

# sedos

## Bulletin 2006

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Editorial	<b>298</b>
Completing the Missionary Task <i>Hugh McMahon, SSC</i>	<b>299</b>
The Significance of Missio ad Gentes for the Young Missionary in the Context of Globalization and Multiculturality <i>John P. Mallare, CICM</i>	<b>301</b>
Religious Indifferentism: New Challenge for the Church's Mission Today <i>Alex Jebadu, SVD</i>	<b>307</b>
Paradigm Shifts in Mission. Understanding and Praxis Through the Centuries <i>Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ</i>	<b>316</b>
Réflexions actuelles sur la relation entre mission et œcuménisme <i>Jacques Matthey, [WCC]</i>	<b>322</b>
Friar Dayanand: Making Christianity Credible and Dialogical <i>Joy Prakash, OFM</i>	<b>325</b>
Les principales sources de violence dans les communautés religieuses <i>Luc Crépy, C.I.M.</i>	<b>328</b>
The Living Bread in the Land of China. A Report About the Chinese Pastoral Bible in China (2000-2005) <i>Cao Xue</i>	<b>333</b>
SEDOS Annual Report 2006 <i>Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP (Executive Director)</i>	<b>337</b>
SEDOS WORKING GROUPS	<b>343</b>
AUTHOR INDEX and SUBJECT INDEX 2006	<b>345</b>
Coming Events	<b>348</b>

## Editorial

**God Said, “Let Us Make Man In Our Image, To Our Likeness. ... So God Created Man In His Image; Male And Female He Created Them... God Saw All That He Had Made, And It Was Very Good” (Gn 1:26, 27, 31).**

In His image; male and female and administrators of His Creation. All brothers and sisters sharing in the joy of His Creation. Yet this joy has not reached many of our brothers and sisters. As we arrive at the end of 2006 we pause to thank the Lord for His Blessings during this year and to reflect on how well we have used the gifts He gave us to work in His Kingdom. He came to show us how precious human beings are as Image of God, so that we do not forget to look for Him in the other.

**May The Joy Of The Kingdom Fill Our Hearts  
And May We Share This Joy With All Throughout The Year!**

In “*Completing the Missionary Task*” **Hugh McMahon, SSC**, challenges the Missionary Congregations to look at the establishing of the Local Church not as the end of the process but as a ‘step on the road to proclaiming the Gospel’.

**John P. Mallare, CICM**, brings the problem of multiculturalism and internationality to the fore. “*The Significance of Missio ad Gentes for the Young Missionary in the Context of Globalization and Multiculturalism*” analyses some of the problems young missionaries encounter within their International Congregations in understanding the meaning of *ad Gentes*.

Globalization breeds religious indifferentism and the Church has a great new challenge to deal

with. **Alex Jebadu, SVD**, in “*Religious Indifferentism: New Challenge for the Church’s Mission Today*” presents and analyses religious indifference, its roots and consequences, in our World and suggests some guidelines to meet the challenge.

**Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ**, in “*Paradigm Shifts In Mission. Understanding and Praxis Through the Centuries*” describes the transitions in understanding the meaning of mission in the history of the Church. A new Springtime for mission is flourishing although not without anxiety and uncertainty.

**Jacques Matthey, [WCC]**, presents the readers with “*Réflexions actuelles sur la relation entre mission et œcuménisme*”. Mission and Unity go together. God’s project is ecumenical since His mission holds the whole World within the communion of Christ’s love.

A Franciscan Brother, **Joy Prakash, OFM**, in his short biography of “*Friar Dayanand: Making Christianity Credible and Dialogical*” offers us a practical example of Proclamation. Friar Dayanand shows us that witnessing the faith within the Hindu culture is possible and a powerful way of proclamation.

“*Les principales sources de violence dans les communautés religieuses*”, explains how rejection of the other is a cruel form of violence and this sometimes happens in our midst. **Luc Crépy, CIM**, reflects on the violence in our society and the means to counteract it.

“*The Living Bread in the Land of China. A Report about the Chinese Pastoral Bible in China (2000-2005)*”. **Cao Xue** presents to the readers the missionary efforts carried out in China to encourage the reading and understanding of the Bible.

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# Completing the Missionary Task

Hugh McMahon, SSC

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Like many of East Asia's metropolises, the city in which I live is unashamedly attracted to the profit motive. There is a standing joke that the *temples* to which people go to worship on a regular basis are the *banks*. Indeed, both rich and poor share an interest in the stock market and each day anxiously examine the rise and fall in share prices.

However, impressions are deceiving. Having lived here for ten years, I find the people remarkably religiously-minded. On a daily basis I see indications that show they are deeply sensitive to the spiritual and non-material world, more so than most urban dwellers in the West.

In this city there is scarcely a home or shop that does not have a well-tended family shrine. During the 'Month of Lost Souls' people burn incense and place fruit outside their door for passing 'hungry souls'. The festivals of local deities are major community occasions and thousands queue up at temples to seek a blessing at the lunar New Year. The police (and the Triads) offer annual service to Kwan Ti, the deity of courage and loyalty. No building or new enterprise is launched without a religious ritual.

I have found the ordinary people to be friendly, family oriented, law-abiding and hard working. While they have their human weaknesses, their efforts to live a moral and conscientious life are at least as sincere as those of any other nation.

With so much in common, and with freedom of religion and no dominant non-Christian creed restricting it, one might expect the Church to be flourishing here at all levels of society.

However, in this city of some eight million people, it is estimated that there are just 250,000 Catholics and that the total number of Christians of all denominations is about 10 per cent. The Catholic Church has been firmly established here for many years and is the envy of other Asian churches for its range of educational, medical and social services. Many of the government officials are graduates of Catholic schools and many ordinary citizens have availed themselves of its institutions. The bishop is well known and popular, in 2002 he was voted the city's 'Person of the Year' for his stand on social issues. The vast majority of the clergy, religious and lay leaders are local, many of them highly talented and experienced. There must be no one in the city who has not heard of the Church yet only 3 per cent are Catholic and this percentage is unlikely to grow unless there is a major change in the Church's image.

One undoubted element of this image, which it has in common with other Catholic Churches in Asia and which is responsible for their limited growth, is its foreignness – its distance from the religious thinking, experience and approach of the ordinary people.

This development is understandable, though regrettable. For most of the past hundred years the goal of mission, in Asia and elsewhere, was to establish vibrant and self-sufficient Local Churches. The original intention was that those Churches would then take on the task of spreading the message among the local people in ways which would be more familiar to them and closer to their heart and situation. It was thought that eventually large numbers of individuals, families and communities would find it natural to turn to these churches in moments of need, truth-seeking or thanksgiving. In few cases has this dream been fulfilled and today many young churches are no closer to localization than when the missionaries left or took a back seat.

Why did this happen? There are a number of reasons or, rather, a chain of reasons.

The emerging local leadership had been formed according to the universal guidelines laid down by the responsible Vatican authorities in order to ensure that their training would be both comprehensive and uniform. Once in charge, the indigenous leadership felt its duty was to continue and stabilize the system they had inherited. It had not been made clear to them that they were

expected to move out of their foreign shell and bridge the gap with the wider population by developing a church more suited to the local situation.

The blame for this lapse can be put on the Missionary Societies which had focused too narrowly on establishing self-sufficient local churches. They had failed to remember that this was only a first step and a second one remained: for the newly established local churches to take responsibility for reaching out to all levels of society in ways that would be more intelligible and fruitful among the ordinary people. The setting up of local churches was meant to be a means and not an end.

Undoubtedly there were also some missionaries who deliberately encouraged the young churches not to drift too far from the universal model of the Latin Church. They feared that inexperience might lead them to be influenced by some of the less acceptable elements in their local culture. There were concerns that any tinkering with the existing system could lead to disagreement and division, based on a failure to understand fully the reasoning and justification behind existing practices and the need for unity. Others believed that, theologically, the Church was never intended for all people anyhow but would always to be a 'little flock' or 'tiny flame' that would inspire and enlighten those in the surrounding darkness. It was more important for it to be 'orthodox' than to be 'accessible'.

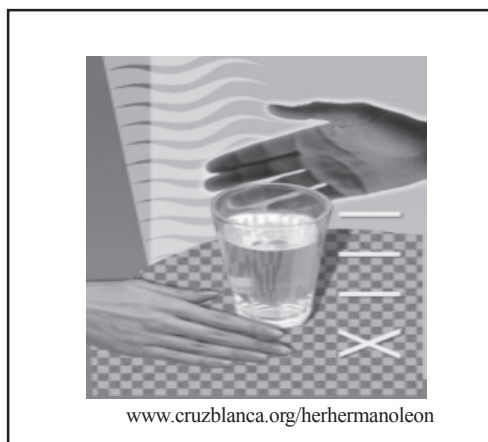
These considerations may have some validity but they should not become obstacles in making the Gospel available to all people, no matter what their educational level or cultural background.

The challenge, then, is for the Missionary Societies to recall that their achievement in helping to set up local churches was a step on the road to proclaiming the Gospel but not the end of the process, nor of their responsibility. They may now need to consider what they can do to encourage and facilitate the Young Churches in making discipleship possible for a larger percentage of the population.

Simultaneously, they need to use their experience and cross-cultural credibility to draw the attention of the authorities in the Vatican to the compelling case for inculturation. They might wish to use SEDOS to combine their resources and expertise in order to do the necessary research and help Church authorities find ways of dealing with legitimate concerns about localization. Then the responsible dicasteries could begin to encourage churches to adopt new approaches that will make them accessible to all levels within their culture.

This would call for a five-year plan to initiate the process and, then, a further twenty-year plan to see it through its early stages. After that, the Missionary Societies might be in a position to claim that their primary missionary task has been completed.

Ref.: Text sent by e-mail from the author for the SEDOS publication in 2006.



# ***The Significance of Missio ad Gentes for the Young Missionary in the Context of Globalization and Multiculturalism***

**John P. Mallare, CICM\***

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## **Introduction**

I am deeply indebted to Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., for the idea of this reflection. His article entitled "Challenges Today to Mission 'Ad Gentes'"<sup>1</sup> gives a rousing summary of the recent developments in the theology of mission and in globalization, their effects on the interpretation of the mission *ad gentes* today, and the latter's future direction. As I read through his article, I sensed an immediate call to react to it, not to disagree, but to validate many of his points.

He talks about the conditions shaping the mission *ad gentes*. The convergence of mission and empire has resulted in a different way of thinking regarding what "mission" and "territory" mean. Mission in the past involved conquering territories. Furthermore, he mentions the "civilizing model" of mission in the past, that is, the provision of European education, technical training and health care. Finally, he recognizes the development of a military metaphor, a model of relationship wherein the missionaries of the past had the ultimate intention of saving souls.

Later, he cites some lessons learned from the convergence of empire and mission, and the geopolitical and macroeconomic structure of today's time. There is the birth of the idea of the "short term" volunteer, and its effects on the type of missionary commitment we have today. He also notes a change in the idea of "territory". Globalization has altered it, from a wide, vast land, to a compressed space. This has led religious congregations to reflect on and even to reinterpret their respective missions *ad gentes* and *ad extra*. In the end, he puts a premium on the role of insertion and dialogue, but he also adds the importance of reconciliation and conflict resolution.

As a young missionary myself, I would like to voice my opinion regarding the present mission trends, especially in the context of globalization and multiculturalism, as well as the possibilities of doing mission *ad gentes* today. It is more a question of expressing the significance for me, and by extension, for most young missionaries, of the Church's mission *ad gentes*.

## **Globalization**

The coming of the modern age has certainly changed the lives of people. The internet, portable telephones, cable television and digital theatres have made entertainment more interesting, though more private. Promenading in open parks has slowly been replaced by the boxed environment of shopping centres. Health care has been much improved. We can also easily communicate with each other in any part of the world, as well as research data with just one click on a 'mouse' button. Even transportation has been made easier by planes and trains becoming more and more rapid. Voyaging by ship has become faster and cheaper yet safer. There is indeed much more value given to time now, for it seems there is not enough time to do all things one wants to do. In the economic world,



because of stiff market competition, companies begin merging to form supercompanies never seen before. They do so in order to survive.

However, there are also negative physical and social developments. There is nuclear warfare, and the presence of unhealthy genetically modified food, among others. Furthermore, the workers of today do not seem to be content with one job in life; more and more people vary careers so often. The world today is truly characterized by instability.

These effects of globalization are not limited to the civil world. Even the entities in the Church itself such as parishes and religious congregations use the modern means of technology to communicate, run their affairs, and do their work, especially in liturgy and vocation animation. Nowadays, for example, in my country, the Philippines, it is not rare for a church in Manila to use an LCD projector during Mass, in order to aid the people to sing and respond. Vocation animators of religious congregations are finding it more and more difficult to attract perspective vocations without using animated *Powerpoint* presentations.

Yet, as Schreiter cites, globalization has caused much “fragmentation” and “homogenization”. Instead of unifying people, it has created much division due to competition. People have become individualistic and private, and have been pulled out from what they were used to doing some years ago. So he says that there is much need for “reconciliation”, in order to unite a people who are divided, even if hi-tech instruments give the impression that they make people closer. These distractions do not spare the youth. A challenge now is how to keep the youth of today at home and how to give them time to reflect. The late John Paul II’s Message to youth expresses this fear:

“... do not yield to *false illusions* and *passing fads*, which so frequently leave behind a tragic spiritual vacuum! Reject the *seduction* of wealth, consumerism and the subtle violence sometimes used by the mass media”.<sup>2</sup>

A consumeristic, capitalistic and advanced world has its effects on the way of mission itself, for it is the dominant world model now. A growing number of today’s missionaries like fast and easy things. Sometimes, other priorities are chosen to the detriment of pastoral work. There is also the “migration” symptom, which can be detected by many missionaries coming from the Third World who wish to work “only” in First World Countries.

### **Multiculturality**

It seems to me that the youth today, even the most deprived, such as those living in villages, are more exposed to different cultures and religions due to migration and exposure to people in their own school, workplace, church and other public places. Many of the young are the progeny of migrant parents, of parents of different nationalities or at least, of different local cultures. Young people always yearn for something new, different, unique, and this idea excites them. Before, international experience was a rarity, but now it has become more frequent, and is even slowly becoming more and more a must, that is, an aid in order to improve and widen the quality of one’s life experience. There is always the desire to go around the world to learn and discover many things in a world which has indeed become very small.

I observe that, generally, for educated youth, dealing with cultural diversity is not a problem. But why is it a problem for many young missionaries especially in international religious congregations? Are they not the same youth we are talking about?

Maybe it would be enough to distinguish the two types of youth we are discussing. The first group are those who search for a career in life, and the latter, those who nurture a certain religious vocation. The former group is open, individualistic, and has no common spirituality. It could be an ordinary peer group, or a conglomeration of youth. Once a member of this group feels he or she is not “in”, he or she can easily leave the group. The latter group is intentionally and consciously formed, disciplined, spiritually nourished, and follows communitarian structures. I think one

reason why the members of the latter group have some difficulty in adjusting to new situations is that they are sent to live, for a longer period of time, with people of other nationalities, and furthermore are asked to integrate within the culture of the host mission country. This demands of the person even changing his or her deep-rooted personal convictions and attitudes to which he or she has been accustomed. It entails sacrifice. It demands commitment. The experience of internationality and multiculturalism touches the core of the person of the young missionary, and this is not an easy process. It does not only demand of him or her a total change in outlook and behaviour, that is seeking to see the positive side of the other, but it also demands an embedded, disciplined and coherent spirituality. In a religious community, not like in a usual peer or dance youth group, or in an association of professionals, there is a common spirituality, a relationship of equality and justice, and a desire to eliminate cultural and racial discrimination. There is no intention to conquer the other (as colonizers) but to live together as equal workers in the Kingdom of God.

I was at the last World Youth Day in Cologne, and I discovered that the youth of today have been exposed to numerous languages and cultures, and even religions. But being “exposed” does not necessarily mean being “knowledgeable”. This should remind us of the great challenge of dealing with these kinds of youth and offering to them a definition of the “Church” and “Kingdom of God” which is more understandable and closer to their hearts. That is why I find it necessary that sessions and exposure on multiculturalism and internationality in schools, seminaries and convents should be initiated even from the very start of schooling or formation. Multiculturalism involves not only the aspect of culture itself, but other categories as well such as sex, language, religion, work preference, career, etc. This creates for the young *formandi* a positive regard for each social category, to be critical of their negative aspects, and the desire to work in a particular culture which interests him or her, in any continent of the world.

### **Mission *Ad Gentes* for the Young Missionary**

Taking all these things into consideration, how does the young missionary of today view the mission *ad gentes* while living in the context of multiculturalism and globalization? What is the significance of the mission *ad gentes* for him or her? To answer these questions, I shall talk from limited point of view — that of a young missionary sent to a foreign country, and as a member of an international religious congregation.

Generally, as I said earlier, a young missionary values new, unique and exciting experiences. But the fear of the unknown explains certain difficulties when faced with new cultures, languages, and religions. Ideally, if we follow the same logic, the concept of mission *ad gentes*, to “the nations”, would also be interesting for him or her, above all, because of the movement involved, that is, travelling to far-away places and encountering the “different”.

There are various types of commitment, but the increasing possibility of short-term missionary work is posing a great challenge to today’s young missionaries and the future of religious congregations as a whole. This is because deep-rooted and traditional charisms would probably have to be altered, and this might not be acceptable to the older missionaries. Furthermore, an enlargement of the scope of the particular charism or missionary objective of a congregation might not be readily undertaken by the congregation itself, as it entails the reshuffling of personnel and heavy financial repercussions. Therefore, in the midst of this “shortening” of missionary engagement, as opposed to a lifetime commitment in one mission territory, the young missionary is challenged to prove his or her own commitment. This commitment is seen in the way one engages oneself in the challenges of mission today in a multicultural context, such as the option for the poor, justice and peace, human liberation and interreligious dialogue, among others. His or her stability and consistence as a missionary is likewise challenged. In a life full of change and movement, the sense of interiority is often lacking.

That is why the phenomenon of young missionaries leaving their mission areas early, and going back home bitter is understandable. The degree of patience a missionary of the past had was conditioned by his or her acceptance of the realities of those times in which he or she lived.

But a young missionary now, for example, one working in the “bush” areas, when faced with such difficulties, cannot help but compare himself to other young missionaries working in the cities who have all the time and luxuries for relaxation, study and all the modern means to do pastoral work. The former would then start reflecting: “There must be a better way of doing mission, where I can work at ease and without much difficulty”. I think this might explain the thought of young missionaries who are sent to mission fields and after a short time, leave, and worse, quit their respective congregations.

I think it is normal for young missionaries to think in this way. However, when one integrates oneself within the context of the original purpose of one’s call, one would actually find it hard to distinguish the effects of exterior factors on one’s mission. The basis is that one finds meaning in what one does, and that what one does is all for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The formation one receives for many years must prepare one for the mission and the task one has to undertake.

