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Editorial

Peace, Joy and Hope!

These are three of the seeds we need to sow in our society so that Love can take root. It seems that the dark forces of despair are getting the upper hand but we are here to hold our candle aloft on the top of the mountain as a beacon of hope for all our brothers and sisters.

In *“Disciples of Jesus: Bearers of Compassion, Peace and Hope in Our World”*, **Hermann Shalück**, OFM, shares with the readers his reflections on a missionary spirituality of hope. To be bearers of Hope and healing we must witness to the ‘encompassing presence of the Spirit of the Risen Lord’ in our midst.

Jean-Blaise Kenmogne in *“Les Églises dans la dynamique du développement : Qu’ont-elles fait et que peuvent-elles faire encore ?”* analyses the role of the Church in the development of society past and present. Our pastoral message and commitment should make us real agents of social transformation.

Religions should understand and respect each other so as to build harmony in society. Interreligious Dialogue on the agenda of the Religious Congregations is becoming ‘an integral part of the commitment to the evangelising mission of the Church’. **Soosai Arokiasamy**, SJ, in *“The Charism and Role of Religious for Building the Local Church Through the Ministry of Interreligious Dialogue”* presents this Dialogue as the Dialogue Ministry.

In *“Le dialogue islamo-chrétien en Afrique de l’Ouest”*, **Hyacinthe Loua**, SJ, contributes a positive and constructive experience on how the community of West Africa practises dialogue at the level of cultural and civic activities by implicitly acknowledging their religious connotations.

Philip Gibbs, SVD, in *“Politics and the Mission of the Church in Oceania”* explains the partnership between politics and mission in the building of the Kingdom of God by analysing the practical case of Oceania.

Theo Aerts, SVD, in *“The Birth of a Religious Movement: A Comparison of Melanesian Cargo Cults and Early Christianity”*, argues that messianic and millenaristic expectations could be signs of healthy development in some circumstances and that they can even contribute to a better understanding of our Christian messianism.

Jojo Joseph takes us back to our beginnings with his essay on the *“Mission of the Incarnate Word Among the Israelites”*. Spiritual renewal: invigorating the old wine or replacing it with new wine? The Incarnate Word reveals the divine concern over the waning of spirituality and the growing ritualism that tends to choke the process of spiritual renewal in the community.

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Disciples of Jesus: Bearers of Compassion, Peace and Hope in Our World

- Hermann Schalück, OFM -

This article is adapted from the Retreat Sessions given to the Sisters of Notre Dame, General Chapter 2004.

Introduction

In search of a missionary spirituality of hope

Which expectations, visions and hopes are alive in our Church and in our Congregations? In your Congregation? What are the challenges a missionary Church and a missionary congregation face today? We have to ask ourselves again and again: "What keeps us going? What makes us live and look beyond our sometimes frightful limitations, shortcomings and failures? Where are the sources of our hope?". Of course the answer can only be this: It is the Risen Christ who inspires us. We drink from the Gospel. We celebrate the Lord's presence in our midst.

In the midst of our weakness in the confusion of the globalized society, men and women feel a deep desire, a deep unsatisfied longing. They want to live in meaningful and creative ways, in relationship, and not to feel themselves the playthings of anonymous powers. They want to be active, responsible, respected in their dignity and in their rights. So many people are lonely. They long for love. What many people experience in a very special way is the feeling of powerlessness, if not outright resignation and cynicism in the face of that propensity for violence that pervades our societies and that characterizes the recent history of the international community.

Many people will probably ask: Is it worthwhile – especially in this very particular context – to speak about compassion, to try build a culture of dialogue and respect? Is it possible to be bearers of hope?

The doubts and questions are there, but we must deepen and strengthen our resolve to remain faithful and to become ever more creative in our commitment.

Personally, I think the most powerful remedy against resignation is common discernment, and in a very particular way the attempt to be "contemplatives" in the midst of our complex post-modern world, trying to see and to hear what the Lord has to tell us.

A "contemplative stance" is in itself healing. It goes beyond what is secondary, superfluous, dangerous, destructive. It "focuses" our view on what is meaningful and essential. It makes us discover new (re-)sources. First and foremost, through contemplation a basic dimension of discipleship becomes visible. Only those who, in following Jesus' example of life and service, know how to "let go", even of their own lives, will be able to live meaningfully ("to gain life"). This "letting go" is not at all pure passivity. It includes the active willingness to do everything that is in our possibilities in order to bring God's love into this world. But "contemplation" also makes us receptive and open to "surprises", to what lies beyond our human potentialities and to healing and transformation. The Chinese Tao puts it like this: "To do the important requires not-doing". But Christian contemplation is not escapist. It rather leads to solidarity. Martin Buber said: "To look away from the world does not lead to God. To stare at the world does not lead to him either". A word of Asian wisdom may also explain what I am trying to say: "Dig wells before thirst overcomes you". In the long run to create and to live a meaningful life is only possible if we have a reservoir of values, of hope, of love.

In speaking about the reasons for our hope, the topic of "healing" will be recurrent. The LWF Tenth Assembly (Winnipeg 2003) made the following statement: "The theme of healing explicitly points to the world and various contexts in which we live. The truth that faith confesses must come alive, be understood, confessed and lived out in ways that genuinely speak and respond to the world's needs. According to Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall, confession takes place when we view the world through Christian

belief and are thrust into an active engagement with what threatens the life of our world. When we assemble together here, it will not be primarily to lament the state of the world. We gather because of our conviction and proclamation that the God we know in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is 'for the healing of the world'. This is the distinct witness we as Christians bring to this widely shared concern for healing. We will be exploring the implications of this for our lives and our congregations".

Jesus' answer to suffering was his healing ministry. Jesus came to break the power of suffering by means of the much greater power of God's love and compassion, revealed in his own life and person. That is why Jesus was not content merely to heal physically. In his incarnation, he drew near to the world of suffering, because suffering belongs to the "human condition". In all, he offered a perspective that can overcome the sense of uselessness of suffering and death. Jesus Christ is indeed the wounded healer, the one who has proved the truth of God's love by the truth of his suffering. In him, God himself showed compassion. A suffering God is a scandal for some religions. But the fact remains that for Christians he revealed himself most visibly through human suffering.

Divine "impassibility" is challenged by the incarnation, by Jesus' suffering and inflicted death. One aspect I want to underline very clearly: Jesus was never "victimized" in the sense that he lost trust, that he became unable to reach out and to love. On the contrary, he shows us that there is something in us that cannot be destroyed by violence, hatred and suffering. This is not accomplished by the "ego" that has the tendency to protect itself and that is concerned with protection, safety, well-being. It is rather the work of the "self" that is concerned with love, compassion, the feeling/experience of interdependency with other human beings, ultimately, with the will of God.

I think that through listening attentively to our inner voice, we all may become aware that we hold opposites in ourselves. Both love and hatred, trust and mistrust exist in this world and in our own lives and hearts. But through Jesus' example we are invited to choose to live from the self's loving nature, i.e., from the Spirit, to love and to identify with all living creatures. Unconditional love is the hallmark of both the Spirit and the "self". It seeks relationship and union. Love creates community, it provides healing and joy.

We are healed by the outpouring of Christ's Spirit. Through that same Spirit, we enter into deeper communion with one another. "To 'receive the Holy Spirit' is to see what God is doing in and through the brokenness of our lives and world to bring healing and new life to human beings and the rest of creation. The Spirit empowers us to act differently in relation to one another. Polarity and hostility that can contribute to violence are overcome in favour of a community of solidarity, responsibility and love. Finitude and vulnerability are accepted rather than what we seek to overcome. Love reaches out and draws others in, creating diverse networks of relatedness".

I. Which are the reasons for our hope?

Resurrection

"There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. The splendour of the heavenly bodies is one thing, the splendour of the earthly another. The sun has splendour of its own, the moon another splendour and the stars another, for star differs from star in brightness. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown in the earth as a perishable thing is raised imperishable. Sown in humiliation, it is raised in glory. Sown in weakness, it is raised in power. Sown as an animal body, it is raised as a spiritual body" (I Cor 15:40-44).

This text affirms the holiness of all creation to be handled with care and reverence. The ultimate promise is one of growth beyond any limitation of our "animal" nature, so that we may experience one day the life of eternity. But this is not achieved in a "dualistic" way, in the sense that one day our perishable body is left behind whereas it is the soul that bears the signs of perfection and of eternity. No, I think it is important to realize that the ultimate goal of our being, i.e., to be one with Christ in a new heaven and on a new earth, is something we are building up even now while we are actively engaged in our life and in our ministry, while we are suffering, looking for healing in our sufferings and while we are committed, together with other men and women of good will, to building a world based on the foundations of justice, peace and love.

So "healing" in this deep sense must be seen as a life-long process. Its purpose is to open the portals of the personality to the full impact of the Holy Spirit so that what is shattered and isolated can be brought to face the light of God. At a given moment this opening of a personality ("growth") may be affected and thus enhanced by a remarkable physical healing, such as the many wrought by Jesus during his earthly ministry. On other occasions a dramatic mental healing may be a precursor, a visible sign of a complete change in one's outlook on life. The miracles of deliverance reported in the Gospel probably come into this

category of mental/spiritual renewal, reminding us that possession is often an added focus of disturbance in an already dysfunctional personality. The prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2 is the quintessence of all healing: bringing good news to the humble, binding up the broken-hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, releasing the prisoners, proclaiming a year of the Lord's favour and comforting the mourner.

The good news for the humble is that the Kingdom of God is here. It is already present in the heart of our personal anguish, and in the heart of political and social turmoil. New beginnings are possible if we open up to the Spirit. The broken-hearted are restored by the ever-present love of God and inspired by the vision of completeness of love that embraces all people and all races and all religions. In this way, also immediate and scarcely bearable tragedies can be illuminated by a universal fellowship of all people living according to Christ's Spirit. The captives are liberated from the prison of their own minds, the walls of which can be the unconscious elements of previous experiences as yet submerged and not assimilated and "healed". The mourner is comforted by the intimate communion s/he is granted by compassionate brothers and sisters at his/her side, a communion that may be a foretaste of the communion of saints, and death is put in its proper perspective as an experience of transition from a limited ego-centred type of awareness to a more embracing fellowship with many others who are also members of the one Family of God.

There comes a time in that life-long healing process when the person is prepared to make a final renunciation: "Father, all things are possible to you. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mk 14:36). These words are the very essence of his healing service for the entire creation; they are the assumption of all human suffering and humiliation. Healing is completed when a person is able to give himself/herself unconditionally to God's service. The ultimate goal is a restoration of all things in the divine image, an image revealed definitively in Jesus Christ, the first-born of all creation.

According to St Paul, when death is swallowed up in victory, the perishable things will be raised up imperishable, not only on a personal level, but also on a cosmic scale. Such is the promise of universal redemption in Christ. At the time of the Lord's final coming, to which all the great religious traditions seem to be looking forward, it may well be that the earth and our own bodies will be transformed ("spiritualized") in a way indicated by the change in Christ's own body. St Paul at this point speaks of a "mystery" of sudden transmutation. At that point, mortal life opens up into eternity, which is not a never-ending time sequence but rather a state of being beyond the confines of time and space, a state in which all creatures will be in union with one another and with God. It will be a state in which human beings realize that they are no longer submitted to the sufferings and frustrations of a fragmented existence and of isolation. They will be authentically parts of one body, whose nature is Christ himself (I Cor 12:27). It is then that the end comes, when Christ delivers up the Kingdom to the Father, after abolishing every kind of domination, authority and power (I Cor 15:24). This vision cannot be dismissed as a merely ecstatic exuberance. On a deeper note it is the end to which the whole created universe tends.

It becomes clear that seen in this perspective, "resurrection" is not an individual event. It involves a constant renewal of human society, of our whole living world which is being plundered; it involves healing within our religious communities; moreover, it involves ultimately the whole cosmos. The healing of the world is therefore not oblivious of economics, politics and the challenge to protect our natural habitat.

The Spirit of God must infuse and transfigure all theories and parties so that they may radiate love, justice and reconciliation where at present there is intransigence, hatred, and civil war. We have to learn the supreme lesson of Christ: of loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us (Mt 5:44). It requires nothing less than a self-giving unto death, if need be, for the sake of truth and righteousness, with that promise of resurrection granted by God himself, for there is no greater love than this, that a person should lay down his/her life for his/her friends (Jn 15:13).

One constant reminder is that we should not succumb to evil and to bad examples. The Gospel invites us to overcome evil by doing good things. St Francis said once that wherever and whenever we see people doing bad things and speaking badly, we should speak positively and do the right things. I believe that this is a very healthy guideline also in our ordinary life. The invitation to "think positively", seen in that light, is not just something which comes from superficial psychological reasoning. It may emanate from a very deep feeling, even awareness, that, in spite of our wounds and other negative experiences, we are a part of God's good creation. That the promise given us is "life in fullness", resurrection. Love combats evil with the intention to help others to be liberated and healed. It is in self-giving love that we raise others to life. "In truth, in very truth I tell you: A grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless it falls into the ground and dies. But if it dies, it bears a rich harvest" (Jn 12:24). This is the essence of healing at its highest.

From what I have tried to say, it follows that true resurrection finds its realization in the new creation full of the Holy Spirit. There will be a deep transformation by the Spirit of our entire person, body, emotions, and psychic life. Again, the healings of Jesus were something more than a restoration of a diseased part or organ to its proper function so that the person could start to lead a normal life once more. They were (and are!) also

a sign that the Kingdom of God is near and is always coming. One may say that the healings wrought by Jesus are “sacraments”, outer and visible signs of an inner grace, of true “life”. Thus the outer manifestation of physical and spiritual healing indicates the complete transformation of the human being into being an integral part of a new creation.

Our present crisis is an opportunity for a new start. I believe that it is also in this period of sometimes painful transition that the Spirit of God will awaken among us new “gifts of grace” (charisms). Among the many duties and spiritual gifts which stand out as particularly urgent and necessary (and sometimes particularly burdensome) are those of prophecy and courage. To some extent it seems that religious life has forgotten its charismatic origin and mission and thus has developed into an empty ritualism and formalism. Yet today, I think, in spite of (or perhaps better, because of) the many signs of crisis and paralysis, there exists a unique opportunity to re-discover the healing ministry of Consecrated Life and to bring it back into the heart of our Church and our societies. In a violent and unjust world, sharing the hopes and fears of their brothers and sisters, disciples of Christ are called to be a loving, contemplative and active presence.

The Church and the Christian communities have deep sources to draw from. They can make visible in our world an attitude, a life style, a “culture” of hope that no person can find in him/herself alone. It is sustained by the inner conviction that history — let alone the history of Christian discipleship — has by no means come to an end, that God’s Spirit is still active, sustaining us despite our weaknesses and creating “new things”, that it is worthwhile to live and perhaps even to die for the values of the Kingdom — justice, peace, compassion, reconciliation — and that the future of a faith community that is deeply rooted in the experience of a living and loving God will be a good one — despite all the prophets of doom that may linger around and are sometimes hiding in the very depth of our hearts.

Religious Life will always find its deepest source in the awareness of the encompassing presence of the Spirit of the Risen Lord. And it is in this way that our Church and our communities will be able to radiate the joy and the hope which are truly the fruit of the Spirit. Kierkegaard has found a beautiful expression for that vision which is unshakably inspired by the experience of God’s unfailing love for us: “If I could make a wish, it would neither be for wealth nor might, but for the passion for the possible. I wish for eyes which will stay young forever and which will always glow with the desire to see what God has in store for us”.

II. The four ways of healing

1. Healing through affirmation

One of the most common ways in which wounds are healed or by which conflicts are settled is love. It is also the most Christian way, for God is the origin of all love. He Himself is love. A Dutch Catholic psychiatrist (Dr Terruwe) says that that affirmation is the answer to most anxiety and frustration. Healing starts with love of the healer and love for the healer or another person. The word affirmation comes from a Latin word which means to make firm, to give strength. Affirmation strengthens the personality by giving it personal significance and a feeling of being wanted and accepted. It belongs to the attitude of love which is truly the ground of our being. In any relationship of love there are always two key elements: a giving and a receiving one. What is always present in this giving and receiving is the affirmation of the other. This relationship will be experienced as “redemptive”, as “liberating”. It will be a source of happiness. One experiences here that it belongs to the essence of our human existence to be with others: it is not good for a human being to be alone (Gn 2:18).

When you experience that another person likes you as you are and sees something valuable in you, you become more aware of yourself as a worthwhile person. Then self-esteem and love of self are increased, enabling the personality to blossom. Affirmation is thus basically a disclosure. I reveal the other person to himself/herself as good and lovable, and when I experience myself in the same way, I become capable of a fully human love. Love for Jesus and for the Father also breaks out. The absence of love is the worst suffering of a human being. It was Jesus’ deepest suffering to see a person closed in on himself/herself, incapable of love. Christian love is universal. It can accept and affirm everyone, both enemies and friends, bad as well as good people. In short, the experience of love and acceptance is a truly healing one, one that strengthens and liberates. It makes us feel “at home” with ourselves and with those who surround us.

2. Healing through prayer

I suggest that we look at prayer as an experience of being loved. We become aware that God accepts us as we are, with all our burdens, shortcomings, diminishments, frustrations, traumas. We are precious in God’s eyes. Prayer can be a very healing experience because it may become an experience of unconditional

love. A love before which we do not need to wear any masks or pretend to be somebody else. That is why — from a Christian viewpoint — we can call a believer a beloved. For as a believer one knows oneself to be lovable in God's eyes. This awareness can change a cold and frustrated person into a warm-hearted and generous one, precisely because the experience of "being loved" calls for love in return. We can only show that by loving and caring for others.

Prayer can also become a way of transcending boundaries. The root of prayer can be described as a deep awareness of being part of an "ocean" of love that encompasses everything, but at the same time an even deeper and very painful awareness of our restrictions and limitations. Furthermore, our desires do not usually coincide with what we actually do, as Paul reminds us in Romans 7:15. But in the depth of our hearts, we long for "wholeness", for a healing of our wounds, we would like our fragments to be put together into one whole beautiful reality.

In fact, there are numerous boundaries and limitations that make us want to "transcend" and to be "one". Some are from inside, some from outside. Our longings are often limited by the experience of sickness and death, by likes and dislikes, by our belonging to a certain culture, by belonging to a certain generation, by being men or women, by being Europeans or Africans or Americans or Asians. We are limited by some experiences of our past and by our present character and temperament. But we are also aware that we are constantly being called to move beyond. Jesus oversteps his limits not through his own power, but through the total surrender to that reality which he calls "Abba", Father. Because of this, his future was not experienced by him as a threat, but as something he could approach with deep confidence, joy and trust.

It is, I think, this kind of self-surrender what transforms us. Life itself is, as we experience sometimes very painfully, a constant letting go. Real love also implies that "letting go", is being non-possessive. Since prayer must be seen as an expression of love, it also includes yielding and abandoning the self to God who loves us. It is this attitude of seeking the will of the Father that makes people different.

3. Healing through conversion

We have stated that the core of our faith is that God loves us as we are, and that prayer is our response to that love. It seems that a life-long conversion is required before we can allow ourselves to be loved by God and before we can begin to experience everything as a gift in our lives. Conversion (*metanoia*) means a deep and ongoing reorientation of one's life, a constant re-setting of priorities and values, in the light of the Gospel of Jesus. It means sorting out our lives. It means deep and very attentive listening to the Gospel and to each other. All this is necessary for healing, because it can give us a new, healthy and even more efficient attitude in our day-to-day responsibilities. But, it seems to be more important in situations of stress and dis-stress.

