoie des missionnaires au delà de ses propres frontières, même à d'autres continents, donnant «de sa propre pauvreté», mais elle est aussi en train d'élaborer une missiologie qui lui soit propre. Ce «revirement» signifie une véritable conversion, une «nouvelle création», une œuvre de l'Esprit. Ce bref article a l'intention d'expliquer pourquoi et comment l'Église Catholique en Amérique Latine a surgi de sa passivité pour arriver à être activement missionnaire.

L'actuel défi missionnaire dans la société et dans l'histoire de l'Amérique Latine

Bien que la grande majorité des Latino-Américains fasse profession d'être catholique sociologiquement, il existe beaucoup «de situations missionnaires» dans le continent. Environ un huitième de la population (soit 65 millions en 2000) appartient aux peuples indigènes, différenciés linguistiquement en quelque 60 ethnies. Plus d'un cinquième de la population (23 %) est Afro-Américain, descendants d'esclaves amenés sur le continent entre les XVI^e et XIX^e siècles. Ces groupes humains non occidentaux, joints à une minorité d'Asiatiques-Américains, constituent presque 35% de la population Latino-Américaine. En gros le tiers des habitants du continent ne sont pas «latins» dans leurs racines culturelles. À côté de ces groupes non occidentaux culturellement différenciés entre eux, il y a les populations «métisses». Elles constituent actuellement approximativement la majorité de tous les Latino-Américains. Ils se trouvent plus ou moins «intégrés» dans la culture dominante nationale ou continentale, mais sont affectés par leurs différentes racines raciales et culturelles (amérindiennes, africaines, asiatiques et européennes). En plus des défis inhérents à cette diversité de cultures traditionnelles, il y a une autre réalité à laquelle l'Église est confrontée : la quantité de personnes qui actuellement vivent comme migrants. Il y a des migrants à l'intérieur des pays et des émigrations vers d'autres pays. Cela concerne environ le tiers de la population totale Latino-Américaine. Ces gens n'expriment pas leur vitalité par le moyen de modèles culturels et religieux établis dans des générations antérieures mais plutôt au moyen d'un mélange de ces formes traditionnelles propres avec des modèles d'autres cultures, avec une dose d'éléments modernes et postmodernes. La jeunesse pose un défi particulier parmi les populations urbaines. Le défi missionnaire de cette réalité multiethnique, pluriculturelle et aussi pluri religieuse rapproche l'Église Latino-Américaine de ses Églises soeurs d'Afrique et d'Asie.

La «christianisation» : un type d'activité missionnaire qui a implanté une Église introvertie

Pendant plusieurs siècles la culture dominante du continent dans ses racines et dans ses expressions a été européenne, particulièrement la variété « latine » typique de l'Espagne et du Portugal. De ce fait, on présumait que le grand défi missionnaire était celui d'enseigner au peuple les expressions religieuses catholiques typiques de la culture dominante et de les transmettre d'une génération à l'autre. Un anthropologue pourrait décrire la situation ainsi : la christianisation originaria a constitué un processus d'acculturation,¹ un processus d'en-culturation.² Dans le meilleur des cas, là où la catéchèse existait, cette christianisation a fait partie d'une «pastorale générale», si générale qu'elle n'a évangélisé personne en particulier, du moins pas dans et depuis sa propre identité culturelle.

Bien qu'il soit habituel parmi les catholiques de parler d'une «première évangélisation» ou d'une «évangélisation constitutive» qui a eu son origine il y a environ cinq siècles, il serait plus exact de parler d'une entreprise de «christianisation». Son objectif a été l'incorporation des peuples du continent en une «Chrétienté» monoculturelle dans laquelle ils seraient soumis à l'autorité chrétienne, tant ecclésiastique que séculière. Il faut reconnaître que l'évangélisation dans le sens spécifique d'annoncer l'Évangile pour offrir une rencontre personnelle avec le Christ vivant avec des fruits de conversion et d'appartenance à un ensemble de disciples, est une préoccupation récente de l'Église Catholique en Amérique Latine, caractéristique de la dernière moitié du siècle. Avant on supposait que les gens apprendraient à être de bons chrétiens par leur appartenance à l'Église, par l'apprentissage de la doctrine, par la réception des sacrements nécessaires pour le salut et par la participation à la vie de dévotion catholique. Beaucoup ont ainsi été de bons chrétiens. Ce projet de christianisation a eu globalement un résultat positif. Les continents d'Amérique Latine, d'Afrique et une partie de l'Asie ont été colonisés par les Européens et sont devenus objets de l'activité missionnaire pendant les cinq cents dernières années. Parmi ces continents, l'Amérique Latine est le seul où le christianisme n'est pas considéré comme une religion étrangère et où l'annonce de l'évangile non seulement est acceptée, mais généralement est souhaitée. Cependant dans le cours des siècles, la christianisation a produit en général une Église introvertie, préoccupée par l'attention pastorale envers ceux qui fréquentaient l'Église et par la conservation de l'influence ecclésiastique dans la vie sociale. Elle n'a pas produit une Église missionnaire, engagée dans l'annonce de l'Évangile aux groupes humains qui n'ont pas encore connu le Christ. On présuma que ceux qui étaient proches avaient été christianisés, mais peut-être étaient-ils non pratiquants, ignorants de leur foi ou indifférents vis-à-vis d'elle. Il n'existait pas de grande préoccupation pour les non-chrétiens au delà des frontières, peuples d'Afrique ou d'Asie : on pensait que ceux-là seraient pris en charge par les missionnaires d'Europe ou, au siècle dernier, aussi par les missionnaires d'Amérique du Nord. Avant le Concile — et ce n'est pas seulement le cas de l'Amérique Latine et des chrétiens catholiques — on n'accordait presque aucune importance aux cultures indigènes ou autres non occidentales dans l'expression de la vie chrétienne. Presque tous les missionnaires chrétiens pensaient que leur culture occidentale était le modèle le plus adéquat ou même l'unique modèle pour exprimer l'Évangile.

Facteurs qui ont contribué à la renaissance missionnaire de l'Église Latino-Américaine

Deux facteurs contribuent fréquemment à la rénovation de l'Église, la première est l'expérience vivifiante de l'approche du peuple dans sa situation de vie concrète. Le second est un retour aux sources de l'identité chrétienne, particulièrement un retour au témoignage des Écritures. Un exemple concret en est le renouvellement missionnaire de l'Église Catholique en Amérique Latine.

Le premier facteur de renouvellement a été interne. Depuis la décennie des années 1950, quelques groupes missionnaires montrèrent un nouvel intérêt pour la situation religieuse des peuples indigènes, particulièrement dans les pays andins (Bolivie, Pérou, et Equateur) et d'Amérique centrale (Mexique et Guatemala), où se concentre 90% de la population indigène du continent. Les missionnaires envoyés dans ces contrées entreprirent un travail d'évangélisation basé sur le renouvellement de la catéchèse quelque peu «à la mode» alors en Europe et en Amérique du Nord. Un détail clé a été la priorité donnée à la formation de catéchistes autochtones. Ceux-ci non seulement devaient catéchiser leurs communautés dans leur propre langue, mais aussi étaient responsables du culte catholique et des autres dimensions de la vie ecclésiale dans leurs communautés. L'interaction entre eux et les

missionnaires fit que ceux-ci comprirent rapidement la nécessité pour eux d'apprendre les langues indigènes. Cela a conduit à un effort pour exprimer la foi chrétienne en termes compréhensibles pour les membres de ces cultures et éventuellement à une mise en valeur théologique plus grande de l'expérience religieuse indigène et de ses expressions culturelles. La missiologie catholique latino-américaine a pris racine non dans les facultés de théologie (comme en Europe) mais bien plutôt dans les défis surgis de la pastorale missionnaire dans ses bases indigènes. Depuis le Concile Vatican II l'enseignement officiel de l'Église catholique a soutenu cette préoccupation des missionnaires pour l'évangélisation spécifique de chaque groupe humain, à partir de sa propre identité culturelle et de son expérience religieuse. Mais les orientations missionnaires du Concile ont eu un impact réduit particulièrement parmi les instituts missionnaires. Pour les évêques et théologiens d'Amérique Latine en général ce fut plutôt l'Exhortation Apostolique *Evangelii Nuntiandi* du Pape Paul VI qui provoqua une prise de conscience sérieuse sur la relation entre l'Évangile et les cultures. Quand on décida que la troisième Conférence Générale de l'Épiscopat Latino-Américain (Puebla, 1979) prendrait ce document papal comme inspiration principale, avec le thème central de «l'Évangélisation dans le présent et le futur du continent», les évêques devaient faire leur l'importance donnée par Paul VI à l'évangélisation de la culture et des cultures. Mais jusqu'à 1975 en Amérique Latine, c'était resté une priorité presque exclusive pour les peuples indigènes.

Un second facteur, très puissant dans ses effets, fut la façon dont le Concile a transformé la théologie catholique. La première Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* a mis fin au mono culturalisme ecclésiastique par son ouverture à l'utilisation des diverses langues dans la liturgie. La Constitution sur la Divine Révélation, *Dei Verbum*, a reconnu que Dieu se communique à l'humanité non seulement par des paroles mais aussi par des événements historiques. Les Constitutions *Lumen Gentium* et *Gaudium et Spes* ont éclairé l'identité évangélique de l'Église et sa mission dans le monde. Son Décret *Ad Gentes* sur l'activité missionnaire a affirmé (n. 2) que l'Église entière est missionnaire par sa nature même. Ainsi cette activité ne concerne pas seulement un corps de professionnels, ceux qui par leur vocation s'identifient comme «missionnaires», mais c'est l'affaire de toutes les instances de l'Église. *Ad Gentes* (n. 6) a distingué aussi l'activité missionnaire dans son sens spécifique de l'action pastorale auprès de ceux qui sont déjà évangélisés.

