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# Editorial

*“Mission is seeking out the other in love,  
a going forth to the other in love”*

Formation is a one of the main headaches for our Institutes. It is hard to find a good formator and even harder to keep the person in the post for enough time to make a significant contribution to the formation of the younger members of the community. We offer some ideas to be included in the process of formation in our Institutes, among them the love of self and others, respect for others and their rights, and respect for nature as an all-inclusive part of our mission.

In *“The Love that Is Mission”*, **Quirico Pedregosa, OP**, challenges us with the basic bottom line of mission: ‘how to love the other as someone different from ourselves’. This has deep implications for the way we prepare our missionaries.

**Lourdes Ann Berbano, S.Sp.S.**, in *“Formation for Mission in Today’s Asia”* clarifies the role of mission and challenges the formators to present the role of the missionary as ‘a way to live as Jesus in the midst of the people sharing their lives’. The implications of this seemingly simple advice can help to throw some light on our formation programme.

*“Human Rights: What responsibilities and Commitments for International Catholic NGOs?”*. This seems to be an additional or optional issue within formation; and yet, **Gabriel Nissim, OP**, presents it as something that is at the core of the Christian message and not only an option for those ‘who are more committed to social issues’.

In *“Our Earth – Our Mission”* **Thomas Malipurathu, SVD** shares his deep belief that love for Creation is intrinsic to our mission and, as such, it must be placed at the core of the formation years.

In the article: *“À Taïwan, des catholiques font l’expérience d’une prière en communauté et d’un partage de la foi”*, **Églises d’Asie** offers us a glimpse into real life mission with a short report of the hardships encountered by inter-faith marriages and how the community tries to find a solution.

**Églises d’Asie** kindly permits us to present an interview of **UCANEWS** with the President of FABC, Archbishop Olando B. Quevedo. *“Le chemin à parcourir est long, mais il y a des raisons d’espérer”* gives us good reason to hope as well as how to prepare our missionary work.

We close this issue with some more considerations on formation. In *“Sharing Our Spirituality and Charism With the Laity”*, **Fr René T. Lagaya, SDB, MTD**, dwells on the ‘capacity (or lack of it) of religious for authentic partnership’. Are we equipping our religious members for the task of dealing with our partners in mission on equal terms?

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# *The Love that Is Mission*

- Quirico T. Pedregosa, Jr., OP\* -

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## Springing from Love

Mission springs from *the mystery of God who is love* (I Jn 4:16), from his overflowing and boundless love for the whole of humanity and creation. In “the fullness of time”, this love sent Jesus among us (*cf.* Jn 3:16). Jesus is the One who is “sent” by the Father. Mission belongs to Jesus’ identity. There is but one mission: *God’s mission*, God’s love reaching out to the whole of humanity and creation. It follows that mission is what God is doing, what God accomplishes in his love. In many ways, God precedes the Church and her missionaries in loving people. God is in mission since creation.

We used to think that religious traditions other than Judaism and Christianity are human ways, efforts, or striving to reach God. But, perhaps, we are closer to the truth when we see that those traditions are God’s ways and means, in his ineffable love, of reaching out to peoples. Mission means to discover the mystery and beauty of God’s love for a people, other than what we are familiar with in our own Christian tradition. In a sense, “mission is to point out to people that the love of God exists already in their own lives”.<sup>1</sup>

## Seeking Out the Other in Love

To follow Jesus is to share both in his life and in his mission. Those whom Jesus calls, he chooses in order to send them out to others that they may preach the Gospel (*cf.* Mk 1:18; 3:14).

Christian discipleship is a discipleship in mission. All Christians participate in God’s mission. This is made possible by the love of God that comes to us and unites us with Christ and sends us out to others that we may bear fruit (Jn 15:7). It is this love that impels us to step out of our narrow selves, our selfish worlds, of our lives of safety and security, of our homes — to encounter others. Thus, mission is *seeking out the other in love, a going forth to the other in love*.

To be sent out in love to others by Jesus belongs to the very identity of his disciples.

With or without, a geographical movement from one place to another or moving out from one’s culture to another, it is this identity and consciousness of being sent out to others that makes one a missionary. It is in this sense that every Christian, every religious is a missionary, regardless of the place where he or she enters the service of the Gospel. The same holds true even for cloistered monks or nuns. In spite of being hemmed in inside the cloister, they live a life of love for others, for the Church and the world.