I have mentioned earlier the challenge of globalization to our missionary work today. How does the Gospel find meaning and inculturate itself in the context of globalization? Michael Amaladoss reminds us of the importance of inculturation:

“The Gospel in relation to culture has a twofold task: it must find embodiment — incarnate itself — in a culture to become a local church; it must also seek to transform the culture of the people among whom it is made present by this local church”.<sup>3</sup>

Globalization has evidently become a “local” culture in itself, though not exactly “local Church” as cited in the quote. Since we have been talking about “inculturation” in the Church, and indeed been applying it in the context of the local cultures we work in, is it then also possible to “inculturate” such globalization, because this is now one “local” culture and a context we find ourselves working in? Does this mean that the Church should enter into a dialogue with globalization itself? How does the Church “incarnate” itself into a globalized world, without being gobbled up by the secularism of a materialistic society? How does it do that?

### **Some primary solutions**

I think, for example, in a consumeristic world, the Church itself should know how to invest and manage its goods. It should also learn how to use the media in its evangelization and take advantage of the power of the media to spread God’s word to as many people and places as possible. As Schreiter also cites in the same article, the Church must also present itself as a “transnational organization” which is not oppressive. The Church should not engage in State affairs, but in matters of justice, especially when the faithful themselves are involved. Pope Benedict XVI elaborates this further by saying that the Church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice”.<sup>4</sup>

How about the young missionary? The individualism and fragmentation caused by globalization should lead the young missionary to self-reflection. Is the presence of modern technology and a fast-paced world encouraging him/her to reflect more on his/her vocation as a religious missionary and to use these modern means to proclaim and live the Gospel effectively, or is it slowly eating away his/her desire to be alone in order to have time for him/herself?

The Mission *ad gentes* is a challenge to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience of the young missionary today. His or her poverty is challenged by the materialistic world whose sole aim is to earn money. His or her chastity is challenged by the increasing temptation to undermine familial and communal values of togetherness and solidarity. His or her obedience is challenged by the kind of trust he or she gives to the formators, superiors and spiritual directors, especially in a world where trustworthy people are becoming a rarity. His or her idea of “power” is also tested.

For the young missionary, who are “the nations”? The answer to this, I guess, is that “the nations” means someone or something needing our immediate help. These are the victims of the negative effects of globalization, especially those people who have lost their trust in someone who



guides and loves them, because of the injustices in society and the never-ending spiral of corruption. In other words, “the nations” refer to those who have lost their trust in God. The young missionary should present him- or herself as a person to be trusted and not to be feared, as someone who works for and loves unity and solidarity. Likewise he or she is asked to be counter-cultural, to go against the changes and trends of time which do not at all ease or alleviate the suffering of people, such as the negative aspects of a particular culture.

The young missionary should always be prepared to work with both the hierarchy and especially the lay people, for the importance of the latter has become much more pronounced in these times when the commitment of religious missionaries is sometimes questioned. Amaladoss clearly explains this:

“As long as mission was seen primarily as the planting of the Church, involving the building of a mission compound with church, school, dispensary, and so forth, the stress was on the priests and women and men Religious as missionaries. But in an international mission conceived in these broad terms, the laity come into their own. Without the institutional trappings they may be even more successful and effective in international mission”.<sup>5</sup>

The young religious missionary belongs to a congregation willing to be an instrument of reconciliation to all people who have been wounded and separated by histories of war, corruption, epidemics, secularisation, colonisation, etc. He or she should help form a Church which is, as Antonio Pernia says, a “home for people of different cultures, instrument of intercultural dialogue, and sign of the all-inclusiveness of God’s Kingdom”.<sup>6</sup> Rather than being a foreigner in a place and seen by people as an oppressor, he or she should be seen as someone who challenges the oppressors and who helps liberate the oppressed from the hands of those who perpetuate their pain, as Christ did when he challenged the *élite* of his time.

Young missionaries must remain open to several possibilities of missionary involvements, for mission now has become “everywhere”. A young missionary has to be a visionary, not only concerned with what he or she can do in the present, but also has a plan for the future, and for the generations of future missionaries to come. He or she should be prepared to teach people how to earn their livelihood, and not only to make themselves dependent on charitable works. He or she must participate in order “to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world’s goods and no longer have to depend on charity”.<sup>7</sup> He or she has to be a moral symbol especially at this time when trust is getting more and more difficult to find.

But we must keep in mind that the notion of *ad gentes* “the nations” as it is, in the context of Mt 28:19, “Make disciples from all nations!”, must always be valued and kept. As *Redemptoris Missio* cites it: “Missionary activity proper, namely the mission *ad gentes*, is directed to ‘peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ’, ‘who are far from Christ’, in whom the Church ‘has not yet taken root’ and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel. It is distinct from other ecclesial activities inasmuch as it is addressed to groups and settings which are non-Christian because the preaching of the Gospel and the presence of the Church are either absent or insufficient. It can thus be characterized as the work of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building up the local Church and promoting the values of the Kingdom. The specific nature of this mission *ad gentes* consists in its being addressed to ‘non-Christians’. It is therefore necessary to ensure that this specifically ‘missionary work that Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church’ does not become an indistinguishable part of the overall mission of the whole People of God and as a result become neglected or forgotten” (n. 34).<sup>8</sup>

There are still many people who have not heard of the name of Jesus. There are still those waiting to hear the Gospel message, and Jesus’ message of liberation, healing and reconciliation. We missionaries, whether young or old, are called to continuously proclaim the Good News and to be where we are most needed. But perhaps, the means of dialoguing and proclaiming might change.

The Mission *ad gentes* challenges the young missionary to deepen his or her spirituality, and to widen the expressions of this spirituality. The Church continues to remind us that “it is important ... to learn to *observe the signs* with which God is calling us and guiding us. When we are conscious of being led by Him, our heart experiences *authentic and deep joy* as well as a powerful desire to meet Him and a persevering strength to follow Him obediently”.<sup>9</sup>

Since our world has begun to offer us many possibilities of doing mission, there should be also other creative possibilities of expressing our faith. But the object of our faith and work remains one: the realization of the Reign of God.

The Church is a family. A good missionary is a fruit, both of a healthy family context, where there is love and sharing, and of a negative family experience which one has overcome, and from which one has learned many lessons.

Finally, in the midst of a world blurred by an ever-increasing number of priorities, and a Church whose foundation is rocked by scandals, materialism and secularism, the young missionary at least has to be clear about the charism of the Founder, and of the congregation he or she is joining, and the constitutionally recognized means of how this charism is expressed and exercised. Misunderstanding this basic knowledge would create confusion. The only proper inspiration to do mission clearly is to be sure why we have chosen to be in our respective religious congregations. It is fidelity to God through the charisms of our institutes which would help make us real and better missionaries.

### Conclusion

Our young missionaries, together with the budding laity, should play an important role in the Church today, and its mission *ad gentes*, for in a practical way, they are the closest to the realities of globalization and multiculturalism. It is important that they be appropriately accompanied in their search for the best expressions of their faith, and their means of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. Together, they form an active voice in the Church and it is important that these voices be heard.

### Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S – Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, U.S.A – “Challenges Today to Mission ‘Ad Gentes’”, Articles in English, <http://www.sedos.org>. Accessed August 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Message of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day (Cologne 2005, “We have come to worship him!”), no. 5, dated 6 August 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Amaladoss, “The Challenges of Mission Today”, in *Trends in Mission toward the 3rd millennium: Essays in Celebration of Twenty-Five Years of SEDOS*, William Jenkinson, CSSp, and Helene O’Sullivan, MM, eds, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 366.

<sup>4</sup> *Dens Caritas Est (DCE)*, no. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Amaladoss, p. 390.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio M. Pernia, “International Religious Communities in a Multicultural World (The Experience of Internationality in the SVD)”, Articles in English, <http://www.sedos.org>. Accessed August 2006.

<sup>7</sup> *DCE*, no. 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Cf.* footnote 2. Pope John Paul II, Message to Youth, dated 6 August 2004, no. 2.

# ***Religious Indifferentism: New Challenge for the Church's Mission Today***

**Alex Jebadu, SVD**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

As far as I remember, I came across the terminology “Religious Indifferentism” for the first time and was aware of it as a serious matter in 2001. At that time I was serving the Church in the Catholic Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia State, USA. The terminology appeared in *Zenit*, a magazine published by the Vatican.

In the article it was noted that the greatest challenge for the mission of the Church today is no longer atheism but religious indifference. Militant and systematic atheism around the world has withered. It no longer has a determining influence in public life and therefore it is no longer considered as a significant challenge for the Church and other religions. Contrarily, a certain cultural hostility is being spread against religions.

The Church has a great new challenge to be dealt with, that is, religious indifferentism in which people do not take an interest in the Church, in God, in spiritual matters or in any religion. Prior to reading this article I was only familiar with the old slogans of many people in the modern world such as: “Christ Yes, Church No”, “Being Spiritual without Religion” or “I am spiritual but not religious”.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. INDIFFERENTISM AS A SERIOUS MATTER**

After reading through many sources it became clear to me that indifferentism, in fact, is viewed as a serious matter not only by the Church but also by many in broader society. To some it is even considered as evil.

- Elie Wiesel, as quoted by Johann Christoph Arnold in his article entitled **The Trap of Indifference**, for instance, said that *the greatest evil in the world is not anger nor hatred but indifference*.<sup>2</sup>

- As an expression of disappointment toward the indifferent attitude of many Israelis around the world to the cause of the Israeli and Palestinian political struggle, Susannah Heschel, in her article entitled **Indifference** published in *Tikkun, A Bimonthly Jewish and Interfaith Critique of Politics, Culture and Society*, July/Aug 2003, said: *“My father, Abraham Joshua Heschel used to say that the opposite of good is not evil, the opposite of good is indifference”*.<sup>3</sup>

- Tom Prior in his article entitled **Indifference** raises this question: *“What is worse, being lost or being indifferent?”*. Then he answered the question himself: *“I say the later. Because a lost person will either keep searching or eventually will ask for help. But someone who is indifferent sits, ignores information and disregards advice. The lost are destined to be found. Indifferent people and organizations, however, are destined to be lost forever. They are not interested in anything, including in being found....”*<sup>4</sup>

- Battista Mondin in his article entitled **Religious Indifference** also says that *religious indifference is perhaps the most widespread and the most serious form of unbelief. It is even more serious than atheism*. For in the case of indifference there is not the slightest sensitiveness to the religious problem. While in the case of atheism the perception of the problem of God persists in man, who still has the sensation of being pursued and tormented by the shadow of God. Yet, up to now, religious indifference has been the matter least studied.

This is probably because, more than a doctrine, it appears as a personal attitudes and it is almost impalpable.

Then Battista Mondin depicts the seriousness of religious indifference as follows:

**(1) Religious indifference is a well-known psychological state of mind.** It is clearly distinguished from ignorance as from rejection, from acceptance as from desire, from affirmation as from doubt.

For example, a traveller on a train would like to smoke, and asks the others if he may do so. If there is a foreigner in the compartment who does not understand the language, he will look at the smoker with greater attention but will not answer either 'yes' or 'no'. As for the others, some will either consent or refuse, and some passengers will be content to shrug or pay no heed to the question. This last case is the attitude of indifference.

**(2) Indifference is characterized as disinterestedness and disaffection.** The first term stresses mainly, even if not exclusively, the intellective aspect and the second one in the same way the volitive aspect. It is quite obvious, in fact, to recognize in the indifferent attitude a double element, one of which refers to the intellect and the other to the will.

**(3) Among the many other definitions that have been given of religious indifference is the one offered by Goblot in his *Vocabolario filosofico*: "Indifference in the religious or philosophical field is *the state of mind which does not pass judgment, which does not affirm and does not deny*, either out of heedlessness, or out of scepticism."<sup>5</sup>**

· The Council Fathers during the Second Vatican Council, when talking about various kinds of modern atheism in the modern world, were in fact aware of what is today known as religious indifferentism when they stated: **"There are also those who never enquire about God; religion never seems to trouble or interest them at all, nor do they see why they should bother about it"** (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 19, § 2).<sup>6</sup>

· Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, warns that **religious indifference as a new face of unbelief or practical atheism is growing rapidly**. A large part of secularized society lives with no reference to religious authority or values. For "homo indifferens", "Perhaps God does not exist, it doesn't matter, anyway we don't miss him". Well-being and the culture of secularization provoke in consciences an eclipse of the need and desire for all that is not immediate. They reduce aspiration for the transcendent to a simple subjective need for spirituality, and happiness to material well-being and the gratification of sexual impulses. A dwindling number of regular church-goers can be seen in those societies marked by secularization. But this undeniably worrying fact does not, however, mean that unbelief is on the increase. Rather, it points to a degraded form of believing: believing without belonging. It is a phenomenon of "deconfessionalization" of "homo religiosus", who, refusing to belong to any binding confession, jumps into and out of an endless confusion of heterogeneous movements. This often silent exodus often heads for the sects and new Religious movements.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. THE FACE OF INDIFFERENTISM AND ITS DEFINITION

There are at least three kinds of indifference: general indifference, political indifference and religious indifference.

#### a) *General Indifference: Sounds positive*

**Indifference or being indifferent in a general sense** is a state of having or showing no interest, concern or feeling; uninterested, apathetic, unmoved, detached or lacking emotional involvement in something.

According to Tom Pryor, in an article he wrote, we are all in fact indifferent about one thing or another. He makes his point clear by giving an example of himself and his wife: "I enjoy going to Barnes and Noble every chance I get to check out the latest books and CD's. My wife Sue is indifferent to all of that. On the other hand, I am indifferent to visiting Dollar Store but Susie enjoys shopping there weekly for its \$1 bargains".

In his article Tom Pryor continues explaining: “You have got you own personal list of things that fall into this category: things you don’t love, but you don’t hate them — you are just indifferent to them. Your personal list might include the colour mauve, accountants, any movie starring Madonna, black-eyed peas, etc.”. Therefore, being indifferent is something that normally happens in every day life and it is not bad to some degree. Then Tom Pryor characterized indifference and its danger as follows:

- **Sometimes, indifference doesn’t matter. With certain things, however, your personal and professional life can be adversely affected by indifference.** For example, you are headed for trouble if you are indifferent about your health, your job, your family, or your finances. And if you are an owner or manager that doesn’t know with certainty the cost and profitability of your products, services and customers, the health of the business will be adversely affected.

- **Indifference is subtle. It develops gradually.** One is not diligent and enthusiastic one day and indifferent the next. As a result, indifference is hard to self-diagnosis.

- **The place where indifference strikes first is the heart.** Then it manifests itself in inactivity. Because it is difficult to see what a person or organization is not doing, it is much harder to detect indifference than if overt errors are being performed. It’s hard to see that I don’t care as much as I ought to, that I’m not involved as much as I ought to be or that I should have grown more by now. This is especially true with a person or organization whose indifference has not caused them to quit altogether.<sup>8</sup>

#### ***b) Political Indifference:***

Political indifference is the policy of a State that treats all the religions within its borders as being on an equal footing before the law of the country. Indifference in this sense is not be confounded with religious indifference. Political indifference is primarily a theory disparaging the value of religions and treating them all equally. While religious indifference designates the conduct of people who, where they do or do not believe in the utility of a religion, do in fact neglect to fulfil their religious duties.<sup>9</sup>

#### ***c) Religious Indifference:***

Being indifferent becomes a religious indifference when it has something to do with religious belief and religious practice. That is, when something that a person is indifferent to is God or any religious belief.

The Catholic Encyclopedia under the subtitle: “Religious Indifferentism” classifies this type of indifference in three categories: Absolute Religious Indifferentism, Restricted Religious Indifferentism and Liberal Religious Indifferentism.<sup>10</sup>

#### **1) Absolute Religious Indifferentism:**

Religious Indifferentism becomes absolute when man philosophically and systematically rejects the ultimate foundation of all religions. When man denies totally and knowingly his dependence on a personal creator, whom, in consequence of his independence, he is bound to reverence, obey and love. This kind of religious indifferentism would include all **atheistic, materialistic, pantheistic and agnostic philosophies** which profess that there is no God. If there is no God, man logically cannot and must not pay attention or be interested in Him. How can man care or be interested in God or something that does not exist?

The Catholic Encyclopedia also says that the error of Absolute Religious Indifferentism is also shared by the **Deist** who, while admitting the existence of a personal God, denies that He demands any worship from His creatures. These systems are answered by the apologist who proves that every one is bound to practice religion as a duty towards God, and in order that he may attain the eternal destination for which he has been called into existence.

#### **2) Restricted Religious Indifferentism:**

Religious Indifferentism turns into a restricted form when people still admit the necessity of



religion on account, at least, of its salutary and significant influence on human life. But it holds that all religions are equally worthy and profitable to all men and are equally pleasing to God.

The classic advocate of this theory is Rousseau who maintains that God looks only to the sincerity of intention, and that everybody can serve God by remaining in the religion in which he has been brought up or by exchanging it at will for any other that pleases him more. This doctrine is widely advocated today on the grounds that, beyond the truth of God's existence, we can attain to no certain religious knowledge. Since God left us in uncertainty, He will be pleased with whatever form of worship we sincerely offer Him.

In the light of this philosophy, we come to a better understanding of many modern people today who admit being spiritual but they reject organized Church or organized religions: "Christ 'Yes', Church 'No'" or "I am spiritual but not religious". With this in mind we come to understand why they refuse to be characterized as "unbelievers".<sup>11</sup>

### 3) Liberal or Latitudinarian Religious Indifferentism:

In the category of Liberal or Latitudinarian Religious Indifferentism are people, most likely Christians, who, while acknowledging the unique divine origin and character of Christianity and its consequent immeasurable superiority over other religions, hold that whatever particular Christian Church or sect one belongs to is an indifferent matter. They say that all forms of Christianity are on the same footing and all are equally pleasing to God and serviceable to man.<sup>11</sup>

### 4) The roots of religious indifferentism:

According to Cardinal Paul Poupard, the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, religious indifference is regarded as the greatest challenge to the Church's mission today. He calls it a sort of unbelief with a changing face. The Church has no choice but to face it, deal with it and with the help of God look for a remedy. But before looking for a remedy, the Church needs to find out what things or agents have fostered religious indifferentism.

#### a) Rationalism

Those who espouse rationalism claim that man's reason is the sole judge and discoverer of all kinds of truth including religious truth. This is the antithesis of the principle of authority which the Church asserts that God, by a supernatural means of revelation, has taught mankind religious truths that are inaccessible to our mere unaided reason as well as other truths which, though not absolutely beyond the native powers of reason, yet man cannot get access to them by reason alone.

From the earliest ages of the Church the rationalistic spirit in fact manifested itself in various heresies. During the Middle Ages it infected the teachings of many notable philosophers and theologians of the schools. Its influence may be traced through the Renaissance to the rise of the Reformation.