Les débuts de la rénovation post-conciliaire en Amérique Latine

Quelques évêques latino-américains, de retour dans leurs églises locales après le Concile, se demandèrent ce que pouvait vouloir dire dans leur continent une Église missionnaire par sa nature même, missionnaire dans un sens actif et non passif. Un an après le Concile, 1966, le Conseil épiscopal latino-américain (CELAM) se réorganise pour un service pastoral plus efficace aux Conférences épiscopales, et crée le «Département des Missions» (connu par les sigles DMC jusqu'à 1978, et DEMIS depuis 1979).

Le DMC organisa des réunions d'étude en 1967 (à Ambato, Équateur) et en 1968 (à Melgar, Colombie) pour identifier les zones humaines ayant le plus besoin de l'activité missionnaire dans son sens spécifique, établir des priorités et proposer un repère solide pour orienter l'action évangélisatrice. Un des apports les plus significatifs à la pensée missiologique à Melgar fut le développement du concept des «situations missionnaires». On refusa la délimitation exclusivement géographique et juridique des «missions» en faveur d'un critère théologique et pastoral. Les groupes humains ont besoin de l'activité missionnaire et pas tellement de l'attention pastorale, non parce qu'ils résident sur des territoires désignés comme «missions» par l'autorité ecclésiastique (tels que les Préfectures et Vicariats Apostoliques dépendant de la Congrégation Vaticane pour l'Évangélisation des Peuples, la *Propaganda Fide*), mais plutôt parce que leurs cultures n'ont pas encore été pénétrées et transformées par l'Évangile. Nous verrons plus bas comment ce concept a influencé la pensée de l'épiscopat du continent à Puebla.

Le DMC (Département des Missions du CELAM) a attiré l'attention sur deux aspects de la situation humaine des peuples indigènes : l'identité culturelle des groupes évangélisés et leur condition socio-économique de pauvreté endémique. À la suite de presque 500 ans de christianisation les peuples indigènes se sont vus non seulement comme victimes d'une évangélisation inadéquate, non adaptée à leurs cultures, mais aussi généralement comme les plus pauvres parmi les pauvres. Alors que la nouvelle missiologie latino-américaine était très attentive à la dimension de la justice sociale,

les théologiens contemporains de la libération ne donnaient pas beaucoup d'importance aux cultures traditionnelles. Tandis que le DMC s'occupait des défis de la mission universelle, le Département opta pour une stratégie particulière : apprendre aux Églises locales à être missionnaires en se consacrant en premier lieu à l'évangélisation spécifique des peuples indigènes dans leurs propres pays. Ainsi elles se prépareraient pour l'action missionnaire au-delà de leurs frontières. Le défaut de cette stratégie résidait dans le fait que 90% de la population indigène était concentrée dans cinq pays (Mexique, Guatemala, Équateur, Pérou et Bolivie) et que dans les autres 17 Conférences épiscopales elle constituait seulement une petite minorité. Jusqu'en 1975 beaucoup d'ecclésiastiques virent le DMC comme le «Département des Affaires Indigènes» ou «Département d'Anthropologie» du CELAM, et donc de peu d'intérêt pour eux. Le Président du DMC de 1969 à 1974 fut Mgr. Samuel Ruiz Garcia du Chiapas (Mexique). Sa mise en valeur théologique des cultures indigènes et son insistance sur la naissance d'Églises locales autochtones et culturellement diversifiées parmi les peuples indigènes étaient considérées comme exagérées et peu réalistes, voire comme une dangereuse menace, ce qui eut pour résultat sa marginalisation dans le CELAM. Par une ironie du sort, ses orientations théologico-pastorales sur la relation entre la foi et les cultures sont actuellement intégrées dans la «politique officielle» de l'Église catholique depuis l'accent mis par Paul VI sur «l'évangélisation des cultures» et par Jean Paul II sur «l'inculturation». Dans ces mêmes années ceux qui promouvaient une animation missionnaire universaliste, cherchant l'appui spirituel et matériel des fidèles pour «les missions» (principalement les Directeurs des Œuvres Missionnaires Pontificales), se basaient généralement sur une motivation théologique déjà dépassée (aider les missionnaires à sauver les pauvres païens d'Afrique et d'Asie) et se montraient rarement informés et préoccupés des situations missionnaires dans leurs propres pays. La seconde Conférence Générale de l'Épiscopat Latino-Américain tenue à Medellín (Colombie, 1968) fut caractéristique de son temps. Elle reconnut à peine l'existence des populations indigènes et les considéra purement et simplement comme des groupes socialement marginaux, non comme des peuples vivants dont l'identité culturelle et religieuse interpellait l'Église pour une activité missionnaire spécifique.

Le nouvel objectif de Puebla : l'attention aux «situations missionnaires» en Amérique Latine

La troisième Conférence Générale de l'épiscopat latino-américain tenue à Puebla (Mexique, 1979) a constitué le point décisif de l'activité missionnaire dans ce continent. À Puebla les évêques ont reconnu l'existence de situations missionnaires interpellantes dans le continent, non seulement parmi les peuples indigènes mais aussi parmi les populations Afro-Américaines, si fréquemment marginalisées dans l'apostolat de l'Église. La condition de ces groupes non occidentaux est désignée comme une «situation (missionnaire) permanente». Puebla a reconnu aussi des «nouvelles situations qui ont plus particulièrement besoin d'évangélisation : les groupes humains affectés par des changements sociaux récents, particulièrement les migrants, ceux qui sont influencés par le sécularisme moderne et postmoderne et ceux qui sont attirés vers de nouveaux mouvements sectaires religieux ou quasi-religieux». Cette catégorie de «nouvelles situations missionnaires» fut identifiée par Mgr. Roger Aubry en 1976 (il fut Président du DMC depuis la fin de 1974 jusqu'au début de 1979). Il est peut-être le missiologue le plus considéré en Amérique Latine. Mais les peuples indigènes, les Afro-Américains et les migrants en situation économique précaire accueillent normalement positivement les efforts évangélistes des Chrétiens catholiques et évangéliques. Alors Puebla attira aussi l'attention sur la condition d'autres secteurs qui constituent «des situations missionnaires difficiles» : il s'agit de nombreux hommes politiques, chefs d'entreprise, militaires, dirigeants syndicaux et ceux qui contrôlent les moyens de communication sociale. Ces groupes se montrent fréquemment non seulement indifférents à l'évangélisation, mais plutôt lui résistent et s'y opposent. Cette catégorie a été identifiée par Mgr. Gerardi de Guatemala (il fut assassiné en 1998) dans la préparation du rapport missionnaire du DMC pour Puebla. Un pastoraliste latino-américain bien connu, Segundo Galilea (celui qui à Melgar consacra le terme «situations missionnaires» pour remplacer la délimitation juridique territoriale de la mission) fit observer que, tandis que Puebla avait répété beaucoup de ce qui avait été dit à Medellín sur les questions de justice et de priorités pastorales, cette Conférence fut plus originale dans sa prise de conscience missionnaire. Elle attira l'attention sur la nécessité d'une évangélisation spécifique de groupes humains de cultures anciennes et nouvelles et exprima aussi un sens de l'urgence missionnaire universaliste. Elle déclara que : «l'heure est arrivée maintenant»

pour l'Église latino-américaine de devenir missionnaire «au-delà de ses frontières», «donnant de sa pauvreté» de personnel et de moyens. Ce sont des phrases qui durant les dernières 25 années ont eu une résonance forte parmi les laïcs de base et aussi parmi les pasteurs engagés dans la mission *ad gentes* (autre terme consacré, à Puebla et maintenant accepté universellement grâce à son utilisation dans *Redemptoris Missio* de Jean Paul II). Depuis Vatican II jusqu'à Puebla le plus grand protagoniste et réalisateur de la pensée missiologique latino-américaine a été le Département des Missions du CELAM. Depuis 1979 (quand le sigle du département devient le «DEMIS»), ce protagonisme s'est diversifié et s'est généralisé dans notre Église.

Après Puebla l'engagement dans la mission se généralise

Jusqu'à Puebla ceux qui avaient promu la mise en valeur théologique des cultures traditionnelles étaient des missionnaires non indigènes comme les Évêques Ruiz et Aubry. Maintenant les protagonistes de cette entreprise sont des penseurs des peuples indigènes eux-mêmes. Ainsi déjà en 1985, le DEMIS parla de transition d'une «pastorale indigéniste» à une «pastorale indigène». Ces nouveaux missiologues font des recherches créatrices tant sur leurs propres cultures ancestrales que sur la théologie chrétienne. Il y a environ 20 ans, eut lieu la fondation de l'Articulation Œcuménique Latino-Américaine de Pastorale Indigène (AELAPI), qui depuis 1990 a organisé quatre «Rencontres-ateliers de Théologie Indienne» et actuellement en prépare une autre pour 2006. Ce mouvement qui a à peine 15 ans de vie en tant que projet formel, cherche à promouvoir un dialogue entre la foi Chrétienne et les religions ancestrales qui conduise à la naissance d'Églises locales réellement inculturées parmi les peuples indigènes. Le nom du mouvement — Théologie Indienne — met l'accent sur la recherche d'une théologie propre pour orienter ses efforts et implique une critique radicale d'une théologie rationaliste européenne qui, pendant cinq siècles, a contribué au mépris de ces cultures, avec pour résultat une christianisation superficielle marquée par des accommodements syncrétistes. En 2002, alors Président du CELAM, Mgr. Jorge Jimenez (de Colombie) a appelé évêques, théologiens et penseurs indigènes à entreprendre des dialogues sincères et à aider le mouvement à atteindre une maturité théologique. Un autre exemple est la promotion d'une pastorale spécifiquement Afro-Américaine depuis Puebla. Les Conférences Épiscopales du Brésil, Pérou, Équateur, Colombie et Haïti ont déjà mis en fonction des organismes et des plans pastoraux propres pour coordonner cet apostolat.