Every religious, in fact, has deepened his or her missionary identity by virtue of his religious consecration. By profession, one consecrates oneself to Christ and to his mission of proclaiming God’s Reign to others. It is not sufficient to count mission as one value among other elements of religious life.

Rather, it has to be seen as the primary value, that is, as the organizing element around which all other elements of religious life are oriented. “The task of *devoting themselves wholly to ‘mission’* is therefore included in their call; indeed, by the action of the Holy Spirit who is at the origin of every vocation and charism, consecrated life itself is a mission, as was the whole of Jesus’ life”.<sup>2</sup>

The way of being that religious need to recover today is a life of being sent to others, a spirit and mentality of living our lives for others in love.

## Loving the Other in his Otherness

There are many challenges of mission today that oblige us to re-visit and re-orient ourselves to mission. I would like to single out one which seems to me of the greatest import to mission today. The biggest challenge of mission today is *how we love the other*. “When we say other, we mean persons considered in how they are different from ourselves. In this sense, each one, even our closest neighbour, is irreducibly other. The same goes for societies, cultures, religions that aren’t our own”.<sup>3</sup> As in the case of love, in mission the other precedes us. Mission like love is defined by the quality of one’s relationship with the other.

More than in times past, we are confronted today by *the stark difference*, by the utter “otherness” of the other. This is not only true in the numerical but also in the qualitative sense. “Have we ever been so starkly confronted by the realities of difference?

Are we conscious of how forcefully difference is resisted, of our inability to live with difference? Ours is a world of falling back on primary identities, of hatred of the other, of the cult of the same”<sup>4</sup>

It seems that resistance to forms of differences is on the rise today, with its ugly heads of ruthless imposition on the one hand and of violent terrorism on the other, an indication of the contemporary world’s inability to deal with differences in a healthy way.

Asia is one area of the world largely marked by great differences. Our region is home to the world’s major religions and smaller traditional religious traditions existing alongside each other. It hosts a wide range of unique and rich cultures, big and small, ancient and modern. Wide social, political and economic divides separate countries from one another and peoples in one and the same nation. The rich and the poor, the weak and the powerful, adherents of divergent ideological and political views inhabit our region.

In the past, and to some extent even today, mission comes about from a position of superiority, arrogance, denial, or violence in the presence of otherness or difference. But, if mission means love, how we relate to or encounter the other is the primary question of mission in our time. In the face of differences, we have to resist the temptation of reducing the other to ourselves or to create them according to our own image. Love beckons us to love the other for what the other is, as different and unique from us. Hence, the bottom line challenge of mission today is *how to love the other in his otherness*.

### **Implications for Preparation of Missionaries**

What are the implications of the above considerations to the preparation of missionaries?

If mission pertains primarily to God and to what He does in his love for the world, then the first spiritual resource of missionaries is their own personal experience of the *love of God*.

They must have experienced how God in his own mysterious ways has reached out personally to them, embraced them in his love and has made them his chosen ones. Without this foundational God-experience it could be

difficult for them to reach out to others in love. Moreover, it might be hard for them to see that God’s love is alive and working in the lives of others too.

As God occupies the first place in mission, it is necessary that missionaries be men and women of God, *persons of prayer*.

God and his affairs take centre stage and if they are to place their lives at the service of God’s actions in the world they cannot but strive to grow in their intimate relationship with God, attune their hearts and minds to God’s will and seek to fulfill its demands. They are challenged to be sensitive to God’s presence and workings in the lives of people and in the world, to become *spiritual persons*. Otherwise, they might think that mission primarily consists in what they do rather than in what God does.

That means to say we need missionaries who are steeped in *contemplation*. Contemplation roots us in God and gives us the vision to see God’s loving activity regarding people and the world. Furthermore, it motivates us to participate in God’s activity, in a beautiful phrase from Yves Congar, “so that I can be there where God awaits me, the link between this action of God and the world”<sup>5</sup>

This must be the reason why today there is so much emphasis on the role of contemplation in mission. As Pope John Paul II put it: “A missionary who has no deep experience of God in prayer and contemplation will have little influence or missionary success. This is an insight drawn from my own priestly ministry and, as I have written elsewhere, my contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation”<sup>6</sup>