From the beginning of the Reformation, the rationalistic current flowed with ever-increasing volume through two distinct channels which, though rising apart, have been gradually approaching each other. **The Reformation** operated through purely philosophic thought which, wherever it set itself free from the authority of the Church, has on the whole served to display what has been justly called the "all-corroding, all-dissolving scepticism of the intellect in religious matters". **Rationalistic speculation** gave rise successively to the English Deism of the eighteenth century, to the school of the French Encyclopaedists and their descendants, and to the various German systems of anti-Christian thought. It has culminated in the prevalent materialistic, monistic, and agnostic philosophies of today.

When the Reformers rejected the dogmatic authority of the living Church they substituted it with the authority of the Bible. But their Biblical rule of faith was interpreted by private judgment. This doctrine introduced the principle of Rationalism into the very structure of Protestantism. The history of that movement is a record of continually increasing division, multiplication of sects, with a steady tendency to reduce the contents of a fixed dogmatic creed. In a few words Cardinal Newman has summed up the lesson of that history: "Experience proves surely that the Bible does not answer a purpose for which it was never intended. It may be accidentally the means of converting individuals; but a book after all cannot make a stand against the wild living intellect of man, and in this day it begins to testify, as regards its own structure and contents, to the power of that universal solvent which is so successfully acting upon religious establishments" (*Apologia pro Vita Sua*, London, 1883, v. 245).

As division increased in the general body of Protestantism, and as domestic dissensions arose in the bosom of particular denominations, some of the leaders endeavoured to find a principle of harmony in the theory that the essential doctrines of Christianity are summed up in a few great, simple truths which are clearly expressed in Scripture, and that, consequently, whoever believes these and regulates his life accordingly is a true follower of Christ. This movement failed to stay away from the process of disintegration, and powerfully promoted the opinion that, provided one accepts Christianity as the true religion, it makes little difference to what particular denomination one adheres. The view spread that there is no creed definitely set forth in Scripture, therefore all are of equal value, and all profitable to salvation. Large numbers in the Church of England adopted this opinion, which came to be known as Liberalism or Latitudinarianism.

Liberal and infidel (absolute) indifferentism has been vigorously promoted during the past half century by the dominance of Rationalism in all the lines of scientific inquiry which touch upon religion. *The theory of evolution* applied to the origin of man, Biblical criticism of the Old and New Testaments, the comparative study of religions, archaeology, and ethnology, in the hands of men who assume as their primary postulate that there is no supernatural, and that all religions, Christianity included, are but the offspring of the feeling and thought of the natural man, **have propagated a general atmosphere of doubt or positive unbelief or liberal indifferentism.**

As a result, large numbers of Protestants have abandoned all distinctly Christian beliefs. While others have emptied their Creed of all its essential dogmatic content. The doctrine of Scriptural inspiration and inerrancy is all but universally abandoned.

It would not, perhaps, be incorrect to say that the prevalent view of many people today is that Christ taught no dogmatic doctrine, His teaching was purely ethical. And its only permanent and valuable content is summed up in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. When this point is reached, the indifferentism which arose in belief joins hands with the infidel (or absolute) indifferentism.<sup>12</sup>

### **b) Freedom**

The psychological foundation of indifference is freedom. It is the sovereignty which man exercises over his own acts and things. It is supreme with regard to any object and any action. In freedom man becomes his own master. He is free to do or not to do, to do this or to do that. He is free to pursue this or that aim. Animals are not indifferent because they are not free. They are driven by instinct to desire or to shun, to operate in one way or in another. While in the case of Man, he is psychologically endowed with absolute freedom. To everything, he can say 'yes' or 'no'. Therefore he can assume the attitude of indifference to any person, thing or action, including indifference to religious matters.

But in the moral and theological perspectives, human freedom is not absolute. Man's freedom is meant and conditioned by certain aims, such as the promotion of justice, peace, love and brotherhood. These aims determine the goodness of the choices that man makes.

Therefore in the moral and theological perspectives indifference may take on various connotations: it can be good or bad, it can be praiseworthy or reprehensible. For example, as regards the murder of so-and-so or abortion, indifference is not permissible. On the moral plane, being indifferent in these cases is a crime and must be severely condemned.

In addition, among the various aims which man is called to fulfil in his life, the two aims occupy the first place: the improvement of his own person and the glory of God. As for the first, he is inclined almost instinctively to carry it out because every creature is driven to persevere and progress its being.

As for the second aim, the glory of God, the duty of fulfilling it is clear to the believer. But can the same be said also of the non-believer? Are the atheist, the agnostic, the person who is indifferent, also bound to glorify God?

In regard to religious indifference, atheism and agnosticism, Scheler, Rahner, Tillich, Grünh, claim that the psychical structure of man is such that it is never possible for it to break off with the Absolute or God. Werner Grünh for example writes: "*Every man believes in God, and it does not matter whether he admits it or not ...*".<sup>13</sup>

### **c) Intellectual Maturity**

From the century of the Enlightenment onwards, religious indifference has been seen by many as a sign of the intellectual maturity of modern man and as the condition to realize his perfect

liberation. It was claimed that being indifferent to religious matters, man was on the right way to become completely self-reliant and self-sufficient, capable of solving all problems and of satisfying all desires, without having recourse to God. Consequently he could, and should, set Him aside and behave as if he did not exist.

But two centuries of history have shown the absurdity of this claim. Modern man, however more advanced and better equipped than all the men who have preceded him, has not only failed to solve any of his fundamental problems such as justice, brotherhood, peace, happiness, pain, death, etc, but he has made them even more acute and deep.

So it is more and more evident that indifference is not the blossoming of intellectual maturity but the consequence of superficiality and lack of judgment. So Augustine's testimony is still valid and relevant today: "Fecisti nos Domine ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te".<sup>14</sup>

#### **d) Science, Technology and Prosperity**

In the judgment of historians, the causes, that have contributed most to causing God to disappear from the consciences and minds of so many people and to spreading religious indifference, were the achievements of science and technologies in the last two centuries. These marvellous achievements served not only to demolish a wrong image of God, but they were also employed as instruments to cause God himself to disappear (death of God).

In fact, on the one hand technico-scientific progress has fostered prosperity, the consumer society, attachment to the earth, immersion in this world. On the other hand it has brought forth in man a sense of security, maturity, self-sufficiency and the conviction that he is able to cope with all problems and all necessities by himself. In the world of nature, subjugated and manipulated by all kinds of machines, the marks of man became more and more evident, while the marks of God became less perceptible.

This set of factors (technico-scientific progress, prosperity, the consumer society together with a strongly secularized culture, supported not infrequently by a policy decidedly hostile to religion and propagandized with those powerful mass media which have been invented in this century) has caused, especially in Europe and in America, lack of interest in, indifference to, and ignorance of God's presence, as also abandonment of the worship due to him.<sup>15</sup>

#### **e) Religious Pluralism**

Along with the intellectual cause just noted, another has been what one might call the automatic influence proceeding from the existence of many religions side by side in the same country. This condition has given rise to **the political indifferentism** referred to a policy of a State treating all religions within its borders equally before the law. Where this state of affairs prevails, when men of various creeds meet one another in political, commercial, and social life, in order that they may carry on their relations harmoniously, they will not demand any special recognition of their own respective denominations. Personal intercourse fosters the spirit of tolerance. On observing that probity and good intentions mark the lives of some of his associates who differ in their religious beliefs, he may easily come to the conclusion that one religion is as good as another.<sup>16</sup>

#### **f) Secularism and Materialism**

Secularism and materialism also have contributed greatly to the growth of the religious indifference of today's modern man. Sacred and secular, in fact, represent two different ways of experiencing the same reality, that is, human life, this world and the whole universe. In themselves, they are not in competition or conflict.

**At the sacred level**, reality is experienced as being under the governance of God, as the object of religious faith. **The secular**, on the other hand, is the same reality construed as being accessible to humanity and under its control. The secular has nothing to do with the concept of "uncleanness", and is therefore not intrinsically opposed to the sacred.

However, human societies which are technologically unsophisticated are tempted to allow the sacred to invade the secular sphere and to discourage human initiative or innovation. This has given rise to a positive understanding of secularisation or "secularity" in which a legitimate restoration of the secular sphere is observed to take place. **Such a restoration was the preoccupation of the so-called "secular theologians" of the 1960's, who proclaimed that humanity had now come of age, and that religious faith had nothing to fear from the full realisation of secular potential, and the ascendancy of the human.**

Unfortunately, secularisation possesses a momentum of its own, and very soon developed into “secularism”, ***the situation in which the secular is observed to dominate or even replace the sacred***. Secularism ***refers to a situation in which religious faith, for one reason or another, is felt to be superfluous. It is a state in which organised religion loses its hold both at the level of social institutions and at the level of human consciousness***. As such, secularism is a datum of modern society. It is a world view which, in theory and/or practice, denies the immanence of God.

***Secularism may stem from explicit unbelief, the denial of the existence of God or of any religious dimension to human life. Such unbelief is rarely the product of a formal, atheistic, rational philosophy***. More often, it is an allegiance to a popular myth of science as the ultimate theory of everything, a conviction that the only truths are those which are accessible to scientific observation and experiment.

Consumer materialism is nowadays the most common cause of secularism. *Rather than formal unbelief* (militant atheism), it is ***a religious indifferentism*** induced by the preoccupation with material things. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, the missiologist, goes even further in his interpretation of secularism. In his numerous writings on the subject he argues that ***materialism not only leads to religious indifference, but that it constitutes a real “paganism”***. Because ***in practice, materialism is nothing other than the worship of what is not God***. It induces a pseudo-religious attitude towards the material and towards a material understanding of reality. Secularism banishes religious belief to the private sphere of subjective opinion and elevates popular science alone to the level of public truth.<sup>17</sup>

#### ***g) Moral Relativism***

Moral relativism is defined as a view that ethical standards, morality, and positions of right or wrong are culturally based. Therefore it is subject to a person’s individual choice. Under this ideology people claim: “We can all decide what is right for ourselves. You decide what’s right for you, and I’ll decide what’s right for me. It’s true for me, if I believe it. What is evil for you is good for me and I do it because I am free to do it and I like it. I am the one who decides what is good and what is bad”.

Moral relativism has steadily been accepted as the primary moral philosophy of modern society, a culture that was previously governed by a “Judeo-Christian” view of morality. While these “Judeo-Christian” standards continue to be the foundation for civil law, most people hold to the concept that right or wrong are not absolutes, but can be determined by each individual. Moral and ethics can be altered from one situation, person, or circumstance to the next. Essentially, moral relativism says that anything goes, because life is ultimately without meaning. Words like “*ought*” and “*should*” are rendered meaningless.<sup>18</sup> It is understandable, then, that Judeo-Christian moral precepts have no place in the heart of modern man who espouses the ideology of moral relativism and becomes indifferent to the Church who claims to hold absolute morality. They might still believe but without belonging.

## **5. REMEDY FOR RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENTISM**

### ***a) Eliminate the Prejudice of Science and Enlightenment***

Battista Mondin says that if it is desired to defeat religious indifference, it is necessary in the first place to go back to the causes that produced it and where necessary eliminate them. Where it is not necessary to eliminate them, as in the case of technico-scientific progress, prosperity, one should show that those achievements of man do not necessarily lead to the elimination of God, but on the contrary, they may even promote man’s meeting with his Creator.

#### ***Prejudice: human reason is omnipotent***

In the first place some serious prejudices must be dispelled, for example, the prejudice of Scientism, Technicalism, Enlightenment, that is, the prejudice that human reason is omnipotent, that it can explain everything and that it is capable of excogitating techniques able to solve all problems including the problem of pain, hatred, injustice, selfishness, death, etc.

#### ***In fact: It is limited***

As a matter of fact, this prejudice, so widespread and deep-rooted from the French Revolution to the First World War, has been struck a hard blow in recent times. In the last few decades man has realized the limited powers of science and the highly dangerous nature of some products of technology. Thus he has become aware, on the one hand, that he is unable to solve some great mysteries which surround him and, on the other hand, that his inventions can turn against him and against nature itself.



**b) Reawaken the sense of wonder**

Secondly, Mondin says that it is necessary to reawaken the sense of wonder in those who have lost the sense of the sacred and have fallen into religious indifference. According to Aristotle, the sense of wonder is the fundamental condition of all seeking and therefore of all knowledge. It is, therefore, the primary condition that disposes man to listen to the voice of the mystery of being and the mystery of God. In nature there is an infinity of things and phenomena which cause amazement, which arouse surprise, which fascinate. The sight of the Alps was enough to make even Voltaire exclaim: "God exists!". But how many other great things, such as the galaxies, for example, or little things such as the cell of the living being or also the organ of sight, if observed attentively, can arouse admiration and call upon us to glorify the one who produced them, God Himself.

To free the spirit again for the sense of wonder, contemporary man must be shaken out of the state of self-sufficiency, superficiality and torpor into which he has let himself be swept during the period of secularization. A great many obtuse and sluggish consciences can be disturbed and awakened by appealing to the sense of dissatisfaction and disappointment that many people feel in the presence of the injustice, disorder, obsession and violence that are spreading in our society. Starting from these experiences, the question can be raised of the ultimate meaning of human life and of the ultimate meaning of the world and of history. It is at this point, perhaps, that the horizon of Transcendence may open up again.

**c) Re-propose and rehabilitate fundamental values**

Thirdly, Mondin says that religious indifference can be broken down by the re-proposal and rehabilitation of some fundamental values which the secularized culture of our time has set aside, or even stifled and eliminated, such as the values of love, sacrifice, generosity, justice, freedom, brotherhood, etc. These are values which Jesus Christ realized better than any other character in history, and which the Church has the task of keeping alive throughout the centuries. Man, obsessed with money, entertainment, pleasure, comfort, "having", must be brought to realize that these are not values. They are not ultimate purposes, but only instruments, means, intermediate goals.

**d) New and fresh ways of re-evangelization**

Fourthly, Mondin says that if religious indifference is successfully broken down by means of the reawakening of the sense of wonder and by means of a renewed appreciation of fundamental values, the *Christian can then go further and urge the person who was indifferent to give new attention to Christ's message.*

But for the presentation of this message to be effective, *it must be expressed in a new language, a living language, a language that reflects the cultural form of our society.* The language, the Church continues to use, has become incomprehensible, at least in many environments: *it is a language of other times and other cultures.* This renewal of religious language is recommended also by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "The individual churches ... have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language" (n. 63).

**e) The power of example of holiness**

It must be present from the beginning and alone can amply replace most methods. It is the way of witness. The latter can shake religious indifference and arouse new interest in the things of God. Jesus himself shook the environment that surrounded him, an environment which was often cold and mistrustful; and he won over his Disciples more with his works than with his words. The Saints too (St Francis, St Philip Neri, St John Bosco, etc.) vanquished religious indifference by becoming living and fascinating expressions of divine reality. Therefore, the most effective medicine against indifference is certainly this: holiness.<sup>19</sup>

**f) A New Evangelization of Culture**

Cardinal Paul Poupard, says that to respond to the changing face of unbelief or religious indifferentism, the Pontifical Council for Culture encourages various initiatives to evangelize culture, including prayer, personal dialogue, Cultural Centres, especially Theological Institutes, the evangelization of desire, a renewed awareness of Christian anthropology, a strong presence in the public forum, the promotion of the values of the family and of life, good Christian formation, the "via pulchritudinis," evangelical use of Christian patrimony, use of the complementary languages



of reason and feeling, as well as the promotion of pilgrimages and many connected issues.

The evangelization of culture aims at letting the Gospel penetrate the actual situation of the lives of the people of a given society. “Pastoral practice must undertake the task of shaping a Christian mentality in ordinary life” (*Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 58). More than at convincing, such evangelization aims at preparing the ground and at enabling listening, a type of pre-evangelization.

If the basic problem is indifference, the necessary task is to attract attention, to stir up the interest of the people. By identifying the footholds or points of anchorage for the proclamation of the Gospel and then acting on them, the evangelization of culture has some recurring themes, ideas, places, and methods.<sup>20</sup>

There is no doubt, Religious Indifferentism is phenomenal in the life of modern man. It is, perhaps, the greatest challenge to the mission of the Church today. The Church has no choice but to face it, deal with it and strive to win man for God. It is a tough mission. But with the help of God, the supreme owner of the mission, we believe the Church still has reason to hope.

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### Footnotes/Bibliography

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<sup>6</sup> “*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 19”, in Flannery, Austin, OP, transl., *The Basic Documents of the Vatican Council II* (Dublin: Dominican Publication, 1995) p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> Poupard, Cardinal Paul, “Homo Indifferens Is Still a Homo Religiosus”, (*Zenit*: Dec. 2004) [http://www.catholic.org/printer\\_friendly.php?id=1626&section=Featured+Today](http://www.catholic.org/printer_friendly.php?id=1626&section=Featured+Today).

<sup>8</sup> Pryor Tom, “Indifference”, *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> “Religious Indifferentism” in *Catholic Encyclopedia* ..., p. 1 of 4.

<sup>10</sup> Jossua Jean Pierre and Geffrè, “Indifference to Religion”, <http://www.concilium.org/english/intro835.htm>, p. 2 of 2.

<sup>11</sup> “Religious Indifferentism” in *Catholic Encyclopedia, ibid.*, p. 3 of 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3 of 4.

<sup>13</sup> Modin, Battista, “Religious Indifference”, *ibid.*, pp. 1–2 of 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2 of 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4 of 6.

<sup>16</sup> “Religious Indifferentism”, in *Catholic Encyclopedia, (ibid.)*, p. 3 of 4).

<sup>17</sup> Shorter, Aylward, M. Afr., “Secularism in Africa: Introducing the Problem”, in *African Christian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March 1997. <http://www.sedos.org/english/shorter.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> “Moral Relativism”, 2004 Moral-Rela2004 Moral-Relativism.com.

<sup>19</sup> Mondin, Battista, *ibid.*, pp. 4-6 of 6.

<sup>20</sup> Poupard, Cardinal Paul, *ibid.*, pp. 3 of 4.

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# ***Paradigm Shifts in Mission.***

## ***Understanding and Praxis Through the Centuries***

**Sr Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ**

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I am delighted that this year's Religious Life Week focuses on mission, and specifically the mission of religious in Asia. Apparently there is at present a second spring for mission, yet at the same time there is also a lot of anxiety and uncertainty about the meaning and the strategies of mission. A year ago the faculty members of MST, some of whom are missionaries, were having a discussion on mission. One professor voiced her discomfort with the term "missionary" because of the old connotations of the term, with the image of a Lone Ranger riding off to the wilds and preaching to half-naked people so as to save their souls for the Church. This paper will, I hope, shed some light on these difficulties. My own task this morning is to provide a framework by showing the transitions and mutations that the idea of mission has undergone and the concomitant practice.

One of the things I love to do in my class is to show that Christianity has been undergoing tremendous changes since the time of Jesus, that things have not always been as they are now, and that they do not need to be so in the future. Christianity is a living organism that interacts with its environment, and in the measure that it does, it changes, it transforms itself, it grows in vitality and becomes even more true to itself.