Mais le changement le plus profond pendant les dernières 25 années est la prise de conscience croissante du défi de l'évangélisation des peuples au-delà des frontières du continent, particulièrement en Afrique et en Asie, l'engagement de catholiques Latino-Américains pour la mission *ad gentes*. Depuis les années 1940 des Congrès missionnaires nationaux se sont tenus au Mexique pour réveiller et former cet esprit missionnaire. En 1977 à Torreón, s'est tenu le premier «Congrès Missionnaire Latino-Américain». Dans le second de cette nouvelle série de Congrès, qui eut lieu à Tlaxcala (au Mexique aussi, 1983) on adopta le sigle «COMLA». Bien que les participants non mexicains fussent peu nombreux (Évêques et Directeurs des Œuvres Pontificales Missionnaires) dans le premier, dès les Congrès suivants des délégations nombreuses participèrent, préparées antérieurement et engagées au service pastoral dans leur pays. Le troisième COMLA, à Bogota en 1981, a eu comme thème la responsabilité missionnaire des églises diocésaines. Le quatrième, à Lima en 1991, mit l'accent sur la formation et l'envoi effectif de missionnaires comme un acte de foi élémentaire de ces Églises. Lors du cinquième, à Belo Horizonte en 1995, on insista sur la mission comme inculturation et cela constitua une célébration de l'identité culturalo-religieuse des Afro-Bréiliens et de leur vocation missionnaire. Le sixième à Paraná (Argentine, 1999) fut déclaré le «Premier Congrès Missionnaire Américain» (avec le sigle «CAM») par le Cardinal Tomko, Préfet de la Congrégation pour l'Évangélisation des Peuples, et eut comme thème principal l'annonce d'un kérygme interpellant qui promeut une rencontre personnelle avec le Christ vivant. Le septième COMLA et second CAM reçut l'appui de toutes les Églises locales d'Amérique Centrale et se tint au Guatemala en 2003. Son thème fut «la mission depuis la petitesse, la pauvreté et le martyre». Le huitième COMLA et troisième CAM se tiendront à Quito (Équateur). Un aspect très important de ces Congrès est la façon dont travaillent ensemble des centaines d'évêques et prêtres et des milliers de religieux et laïcs. La participation de ceux-ci est presque «pentecostale» dans son dynamisme. L'enthousiasme des jeunes est extrêmement prometteur.

Le développement et les contenus d'une nouvelle missiologie en Amérique Latine

À l'intérieur de tout cela est en train de se développer en Amérique Latine une nouvelle missiologie ou théologie de la mission. Celle-ci répond à deux préoccupations principales. La première est la réponse aux situations dans ce continent. La seconde est le défi de la mission au-delà de ses frontières, la réponse aux situations missionnaires en d'autres continents. Les deux sont en relation intime.

Le premier espace de recherche théologique traite d'une **orientation adéquate pour l'évangélisation des peuples indigènes** (et d'autres groupes culturels). Comment la situation historique et culturelle des différents peuples entre-t-elle dans la théologie de la mission ? Quelle visée théologique sera capable d'orienter une véritable inculturation de l'Évangile dans les divers peuples pour que naissent parmi eux des Églises locales avec leur «propre visage», nées de leur culture ? Dans tout cela, comment être fidèle à l'Évangile tel qu'il a été reçu et affirmé dans la tradition théologique chrétienne et catholique et aussi à l'identité et à la vitalité culturelle des divers peuples ? Comment l'expérience religieuse ancestrale des peuples, exprimée dans leurs propres langages et symboles culturels rejoint-elle la révélation chrétienne, avec le salut réalisé «une fois pour toutes» dans le Christ Jésus ? Tout cela implique de traiter sérieusement des questions centrales de théologie fondamentale (les sources de la révélation chrétienne) en christologie, pneumatologie, ecclésiologie et anthropologie théologique. Ces questions sont centrales et non marginales.

Le deuxième espace de recherche théologique traite de **la motivation pour l'urgence de la mission «ad gentes»** : l'évangélisation de ces groupes humains qui ne connaissent pas encore le Christ et son Évangile (ou le connaissent à peine). Évidemment offrir une exposition satisfaisante de la missiologie qui est en train de se développer en Amérique Latine est impossible dans ces quelques pages. Mais je peux dire qu'une affirmation dans la Constitution pastorale du Concile est centrale dans cette théologie. La Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 22) déclare que nous devons croire que par des manières connues de Dieu, l'Esprit Saint offre à tous une participation dans le mystère pascal du Christ. Ce texte concis exprime bien le fondement trinitaire et pascal de la mission. Il implique que le salut a un contenu, une configuration et un dynamisme définitifs, divinement révélés dans la mort et la glorification du Christ. Il englobe aussi effectivement la situation des peuples évangélisés et leur propre expérience historique et culturelle du don Pascal de l'Esprit dans le même «contenu» du message évangélique. La mission est urgente non tant pour sauver les gens de la perdition éternelle que pour les rendre capables de leur participation pleinement humaine dans le mystère du Christ. Cette participation pleinement humaine implique qu'elle soit consciente, libre, responsable, joyeuse et généreuse. Elle implique moins un salut passif (ce qui arrive aux âmes après la mort) qu'un salut actif, agissant ici et maintenant dans l'histoire, dans la vie sociale et culturelle des personnes et des peuples. Elle implique de faire partie des disciples : connaître le Christ, l'aimer et le suivre dans la communauté de ses disciples qui est l'Église. Cette perspective a déjà été présente en germe dans la réflexion et la rencontre DMC à Melgar (1968) et a été nourrie progressivement par l'insistance de la théologie Latino-américaine sur la conscientisation des gens à l'action de Dieu dans l'histoire et à leur participation libre et responsable dans la transformation du monde suivant le plan de Dieu. C'est une perspective missiologique profondément évangélique et authentiquement Latino-Américaine.

Conclusion

On pourrait dire beaucoup plus de choses sur le nouvel esprit missionnaire qui est en train d'animer l'Église catholique en Amérique Latine. Ce que nous avons décrit pourrait être documenté par une référence scientifique à des sources publiées. Évidemment nous devons reconnaître que les pasteurs et les fidèles catholiques partagent cette vision et cet engagement missionnaires à des degrés divers. Un enthousiasme et un engagement total pour la mission ne sont caractéristiques que d'une minorité relativement petite. N'importe quel mouvement compte un noyau bien motivé, un certain nombre d'autres engagés de façon constants dans son objectif et sa visée, et enfin d'autres qui y participent de manière occasionnelle et marginale. Il reste beaucoup à faire pour la formation missionnaire des pasteurs, des fidèles et en particulier, des missionnaires et des missiologues.

Mais l'enthousiasme de ceux qui sont déjà engagés dans cette rénovation missionnaire est en

train de toucher l'Église en général. Quand nous comparons ce qui se passe aujourd'hui avec l'indifférence et la passivité au regard de la mission typiques des générations antérieures, nous pouvons seulement remercier Dieu pour les dons de renouveau donnés à l'Église et au peuple Latino-Américain dans les 40 années depuis le Concile et son Décret missionnaire, *Ad Gentes*.

Notes

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¹ Un changement culturel produit par le contact direct et prolongé avec une autre culture, et sa transmission intergénérationnelle.

² L'apprentissage de modèles culturels déjà établis.

Réf. : *SPIRITUS* (Hors-série) 2005, “*Ad Gentes*, 40 ans après”, pp. 36-48.

The Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue

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(President of DIM)

Interreligious dialogue is a grace for our time. It is a way of evangelical conversion. This is particularly apparent where spiritual experience is concerned. I would like to describe this discovery here, above all as it is practised by Christian monks and nuns who have met another religion in the context of their spiritual journey.

A Koan¹

I must begin, however, with a fact that is too often forgotten: this enterprise of intercultural or interreligious dialogue is difficult and ultimately **impossible**. We can never meet the other as he is, in his uniqueness. An experience, even elementary, of interpersonal dialogue shows us this straight away. All the more so when it is a matter of meeting people of a very different race or religion. Moreover the claim to know the other intimately is not only illusory, it can also be resented as a lack of respect. The efforts which Westerners have made to learn oriental languages, to assimilate their thought, to live for a long time among Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists, all this still cannot allow us to be aware of the inner life of an adept of these religions. Even those Westerners who have converted to an oriental religion have to recognise that they are still, in large measure, strangers. What, then, can be said about one who does not wish to renounce Christianity?