Since we participate in God’s mission by becoming a link of his loving activity in the world, then the most essential virtue for missionaries is the *virtue of love*. There is only one virtue of charity: the love of God and the love of neighbour constituting one whole single movement of divine love. A missionary is called to be a loving person. Only a loving person can effectively share the love of God with others. The virtue of charity is God’s gift, as St Paul says, “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given us” (Rom 5:5). But, for this gift to be operative in our lives, we need to have a corresponding human capacity to love, the so-called love of friendship, a mature love for the sake of the other. St Thomas Aquinas explains that our relationship with God has the nature of a love of friendship. Charity

is God's love of friendship with us and a person's love of friendship for God.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus calls and loves us as his "friends" and asks us "to love one another" ("as he has loved us") as friends (Jn 15:14-17). Thus, "befriending" others, according to Chrys McVey, is "the heart of mission".<sup>8</sup> Missionaries, by their *love of friendship*, more than anything else, draw hearts to Christ! If mission today means loving the other in his otherness, we need missionaries schooled in *dialogue*, a value so necessary in our time to pay homage to the otherness of the other. The shift from imposition or confrontation to dialogue is a most crucial challenge of mission. This is particularly true in Asia. We are challenged to enter into dialogue with cultures, religious traditions and with the socio-economic realities of the people, especially of the poor.

Dialogue demands, above all, an *openness to learn from another*. I was recently in Japan to visit the Brothers. I asked a Brother who has been a missionary for 49 years, what would be his best advice to anyone going on mission. He answered me straight to the point: "One should go to mission not wanting to teach but to learn". That seems to me the primary requisite of dialogue, a whole mentality or spirit of seeking to learn from the other: the other's language, culture, religious tradition, history, philosophy, and socio-economic realities. This is a tough challenge, an excruciating experience of learning again from scratch, of being a beggar of the truth of the other. But, this is the only way to enter into the "world", the mystery of the other, if one has to love the other in his otherness.

Dialogue also requires missionaries to seek to know the societal context of the people they serve. It is better if they have the habit and commitment to know and understand the *context and needs of people*. Otherwise, one is bound to do what one simply thinks or wants to (which is a far easier thing to do) but fails to respond to the real needs of the people.

Dialogue does not prevent a missionary from sharing his/her cherished beliefs and values. It is not meant in any way to forget or hide one's own unique identity as Jesus' disciple. But, like the Master, he or she can do it best by a life of witness, especially in our region, "where people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument".<sup>9</sup> "A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire".<sup>10</sup> The most effective way for us Christians to share our faith while respecting the freedom of others is simply by being true to who we are. Missionaries are challenged to become

*authentic witnesses* of God's love. The best testimony they can offer is the quality of their loving actions and loving relationships towards all those they encounter. In all this loving of the other in his otherness, Jesus himself is our model. When the divine Son was sent to us for love of the world (he was in mission) (Jn 3:16), and paid immense homage to our otherness. He "became flesh" and "pitched his tent among us" (Jn 1:14). He "emptied himself" and "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil 2:6-7); he came "to serve" (Mk 10:45) and laid down "his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). Indeed, he has gone a long way in welcoming our otherness. In life and in death, as if, in order to give himself fully to us, humans, he "emptied" himself fully of his divinity. By his *loving embrace of our otherness*, it was possible for him to save us, to bring life to the world.

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#### Endnotes

1. Philip Pan Yongda, from his talk given at the meeting of Regents of Studies of Asia Pacific at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, 1999.
2. *Vita Consecrata*, n. 72.
3. Report of the Commission *De Missio Ordinis* of Friars Preachers, 1998, nos. 21.
4. *Ibid.*, no. 1,1,3.
5. As quoted by Paul Murray. *Preachers at Prayer*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2003, p.17.
6. *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 23.
7. *Cf. Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, art. 1.
8. Chrys McVey, OP, "Befriending: The Heart of Mission", in *SEDOS*, Vol. 35, No. 1/2, 2003, pp. 3-7.
9. *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 42.
10. *Ibid.*, no. 23.

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# *Formation for Mission in Today's Asia*

- Sr Lourdes Ann Berbano, S.Sp.S. -

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**INTRODUCTION:** Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat.

Right now I feel like doing a Julia Roberts (from the film: “The Runaway Bride”) to become a “runaway speaker”. Besides having to stand up before all of you and deliver this talk, at Fr Domingo Moraleda’s request, who would not take “No” for an answer, I am to address the formidable topic: “Formation for Mission in Today’s Asia”. In the light of all the previous input and the corresponding challenges and especially after yesterday’s questions and Fr Moraleda’s remarks my inner trembling would now register more than 10 on the Richter scale.