Mission is Christianity acting itself out, it is the active dimension of being a Christian. It is the imperative that keeps Christianity moving out to the world, crossing boundaries already established. It is what catalyzes change in theology and the life of the Church in general. Because it keeps pushing Christianity to new frontiers, it creates states of temporary disequilibrium and chaos and feelings of strangeness and unfamiliarity of new situations. But disequilibrium and chaos, when handled well, are the deep sources of inspiration, of new energy and creativity.

Religious congregations, because of the prophetic nature of their call, are those who have traditionally pushed the frontiers of the established Church, have placed it in creative chaos. Prophecy and mission go hand in hand: prophecy listens to the groaning of the Spirit in humanity's cries of distress; mission responds in the same Spirit to these cries of distress. It is in prophecy and mission that religious life fulfills itself. And by fulfilling itself, it gives new life to Christianity.

I guess what I am saying here is that "mission" is ours. Whether our congregations are juridically missionary or not, we are all missionaries because mission is of the essence of Christianity. When we take mission seriously, it is we who keep Christianity moving forward. We participate in transforming Christianity by responding in mission. So, paradigm shifts in mission are not a thing of the past, nor are they outside of us. They are ongoing and we are part of the shifts.

I would like to comment on these two terms first.

"Mission", when used in our present understanding, is relatively speaking, a recent word. The reality behind the word has always existed in Christianity. Originally it meant the sending of the Son by the Father, and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son in the doctrine of the Trinity. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century the term began to be used for the act of sending Church representatives to foreign lands, and I think this is the understanding many people still have.

"Paradigm shifts" are distinctions that scholars, particularly scientists, make to show deep changes in understanding, perceptions, values, and attitudes of groups and societies. They are descriptions of what has come about, not prescriptions of what we want to happen. Use of the term does not imply that the latest shift is necessarily the best, nor is it the last word on the matter.

Paradigms could be contrasting but they could also co-exist and intermingle in the same person or institution. I was very struck some years ago by a sister who had studied theology for many years and later became provincial of her congregation. She said of herself: "In my thought I am radical, in my speech I am moderate, and in my life-style I am conservative". (How many of us in this room are that way? I am sure if we were really honest and courageous, if we were less of conformists,

many of us would be more radical than our appearances!). What is true of individuals is also true of social groups. We don't need to be afraid that we are schizophrenics!

So, in the Roman Catholic Church today, you have the co-existence of different paradigms because the residue of certain historical periods is still with us today either as continuing currents or as revivals alongside new modes of thought.

In a religion shifts in paradigms are mainly due to two factors: First, its internal dynamism. Max Weber, the sociologist of religion, calls it "routinization of charisma". A new group is at first all fired up by the vision and inspiration of the Founder. Later, after the passing away of the Founder, in the attempt to preserve his message, the group of followers orders and structures its worship, its ideas and its organization, usually setting up hierarchies of specialized functions. (In the church, for example, this is how we now have bishops, popes, canon lawyers who were not there at the beginning).

Second, the concrete historical context. Even the most introverted religions are part of a social context, and since societies are not stagnant, religious groups will always experience change. The more so for an outgoing religion like Christianity.

The German theologian Hans Kung very conveniently charted for us the different paradigm shifts of Christianity through the ages. Anyone who has done some study of the development of Christianity will readily agree with him. David Bosch, in his *summa missiologica*, *Transforming Mission*, uses these same divisions in structuring his magisterial book. One can hardly improve on Bosch, so I will be very dependent on him, but I would like to concentrate only on the paradigms which, I think, apply to the historical journey of Roman Catholicism.

So, I will speak only about the following paradigms: the Jesus movement within Jewish Christianity, the Greek or Hellenistic paradigm, the Roman Catholic Mediaeval Paradigm, and the Vatican II paradigm. I will not develop the Postmodern or Ecumenical paradigm because that will be taken up by the other Speakers. You will notice that the Roman Catholic Mediaeval paradigm continued beyond the years of medieval history, which according to Church historians, ended with the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's. The doctrine and practice of the Roman Catholic Church remained basically unaffected by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution — events of cataclysmic proportion within the last 500 years. It was only when John XXIII decided to open the windows of the Church that a reversal of fortress Catholicism could take place.

### **The Jesus movement of Jewish christianity**

The New Testament, the written source of our religion, is an epiphanic document. Its sole purpose was that of bringing Jesus Christ to its surrounding world. It showed the person and message of Jesus as consistently pointing to one thing only: the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom was the mystery that illumined the horizon of Jesus.

Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God in parables taken from the world of nature and the world of human beings which show natural life-processes and the movement of creation towards fullness of life. They dramatize God's joy and exhilaration at finding again the creatures who have been lost and found. God delights in the vitality of God's creatures.

The miraculous healings of Jesus were the irruptions of God's Kingdom into the world of suffering and disease. The Kingdom of God brings salvation not only in a religious sense and what we call miracles are actually entirely a matter of course in the radiance of the new creation.

Jesus announced God's Kingdom to the poor. This term embraces all those who suffer want, the invisible non-persons of our societies, those who seem unprofitable, those who suffer discrimination and oppression, the sick, and those who knew no justice. He did not make them like the rich, but introduced them into a new culture of fellowship and sharing.

Bosch identifies four major ingredients of the missionary ministry of Jesus and the early Church:

1. The person of Jesus himself. Jesus, the paradoxical figure who shocked his contemporaries because he saw things differently, from the perspective of God, and saw through the machinations of human beings.
2. The early Christian mission was political, indeed revolutionary. It rejected all idols of both Jewish and Graeco-Roman society and revealed their hollowness.
3. The revolutionary nature of this mission was manifested in the new relationships that came into being in the community, a movement without precedent: Jews and Romans, Greek and barbarian, free and slave, woman and man, rich and poor, accepted one another in love and service.

4. In spite of all their striving towards the Kingdom, they did not usher in an ideal world. Their intense hope had not yet been fulfilled, the larger world with its injustice, oppression, poverty, hunger apparently remained the same.
5. They ministered in weakness. Jesus and his Disciples would all be marked by the passion, each in his/her own way.

### **The hellenistic/Greek Church**

By the second century the Jesus movement of the first century had irrevocably turned into an institution. (This is what I referred to as routinization of charisma). Christianity was still in its infancy, and still a minority faith despised by the Romans but it had already lost much of its early fervour and uniqueness, increasingly resembling its surrounding culture. It gradually gave up its eschatological longing and settled into this world. Together with this was a diminished sense of the Spirit moving them outward as in the time of Paul; the Spirit became more an agent of sanctification.

The Christian faith went through a profound change, being transformed not only in the liturgical, sacramental life of the Church and in the structures of its organization and legislation, but also in its doctrine — that is, in the understanding of the revelation that had given birth to it. The early Christians did not simply express in Greek thought what they already knew; rather, they discovered, by their use of the Greek language and philosophy, new meanings in what had been transmitted to them in faith. The Doctrine of the Trinity, which became foundational for Christianity in subsequent centuries, is the chief example.

This was part of the reworking of the Christian Tradition by the Fathers of the Church in Christianity's interaction with Greek culture, a necessity once it moved out of the narrow confines of the Jewish world into the oecumene of Hellenism. However, by adopting Platonic categories of thought, the Church established itself in the world as an institute of almost exclusively other-worldly salvation. The Gospel became timeless, not in the sense of eternal, but outside time and history. The world became a launching pad for the next life, believers did not seriously involve themselves with the world and all its contingencies.

In terms of mission, the Church saw the Roman Empire as the primary sphere of its activities and expansion, its mission being basically done once Christianity was spread throughout the empire. (There were however, peripheral churches like the Nestorian church more actively involved in mission outside the boundaries of the empire).

Up to the third century there were still itinerant preachers, charismatic healer-missionaries, and miracle workers but their mobile ministry eventually gave way to the settled ministry of bishops and deacons. From the fourth century the monk would gradually replace the itinerant preacher as missionary in as yet unevangelized areas.

### **Mediaeval Roman Catholic**

For at least three centuries the Christian Church had been stamped almost exclusively by Greek culture, but this was gradually supplanted by the Latin *mores*. Greek theology had some basic differences with that of Latin. In the Greek Church redemption was a process in which human nature, by means of a "pedagogical" progression, was taken up into the divine. Latin theology emphasized the ravages of sin and the reparation of fallen humanity through the redemptive death of Christ.

Augustine of Hippo, although chronologically he belonged to the Ancient Church, (354-430) inaugurated the mediaeval paradigm by placing his indelible stamp on the entire subsequent Western theological history. This is to be attributed not only to his genius, but also to his personal history and to the political circumstances in which he found himself. Among his many achievements, Augustine victoriously responded to the Donatist and the Pelagian controversy in the Church. He succeeded in showing a way forward and his reactions to these crises were to shape both the theology and the understanding of mission of subsequent centuries.

The Pelagians were an optimistic lot, and they viewed human beings as capable on their own of attaining to the good, not needing divine grace. Augustine opposed them with the idea of original sin, that human beings are depraved from birth and had to be ransomed from evil. Christ had redeemed us through his death on the cross and our task is to appropriate this into our souls. In saying this, Augustine put the locus of redemption on the individual and on the spiritual. Salvation, thus, became a private affair, a reward to be enjoyed in the heaven of the afterlife.



The Donatists claimed perfection for the Church to such an extent that sacraments administered by agents of the Church who had erred grievously could not be valid. Augustine's response was that authority and holiness belonged to the Church, not to the individual ministers, and echoed Cyprian of Carthage's dictum that "outside the Church there is no salvation" (*Ep.* 73,21; PL 3, 1169). This has been repeatedly claimed by Popes and Councils up to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Augustine's theology interiorized and institutionalized salvation. It had practical consequences for mission: converts must be baptized into the Church as soon as possible. Proselytism became the chief task of the missionary. This presumably manifested a genuine desire to bring about the welfare of those who did not yet belong to the Church.

The Monastics were at the forefront of mission in early the Middle Ages. Although monasticism was not founded explicitly for mission, the by-product of the establishment of monasteries was for the benefit of people in their environs, including the peasants. Outstanding among their accomplishments was the explicitly missionary undertaking of the Irish and Benedictine monks who converted whole kingdoms by appealing to their leaders.

The monks did the work they found at hand and slowly, painstakingly constructed European culture from developing agriculture to establishing centres of education. As Newman said: "They found a swamp, a moor, a thicket, a rock and they made an Eden in the wilderness". In the midst of the turmoil of violent societies, they urged peace on bellicose warriors.

Later, the Franciscan and the Dominican Mendicant Orders, followed on the heels of the Monastics, meeting head on the moral and social challenges of the commercial revolution, the crucial shift from barter economy to money economy and from rural to urban society, a truly radical shift. This necessitated a level of knowledge and sophistication hitherto unknown to Europe, and the Mendicants found their mission in the vortex of this change through education in universities.

At the close of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, explorers from the Iberian peninsula opened sea routes to Africa, America, and Asia, inaugurating a completely new period in world history: European colonization of the peoples of these continents. Europeans met people who were not only physically, but also culturally and linguistically very different from them, a fact that made them regard these peoples as inferior.

The colonial period precipitated an unparalleled era of mission. Europeans discovered there were still millions of people who knew nothing about Christ and the salvation he offered and who were all headed for eternal punishment. Colonialism and mission were interdependent; the right to have colonies carried with it the duty to Christianize the colonized. The Pope "entrusted" new mission territories to specific missionary orders so as to prevent rivalry between missionaries from different orders or nations. The colonial Churches were in a sense, subsidiaries of Rome, "missions", daughter churches, immature worshipping communities, frequently the objects of Western paternalism. One very important but often neglected element was the entry into the mission fields of women religious, who courageously defied the social and religious norms of their time by venturing into so-called uncivilized territory. (Pierre Charles, a missiologist in the 1950's, wrote an article claiming that many women religious were prevented from going to the missions because of the fear and hatred of women during those centuries of witch-hunting, when women were linked to evil just because of their sex).

In this situation of commerce and colonialism the Church, except for a few notable exceptions like Bartolomé de las Casas, Matteo Ricci and Robert de Nobili, did not develop in terms of new insights into its nature and function in spite of the radically new circumstances it encountered. It was because it maintained a position of power and not of vulnerability. It adapted itself in very minor ways to the cultures of the new peoples, but it was not open to being changed fundamentally.

While many church people plunged into foreign mission enterprises, others rediscovered mission in their own lands. Under the impact of the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholics awakened to the fact that the majority of the people of Europe were superficially evangelized even after 1,000 years of Christian presence. "Missions" were organized for the European hinterland for a truer conversion of the continent.

The theological and missionary paradigm remained mediaeval. The Church as a sacral-hierarchical institution was the real bearer and agent of the mediation of grace. Mission was performed by means of a system of authorization and delegation. All forms of Christian missionary activity were reduced or subordinated to this pattern of authoritative commissioning. The Roman Church held strongly to a Christian exclusivist claim on truth and maintained that it alone represented the true form of Christianity.

The Catholic Church kept to a high level of missionary commitment since the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century,



but in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was a real flourishing of religious congregations founded specifically for foreign missions and national missionary societies were organized. (Many of our congregations here were founded at this time). The two basic principles, *conversio animarum* and *plantatio ecclesiae* were the self-same principles born of Augustinian theology.

## Vatican Council II

The 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced several events that shook it to the core: two devastating world wars; the Russian and Chinese revolutions; the horrors perpetrated by Nazism, Fascism, Communism and Capitalism; the collapse of the great world empires. The Catholic Church did not remain unscathed. As a result, the various disciplines, the natural and social sciences, philosophy, history, have had a profound and lasting influence on theological thinking. Elements which had for centuries been absent from the Churches or had found a home in marginal Christian movements surfaced and effected a re-examination of the Tradition of the Church and catalyzed major shifts in the concept of mission during the Second Vatican Council. Robert Schreiter identifies four major shifts:

### **1. *The Trinitarian locus for the origin of mission***

Scripturally and theologically, mission was located in the sending of the Disciples after Easter in what has been called “The Great Commission” as found in Mt 28:19. *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity) locates the origins of missionary activity in the Trinity itself, in God’s eternal plan of salvation for all seen in the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit into the world. This means that it is of the very nature of the Church and the Christian to be missionary. Mission became more than expansion of the Church, it was to be something motivating the very heart of the Church, because by being missionary the church was drawn into the life of the Trinity itself. Mission moved from conquest to invitation, dialogue and sharing and its purpose was to bear witness to the trinitarian life, to bear witness to the very life of God. Mission moved from a clearly defined task of winning converts and planting the Church to the more complex combination of proclamation, witness, dialogue, service.

### **2. *Expanded understanding of the Church***

*Lumen Gentium*, as we all know, contains two different understandings of the Church. The first is the mediaeval image of a perfect and hierarchical society mirroring the celestial society surrounding the throne of God and the most complete possible presence of God on earth. The other image is that of the pilgrim people of God dominated by the story of the Exodus, a collection of people engaged in a journey, therefore less secure, vulnerable, and subject to change as it goes on its journey. It is disidentified from the kingdom of God. This humbler stance called for a positive and constructive dialogue with the world.

The Council spoke of the necessity of the Church and membership in the Church as the visible sign of the fullness of salvation, but it also implicitly raised the question of whether the Church was really necessary to salvation. Ideas of Church and salvation now became vague and uncertain.

### **3. *New understanding of salvation***

Salvation can no longer be defined only in “religious” terms but also in terms of what happened elsewhere. *Gaudium et Spes* stressed the imperative for the Church to read the signs of the times which condition the life of the whole human family.

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in our hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men and women, of men and women who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the Kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men and women.

### **4. *New understanding of other religions***

From the time of the Fathers of the Church there were already ideas that noble elements in

non-Christian religions were seeds of the Gospel and were to be purified or transformed so as to be bearers of grace. *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) built upon that tradition and took it a step further by affirming the positive values of Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. It called for dialogue with other religious traditions not only to learn about them but to discern in them the pathways to God. The stance, therefore, was humility and hospitality rather than superiority.

This also raised the question of whether these other religions were agents of salvation, and not only the Church.

These new ideas from the Council gave new *élan* to missionary activity but after 1968 the numbers declined. This was probably due to large-scale exodus of religious but there was also the growing insecurity about what the exact nature of mission was. Out of the exploratory attempts to deal with these dilemmas, emerged certain ideas: that the task of mission is to help build up that *pleroma* or plenitude in Christ in all things; to carry the incarnation of Christ further into every culture; and to work toward peace and reconciliation.

In 1975 Paul VI promulgated *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, an Apostolic Exhortation which grew out of the Synod of Bishops in 1974. The most important section of the document deals with the nature of evangelization. He says that the process of evangelization is very complex and he sums it up: evangelization is a “complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative”.

Since then there have been considerable developments in thinking in mission in official Roman Catholic documents which have elaborated on ideas that were found in kernel in Vatican II. Many of these ideas came as a result of closer encounter with the modern world, and have created confusion and hesitation. Four areas carrying the imprint of these ideas are:

1. movements of different forms of liberation theologies, basic ecclesial communities
2. dialogue with peoples of other world faiths
3. cooperation with “all people of good will” in building up a family of nations and societies in the search for peace with justice
4. recognition of soulless economic/technical development whose very meaninglessness raises questions about the meaning of life

The contemporary world has many expectations and demands of missionaries; they are quite different from those our forebears had to meet. We are in search of a post-modern, ecumenical paradigm that would respond to these challenges and widen the parameters of mission. The understanding of Christian mission in the world is unfinished. We need to discern the Spirit’s invitation to creativity in areas of life, mission, and apostolate. There are many things we can do, but I would like to make one suggestion:

*Think outside the box.* Creatively, imaginatively take initiatives. Be self-directing and self-correcting. Do not be too dependent on others for the agenda of mission.

Have your own vision. Don’t just rely on religious authorities having a vision and opening the way for you. The majority of religious leaders are placed in authority because of their administrative and interpersonal skills, not necessarily because they have a vision. They often depend on their members for vision. I think this line attributed to Gandhi is appropriate: “There they go, I must run after them for I am their leader!”. The role of a leader according to Arbuckle is to harness the creative energies of the prophet so as to give direction to the institution.

I would like to close with these words from Bosch:

“We do not have all the answers and are prepared to live within the framework of penultimate knowledge, that we regard our involvement in dialogue and mission as an adventure, are prepared to take risks, and are anticipating surprises as the Spirit guides us into fuller understanding. This is not opting for agnosticism, but for humility. It is, however, a bold humility — or a humble boldness. We know only in part, but we do know. And we believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed. We do this, however, not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses; not as soldiers, but as envoys of peace; not as high-pressure salespersons, but as ambassadors of the Servant Lord” (Bosch 1991: 489).