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:8). These are the people who are single-minded, without hidden intentions, people who are whole and without falsehood. Such people are transparent. They have nothing to hide and have no pretenses. They are usually joyful people even when they suffer, because they know in whom to put their trust. Nothing can disturb them, for they are those who have discovered that the way to save their life is to lose it. They are ready to love and to be loved.

Conversion does not bring about necessarily spectacular changes. But it may well be said that a person who is more at peace because s/he has been able to surrender to God's love, is more often than not more relaxed, more friendly, more sensitive to the needs of others. Bad moods may be less troubling for oneself — and especially for others! I do think that in psychological terms it may be said that spiritually healthy people find fewer things boring and can dedicate themselves better than those who are not healthy. Such a person, in terms of Christian spirituality, is one who has become a child of God, one who delights in doing the Father's will, one who is born in the Spirit who enables us to call God "Abba", the loving Father.

Jesus was a fully receptive person, willing to listen to others. His desires were the same as the Father's. This gave him a deep freedom, and it opened up for him the possibility of ever richer human contacts. It enabled him to be kind, patient and enduring, but also at times very decisive. People recognized him as one who was drinking from a deep source, somebody sustained by a secret power, somebody not fragmented by hidden intentions or motives. His followers realized this slowly by discovering the source from which he lived. After Pentecost, they experienced something of the same reality themselves: a new birth that occurred through their openness and receptivity to the gift of the Spirit. They became aware that this was the Spirit of Jesus, a Spirit that brought freedom, integration, healing.

4. Healing through Community Experience

One of the most natural ways of growing up healthily is to be a member of a healthy family. A family

in which the parents care for each other and for their children, a home where the children receive warmth, sympathy and love. In such an atmosphere they get every chance to grow up as physically and psychologically healthy people.

It is helpful to remind ourselves, religious men and women, that a religious community should also have the makings of a warm family atmosphere. It should by all means be a community where one is allowed to be oneself, where one need not be perfect but where growth and wholeness are stimulated. A common cause and a common purpose (*cf.* your overall theme of service in promoting compassion, peace and hope, or it may be called seeking the Kingdom of God) should bind the members together and make them into men and women who care for each other and who affirm each other.

Such a community will be welcoming and healing. It will communicate peace and rest. It can offer guests a space where they can find themselves. Many people suffering from loneliness are anxiously searching for a brother or a sister or an event or a celebration that will take away their loneliness. Helped by a loving community, they can be led to discover that their own wounds must be understood not as sources of despair or bitterness, but as integral to our human condition and as beginnings of liberation and hope — a hope that leads people beyond merely human togetherness to Him who calls his people from the land of slavery to the land of freedom, and to him who came not for the healthy, but for the sick.

What was said earlier about prayer and community is especially true of a community praying together. Gathering together in his Name makes Christ's presence felt. It takes people beyond themselves, changes them and makes them more aware of what they can do about certain problems they may experience. Praying for peace, for example, does not bring about automatic solutions in longstanding conflicts, such as many parts of our world are experiencing. But praying together for peace in that fundamental attitude of self-surrender we have been talking about, may be a decisive step for a community to become more peaceful in its own heart and thus to become also a more effective and powerful "instrument of peace" for others. Praying together is powerful and healing because it creates a "*koινωνia*" or fellowship. Wherever this fellowship is formed, something of the Kingdom appears, i.e., something of salvation, liberation, wholeness comes to the surface and is also experienced. Isolation, division, ongoing frustration and fragmentation is the opposite of harmony, well-being, "*shalom*". Our communities should become places where people and we ourselves in the first place should experience something of what was said about Jesus: "It was as if power came out from him".

I want to dedicate a final reflection to the healing dimension of the Eucharist. This sacrament sums up every level and aspect of our human existence. The Eucharist also portrays the whole mystery of Christ's incarnational life of service, ministry, passion, death, Resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is the deepest and the richest symbol of Christ's healing love among us. St Paul clearly believed that the reception of the Eucharist and reverence towards it were bound up with bodily health. If we examine many Post-Communion prayers of our Roman Missal, we find that several of them explicitly envisage "health of mind and body" as a result of Holy Communion, which, as we well know, is also a motive for bringing communion to the sick. Many prayers address Jesus as the "author of all healing". They acclaim the body of Jesus Christ as a "food which can heal forever". They ask that it may "make them well" or "restore their health" and that it may "turn our anxiety into joy". The ordinary Sunday prayers continually express aspects of physical healing as well as social and spiritual healing. Many ask for "strength", even "strength to face the troubles of life", as well as for protection and the more general desire to experience God's "healing presence within us". Some of the petitions seem to be mainly concerned with psychic health. They ask for gifts of understanding, wisdom, new purpose, inner peace, full contentment. Let us also remember that in the prayers of the Ordinary of Mass, the prayer following the Lord's prayer asks to be delivered "from every evil" and from "all anxiety". Let us keep in mind also that at every Mass, before Communion, we make the prayer of the centurion our own: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say a word and I shall be healed".

I recently came across a prayer which seems to be used in Tanzania. It includes a remarkable development of truly incarnated and eucharistic spirituality:

"O Lord and King of peace.
Grant us true and lasting love,
so that we may find mutual understanding in our
families,
in our villages and in our whole community.
Help us to be rid of our constant enemies:
magic, fear, witchcraft belief, quarrelsomeness,
stupidity, disease and poverty,
so that we can all live in justice, peace and sisterly/

brotherly love,
and in all ways contribute to the building of your
Kingdom,
while we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our
Saviour Jesus Christ”.

III. Dynamic and Creative Fidelity

Discerning and naming the contexts of our witness

The contribution that I wish to make and present to you has no other objective than to help you read what is written in the book of history: words that are related to God, who reveals himself, words that really concern us. We recognise ourselves as those who feel summoned to seek “in the history of individuals and of entire peoples the traces of God’s presence, a presence guiding all humanity towards the discernment of the signs of his saving will” (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 79).

I would like to discuss with you on the subject of what we have learnt from experience, of what we see around us, of what we hear, thereby keeping in mind the conclusion and concluding appeal of *Vita Consecrata* (*VC*): “You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished!” (n. 110). Through these words John Paul II presents himself as a witness of the *mirabilia Dei* (God’s miracles), the sending into this world of our Founders and of the many fellow Brothers and Sisters who have preceded us. *Vita Consecrata* invites us to regard ourselves as the original heirs of their own charismatic inspiration. That is both the mandate and the synthesis of the Apostolic Exhortation, and on the basis of that exhortation I would like to suggest to you a number of conclusions.

Let us first try to answer the question: “Where do we stand?”. We are convinced that “the consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity, as it is announced in Scripture and as it emerges from an attentive reading of the signs of God’s providential action in history”, because “it is often through historical events that we discern God’s hidden call to work according to his plan by active and effective involvement in the events of our time” (*VC*, n. 73). It is therefore a primordial expression of respect and acceptance of God, who meets us halfway and questions and defies us, to ‘know’ the age in which we live, and even more important to ‘know’ what preoccupies our contemporaries’ minds because according to Jean Vanier “each person is a holy history”. Throughout history God has repeated to us many times what he had said to the Samaritan woman: “Give me something to drink” (Jn 4:7). He also invites us, like he summoned the Apostles: “Give them something to eat yourselves” (Mt 14:16). Accepting the challenge of inculturation as a call to co-operate in a fruitful way with grace (*cf. VC*, n. 79), I would like to present to you a number of points of orientation that should enable us to acknowledge the drastic changes in our time that come to us like the hungry and the thirsty whom we are called to serve.

At first sight, our age is one of an increasing fragmentation: institutions, even Church institutions like our own, convictions, values, relationships, families seem to be falling apart. In the West the number of disrupted families is dramatically increasing. Families become ever smaller and less stable. There is an ever widening gap between the generations. The greatest tragedy, however, is the mentality illustrated by this often heard utterance: “That is just the way it is. There is nothing that we can do about it”. It is a disruption that causes insecurity, a lack of continuity, of reference points we can trust, and of healthy traditions. Our memory is suffering from a loss of values, and consequently the same is true for our sense of “belonging”.

On a larger scale, one observes the disruption of society, in which we notice more and more such phenomena as the formation of blocs and the resurgence of racism. A group that is ‘different from mine’ is my opponent, a rival against whom I must protect myself or whom I must attack before he attacks me. In our cities we regularly witness acts of physical violence, but also — and these are less noticeable — examples of psychological violence, of economic and of juridical injustice. There is often a deep division between different components of one’s community. The same is happening in our Church. There is still a long way to go before we fully realize what St Paul has meant when he wrote that all are one in Christ and that it does not matter whether we are Jews or Greeks, men or women.

Further expanding the horizon, I see how the disruption continues, and even affects the relationships between different nations. After the Cold War, new ethnic conflicts have exploded. I do not think that we are talking about mechanisms that were introduced by outside forces. I think that those phenomena are the result of what was repressed in the past.

At the root of all social disruption we can always discover the inner disruption from which our age is suffering. People nowadays generally distrust the great “myths” from the past, and they experience

how volatile and weak are the institutions, the familial structures, the social tissues. Even when you find employment, you never know whether or not it will last or how long your career will be. One no longer finds one's identity in the traditional way (profession, family, religion). The result is the so-called 'patchwork identity', composed of separate pieces and individual experiences that more often than not do not correspond to existing models. The inner conflicts, whether recognised or not, often remain unsolved and lead to an acute form of fear and to a sense of abandonment often reinforcing neurotic behaviour. In today's society we also discover phenomena that become ever more widespread, but that seem contradictory to the aforementioned disruption, like e.g. globalisation, the Internet connections that seem to eliminate space and time, and that seem to neutralise the divisions in society. At the same time "globalization" leads to a situation in which the poor once again fall by the wayside. Only the one who is blind will never notice that. Among all the poor, the elderly and the children, especially in the South, are the ones who are affected most of all by the economic mechanisms of a global and free-market economy.

Closely related to this are the environmental issues. 'Mother Earth' is ill and is being plundered. The poor are the ones who have to face the gravest consequences of that evolution. Despite some efforts to do something about pollution and other environmental problems, nobody seems prepared to stop companies from destroying forests or rice fields. Moreover, these companies ignore the fact that by destroying those forests and rice fields, they cause unemployment for millions of people who used to earn a living from working the soil (agriculture). Other companies close their factories and transfer them to other countries or other areas where the cost of labour is low. In his "Message for the 23rd World Day for Peace" (1 January 1990) John Paul II said that "the right to a safe environment is ever more insistently presented today as a right that must be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights", (n. 9) and he added that "an education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth" (n. 10).

We ask ourselves: Which message does God address to us through the signs of our globalised world? While information technology has been developed at a vertiginous speed, we notice the absence of dialogue and real communication between people. That contributes to the already extensive disruption of society. On a deeper level, this leads to anonymity and isolation. A very simple question is to be put also to communities of religious men and women: how does the use of TV and the Internet affect the quality of your face-to-face communication? Even your life of prayer? The more profound exchange that invigorates, makes one grow, affirms and reinforces relationships, is often becoming rather weak. Patterns of a neo-capitalist lifestyle prevent us from careful and attentive listening. He or she is not a 'personal mystery' ready to be unravelled and from which one might learn. One tends to approach everyone 'cautiously'. Life-long commitments in marriage are no longer options for many people, and the same seems to be true for commitments in religious life. It is in this fragmented, violent and vulnerable world that we feel called to "deepen our own understanding of the Christian tradition of contemplation, community sharing, hospitality, respect for persons and attention to the environment" (*VC*, n. 79).

With our eyes and hearts open to the men and women of today and to the whole of creation, I should like to try to point out a number of qualities of a renewed dynamic presence in the Church and in the world, thereby remaining well aware of the fact that "true prophecy is born of God, from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history" (*VC*, n. 84). There is — in other words and as I have pointed out before — the priority of contemplation that we understand as "taking root in that which does not change", and thereby gives a certain unmistakable colour to our lives as Christians: We believe in the Spirit of the Lord, in his presence both in our personal lives and also in the life of our faith. This active presence of the Spirit is the driving force for our renewal. It gives us strength, last but not least also the strength to denounce "all that is contrary to the divine will", and that we explore "new ways to apply the Gospel in history, in expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom" (*VC*, n. 84). As Z.M. Isenring states, that may mean in more concrete terms that in religious life "poverty becomes participating in the poverty of the poor, celibacy brings us to the side of the lonely, and of those who against their will are forced to live on their own, obedience forces us to be solidary with the repressed, the handicapped and the outcasts".

Let us try to accept today's challenges and face the current challenges with the same courage, the same spirit of enterprise, the same creativity as our Founders and Foundresses did, thereby remaining loyal to our original charism, but trying to "incarnate" it into today's historical and social context. A difficult but inspiring challenge! It is a responsibility from which we cannot shy away, and it has to do with our prophetic task of denouncing "sinful structures" dominating our international community, e. g. the fact that wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few while the number of poor people is soaring incessantly. We should do this from both a "political" and a contemplative perspective, mindful of the fact while we denounce what is sinful, we are to be — always and everywhere — signs and instruments of peace, announcing God's love to all without distinction.

Thus we have to be present at the side of those who suffer, but without becoming either partial (in the

sense of excluding somebody from our attention and love) or indifferent, for the Lord himself has not remained indifferent: He went out to the sick, the poor, the outcasts, to those on the periphery of society and also on the periphery of the religious community of his time. The vulnerable had his special attention. Today's poor and vulnerable should always have ours (*cf.* *VC*, nn. 82-83). We feel inspired by the love of Christ that “urges us” (II Cor 5:14) “to respond generously and boldly to the new forms of poverty through concrete efforts, even if necessarily on a small scale, and above all in the most abandoned areas” (*VC*, n. 63).

The presence of a “healing” faith community should always alleviate isolation, stimulate dialogue, build communion. Religious communities have the truly missionary vocation “of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesiastical community, and even beyond its boundaries, by opening or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially where today's world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence” (*VC*, n. 51). I am sure that by reacting lovingly, attentively and respectfully to the challenges of intolerance and rejection, we touch on the essence of the credibility of our life, and consequently, of the Gospel of Jesus. That implies that we must foster and nurture warm human relationships, friendship and hospitality. That requires personal human and spiritual maturity, for only by believing in the one true Father and his only Son can we truly see ‘the other’ as our brother and our sister.

In evangelical contrast to every possible form of “exclusivity” and “exclusion”, we must live mindful of the “inclusive” spirituality of Christ. That will be possible if we are open for dialogue. In its deeper sense, dialogue means the capacity for an unconditional encounter with the “other”. Dialogue is an aspect of the constant conversion and of true discipleship. It means the willingness to treat the “other” in the light of God's love and to relate to him/her in respect, renouncing every temptation of power and coercion. It is a constant effort to be “just”, thus being at the service of life and peace. A true spirituality of dialogue also implies taking courageous initiatives in relation-building with other Christians and with followers of other religious traditions. I am deeply convinced that it is especially international religious communities like yours — nourished not only by the Gospel, the charism of their Founders/Foundresses but also nourished and enriched by the longstanding experiences of living in close context with other cultures and religions — who have to be true “laboratories” of intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

IV. Suggestions for Meditation, Reflection and Sharing

A Text for meditation:

Resurrection

I am convinced that Jahveh is at the origin of all life
 He has created the universe,
 the seas and the continents.
 The galaxies, solar energy and the energy of the atom.
 Human beings, the animals and plants.
 Everything finds its origin in him, and in him everything has its
 consistency.
 An invisible stream of life fills all things.
 Even I feel taken up and carried by him.
 O Lord, the whole of creation praises you.
 Men and women, young and old
 among all peoples, races, nations and cultures
 are an imprint of your order, your logic, your intelligence and
 your wisdom.
 You are beauty, love, relationship, life.
 But human beings throughout time do not speak only of life and
 happiness:
 Often have they obscured your countenance, O Lord.
 Deeply engraved in the memory of humanity
 are the stages and the stations of a way of the Cross
 which Jesus travels along with it:
 there, in effect, are the innumerable and apparently absurd deaths
 great and small
 of the incalculable number of people of all times.
 The sorrow of those whom no one consoles.

The scream of the tortured.
 The empty stare of the starving and the dispossessed.
 The anonymous victims of every catastrophe and every war.
 The traces of desertification and the pillage of our planet.
 The whole of creation sighs and lies waiting.
 Even though it proceeds from your power and your love,
 it groans, like our Saviour Jesus Christ, on the road that leads to
 fulfilment.
 All of matter, the microscopic elements, the light, the genetic
 code,
 all evolves according to your secret plan
 and strives to reach the point omega,
 the new heavens and the new earth,
 and the human being who is truly your image and your perfect
 likeness.
 With the numberless men and women of all times, cultures and
 religions
 I firmly believe:
 Jesus has risen from the dead.
 The grain of wheat has burst through the crust of the earth and
 bears fruit.
 Creation moves forward on the path of life, not on that of
 destruction.
 Human beings are created for love, not for hatred or destruction.
 Our life and our history are criss-crossed by the experience of
 death.
 But we live in hope of being at the beginning and the dawn
 of a road that has meaning and fulfilment,
 of the experience of the resurrection in the bosom of our life.
 The Resurrection of Jesus is not a distant event.
 It changes the world, even today.
 There I see it realized where people are working for peace
 when there is strife and war.
 Where there are people who respond to hatred with love,
 to violence with non-violence
 to cynicism with the openness to new horizons
 which goes beyond all the experiences lived up to this day.
 Resurrection in the heart of life:
 I have faith in good expectations
 — in my own and in those of my sisters and brothers —
 rather than in all negative experiences.
 Life is always stronger than death.

(Hermann Schalück, OFM)

Ideas to stimulate reflection and sharing

When we look at the problems and challenges which grow out of the inequalities and injustices of our world order, and at the need to liberate the poor, the need for reconciliation, for working towards peace, for ecumenism, for dialogue with other great world religions, then we see that there are still many stages to be travelled along our path. In order to be able to fulfill the task which the Lord in truth has given us, we must think in new, greater parameters than heretofore, and also learn to pray, for God speaks to us today through the historical challenges of globalisation.

Communities of Consecrated Life are nowadays often occupied with difficult local and regional problems, for example, the preservation (or closing down) of houses, merging structures, etc. How much strength and time remain for the “wider horizons”, for solidarity, for the sharing of material and human resources, for

the creation of new traditions, for new steps in the evangelisation of cultures, which are motivated by a renewed missionary spirituality? Our present situation can be likened in scriptural terms to Lk 9:60: We are busy with burying our dead and have little time (or strength) left to proclaim the Kingdom of God. How much creative imagination and how much mutual support would be necessary in order to understand the signs of the times, to find answers from the Gospel, to bring the Gospel back into the heart of our Church, our communities, but also to the ends of the earth?

I would like to suggest that we become ever more determined to leave behind fossilized structures and mentalities, which sometimes are no longer vehicles of spirit and life. I suggest that we try to overcome those structures and convictions that prevent us from being truly international, itinerant and missionary communities which try — with all the risks this may entail — to incarnate their charism afresh in today's world. We must grow in a true spirituality of hope, being on the road like the Disciples of Emmaus, open to dialogue, listening to what the Risen Lord has to tell us even if we do not always fully recognize him. Sharing with each other the experiences of being pilgrims of hope, never forgetting that the Spirit of the Lord is already active within us. He will open our eyes and hearts and give us new life.