“FORMATION for MISSION in TODAY’S ASIA”. There were many doomsday scenarios before the century ended, and there are still some going on. Sometimes formation meetings are like that too: with problems and needs multiplying especially in line with the emerging Asian culture, that Fr Danny Huang graphically presented, and no simple answers. Sometimes we do not even know what questions to ask. Is there hope?

I’d like to go back to a shining moment in our history: BDSA’86 and a smaller version of it, but no less dynamic: AYALA, MAKATI: 20 August 1999. The backdrop of these were times of enormous problems, crisis, great challenges. They became moments of purification, of listening to events and sifting through, “distilling” essentials, of taking a hard look at where we were, and what we were called to be and do. Of finally taking a stand and making hard choices, weak and vulnerable as we were, before the powers-that-be. And we did. At least for those brief moments.

Hopefully the challenges before us will also do the same, and help us emerge as the handful of hopeful “Anawims” who in embracing their poverty and powerlessness know the power of Yahweh in their own lives, and therefore who can “stand up and deliver”, taking up the prophetic role that we are called to live creatively, in the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. Fr

Jose Cristo Rey called this ‘creativity as our emergency response to chaos’, and this as Sr Amelia Vasquez pointed out, is an attitude belonging to the original mission paradigm of Jesus: disciples ministering in weakness, not from a position of power.

OVERVIEW: First, I will highlight a few of the mission challenges we are so familiar with, and share a bit of my reflection on them.

Then we will discuss some of the implications these challenges have for formation, followed by practical considerations or applications, and further questions. I do not presume to offer solutions nor “how-to’s”. Maybe future Formation Conventions can deal with that. I just hope to pitch in my little ideas on the issue.

## **I. SOME IMPORTANT MISSION CHALLENGES**

I lifted one simple sentence from a report on the Special Synod for Asia, (1995-6) to develop our present theme: Our mission is “to live as Jesus in the midst of the people sharing their lives”. ... So simple and elementary, I almost hesitated to use it. But I was happy when Fr Danny Huang said the same thing, though he said it so beautifully: “Tell the story of JESUS, EMBODY the story of JESUS in such a way that the beauty of God’s love reaches the hearts of people in Asia”. Sr Amelia said the same thing: go back to the JESUS paradigm, and Fr Martin echoed it when he emphasized that JESUOLOGY should come before Christology. So simple, so beautiful. So *mahirap naman*. Let’s break down the challenge:

1. “In the midst of the people”: The call seems more urgent than ever: to be where people are. To be rooted in the realities of our times – you are well aware of them. It involves not merely awareness of the social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual realities of Asia, their history, their systemic functioning that make them persist, but I feel it goes deeper: It is not enough to know. For

me to change, I must be affectively touched. It means then, to be one in mind and heart with the “lost the last and the least”, as Fr Huang called them. To suffer with them, to be touched by, to ache with, them, to long for what they long for, to be anxious with their anxiety, to join hands with, them in their struggle towards wholeness, towards the life that God has meant for all. Like Fr Leo with the Badjaos. This belongs to our mission of INTEGRAL EVANGELIZATION. Sr Amelia, quoting Bosch, called it: “to be the heart of God in this world (Trinity painting).

If “being with people where they are” means this deep communion of life with them, then it means a way of life, a mentality, an attitude of the mind and heart that permeates my whole being, no matter what situation I find myself in and what ministry I perform. This is not to undermine the priority of ministry in our “frontier mission situations” and the need for actual involvement with the poor, the oppressed and marginalized where they are. But it goes beyond activity and ministry. It is a way of life. “Embodying the story of Jesus”, Fr Huang called it. We need to change structures and ministries; even let go of our most precious ones, but changing structures and ministries will not automatically change inner attitudes and mentalities. They have to go hand in hand. Sometimes, it seems easier to change external structures than inner attitudes. And often, what makes changing structures difficult are precisely deep-rooted attitudes and mentalities, especially unconscious ones. Touching established institutions, for example! (It’s not the closing of the institution that actually bothers us in truth, but the symbolic meaning, often unconscious, it has for us: security, stability, feeling useful, competent, needed, etc.).