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# ***Réflexions actuelles sur la relation entre mission et œcuménisme***

- Jacques Matthey\* -

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Depuis un demi-siècle, le christianisme est en profonde évolution. Des Églises historiques en Occident perdent des fidèles, des Églises à tendance charismatique croissent partout dans le monde et particulièrement en Afrique, Asie et Amérique latine. La plus grande partie des chrétiens vit déjà dans ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler le "Sud", dans des nouvelles Églises très dynamiques d'un point de vue missionnaire et pour lesquelles la quête de l'unité visible avec les Églises traditionnelles n'est pas une priorité. Leurs contacts avec le mouvement œcuménique sont souvent inexistants. Même les Églises qui ont lutté pour l'unité dans le passé ont tendance à se replier sur leur propre identité confessionnelle. C'est dans l'air du temps : le système économique, basé sur la concurrence incontrôlée, infecte le monde culturel et religieux.

Au moment d'approcher le centenaire de la conférence missionnaire mondiale tenue à Edimbourg en 1910, considérée comme le point de départ du mouvement œcuménique, il est donc urgent de reprendre le dossier de la relation entre mission et unité. Je me propose de le faire en précisant d'abord ce que j'entends par "mission", puis en évoquant quelques raisons qui militent en faveur du lien entre "mission" et "unité".

## **Mission — trois espaces et dynamiques concentriques**

Parler de "mission" au sens le plus large, c'est se référer à l'identité même de Dieu telle qu'elle est révélée en Jésus-Christ par l'action de l'Esprit. Le Dieu trinitaire vit de la relation de communion entre trois "personnes", dynamique d'amour et de liberté dans l'unité. Le projet ou la **mission de Dieu** vise à englober le monde entier dans cette communion d'amour en Christ (Ep 1,9-10).

C'est une vision d'unité et de réconciliation entre humains, entre communautés, avec la création régénérée et avec Dieu. C'est donc dans ce sens que Dieu agit dans le monde par des moyens multiples que la missiologie s'efforce de discerner.

La "mission" a un deuxième sens, plus restreint, se référant à l'Église en tant que communauté apostolique, c'est-à-dire "envoyée" par le Christ dans la puissance de l'Esprit pour une tâche spécifique au sein de la mission de Dieu. Communauté visible signifiant l'horizon du projet de Dieu et son centre en Christ, l'Église renvoie à l'identité du Dieu un et pluriel. La **mission de l'Église**, son ministère irremplaçable, consiste à faire rayonner l'Évangile par tout ce qu'elle est, vit, dit et fait, au niveau local et universel.

Trois formes de présence au monde sont comme une concentration symbolique du caractère apostolique de l'Église. C'est ce que j'appelle la mission au troisième sens, le plus restreint :

Il s'agit tout d'abord de la **mission locale de l'Église** qui consiste à former et multiplier les communautés de guérison et de réconciliation. En tant qu'ambassadrices du Christ, les communautés ecclésiales sont appelées à ouvrir et cultiver des espaces où les personnes en recherche, en détresse, en pèlerinage, peuvent trouver du repos, du sens, du silence, l'assurance du pardon régénérateur, déposer leurs fardeaux, partager joies et angoisses, trouver la compréhension et l'amour. De tels espaces ne peuvent jouer ce rôle que s'ils sont façonnés par la Parole de Dieu, la prière, la communion, les symboles de la tradition chrétienne et l'accompagnement pastoral qui donne priorité à l'humain sur les règles religieuses, culturelles ou économiques.

Mais comment de telles communautés peuvent-elles incarner la guérison et la réconciliation si

leur vie et leur action se font en concurrence avec ou dans l'indifférence aux autres Églises qui se réfèrent au même Seigneur ? Comment prétendre être porté par et porter un message qui donne sens pour les vies divisées des humains et sociétés d'aujourd'hui en se satisfaisant de la division au sein du Corps du Christ ? Quand la mission locale n'est pas articulée à la quête de l'unité visible, c'est la crédibilité de l'Évangile qui est en jeu.

Un autre aspect de ce sens restreint du mot "mission" est **l'évangélisation** comprise ici comme le partage de la parole de l'Évangile articulé à une invitation à centrer sa vie en Christ. Un partage de la parole

qui met l'accent sur l'offre gratuite de Dieu, accompagnée ou précédée par des signes de guérison. L'évangélisation partage une espérance, fait rayonner un message libérateur qui redresse tous ceux qui sont courbés. Bien des Églises ont malheureusement perdu le goût de l'évangélisation alors que d'autres en contestent le principe même. À mon avis, elles manquent de fidélité au message chrétien qui est une semence qui doit être mise en terre et non gardée en réserve.

Par ailleurs, l'évangélisation est aussi épreuve de vérité pour l'œcuménisme. Les Églises peuvent-elles faire campagne ensemble et laisser chacun rejoindre la communauté dans laquelle il ou elle pourra épanouir sa foi et ses charismes ? La réalité est bien différente. Trop d'Églises sont tellement crispées sur une "nécessité" ou un "ordre" d'évangélisation qu'elles en perdent le respect des personnes et des autres Églises pour lesquelles Christ est mort. Le prosélytisme est péché contre l'unité. J'entends par prosélytisme l'effort conscient d'attirer à soi des fidèles d'autres Églises. Cela crée des conflits majeur entre traditions chrétiennes. Et très souvent, cela se fait à l'aide de méthodes douteuses considérées comme efficaces. Or, la mission à la suite du Christ doit éviter les stratégies "sataniques" qui lui avaient été proposées pour le tenter (Mt 4, Lc 4). C'est notamment l'utilisation du pouvoir ou l'offre d'avantages pour forcer la conviction.

Le même respect des Églises partenaires devrait être sous-jacent à la participation des communautés chrétiennes à la **mission mondiale de l'Église**. Les règles de relation que l'on peut discerner dans les lettres de Paul renvoient à l'égalité et à un partenariat entre Églises locales qui ne soit pas marqué par le pouvoir de l'un sur l'autre. Dans le monde de la concurrence acharnée, dominé par les puissants, la mission doit et peut vivre l'unité qui offre une alternative évangélique. C'est l'Église locale qui porte la responsabilité première de la mission et de la diaconie dans son contexte. L'appui que peuvent et doivent lui apporter d'autres Églises ou réseaux missionnaires doit la respecter, être à son service et non lui dicter son action. Or, depuis la fin des années 80, le partage international des ressources et des personnes est de plus en plus marqué par les règles du marché de la charité, où les donateurs imposent leurs exigences. Or, la règle de Ph 2, 3, «avec *humilité, considérez les autres comme supérieurs à vous*», contredit cette logique. Comme Église, il n'est pas admissible d'intervenir dans une région où d'autres Églises sont présentes sans entrer en dialogue préalable avec elles et négocier une mission commune. Outrepasser cette règle de déontologie peut détruire en peu de temps ce qui a mis des années à mûrir.

### **La quête de l'unité visible comme contenu même de l'Évangile**

D'un point de vue évangélique, un "succès" missionnaire acquis au prix de la mise en danger de l'unité est un contre-témoignage. Il semble facile en effet d'imiter les stratégies "mondaines" de *marketing* et d'offrir un message adapté au segment de marché religieux que l'on souhaite conquérir. On peut ainsi gagner des convertis, mais souvent en ruinant les relations avec d'autres Églises. Je prétends qu'il s'agit, dans ce cas, d'une trahison de la mission ; car c'est un Évangile tronqué ou même falsifié qui est offert.

Trois brèves références bibliques suffiront à l'expliquer :

Dans la prière sacerdotale de Jean 17, le Christ appelle ses disciples à l'unité, non pas pour des raisons structurelles ou utilitaires, mais parce que cela renvoie à l'unité entre Père et Fils, donc à l'identité trinitaire de **Dieu**. Des Églises séparées reflètent l'image d'un dieu désuni, déchiré, divisé, et, de ce fait, témoignent d'un Évangile défiguré. Être en mission, ce n'est pas seulement appeler à

la foi, mais à la foi et vie en communion avec le Dieu qui est Père, Fils et Esprit, avec et dans l'Église. L'incapacité des Églises à vivre l'unité visible empêche les humains de discerner la véritable nature de Dieu.

Les hymnes des lettres aux Ephésiens et Colossiens proclament que la croix a détruit le mur de séparation qui justifiait les divisions humaines et ainsi leur enlève tout caractère absolu. Depuis la mort du Christ, il est hérétique de glorifier son propre groupe au dépens des autres. Il a fallu que le Christ meure pour que l'unité du genre humain, détruite par le péché, soit rétablie. Quel est donc le témoignage d'Églises qui se montrent incapables de manifester cette unité-là, parce que leur identité confessionnelle leur est plus importante que l'amour des frères et soeurs en Christ ? L'envoi en mission de Matthieu 28 indique pourtant que la communauté des disciples se compose de "toutes" les nations et plus seulement du peuple de Dieu, dépassant ainsi les identités individuelles.

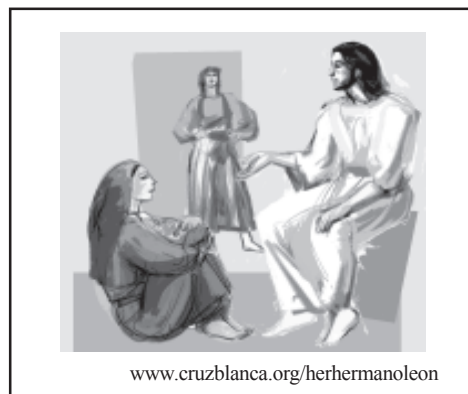
L'**Esprit Saint** manifeste la présence guérissante de Dieu et rend les Églises missionnaires par la puissance des charismes, dons de la grâce de Dieu. Nombreux et variés, ils vont, par exemple, de la capacité de conduire des réunions à la guérison par imposition des mains, de la prophétie à l'accompagnement des personnes en fin de vie. Cette diversité a induit des divisions entre Églises croyant devoir placer des priorités parmi les charismes. Là aussi, tentons de discerner l'essentiel. Paul l'affirme sans équivoque : «*il n'y a qu'un charisme à valeur définitive, c'est l'amour*» (I Co 13), l'amour qui est le lien d'unité. Une mission qui n'incarne pas l'amour qui conduit à l'unité est infidèle à la mission de l'Esprit.

En conclusion, notre fidélité appelle au témoignage dans l'unité, à la mission qui lutte pour l'unité, par opposition à un activisme qui crée ou renforce les divisions résultant du péché. Parallèlement, la quête de l'unité qui se fait aux dépens du témoignage dans le monde ne reflète pas non plus fidèlement l'identité du Dieu trinitaire qui vise à étendre sa communion à l'ensemble de l'humanité et de la création.

## Note

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# ***Friar Dayanand: Making Christianity Credible and Dialogical***

**Friar Joy Prakash, OFM**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

He clearly introduces himself as a Christian and a Franciscan at that. His straightforward presentation of himself puts Hindus at ease, though recently the Hindu population has become very intolerant of Christians of any shade and colour. He has not met much difficulty in encountering people who are ill disposed towards Christianity and the Church. Often along the alleys or at bus stations people come to this friar-*sannyasin*, Dayanand, to ask for his blessing and a good word for them.

## **PROCLAMATION BY WITNESS**

Dayanand clearly follows the tradition set by Robert de Nobili, S.J., Matteo Ricci, Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux and others long-ago, who in their attempt to incarnate Christ on Indian soil did so with the utmost respect for the culture and life of the people. Dayanand meets the educated and the ignorant, the cultured and the crude, the rich and the poor, the sick and the healthy, people of every walk of life. He makes people feel at ease with his Christian and Franciscan presence primarily. He wears a sizable cross and carries a Bible in a shoulder bag. His teaching is always on Jesus and people love listening to him. (The Hindu mind is open to the person of Jesus, but not to the Church, to Christianity and to conversion).

In the belligerent fundamentalist Hindu atmosphere of modern India, Dayanand boldly proclaims Jesus as the Sadguru (the good Teacher/Master), and those who wish to continue in the teaching and life of Jesus, Dayanand makes Disciples of Jesus. For this he uses a ceremony similar to Baptism but their names are not recorded in a church baptismal register. From the way people seek him out even when he is in distant villages, it is clear that people want to come into contact with the teaching of Jesus and be influenced by Him.

In the year 2000 the World *Christian Encyclopedia* reported that there were 13,676,310 non-baptized believers in Christ. They were members of non-Christian religions who had been converted to faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour but who chose to remain in their religions as witnesses to Christ. The largest numbers are Hindus, primarily in India, followed by Buddhists, primarily in China. It is forecast that their numbers will grow to 23,480,000 by the year 2025 (David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, "World Christian Encyclopedia", 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001, 1:20, 29).

Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) says, "Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization" (n. 21).

In the months before his election, Pope Benedict XVI, spoke more than once of the importance of giving new reality to faith today through various lived experiences. Since faith is not mainly a question of doctrine or knowledge, he said, it needs "existential roads". Therefore the Church itself should be "a context of experience" where "the art of living" is learned. When this happens, people can move from a "second-hand" knowledge of religion to a "living encounter" with Christ.

## THE MEDIUM OF PROCLAMATION

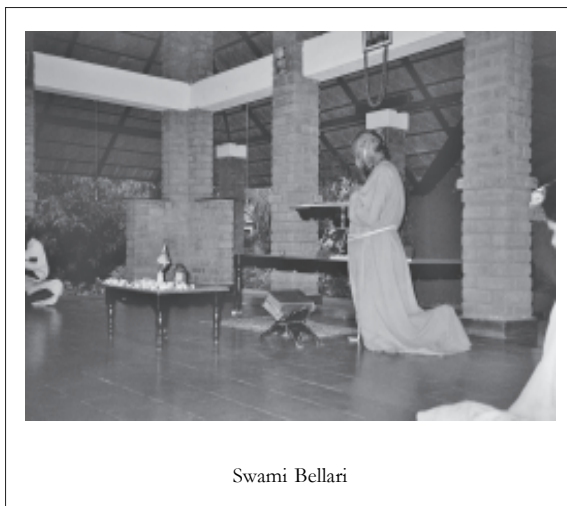
For the past 30-35 years, Friar Dayanand (meaning: bliss of righteousness) has been paving these “existential roads” in “the art of living” the Christian faith in the Indian cultural and historical context. He goes about in a saffron habit (yellowish in colour signifying a person who is inflamed by God – the dress of the Hindu “*sannyasins*”) walking bare-foot along the roads the length and breadth of India. He is not posted in any parish, but engages in a ministry of itinerant evangelization. He walks from village to village, mostly Hindu and Muslim villages, to announce the message of Christ. He offers no social benefits, no material relief. Just the Word of God and the message of Jesus.

### *The Structure*

With age catching up on him, he felt called to have a permanent place where he can meet the people periodically. He also feels that the harvest of “Disciples of Christ” should be properly instructed and he wishes to share his experience with friars of the Province. Of late he has been joined by Friar Sevanand (the one who delights in service). They have begun a Franciscan Ashram in Bellary. The very simplicity of the Franciscan life-style is so much in keeping with the Ashram ideal of India. These two friars combine in a creative way the Franciscan Order’s concern for Inter-religious dialogue and evangelization.

An Ashram is open to people throughout the day and night. People of every type and colour and language can come and find nourishment. The Brothers, Dayanand and Sevanand, live among people in Gospel simplicity and in fraternal love. The Word of God, prayed and reflected upon, in the light of the reality of pain, suffering, struggle and hope, guides the path of fraternity. Hence there is always Action and Contemplation going on at the same time. This quasi itinerant fraternity is missionary, living a life of prayer and service, without money or a fixed income or abode and in mendicancy.

The Ashram is for God-seekers who value spirituality more than belonging to any religion. It is open to the public and the public may come at any time of the day or night. They receive hospitality, a free stay and food. The food is provided by the Disciples of Jesus themselves and there is always enough and more to feed the hundreds who visit the Ashram every day.



Swami Bellari

## LANGUAGE AND EXPRESSIONS

Friar Dayanand speaks most of the south Indian languages: Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and can also express himself in Hindi – the north Indian language. He has a good command of English. He switches from one language to another so as to make people feel at home with the message he is preaching.

The people do not understand certain Christian expressions, so he provides an Indian equivalent which speaks to the heart of the people. These expressions make the Hindus feel at home. For example, Baptism: *papa paribara snana* (bath of repentance), Lent - *Upavasa* (*upa* + *vasa* = dwell

close); Catholic Church – *Aadi Vinaya Aikya Sampradaya* (original, obedient, united tradition of Jesus’ disciples). With these expressions, the person of Jesus becomes more and more palpable.

### PERSONAL WITNESS

Dayanand would not compromise on who Christ is for him but lets the Christ-influence have a visible impact on his own personal life. Dayanand reformulates the idea of the uniqueness of Christ employing the Hindu concept of guru as a Christological model. Therefore the Hindus have come to a new receptivity as the Christian Gospel is conveyed in a language familiar to them.

### CONTEXTUALIZATION

What is needed is a true ‘contextualization’ where the heart of culture is embraced and transformed by the Gospel. Such radical contextualization is seen as ‘mission in the way of Christ who became one of us’. It does not seek the disappearance of a culture or religion nor does it do away with differences, but rather holds them together in a community of communities, thus creating for all people in their different cultural contexts a place to feel at home. Friar Dayanand clearly follows the teaching of St Francis of Assisi, “Any brother, who, by divine inspiration, desires to go among the Saracens and other non-believers ... can live spiritually among them in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians. Another way is to proclaim the word of God when they see that it pleases the Lord God” (*Rule* 1221, Chapter 16).

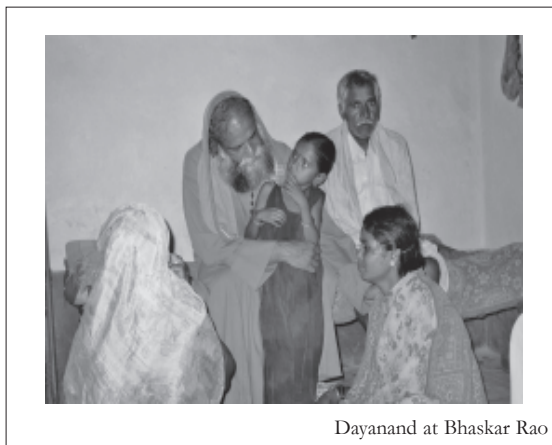
About 40 years ago the document of the Second Vatican Council, “Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (28 October 1965) was published. The Church had officially taken the first steps in relating positively to other religions: “The Church ... urges her sons (and daughters) to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith, and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, as well as their social and cultural values” (*cf. Nostra Aetate*, n. 2).

Samuel Rayan, S.J., the Indian theologian, after analysing the concrete experiment of Sadhu Ittiyavirah (lay Catholic “*Sannyasin*”) for a meaningful dialogue with Hinduism says, “I have always felt that ultimately it will be in the language of St Francis, his language of love, freedom and song, in the language of renouncement and of the wounds of Christ and of contemplation, in hymns to Brother Sun and Brother Death, that Christianity and Hinduism can meet in real dialogue, and in truth give themselves to each other” (*Modern Mission Dialogue*, edited by Jan Kerkhofs, Ireland: Ecclesia Press, 1969, p. 44).