The genuine form of solidarity which corresponds to the Gospel and to the example of Jesus comes from “within”, but is directed “outwards”. It follows the example of the “*kenosis*” (self-emptying) of God in Jesus (*cf.* Phil 2). Jesus came not to possess, but rather to share, to build and to love. Christian solidarity is, like prayer, an act of faith in the living God, who is life and wants to give life to all. It is important for the “sustainability” of our discipleship that we bear witness to the hope that lies within us. Not merely rhetorically, but rather in convincing deeds of love, reconciliation and liberation of the poor. Not in our own family alone, rather above all with people of other confessions, religions, colours and cultures. I believe that new forms of solidarity in favour of the poor must be found. Our service draws its strength from contemplation and from the encounter with the mystery of the living God, especially in the Eucharist.

Our response to the challenge of the secular world and the confusingly diffuse postmodern, often esoteric forms of religiosity cannot be to retreat into a ghetto of inwardness, into a non-incarnated spirituality. It would be disastrous if “spirituality” and “service to the Kingdom of God and His justice” were played off one against the other. The goal must be a spirituality which passionately seeks justice in the one world, in the Name of the one God, who himself — as St Francis says in one of his prayers — bears the names of “Peace” and “Justice”.

We are called to live our spirituality, especially the following of the poor Jesus, in the social and political context of our globalised world. This calls for a public, visible form of solidarity with the poor of this world, with the people who have been robbed of their rights, with “Mother Earth” and with the whole of creation which has been robbed of its dignity. We should set the logic of love, respect and compassion against that of the market and of power and against the philosophy of the “dinosaurs of globalisation”. This means shaping the world which has been entrusted to us in a spirit of justice, mindful of the principle of equal dignity for men and women, being prepared to listen and learn from the other, in the fundamental attitude of dialogue described earlier as a vital network of co-responsibility. As H. Camara once said: “Nobody is so poor that he has nothing to give and nobody is so rich that he cannot receive”.

In order to understand “from the viewpoint of the victims” the limits and negative effects of a globalisation which is seen in purely technological and economic terms and to shape the global world in a more human way, there is a need for both the individual and communal commitment of Christians, but also especially of the “alliances of solidarity”, not just among Christians. National and international institutions, which work for a world-wide civil society, including religious orders, missionary movements, development and human rights organisations, must strive to network in an ecumenical way.

Notes

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Les Églises dans la dynamique du développement : Qu'ont-elles fait et que peuvent-elles faire encore ?

- Jean-Blaise Kenmogne -

Directeur Général du CIPCRE

Si nous posons un regard d'ensemble sur le problème du développement et les réalités qu'il couvre depuis bientôt cinq décennies, le sentiment qui s'impose concernant l'action des Églises dans ce domaine est celui d'un immense fossé entre les théories élaborées et les pratiques sociales qu'elles ont induites. C'est le sentiment d'échec des stratégies engagées par les communautés chrétiennes pour répondre aux quêtes et aux attentes que le mot même de développement a libérés dans l'imaginaire des peuples, avec toutes les ambiguïtés, tous les malentendus et toutes les illusions qu'il couvait. Tout s'est passé comme si, dans la danse des visions multiples du développement et dans les débats qui ont agité les esprits sur ce sujet à l'échelle internationale, l'Église avait pris des positions dont elle n'a pas tiré des pratiques pastorales de transformation sociale conséquentes.¹ Cela est d'autant plus vrai qu'il est difficile de voir clairement aujourd'hui à quel développement les communautés chrétiennes se sont consacrées dans les relations Nord-Sud et à quels résultats elles ont abouti, eu égard aux ambitions que les réflexions à partir de l'Évangile permettaient de libérer dans le monde.

Pour démêler l'écheveau des questions relatives à cette situation, il est utile d'interroger d'abord la position des Églises dans les théories du développement avant de considérer ensuite les résultats de la pastorale du développement dans le contexte de l'ordre mondial actuel.

L'Église dans les théories du développement

Quand, à l'aube des années 1960, le problème du développement est posé dans le cadre des relations entre pays riches et pays pauvres, il consiste essentiellement en une question des possibilités pour les pays pauvres de rattraper leur retard économique par rapport aux pays riches. Ceux-ci représentent le modèle et le stade suprême du développement. Leur mode d'être, leur organisation sociale, leur art de vivre et leur type d'esprit représentaient ce à quoi les autres pays sous-développés devaient aspirer. On distinguait clairement les étapes que les pays sous-développés étaient obligés de traverser pour arriver au niveau des pays développés.² Le monde était ainsi divisé entre ceux qui avaient déjà atteint le sommet du développement et ceux qui devaient forcément les rejoindre, selon des lois économiques inéluctables.

En quoi consistait le développement à cette époque ? En la généralisation du mode de vie des sociétés industrielles d'Occident sur toute la planète, grâce à l'insertion des pays pauvres dans le capitalisme avec sa philosophie du profit, sa course à la croissance, sa civilisation du béton, son adoration de la consommation et ses richesses ostentatoires. Se développer signifiait copier purement et simplement ce que l'Occident était et ce qu'il proposait : une industrialisation à outrance, une soumission aux politiques d'investissement dans l'économie du marché, une libération des rêves d'enrichissement par l'accumulation des produits de consommation et la conformation à la civilisation de l'Argent-Roi.

À ce modèle du capitalisme s'opposait celui du communisme, dont l'idée du développement n'était pas très différente du capitalisme quant aux finalités, mais sur les méthodes. Le communisme proposait une voie fondée sur l'appropriation collective des moyens de production et la planification étatique des

projets de développement alors que le capitalisme misait sur la propriété privée et la liberté des individus dans leurs intérêts.

Cette étape du développement comme rattrapage des sociétés riches par les pays pauvres n'a pas résisté à l'épreuve des réalités. À l'analyse des relations entre les pays riches et les pays pauvres, on s'est rendu compte que le rattrapage était une illusion car, dans le modèle qui structurait le monde, c'étaient les pays riches qui, en fait, appauvrissaient les pays pauvres. Le Tiers-Monde, que l'on situait entre le modèle capitaliste et le modèle communiste, souffrait de la pauvreté et de la misère chronique non parce qu'il était en retard par rapport aux pays riches, mais parce qu'il était dominé et écrasé par ceux-ci. Le développement secrétait en fait le sous-développement comme le foie secrète la bile. Loin d'être une étape préliminaire au développement, le sous-développement en était, en fait, la conséquence.³ Son enjeu réel était la libération des pays pauvres par rapport à l'emprise du modèle capitaliste et de sa domination du monde. C'est l'Amérique Latine qui a mis l'accent le plus appuyé sur cette dimension de la question. Elle a refusé le «développementisme» comme course derrière le modèle occidental qui était la cause réelle du sous-développement. En lieu et place d'un tel développement, elle a voulu penser et vivre le développement comme réorganisation libératrice des énergies des populations appelées à se prendre elles-mêmes en charge à partir de leurs besoins réels. Si libérer signifiait alors sortir du moule d'aliénation et d'extraversion des besoins pour pouvoir s'organiser en sociétés responsables d'elles-mêmes, le développement cessait d'être un problème spécifiquement économique pour devenir un problème politique, avec ce que cela comporte comme rapports de force à l'échelle internationale. Les années 1970-1980 furent dominées par les débats sur les implications pratiques de cette dimension politique du développement. Le Tiers-Monde était pris dans les tenailles du conflit Est-Ouest que les enjeux politiques du développement comportaient. Il était, en fait, écartelé entre le capitalisme et le communisme et ainsi vivait paralysé par la guerre idéologique qui opposait les deux blocs.

Avec la destruction du mur de Berlin et l'effondrement du communisme, les années 1990 et l'entrée dans le XXI^e siècle furent dominées par la victoire absolue du capitalisme et sa transformation en néolibéralisme dans un contexte nouveau : celui de la mondialisation. Avec cette nouvelle réalité, la question du développement s'est transformée de fond en comble.

Dans la mesure où elle vise l'intégration de toutes les politiques économiques des nations dans un seul système néolibéral sous la houlette des institutions financières internationales, la dynamique de la globalisation a cassé les ressorts de la politique comme lieu d'engagement des nations pour leur propre développement. Celles-ci sont obligées de se soumettre désormais à un ordre mondial dont les impératifs économiques et idéologiques obéissent aux intérêts de grandes entreprises globalisées devenues désormais les Maîtres du monde. Le système mondial est devenu ainsi un goulot d'étranglement⁴ où les nations pauvres n'ont ni la possibilité de rattraper les pays riches ni la capacité de se déconnecter du système mondial tel qu'il est. Dans ce contexte, le seul choix qui s'offre est d'appliquer les politiques conçues par les Maîtres du monde.⁵ Or, ces politiques ne sont pas pensées ni élaborées pour les intérêts des pays sous-développés, ou les pays en développement, pour reprendre le vocabulaire en cours, mais pour l'enrichissement des pays riches. La vraie bataille pour les pays pauvres, c'est de travailler pour maîtriser la logique néolibérale en vue de sortir de la nasse les pays pauvres et d'entrer dans la classe les pays émergents, ceux qui s'intègrent par leur dynamisme économique dans le commerce mondial et les flux économiques de la globalisation. Au cœur de la compétition ainsi ouverte, les inégalités, les précarités et les fragilités des pays pauvres sont telles qu'il n'est même plus possible de donner au mot développement un contenu qui soit tant soit peu acceptable. Le système mondial est devenu si inhumain que certains penseurs proposent même que l'on n'utilise plus le terme de développement parce qu'il ne correspond plus à rien de ce que le système mondial peut offrir comme rêve aux pays qui souffrent de son emprise. Ce qu'il faut, ce n'est pas le développement déjà complètement dévoyé et pourri par les pays riches, mais *une politique de l'humanité*.⁶

On en est là, dans les théories du développement. Nous vivons leur invalidation comme champ d'espérance réelle et réaliste. Comment l'Église s'est-elle située dans ces débats ? Comment a-t-elle pensé le développement et à quels résultats a-t-elle abouti ?

Il y a lieu de dire avant tout qu'une forte mouvance des communautés chrétiennes à tendance

spiritualiste a refusé la problématique du développement comme tâche pour les Églises. Faisant de la seule annonce de l'Évangile et de la proclamation de Jésus-Christ le centre de son message, elle a orienté son action vers le salut dans l'au-delà, en refusant de faire des enjeux sociopolitiques une interpellation pour la foi chrétienne. Comme dirait le théologien Gabriel Vahanian, au lieu de vouloir *changer le monde*, elle préfère clairement *changer de monde*.⁷ Son ambition visait à aller au ciel comme si la terre n'existait pas, selon le mot du Prélat camerounais, Mgr Ndongmo, de regrettée mémoire. En fait, elle a cherché, surtout dans les pays africains, où son discours a eu une large audience, à placer l'exubérance rituelle et l'exaltation d'un moralisme individualiste au-dessus de l'éthique sociale et de ses exigences de transformation sociale.

Face à cette mouvance, un christianisme de réflexion sur le développement s'est affirmé avec vigueur et fermeté dans la pensée chrétienne. Trois étapes peuvent être ici dégagées.

La première est celle de la publication de la célèbre Encyclique du Pape Paul VI : *Populorum Progressio*. Dans la ligne de la doctrine sociale de l'Église et sur la base d'un important travail théorique abattu par les équipes du Père Lebreton sur le développement,⁸ le Pape avait orienté les réflexions dans le sens de la promotion intégrale de la personne humaine et des sociétés. En fait, il avait intégré l'éthique et la spiritualité dans les recherches sur le développement de l'homme et des peuples. Dans un monde où l'on avait tendance à ne penser les réalités qu'en termes de croissance économique, la pensée de l'Église conduisait à considérer le développement en termes de *développement humain*, avec ce que cela comportait de paramètres de bonheur individuel et social. Dans cette perspective, on peut considérer que l'apport des communautés chrétiennes dans les débats a été d'humaniser le développement en le pensant comme la promotion intégrale de l'Homme, de tout l'Homme et de tous les hommes. Le Père Vincent Cosmao a condensé toute cette vision du développement dans un ouvrage remarquable : *Changer le monde, une tâche pour l'Église* (Paris, Cerf, 1979).

Ce livre a éclairé la deuxième étape de la vision du développement dans les communautés chrétiennes : l'étape de l'engagement des Églises dans le processus de la promotion humaine comme ce fut le cas en Amérique Latine et en Afrique. Il faut évoquer ici toute la théologie de la libération qui a placé la dynamique libératrice de la foi au cœur du travail d'un développement conçu et vécu comme transformation des rapports sociaux de domination. La visée et l'ambition libérées par les communautés chrétiennes d'Amérique Latine et d'Afrique a montré en quoi le développement humain ne pouvait être qu'un développement solidaire, non soumis aux principes et aux paramètres d'un capitalisme qui détruit l'humain et anéantit les solidarités entre les peuples. Dans cette perspective du développement humain et solidaire, la pensée ecclésiale latino-américaine et africaine a mis en lumière une autre dimension du développement : sa dimension endogène. Comme il est essentiellement libération, le développement ne peut pas, dans sa concrétisation, être octroyé de l'extérieur : il se sécrète du dedans, il prend son essor *de l'intérieur et à l'extérieur*⁹ des forces créatrices des communautés. Plus encore que par ses dimensions humaine, solidaire et endogène, le développement a été pensé dans la mouvance ecclésiale comme un développement durable, c'est-à-dire sensible à la sauvegarde de la création, des systèmes naturels et des intérêts des générations futures.¹⁰ Une vision holistique de la promotion humaine a pu ainsi s'affirmer et s'épanouir dans la vision du développement.

Le troisième moment de l'intervention des Églises dans les débats sur le développement est celui de l'engagement des communautés chrétiennes dans le mouvement altermondialiste actuel. Dans beaucoup de pays du monde, les Églises ont pris gain et cause pour les logiques de contestation de l'ordre néolibéral et de sa globalisation sauvage. Elles ont fait de ces logiques non seulement des logiques de contestation, mais *des logiques de résistance, de révolte et de résilience*,¹¹ avec beaucoup d'associations de la société civile qui militent pour une mondialisation solidaire. De ce point de vue, on peut affirmer que les communautés chrétiennes ont donné aux ambitions du développement une dimension globale, mondiale au sens positif du terme. Le développement est devenu, dans leur mouvance qui est celle de la société civile, une dynamique globale d'altermondialisation, c'est-à-dire de l'invention d'une nouvelle société mondiale, juste, solidaire, responsable et libérée de la malédiction néolibérale qui pèse sur le développement des peuples aujourd'hui.¹²

L'Église dans les pratiques du développement

Si dans les théories du développement, l'Église a une place importante par sa capacité à éclairer

les esprits sur la base des valeurs éthiques et spirituelles, il n'en est pas de même dans le domaine des pratiques et des stratégies du développement. A ce niveau, rien de décisif n'a été réellement fait pour répondre aux enjeux de fond que la pensée de l'Église a dévoilé. Le déficit des communautés chrétiennes se situe à un double niveau : d'abord celui de l'imagination créative, ensuite celui de la pastorale de terrain et de la pédagogie du développement fondée sur l'Évangile et de la cohérence entre foi et action.

Déficit d'imagination créative

En matière de stratégies de développement, on sait que l'ordre mondial a fait fonctionner trois mécanismes pour soutenir les pays en voie de développement : l'aide, l'endettement et le commerce.

L'aide a servi à donner aux pays pauvres les moyens de se doter d'infrastructures pour l'industrialisation et la modernisation de l'espace de vie grâce aux grands travaux d'aménagement (routes, barrages, complexes agricoles, etc.). Cela s'est fait sans que l'on se pose la question de la fécondité et de l'efficacité du cadre à l'intérieur duquel cette aide atterrissait. Cela s'est fait également sans que l'on se demande si les mentalités locales correspondaient aux attentes et si les règles globales du jeu international rendaient possible une utilisation efficace de l'aide au service de ce que les donateurs entendent par développement.¹³ Les résultats de ces négligences ont été catastrophiques : aucun pays n'a pu vraiment amorcer un processus réel de développement grâce à l'aide qu'il a reçue. En Afrique particulièrement, l'aide a abouti dans plusieurs pays à des éléphants blancs, à une gestion chaotique des économies nationales, à la corruption, aux détournements de fonds et à une mentalité d'éternels assistés. À l'intérieur même des mécanismes d'octroi et de fonctionnement des fonds d'assistance aux pays pauvres, les choses sont souvent telles qu'on ne sait pas vraiment *qui aide qui*,¹⁴ qui tire vraiment les bénéficiaires des sommes engagées ni qui est le vrai maître du jeu.

L'échec de l'aide bilatérale ou multilatérale est aussi l'échec de la voie du développement par endettement. Dans les années 1970, l'Afrique s'est massivement endettée. Elle ne s'est pas développée pour autant. L'endettement l'a plutôt plongée dans une crise chronique où la misère, le dénuement et la pauvreté sont tels qu'ils condamnent beaucoup de pays à quémander indéfiniment des annulations de dettes, des rééchelonnements de leurs remboursements et des réendettements "salutaires", dans un cercle infernal où l'on s'endette pour rembourser et où on rembourse pour s'endetter. En vérité, même dans les simples termes de la logique économique et de ses paramètres, il n'est pas possible de penser un développement qui serait fondé sur l'extraversion des besoins et leur satisfaction par l'endettement. Prendre une telle voie est une pure aberration. L'Afrique l'expérimente aujourd'hui dans la tragédie de son sous-développement sans issue.

Face aux impasses de l'endettement, les Américains ont cherché à faire du commerce la clé du développement. Peine perdue. Dans le contexte mondial où le commerce obéit aux réglementations néolibérales au profit des puissants, ce ne sont pas les matières premières dont l'Afrique dispose qui développeront son économie. Soumise à la détérioration des termes d'échange et à la logique des politiques commerciales des pays riches, l'Afrique n'a pas le poids commercial qu'il faut pour espérer se développer par la voie du "Trade, not aid" propre aux Américains.

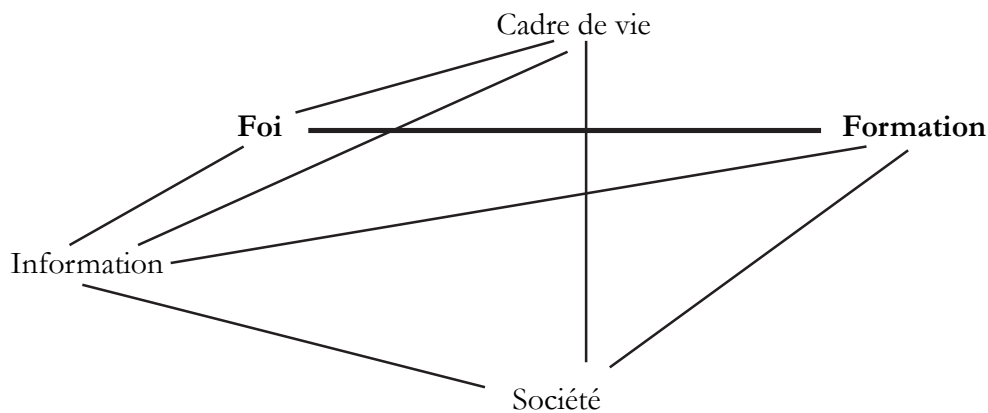
Qu'a fait l'Église face à ce triple blocage de l'aide de l'endettement et du commerce en matière de développement ? Au lieu de se fonder sur le message biblique pour y découvrir les principes d'une pratique d'économie solidaire et d'une vision du bonheur collectif qui constituerait un projet d'altermondialisation globale face au sous-développement, elle s'est soit enfermée dans des théologies spiritualistes pour changer de monde au lieu de changer le monde, soit contentée de colmater les brèches dans le contexte des misères incommensurables, en Afrique particulièrement. La Bible n'a donc pas été incarnée dans des pratiques et des techniques ecclésiales de transformation du monde comme monde global, comme ordre mondial injuste et destructeur de l'humain.