Dealing with inner attitudes and dispositions is a major task of FORMATION. Are our formation programmes and practices geared toward this inner change, or are we mainly focused on external behaviour? Do we help formands get caught up with meanings, not simply adapt forms? As Fr Jose Cristo Rey would put it: Do we create the atmosphere for them to dream?

2. Sharing their lives...”. We recognize anew that to share people’s lives is to be in communion with them, not just to give – at which we had long been adept – but more: to learn to receive because I recognize my real need, my lack, my inadequacy, side by side with a recognition of the other’s giftedness

and capacity to give. I need to be in solidarity – and, I like the term Fr Jose Cristo Rey used – in inter-equality with all who are willing to work for Kingdom values like justice, peace, genuine freedom – with the laity, men and women, other cultures, other religions, the poor. If we look at our Asian reality alone: how vast and diverse it is: 49 nations, its people comprising  $\frac{2}{3}$  of humanity. Only 2 per cent are Christian. The home of the great religions and movements. For practical reasons alone, not to mention the theological and scriptural ones cited by Fr Martin Ueffing: how can we not need to work hand-in-hand with other cultures and religions in addressing the burning issues of our time, even only for survival? As Fr Martin said, we cannot address the problem alone. So we listen to the other stories of Asia, even as we share Jesus’ story.

Sharing people’s lives means therefore being inclusive, as our previous speakers said, in DIALOGUE of LIFE with all peoples, religions and cultures that goes hand in hand with INCULTURATION. Both require the shedding of positions or illusions of superiority/advantage over the other. Again this touches more than simply skills. It touches a disposition of mind and heart, a mentality, an attitude. It sounds so simple, we’ve heard it time and again especially since Vatican II, yet it is striking (and humbling!) for me to note time and again how deep-seated our prejudices can be, and how subtly and persistently operative, precisely because they are often unconscious.

After one Formation Convention where I teamed up with two other Filipinos, one sister from another country approached me to share some problems in formation.

Humbly she confessed that until that convention she thought she had “nothing to learn from Filipinos”. In fact her exact words were, “I thought they were uneducated”. We could react with an understandable sense of indignation and say, “*anong akala niya!*”. I think I did. *Sa loob-loob lang*. But fairly recently, *nabahiya ako sa sarili ko*. In one community faith-sharing, I was relating an experience about a trip to Europe, when I got sick on the plane and on top of that I was detained in Athens for not having a visa, even though I was only a transit passenger. A man approached me and helped me out, going out of his way with the utmost kindness, seeing to my needs until I landed safely in Rome. I concluded my story with the comment: “and he was a Buddhist, at that!”.

As soon as I had uttered the sentence, I

wanted to take it back and swallow it, or hide under my chair. I caught the subtle nuance of what I had just said: “And he was a Buddhist at that!” as it betrayed an unconscious mentality: you may not expect such kindness from a Buddhist. From Christians, yes, but it comes as a surprise from a Buddhist. What triumphalism!

(Fr Michael Amaladoss’s commentary to the Post-Synodal Exhortation “Church in Asia”, [*Ecclesia in Asia*] (*Asia Focus*: 26 November 1999) touched on this point about dialogue: referring to the document, he said, “Inculturation is encouraged. But set in the context of proclamation this is a point of view from above rather than from below. It has more to do with the ‘adaptation’ of the Gospel to the various cultures of Asia than with a free and creative response of the Asian peoples to the Gospel. It goes back to the position that the Church has nothing to get, nothing to learn. It can only give”. This attitude denies the truth that the SPIRIT is just as actively at work in other peoples’ cultures and religions as in ours).

As in the first point, this touches inner attitudes and our way of BEing.

3. “To Live as JESUS”. The rootedness in reality, communion, dialogue of life, inculturation, all these find their foundation, and in fact become imperatives when seen in the light of this renewed call: to live as Jesus, to tell his story. I need to be involved simply because Jesus was involved, and I follow Jesus. As simple as that!