It must be added that the enterprise of dialogue is no less problematic when one considers the other aspect, that of the reception the other. In wishing to come ever closer, one comes up against another impossibility. This approach is even ultimately suicidal, when an unconditional acceptance results in a total invasion and the loss of one's own identity.

So, it is important to begin by being aware of the formidable pitfalls which menace interreligious dialogue.

Yet, in spite of everything, how can we relinquish it? Must one who is fascinated by the ideal of the *advaita* or of being a potential *bodhisattva* abandon hope of ever understanding this spiritual universe? Must one who has met a spiritual person of another religion — like Fr Henri Le Saux who met Ramana Maharshi — interrupt his quest on the pretext that in the end it leads nowhere? No! When such a discovery is made at the most intimate and true level of our life in the presence of God, when its obvious fruitfulness is apparent, one cannot rest there, even when we have realised that the enterprise is dangerous and impossible, because this theoretical impossibility is challenged by practical experience.

It is true that those ill prepared for such a spiritual experience should proceed with great prudence; in some cases they would do better to give it up altogether. But it is **necessary** that some members of the Church should commit themselves to the task. It is essential for the life of our Christian faith in today's world that the reality of other Paths towards the Ultimate should be taken into consideration. Moreover the churches have crossed a threshold of no-return, it is out of the question to go back to the attitudes of fifty years ago.

Finally we must recognise that there are two contradictory facts before us: dialogue is both **impossible** and **necessary**. Although impossible it is none the less necessary, nor less impossible

because necessary. Moreover these two characteristics must not be set against each other nor allowed to neutralise one another, because they go together.

This is why we can say that the way of dialogue is a kind of *koan* 'something which we can neither swallow nor spit out again'.² The contradictory statements which form this *koan* must coexist, until the meaning of this situation clarifies.

I shall begin this presentation of the position a little schematically because this will have the advantage of keeping us vigilant and patient, modest and audacious. In this way of dialogue, more than in any other, we do well to meditate on the recommendation of St Bernard: 'Be audacious in your humility'.³

Contradictions

Such an approach also enables us to interpret better the present situation and the often contradictory attitudes which we find among Christians.

The Declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council recognised the **legitimacy** of a dialogue with other religions. Today we have gone a step further. Everyone agrees on the **necessity** of this dialogue. But, if among some this understanding is broad and serene, among others one senses a certain reticence in venturing into this field. The general trend of most official documents must be studied with this in mind. They recognise first, not without condescension, that Christians have much to learn from other religions, but they generally add as well many warnings against all the dangers implicit in this work.

This fear is justified by the very nature of dialogue which always leads one further than could be foreseen and which can provoke serious questions: does an over-eager association with other spiritual paths risk a loss of one's own identity? This is a more or less conscious fear among many Christians. It is this which explains the obvious contradictions between some very frank general declarations and the restrictive and awkward concrete applications. This is not the place to analyse this situation, but we can all recognise it, even within ourselves. The question which I wish to raise is rather: how can we liberate ourselves from this fear?

The paradox of monastic interreligious dialogue

Let us now look at what monks and nuns can do in this field. The vocation of the monk is to 'sit and be silent',⁴ as the monastic Fathers repeat.⁵ Why then do some of them leave their cells to go and talk to Japanese bonzes or Hindu *sadhus*? One can understand the Jesuits doing so, but what is a Trappist like Fr Louis (Thomas) Merton doing there and, in his train, an ever increasing number of Western monks and nuns? There is no *a priori* reply, because here again experience has run ahead of theory. The first occasions of encounters between Christian and Buddhist monks were fortuitous, but they brought about such remarkable **reciprocity** between monks from every country that a number of Benedictines and Cistercians from America and Europe set about organising opportunities for meeting. From 1978 commissions for intermonastic dialogue were created on these two continents. At present they are also found in Asia and Oceania.

Encounters organised in this setting demonstrate in fact a paradoxical form of dialogue, not just based on verbal exchange, but on the experience of hospitality and the practice of spiritual methods elaborated in other traditions. Isn't the deepest religious experience beyond words? In every case it is within the setting of this inexpressible centre that the meeting is most fruitful. One can understand then how men and women who do not talk a lot, but who have much experience in listening⁶ may have a specific role to play in this great movement of interreligious dialogue. Nuns and monks are obviously not the only ones on this path of 'dialogue in religious experience',⁷ but their characteristic manner of proceeding merits careful study.

Monastic interreligious dialogue reveals symbolically some important dimensions for the furtherance of the dialogue. It does not run alongside other forms of dialogue, such as the dialogue of daily life, solidarity in action and in theological reflection — all of them irreplaceable — but it reminds us of the horizon of all dialogue. And in signifying its powerlessness to formulate the

mystery in words, this horizon of night and silence can give to every encounter between believers of different religions the depth of focus which secures a truly religious quality.

I would like to pay closer attention to the characteristics of this type of dialogue: to the setting for interreligious dialogue, its demand for conversion and the possibility of bringing about a meeting in prayer. It will then become apparent that at this level one can go beyond the fear some Christians now feel with regard to interreligious dialogue.

Dialogue and Hospitality

Simply the fact of living for a time with believers of another religion, and particularly in a place of intense spirituality, is already an experience of dialogue. Even if no verbal exchange is possible because, for example, of the obstacle of language, hospitality in a monastery or a place of pilgrimage can be a very strong experience of encounter. Some Christian and Buddhist monks and nuns have had the experience of going to live in Zen Buddhist monasteries in Japan and in the abbeys of Europe respectively.⁸

Hospitality, for St Benedict a synonym for humanity,⁹ is a universal paradigm. It is sacred in every culture. Now this practice is a question of welcoming the stranger, one who is unavoidably other. So we can find here precious guidance on how to welcome the believer of a different religion and thus to welcome our God, the mysterious Stranger, who is always different from what we expect. Indeed, as Christian de Chergé said: 'each of us acknowledges in a different way Him who alone is truly different'.¹⁰

This kind of interreligious encounter is less studied and apparently more difficult to describe than dialogue in the precise meaning of the term, but it is much more significant and always leaves traces of its passage for much longer.¹¹ Hospitality concerns the whole person, and not only the intellect or the affectivity; it needs time; above all it expresses, and achieves, a more attractive approach, as it needs great mutual confidence to allow a stranger to penetrate one's home or to risk, in return, the acceptance of an invitation to enter his home.

Experience proves in every case that a verbal exchange taking place in the context of hospitality and in an atmosphere of confidence which this assumes, can go much further. To engage in dialogue in depth, hospitality is even a decisive **environment**; on the other hand words, deprived of this context may well lack resonance.

Louis Massignon went so far as to say: 'It is only in the measure that one gives hospitality to the other, that one can understand the truth that unites us socially. One only finds the truth in practicing hospitality'.¹²

A word that crosses over

In short, what is dialogue if not hospitality offered to the words of the one with whom we are speaking? The words we exchange 'cross over' the distance which separates two people. This is the meaning of the prefix *dia* in the word 'dialogue'. But it seems to me that they not only cross over this neutral space. When they proceed from the heart they do not remain superficial; they can reach the heart of the other person and rest there. I would then define dialogue as '**a word which can cross over to another person**', and it should be added, as Gabriel Ringlet suggests: 'a silence which can cross over to another person'. When we can engage in conversation confidently with a believer of another religion the testimony that we give is a testimony of acceptance, and the truth to which we attest is what I would call 'a hospitable truth', that is to say a truth which takes into account the truth of the other and where he can already recognise himself a little. The words of the Gospel are not compact and peremptory words; they are porous, open, and receptive of every human experience. That is why they can so easily enter into dialogue.

Intrareligious dialogue

The experience of monks also contributes to the development of another dimension of

interreligious dialogue. The practice of spiritual methods elaborated in the East is a significant challenge for Christians. They are in fact receiving these Hindu or Buddhist methods into the very sanctuary of their own spiritual life. True, they are only means, spiritual 'paths', but their influence can be great and all the more so if those who practise them do not realise that at the time. This is why such practices, adopted without discernment, have sometimes done harm. But Christians, and monks in particular, have better understood what is at stake in this approach.¹³ It is in fact a question of bringing a spiritual **discernment** to bear on the subject of the adoption of these practices, and this discernment is in reality an interior dialogue, carried out at the very heart of their spiritual journey. Every **interreligious** dialogue carries this '**intrareligious**' dimension, according to the expression suggested by Raimon Panikkar.¹⁴ It is the case above all in the areas which concern the spiritual life directly. The interior dialogue is sometimes a conflict, and at other times the discovery of a complementarity or a possibility of synergy, but, in any case, this dialogue is carried out as a religious endeavour and not just as something which only concerns exterior relationships.

A way of conversion

At this level dialogue is undertaken as an engagement on the path of the Gospel. One can quote here the words Pope John Paul II said, in another context it is true, but valid for all forms of dialogue: "this sort of dialogue is a challenge for all those taking part in it, a real form of spiritual experiment. It is a question of listening to the 'other' and opening oneself to the personal witness, but also learning to risk, leaving the outcome of the dialogue to God... No one can sincerely take a role in a dialogue process if he is not ready to open himself to the truth and to grow increasingly in it. Openness to the truth means willingness to change", readiness for **conversion**.¹⁵

It is possible to be even more specific about the content of this conversion in the light of the experience of monks and nuns whom I know.