Déficit d'action pastorale

En fait, toute l'action des Églises a souvent consisté soit à tourner le peuple vers la pastorale priante soit à faire du micro-développement, avec des projets relevant de l'action sociale, que l'on désigne globalement par le terme d'œuvres de l'Église : les hôpitaux, les écoles, les centres sociaux

et les activités agro-pastorales. Même si ces activités ont une signification importante pour soulager les misères, elles n'ont pas encore, à ce jour, constitué une véritable dynamique de développement à grande échelle. Leur réussite même dénote l'incapacité des communautés chrétiennes à affronter les grands enjeux de la promotion humaine à l'échelle internationale, c'est-à-dire les questions actuelles par rapport auxquelles l'Église semble en retrait du point de vue de son action, même si elle y consacre beaucoup de discours et de réflexions. Si elles en restent à ce niveau de la pastorale priante ou des micro-actions, les Églises risquent d'être en dessous de ce que leur propre vision du développement présuppose et engage dans la situation actuelle du monde. Le vrai problème est de passer du rituel spiritualiste et des micro-actions à une échelle plus vaste, celle de l'ambition dont parlait déjà le Père Vincent Cosmao comme d'une tâche inhérente à la mission de l'Église: changer le monde. Cela exige que la pastorale du développement devienne une pédagogie du développement fondée sur la manière dont Jésus déployait son action comme volonté de mettre *les gens debout, ensemble et au travail*,¹⁵ dans la perspective d'une mission de construction des solidarités humaines responsables et créatives, comme on le voit avec l'action missionnaire des apôtres et des premières communautés chrétiennes. Cette mission consiste à s'engager dans une évangélisation globale, qui s'accomplisse à travers de nouveaux lieux d'espoir, de nouvelles dynamiques ecclésiales capables de rassembler les chrétiens et les chrétiennes dans une nouvelle volonté de bâtir concrètement le développement. Un développement qui soit humain, durable, endogène et solidaire, comme c'est aujourd'hui le rêve de tous ceux et toutes celles qui croient qu'un autre monde est possible. Dans cette mesure, l'altermondialisation est le nouveau nom du développement, l'enjeu pour lequel les communautés chrétiennes devraient libérer toutes leurs énergies créatives.

C'est cette vision que nous nous sommes donnée comme perspective dans le travail que nous réalisons sur le terrain au CIPCRE (une ONG d'obéissance chrétienne : www.cipcre.org), en promouvant une vision holistique de la promotion humaine où nous mettons en interaction, comme pôles constitutifs du développement, les éléments suivants :



A travers ce schéma, nous voulons montrer que le développement pour lequel les Églises sont appelées à mobiliser leurs forces est un développement qui devrait unir toutes les actions de pastorale du développement à l'ambition d'un débat. Un débat qui engage les communautés chrétiennes dans une mobilisation pour une altermondialisation concrète, où notre foi en Jésus-Christ forge des mentalités sociales par la formation humaine fondée sur l'Évangile. Ceci en vue de changer la société et le cadre de vie grâce aux valeurs éthiques et spirituelles, au sein des projets concrets de promotion humaine. Au CIPCRE, nous avons choisi l'écologie, les droits humains et l'éducation sociale comme champ de notre contribution au développement. Nous comptons aussi mobiliser les autres organisations chrétiennes pour rompre avec la logique du développement à petite échelle et affronter les enjeux mondiaux de la promotion humaine. Nous savons que cela exige la constitution de grands réseaux mondiaux des communautés chrétiennes décidées à bâtir un nouveau développement.

Notes

¹ Lire Reto Gmünder, *Évangile et développement, pour rebâtir l'Afrique*, Yaoundé-Bafoussam, CLE-CIPCRE, 2004.

² Lire W.W. Rostov, *Les étapes du développement économique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1962.

³ Sur cette problématique, on lira avec intérêt Kä Mana, «La problématique du développement dans la pensée africaine», in *Zaire-Afrique*, n° 90, 1977. «Développement ou Libération», in *Zaire-Afrique*, n° 92, 1978 ; Christ d'Afrique, Paris, Karthala, 1994.

⁴ Lire à ce sujet : Dominique Wolton, *L'autre mondialisation*, Paris, Flammarion, 2003 ; Joseph E. Stiglitz, *La Grande Désillusion*, Paris, Fayard, 2002 ; Dany-Robert Dufour, "À l'heure du capitalisme total, servitude de l'homme élevé", in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, n. 592, Octobre 2003.

⁵ Lire : Zaki Laidi, *Un monde privé des sens*, Paris, Fayard, 1994 ; Susan George, *Le Rapport Lugano*, Paris, Fayard, 2000 ; Jean Ziegler, *Les Maîtres du monde et ceux qui leur résistent*, Paris, Seuil, 2001.

⁶ Lire Edgar Morin, "Pour une politique de l'humanité", in *Ecovox*, n. 26, mai-août, 2002.

⁷ Gabriel Vahanian, *Dieu et l'utopie, L'Église et la technique*, Paris, Cerf, 1977.

⁸ Lire L.-J. Leuret, *Dynamique concrète du développement*, Paris, Économie et Humanisme, Editions Ouvrières, 1961.

⁹ L'expression est de la militante altermondialiste malienne Aminata D. Traoré.

¹⁰ Lire Peri Rasolondraibe, "Holistic Approach to Development : a Perspective from Churches in the South", Oslo, Norway, 22 October 2000 : www.bistandsnemnda.no/publikasjoner/peri221002.htm

¹¹ L'expression est de Kä Mana.

¹² Lire Kä Mana (*Sous la direction*), *Réussir l'Afrique*, Yaoundé-Bafoussam, Éditions CIPCRE, 2004.

¹³ Je renvoie ici aux critiques acerbes d'Axelle Kabou à l'égard des mentalités anti-développement en Afrique. Son livre, *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1991) est très éclairant sur ce sujet. Je renvoie également au livre de Daniel Etounga-Manguelle, *L'Afrique a-t-elle besoin d'un programme d'ajustement culturel ?*, Paris, Nouvelles du Sud, 1990.

¹⁴ L'expression est de Mobutu Sese Seko.

¹⁵ L'expression est de Laurien Ntezimana.

Réf. : *Mission de l'Église*, n. 150, Hors-série, janvier-mars 2006, pp. 35-42.

... "l'altermondialisation est le nouveau nom du développement"...

The Charism and Role of Religious for Building the Local Church Through the Ministry of Interreligious Dialogue

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Editor's Note: This article is an excerpt from the author's comprehensive paper entitled "Dialogue Ministry of Religious in Building the Local Church" delivered at the colloquium organized by the Office for Consecrated Life of the FABC, in July 2005 at Hua-Hin, Thailand.

It is interesting to note that many religious congregations and orders have included the dialogue ministry in the renewed constitutions and institutes and have established secretariates for dialogue as part of their commitment to the evangelising mission of the Church. (Jesuits in their General Congregation 34, have a decree on interreligious dialogue).

In Asia we do not start our ministry of dialogue as if from a *tabula rasa* because Asian reality is part of us and people of different religions and cultures have been living as neighbours in daily life and in work places. This is the area of dialogue of life. In schools and colleges, in centres of health care, people of different religions are fellow students and fellow patients. The daily relatedness is part of Asian reality. Asian religious are part of this reality. The already given situation of relatedness with people of other faiths should not be taken for granted but needs to be gratefully accepted and then deliberately and purposefully chosen and strengthened. This will be our starting-point and an initial strength for the ministry of dialogue. This way we enter into other forms of dialogical living, action, theological exchange and sharing our interreligious encounter is always for the service of the Gospel for the life of the world. *Ecclesia in Asia* speaks of the specific contribution religious can make to the church, especially to the Local Church:

“Men and women in the consecrated life can contribute very significantly to interreligious dialogue by witnessing to the vitality of the great Christian traditions of asceticism and mysticism”.

This text speaks of the specifically valuable contribution religious can make to interreligious dialogue ministry. It is a dialogue through witness but religious do more than this (n. 31).

Referring to the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* John Paul II emphasized “the intimate connection between the consecrated life and mission. Under its three aspects of *confessio Trinitatis*, *signum fraternitatis* and *servitium caritatis*, the consecrated life shows forth God's love in the world by its specific witness to the saving mission which Jesus accomplished by his total consecration to the Father” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 44).

In this connection the Pope says: “The Church in Asia looks with profound respect and appreciation to the contemplative religious communities as a special source of strength and inspiration. Following the recommendations of the Synod Fathers, I strongly encourage the establishment of monastic and contemplative communities wherever possible” (n. 44). In the continent of many religions, the Pope reminds us that “consecrated persons need to bear convincing prophetic witness to the primacy of God and to eternal life”.

Again religious in Asia living their charism in a contemplative way of life can make a specific contribution to the mission of the Local Church. This will eminently prepare them for dialogue with people of other traditions, especially at the level of dialogue of religious experiences and spirituality. The Pope invites religious to such a service: “All who have embraced the consecrated

life are called to become leaders in the search for God, a search which has always stirred the human heart and which is particularly visible in Asia's many forms of spirituality and asceticism. In the numerous religious traditions of Asia, men and women dedicated to the contemplative and ascetical life enjoy great respect, and their witness has an especially persuasive power" (*ibid.*, n. 44).

Moreover, the Pope affirms what the religious can contribute to a powerful witness in the context of people of religious traditions: "Their silent example of poverty and abnegation, of purity and sincerity, of self-sacrifice in obedience, can become an eloquent witness capable of touching all people of good will and lead to a fruitful dialogue with surrounding cultures and religions" (*ibidem*). This is precisely what religious can do for the Local Church — to engage and live in fruitful dialogue with cultures and religions among whom the Local Church in most of the countries in Asia live and thus promote the mission of the Church.

Here we must draw attention to contemplative religious missionaries who have established dialogue in the area of religious experience, prayer and spirituality with other religious traditions in parts of Asia. In India we have had pioneers in interreligious dialogue with Hindu traditions like Abhishiktananda, Francis Acharya, Bede Griffiths (Benedictine monks), Ignatius Hirudayam and others in dialogue with the Hindu tradition and persons like William Johnston, Hugo Enomiya Lassalle and Kakichi Kadowaki in Japan in dialogue with Buddhist and Zen traditions, so Fr. Aloysius Pieris with Sri Lankan Buddhism. The list of such people cannot be exhaustive. Their contributions are the fruit of interreligious dialogue and encounter and have brought enrichment to the Christian faith and spirituality. Here we have also monastic inter-faith dialogue. These persons and many others belonging to different congregations like Sr. Sara Grant and Vandana Mataji have both promoted Hindu-Christian dialogue through their interreligious ashram in Pune and Uttarkashi in India.

Such people of the Spirit have contributed to the Local Churches in Asia. People from Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and other countries would know many dedicated religious promoting interreligious encounter in their own countries. In Asia we need such dialogue with the Islamic tradition. There have been people engaged in Christian-Muslim Dialogue, in India Fr. Paul Jackson (we know persons like Tom Michel) and other scholars have started a dialogue with Islamic and Sufi traditions besides promoting sound knowledge of Islam and Muslim communities among Christians through the publication of articles, books and seminars and animating religious communities for a dialogical way of life, mission and ministry.

The approaches of all these pioneers and others have in some way or other contributed to the true inculturation and integration of the Local Church into the spiritual traditions making the Church truly Christian and truly Asian. Their example remains a challenge and invitation to religious for dialogue at the level religious experience with Asian religious traditions.

Again we emphasise that the triple dialogue of FABC or the three paths of mission of *Redemptoris Missio*: proclamation, dialogue and human promotion are interrelated. One cannot exist without the other.

Earlier I mentioned the four expressions of dialogue. We need to appreciate the value and merit of each of these forms of dialogue and their interrelatedness. Thus we see that Christian peoples have dialogue of life in day to day life in their good neighbourliness with people of other faiths or in places of work (this could be extended to educational institutions), dialogue of cooperative action for the common good of a community (here one can mention religions coming together to promote peace, human rights and undertaking common projects for the good of the community or the poor), dialogue of sharing religious experiences and coming together to celebrate religious festivals (here we can include learning from the spiritual traditions of other religions regarding prayer and other spiritually enriching practices, always discerning the work of the Spirit in all of them) and dialogue in which exchange and discussions of religious traditions take place and discover the values and meanings of each other's traditions with a view to better understanding and building peace and harmony between believers. The different forms of dialogue would need different gifts. Religious can engage in these varied expressions of interreligious encounter according to their charism and gifts. They can also help and train laity and youth for this way of Christian life in dialogue with people of other faiths.

In the above ways religious through the gifts of the Spirit of their charism help the Local Church to become a church of witness to God's actions in the Spirit of Christ and make it deeply rooted in the riches of the spiritual traditions and make the Local Church truly a church of dialogue and in dialogue for the mission of witness and service to the people of the different countries of the continent.

Religious engaged in interreligious encounter learn to appreciate the specific values of different religious traditions and make the local communities of faith into communities of dialogue. Thus they can help them become truly communities of witness to the dialogue of salvation of God in Christ with all humanity. Here below we shall hear what the Bishops of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei say on what we can learn from different religions in their response to the *Lineamenta* for the Asian Synod:

1. From Muslims, the Church can learn about prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
2. From Hindus, the Church can learn about meditation and contemplation.
3. From Buddhists, the Church can learn about detachment from material goods and respect for life.
4. From Confucianism, the Church can learn about filial piety and respect for elders.
5. From Taoism, the Church can learn about simplicity and humility.
6. From Animists, the Church can learn about the reverence and respect for nature and gratitude for harvests.
7. The Church can learn from the rich symbolism and rites existing in their diversity of worship.
8. The Church can, like the Asian religions, learn to be more open, receptive, sensitive, tolerant, and forgiving in the midst of plurality of religions (Peter C. Phan, *The Asian Synod*, p. 36).

Some specific areas for people in consecrated life for the ministry of interreligious Dialogue.

As I mentioned earlier, dialogue of life is our starting point and our initial strength. Asian Bishops have given top priority to dialogue of life which should be practised by ordinary Christians who are not experts, in their day to day encounters and relations with the followers of other religions. This form of dialogue according to the Bishops is “the most essential aspect of dialogue”. The dialogue of life is a wide space open to the majority of people in the institutes of consecrated life.

In the thinking of Asian Bishops, dialogue of life takes place when, “each gives witness to the other concerning the values they have found in their faith, and through the daily practice of brotherhood, helpfulness, open-heartedness and hospitality, each shows himself to be a God-fearing neighbour. The true Christian and [their neighbours of other faiths] offer to a busy world values arising from God’s message when they revere the elderly, conscientiously rear the young, care for the sick and the poor in their midst, and work together for social justice, welfare, and human rights”(BIRA II, 1979, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, vol.1, p.115).

This aspect of dialogue belongs to our being part of Asian peoples in ordinary life. This is one area religious need to reflect on and find ways of strengthening and promoting as part of their commitment to the ministry of dialogue.

According to the Bishops the focus of dialogue should move away from dialogue as way of “talking or discussing” to a way of “living together” with a focus on “sharing life” and building relationships for promotion of a just and peaceful society and fuller humanity of all. Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* seems to echo this invitation.

“Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way” (n. 57).

The Areas for Dialogue

Today Islam, more than ever, has become a global religion. Its religious, political and economic power is something we have to reckon with, though centuries of conflict, rivalry and even war (the recent events of 9/11 and 7/7) may seem to have made interreligious dialogue with Islam more difficult, definitely in some countries based on Islamic law. The Church (*cf. Nostra Aetate*) has consistently promoted dialogue with Muslims. For the Local Churches of Asia, dialogue with Muslims is all important in order to build bridges of understanding and cordial relations for the common good of all and civil society. Here religious have an important contribution to make. It is necessary that religious who engage in dialogue with Islam and the Muslim communities need to approach this with preparation, knowledge and respect for a fruitful outcome.

However, in some places religious have found it difficult to dialogue with Muslims, especially in States based on Islamic law. Those who work in these situations need strong faith and support from their communities.

Hinduism is a complex tradition. In general, we find Hindus are open to dialogue and willingly cooperate. One can see in their religious way of life an ardent sense of devotion, desire for and

practice of meditation and concern for the well-being of all. They have a vision of integrated life. They have a tradition and heritage of profound philosophical thought and mystical ways, besides great ethical values, ashrams as centres of spiritual guidance through their gurus, rich symbolism of popular religiosity and practices. They are all areas open to fruitful interreligious dialogue. As I mentioned earlier there have been many religious men and women who have been pioneers in Hindu-Christian dialogue. Religious, especially in South Asian countries have many avenues of creative interreligious dialogue. We are aware of the curse of casteism and practice of untouchability. In interreligious cooperation we have to fight against this curse and false ideologies of revivalism.

We know Buddhism is a widespread religious tradition in many Asian countries. The tradition is particularly strong in many South-East Asian and East Asian countries besides Sri Lanka in South Asia. They follow the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path of the Buddha. They also follow a way of ethical discipline, meditation and knowledge that leads to inner liberation and enlightenment. Buddhism invites them to practice compassion towards all living beings. This elicits universal appreciation. In Buddhist countries, religious together with Buddhists can face issues of justice, ecology, development and peace-building common to all. Besides it will help Christians to discover their own Christian roots of social compassion.

Today we are faced with an increasingly disturbing phenomenon of religious fundamentalism and revivalist movements. We need to recognise its presence in all religions. In the context of interreligious dialogue, religious dedicated to this ministry need to study its roots and understand the reactionary nature of this phenomenon. In our approach we need to respond to the legitimate questions and hurt feelings of a community and its identity in the context of the modern aggressive onslaught of one-sided secularism. This can prepare us for ways of dialogue, healing and reconciliation. This would lead us also to ask for forgiveness for our past attitudes of intolerance and for injustices. (Here we recall the Christian gesture of asking for forgiveness for similar wrongs of the members of the Church in the past by Pope John Paul II). This has to be done with apostolic discernment.

Recent attacks in London, Ayodhya, and elsewhere, tell us that consistent and enduring dialogue in all four forms are necessary in our fractured world. In a world of religious conflicts, fundamentalism and communalism, religions are made part of the problem, whereas they should be part of the solution.

Religious through their ministry of interreligious dialogue should make religions a source of enlightenment and a constructive force for peace-making and building social harmony between peoples, especially in situations of misguided religious extremism, fundamentalism, communalism and sectarianism. In this way religions will become part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Interreligious involvement for justice and peace

We know that many women and men religious actively engaged in the different types of interreligious dialogue work for justice, human rights and peace. For them these works of human promotion are an interreligious project. We must note also that they do not function as individuals isolated from their other fellow religious or communities but with the full support and encouragement of their communities and superiors. This is seen in the fact that many of these gatherings, meetings and planning take place in the houses of religious communities which provide many facilities. All this is a hopeful sign.

Religious, because of their consecration and vows, carry a moral weight when they engage in works for justice and peace in collaboration with people of other faiths. There is presumption among these people that our involvement in these works is not motivated by personal ambition and vested interest. Our unselfish commitment to this brings seriousness to the cause we want to serve. Sometimes religious involved in such works suffer and lose their life. The cost of genuine and serious commitment is martyrdom.