“To live as Jesus”, is to be as passionately driven as Jesus was by the reign of God — the love of God for all humankind. Thus the challenge “to live as Jesus” touches among other things the two points:

- the imperative of a prophetic response to our contemporary situation: That was the response of Jesus.
- Such involvement can only be rooted in the love-relationship with God, as Jesus’ mission was rooted in his love for the Father and his Kingdom. Therefore, as Archbishop Quevedo in an address to Major Religious Superiors pointed out, it has to do with “confronting the temporal situation but goes far beyond economic and political liberation”. It has to lead ultimately to “self-transcendence – getting in touch with what is deepest in us and yet is beyond us — our innate yearning for the Absolute” (Quevedo). Note, this is counter-cultural to one of the aspects of the emerging Asian culture that Fr Huang pointed out: individualism that allows no absolute

values, relativizes and personalizes everything, leading to *mababaw na kaligayaban*. We settle for what satisfies us temporarily, but create deeper dissatisfactions and hunger in ourselves.

A formator was lamenting his experience with some scholastics who are trying out an experimental regency, among the urban poor. They were enthusiastic about their experience with the people, five days a week. But on a week-end visit to them, the formator noticed that the scholastics did not celebrate the Eucharist. The reason they gave was that they were too tired after the five-day intensive work with the people. There seemed to be no hunger, no desire for moments of prayer either.

Conversely, the survey on women religious in the Philippines done by the Institute of Women’s Studies and published in 1993 had an interesting finding: In the chapter:

“Understanding of Self, Congregation and Society”, under the sub-heading:

“Sentiments Toward Varied Religious Issues”, on trend was:

“The majority agreed to the need for Women religious to return to more contemplative lifestyles and focus only on the spiritual welfare of the people. Based on the trends in the responses to statements about their sociopolitical involvement, the Sisters appear to be more inclined to changes that portend improvements within the congregation rather than to those that deal with the external world. Only a little over half of the group agreed that there is a need for more proactive social involvement among the religious”.

This response deviated from the trend of the rest of the responses. The rate of satisfaction with the changes post-Vatican II in congregations’ thrusts, ministries, formation, etc., in line with contemporary situations and needs was high.

I highlighted the two opposite positions — the seeming activism of the seminarians (I say “seeming” because there are many considerations to be taken before reaching a conclusion) and the desire of some women religious to “focus only on the spiritual welfare of the people” neither to advocate a rigid adherence to “scheduled prayer”, regardless of mission context, nor to downplay the contemplative, spiritual dimension of consecrated life. Rather, I was struck at the seeming lack of unity of both dimensions: the rootedness in the reality of the people, and the rootedness in God. In



our Jesus story, one flows into the other, the Being into the Doing. They become ONE. In the busiest moments, JESUS was alone up in the mountains. Yet he healed on a Sabbath. Genuine mission cannot be divorced from the personal love-relationship with God and a passionate involvement with the world becomes an outflow of this deep union with Him. I feel this holds true even for contemplative congregations (we may remember deeply spiritual persons like Thomas Merton, Mahatma Gandhi, among others).

Once more we had been talking about inner dispositions, mentality, way of being, witness of life.

## II. SOME IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH CHALLENGES FOR FORMATION

Obviously, the challenges I highlighted are neither exhaustive nor even comprehensive, and neither will the implications that follow be. As I said, maybe future Formation Conventions can deepen these topics and translate them in more concrete, operative terms). (I also refer you to the survey results I cited, especially the chapter on Formation – what has been done and how the Sisters of the different congregations feel about them. There is also an article treating the five Jubilee themes and their application to Formation by Fr Ben Moraleda (*Religious Life Asia - the ICLA publication*, Vol. 1 n. 4) for more ideas on these issues.

Let me just take up a few points:

The 1998 Asian Synod highlighted the following as essential for formation for mission:

- Biblical formation
- Centrality of Christ and the Spirit
- Cultural and religious traditions of Asia
- Social doctrines of the Church
- Immersion in situations of poverty
- Formation to build community
- Psycho-spiritual aspects for harmonious growth
- Co-responsibility and participation with the laity
- Becoming people of prayer and deep experience of God
- Becoming spiritual masters and guides to bring people to the experience of God
- Becoming zealous missionary pastors and spiritual guides more than administrators

- Training for dialogue with peoples, cultures and religious traditions
- Training for ecumenical dialogue

(Do you notice anything? There is no mention of women issues!).