Respect, tolerance and care not to impose one's own categories on those with whom one speaks is already a significant spiritual disposition. But we must go further, 'if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles'.¹⁶

Really to **listen** to someone in a religious context shows that one is prepared to pay attention but also to receive help from him, even if it comes from another spiritual universe. The guest who is welcomed among us may be a Messenger from the Lord, as has often been the case since the time of Abraham.¹⁷ He may bring a new call to conversion. **Hope** is at the heart of the movement of dialogue, as it is at the heart of every quest for the truth, as the poet Jo Bousquet tells us: 'there is no truth without investing in hope'. In fact, one can state that, without this hope in the other, the encounter remains merely formal and without much respect, since one does not expect the other person to be capable of telling us anything important. It is not always easy to demonstrate hope, but it is certain that in this way we can give a beautiful testimony of the Gospel. The invitation of St Peter in his first Epistle¹⁸ to 'give an account of the hope which is in [us]' expresses a new demand. The testimony we give cannot be limited to the content of our hope, the mystery of Christ. During the course of dialogue with a believer of another religion it is not always possible or opportune to proclaim the *kerygma*. But it is always possible to testify to the dynamism of hope which the Spirit of Christ gives us. To listen, wait and hope are attitudes of dialogue through which we can proclaim the Gospel, implicitly yet very clearly, to a person open to spiritual values.

The experience of dialogue introduces yet another evangelical experience, that of **poverty**. If, at first, the encounter with other believers is often dictated by the need to acquire new understanding and spiritual methods which can enrich us, this same contact may in the end, without our knowledge, act as an abrasive which takes away our comfortable certitudes and calls into question traditional spiritual practices. Many cultural and theological treasures accumulated through the Christian tradition to defend or illustrate our faith become less essential than they seemed. The practice of dialogue in spiritual experience brings about in this way a discernment and a clarification of formulations and methods precisely because it is an encounter at an ineffable level. Since there are risks not everyone indiscriminately should be advised to undertake it. But among those who have already acquired a certain spiritual maturity such an experience is beneficial. It makes them simpler and poorer in

heart. So 'the other, all the others are the passion and wound through which God can burst through the fortresses of our self-complacency and bring a new and fraternal humanity into being'.¹⁹

Interreligious prayer

It is now possible in this context to approach the crucial question of prayer between believers of different religious confessions. The paradoxical demands of dialogue become more strikingly obvious.

There are in fact in every culture very varied forms of prayer and meditation, and they all have in common the desire to communicate with the Ultimate. It is then here that one ought to be able to make the most positive encounter. But every prayer is nevertheless characterised by the religion in which it developed. They arose within a particular and thus exclusive confession. Is it possible to take part in a Hindu or Muslim prayer without belonging to this Community of believers?

The meaning and lack of meaning in dialogue now becomes very clear-cut. It has long been believed that at this level dialogue has no meaning and it must be renounced. At the very most one can envisage a multi-religious prayer, that is to say the juxtaposition of different expressions of prayer. But experience compels us to go further. During the Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi in 1986, the organisers had to limit the encounter to such a multi-religious prayer, where the representatives of the different religions succeeded one another on a platform set apart from the assembly to recite their prayer. In spite of all these precautions it became apparent in a flash that all of them formed but one gathering for prayer: all the religions were not too many to implore peace for our world! The participants came to realise that they not only assisted respectfully at a manifestation of an unknown faith; they were united in **a single prayer** which reached beyond the various verbal formulations. They discovered that an interreligious communion was possible through prayer which lies at the heart of each religion, if not in words, then in silence.

In a discourse to the Cardinals and members of the Roman Curia on 22 December 1986, the Pope drew theological conclusions from this event, recalling that: 'every authentic prayer is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person' (n. 11).²⁰ These words manifest a radical evolution, indeed even a revolution in theological reflection. Where until very recently one only recognised the purely natural expression of human aspiration or even an illusion of the devil, now the action of the Holy Spirit of God is seen.

This conviction obviously changes the situation of interreligious dialogue. In so far as an exchange of views with other believers cannot lead to an encounter at the inexpressible centre of our life, but must necessarily be confined to questions about formulations, history or rituals, dialogue was a hopeless undertaking. But today we are able to recognise the presence of God, particularly in the prayer of other believers, and it is here that the encounter reaches its high point. Prayer is in fact the shortest road between human beings, because God is very near to each of them. I believe that one can go so far as to say that the communion in prayer is the **keystone** of dialogue.

All forms of dialogue do not have to end in prayer. But if this possibility is excluded the structure of dialogue collapses. 'When two people talk together, there is always a third who may listen: the eternal listener. But where this eternal listener is absent, all the talking becomes monologues, even the dialogues'.²¹

Finally to go beyond fear

Thomas Merton had a presentiment of this during his journey in Asia:⁶ 'The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are'.²²

This conclusion to an improvised talk is not a thesis of dogmatic theology, but it expresses very well the determining role of such a communion in interreligious encounter at the spiritual level.

It is not surprising that this role may not yet be recognised by all Christians. Those who have

not already had the experience of an interreligious encounter which touched them at the deepest level find it difficult to grasp. For them the result of dialogue is at another level. ‘The purpose of interreligious dialogue is the knowledge and mutual esteem which enables one to establish a relationship of understanding and friendship and which, in its turn, permits a closer collaboration in the defence of spiritual values and in activities promoting justice, fraternity and peace, since this is the specific work of religions for the good of humanity’.²³ In this perspective, it must be noted, the ultimate end of dialogue seems to be the composition of a league for the mutual defence of spiritual values. The sharing of these values and the reciprocal stimulation received are not envisaged — though they are not excluded. The only thing in the mind of the author of this editorial is the relationship of strength with other religions and with ideologies and mentalities which threaten spiritual values. Yet when one rallies one’s strength, it is because one is afraid.

So we return to the question at the beginning: how can we liberate ourselves from fear? The fear which threatens every religion but also the fear the religions have of each other, the two are linked.

It seems to me that to get beyond these fears it is not enough for the religions to turn to exterior factors on every occasion to meet the dangers that the present world imposes on them. One must begin by turning together towards the interior, for mutual stimulation in the spiritual quest. Activities promoting justice and peace stemming from this quest will surely be more serene and relevant.

This path of interior experience and conversion of heart is more difficult than encounter directed to an external goal. But it is the only path which enables one to get beyond the contradictory demands of dialogue and the fear which they engender. It does not evade problems by sliding over the top of them. On the contrary it approaches all the demands of interreligious dialogue clearly and humbly: it recognises the paradoxical calls and even discerns within it a true *koan*. In taking the experience of so many men and women, Christians or those of other religions, as a basis, I am sure that it can be done, because it brings into play a very intense religious engagement to **go into the matter** as deeply as possible. And it is only by going into the foundation of one’s life that one finds the solution to the *koan*, a way into the mystery of the will of God for our world and its many religions. This is why I believe that the path of dialogue in spiritual experience is a grace for our time.

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Notes

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¹ *Koan* was originally a juridical term, a ‘typical case’ in jurisprudence. In the Zen tradition it is used for typical stories of the enlightenment of a disciple. The encounters with a Master, which are evoked in these *koan*, are most often characterised by a paradoxical logic or even an apparent absurdity. Only a very intense spiritual concentration can unlock the meaning.

² *Mumonkan*, commentary of Mumon originally from *Joshu’s dog*.

³ ‘*Sumat humilitas audaciam*’, in the *Sermon super Missus est*.

⁴ Book of Lamentations, 3:28.

⁵ St Jerome. *Letters*, 50:4, PL 22:514.

⁶ ‘Listen!’ is the first word in the Rule of St Benedict.

⁷ According to the expression proposed in 1984 by the Secretariat for Non-Christians (now called Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) in its document entitled *Attitude of the Catholic Church Towards Believers of Other Religions*, n. 35.

⁸ One of the visits has been described by Benoît Billot, *Voyages dans les monastères zen*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1987.

⁹ Benedictine Rule, 53:9.

¹⁰ Christian de Chergé, in a private conversation.

¹¹ I have dealt with this theme in a more systematic way in a book entitled *By Faith and Hospitality*, published by Gracewing, Leominster, UK.

¹² *Opera Minora*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1969, t. 3, p. 586.

¹³ Cf. *Contemplation et Dialogue, repères et perspectives es puisées dans l'expérience des moines*, published by the DIM Commission, *Bulletin du Conseil Pontifical pour le Dialogue entre les religions*, 1993, XXVIII/3 no. 84, pp. 250-270.

¹⁴ *Le Dialogue intrareligieux*, Paris, Aubier, 1985.

¹⁵ La Nécessité du dialogue dans une Église troublée et divisée, John Paul II's Address in German to the Austrian Bishops at Archbishop's residence in Vienna, 21 June 1998, n. 7 (in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, 8 July 1998, p. 4; cf. *La Documentation Catholique*, 19 July 1998, no. 2186).

¹⁶ Cf. Mt. 5:41, (RSV).

¹⁷ Cf. Genesis 18:1-10 and RB 61:4.

¹⁸ I Peter 3:15.

¹⁹ Mgr Pierre Claverie, Bishop of Oran, in the introduction to *Missel des Dimanches*, 1996, Paris, Édition collective des Editeurs liturgiques.

²⁰ Discourse to the Cardinals and the Curia, 22 December 1986, *Bulletin du Secretariat pour les non-chrétiens*, no. 64, 1987-XXII/I, p. 69; ORE.

²¹ Max Picard, *La fuite devant Dieu*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1956, p. 76.