In India when Graham Steines and his two sons were burnt alive by Hindu extremists, a group of Hindus, Christians including Catholic sisters went to the place where the cruel murder took place to express their solidarity with Mrs. Graham Steines and her daughter and made their visit into a pilgrimage for peace and solidarity. We published in the journal *Vidyajyoti* a reflection of Swami Agnivesh who led the group. This reflection first appeared in the secular daily *The Times of India*. The visibility of religious in such engagements not only carries publicity value but also bears witness to our being people of faith.

Women religious have a special role to play in the promotion of gender justice. In many of our

traditional societies, violation of gender justice is common because of the strongly patriarchal nature of society. This is the case in Islamic and Hindu societies. To work for the cause of gender justice, women religious are better placed socially as their freedom of movement and easy contact with women enables them to conscientize women about justice and dignity and to accompany them in their struggle.

At the same time women religious should not restrict their dialogue ministry only to issues of gender justice but broaden the scope of the ministry to include issues of social justice, ecological issues, peace-building and promotion of social harmony and peace. Though we emphasise the specific role women religious can and ought to play for the promotion of gender justice, we affirm that it is not an exclusive concern of and for women. It is a project for all including men religious. Both men and women have to work collaboratively for gender justice.

Some pointers for concrete action in this ministry

1. We need to develop spirituality for dialogue characterised by a deep respect for all the rich spiritual traditions of others as fruits of the Spirit who blows where it wills. We must be sensitive to people's search for meaning, yearnings for contemplative experience of the Divine and readiness for compassionate commitment to the poor who seek justice, dignity and freedom. We should be open to be "enriched by the spiritual experiences and ethical values, theological perspectives, and symbolic expressions of other religions" (GC, n. 34).

2. It is vital that those who are engaged in the ministry of dialogue be deeply rooted in the Christian faith and committed to the Gospel way of life. This is important for genuine dialogue with people of other faiths. It requires also a solid foundation in theology, careful study of the Decrees of Vatican II and other documents of the Church and those of Bishops' Conferences and of the FABC on the value, meaning and necessity of interreligious dialogue.

3. Another sector by way of preparation for a dialogical way of evangelisation is formation. During formation the young religious are helped to become acquainted with the religious beliefs and practices of the followers of other religions, especially of those who are people of their ministry region or country. This can be done by special courses together with some involvement in the dialogue ministry in their pluralistic situation. With this kind of preparation, proclamation of the Gospel should be sensitive to the religious and cultural milieu of people of other faiths. This would demand also that they be attentive to the Spirit at work in them.

Theologically, we need to dwell on the one divine plan of salvation in Jesus Christ for all in relation to the religious traditions and experiences of others who find themselves spiritually nourished by their own traditions. This goes with a sound theology of religions and dialogue.

4. One aspect of the triple dialogue is dialogue with the poor. It calls for our commitment to justice for the poor with whom we work and in whose struggles we participate. The poor including indigenous people belonging to different religions.

Together with them we work for a just, humane, peaceful society for all. In Asia, this means also building basic human communities inclusive of all on the foundation of truth and love. In this work with the poor we denounce structures of injustice and collaborate to create a world of justice and peace.

5. Many of our congregations have social and cultural centres. It is important that they do not become purely secular centres without any reference to the positive and liberative power of religions and cultures. Rather, in their way of working, they need to include the liberative elements and dynamics of the religions of the people and their cultures so as to build a just world and an equitable, humane social order.

6. Another area is our educational institutions. The vast majority of the clientele of our institutions belong to different religious traditions. We should consider them centres of dialogue for social transformation. They should foster positive attitudes on the part of students for interreligious living and social harmony. Both the institutions and students should become agents of social change.

7. The pastoral field where men and women religious work is a vast area to educate Christians on how to live their faith in a religiously plural context. Interreligious dialogue has to become part of catechesis and faith formation. We have already mentioned the dialogue of life as an essential part of Christian living in our multireligious situation.

Religious priests working in the pastoral field like parishes have a wide scope to extend their ministry to people of other faiths in their area. Dialogue will help them to experience God's compassionate love and make them realize that all are children of God. This will help all to work

together for peace and harmony for the benefit of all. We need to remember that we are on pilgrimage and are journeying together with people of other faiths towards the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of peace and love. In this ministry, the Church will be the voice of the poor, express commitment to the young and women.

8. Different congregations need to encourage persons who can become experts for dialogue of theological exchange. Since this dialogue is becoming a global concern, planning this ministry should include interprovincial and even international exchange of persons and be done in collaboration with other groups. Those involved in dialogue of theological exchange have a double responsibility:

1. They have to engage in honest, respectful dialogue with experts in the other religious traditions.
2. They need to communicate the results of this dialogue with others and their fellow religious to help them understand and appreciate such dialogue. Being a new area, one should not be surprised if there are misunderstandings and even mistakes. But in communities of dialogue, there is openness to correction and reorientation.

Conclusion

Perfectae Caritatis states, “The manner of life, of prayer and of work should be in harmony with the present-day physical and psychological condition of members. It should also be in harmony with the needs of the apostolate ... with the requirements of culture and with the social and economic circumstances” (n. 3). Today, interreligious life has become an imperative of evangelisation and not a mere pragmatic necessity of our pluralist societies. If we, as consecrated religious, are to work effectively for justice in those societies and to strive seriously to build both communal peace at the local level and peace among nations, we must involve ourselves in ongoing interreligious efforts and be ready to take part in new initiatives as the need arises in our continually evolving societies. This will certainly redound to the mission of the Local Church for witness and service.

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Note

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Le dialogue islamo-chrétien en Afrique de l'Ouest

- Hyacinthe Loua, SJ -

I. Une convivialité certaine ...

Si, dès les premières années de l'hégire et avant la période des croisades, les relations entre juifs et musulmans furent nettement mauvaises, les rapports entre chrétiens et musulmans, en revanche, semblèrent plutôt satisfaisants. Un verset du saint Coran est souvent cité pour décrire ces rapports : *«Tu trouveras que les hommes les plus proches des Croyants par l'amitié sont ceux qui disent : "En vérité, nous sommes chrétiens". C'est qu'il y a parmi eux des prêtres et des moines, et qu'ils sont exempts d'orgueil»* (Coran 85). Le premier dialogue islamo-chrétien remonte donc à l'époque du Prophète lui-même.

Cependant la question du dialogue entre les cultures, voire entre les religions, se pose avec beaucoup d'acuité depuis les événements du 11 septembre 2001. Préjugés, actes de xénophobie, malentendus, méfiances et conflits opposent musulmans et chrétiens en Tchétchénie, en Bosnie, au Pakistan, au Soudan, au Nigeria, etc. Ils nous rappellent que la religion n'est pas déjà devenue, comme certains l'espéraient peut-être, un facteur politique et socioculturel quasiment négligeable dans le monde contemporain. Et son renouveau en territoire islamique, s'il s'effectue sous la houlette fondamentaliste, pourrait bien compromettre même l'avenir du dialogue islamo-chrétien.

En Afrique de l'Ouest, les relations islamo-chrétiennes s'établissent d'abord au plan humain de la vie sociale et impliquent toujours des dimensions sociopolitiques. Hommes et femmes ont parfois du mal à avoir un jugement impartial et à aller au-delà de leur propre vision des choses. D'où la méfiance et les rivalités entre musulmans et chrétiens. Mais, dans le contexte sociopolitique actuel, chrétiens et musulmans sont invités à tirer les leçons de quatorze siècles d'histoire mouvementée, et à comprendre que la voie du dialogue pourrait les aider à vivre une amicale collaboration au service de Dieu, des hommes et du monde. Aussi, voit-on musulmans et chrétiens d'Afrique de l'Ouest s'efforcer de réfléchir sur la manière de vivre ensemble le dialogue des religions. Le dialogue islamo-chrétien est vécu à plusieurs niveaux de la vie sociale sous différentes formes de convivialité.

1. Du silence respectueux au dialogue des expressions religieuses

Le dialogue des religions signifie non seulement discussion et débat sans passion, mais aussi toute relation interreligieuse positive, constructive et sans syncrétisme entre individus et communautés de foi différentes, en vue de l'entente et de l'enrichissement mutuels. L'enjeu du dialogue islamo-chrétien repose de prime abord sur la foi commune en un Dieu unique, le Dieu d'Abraham. Cette fraternité de foi implique chez tous les croyants l'adoration commune et la solidarité dans la recherche de la justice, de la paix et du développement durable. Le Coran n'invite-t-il pas les croyants à *«se surpasser les uns les autres dans les bonnes actions»* ? (Coran 5:48). Cet appel au dialogue dans la vie quotidienne fait prévaloir la convivialité sur l'impérialisme religieux.

Le dialogue islamo-chrétien se vit en Afrique de l'Ouest, au niveau des activités civiques ou culturelles, dans la reconnaissance des éléments religieux communs à toute foi monothéiste et dans le partage et dans la collaboration des expériences religieuses. Une infirmière chrétienne, par exemple, parle-t-elle de Dieu bon et miséricordieux à un malade musulman mourant qui s'abandonne à la

volonté de Dieu, il y a une communion de foi. Un musulman rappelle-t-il de son côté à un chrétien telle ou telle invocation adressée à Dieu, dans le cadre d'une exhortation ou d'une adoration commune, il y a aussi communion de foi. Les mêmes formules religieuses (Dieu soit loué ! Dieu merci ! Si Dieu le veut !) sont employées tant par les chrétiens que par les musulmans. Dans les hôpitaux de la sous-région, les aumôniers chrétiens n'excluent jamais de leurs services spirituel et humanitaire les malades musulmans, souvent majoritaires dans l'établissement.

A l'occasion des grandes fêtes religieuses les autorités musulmanes et chrétiennes sont souvent présentes et échangent des vœux, que ce soit aux fêtes de Tabaski (Aid al-Adha ou fête de mouton) et du Ramadan, ou à celles de Noël et de Pâques. Lors des cérémonies d'ordination sacerdotale ou épiscopale, les musulmans sont souvent présents aux côtés des chrétiens. Quand le pape Jean-Paul II est arrivé en Guinée en 1992, tous les responsables musulmans et autres responsables religieux étaient là. Prélude à un réel dialogue de vie et de solidarité.

En effet, il faut bien reconnaître que la convivialité au niveau des religions, même si elle se présente et s'exprime par la tolérance et l'acceptation réciproque, reste le lieu le plus délicat du dialogue islamo-chrétien. Des attitudes religieuses communes sont concrètement vécues ; elles ne préjugent pas des discussions sur les doctrines. Chrétiens et musulmans ont peur que ce qui les unit dans la simplicité de la vie quotidienne ne les sépare dans la discussion intellectuelle. Les actes religieux parlent plus que les paroles. C'est le «dialogue du silence»¹ où Dieu parle directement à chacun.

Cependant, certains jeunes chrétiens et musulmans des villes comme Abidjan, Dakar, Conakry, Bamako, etc., marquent une différence par rapport à ce dialogue du silence. Ils se réunissent de plus en plus autour des projets de développement en vue de participer activement au décollage économique et social de leur milieu. Ils se rassemblent parfois de manière informelle autour d'un débat sur leur foi et leurs traditions religieuses. Le but de ces débats entre jeunes chrétiens et musulmans est de surmonter progressivement leur ignorance religieuse en vue de renforcer l'esprit de communion par le dialogue. Cette communion par le dialogue est une possibilité d'harmonisation des principales différences, de tout ce qui peut diviser les humains, même les religions.

2. Vivre en famille au défi de la pluralité des religions

En Afrique de l'Ouest, il existe des zones dans lesquelles chrétiens et musulmans sont pour la plupart des convertis de fraîche date. Les questions d'ethnies se superposent assez souvent à celles de religions. L'appartenance à une même souche sociale ou ancestrale et à une même religion traditionnelle demeure le socle sur lequel se construit la vie sociale dans toutes ses dimensions religieuses et économiques. Très souvent, les clivages religieux disparaissent dans les cérémonies culturelles et identitaires, telles que les sacrifices traditionnels, les cérémonies d'imposition du nom, de baptême, et les rites de passage.

Des membres d'une même famille se réclament souvent de confessions religieuses différentes sans que cela nuise aux liens familiaux. Les relations familiales, claniques et ethniques peuvent être des voies de tolérance ou de convivialité. Au Mali, en Guinée et au Sénégal, des prêtres catholiques sont issus de familles musulmanes : la tradition religieuse des parents ne semble pas entraver l'exercice de leur ministère. Il y a là un véritable dialogue islamo-chrétien.

Il faut cependant nuancer ce propos. D'autres chrétiens, issus de familles musulmanes, sont quasiment bannis par leurs parents à cause de leur choix religieux. En Côte d'Ivoire, en Guinée, beaucoup de jeunes chrétiens issus de familles musulmanes sont victimes de leur choix religieux. Ceux ou celles qui échappent au «verdict-bannissement» sont souvent considérés comme des étrangers dans et par rapport à leur famille. Un ami chrétien issu de famille musulmane reconnaît : «Je suis chrétien, issu de famille musulmane. Je ne suis pas rejeté et banni par ma famille comme beaucoup d'autres jeunes musulmans convertis au christianisme, mais mes parents, mes frères et mes soeurs m'appellent *le chrétien* ou *le prêtre*». Cette appellation change la relation et crée inmanquablement un clivage familial.

Hormis cette nuance importante, il faut reconnaître que les familles chrétiennes et les familles

musulmanes agissent aujourd'hui en faveur du respect intégral de la vie humaine en condamnant l'avortement et l'infanticide comme «des crimes abominables» (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 51). Presque partout en Afrique de l'Ouest, musulmans et chrétiens s'unissent pour sensibiliser et lutter contre le SIDA. Une «Caravane de lutte contre le Sida», composée de musulmans et de chrétiens, fait par exemple le tour de l'Afrique de l'Ouest pour sensibiliser les populations sur le SIDA. Les crises religieuses et la dégradation des valeurs familiales invitent-elles chrétiens et musulmans à un vivre ensemble des peuples ?

3. Lutter ensemble pour la justice et la paix

Le même souci de justice sociale, de civisme, d'aide aux défavorisés peut être le ciment d'une activité commune et par conséquent, d'un dialogue. En Guinée, au Sénégal, au Mali, au Burkina Faso, en Côte d'Ivoire, musulmans et chrétiens prennent des initiatives communes pour défendre la justice et la dignité humaine. C'est ainsi que, dans la crise actuelle de la Côte d'Ivoire, musulmans et chrétiens s'unissent dans la lutte pour la paix. Pendant la fête du Ramadan, le 4 novembre 2005, ils se sont retrouvés dans les mosquées d'Abidjan pour une adoration commune et pour confirmer leur engagement dans le processus de réconciliation et de paix. Ce geste de solidarité et de fraternité est une véritable expérience de dialogue islamo-chrétien.

Dans la sous-région, les crises sociopolitiques renforcent aussi la concorde entre les citoyens et les poussent à s'accepter mutuellement. Par exemple, musulmans et chrétiens dénoncent le marasme économique dans lequel vivent certains pays comme la Guinée, la Sierra Leone, le Liberia, etc. La création en 2000 du Forum des Confessions Religieuses de Côte d'Ivoire a été la conséquence de la crise sociopolitique qui déstabilise le pays : «*Les crises politiques généralisées dans de nombreux pays de la sous-région ouest africaine, notamment la Côte d'Ivoire, ont donné naissance à un dialogue interreligieux effectif. Les responsables religieux ne se contentent pas seulement de déclarations formelles dans le domaine du dialogue interreligieux mais acceptent de partager la souffrance de tout le peuple comme de chaque confession*». ² Une véritable mobilisation des responsables religieux est à l'œuvre aujourd'hui dans une Afrique en proie à des guerres civiles. Par exemple, le président du Conseil national islamique de Côte d'Ivoire (CNI), El Hadj Idriss Koudouss, a énoncé dimanche, 27 novembre 2005, à Abidjan une Charte visant à amener l'ensemble des fidèles religieux ivoiriens à s'abstenir de toute agression physique ou verbale et à se porter mutuellement assistance. «*Ensemble, transformons le bétail électoral des génies politiques en fidèles croyants pieux et donc soucieux du respect des droits d'autrui*» ³ a-t-il déclaré lors de la célébration de la 25^e édition de la fête des moissons de l'Église du christianisme céleste.

En Afrique de l'Ouest, le dialogue des religions concerne tout le monde. En Côte d'Ivoire et en Guinée, les dirigeants politiques ont créé des Ministères des Cultes ou des affaires religieuses qui traitent de la question du dialogue des cultures et des religions. Au Ghana, en Sierra Leone, au Liberia, existent des conseils religieux dont le rôle est de promouvoir la paix et de renforcer les liens de solidarité et de convivialité entre les croyants de différentes traditions religieuses.

4. La convivialité au niveau socioculturel

Dans les projets de développement agricole, commercial et industriel, initiés par les Conférences épiscopales de certains pays (au Mali, au Burkina Faso, au Sénégal, en Côte d'Ivoire), on ne fait aucune distinction entre les confessions religieuses. Le projet de lutte contre le SIDA entrepris par l'Église catholique du Burkina Faso, par exemple, concerne toute les populations du pays. Tous ceux et celles qui sont malades, musulmans, chrétiens et autres, bénéficient des mêmes soins de santé. Musulmans et chrétiens se sentent partenaires d'un même destin. C'est ainsi que dans les écoles privées, dans les centres culturels et dans les dispensaires de l'Église catholique, les musulmans sont largement accueillis par les chrétiens, à la fois comme bénéficiaires et partenaires. Les jeunes musulmans s'inscrivent dans les écoles chrétiennes et y bénéficient comme les autres, de l'instruction religieuse — chrétienne ou musulmane — qui y est offerte. Ils y font l'expérience d'une émulation qui ignore les frontières religieuses. Outre ces écoles chrétiennes, musulmans et chrétiens se retrouvent dans les écoles publiques laïques qui, par principe, ne pratiquent aucune distinction religieuse.

Il faut cependant reconnaître que les écoles coraniques (medersas), compte tenu de leur

orientation religieuse, sont réservées généralement aux musulmans — comme les petits séminaires le sont aux catholiques. Ces écoles sont, dans un certain nombre de pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest, subventionnées par les pays arabes, et la plupart de ceux et celles qui y étudient poursuivent leur formation dans les pays maghrébins ou arabes. Mais d'autres musulmans commencent leurs études dans ces écoles et les poursuivent dans les grandes écoles et universités de l'État où ils côtoient des chrétiens.

Les conférences, les forums, les colloques et les rencontres islamo-chrétiennes visent de plus en plus à l'harmonie de la société et à l'engagement des religions en faveur de la justice et de la paix. En juillet 2005 par exemple, l'ambassade d'Iran en Côte d'Ivoire a organisé un colloque sur le dialogue des cultures et des civilisations à l'intention de tous les *leaders* des différentes confessions religieuses. Ce fut un lieu de réflexion, entre autres, sur la situation de crise particulière que traverse le pays. Le but de tous ces rassemblements est de «faire sauter le verrou de la division pour des motifs purement religieux, par la promotion d'un dialogue effectif basé sur la tolérance et le respect mutuel». ⁴ Le débat sur le dialogue islamo-chrétien s'impose de plus en plus comme une nécessité. Il se propose comme une invitation à construire une culture du dialogue.

N.B. (*Article à suivre*)

Notes

¹ Maurice Borrmans, *Orientations pour un dialogue entre chrétiens et musulmans*, Cerf, Paris, 1981, p. 170.

² Pierre Loua et Kassimi Bamba, in *Débats*, n. 5, mai-juin (2003), pp. 11-16.

³ <http://www.angolapress-angop.ao/noticia-f.asp?ID=395337>, consulté le jeudi 15 décembre 2005.