### Note

Friar Dayanand and his Ashram way of life makes a statement for the people of our times in more ways than one.

Ref.: Text sent by the author by e-mail. June 2006.



Dayanand at Bhaskar Rao

# ***Les principales sources de violence dans les communautés religieuses***

- Luc Crépy, C.I.M.\* -

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*Le Père Luc Crépy est Eudiste et Président de la Conférence des Supérieurs Majeurs de France.*

Toute vie humaine est habitée par des forces et des désirs souvent contradictoires qui nous rapprochent ou nous éloignent des autres. La violence — différente de l'agressivité — est sans doute une de ces constituantes fondamentales de nos existences qui nécessite un travail permanent d'humanisation pour qu'un «vivre ensemble» soit possible, pour qu'une reconnaissance et un respect de l'autre permettent une vie en groupe ou en société. D'une manière générale, le travail d'assomption de la violence est une condition nécessaire pour tout individu dans sa croissance en humanité et pour toute société humaine dans sa pérennité. Les religions ne sont pas en dehors de cette problématique et certains auteurs soulignent le lien étroit entre «la violence et le sacré», s'interrogeant en particulier sur les enjeux de la dimension sacrificielle — constitutive de la plupart des phénomènes religieux — dans la régulation de la violence.<sup>1</sup> Les guerres de religions sont aussi souvent citées — à plus ou moins bon escient (!) — pour souligner la violence que manifeste parfois «l'homme religieux» ... sans doute parce que la violence touche aux ressorts profonds et vitaux de la personne humaine et de sa quête d'absolu.

Si la violence n'est certes pas une spécificité de la religion, la vie communautaire, propre à de nombreuses formes de vie religieuse, implique, à travers le rassemblement d'individus différents, un mode de vie et de relations susceptible de générer de la violence entre les membres d'une même communauté. La sagesse des règles monastiques et des constitutions des ordres apostoliques témoigne de la lucidité des fondateurs ou des fondatrices pour permettre à leurs communautés de vivre dans la paix et d'assumer évangéliquement les tensions inévitables de la vie commune. Le présent article voudrait tenter de dégager quelques pistes de réflexions sur les principales sources ou facteurs de violence dans les communautés religieuses, à partir de l'expérience ordinaire que l'on peut faire dans l'accompagnement ou l'animation de communautés, au sein d'instituts religieux ou de sociétés de vie apostolique dans l'Église catholique.

Cette réflexion a été entreprise, pour une part, en décembre 2002 à Lourdes lors de l'Assemblée générale des responsables des religieux et religieuses en France,<sup>2</sup> dont le thème était : «*Vie religieuse et violence. Quel témoignage ? Quelle mission ?*». Nous nous inspirerons de certains éléments échangés au cours des carrefours et des conférences.<sup>3</sup> Notons qu'au premier abord, le ton global de cet écrit paraîtra peut-être quelque peu pessimiste ou négatif quant à la vie communautaire, puisqu'il aborde cette question par le côté de la violence ... mais à bien y regarder, c'est souvent en refusant de parler de la violence que celle-ci se fait plus corrosive pour la vie commune... une attitude réaliste souscrivant à la réflexion de D. Bonhoeffer : «*La vraie communauté chrétienne est à ce prix : c'est quand nous cessons de rêver à son sujet quelle nous est donnée*».<sup>4</sup>

## **La vie religieuse face aux violences internes et externes**

La vie religieuse n'est pas indemne de violence : la violence originare en chaque personne transparaît, d'une manière ou d'une autre, dans toute vie commune. De même, les climats de violence et de conflits, qui agitent fortement une région ou un pays, influencent la vie des communautés religieuses. Bien que les religieux et religieuses aient à coeur de poser un signe prophétique fort par

leur manière de vivre fraternellement, affronter la violence demeure toujours un combat à mener pour rendre possible un vivre ensemble et une réelle acceptation des différences ... pour devenir «experts en communion».<sup>5</sup>

Le choix de la vie religieuse implique de vivre des relations de grande proximité avec d'autres personnes : dans la vie monastique où, tout au long d'une vie, en un même lieu, chacun accueille ses frères (ou sœurs) jour après jour; dans la vie apostolique où, souvent en petites communautés, la Mission est vécue ensemble au rythme des forces et des faiblesses de chacun. Ce chemin choisi de vie fraternelle est exigeant, si ce n'est décapant, et conduit à une connaissance mutuelle et à une vérité des relations. Cependant, cette confrontation permanente à l'autre peut engendrer tant la conversion que la violence ... l'expérience de la vie de famille montre que plus la proximité est forte plus les conflits sont violents ... il en est de même dans les familles spirituelles.... La dimension communautaire de la vie religieuse n'existe pas en dehors des relations humaines dans tout ce qu'elles ont de fort mais aussi de fragile, dans tout ce qui génère l'amour et la reconnaissance mais aussi la haine et la violence, dans toutes les composantes qui peuvent faire d'une communauté un lieu d'épanouissement et de communion ou un enfer...

La situation actuelle des communautés religieuses dans les Églises d'Europe occidentale avec le vieillissement de leurs membres et la pénurie des vocations peut devenir aussi source de tensions et de conflits. En effet, cette situation suscite parfois des affrontements intergénérationnels ou, pour le moins, des difficultés d'intégration des plus jeunes au sein des communautés. Ce déséquilibre démographique peut être perçu et vécu comme une violence plus ou moins larvée dans la vie des communautés ou même des instituts. Il ne s'agit pas ici, bien sûr, d'une violence physique mais du risque d'une violence d'ordre psychologique — et institutionnel — qui contraint les uns ou les autres soit à des attitudes d'exclusion, soit d'intégration forcée à tel ou tel mode de vie communautaire. Ainsi, par exemple, voit-on parfois une trop grande exclusivité accordée aux quelques jeunes présents dans la communauté et la mise à l'écart des plus anciens, ou au contraire le poids d'un groupe vieillissant pesant sur les projets des plus jeunes et parfois même sur la mise en œuvre du charisme propre de l'institut.

Les sources de violence affectant les communautés religieuses ne sont pas simplement liées aux difficultés inhérentes à la vie communautaire, ni au contexte ecclésial actuel. Les religieux et religieuses se trouvent aussi confrontés, à travers leurs diverses formes d'apostolat, à de nombreuses situations de violence sociale et politique : les situations de précarité sociale et de grande pauvreté dans les quartiers ou les régions difficiles tant en Occident que dans les pays en voie de développement, les conflits ethniques ou interreligieux qui divisent des pays entiers et conduisent parfois à des génocides, les conflits armés, etc. Tout cet environnement tendu, et parfois dangereux, n'est pas sans conséquence sur la vie même des communautés. Ces pressions extérieures peuvent conduire à l'instauration d'un climat de défiance, de rejet ou de non-reconnaissance des différences. La vie communautaire, malgré l'entraide, la foi commune et la volonté de vivre ensemble, ne demeure pas imperméable aux violences externes qui risquent de s'immiscer discrètement entre les personnes ou de déstabiliser certains membres plus fragiles (comme, par exemple, le cas de communautés pluriethniques ou pluri-culturelles où la cohabitation de diverses ethnies ou cultures peut, en cas de conflits, se révéler délicate et source parfois d'exclusion).

La vie religieuse — témoin et actrice de l'annonce d'un Royaume de justice et de paix — n'est pas en dehors des mécanismes profonds qui animent toute société humaine. En prenant conscience de la violence qui peut surgir au cœur de la vie communautaire et des engagements au service de notre monde, elle partage le nécessaire chemin d'humanisation que doit entreprendre tout groupe humain pour une possible existence. Les choix de vie évangélique n'estompent pas la dimension violence de l'existence humaine, ils l'affrontent en cherchant à la désarmer par la force d'aimer. La Croix en est l'expression la plus vive....

### **La confrontation quotidienne à l'autre et à soi-même**

Si les communautés religieuses ne sont pas à l'abri des conflits inhérents à toute communauté humaine et des situations de violence qui marquent notre monde, il y a, sans doute encore plus en



amont, le choix — quelque peu radical de la vie consacrée — de vivre au quotidien des relations fraternelles fortes où la référence aux autres — à l'Autre — est fondatrice. La reconnaissance de l'altérité dans toutes ses dimensions est un travail de conversion permanente auquel fait face celui ou celle qui choisit de vivre dans une communauté religieuse.

Si, comme l'écrit Jacques Arènes, *«la violence est l'expression de l'angoisse d'altérité; elle est un mélange de méconnaissance et de reconnaissance de l'autre»*,<sup>6</sup> la vie communautaire, qui réunit des personnes qui ne se sont pas ou peu choisies est un lieu privilégié où méconnaissance et reconnaissance des autres se conjuguent fortement ou même ... s'entrechoquent. De fait, l'altérité n'est pas toujours cette heureuse distance qui nous permet d'entrevoir nos richesses complémentaires et de lire sur le visage de l'autre l'appel à la rencontre unanime des cœurs... L'altérité n'est pas un vain mot quand il s'agit, années après années, de vivre avec les mêmes frères (ou soeurs). Le temps, à la fois, met à nu les différences constitutives de chacun — qualités et défauts —, et semble éroder le mystère qui constitue chaque personne. Naît alors le sentiment assez paradoxal et d'une frustration devant l'impossibilité — la réalité — de changer l'autre, et d'une tentation de mettre la main sur l'autre, le connaissant trop bien. La violence peut naître de cette impasse, source d'angoisse : ne savoir que faire de cet autre et l'enfermer dans une image définitivement réductrice. Quête de reconnaissance et méconnaissance d'une possible requête... Lorsque le temps, au gré des étapes de la vie, n'est plus source de nouveautés au sein des relations communautaires, les conflits demeurent et le regard sur l'autre s'obscurcit ..., la violence apparaît alors parfois comme l'ultime recours pour exister différemment.

Sans entrer ici dans une approche psychanalytique des mécanismes de la genèse, tant individuelle que sociale, de la violence, il est clair que la capacité de confrontation à l'autre dans une vie commune est aussi marquée par notre propre capacité à nous confronter à nous-mêmes. Soi-même comme un autre... *«À l'opacité du rapport à soi-même répond l'obscurité de l'ambivalence vis-à-vis de l'autre. À la violence intérieure correspond souvent la violence externe, dans un mouvement de protection difficile à identifier par le sujet»*.<sup>7</sup> Certaines personnes ont connu dans leur existence — à un âge jeune ou adulte — des expériences traumatisantes de violences — corporelles ou psychologiques dans leur vie familiale, scolaire ou professionnelle — qui vont induire des comportements parfois violents dans des situations d'insécurité ou de manque de reconnaissance. De même, l'attitude de tel ou tel membre de la communauté (en particulier de ceux ou celles qui exercent l'autorité) peut susciter chez ces personnes des réactions violentes, qu'elles-mêmes seront parfois bien en mal d'expliquer consciemment. La consécration religieuse n'efface pas les séquelles de traumatismes importants, et la méconnaissance ou le déni de telles situations risquent d'être une source de difficultés permanentes dans une vie de communauté.

### **La violence générée par les dysfonctionnements institutionnels**

D'une manière plus générale, une des sources de la violence dans toute communauté humaine et dans toute société est l'oubli que l'existence humaine est, en quelque sorte par nature, institutionnelle.<sup>8</sup> Nous vivons dès notre naissance dans un monde institué, que nous n'avons pas choisi ; de même, nous entrons dans un institut religieux qui existe — dans la plupart des cas — avant nous.

L'individu et l'institution sont des réalités indissociables. Une des fonctions de l'institution est de socialiser, de moraliser ou de spiritualiser — convertir? — les pulsions et les désirs qui sont, par définition, pour une part asociaux, irrationnels et subversifs. La manière d'un individu de se situer face à l'institution dépendra de sa capacité d'intériorisation, c'est-à-dire sa capacité d'accepter de limiter ses désirs en vue d'un bien supérieur comme le bien commun (c'est sans doute un bon critère d'aptitude à la vie communautaire). Le refus de toute institution peut devenir rapidement déshumanisant et souvent violent. S'il existe des institutions répressives, ce n'est pas en général le fait de leur institutionnalité mais celui de leur fonctionnement qui ne respecte pas l'individu.

Les sciences humaines, dans l'analyse de notre société actuelle, soulignent fortement la part importante du subjectivisme chez l'individu contemporain qui juge et agit souvent à partir de son «ressenti». Les sentiments tiennent ainsi une place prépondérante dans les relations aux autres — et dans la constitution des couples<sup>9</sup> — au détriment de la dimension institutionnelle des divers liens que la société civile ou religieuse offre. Les engagements pris dans la vie relationnelle sont alors fragilisés car les situations de tensions et de conflits ne sont plus médiatisées par l'institution et

risquent de laisser le champ libre à toutes formes de violence. Cette «désinstitutionnalisation» et ce primat de la subjectivité ne sont pas sans conséquence sur la vie communautaire aujourd'hui et la régulation des conflits.

De fait, dans la vie religieuse, la communauté n'est pas un élément secondaire, proposé au gré des affinités électives ou des nécessités matérielles. Elle ne repose pas non plus sur les sentiments, les modes ou les attentes des uns et des autres. La communauté est une réalité d'abord d'ordre spirituel dans laquelle chacun s'engage librement et témoigne ainsi d'une possible fraternité universelle.<sup>10</sup> Cette recherche de communion et d'entente réciproque dans la vie communautaire n'est concrètement possible qu'à travers la mise en œuvre d'une dimension institutionnelle, bien sûr choisie et acceptée par tous, mais qui doit en permanence être relue et vérifiée tant par les responsables que par les membres de la communauté. La perte progressive de références à la Règle ouvre les portes à la subjectivisation de la vie communautaire et à un effacement des grands repères de la vie commune, sources possibles de violences. Certes, la vie liturgique et de prière doit fournir un cadre solide à la vie commune mais il est clair qu'elle ne joue véritablement ce rôle que si, dans la vie très concrète, les règles données par l'Institut sont intériorisées par chacun et mises en œuvre par tous (y compris dans les domaines les plus matériels comme la transparence au niveau économique).

On peut illustrer ce type de dysfonctionnement institutionnel de diverses manières et à différents niveaux. Il y a d'abord la régulation interne de toute communauté qui, selon les règles de l'Institut, se traduit par une répartition des tâches et des responsabilités mais aussi par le déroulement ordinaire de la vie communautaire. En principe, toute communauté essaye de vivre selon un plan de vie communautaire qui organise tant la vie au quotidien que les temps forts de la communauté. Le non-respect des grandes lignes de conduite choisies par le groupe entraîne — consciemment ou inconsciemment — la mise en place de rapports de force qui régissent alors les choix les plus ordinaires, justifient les comportements individuels et excluent d'une manière ou d'une autre ceux ou celles qui subissent la situation. Dans cette perspective, si le supérieur de communauté ne peut rappeler ses frères au respect des règles posées — ou s'il n'y est lui-même pas fidèle —, le principe d'autorité soit s'estompe peu à peu, soit se transforme en autoritarisme inefficace : il ne joue plus son rôle d'accompagnement des membres de la communauté et de régulation de la vie commune. Le risque de violence apparaît insidieusement dans des rapports inégaux, des frustrations souvent cachées et une insécurisation des personnes qui se traduit par des comportements souvent d'autant plus rigides que la personne est peu sûre d'elle-même. La vie commune loin d'être un lieu de respect mutuel et de croissance spirituelle et humaine devient un lieu déstructurant et étouffant, propice à toute sorte de débordements.

Parfois, le fonctionnement même d'un Institut peut être perçu comme générateur de violence au sein des communautés, en particulier dans la manière dont l'autorité est exercée et dont les décisions sont prises. La composition de communautés est un exercice difficile et les nominations — ou obédiences — peuvent être vécues comme un non respect des personnes et comme une certaine forme de violence faite tant à l'individu qu'à la communauté elle-même : «Pourquoi l'obliger à venir avec nous... Avec eux ?». Ce sentiment de violence est renforcé s'il n'existe pas d'instance de médiation — d'appel — dans l'institut ou si le pouvoir paraît être exercé de manière solitaire sans l'appui d'un conseil qui aurait peut-être permis une meilleure perception de la situation tant personnelle que communautaire. L'oubli de la complexité des personnes et des communautés et l'absence d'écoute et de concertation rendent pour une part inopérante la délicate tâche de gouvernement et risque de sécréter un climat délétère, porteur d'une violence quasi institutionnalisée ! ....

## Conclusion

Au terme de cette approche trop brève — et peut-être un peu sombre — de cette vaste question de la violence dans les communautés religieuses, il est aussi important de repérer les capacités humaines et spirituelles que la vie religieuse peut mettre en œuvre pour faire face à ces situations de violence et vivre pleinement des choix de vie qui consonent avec l'Évangile. La violence conduit à penser les limites, limites de toute personne, limites de la vie communautaire et des instituts face au

vieillesse et au petit nombre, mais aussi face aux conflits qui traversent nos sociétés comme nos communautés ecclésiales. Pourtant, c'est en prenant conscience de ses limites que la vie religieuse, à travers le défi de la vie communautaire, témoigne que la violence n'a pas le dernier mot, et que des hommes et des femmes de races, de cultures et d'âges différents peuvent ensemble vivre une fraternité au quotidien et être signe du projet de Dieu de rassembler l'humanité dans la paix.

La violence est souvent l'expression — l'extériorisation — d'une incapacité à assumer des blessures, des frustrations, des manques difficiles à contenir ou à maîtriser. Face à la violence qui enferme dans l'immédiateté et l'absurde, la vie religieuse propose l'apprentissage de l'intériorité : à l'écoute de l'Esprit, prendre le chemin de l'intériorité apprend à habiter sa vie intérieure, à trouver la juste distance avec les autres, à relire son existence dans la durée, à faire mémoire de ce qui donne sens à l'existence humaine, la nôtre et celle des autres. C'est sans doute un des enjeux de la consécration des religieux et religieuses dans le célibat, la pauvreté et l'obéissance, qui les inscrivent à la fois dans une dépendance — librement choisie — aux frères et aux sœurs de la communauté, et dans une indépendance vis-à-vis de ces trois grandes sources de violence — le pouvoir, l'argent et la sexualité — qui défigurent les individus et les sociétés humaines.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. René Girard, *La violence et le sacré*, Paris, Grasset, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> 2<sup>ème</sup> Assemblée Générale de la Conférence française des Supérieures Majeures (C.S.M.) et de la Conférence des Supérieurs Majeurs de France (C.S.M.F.), 2-3-4 décembre 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Voir: Jacques Arènes, *Anthropologie de la violence et vie religieuse*, Documents Episcopat, n° 9, Juin 2003. Bruno-Marie Duffé, *Pour une approche théologique des situations de violence*, Documents Episcopat, n° 13, Septembre 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *De la vie communautaire*, Labor et Fides, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Paul II, *La vie Consacrée*, § 46.