²² *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, New York, New Directions, 1973, Appendix 3, p. 308.

²³ *Le christianisme et les autres religions, — le débat sur le dialogue interreligieux*, unsigned editorial in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, no. 3494, 1996, 1, p. 116.

Ref.: *A.I.M. Bulletin (Alliance for International Monasticism)*, 2004, n. 80-81 (double number), pp. 9-20.



Women in Dialogue

Penelope Jonhstone and Rabiatu Ammah

On the Straight Path Women in Islam

Penelope Johnstone*

Introduction

In recent years, Islam has attracted attention for many reasons, in particular for the phenomenon of young women deliberately choosing to follow its rulings with devotion and enthusiasm. This is hardly consistent with the popular stereotype of Islam in the Western world, and especially of 'women in Islam': perhaps a silent veiled figure, submissive to menfolk and family. So what makes conversion to Islam such an attractive proposition for many young Western women?

In search of a few answers I went first to traditional sources, and then to modern Muslim women. A different picture began to emerge. Women can find in Islam a sense of security, identity, and spiritual fulfillment which they have not found elsewhere. Islam's very specific and demanding rules of diet, comportment, and religious practice, when interpreted from their spiritual aspect, can prove not to be restrictive but to bring these women a true sense of freedom.

Women in the Qur'ân

First we look at Islam in historical terms, and this means primarily the Qur'ân. Guidance is a vital element in Islam. The Qur'ân itself is described in many places as 'guidance', as a mercy to humankind, freely offered to all people on equal terms (e.g. 6:157). The Fatiha, so often recited, contains only one request:

'Lead us on the straight path ...'.

Muhammad and his followers look not to a personal saviour but a 'clear message', summoning them to the worship of the One God: not only to ritual, but to an entire life in conformity with the will of God.

The Qur'ân, then, has guidance for all; but how much of it relates specifically to women? It is generally accepted that Islam did improve the lot and status of women. The Qur'ân commands that female children must be brought up and cared for (not killed, as sometimes had happened); that orphans and widows must be provided for; that up to four wives (only) may be taken, and must be treated well. On the other hand, in the context of marriage certain verses say that equal treatment is almost impossible, which has led some to interpret this as forbidding polygamy.¹

Women's religious value is clearly stated in the Qur'ân. Men and women are equal before God, who created them with their differences:

O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person (or soul); created, from it, its mate, and from these two scattered (like seeds) countless men and women. Reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you); for Allah ever watches over you (Q. 4:1).

In their duties, and reward, they are equal:

For Muslim men and women — for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise — For them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward (Q. 33:35).

In each category both the masculine and feminine plural forms are used, making it abundantly clear that both men and women are addressed. Elsewhere, anyone who does good deeds, 'be they male or female', will enter Paradise (Q. 4:124). As is well known, there are verses giving women a different status from men, especially regarding inheritance, marriage, and divorce; but a great deal depends on interpretation and on the context, as Muslim women themselves are increasingly coming to realise. A good self-image in the socio-economic field, which many Muslim women are developing, must have some connection with a sense of self-worth in a more strictly religious context.

One woman in particular is mentioned at some length in the Qur'ân: Maryam (after whom *sura* 19 is named), indicating Mary the Mother of Jesus. The account given of her can be traced to both New Testament and apocryphal sources. In one narrative the Angels sent to her say: 'O Maryam! Allah has chosen thee and purified thee, and chosen thee above the women of all nations' (Q. 3:42). The parallel narrative in *sura* 19 refers to the messenger as 'our spirit' (*ruh*). Mary/Maryam is described as an example of devotion and purity, receiving special privileges. In the extended sense, she is a 'Muslim woman', for the word itself means simply one who has submitted to God.

Where women are concerned, the Qur'ân lays down principles and basic commands which are then often explained and elaborated by the *hadith*, the second source of Islamic law.²

Women in the tradition

Individual items of *hadith* are often reported on the authority of one of the Prophet's wives, in particular 'A'isha, his favourite wife, who outlived him by many years. Women played an important part in the Prophet's life, and he treated them with respect. His first wife, Khadija, supported him through the troubled early years of his message and preaching, and he always spoke of her with respect and gratitude. Only after her death did he take other wives.

These Wives of the Prophet were later known collectively as 'mothers of the believers', after a Qur'anic verse: 'The Prophet is closer to the believers than their selves, and his wives are [as] their mothers' (Q. 33:6); and they are told directly: 'You are not like any other women' (Q. 33:62). In some *hadith* 'A'isha is described as 'superior' to all other women, though not to Maryam.

Fatima, the Prophet's daughter by Khadija, was married to Muhammad's cousin 'Ali, one of the first believers and later the fourth Caliph. She was a model daughter and wife, and with her father, husband, and two sons Hasan and Husayn, forms the *Ahl al-bayt*, the Household *par excellence*. Many traditions about her superiority circulate among the Shi'a Muslims.³ She is described as the 'mistress of the female inhabitants of heaven, except for Maryam'; she is to be the first woman to enter Paradise on the last day.

References to women of piety are few until we meet with Râbi'a al-'Adawiyya of Baghdad (c. AD 717-800). Her story has been told in detail by Margaret Smith, who places her in the tradition

of asceticism and contemplation reaching back to the Christian Fathers of the Desert.⁴ She was considered the equal of a man, and accepted as a guide and teacher by her contemporary, male, Sufis. Even within the context of her time, Râbi'a was exceptional in her disregard of all worldly matters, even thinking that the study of *hadith* was a distraction from prayer. She wished only to live in total accord with the will of God, and in the end welcomed death. Some of her prayers are often quoted:

O my God, if I worship you from fear of hell, burn me in hell; and if I worship you from the hope of Paradise, exclude me from it. But if I worship you for your own sake, then do not withhold from me your Eternal Beauty.

... You have given me life and cared for me, and yours is the glory. If you were to drive me from your door, yet I would not forsake it, for the love that I bear towards you.

Tradition has great importance in Islam, so this historical background is relevant to the position and role of women today, to how they see themselves, how they relate to their history; to the place in their lives given to prayer and Qur'ân reading; and to how they pass on the faith to their children.

Women in Islam today

First we can look briefly at a modern woman scholar, Riffat Hassan, of Pakistani origin, who deals boldly with some areas of deep controversy. These issues, because they stem from the Qur'ân, can affect the lives of women in countless ways.

In a long discussion of creation and the Islamic tradition, she points out inconsistencies in a *hadith* which says that woman, created from man's rib, is crooked. She holds 'That Allah's original creation was undifferentiated humanity is implicit in a number of Qur'anic passages', e.g. 'And of him/it [humanity] He made two sexes, male and female' (Q. 75:39). She addresses women themselves, convinced that they must return to the point of origin and challenge the authenticity of *abadith* (*hadith*-s) which makes them ontologically inferior, subordinate and crooked. It is gratifying to know that these *abadith* cannot be the words of the Prophet of Islam, whom history portrays as a staunch upholder of the rights of women.⁵

Elsewhere she points out how the Qur'ân and *hadith*, the primary sources, have been interpreted solely by men; and that modern Islamisation processes have systematically sought to deprive women of their rights. She is however loyal to that true Islam in which patriarchy is not inherent: 'The Qur'ân, as God's word, cannot be made the source of human injustice'.⁶

I was present on one occasion when a talk by Riffat Hassan caused initial consternation for a group of Muslim women. Later, on reflection, they found that to go back to the sources, in the company of a woman scholar, was enlightening and liberating.

Most women do not go so deeply into the theory, but live their faith from day to day, having to work out difficulties for themselves. It is this daily-life kind of faith that was described to me by several women, from a variety of backgrounds: Somali, Pakistani, Indian, Moroccan, Jordanian, and English, mostly living in Britain. Some of these women were already friends of mine and agreed to talk about their faith — which a few had done before several times. Some were introduced to me for the purpose of interview. Some belong to a Sufi order or *tariqa*; most are married with children. Only two have work which is specifically connected with Islam. They do not agree on all points, but are united in their loyalty to Islam and in their sense of responsibility and of contentment as Muslim women. While there is no more a 'standard Muslim' than there is a 'typical Christian', these women together are an articulate group who have much to say to us. Although of a different faith community, we can in some ways identify with them.

Religious duties

Prayer to these women is central, being the basis of a person's relationship to God and to fellow believers. Prayer gives structure to the day; it fits into the natural cycle, and puts things into perspective.

Five times a day, it is a deliberate reaching out to God, putting oneself into the place of creature and worshipper, and a regular reminder of what is really important. One woman says, 'Prayer makes me feel humble; God has put me here to be a trustee', and in this way, obeying his commands is easier, and a joyful task.

There is stress on the personal influence on the young exerted by parents, grandparents, and the extended family. Children can be taught gradually, encouraged to join in the prayer ritual when they wish; and they generally do wish, as it is a sign of becoming grown-up. So is fasting. A few of these women had not had this training in their youth. For one, the discovery of the duties of the faith and the discipline of prayer had totally transformed her life and way of thinking: 'It was like a miracle'. It is even harder for a 'new' Muslim, a convert, to learn the language and actions of the worship; but even so, it is seen as something that is meant to be 'simple, and not a burden'.

The formal obligatory worship can instil feelings of awe, thankfulness and trust, and can lead on to more private prayer, to 'talking to God in an informal way'. Guidance can come too, not as a flash of inspiration but from deep within, or from some external contact or advice. There is personal responsibility, but upheld by the divine: 'The more you pray, the more certain you become of your own decision'.