⁴ Pierre Loua et Kassimi Bamba, in *Débats*, n. 5, mai-juin (2003), p. 12.

Réf. : *Débats (Courrier d'Afrique de l'Ouest)*, n. 31, Janvier 2006, pp. 17-22.



Politics and the Mission of the Church in Oceania

- Philip Gibbs, SVD -

Manila, today's megacity of the Philippines was founded in 1571 during the period when the Spanish ruled the seas between Mexico and South East Asia. Largely due to early Spanish influence the Philippines is predominantly Catholic. However, moving eastwards across the Pacific Ocean, one finds that Catholics are not the principal Christian denomination throughout most of Oceania. Initially the position of the Catholic Church was closely associated with European politics. Later the Church became entangled in power-plays within and between Pacific nations themselves. Recently the Catholic Church has found itself drawn to proclaim a prophetic message in situations of political turmoil. This paper will provide examples showing how the Church has played and still plays a political role, and will point to some implications of the mission of the Church in Oceania today.

Joining Forces with Spain

Even in its establishment there was a strongly political dimension to the Church's presence in Oceania. Priests and religious accompanying the Spanish explorers assisted in taking possession of the new-found lands. For example, on Espiritu Santu Island (part of what is now Vanuatu) in 1606, Pedro Fernandez de Quiros arrived on the beach along with Father Commissary and five companions. The priest received from the admiral a large wooden cross which was carried with due solemnity to a pedestal in a makeshift church built the day before. Then amidst sprinklings of holy water Quiros took formal possession of the island.¹

The first formal evangelization of the North Western Pacific islands of Micronesia had to wait until 1668 with the arrival in Guam of a group of Jesuits, supported by some secular assistants and soldiers. The antagonism of the local Chamorro people led to the strengthening of the Spanish administration with the appointment of the first Governor in 1676 and the development of a military garrison. Thirty years later, administration was facilitated by the forceful removal of the Chamorro people from scattered villages of the Northern Marianas to Guam, where they were relocated in settlements within earshot of the mission bells. Church and State cooperated to transform Agaña from a village into the first town in Oceania, complete with square, Government House, church, convent, and Jesuit College.

Mission Competition and Military Power

Whereas Spanish Catholicism was brought to the Western Pacific islands, British and American Protestantism predominated in the South and the East. In 1797, the Missionary Society (later London Missionary Society — LMS) attempted to found missions in Tahiti, the Marquesas, and Tonga. Only the Tahiti mission survived. Queen Pomare of Tahiti worked closely with the LMS missionaries. However, in 1836 Catholic PICPUS Fathers (Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary) arrived in Tahiti. They were immediately expelled by Queen Pomare who resented any competition with her LMS friends. The French felt affronted by this and sent a frigate to Pape'ete (Tahiti) in 1838 demanding \$2000 compensation and a salute to the French flag. Queen Pomare appealed to Queen Victoria of Great Britain for assistance. Queen Victoria chose to remain silent. Then the following year another French gunboat arrived at Pape'ete declaring that it would bombard the town unless Queen Pomare pay 2000 Spanish dollars and allow the free entry to Catholic missionaries. Three years later France took over Tahiti as a French Protectorate. The Tahitians

resisted violently. Finally, Queen Pomare, realizing that Queen Victoria of England had no intention of ever responding to her many letters pleading for support, reached an agreement with France. Queen Pomare would submit to be France's Protectorate so long as Britain agreed to certain concessions. Thus, Tahiti became a French possession and the way was opened for the expansion of the Catholic Church in the region. In 1848 Tahiti's first Apostolic Vicariate was established near Pape'ete, and more French missionaries arrived.

The scenario whereby Protestant missionaries sought to cooperate closely with the local leadership, followed by conflict between Protestant and Catholic missionaries, resolved through a show of military power, was to be repeated in many parts of Oceania.

After several years in Hawaii, Hiram Bingham — the leader of the Protestant mission — realized that he should foster relations with the extremely powerful female Chief Ka'ahumanu rather than the presumed leader Kamehameha II who in fact was relatively powerless. In 1825 after the mission changed strategy, mass conversion occurred with the assistance of Ka'ahumanu.² Then the Catholic PICPUS Fathers came to the Hawaiian Islands in 1827. This led to a period of intense mission competition. Bingham tried to influence Ka'ahumanu to have the priests expelled but French naval officers demanded equality of treatment for French nationals, including missionaries. Eventually Captain Cyrille Laplace obtained a promise of freedom of religion and the release of all imprisoned Catholics in exchange for France's formal recognition of Hawaiian sovereignty.

Likewise in Tonga, in 1827, the Tongan King refused Marist missionaries the right to land because Tonga was already being evangelized by Wesleyan missionaries. The second attempt in 1842 was more successful, but later the Catholic Church was burned down and Catholics suffered a period of persecution. Then in 1858 a French naval unit demanded reparation for the damage suffered by the mission. The Tongans refused compensation, but instead, by royal order, granted freedom of religion.

The Wesleyans survived in Fiji because they were sponsored from Tonga and had the support of the recently converted Tongan Christian Chief, Tupou. The situation in Fiji was unsettled with intertribal wars and these were only resolved when Tupou intervened with 2,000 Tongan warriors in support of a chief named Cakobau at the Battle of Kaba in 1855. Cakobau showed his gratitude by accepting Protestant missionaries and at the same time supported British colonialism in Fiji. He was the leading chief when the island group became part of the British Empire in 1874. The French Marists arrived in Fiji in 1844 where they were met with dislike and indifference. They made slow progress until a French naval ship secured freedom of religion there also.

Whilst they often relied on military power to gain a foothold in the islands, Catholic missionaries did not always give their full support to the government authorities. Polynesia's first Apostolic Vicar of Tahiti, "Tepano" Jaussen championed the Islanders' rights against French absolutism for over 40 years.³ In New Zealand, Bishop Pompallier, with the Marist missionaries, found it hard to support British plans for the future of the country and its people. In Papua New Guinea, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) and the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) sought to establish the Catholic Church in spite of colonial government restrictions.⁴

Politics of Independence

The Church in the Pacific survived many challenges including the effects of two World Wars. Following the Second World War, many of the island peoples wanted independence, and those that did not want it were encouraged to seek some form of independence nevertheless. Many leaders were churchmen. Vanuatu's first Prime Minister, Fr Walter Lini, was an Anglican priest. His first two Deputy Prime Ministers were Rev. Fred Timakata and Rev. Sethy Regenvanu. The first Leader of the Opposition in Vanuatu was Fr Gerard Laymang. In the Solomon Islands, Rev. Leslie Boseto, former President of the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, became a Cabinet Minister. Jean-Marie Tjibaou, a former Catholic priest, led New Caledonia's Independence Movement. In Papua New Guinea, priests and former seminarians have had prominent political roles, notably John Momis, who in the 1970's played a major part in writing the Papua New Guinea Constitution and is presently serving as Governor of Bougainville.⁵

Moves for Independence presented a new situation for the Catholic Church. France was engaged in nuclear testing in the Pacific and was insisting that its colonies remain as overseas French territories. Thus, whereas a century before links with Western powers, particularly France, had proved to be advantageous in forcing recognition of freedom of religion, now the Church found that links to Western powers provoked suspicion on the part of Indigenous people. The Church entered into a phase of the politics of independence and revitalization.

Communist or Saint?

In the late 20th century in the Polynesian Kingdom of Tonga, where ritual authority is highly developed, the Wesleyan Church had very close ties with the King and nobles. However, Bishop Patelisio Finau, the Catholic Bishop of Tonga, felt the need to challenge the establishment in the form of the monarchy and the accompanying nobility and traditionalist *élite*.⁶ He saw that a very small number of *élite* were using their positions not to lead, but to take a disproportionately large share of the national wealth and resources. The condition of the common mass of Tongans was unchanging and even worsening. It was his concern for the poor and the voiceless that inspired Bishop Finau to lead a march of the landless and homeless to present a petition to the King in 1983. It was the same concern that moved him to lead a march to present a petition on behalf of the Pro-Democracy Movement in 1991 (Foliaki 1994:7-15). He was a political churchman, not in the sense of having parliamentary ambitions, but in terms of championing the poor and marginalized and challenging the established *élite*. As a result he was accused of being a Marxist, a communist, and a representative of a foreign power — the Vatican (Barr 1994:35-48). Bishop Finau was fond of quoting Bishop Helda Camara of Brazil, “When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint, but when I am asking why the poor have nothing to eat, they call me a communist”. His death in 1993 was a great loss to the Church of Tonga and the whole of Oceania.

Revitalization Movements

Faced with dramatic social change, people throughout Oceania have often responded with various forms of religious movements ranging from Indigenous revitalization movements to Christian revival campaigns. Micronesia provides an example of a religious movement that challenges both the Government and the established Churches. The Modekngai Movement started in Palau around 1905. Modekngai promotes the existence of a single God — one of the local Palauan deities equated with Jesus; its symbol is the cross and its meetings are similar to Christian services. Their most important ceremonies are healing services. By 1937 the Movement was in complete control of all local political power in Palau. After the Second World War over 700 Palauans told American census takers that they were members. Still in the 1960's it was estimated that Modekngai embraced about a third of the population (Carucci and Poyer 2002:227).

The Palau case is not an isolated one. From New Zealand to Hawaii, from Papua New Guinea and to the Solomon Islands, religio-political movements have arisen, particularly in times of socio-cultural and political stress. Recently, in August 2003, Bishop Terry Brown of the Anglican Church in the Solomons wrote: “The Weather Coast of Guadalcanal is largely Roman Catholic, but there is also the Moro Movement on the southeast side of the Weather Coast. They date from the 1960's, and are former Roman Catholics who left the Catholic Church to go back to ‘Guadalcanal customs’, including the gods of Guadalcanal, traditional dress, etc. Most of the members of the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA, later renamed Isatabu Freedom Movement, IFM) were Roman Catholics or members or offspring of the Moro Movement. There was certainly cultic activity by the IFM. Many of their fighters wore traditional Guadalcanal loin cloths and a traditional string around the neck (like the Moro Movement). They used various forms of magic to make themselves immune from gun-fire. They were very poorly armed, with traditional spears and homemade guns from leftover WW2 materials — over against the MEF's guns from the police armory in Honiara”.⁷

Religio-Political Developments in Fiji

The Churches including the Catholic Church have still to find effective ways of dealing with such religio-political movements, which continue in ever new forms in parts of Oceania even until today. Consider, for example, recent developments in Fiji. The interaction between Christianity (in particular Methodism) and Fijian politics has been a major factor in shaping modern Fijian

nationalism. Colonel Rabuka's two *coups* against the Government in 1982 fed "anti-heathen" sentiments particularly among the Methodist majority in Fiji. The fundamentalist Methodist faction which was closely allied to the military regime wanted Fiji to be declared a Christian State. A Sunday Decree was imposed in 1987 and roadblocks were set up to prevent anyone from violating the Sabbath. Sister Teresia, a local Marist Missionary Sister, protested against Colonel Rabuka and his parade of military might through the streets of Suva. The Colonel told her to be quiet and to stay in her convent and pray. Later a public protest was staged involving Anglicans, Catholics, and Presbyterians. Two Catholic priests and a number of lay people from the three Churches were arrested and imprisoned.

By the year 2,000, with the attempted *coup* and hostage-taking in Fiji by businessman George Speight, the situation had changed somewhat. Fijian ethnonationalism was still strong and this caused divisions within the Fiji Council of Churches. Everyday, during the crisis there were Christians in the parliamentary complex singing hymns, offering prayers, and preaching sermons. The principal actors in this religious activity were Seventh Day Adventists and some leaders of the new fundamentalist religious groups in Fiji (Tuwere 2001:47). Just before the 2001 elections a group called the Assembly of Christian Churches (ACCF), which included the Methodist Church, the Assemblies of God, and a number of fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic churches held a public meeting. They spoke of reconciliation but appeared to have strong support from Laisenia Qarase and his nationalist Sogoso Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) Party. To many it was clear that the Churches belonging to the Assembly of Christian Churches used their members for very definite political ends. This became obvious after Prime Minister Qarase nominated Rev. Tomasi Kanailagi as one of his appointees to the Senate. The Catholic Church generally has been critical of ethno-nationalism and has tried not to become involved publicly.⁸ However, the nomination of the Rev. Kanailagi caused such controversy that in a rare public statement, Catholic Archbishop Petero Mataka of Suva condemned the Methodist Church's involvement in politics and Kanailagi's acceptance of a Senate seat. On the front page of the Sun (September 22, 2001) Archbishop Mataka is reported as saying:

Mixing religion and politics has been the norm with the Methodist Church in Fiji since 1835.... It has just become obvious that what they have been doing in the dark is now clear for all to see. I hope that now their hidden agenda will be exposed.

Religious Politics in Papua New Guinea

The involvement of fundamentalist groups is no more apparent than in recent times in Papua New Guinea. During the 1997 election campaign period the news broke about a secret multi-million kina deal involving a mercenary force to train soldiers to fight in Bougainville. This quick-fix contract with the "Sandline International" Company backfired badly on the Government, with a near military *coup* and rioting in the streets of Port Moresby. Eventually the Prime Minister, his Deputy, and the Minister of Defense had to stand down to allow for an official enquiry into the affair.

Born Again Christians achieved a good deal of publicity during the Sandline crisis. The Governor General, Sir Wiwa Korowi, published a full-page press release in the daily paper calling on people to "get down to your knees and pray and ask God to give you and me a total peace of mind that we need to endure". The military commander who sparked off the crisis, Brigadier General Singirok, said that his decision to denounce the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Defense Minister, was based on ethical principles and his Christian convictions. He is reported as saying that he was an instrument used by God.

Besides Sandline, there were other politically sensitive issues involving Christians in the Defense Force. For example, there was a move by some Born Again Christians in the military to establish a mission of "spiritual operations" in war-torn Bougainville. The mission to send the army of "prayer warriors" to Bougainville was abandoned only after the Chairman of the Heads of Churches Committee wrote to Brigadier General Singirok expressing his amazement that private soldiers had been identified for detachment to Bougainville for spiritual duties. This was contrary to the policy that spiritual duties were always the sole responsibility of official chaplains.

Though the move might appear to be an honest evangelization effort, the proponents were surely not blind to the political implications and the side effect of undermining the Catholic efforts at reconciliation in Bougainville. The Bougainville population is 75% Catholic, and the Catholic

Church's solidarity with the people in their plight had aroused suspicion on the part of some in the National Government and in the Papua New Guinea Defense Force.

The most significant involvement of the Churches in the political process came with a prayer movement called "Operation Brukim Skru" (Bend the knee). All the Churches were involved, though the initiative in most cases lay with the conservative Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches. Shortly after, a secret national intelligence report speculated that there could be a deliberate plot by politically minded Christians, riding on the wave of anti-corruption sentiments and using the Sandline issue, as a means to further their political ambitions.

Only a year after the formation of the new government Catholic Archbishop, Brian Barnes in his 1999 Easter message warned that the future of Papua New Guinea as a free democratic country was threatened. The next day the Post-Courier newspaper headlines read, "Bishop: Gov't must go". Interviews with the Archbishop appeared with stronger opinions than in the Easter message. He was quoted as saying that the personal conduct of many PNG leaders was shameful, and that there was a need for a change of government (Post-Courier, 1 April 1999, p. 3).

The issue became the leading story on radio and television. Protests came from government ministers, but support soon came from other Christian Churches. Sophia Gegeyo, the General Secretary of the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC), is quoted as saying: "... Politicians cannot keep the Church quiet while the people they represent suffer as a result of bad government decisions and leadership.... The Bishop has spoken the mind of the ordinary people in the country" (Post-Courier, 7 April 1999, p. 3). Anglican Archbishop Ayong, in a letter to the Post-Courier newspaper wrote, "Any politician who tries to suggest that Church leaders should keep out of politics does not know his Bible.... From the time Israel moved into Canaan, the spiritual leaders of God's People have been challenging, rebuking, correcting, and, at times, condemning the political leaders when they wandered from God's path. That duty remains today" (Post-Courier, 4 April 1999, p. 11).

Three months later, on 7 July 1999, the Prime Minister had lost so much support that he was forced to resign. Though the significance of the Archbishop's criticism may be debated, it is clear that his action acted as a catalyst for others to work for a change of government (Gibbs 1998:27-51, 2001:155-74).⁹

Contemporary Challenges

In the light of present political realities in Oceania, what is the mission of the Church today and for the future? Despite secular influences, politics and religion will presumably remain closely related throughout much of the region. Whether it be fundamentalist doctrine urging people towards a new form of Christendom, or socially aware faithful speaking out against economic exploitation and ecological destruction, the Churches surely will resist being confined to the "sacristy". Restrictions would go against the tendency of Pacific people to elaborate religious understandings in all domains of life. Much could be said, but I will limit myself to outlining the mission of the Church in four points:

1. supporting democratic forms of participation
2. serving as prophetic witness
3. maintaining a place for the transcendent
4. promoting the Kingdom of God

Supporting Democratic Forms of Participation

Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar in an address to a meeting of the World Commission on Culture and Development said,

People's participation in social and political transformation is the central issue of our time. This can only be achieved through the establishment of societies which place human worth above power, and liberation above control. In this paradigm, development requires democracy, the genuine empowerment of the people.¹⁰

Democratic principles promoting the rule of the *demos* or the poor is surely in line with the Gospel. Most often the poor are unable to express or impose their will and need to be empowered.

That is where the Church can and must play an important role. But to fulfill this role the Church cannot be overly dependent on Government power or money, nor can it place a high priority on maintaining the *status quo*. Concerns about Government funding and not “rocking the boat” may well be obstacles for the Church in many countries of Oceania.

Ron Crocombe gives an example from the Cook Islands. When the ruling party won an election in 1989 with only 52% of the vote, it sought a broader basis of support by co-opting the Churches. When any religious organization wanted to build a church, Sunday school, or other project, the Government provided workers, equipment, material, and cash. Crocombe says that in Avarua village alone the Catholic Cathedral was built in 1994, the Cook Islands Christian Church rebuilt in 1995, and a new SDA Church built in 1996 using Government resources. The understood price was collusion.¹¹

Is the above example merely an expression of the “Melanesian Way” or the “Pacific Way” with its holistic worldview that tends not to separate Church and State? Admittedly, there can be as many forms of governance as there are nations. Democracy is not limited to a mere handful of forms such as those found in America, Britain, France, or Australia. Each country will have its own characteristics. Possibly Oceanic democracy will show greater emphasis given to communal rather than individual values. However, the task of the Church is to help people distinguish between beneficence and an unacceptable political patronage that amounts to corruption. Until today many of our churches are still struggling to be free from colonial or neo-colonial thinking. Authoritarian Governments and authoritarian Churches reinforce one another, leaving little freedom for genuine leadership in the arena of participatory democracy. The principal goal is that people will be sufficiently empowered to be able to participate significantly in the honest governance of their country.

Prophetic Witness

I have already given the example of the prophetic witness of the late Bishop Patelisio Finau of Tonga and of Archbishop Brian Barnes, O.F.M., of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. The Church in Oceania badly needs other leaders, clergy or lay, and communities who will be prepared to read the signs of the times and offer a prophetic witness to the Gospel faith in our time. One cannot dissociate faith and politics. In this sense, the Church does have a prophetic role and to do this it must be “political” in that challenged by the socio-economic and political situation, it both presents and demonstrates Gospel values.