<sup>6</sup> J. Arènes, *idem*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> J. Arènes, *idem*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Un peu à la manière d'Edgar Morin : «*L'homme est culturel par nature, et naturel par culture*». in : *Le paradigme perdu: la nature humaine*, Paris, Seuil, 1973.

<sup>9</sup> Voir par exemple, Xavier Lacroix, *Les mirages de l'amour*, Paris, Bayard Éditions, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> «*Insérées dans les sociétés de ce monde — des sociétés souvent traversées de passions et d'intérêts conflictuels, aspirant à l'unité, mais incertaines sur les voies à prendre — les communautés de vie consacrée, où se rencontrent comme des frères et des sœurs des personnes d'âges, de langues et de cultures divers, se situent comme signes d'un dialogue toujours possible et d'une communion capable d'harmoniser toutes les différences*». Jean-Paul II, *La vie consacrée*, § 51.

Réf. : *Spiritus*, n. 178, mars 2005, pp. 75-84

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# ***The Living Bread in the land of China***

## ***A Report about the Chinese Pastoral Bible in China (2000-2005)***

- Cao Xue -

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“By day he led them with a cloud, and by night with a fiery light. In the desert he split rocks to give them abundant drink. He made streams come out of a rock and caused water to flow like a river” (Ps 78 [77]:14-15).

Jesus said to her: “Those who drink of this water will be thirsty again; but those who drink of the water that I shall give will never be thirsty; for the water that I shall give will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:14).

### **1. First Part: Three Stages of Distribution Work**

The translation of the Chinese Pastoral Bible was done in Manila and Taiwan in 1991-1997 under the supervision of Fr Bernard Hurault. Fr Bernard Hurault is the notes-compositor of the above-mentioned Bible. The first version of this special edition of the Bible was published in Spanish and distributed in Chile. It aims to help simple and poor faithful Catholics to enjoy the words of God in their daily environment. Its notes are written to give readers pastoral as well as spiritual direction. During the translation into Chinese in Manila, Fr Bernard Hurault did not know what future the Chinese Pastoral Bible would have in the vast land of China, which later on turned out to be a truly blessed event and legend.

At that time Fr Bernard just had faith in the leading of the Spirit. He trusted that God through his work and the work of his team (five Chinese ladies, both from mainland China and Taiwan) would offer the word of God to the Catholic population in China, and hoped for the best. Fr Bernard believed that the Chinese Pastoral Bible would be a true fountain for millions of people who are looking for God.

The translation work came to an end in 1997. In 1998 the Diocese of Hong Kong granted the *imprimatur* to the Chinese Pastoral Bible, not without a strict checking on its translation of texts and notes. After spending two years on minor corrections, the Chinese Pastoral Bible in simplified characters was printed and published in the year 2000 in China. So, 50,000 copies were delivered to Beijing from Nanjing Amity Printing Press in January 2000.

Then came the question of distributing 50,000 copies to the Catholic Church that never had had much experience with the Bible. One might imagine that it would be an almost impossible task. But with the Holy Spirit nothing was impossible. Although at that time Church people in China did not think that using and sharing the Bible within communities was a primary important matter, there was still a hope for us to start this biblical journey: to feed the simple and poor Catholics with words of God, to evangelize the Chinese people through the Pastoral Bible, to build up Christian communities by leading them with words of God.

With the support of Fr Bernard — spiritually and financially — we started the process of introducing the Pastoral Bible to the whole of China. Now flashing back through the distributing work of these five years, I can list them into three different steps. They are the following:

### ***A. Stage One: Local visits***

Since Church authorities were not aware that a new edition of the Bible was out, I had to visit many provinces. Moreover, even in some parishes where the priests were fully informed that the Pastoral Bible was out for people to use, they reacted very slowly. There were many reasons for this, one was that the spirit of the Second Vatican Council had not yet touched the Chinese Catholic Church. So reading the Bible and sharing its fountain of life within lay communities was still an unknown experience.

Many parishes were too poor to purchase copies. Visits to many parishes across the whole country helped us to see more realistically the pastoral situation. We spent time chatting and listening to the sharing of many parish priests who were facing endless pastoral problems and difficulties. Complaints also.

Most of all, their anxiety was that lay people were not formed biblically at all. The Church structure was still in the old style. One man was responsible for all, and each member did not know how to share in the common responsibility. So we did our best to suggest to parish priests to let lay people try sharing the Pastoral Bible among themselves. Many strong, encouraging words came directly out of our mouths to console priests and plead with them to let copies of the Pastoral Bibles be put in the hands of the lay people. We are fully convinced that Christian communities in order to live as the body of Christ, need to base their life on Holy Scripture. We had no other fountain of life than the Word of God. We have no other wisdom than the wisdom of God. We have no other truth than Jesus Christ, our Saviour, the Son of God incarnated among us. Looking back at these years of introducing the Pastoral Bible to numerous communities, we are glad to say that many aspects of Christian communities have been changed and life re-found in Christ and renewed through the Holy Spirit. This transformation was made possible because of the presence of the Pastoral Bible in China.

### ***B. Second Stage: How we introduced the Pastoral Bible***

During this stage, we did our best to persuade parish priests to order as many copies as possible. We invented several methods of persuasion. First, to encourage people to order copies and without any pressure to pay immediately. For example, I went to Lanzhou Diocese (Gansu Province, North-West of China) to promote the Pastoral Bible. Fr Liu, the priest in charge at that time, introduced me to the nearby Diocese of Tianshui. There, I travelled for seven days accompanied by two priests and two sisters — visiting small and poor villages. Their standard of living was poor, but their interest in receiving the Word of God was great. We decided to send 10,000 copies for the three dioceses within the Province of Gansu (whose capital city is Lanzhou) without asking for immediate payment. Ten thousand copies were divided between the three dioceses. I accepted their invitation to conduct a Basic Biblical Formation course for all priests and sisters of the three dioceses in Lanzhou. Later on, a small biblical movement was organized in each place. Unfortunately, they never managed to pay their debt because of many out-of-control reasons. But the most important thing is that 10,000 copies were delivered to the poor people and used by them.

This kind of method was used throughout the country. We created a system for all poor parishes to buy the Pastoral Bibles, without immediate payment. We made an agreement with our Chinese Publisher, that we could order the Pastoral Bible for any parish or address in the country without immediate payment. This means any parish priest who wants to present the Pastoral Bible to the people and who is unable to cover the cost can do so without being burdened by money matters. By the end of the year we will pay the full price of the (total) copies we sold during the year. Later we will send invoices to all buyers to pay us. However recovering our money from different parishes has always been a lost cause. Many parishes could not afford to pay even if it was delayed for one year. Fr Bernard and Fr Anta supported our “distribution system” with their funds.

Each year a big amount of money went out for subsidizing and donating copies of the Pastoral



Bible to poor parishes. Thanks to the reception of this big amount of funds, 230,000 copies were distributed through the whole China from 2000 to 2005. Our copies even reached the most remote and far away provinces such as Yunnan and Guizhou. The presence of the Pastoral Bible in many different places meant a “pressure” as well as an invitation to local communities. Realizing that the Pastoral Bibles were already arriving, priests thought that they “must do something about it”. It is from there that biblical formation work started taking place and brought the flame of the Spirit to renew everything within the life of individual Christians and within communities. In some dioceses due to a shortage of priests, many Catholics’ right to, and need for, the sacraments are denied, but thanks to the presence of the Pastoral Bible some local communities are nourished by the Word of God during the long absence of priests.

### ***C. Third Stage: Biblical Formation Work***

Biblical formation work became the focus of our biblical movement in 2003. Many parishes ordered Pastoral Bibles but did not know how to help lay communities to “eat” and “drink” at this fountain of life. Phone calls came in and people expected us to go to their parishes and encourage them to use the Pastoral Bible. At hearing these invitations, we felt inspired but at the same time terrified. We did not know what to teach and how to guide people into the life-long journey of the Bible, both in their daily Christian life and in their community life. But we had no other choice than to obey the will of God. God loves his people and he wants them to grow maturely through understanding the Bible, through re-living Bible experiences. God wants his people to get to know his Son Jesus Christ through meditating on and understanding the Bible. I still remember well those first biblical courses we conducted. We prayed so much to the Holy Spirit and asked Him to show us how to move the group and what kind of biblical texts to choose. Once in Shandong Province, Linyi Diocese, I was invited to give a 7-day course to more than 300 participants. Their age differed from 10 to 70 and they were all from the countryside. It was with the Spirit’s help and strong presence that we went through intensified but satisfying days with all of them — they deepened our understanding and experiences of Jesus Christ, through the Bible. We learnt how to cooperate within the Catholic community — which was a new thing for most participants. We reconciled with God and with each other through the guidance of biblical texts (Lk 15; Mt 18, etc). We were strengthened to love by reading Romans 12:9-21. As soon as we finished the first bunch of courses in different places, the news went out to more dioceses. More phone calls came in and more invitations arrived at our door. We were the witness of so many thirsty hearts who were longing to hear the words of God. We created many charismatic songs for praying and for animating different groups. We put our whole heart and effort into serving different groups whose zeal and interest in the Word of God touched us deeply.

To summarize the basic style and spirit of our courses and most of all, what it is that renewed numerous groups through biblical formation, I can list the following:

- 1) Lead the whole group to pray to the Holy Spirit, asking for guidance through the day. Ask wisdom to promote true, inner experiences of God with all participants when biblical texts are “tasted”.
- 2) Never give intellectual explanations of biblical texts.
- 3) Instead of giving what seems important to our animators, we must give what seems more important to all participants.
- 4) Search for different methods when studying biblical texts so that people can experience the Gospels as a living fountain and not merely as written texts. Groups often favoured Bible drama. Individual sharing was another way of invoking the fire of participants. Participants often revealed a thousand different aspects of the living God among non-Christians. Through group work, biblical dramas and dancing, we constantly went back to the biblical texts and realized that what was written there, although thousands of years ago, although translated from different languages, although difficult to understand fully, people got to know clearly that God so loved the world and each one that he sent his only Son to save us. We are saved

and new life is given. We have a home to return to and we have hope of eternal life. This new experience often set people free and brought an inner force to Catholics to go out and evangelize the world. “You must go to the ends of the world and baptize people in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*cf.* Mt 28:19). Biblical formation work helped communities to discover a living and Resurrected Jesus among them. It has renewed their life in Christ and bestowed a new energy for spreading the love of God to all surroundings. In some parishes after a ten-day or 15-day Biblical Formation Course, some non-Christian participants would be already formed within the course, thus, by the end of the course, they were baptized and welcomed into the communities. This particular ending of our Biblical Course always brought great joy and celebration to all the participants.

The following are some letters during that time which I wrote to Fr Bernar Hurault telling him about the different stages of our biblical work in China.

## **2. Second part: what are we doing this year?**

- 1) We continue to subsidize Pastoral Bibles from the official price of RMB 13,5 for each copy to 10 yuen per copy, so that poor parishes can afford to buy them.  
We plan to distribute 10,000 copies at RMB 10 per copy through our small distribution office in Jilin.
- 2) We sent four biblical animators to the South West of China. Three in Guizhou Province who are visiting lost Catholics and renewing them with biblical formation. We asked a young lady, Ms Xiao Si to go to the very South West of Yunnan, across the frontier with Myanmar. She is now working in Laiza, a small town on the Myanmar side to teach Chinese and the Catechism to Chinese people. We arranged to send 100 copies of the Pastoral Bible to Chinese business people in Laiza since they are interested in sharing the Christian Faith.
- 3) We continue to occupy two pages in a nationally distributed Catholic Journal which is called *Sheng Xin Bei Lei*, where we share our biblical experiences with different communities.
- 4) We will conduct a one-month Biblical Formation Course for 50 catechists in Dali Diocese, in July.
- 5) We will try to establish a Bible School in the South West of Guizhou Province. It will be a Centre of Biblical Formation for all Catholics in this region. In August we will try to conduct our first Biblical Formation Course there in Anlong Parish of Guizhou Diocese.
- 6) We will go to help Hanzhong Diocese (South of Shaanxi Province, whose capital is Xi'an), to conduct a 7-day Biblical Course for all priests and sisters. Later on, they will transmit their experiences to the local communities for which they are responsible.
- 7) We will help Baotou Diocese to run a biblical retreat. The course will last for 7 days and it will be based on Holy Scripture.

Ref.: “Seventh European Catholic China Colloquium” (6-10 September 2006), pp. 1-8.

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# ***SEDOS ANNUAL REPORT 2006***

## **- SEDOS ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY -**

***“SEDOS is a forum open to Institutes of Consecrated Life, which commit themselves to deepening their understanding of global mission. SEDOS encourages research and disseminates information through its Bulletin and website, public conferences, working groups and its Annual Seminar”.***

### **INTRODUCTION**

SEDOS has for one more year continued to labour for the Kingdom, sometimes quietly and oftentimes no so quietly. And once more our efforts during the year 2006 have been fruitful. We, the members of the SEDOS family do not pretend to solve the problems of the World nor those of the Church, but we continue to be committed with words and deeds to the study of Mission as our little contribution to all our brothers and Sisters. Yes, I believe that 2006 has been another fruitful year thanks to the commitment of the Institutes members of SEDOS and especially to so many personal contributions. It has been because of your efforts that SEDOS has been able one more year to continue to offer its services to everybody, wherever they are and whatever their faith. Thank you, each and all for your missionary spirit.

Of course, a very special word of thanks to the members of the **Society of the Divine Word**. They continue to generously offer the premises to house the office of SEDOS, as they have been doing from the beginning as a contribution that can not be repaid but by the Blessing of the Lord. A big word of thanks to the **Brothers of the Christian Schools** for offering their premises for just a nominal fee to host all the SEDOS Conferences, a contribution that makes it possible to continue offering this service. We also wish to remember and thank those of you who graciously send your books and magazines to our Documentation Centre, specially the **Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers** who always make sure SEDOS receive copies of the new titles published by **ORBIS Books**.

Our gratitude to the members of the **SEDOS Executive Committee** that have all through the year given their time, encouragement and advice so as to facilitate and make possible the diverse activities of SEDOS. This year we specially thank our President Sr Mary Wright for her leadership and we wish her all the blessings on her new work.

Naturally we remember with gratitude our Partners and Sponsors in Mission formation, **Misereor, Missio Achen and Missio Munich** for the continuous material and moral support they generously provide us with. They are always silently walking with us and their support is warmly felt and greatly appreciated.

We also wish to say ‘*thank you*’ to the many friends who through the year have sent so many words of encouragement.

### **SEDOS ORGANIZATION**

This year we are pleased to introduce three Congregations that have requested to be accepted into our SEDOS family and to share with us their rich experience,

- **Religious of Mary Immaculate, Claritian Missionaries, (RMI)**
- **Religious of Presentation of Mary, (PM)**
- **Sisters Of Charity Of Jesus And Mary, (SCJM)**

Welcome to our family! May the Lord grant us many others to help in His work.

But there is a sad note too; and this year we have also to report that two Congregations have decided to leave SEDOS,

- **Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, SCJ**
- **Society of the Catholic Apostolate, SAC**

We thank the members of both Congregations for their support during the past years and hope they will continue to benefit all of us with their experience.

### **Executive Committee**

The members of the Executive committee have once more managed to find time in their busy schedule to assist the Director and meet together in between trips. Specially appreciated were the calls and messages they sent from different parts of the world providing the office with guidance and help in planning the activities of SEDOS. In order to facilitate a minimum quorum presence at the meetings and Official Activities, the Executive Committee has seen necessary to increase the number of members from 10 to 12, adding two more Superior Generals.

#### **- Members of the Executive Committee for the Year 2005-2006:**

**President:** § **Sr Mary Wright, IBVM**, Superior General of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Elected to the Executive in 2001.

**Vice-President:** § **Fr Teresino Serra, MCCJ**, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries. Elected to the Executive in 2004.

**Treasurer:** § **Sr Monika Lita Hasanah, OSU**, General Councillor of the Ursuline Roman Union. Elected to the Executive in 2003.

#### **Members:**

§ **Sr Inés María Gutiérrez, SUSC**, General Councillor of Holy Union Sisters. Elected to the Executive in 2005.

§ **Sr Elisa Kidanè, SMC**, General Councillor of the Comboni Missionary Sisters. Elected to the Executive in 2005.

§ **Fr Pierre-Paul Walraet, OSC**, General Councillor of the Order of the Holy Cross (Crosiers). Elected to the Executive in 2001.

§ **Fr Juan Antonio Flores Osuna, SX**, Generalate of the Xaverian Missionaries. Elected to the Executive in 2002.

§ **Fr Michael McCabe, SMA**, Generalate of the Society of African Missions. Elected to the Executive in 2002.

§ **Sr Maureen McBride, RNDM**, Superior General of the Religious of Our Lady of the Missions. Elected to the Executive in 2003.

§ **Fr Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP**, Order of Preachers (Dominican Order). Elected as Executive Director in 2003.

This year Sr Mary Wright finishes her term as President of SEDOS and as Superior of their Congregation. To her we express our gratitude for guiding SEDOS through all these complicated years, giving her time and her wonderful insights to help us look forward. We are sure that she will continue to offer us her cooperation and support wherever she might go. Thank you, Mary, for being always there as President and as friend whenever I called on you.

This year we are presenting and requesting the Assembly to confirm the enlargement of the Executive Committee Members. Two sisters will be presented as members of the Executive: **Sister Maria Pilar Benavente Serrano, MSOLA** and **Sister Judith Moore, SMSM**. And from her we thank them for generously accepting to commit their time and efforts to our common task.

### **SEDOS Staff**

During the year the office has slowly continued with the plans of restructuring and modernising, trying to update the ways and services provided to the members and to all. *Sr Celine Kokkat, JMJ* has recently joined the office staff and we hope she will be able to take over the administration activities of SEDOS in the future. More training for the staff has been provided, mainly in the areas of Internet and Database management, and we can say that the databases have been updated and almost brought up to date. This was one of the biggest problems and we are confident that it has at last been solved, so that we can continue to streamline and adequate the office to the needs of the times.

In charge of the publication of the Bulletin and Homepage articles is *Mrs. Ilaria Iadaluca*, and *Mrs. Margarita Loftbouse* takes care of the accounts, subscriptions and matters related to the running of the office. Apart from their specific tasks they are called upon to share in the organization of the different activities throughout the year. Providing special, professional help is also *Ms. Philippa Wooldridge* as proof-reader and *Mr. Bernard Perez* is the new person in charge of the WebPage, on a part-time basis, and he is training of the staff in the use of the programmes.

## **LOOKING AT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE YEAR**

We have continued to strengthen the connections and relationships with the different groups and Institutions related to global mission, be they Catholics or from other Confessions. Time and energy have continued to be invested in attending meetings and being present at events related to Mission endeavours in order to make our SEDOS resources available and known to staff and students at Universities and the members of different commissions and committee groups.