Ramadan, the month of fasting, can create a greater awareness of spiritual things, sensitivity to others, consciousness of duties towards God. 'Ramadan is a gift' despite the very real discipline and sometimes hardship of going without food and water all day: 'It is a time for reappraisal of your whole life'.

In a Muslim country Ramadan takes on an extra significance, being part of normal life and local culture. There is a sense of solidarity, and of enjoyment in preparing the evening food and meeting friends and family. Almsgiving is encouraged, and the poor are remembered and helped.

Women, the Qur'ân and Arabic

Prayer and fasting are both commanded by the Qur'ân. Reading the Qur'ân is a pious duty, and when women gather they will often read an extract and use this as a basis for discussion: it is a constant source of inquiry, teaching and wonder. Several years ago I attended, by invitation, a small gathering of Muslim women during Ramadan. Only a few were of Arabic background, and five were recent converts; as it happened, they asked me, the only non-Muslim present, to translate the Qur'anic passage into everyday English for the 'new' Muslims. This probably does not happen often though.

The women who spoke to me consider it important to know the Qur'ân in Arabic, and will try both to learn it themselves and ensure that their children are instructed. One woman saw it as a 'liberation' to understand the Arabic and be able to 'go to the source'. Conflicting views came to light, from the Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic speaking Muslims, whether to know and also understand is vital or whether to recite is what matters. In both cases, learning by heart is valued.

Clothing and the veil

Muslim women all agreed that clothes and bearing should be appropriate and 'modest', something which applies to men also. The Qur'ân addresses both:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; ...

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except that [must ordinarily] appear ... that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to [men to whom they are related] (Q. 24:30-31).

The ways in which 'veiling' has been interpreted throughout history are due to a number of factors, most obviously the cultural milieu, the social status of the women (and primarily their husbands), economic considerations, the general attitude and expectations of the time, and sheer

practicality. A village woman who has to work in the fields will have different constraints from those of a woman in the city. In its most extreme form, the *hijab* (literally veil or curtain), or its subcontinental equivalent the *burqa*, may mean completely covering the body to conceal the hair, perhaps the face also, as well as the outline of the female form.

The *hijab* may be adopted by women who wish to signal that they are devout Muslims, and in some Islamic countries may be a sign of conformity, or indeed the women may be under pressure to dress this way — something which can happen in Egypt for example. A non-Muslim observer points out that in Britain:

There is a variety of attitudes among Muslims themselves towards the question of whether it is correct for females to cover their heads and for some the 'burqa' is associated with economic status and educational attainment, rather than simply religious 'identity'.⁸

The more independent Muslim women generally have their own ideas, and are well able to sort out the essentials. One spoke of the 'internal *hijab*' and being confident with her inner self. Another said the scarf is for her a 'protection' and brings respect, as people know she is a Muslim. Some Malaysian students in Manchester told me some years ago that they had adopted the strict Muslim clothing on arrival, as protection from what they saw as a very permissive and unsafe environment. It is 'not what you were but what you are' that ultimately matters, as one told me who also said that she would put on her headscarf to pray. Realising the difference can leave the individual free to choose her level of veiling, provided of course that family, husband, and society agree.

Past and present

In this and other matters, women of early Islamic times can be seen today as role models, at any rate to a limited extent; and can be a source of strength, showing women's real status in the formative period. But they are not always well known, and this is probably the result of the early education of children, and the way in which these women are presented. Khadija is perhaps a bit shadowy, but also a 'mother figure', as one young woman said, and very close to the source. 'A'isha is acknowledged to be significant in early Islamic history, and is seen as a strong and independent-minded woman; Fatima, revered by the Shi'a, is also important in Sunni tradition. From somewhat later, Râbi 'a the Sufi is seen as independent and influential, a source of advice and teaching, the embodiment of religious devotion, and is able to inspire one young woman with 'this same world negating feel'. In the bustle of modern life, she 'shows how close you can get to your Creator'.

The woman of today, however, has very different pressures, problems, opportunities, and prospects. One, a convert, feels 'privileged and fulfilled' as a human being and a woman within Islam, while another speaks of the equal responsibility of man and woman, as she has experienced it. In spiritual matters they see no distinction, because 'the spirit, like God, has no gender'. The physiological differences are acknowledged, for men are stronger physically. One woman described how her attitude changed with the arrival of children: it is they, not the state of marriage, which keeps her from other activities.

They agree that young women should be encouraged to develop their gifts and skills, for training and experience are of immense benefit within a family, and the mother is traditionally the first teacher of her children. Each woman is different, and has to be 'in tune with her *fitra*' (innate God-given nature); 'We don't all use our potential, but we must for the sake of humanity'. The *hadith* on seeking knowledge applies to all equally, though circumstances and abilities differ.

The degree, or lack, of freedom is acknowledged, but is not seen as the fault of Islam: 'The Prophet came to liberate women, not oppress them. Islamic societies do vary, and they are subject to mistakes like any other'. It is this same *fitra* that 'makes all of us seek God, search for something or someone greater than ourselves'.

These women, and many others, strive to keep their faith and daily life in harmony, whether or not they combine work with family duties, while the rhythm of prayer brings the whole of life

consciously into the presence of the Creator. As one very practical woman said: 'Islam is all about worship, and how to relate it to reality. Everything is worship'.

Notes

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¹ Qur'ân 4:3, cf. 4:129. Qur'anic verses quoted here are from Yusuf Ali, *An English Version of the Holy Qur'ân* (Lahore, n.d.) All the verses referring to women can be found in a convenient form (though a different version) in W.W. Fernea and B.Q. Bezirgan, eds., *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, University of Texas Press, 1977, 7-26. This anthology gives some useful extracts illustrating a wide variety of subjects concerning Muslim women.

² The *hadith*, the account of the words and actions of the Prophet, were collected in written form in the 9th century AD. Reference here is mostly to *hadith* in Bukhari's collection.

³ The majority of Muslims in Britain are of the Sunni branch. A sizeable minority belong to the Shi'a, and there are Isma'ilis. The women interviewed for this article were Sunni.

⁴ Margaret Smith, *Râbi'a the mystic and her fellow-saints in Islam*, Cambridge University Press, 1928. Briefer information about Râbi'a can be found in Smith's *The way of the mystics: the early Christian mystics and the rise of the Sufis*, reprint, Sheldon Press, 1976.

⁵ Riffat Hassan, 'Made from Adam's rib: the woman's creation question', *al-Mushir* xxvii, 1985/3, 124-55, at pp. 143 and 154.

⁶ Riffat Hassan, 'Muslim women and post-patriarchal Islam', P. McCooey, W.R. Eakin, J.B. McDaniel, eds., *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, New York, Orbis, 1991, 60.

⁷ Interviews carried out mainly between September and December 1997.

⁸ Marie Parker-Jenkins, *Educating Muslims' Children*, School of Education, University of Nottingham, 1991, 14.

My thanks go to the editors of The Way, and to the Muslim women who gave their time and effort to be interviewed for the article.

Building God's Peace and Justice Together

*Rabiatu Ammah

Introduction

This paper will focus on a critical assessment of the position of non-Muslims in the context of the call for Shari'a from a cross-section of Muslims. Are non-Muslim minorities marginalized in this situation by religion *per se*, or are there other factors such as ethnicity, economics or sheer ignorance that hinder the promotion of the principles of Islamization? I will address these questions from my own background as a Muslim, an African and a woman; my examples will be taken from my country, Ghana, as well as other places such as Nigeria and Sudan where Islamization has taken place. First, though, I wish briefly to set out the conceptual framework with which I shall be working.

Conceptual Framework

My understanding of Islam is that it is an 'ecumenical' summons to the whole of creation to share in God's peace. According to the Qur'ân, Islam is all-embracing in terms of nature, humankind

and human history. Its mission is to proclaim this ecumenical understanding, which means to affirm Islam as the inherent or innate truth of religions, and to challenge any religious pretensions which seek to limit the universality of divine revelation. This affirmation and challenge must be given by Muslims in relation to all other historical religions, but, at the same time, they must apply them with equal vigour to their own critique of historical Islam. Hence, the Qurʾān calls people of religion to an interreligious dialectic. In particular, Muslims and Christians are called to engage in ecumenical dialogue in witness to the faith in God which they have in common, so that they can work together in fulfilling their mutual responsibility of seeking peace on earth through obedience to the divine will. The desire for community — a community of harmony and peace — is common to both Islam and Christianity.

Muslims and Christians are therefore called to action to establish the *umma* or the ‘Kingdom of God on earth’. They have a common agenda, which is not simply a matter of acknowledging one another’s commonalities. The critical question is how Muslims and Christians can together establish the peace, justice and righteousness that underlie their traditions in contexts where, on the one hand, there is a constant cry for the application of the *Shari‘a* in Muslim communities with Christian minorities and, on the other, Christians insist that their rights will be violated. Can Islamization be effected in the multi-religious and secular societies in which we live, in ways that will be meaningful and generally acceptable?

Setting the Agenda

In a pluralistic society, questions of inter-communal harmony assume great importance. Freedom of conscience, speech and religion, and the right to profess as well as to propagate one’s religious convictions consistently with law and morality will be regarded as inviolable rights of everyone in the modern world. Whilst contemporary discussion around the Muslim world regarding a more authentic way of life makes the question of Islamization a relevant topic on one hand, non-Muslims living in Muslim societies see this issue not merely as relevant but as threatening their very existence on the other. Islamization appears to have a stigma attached to it, and non-Muslims are very apprehensive about the whole process. It has been construed as militant, archaic and retrogressive, with very little to offer to the world, and as exhibiting a basic attitude of rejection towards those who do not belong to it.