Fijian theologian Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere writes of the importance of *vannua* or land in the Fijian context. Then he asks: What about the landless in a place like Fiji? When leases expire Fijian land owners will be legally entitled to take back their land. Where will the Indian farmers go? So he raises the question of who is our “neighbour” in Fiji? Who are the “poor” (*anawim*) in the aftermath of two *coups* in Fiji? Tuwere proposes that love of God and neighbour is a necessary condition for land ownership. The prophetic challenge announces that one should not expect to hold on to the land if one’s relationship with God or neighbour is violated. Land is a free sovereign gift of Yahweh who gives and takes away. Jesus Christ who challenged the Jewish authorities is challenging the chiefly leadership in many parts of Oceania today. Tuwere says that, “When a form of nationalism is justified on the basis of a religious fundamentalism, we have a perfect recipe for the destruction of human community. We then deny ourselves the right and the freedom to life” (1995:12).

In recent years the issue of a nuclear-free Pacific has captured the attention of people in Oceania in a way that few other issues have done. It is admirable to see nations like New Zealand and Palau being prepared to sacrifice economic gain and military power in an effort to ensure a life-giving environment for future generations. A number of the Churches in Oceania have played an important role in supporting the moral dimension of such issues.

Sacrifices will also be required of individuals in their prophetic witness to faith. At the end of 2003 in the Solomon Islands people were mourning the martyrdom of seven Anglican Melanesian Brothers who in April 2003 had gone to the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal on a peace mission to rebel leader Harold Keke. The first Brother was tortured over several days and killed. Another three were killed upon arrival and buried in a single grave. Their bodies, recovered by the RAMSI Forces (combined Australian-led Intervention Force), have been reburied near their community

house at Tabalia. In the funeral procession, in front of each coffin there was a banner reading: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God” along with the name of the Brother who had given his life in the cause of peace. Family members showed deep faith in dealing with their grief. The father of one of the dead Brothers told the head of the congregation that he had buried his grief in the grave with his son and now he could live again. Two days after the funeral the Melanesian Brothers admitted 48 new Brothers to their community.¹²

Maintaining a Place for the Transcendent

In his Letter to the Church of Oceania, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Pope John Paul II writes:

“It is certain that commitment to social justice and peace is an integral part of the Church’s mission in the world. Yet her mission does not depend upon political power. The Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end” (n. 26).

My intention is not to promote dualistic thinking that separates the temporal and spiritual orders. There is only one history — which includes the history of salvation. I am convinced, however, that the Church has a special mission today to maintain a place for the transcendent in political discourse. Democratic systems, the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the like enable us to live with freedom and responsibility. But taken in isolation these ideals will remain merely that — ideals — unless based on a deeper source of respect for humanity. The source of that respect cannot come only from humanism, but from acknowledging the transcendent dimension of our shared humanity which has its source in the divine.

Today the nations of Oceania are bombarded with secular influences and forms of economic rationalism so there is a tendency to think of economic growth as the prime indicator that all is well. However, many nations are finding that such so-called “progress” is weak on distributive justice and genuine forms of integral human development. To try to develop a country merely through economic growth is like trying to fly with one wing. It is doomed to failure. Thus, the Church has an important role to impress on leaders that power that does not respect the non-material dimension of life whether above us or among us, is fatally flawed. This is where I see the weakness of many programmes for peace-making and reconciliation, for political awareness or AIDs awareness. Unless they tap into that dimension of humanity that is the source of respect for ourselves and others, then there will be no respect for secular authority either. The Church has a mission in the community — often called civil society — to transcend the limits of secular thinking so as to address humanity in a genuinely universal way.

How to do it? The political awareness campaigns funded by the Churches in Europe seem to have little effect. People are tired of sermons about the obedient and righteous life. If only the Church could tap into the power of religious symbolism such as in the following poem by Samoan Albert Wendt (Wendt 2000:11-2):

The *faa-Samoa* is perfect, they said / from behind cocktail bars like pulpits /
double scotch on the rocks, I said

we have no orphans, no one starves / we share everything, they said / refill my
glass, I said

and we all have *alofa* / for one another, they said / drown me in your *alofa* then, I said

it’s true they said, our *samoa* / is a paradise, we venerate our royalty, / our pastors
and leaders and beloved dead

God gave us the *faa-Samoa* and / only he can take it away, they said / amen, I said
their imported first class whisky / was alive with corpses: my uncle / and his army of
hungry kids, / malnourished children in dirty wards, / an old woman begging on the bank,

/ my generation migrating overseas / for jobs, while politicians / and merchants grab
obesely / in the RSA, and pastors bang /out sermons about the obedient / and righteous
life — *aiafir** / all growing fat in / a blind man's paradise.

*Sweat-eaters

Promoting the Kingdom of God

New Testament scholars today agree that the central message of Jesus' mission was the proclamation of the Kingdom or Reign of God (Mk 1:15). How is this Kingdom of God related to the political realities in contemporary Oceania? In an address on Pacific Women's Theology, Sister Keiti Ann Kanongata'a from Tonga said, "To theologize our life in the Pacific, in a visionary way, means a call to fashion an alternative way of living in the world. This is a way of covenantal responsibility, a way of living known as the Reign of God" (Kanongata'a 1992:11).

Sr Keiti Ann emphasizes two important points: an alternative way of living and covenantal responsibility. The new ethic of the Kingdom of God, as shown in the Sermon on the Mount, is the very reverse of worldly concepts of authority and influence: "Blessed are the poor in spirit ..." (Mt 5:3). At the Last Supper Jesus gave the example of the washing of the feet. Insofar as Chiefs and Church leaders in the Pacific demonstrate this new ethic then they are reflecting the values of God's Kingdom. Otherwise, there is the danger of ecclesiastical imperialism. Moreover, God's Kingdom is not something to be pursued individualistically, but is manifest in *communio*. Thus, if leaders act responsibly with the community in mind, and if communities demonstrate the life of the beatitudes, then they reflect Christ's mission to establish the Reign of God.

Relations between politics and religion in Papua New Guinea were brought dramatically to public attention early in the year 2000, when the Speaker of Parliament, Bernard Narokobi, had a large cross fixed on top of the parliament building. It was illuminated so as to be visible at night. Bernard Narokobi explained that the cross represented the light of Calvary and our hope in the future as Christians. Not everyone agreed with the Speaker. Some comments in the newspaper reflected the view that the National Parliament is not a holy place and one "can never put darkness and daylight together" (Post Courier, 27 June 2000, p. 10). Eventually the cross was removed. However, Narokobi defended his position saying that the cross was a reminder that Papua New Guinea is a "Christian country". He then made the point that parliament makes decisions that are sacred for the common good of the people. Narokobi's action is an attempt by a devout Catholic to bring a symbol of Christian power into the very centre of political power. Is it too unrealistic and idealistic to think that parliamentary decisions are sacred because they are for the common good of the people?

Inculturated Politics

From what has been said above it may be seen how Christian faith in Oceania is becoming inculturated through being politicized. Culture is not simply traditional folkways from the past. Culture is what we live. The Church must be involved in helping people of the Pacific to move from a "culture of silence" whereby people blindly obey chiefly authority whether they like it or not, to a "culture of solidarity", building on Pacific communal values, whereby people can participate in bringing about changes that affect their lives. I maintain that shared religious values can unify and inspire people to work for such changes.

Political involvement is a Christian duty. However, one must discern what appropriate involvement consists of in any place and time. In the contemporary Pacific it has much to do with reminding the political world of its real task — that is the attainment of peace and justice and the development of a more human world for all the populace. In reality this is a radical mission because faith relativizes the political realm in the light of the Kingdom of God.

There is an inevitable tension between the use of religion to gain political power and its use to

control power for the common good. The former is regrettable. The latter course reflects the values of the Reign of God. Tensions between religion and politics are a part of contemporary life throughout Oceania. Thus, an important dimension of the Church's mission is the struggle, in theory and practice, to find an appropriate and effective balance.

Notes

- ¹ Max Quanchi and Ron Adams (eds.), *Culture Contact in the Pacific*, 33.
- ² Quanchi and Adams, *Culture Contact*, 103.
- ³ Steven R. Fischer, *A History of the Pacific Islands*, 106.
- ⁴ Brij V. Lal and Kate Fortune (eds.), *The Pacific Islands*, 178.
- ⁵ Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, 217.
- ⁶ Bishop Finau gained an MA from the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) in Manila in 1970.
- ⁷ Bishop Terry Brown (Anglican Bishop of Malaita). Personal Communication 23 August 2003.
- ⁸ The Catholic Church is an active member of ECREA (The Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy) which seeks to support and empower communities in Fiji.
- ⁹ See Gibbs, "Religion and Politics in Papua New Guinea 1997-2000".
- ¹⁰ Kyi 1995:18. Being held under house arrest in Myanmar since 1989, she wrote the address for a meeting of the World Commission on Culture and Development, held in Manila on 21 November 1994. At the author's request, it was presented on her behalf by former President Corazon Aquino of the Philippines.
- ¹¹ Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, p. 225.
- ¹² Anglican Communion News Service 3667, 7 November 2003.

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The Birth of a Religious Movement: A Comparison of Melanesian Cargo Cults and Early Christianity

- Theo Aerts, SVD -

II.

In the preceding pages we looked at the origins of Christianity, as seen against the background of Melanesian cargo movements. It is not our purpose now to judge the cargo cults by the principles provided by Christianity,⁴⁸ but rather to stress some points of difference between the two currents. For this we have to look not so much at the externals and at the operative mechanisms, but rather at the aims and the purposes which inspire each movement. Here as everywhere, similar or analogous means can be used for quite different ends.

1. We have nothing to add to differentiate the framework from which messianic movements spring; they are definitely the property of each distinct culture. But already in the historical occasion in which messianism takes place, some differences become visible. The Jews in their time wanted above all political independence; this led to the various military campaigns of the Zealots, and to an atmosphere sympathetic to them, as can easily be substantiated from late-Jewish and New Testament sources. Some have thought that a similar background provides a good explanation of Melanesian messianism.⁴⁹ True, the political situation at the time, and the inhuman experiences of Melanesians with sandalwood-traders, black-birders and whale-hunters before the colonial era proper, have had their effects. But it should also be remembered how easily history is forgotten, and that the kind of colonialism exercised in these islands has generally not been too harsh. It may be enough to quote such an uncompromising authority as John Kaputin who, during the Fourth Waigani Seminar (May 1970), accused Australia of not having left New Guinea what all other colonial powers had granted their former subjects, viz. a common enemy. If then, in this regard, one cannot simply speak of subjugation and oppression, one has to rely all the more on the unsettling effect of even the most friendly contacts.

The changes “from stone to steel” — an economic factor — and the impact of schooling and missionary advance — first of all a social factor — battered heavily against the traditional world-view. Through these contacts the local people were thrown off balance; they saw so many new things that their old global view crumbled and could no longer integrate the many unprecedented experiences. Melanesians wanted to have the new goods, and to be like those who already enjoyed them — even by changing the colour of their skins (as would be observed in several of the adjustment movements). This current became anti-White out of sheer necessity, because administration, business and missions alike⁵⁰ swelled the group of unbelieving countrymen, who stopped the “cargo” from coming. This cargo encompassed foodstuffs, cloths and tools, available without hard work, but also such spiritual values as equality and dignity, which were almost lost in the clash of cultures. What the movements aimed at, then, was not an exact replica of what the Judaeo-Christian Movement had aimed at. It was not the great national leader of the past who should return, but the culture-bringers of ancient myth (or the ancestors) who should care again for their people. With this outlook Melanesian movements are of a religious kind in origin, as also the Jesus Movement was at the beginning of our era.

2. As said earlier, the person of a Founder is essential; he brings into the open what lives, unexpressed, among the people. He proves to have the ability to evaluate both the old traditions

and the new experiences, and to present that acceptable and even cogent synthesis for which all were longing. He is the man who also has the strength to convince his bewildered community and to provide them with satisfying answers. However, in the majority of cases, the first leader recedes swiftly into the background and new leaders come forward to take his place, though they, too, often lose control of their hearers. Yali or Paliau are some New Guinea examples where the battle against the recrudescence of cargo morality was lost.⁵¹

The New Testament Founder is different; he, too, was able to evaluate the old traditions in a new synthesis, though he took at the same time a stand against other attempts which were current in late Judaism, such as the solution by human violence which the Zealots proposed or the answer of spiritual readiness given by the Essenes.⁵² The Kingdom of God, of which he knew himself to be the herald, did not admit of external observation (Lk 17:20-21), as Sadducees and nationalists would have liked, nor did it mean - in the words of St Paul — “eating or drinking” (Rom 14:17), that is: observing all kinds of dietary and other laws as Pharisees and Essenes demanded. On the contrary, it was a gift of God which man could never buy (*cf.* Mt 20:1-2; 22:1-2). The means to hasten the coming of the Kingdom — as far as human actions were concerned — were not a destruction of the past and some kind of external ritual, but rather a “conversion” of the heart, manifested in working and praying and in continual readiness. It is illuminating for New Testament expectations of the end that the most eschatological text in Mark (Mk 13) is interspersed with non-eschatological elements, such as the refusal to fix a date (v. 32), the repeated monition to be ready (vv. 5, 9, 23, 33) and the command to persevere till the end (v. 13). When the Gospel says that Jesus’ Kingdom is “not of this world” (*cf.* Jn 18:36), we must understand that it is already present in the person of Jesus, in his Good News and in his mighty deeds. He himself summarized this when he spoke: “If it is through the Spirit of God that I cast out devils, then know that the kingdom of God has overtaken you” (Mt 12:28). These few quotations show that in Christianity the person of the Founder is much more central than in the majority of other messianic movements, and that his first avowed aim was not to encourage an observable human achievement, but rather to make men ready to accept the gift of God. This idea of “gift” or “grace” comes close to one of the main functions of the culture-givers or culture-heroes in Melanesian mythology, and explains why the latter deserves our sympathetic attention: not work, but grace, is the key to human and Christian salvation.

3. What Jesus is and what he says are, in a way, the same, since He is the Kingdom he preaches about. Yet it can be added that the basic elements of his Kingdom contain a more satisfying answer to human longings than that given in a cargo cult.⁵³ Perhaps we can, for our purpose, reduce Jesus’ message to two points: **(a)** the universal equality of all men, which in turn is based on **(b)** the common fatherhood of God. In fact, cargo cults remain linked to local needs and provide local answers; yet they struggle with the problem of a widened experience, in which village or tribe can no longer cater for all one’s needs, and in which the native people notice how foreigners are head and shoulders above them in solving these problems. They could say, as the elders of Israel to Samuel: “Give us a king to rule over us, like the other nations” (I Sm 8:5). History has shown that, to a certain degree, cargo cults have succeeded in bringing people together and in contributing to national awareness. It should be added that the doctrine of God, the Creator of all men, and of Jesus, the Saviour who died for Black and White alike, provided a new element, not present in the traditional tribal religion. There was, indeed, a difference in content in the Christian and the Melanesian way of looking at reality, while at the same time the Christian answer enabled Melanesians to arrive at a wider synthesis.

Some of the points made were not observed by earlier investigators, and so F. E. Williams led many after him astray by terming the native unrest of 1919/31 a madness; the Acting Resident Magistrate could not believe his eyes when he saw “a number of strong, able-bodied natives in mid-afternoon, dressed up in a clean new toggery, sitting as silently as if they were sticks and stones instead of being at work ...”; and he added sadly, “they were breaking no part of Native Regulations”, as if a punishment would have matched the situation.⁵⁴ We now realize that a psychological interpretation of cargo cults, as also the doubts cast upon the sincerity of their charismatic leaders, are quite insufficient to explain the cults’ true dimensions. Yet the temptation remains to overrate the extraordinary and paranormal symptoms which occur during the outbreaks of some cults.

Margaret Mead is satisfied to define a potential cult-leader as “one with a capacity for total conviction”, thus leaving room for a wide range of personal characteristics and for the inclusion of behavioural patterns which are world-wide in distribution. Such symptoms of commitment are to a large degree fashioned by culture, but in their roots are common to all human beings. As everyday examples she quotes uncontrollable trembling at the height of emotion, unconsciousness as a response to unbearable situations, the recurrence of the obsessive dream, etc.⁵⁵ We might add that the expectation and acceptance of “miracles”, and the tendency to enhance stories about important people fall under similar universal laws. For these reasons we would not like to see too much of a difference between the events which underlined the historical work of Jesus and those which accompany the emergence of a cargo movement. Each has to be understood in its respective cultural frame.

4. As to the last point referred to above — the proselytizing activity of cult members — we can be brief. A foreign influence, such as seeing government officers going on patrol or missionaries visiting their outstations, is not unlikely. Yet, once admitted that the situation after European contact led to the discovery that the native world did not end with the village or the tribe, there is no reason not to credit the people themselves with having discovered the proper ways for contacting their neighbours; it is only normal that similar causes should have similar effects, without invoking every so often a borrowing from elsewhere.

At the end of our comparison we should pause and realize the advantages of having such a wealth of comparative material before us, a wealth which is accessible to every Melanesian. The human experience contained in this immense and multiform flood of messianic and millenaristic expectation is no doubt “a healthy sign of (the people’s) vitality” in some different circumstances,⁵⁶ but the same outburst of moral energy is also, in the words of Father M.-D. Chenu, a source for understanding (*le lieu intelligible*) our Christian messianism; it constitutes, as it were, its prefiguration and its preparation, and enables us to approach our hearers in a true dialogue, both psychologically and theologically.⁵⁷ This material would not easily find its way into the traditional, deductive theology, which is accustomed to start its exposition from the precise results of centuries-long struggles and precisions. It finds, however, a sympathetic welcome in the inductive approach to the faith, and inspires understanding attitudes in the pastoral field as well. In this way a theological and psychological dialogue becomes a real possibility.

Notes (continued)

⁴⁸ Compare J. Strelan, *Search for Salvation. Studies in the History and Theology of Cargo Cults*. Adelaide 1977.

⁴⁹ Similar explanations have been offered by T. Bodrogi (note 11), J. Guiart (note 47) and P. Worsley (note 3).

⁵⁰ The roles of traders, missionaries and administration officers is not the same, of course, and distinctions should be made which could rely upon some of the considerations given by K.O.L. Burrige (note 8), 140-146. R. Jaspers, *Kolonialismus und Missionstätigkeit*, in: H. Waldenfels, ed., ... denn Ich bin bei Euch”. Festgabe für J. Glazik (und) B. Willeke, Köln (1978), 169-182, briefly discusses the causes of friction between missions on the one side and business-administration on the other.

⁵¹ Cf. P. Christiansen (note 26), 124.

⁵² See respectively the studies of O. Cullmann, *Christ and the Revolutionaries*, New York 1970 and of J. Carmignac, *Jesus Christ and the Master of Righteousness*. Baltimore-Dublin 1962.

⁵³ The same observation would apply to the Jesus movement at the beginning of our era as compared with the thirty odd messianic movements in Jewish history (see W.D. Wallis, note 6). Whereas the latter remained episodic incidents, the former one succeeded, because as Rabbi Gamaliel sensed, it came “from God” so that it could not be stopped by men (*cf.* Acts 5, 39).

⁵⁴ Quotation in F.E. Williams (note 21), Appendix, and in P. Worsley (note 3), 84.

⁵⁵ M. Mead, *Independent Religious Movements*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and Religion* 1. 1958/59, 324-329; quotation pp. 326-327.

⁵⁶ Thus the anthropologist R.R. Marett, in the Introduction to F.E. Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, London 1928, p. XI.

⁵⁷ From a panel discussion held on March 28th, 1968, and reported in H. Desroche (note 3), 5.