Special events where SEDOS has been present have been the **3<sup>rd</sup> European Conference of Missiology organized by AFOM** (*Association Francophone Oecuménique de Missiologie*) during the month of August. **The second big event was the First Asian Mission Congress: "Telling the Story of Jesus", organized by the FABC** (under *Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli*) in October in Thailand. We have continued to be in close contact and co-operation with the IAMS (International Association of Mission Studies) as well as with the Executive Committee of the IACM (International Association of Catholic Missiologists) in order to find ways of closer co-operation in our activities.

### **A. - SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES**

Thanks to the financial assistance and spiritual support received from **Misereor, Missio Aachen** and **Missio Munich** SEDOS has been able to continue organizing and carrying out its educational Conferences and the Residential Seminar in Ariccia during the year. Through these pages we want to acknowledge their help and to express our gratitude to the members of these three Organizations for their continuous support and encouragement and pray that we may continue to develop ever newer ways of co-operation in this field of Mission. Likewise our gratitude goes to the **Brothers of the Christian Schools** at whose General House SEDOS hosts its Conferences.

In order to increase co-operation with other groups and Organizations SEDOS has decided to join in the sharing of resources of planning and carrying out Annual Conferences. By doing this we hope to maximise our resources maintaining a wide range of themes offered, to avoid overlapping and duplication, as well as not overburdening the members attending the Conferences with too many choices and, very important, to cut costs.



## CONFERENCES

· **6 December 2005** - Annual General Assembly  
**“The Kingdom of God: Jesus’ Principle for Action on this World and in this World”** by Fr John Füllենbach, SVD

· 3 March 2006 - **Church And The New Social Movements:**  
**“New Horizons Opened for our Missio. A beginning, a Road, a Hope”**  
Sergio Torres & Luiz C. Susin, Sec. Ejec. Proyecto Foro Mundial de Teologia y Liberacion

· 16 - 20 MAY 2006 - **SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR - ARICCIA -**

**“MISSION AND MONEY:  
PERSPECTIVE FROM RELIGIOUS LIFE”**

*Fr. John Füllենbach, SVD: The Kingdom of God*  
*Helmut Rakowsky, OFM Cap: Mission and Money*  
*Alessandro Guarda, MCCJ: Mission to the poor in the Gospel*  
*Fernando Domingues, MCCJ: Mission of the Church*

· 12-13 October 2006 - **Congregazione Vita Consacrata P. Cons. JPIC - SEDOS**  
**Consacrated Life and The Social teaching of the Church. Guidelines for Formation**

· 17 October 2006 - **SEDOS & USG/UISG**  
**“Ecumenism Calls Forth Religious Life”**

By:

**H. Em. Cardinal Walter KASPER: Changes in the ecumenical scenario**

**H. Ex. Bishop Brian FARRELL: Involvement of religious in the search for unity**

## RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR

This year the Annual SEDOS Residential Seminar was held at Ariccia from the 16 to 20 of May. The topic on which the participants shared experiences was: **“MISSION AND MONEY: Perspective From Religious Life”**. The structure of the Seminar offered a balanced combination of input and personal experiences through the help of a well-chosen group of speakers and the sharing of working groups. The Facilitator was **Fr Alessandro Guarda**, treasurer of the Comboni Missionaries, and experienced speakers were invited to share with us the insights of their Congregations in this field, as well as their rich personal experiences.

Next year (2007) our Annual Seminar will be held at Ariccia **on the last week of April – from the 24 to the 28** and the Theme of our research and discussion will be: **“International Formation for Mission Ad Gentes”**.

The main reason for the change in our traditional dates for the Seminar is to avoid overlapping with the Plenary Sessions of the USG and UISG, as well as to solve the problem of the no-availability of the place during the whole of May.

## B. SEDOS WORKING GROUPS

Our SEDOS Working Groups have continued to facilitate the exchange of ideas and the deepening and detailed study of the themes presented at the Conferences.

- **SEDOS Working Group on Economic Justice.**
- **SEDOS-CBF Working Group “Bible and Mission”.**
- **SEDOS Working Group “Donne ad Gentes”.**

## C. SEDOS PUBLICATION

### *SEDOS BULLETIN*

The publication of the SEDOS Bulletin continues to be one of the main tasks of all the office personnel. The publication continues to be in English and French, but once more we have to report that the voices calling for space in Spanish are increasing and getting louder. We still have not solved the problem of how make more present our brothers and sisters from South America, although we are trying to discuss different possibilities with the French and Spanish Editors of **Spiritus**.

This year we have at last been able to update the databank on subscriptions and we can now begin to find ways to increase subscriptions and to offer 'On-line' subscriptions. All the subscribers will be provided with a password to be able to access the Bulletin on-line. The prices have been adjusted to reflect the cost of postage, that this year has experienced a tremendous increase (as you will see reflected on the Financial Report). The new Subscription prices for 2007 will be *Euro 30,00 for Europe, Euro 45,00 (55,00 US\$)* for outside Europe and *Euro 20,00* for on-line subscription. The number of subscribers during 2006 is 768; including 162 as exchange copies and 58 complimentary copies.

The editorial policy continues to maintain the global scope of the articles inserted. All the members of our Congregations read and come across good articles on Global Mission. We invite all the Congregations to encourage their members engaged in research studies on Mission to write and send papers to the SEDOS publication desk. We need the research efforts of our members to maintain alive the flame of SEDOS. We also invite and encourage all our readers to share their insights writing or sending us information about the many interesting articles they come across so that we could make them available to everybody.

### *SEDOS HOMEPAGE*

Attending different International activities we were pleased to realized that our SEDOS WebPage (<http://www.sedos.org>) is frequently consulted and the material used by many Institutions of Education, as well as individuals. The contents and availability of the material posted to all is widely appreciated. Our commitment to change and improve the WebPage is slowly bringing results and we shall continue with our efforts to offer Subscriptions 'on-line'.

### *DOCUMENTATION CENTRE*

The Documentation Centre continues to be open and available to all but the way we used to collect data and organize the work in the Library has changed. The personnel have been reduced and we no longer try to do the repetitive work being done elsewhere. We are still looking at plans to digitise the important material we possess.

We have found a new Internet technician and work has began to strengthen the database of titles and to set up an on-line archive as a way to make the Catalogue accessible through the Internet.

## LOOKING AHEAD

SEDOS is banking on its wealth of 40 years experience in order to continue to be of service to the Church as a researcher of Mission trends. Its role as an open forum for Missionary Religious Institutions, and not only for them but for Missiologists of Protestant Churches as well is still needed and much sought after in our days. SEDOS still has much to offer to all as an open Forum for discussion and as a Centre to gather and channel resources and information on Mission trends.

For the year ahead we will continue to make use of the Information technology to link and exchange

information on real time. In order to achieve this we shall continue with our plans to streamline the office and to invest more on the training of the personnel.

We are ready to offer subscribers the possibility of an 'on-line' Subscription to the Bulletin beginning this year of 2007. This will lower the costs for the office (and for subscribers). For this purpose we will provide all the subscribers with a password and offer them the possibility of downloading material directly from our website. By doing this we hope to encourage a wider use and distribution of the contents of our Bulletins.

An Archive with past numbers of the SEDOS Bulletin is being set up and will soon go 'on-line' offering the possibility of subscribing to the service or to request and exchange material and information via e-mail.

The Plans for digitising all the contents of the SEDOS Bulletins from the beginning, and to offer it as a valuable collection of the development of missionary thinking since the Second Vatican Council, are still on and we are still looking for funds to begin the project.

The 'on-line' 'Forums' for the SEDOS Working Groups are still pending and looking for people to co-ordinate and administer the contents.

Links to all the Generalates who are members of SEDOS will be created on our WebPage. In order to compile a complete list we request all the Generalates to provide us with the Internet address of their Congregation.

We would like to strengthen our relationship with the Professors of Missiology of the Pontifical Universities and encourage informal gatherings and exchanges with them so as to facilitate research work and publication.

Finally, we once more invite all of you to help in spreading the knowledge of SEDOS among other Institutes and to encourage them to join our family. One way of doing it might be to invite and even to offer others a 'Gift Subscription' to the SEDOS Bulletin.

These are our main goals for the near future out of the many possibilities open to us. Naturally, this calls for a commitment of material resources and personnel on the part of the Religious Congregations members of SEDOS. We gratefully count on the generous help from Misereor, Missio Aachen and Missio Munich. We are grateful for the great help and commitment that some of the Congregations are offering and we invite the other members to make SEDOS services known within their own Institutes and to encourage their members to write and share their Mission insights and research work.

Respectfully yours,

Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP  
SEDOS Executive Director

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# ***SEDOS WORKING GROUPS***

## ***“DONNE AD GENTES”***

On 21 June 2005 the group made an evaluation of the past year and decided what form the meetings should take in the future. The evaluation was done with the help of images like:

The Open Doors  
The closed Doors  
The Door to be Opened

It was decided to choose a topic associated with the ‘missio ad Gentes’ which the members of the group in turn had to present to the others. It was agreed to begin with **Mission as Relationship**.

On 26 November Sr Mary John, SSpS, made the presentation on Mission as Relationship with special reference to their General Charter Documents. It was published in the SEDOS Bulletin.

On 16 February Srs Melena and Maria, FMA, presented the theme: “Dire Interculturalità è dire Relazione”.

On 3 June Sr Mary Jane, Marist Sisters, presented the theme: “Mission a call to reach out in Relationship”.

Sr Marina Cassarino, SMC

## ***“BIBLE and MISSION”***

During the year 2006, the SEDOS Working Group “Bible and Mission” succeeded in organizing only two meetings, the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting and the 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. The 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting had been planned but was called off due to lack of participants.

### **20<sup>th</sup> meeting: January 18, 2006:**

The article for discussion was, Theo Aerts’ “The Birth of A Religious Movement: A Comparison of Melanesian Cargo Cults and Early Christianity”, from *Verbum SVD*, 20, 1979, PP. 323-344.

### **21<sup>st</sup> meeting: March 22, 2006:**

Topic: In this session we discussed two articles: “The Function of the Bible in Roman Catholic Mission”, by Tim Lenchak, and “The Function of the Bible in Protestant Mission”, by J.N.J. Kritzinger. These two articles are taken from the book, *Scripture, Community, and Mission. Essays in Honor of D. Premen Niles* (ed. By Philip L.Wickeri), 2002, 1-17 and 19-43. Only three members attended the meeting.

### **22<sup>nd</sup> meeting:**

It was planned to take place on 3 May 2006. The articles chosen were:

“Toward a Kenosis of Mission: Emptying and Empowerment for the Church and for the World”, by Philip L.Wickeri and “A Dalit Reading of Genesis 10-11:9” by Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon. Both articles are taken from the same book referred to in the 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. The planned meeting could not take place because only two people who were free to come for the meeting, namely myself and Tim Lenchak from the same Collegio. We thought it best to postpone it for the present.

### **Personal remark**

The members of the group are normally those working at their Generalates. Often they cannot attend the meeting because they are away from Rome for visitation or for other commitments of their Congregation.

At the last few meetings, some students joined the group but that did not last long. How can we make this group's activity known to others, especially to those who are related to SEDOS?

I have been in this group since October 2004, and the meeting, in my opinion, was no more than coming together and commenting on the articles being read. Participants' comment being made by participants are rather spontaneous and free. There was no structured presentation of the topic which was then followed up by discussion.

Fr Guido Tisera, SVD

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### **“ECONOMIC JUSTICE”**

In February, 2006, the SEDOS Working Group on Debt joined in partnership with *Caritas Internationalis* and the JPIC Promoters in Rome to form the **“SEDOS, Caritas Internationalis, JPIC Promoters Working Group on Economic Justice”**.

The Objectives of the working group are:

1. To campaign for the achievement of Goal 8 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). “To secure a global partnership for Development”.
2. To provide information to the congregations to campaign particularly on target 13 of Goal 8: “Address the special needs of the least developed countries (LCD) which includes: tariff and quota-free access for LDCs’ exports, enhanced programme of debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries and cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more Official Development Assistance (ODA) for countries committed to poverty reduction”.
3. To offer campaigning possibilities for the SEDOS-related congregations on target 13 of Goal 8.
4. To create synergies with other groups of congregations working on other targets of the MDGs.
5. To promote fair trade to congregations in Rome.
6. To promote the idea of seeing work around these issues as central to the mission of religious congregations.
7. To convey this campaigning to the media.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations provide an agenda for the global community for the next ten years and fit well with the Social Doctrine of the Church.

During the year, 2006, the new Working Group on Economic Justice:

- Wrote a letter to Paul Wolfowitz, president of the World Bank expressing concern over the delays in debt cancellation. This was in collaboration with other debt campaigns.
- Encouraged the purchase of fair trade products by sending out a list of fair trade stores in Rome to all the JPIC promoters; invited the fair trade store “Pangea” to a JPIC meeting to explain the idea behind fair trade; invited *Il Fiore*, a fair trade store outside of Rome to exhibit and sell their products during the JPIC Commission Seminar in November.
- Will host, Donal Dorr, SPS, at the SEDOS General Assembly. Father Dorr will speak on “Christian Mission and the Millennium Development Goals.

In the coming year, 2007, the G8 meeting will be held in Germany. Debt cancellation will be an important item on the Agenda. The “SEDOS, Caritas Internationalis, JPIC Promoters Working Group on Economic Justice”, will be involved in advocating for more significant debt cancellation.

Sr Cathy Arata, SSND



## *Author Index 2006*

	<i>Page</i>		<i>Page</i>
AERTS, Theo, SVD	239-241; 284-295	KENMOGNE, Jean-Blaise	214-219
AMMAH, Rabiatu, Dr.	91-95	LOUA, Hyacinthe, SJ	226-229
AROKIASAMY, Soosai, SJ	220-225	MALLARE, John P., CICM	301-306
CHABERT, Yvelte	51-56	MARTHOZ, Jean-Paul	263-265
CRÉPY, Luc	332-336	MARTIN, Camilla,	247-252
de BÉTHUNÉ, Pierre-François, OSB	79-85	MATTAM, Joseph, SJ	187-190
DOMINGUES, Fernando, MCCJ	129-136	MATTHEY, Jacques, [WCC]	322-324
D'SOUZA, Philomena, FMA	279-283	McMAHON, Hugh, SSC	299-300
FUELLENBACH, John, SVD	101-110; 223-231	NEO, Julma, DC	253-262
GARCIA PAREDES, J. Cristo Rey, CMF	259-269	PRAKASH, Joy, OFM	325-327
GIBBS, Philip, SVD	230-238	RAKOWSKI, Helmut, OFM Cap.	112-122; 191-196
GORSKI, Juan F., MM	72-78	RODRIGUEZ LINERA, Carlos, OP	50; 99; 202; 222; 250; 298
GUARDA, Alessandro, MCCJ	124-127; 138- 147; 148-151	SCHALUCK, Hermann, OFM	203-213
GUTZLER, Antoinette, MM	57-64	SMITH, Susan, RNDM	240-246
JEBADU, Alex, SVD	307-315	TONGLET, Jean	328-331
JOHN, Mary, S.Sp.S	65-71	UCHEM, Rose, MSHR, Ph.D.	270-278
JOHNSTONE, Penelope,	86-91	VASQUEZ, Amelia, RSCJ	316-321
JOJO, Joseph	242-247; 251-258	WRIGHT, Mary, IBVM	197
KAVUNKAL, Jacob, SVD	232-239	XUE, Cao	337-340

# Author Index 2006

## CHURCH

- *China* The Living Bread in the Land of China. A Report About the Chinese Pastoral Bible in China (2000-2006), p. 333;
- *Development* Les Églises dans la dynamique du développement : Qu'ont-elles fait et que peuvent-elles faire encore ?, p. 214;
- *Local* Asian Religious Identity in the Context of the Building up of the Local Church, p. 253; The Charism and Role of Religious for Building the Local Church Through the Ministry of Interreligious Dialogue, p. 220;
- *Melanesia* Politics and the Mission of the Church in Oceania, p. 230; The Birth of a Religious Movement: A Comparison of Melanesian Cargo Cults and Early Christianity (Part I, p. 284 - Part II, p. 239)
- *Second Vatican Council* Journeying to the Other Side: Beyond Previously Accepted Boundaries, p. 57;

## DIALOGUE

- *Interreligious* The Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue, p. 79;
- *Latin America* La transformation missionnaire de l'Église latino-américaine, p. 72;
- *West Africa* Le dialogue islamo-chrétien en Afrique de l'Ouest, p. 226;

## EVANGELIZATION

- *Kingdom* The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Principle of Action in the World, p. 223;
- *Other Religions* Mission of the Incarnate Word Among the Israelites, p. 242; Indirect Presence of the "Word" in Other Religions, p. 251;

## ISLAM

- *Dialogue* Women in Dialogue, p. 86; Building God's Peace and Justice Together, p. 91;

## MEDIA

- *Violence* La violence dans les médias. Le refus de penser, p. 263;

## MISSION

- *Asia* Paradigm Shifts in Mission – Understanding the Praxis Through the Centuries, p. 316;
- *Catholic* A Roman Catholic Perspective on Doing Mission, p. 232; Catholic Sisters and Mission: What About Mt 28:19-20?, p. 240;
- *Challenges* Oser une alliance pour la mission, p. 51; Creativity in Mission, p. 259; Completing the Missionary Task, p. 299; Religious Indifferentism: New Challenge for the Church's Mission Today, p. 307; Réflexions actuelles sur la relation entre mission et œcuménisme, p. 322;
- *India* Friar Dayanand: Making Christianity Credible and Dialogical, p. 325;

- *Missio ad Gentes* The Significance of ‘Missio ad Gentes’ for the Young Missionary in the Context of Globalization and Multiculturality, p. 301;
- *Relationship* Mission: A Call to Reach Out in Realtionship, p. 65;

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

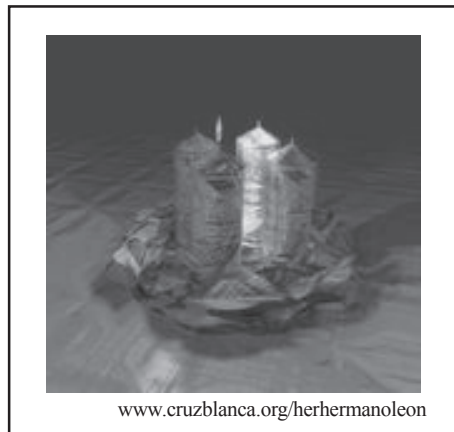
Les principales sources de violence dans le communautés religieuses, p. 328;

## SEDOS SEMINAR — ARICCIA 2006

- *Money* “Mission and Money - Perspective from Religious Life”, pp. 99-197

## WOMEN

- *Asia* Le trafic des femmes asiatiques, un esclavage des temps modernes, p. 279;
- *Gender* Gender Inequality as an Enduring Obstacle to Mission, p. 270; Des femmes “actrices” à part entière, p. 247;



## ***SEDOS Coming Events***

***A Very Merry  
Christmas and a  
Happy New Year to  
You All!!!***



### ***Seminar 2007***

***“International Formation for ‘Missio ad Gentes’”***

*Please, take note of 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 will follow* -