This has come about as a result of the methodology adopted by those who wish to show their zeal for Islam and, who in their bid to demonstrate this, emphasize only the *hudūd* in a discriminatory way. As a Muslim, I too feel threatened by this militant way of doing things; it is also gendered. A further problematic area is the negative connotation associated with the classically formulated concept of the *dhimmī*, or non-Muslim living under the jurisdiction and protection of Islam. The arguments here hinge on the fact that the *dhimmī* is basically discriminated against, not being considered a full citizen. There arises therefore a polarity between Muslims and non-Muslims on the question of the status of the *dhimmī*.

Thus, using Islam as an ideology raises problems for the non-Muslim who does not believe in Islam. Islamization is perceived by the non-Muslim as having different standards and laws for different sections of the population in the same state in matters of public concern. It would appear that with Islamization one religion is the axis around which public life revolves, and non-Muslims therefore cannot participate fully in the conduct of national life. This attitude not only frustrates the minority community, but also prevents its members from utilizing their capabilities to the full. In the long run, it may also deprive the State of some of its finest human resources.

While the general attitude of the media towards *Shari‘a* may be regarded to some degree as biased and prejudiced, and also as perpetuating stereotypes, certain approaches to Islamization and the status of non-Muslims have certainly given cause for alarm and reservation. Muslim attitudes have not helped the situation in several cases — for example in Nigeria, where the application of Islamization seems to be more interested in flogging (especially women) rather than in creating wealth. This interpretation and application of the *Shari‘a* is stacked against women. It is not surprising

that, for instance, during Numeiri's Islamization process in Sudan, the Republican Brothers contended that the traditional interpretation of the *Shari'a*, especially as related to Muslim women and to non-Muslims, was outright discriminatory. Thus, *fiqh* and its teachings on non-Muslims should be seen in its proper context. Verses relating to the *ahl al-kitab* and the question of *dhimmi* status must be studied critically, analysed and evaluated in historical contexts.

As a Muslim who believes that Muslims should be able to live according to the principles of *Shari'a*, the problem for me is not how to dissuade fellow Muslims. Rather, the problem is to see how Muslims can be objective and realistic in dealing with those who do not subscribe to their ideology yet who are a part of the same community. A related question is that of creating a congenial atmosphere of justice and freedom for Muslims themselves. Contemporary Muslims should not address these issues from the point of view of the classical formulations of *fiqh* if they are to minimize the fears and the apprehensions held by non-Muslims. The question relating to the *jizya*, the concept of *dhimmi*, and the penalty for the apostate are typical examples which have to be explained contextually to be meaningful in the contemporary world.

As has been intimated, approaches to these issues from Muslims themselves have influenced some negative attitudes. Yet the *Shari'a* as a system should not be seen as an instrument of oppression; properly interpreted and applied, it acknowledges and caters for the rights of non-Muslims. The *Shari'a* has principles that can help improve the socio-economic, mental, emotional, and spiritual life of the human being, if applied properly. A Christian or Muslim should not feel apprehensive about such a holistic system, because Christianity presumably stands for the same objective. This being so, there is need for a dialogue between the different religious traditions to map out a strategy in the contemporary world to achieve these goals.

In setting the agenda for any meaningful discussions between Christians and Muslims, it is also imperative to review the 'why' of Islamization in the contemporary world, especially as this is intricately related to extremism, a search for a voice, and a search for justice. I have often asked myself why I, as an African, should be subjected to British law and why I should be bound by it. Can I, as a matter of divine or human right, choose to revert to another system? Should not Africans, both Christians and Muslims, be able in principle to revert to traditional religions if they so wish, since what the colonial systems bequeathed to them is so alien to their culture? The history of colonialism and imperialism, and the legacy these have left for Africa, are well known, as are Africa's problems of poverty, disease and instability, and its struggles to become politically, economically and ideologically independent.

Marginalization and extremism

It is against this background that the agitations in various parts of the Muslim world can be considered — not with the intention of revisiting history and the pain associated with it, but rather to show that some policies have had, and continue to have, far-reaching implications and ramifications for Christian-Muslim relations. For example, colonial policy on education in Northern Ghana was such that Muslims were marginalized as a result of missionaries being asked not to operate schools in predominantly Muslim areas; in places where they did open schools, conversions took place.

Thus, lack of education relegated Muslims to the periphery of the periphery. While this policy had nothing essentially to do with Christianity or with the teachings of Jesus, Muslims still view this marginalization in the light of religion as the implementers of the policy were Christian.

A critical question which must be addressed is this: what do people do when, as a result of perceived injustice and human rights violations, fundamentalists are pushed to the wall? How do displaced people react when the whole world does very little about their plight? For some people the answer lies in extremism. I do not subscribe to, and would not justify, such a reaction, yet it does seem that extremism is sometimes rooted in discontent, dissatisfaction, oppression and dejection. Therefore the fundamental human question of justice needs to be addressed, since it lies at the core of religion.

One way Muslim communities can seriously curb fundamentalism and extremism is for the

authorities to give them a voice and constantly to engage in dialogue with them on critical issues. Through such a relationship, the authorities may come to appreciate some of the concerns raised by fundamentalists, and find ways of dealing with them before they get out of hand. Another way of trying to curb this tendency is for different Muslim organizations to meet regularly and deliberate on how to forestall these tendencies in their respective countries. Most important, in Muslim-dominated areas where there are minorities, special efforts should be made to contact, to engage in dialogue, and to find solutions to the needs of these minorities. Efforts should also be made to explain the Islamic religion to them in an intelligible manner, so that the minorities earn the trust of Muslims.

Education of the general Muslim community is critical in controlling the fundamentalist trend. This means that an academic study of religions in Muslim communities should pervade the educational system. In the same vein, Islam should be studied analytically and critically at all levels of society, whether formally or informally. Part of the curricula or syllabuses of educational institutions should address the question of how the *Shari'ah* can be made intelligible and meaningful in a modern democratic State. It should also emphasize peace studies, trying to inculcate the values of love, tolerance and forgiveness through the family system. This would help in the moulding of progressive Muslims, true to their faith and also open-minded and tolerant. In dealing with the question of fundamentalism or extremism, it is also important to point out that, because Islam is in no way monolithic and there are divisions based on sectarian and spiritual lines, there can be no single model to emulate. This is in itself problematic, yet the question of extremism has to be tackled through education, which is a slow process. The Muslim academic community, therefore, has a major task ahead in taking up this challenge.

Contextualization

For me in Africa, setting the agenda also means dealing with bread and butter issues. Hence the discussions go beyond the academic discourse into other realms. Whilst issues of *Shari'ah* and *dhimmi* status may be of global relevance (and more so to us because of the Nigerian situation), Christians and Muslims already have an Agenda for Africa.

In addition to the common global issues, the local context must also be given due consideration. A critical issue is how Muslims and Christians in Africa can work together to eradicate malaria, poverty, disease and corruption, and endow their society with peace and justice on the continent — the mosquito does not discriminate on the basis of religion.

The difficult economic situation of most African countries is well known. The insecurity in so many people's lives as a result of war, famine and natural disasters make it imperative for Muslims to use resources within Islam to find solutions to such enormous problems. This could be achieved more effectively if people of faith were to mobilize resources to improve their social economic status, a step necessary to restore confidence and raise the standard of living. It is a sin for a Christian to enquire about the religious affiliation of people before putting up a school in a particular area. In the same vein, it is un-Islamic, almost tantamount to *kufr* (ungratefulness), for a Muslim to build a well and not to make it accessible to non-Muslims. This contradicts the concept of social justice, which does not know of any distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Through the mercy and grace of God, even those who do not believe in God still enjoy his sustenance and his bounty.

A presupposition of such cooperation is that Muslims, Christians and all people should be alert to the political domain. It is the duty of all to criticize Governments in Africa which are oppressive, dictatorial and unable to serve people. Muslims and Christians committed to creating the Kingdom of God have much to do to create better, healthy and strong independent nations. In view of this, Muslims and Christians must do advocacy on these critical questions, most of which are not necessarily theological or religious. Muslims and Christians must collaborate and network in promoting peace and justice.

I have tried to show how these two religions are bonded on the basis of a common humanity with an agenda for action. There is a divine imperative not only to talk but to act. For this divine

imperative to be successful, on one hand Muslims must revisit the question of the *dhimmi* in the context of Islamic political reassertation. On the other, Christians must also appreciate the cultural and identity crises which Muslims are going through, and their effort to find an alternative lifestyle.

Critical questions of the causes of extremism and fundamentalism need to be taken seriously, not glossed over as trivial issues. Although there are important global questions to discuss, contextualization of these issues in particular situations is indispensable.

Note

* Dr Rabiatu Ammah, participated in the Christian-Muslim Seminar entitled: 'Building Bridges' held at Lambeth Palace in January 2002. She is a Muslim lecturer at the University of Ghana.

Ref.: [For both articles]: *ENCOUNTER (Documents for Muslim-Christian Understanding)*, January 2003, n. 291.

Coming Events

SEDOS MAY SEMINAR 2006

**“ MISSION and MONEY:
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?