Mission of the Incarnate Word Among the Israelites

- Jojo Joseph -

1. Introduction

The incarnation of Jesus among the Israelites reveals the divine concern of “The Word” over the waning spirituality and growing ritualism which tended to choke the process of spiritual renewal in their community. When the wine of spiritual wisdom imparted to a community fails to inspire and renew them into righteous and compassionate human beings, reformers or prophets are commissioned in succession to invigorate them by refilling them with the same old wine. When this also does not yield the desired results, the community may be served with a new wine to make them righteous and eligible for eternal life. The mission of Jesus among the Israelites indicates that he had the primary function of refilling them with the old wine and the secondary function of instituting the new wine. This article reflects on these two functions of Jesus among the segment of Israelites who failed to respond to the call of earlier prophets including John the Baptist to repent and to become righteous and compassionate.

2. Jesus came primarily for the sinners or the unrighteous. Who are the unrighteous?

Jesus started his public ministry by indicating that he was impelled by the Spirit to preach the wisdom of the Gospel to those who were “poor” in Spirit, “blind” to the Light of Truth, and “bonded” to the materialistic world (Lk 4:17-21). The spiritual connotation of the biblical terms such as the poor, the blind and the bonded seems to be one and the same (Jer 5:4, 4:22; Rv 3:17-19; Jn 9:39; Gal 4:9; Rom 8:21). The same connotation is applicable when we say that Jesus came to fill new empty wineskins with new wine, to heal those who were sick in the soul, to give the white robe of righteousness to those who were naked, to put back on the right track the sheep that had lost their way, or to seek the regeneration or rebirth of those who were spiritually dead.

Jesus reiterated the intent of his mission through these categorical statements. *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners for repentance”* (Mt 9:12,13; Mk 2:17; Lk 5:31,32). *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel”* (Mt 15:24). These statements of Jesus prompt us to reflect on the following issues. “Who were the targets of His mission? Whom did Jesus consider to be the lost sheep or the unrighteous and sinners among the Israelites? What is the divine criterion for judging righteousness and unrighteousness? What causes people to be unrighteous?”.

The main targets of the incarnate Word during His ministry on earth were not those who were trying to lead a righteous way of life in accordance with the “spirit of the scriptures”. Though all are free to accept the new wine, the mission of Jesus was directed mainly at the sinners or those who were “poor in Spirit”. The scribes and Pharisees in general failed to instill true spirituality and a yearning for practicing inner virtues among the people whom they were expected to guide. They meticulously practiced the laws and rituals in accordance with the “letter of the scriptures”, but they were ignorant about the underlying principles of “spiritual renewal”. They tried to please and reach God “vertically” without recognizing the ultimate necessity of practicing the golden rule of “horizontal love” of fellow human beings. Horizontal love is the expression of true vertical love (I Jn 4:21). The exhortation for horizontal love is the essence of the teachings in all scriptures (Lev 19:17,18; I Jn 2:7-11, 3:11; Gal 5:14; Rom 13:9-10).

Jesus made it very explicit that it is not the observance of rituals or animal sacrifices that pleases God, but an attitude of thanksgiving and compassion to the fellow human beings: “*I desire compassion and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous but sinners*” (Mt 9:12,13; Ps 50:13,14,23f). Those who have attained spiritual communion with The Word of God can be identified by their righteousness and compassion. Those who continue to remain unrighteous miss the real essence of The Word of God inherited by them and move away from salvation, despite remaining as active members of the religious institution: “*And these will go into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*” (Mt 25:44). God judges humans by their attitudes (Rom 2:16f). Unless a person becomes so righteous that he/she never thinks of calling another person a worthless fool, he/she does not become eligible for eternal life (Mt 5:20-22).

The eligibility for eternal life depends not on blind faith in some facts, figures or doctrines, tradition to which one belongs, or obligatory acts like rituals, prayer, fasting and alms-giving that one practices, but on the final effect of all these in transforming the individual to love the neighbour unconditionally. It is not religious works that save us, but service of humanity with compassion. “*And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God*” (Mica 6:8). Those who love their neighbour without any precondition have no cause to worry about salvation (I Jn 2:9-11f; Jas 2:8f) ... “*... you are my disciples, if you love one another*” (Jn 13:34-35). The criterion for the Final Judgment is very simple and transparent. Individuals of all nations are subjected to the same litmus test to decide whether he or she is eligible for eternal life. The question that really counts is, “Did your faith in The Word of God transform and purify you to love your fellow humans, especially your enemies?”.

Those who do not consider it necessary to be compassionate to the fellow travellers during their journey of life are “passive sinners” since they hurt others passively. They belong to the same category of unrighteous people who actively hurt or exploit others to satisfy their selfish interests. The passive sinners unwittingly remain complacent and continue to offer their prayers like the spiritually ignorant Pharisee (Lk 18:11). They are likely to get shocked on the Day of Judgment when they realize that their lack of sensitivity to the pain and injustice suffered by their fellow humans are so serious as to deny them eternal life (Mt 25:31-46).

Selfishness and sinful nature result from ignorance or lack of spiritual wisdom (Jer 4:22f). The inner meaning of the Scriptures becomes clear only to those who meditate on them deeply (Ps:119 [118]: 99) with a pure heart after consciously purging the thorns of sinful tendencies from oneself (II Cor 12:7f). All spiritual reformers and prophets try to remove spiritual ignorance from the target community and to fill them with the wine of spiritual wisdom that makes them righteous and compassionate. This is a challenging and risky assignment, especially when a religious community has become spiritually ignorant, corrupted, unrighteous and habituated to non-transformational modes of worship and ritualism.

The scribes and Pharisees were unable to digest the corrective teachings of Jesus and condemned him to death due to their spiritual ignorance or lack of spiritual wisdom. Recognizing this Jesus said, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk 23:34). Taking pride that they were chosen and ordained by God, and thinking that they had the duty of defending their faith and religious institution, they sought to destroy Jesus (Mt 12:14), who they thought was really blaspheming when He claimed spiritual oneness with God (Mt 26:65f). They did not know that everyone is entitled to attain “Abba experience” or oneness with God. They sincerely thought that a carpenter’s son could not be the Messiah whom they were awaiting (Mt 13:55-57f). They lacked the spiritual discernment to recognize from the words and deeds of Jesus that He was the Messiah. The prophecies were not so transparent (Acts 13:27f) as to indicate clearly through literal exegesis that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Obviously they deserve forgiveness for their spiritual ignorance. This prompts us to examine whether our present exegesis enables us to understand the true intent of our Scriptures and to practice neighbourly love.

The religious scholars remained spiritually ignorant or blind (Mt 15:14) and “uncircumcised” since they failed to practice The Word of God or the essence of the scriptural wisdom inherited

and preached by them (Rom 2:13, 17-25). It is the doers of The Word of God, not hearers that gain spiritual wisdom (Ps:119 [118]: 99-100; Mt 7:21,24f; Jn 13:17f; Jas 1:22,25f; Lk 6:46-49f). The Spirit of God opens up the mind of simple and willing aspirants and enlightens them with spiritual wisdom (Ps 19:7f; 119 [118]:130f, Lk 24:16,45f). Enlightened Jews like Simeon (Lk 2:25-31) had the spiritual wisdom to recognize that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

3. Hazardous assignment of refilling wineskins with the old wine

Followers of all religions are called by their respective scriptures or Word of God to be renewed spiritually through a “second birth” and to become perfect and holy. But in general they are all rooted mechanically in their own unique rituals and rarely do they progress spiritually and become righteous and compassionate. This may give the impression that scriptures are at fault. All communities tend to disregard the tenets of their scriptures or the spiritual wisdom inherited by them. Spiritual reformers have a role to play in all communities at all times. All human beings need to undergo constant inner conversion towards perfection and holiness day by day (II Cor 4:16f) and they need to be prompted periodically to help them to do it.

Correcting the hardened perceptions and unrighteous behaviour of an errant religious community by refilling them with the old wine seems to be more challenging than shaping up a new and open minded community with new wine. The prophets who work among the former are faced with a “professional hazard” as clearly depicted in the Bible. But such communities are never considered as beyond redemption and excluded from mission. A succession of prophets and reformers are commissioned by God to refill them with the old wine and to reform as many as possible.

Jesus had such a mission to execute among the Israelites before he formally introduced the new wine. He did not want to destroy the existing religion or to replace The Word of God available to the Jews, but to provide true interpretation of the Scriptures and to guide the people towards righteous living without in any way annulling a single word (Mt 5:17-19f). Even the worst antagonists of Jesus could not establish that he contravened the wisdom of the old wine through any of his words or deeds. The essence of The Word of God remains the same eternally, irrespective of the form in which it is manifested. However it is beneficial if it is interpreted in tune with times and served according to the changing needs of the target community. Servants of God in all communities who are impelled by the call of prophetic mission rise up periodically to fulfill this mission and Jesus Himself had such a prophetic role among the Jews.

The disciples of Jesus were some of the first ones to respond to the teachings of Jesus. They realized that transformation of the heart was more important than strict adherence to traditions and obligatory customs. They deviated marginally from the established tradition. The scribes and Pharisees who noted one such deviation complained that the Disciples of Jesus had transgressed the religious tradition of washing the hands before eating (Mt 15:2). Jesus justified the action of the Disciples by illuminating the theme that it is the inner hygiene that is more important than external hygiene (Mt 15:11, 17-20f; Lk 11:37-40f).

The Pharisees disapproved of the act of the Disciples of Jesus in plucking grain on a Sabbath day and they considered it as transgression of the existing law. But Jesus responded by severely criticizing their ignorance and misunderstanding of the Scriptures (Mt 12:1-8). He freed His Disciples of the charge of violation of law, much to the discomfort of the guardians of the law. It was not the intention of Jesus to abolish the laws, but to make the people realize that attainment and practice of compassion is more important than blind adherence to laws. This is further stressed in the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). The simple and illiterate “outsider” might not have followed the “Law”. But on account of the “circumcision of his heart”, he is dearer to God than all the Jewish scholars of Law who close their eyes on those who are weak and needy, physically, mentally and spiritually (Rom 2:26-29).

During the process of re-interpreting The Word of God, Jesus antagonized the scribes and Pharisees by exposing their hypocrisy and criticizing the vainness of their external or physical

worship (Mt 15:7-9; 23:27). Some Pharisees failed to develop a compassionate attitude though they unflinchingly practiced the ritualistic part (Lk 11:42). They were not eligible for the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 5:20) and were unfit for occupying the chairs of a religious institution (Lk 11:43-46f). Those who were supposed to be guides of the people acted as obstacles in the spiritual progress of the people not only by misguiding them, but also by persecuting and killing the prophets who came to reform them (Lk 11:47-52f).

Prophets are normally well recognized outside their own community, but are disowned by their own people (Lk 4:24), since they do not blindly follow the footsteps of the mainstream community. They practically demonstrate and espouse a new way of life to be emulated by others. They have an unenviable and thankless mission to execute, because they have to point out the mistakes of unrighteous people including highly placed individuals and religious authorities and to ask them to repent and undergo transformation of heart. Prophets who try to refill unreformed religious communities with old wine have to necessarily suffer the “professional hazard” of getting persecuted and even killed by their own people. Prophets carry out their mission due to an inner call and they take up their work sacrificing themselves like a candle that burns itself to give light to others. Servants of God who work for a sinless world or the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, willingly face various forms of suffering during the process of reforming others. The Word of God demonstrated this in person, as a lesson for all willing spiritual aspirants.

4. Seamless Transition from the Old Wine to the New Wine

When the majority of a religious community gets obsessed with rituals and religious laws without deriving any benefit, they need to be offered a better and timely wine that is capable of transforming and making them righteous and compassionate. On the other hand, the minority who succeeds in deriving the benefit of repentance and inner transformation from the old wine need to be commended for their perseverance and they should be permitted to hold on to the old wine as long as they want to be nourished by it. The incarnate Word had such a unique role to fulfill among the Jewish community.

The capability of the old wine had dwindled considerably, not due to any inherent deficiency, but due to the human error of centuries of misinterpretation and misguidance. Great scholars of Judaism including Saul who later became Paul failed to undergo life-giving transformation before they accepted the new wine. Paul has clearly testified that the gain he derived from the old wine is worthless compared to the wealth he gained through Christ (Phil 3:5-11). Even great teachers among the Pharisees such as Nicodemus failed to undergo spiritual transformation or re-birth through the old wine (Jn 3:1-10). The old wine was not a mere concoction of dead laws, but life-giving wholesome spiritual food consisting of both “Mosaic Laws” and “Prophetic guidance” (Rom 2:20; Lk 16:29-31). Prophetic guidance reflected the true spirit or kernel of the Scriptures, but it was often neglected by the followers, making the mechanical observance of Mosaic Law meaningless and lifeless. All scriptures are expected to edify and transform the followers (II Tim 3:16-17f) but seldom does this happen without pastoral, prophetic or messianic inculcation.

The sinners or the unrighteous among the Israelites were offered prophetic guidance according to the old wine repeatedly by several prophets including John the Baptist (Lk 3:3,18) who prepared the way for the new wine (Mt 3:3). John could touch the hearts of his followers and take them up to the stage of confession of sins or “Baptism of repentance” and enable them to obtain remission of their sins (Mk 1:4-5). He enabled several people including tax gatherers and harlots to repent and to walk towards the Kingdom of God (Mt 21:31,32), while some others including chief priests and elders refused to get into the track of righteousness.

John the Baptist continued to baptize the Israelites even after Jesus had started baptizing the people (Jn 3:22-25f). Jesus was winning more disciples through baptism (Jn 4:1). Never did John ask his disciples to become disciples of Jesus, but he left them free and inspired them by saying that Jesus would baptize them by Spirit and fire (Jn 1:35-40f; Mt 3:11f). John knew that he had a decreasing role in reforming the Jews through the old wine and that, Jesus had an ever increasing role through

the new wine among the unrepentant and unrighteous people, not only among Jews but also other religious communities (Jn 10:16). John and Jesus tried to avoid possible disputes or misunderstanding between their disciples (Jn 3:25-30f; Mt 11:1-15f).

Jesus came in search of the lost sheep who had failed to respond to the call of earlier prophets for repentance and he tried to refill them initially with the old wine. There were several sinners among the Israelites like Zaccheus who were coaxed into repentance by Jesus (Lk 19:5-10). Those whom he cleansed or healed spiritually or physically were expected to follow the purification and thanksgiving procedures prescribed by the Mosaic Law. For example, the leper whom he cleaned was asked to present himself to the priest and to offer the sacrifices prescribed by Moses (Mt 8:1-45). In another instance, Jesus cautioned the Jews not to emulate what the Pharisees practiced, but he specifically instructed them to follow what they preached (Mt 23:2,3). This demonstrates that during the initial part of his ministry, Jesus exhorted the Israelites for a return to the original intent of the scriptural commandments or to the old wine of Judaism.

We may also note that while Jesus asked his Disciples to serve the old wine and to preach the Kingdom to the unrighteous among the Israelites (Mt 10:5-7f), he specifically instructed them not to serve it to the Gentiles and Samaritans. It is clear from the response of Jesus to the Canaanite woman's request that his primary targets were the Israelites (Mt 15:24). Obviously the outsiders were not ignored but they were entitled to the new wine that was yet to be formally introduced through the Liturgy of The Eucharist. The old wine has special relevance for the community of Israelites, whereas the new wine is open to all, including the Israelites, who are attracted by it. The prophets of the old wine and the apostles of the new wine worship the same God, and they differ only in the "Way" in which they worship. The first Christians were faithfully observant Jews who saw the new wine as the distortion-less expression of the old wine. This point is one of Luke's main emphases in the Book of Acts (see e.g. Acts 2:46; 3:1; 18:18; 21:20; 22:12; 23:1,6; 24:14,15; 25:8; 26:6-7, 22-25; 28:17).

Jesus could have easily picked all his Disciples from among those who were spiritually well groomed or in other words partially filled with the old wine by John or the earlier prophets. However finding most of them to be moving in the right direction, Jesus chose others who lacked spiritual direction. We find that most of whom he chose as his disciples were quite raw or in other words new empty wineskins. Through the parable of the wine and wineskins, he declared figuratively that he preferred to fill up the new wine in new empty wineskins and not in old wineskins that have already responded positively to the old wine and are sensitized (Mt 9:14-17). From the beginning, Jesus tried to train his disciples in the way of the new wine. He wanted them to grow beyond the stage of repentance and promised them the "Baptism of Spirit" from the Father (Lk 24:49; Acts 2:4,33f). He groomed them so that they would become perfect fishers of men and continue his work within and outside Israel after he left them.

Just before he laid down his life, Jesus formally inaugurated the New Covenant by instituting the Liturgy of The Eucharist (Mt 26:26) primarily for the benefit of those who had failed to get transformed spiritually by their inherited wine and also for those who have not inherited any wine. The Disciples of Jesus were instructed to serve the new wine to the unrepentant among the Israelites and also to the rest of the world (Lk 24:47). Both the old and new wines constitute the wisdom of God or The Word of God, but their followers express or celebrate their faith in different ways. Jesus sought to simplify the observance of rituals and to lessen the burden of religious laws for the benefit of the followers of the new wine. He declared, "... *my yoke is easy and my load is light*" (Mt 11:30). The old pattern of worship is replaced by a simpler one. Though it is more meaningful and endearing for a wider spectrum of followers outside Judaism, the first converts from Judaism found it extremely painful to forego their cherished rituals and mode of worship (Acts 21:17-26; Gal 2:11-14).

Rituals keep the followers reminded of events in their community in which divine action was experienced. Israelites follow a worship pattern based on the exodus event. They remember what God had done for them in delivering them from Egypt and bringing them into the Promised Land.

The Ark of the Covenant containing the manna and the Covenant Tablets ensures the presence of The Word of God amongst them. Christians follow a worship pattern that is centred in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and its key component is the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist. It ensures the presence of the crucified and risen Word of God amongst the Christians. One of the functions of the laws, rituals and festivals is to help the followers to remain as a cohesive community or brotherhood. Through community participation in rituals, they are expected to gradually undergo inner transformation and to become pious, righteous and compassionate. All are expected to go through a process of repentance (II Cor 7:10f) and to become as perfect and as holy as the Father (Mt 5:48f, Lev 19:2f; 12:45f) by scrupulously following the spirit of the Scriptures.

5. Conclusion

During his mission on earth, the primary target of the incarnate Word was the segment of the unrighteous people among the Israelites. Initially he tried to reform them through their inherited scriptural wisdom or the old wine. When he interpreted and expressed it with precision and perfection followed by miracles, it helped many including Zacheus to repent and reform, but the custodians of the Law and the scriptural scholars found it incompatible with their distorted spiritual perceptions. Before the end of his role on earth, the incarnate Word instituted the new wine as part of his messianic role, so that all those who received it into their heads as well as hearts could attain righteousness, compassion, spiritual wisdom and eternal life. The followers of the new wine among the Israelites did not have to practice the elaborate Jewish religious customs that had gathered moss over the centuries and become a bane instead of boon for the beginners or those who were not yet spiritually initiated.

Note

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SEDOS Coming Events

- Annual General Assembly 2006 -

**Tuesday, 5 December, 2006
14:30 hrs**

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

- For SEDOS Members only -

- Open Conference 2006 -

**Tuesday, 5 December, 2006
16:00 hrs**

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

- More details will follow -

Seminar 2007

"International Formation for 'Missio ad Gentes'"

Please, carefully note the dates:

24 - 28 April

Basic structure proposed for the themes to be treated:

- 1. Multicultural Formation***
- 2. Ad Gentes Today***
- 3. Experiences of Multicultural Spirituality***

- Ariccia (Rm) - "Casa Divin Maestro"

- More details to follow -