There is one thing, however, that I wish to go back to: No doubt this long list of formation content is necessary. But to live like JESUS in the world, to tell the story of Jesus again and again by the way I live means developing a disposition of mind and heart, according to the mind and heart of Jesus. Studies, immersion experiences, formative community-life, prayer experiences are not simply aimed at deeper knowledge nor apostolic skills and know-how and much less to comply with expectations and get a positive *votatio*. They are primarily meant to facilitate this in-depth conversion process: allowing the Holy Spirit to mould my mind and heart into the mind and heart of Jesus, so that I can be the heart of God in the midst of the world. This is the missionary's witness of life that touches the depths of one's being. (It is getting more and more difficult!).

### ATTITUDE-FORMATION: how does this come about?

Let us illustrate this process with a real-life example: this was shared by Fr Martin Ueffing in a recent homily he gave to our Junior sisters.

Last Christmas, Fr Martin went to Malibeong, Abra, to take a vacation with two companions. After a busy semester he had in mind a quiet time of rest, communing with nature, finding the space he felt he badly needed. When they reached the place, however, the parish priest immediately assigned to them the care of the *simbang gabi* in the different barrios. He strongly protested, saying that this was not his idea of a vacation, nor was he ready for mission in the place. He did not know any Ilocano, it was his first visit, he did not know the culture, etc. All this went against his theories of mission and his mission ideals. His protests were to no avail. Reluctantly he agreed. After instant reading lessons in Ilocano, he gamely pitched in. After a series of arguments with his companions however, he felt fed up. At dawn one day, he took a long walk through the forest, and came to rest in a promontory, with a beautiful mountain view. The beauty of the place was enthralling. He suddenly became aware of his reactions, his attitudes to the situation and began to critique them. He had his convictions, theories and ideals, and these

were valid. But the concrete reality was different. What was the Spirit telling him through these? And the space and refreshment he needed – was this magnificent view at dawn not enough? Is the concrete situation calling for a different response? Is this not where the people were, is this not a real concrete need? He stayed with this, and eventually he felt reconciled with the situation, chose to respond, stayed until the end, and found peace.

Sr Leonisa's experience was similar: she was ready for an immersion experience, to be poor among the poor. Yet the poverty she experienced was of a different kind – that of giving up the fulfillment of this desire, temporarily at least, and still keeping her solidarity with the poor within the limitations of her actual situation. This was in response to a real need elsewhere. The inner attitude of solidarity with the poor remained even though the situation was different from her expectations, even when she was not in a ministry directly serving the poor. And of course she still found a way of direct contact with the poor.

Fr Leo said that no book he had read, no lectures he had heard prepared him to cope with the numerous demands and challenges he encountered in Basilan. But he was equipped with something else – certain attitudes and dispositions that made him open and responsive to them.

All three examples show that they were able to respond with creative openness, flexibility, resourcefulness, resilience and adaptability, without watering down the ideals they were convinced about. How come?

They were truly **ROOTED IN THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION**. Touched by the local people. In inter-equality with them. But there was something more:

Fr Martin became aware of movements of disturbance within him. He entered these, grappled with them. Sr Nisa was disappointed with the institutional assignment. She faced her disappointment, head-on. Fr Leo admitted his fears, struggled through them.

They were **ROOTED IN THEMSELVES** – in the reality of their spontaneous reactions, feelings, impulses. And they were able to sift through these inner realities to be able to make a faith-response that needed some painful dying. They recognized the Spirit at work in the unexpected, unprogrammed situations, and the Spirit gave them strength to embrace such situations and make them a growth experience.

Do we realize what the process we have described is? Nothing less than discernment:

listening to, awareness of; and sifting through the realities within us and outside us, to recognize the face of the Holy Spirit in such movements within and without. The discernment that becomes a way of life, a predisposition, an attitude, not just a method we use when we need to make a big decision. The discernment that can help us in these times of pluralism and unlimited choice not just in the malls but also at times in our own religious houses.

Aren't these attitudes of interiority, of reflectiveness of sensitivity to the fine movements of the Spirit within and without part of our traditional Asian culture, that we need to recover? And, if I may add, they are also related to the "feminine principle" that can complement and balance the rational systematic analysis which we often use to try to understand our situation. Fr Ben Moraleda in his article: "The Great Jubilee: Its Challenges and its Opportunities for Formation Communities" (*Religious Life Asia*, Vol. 1, n. 4) re-reads "return the land" to "return to the land", and includes among other things, a coming home to ourselves – a being in touch with who and where we are. He also points out that "recovery of the feminine principle" should include wholeness and integration through the inclusion both of feelings and rationality in our way of being. Both are operative in discernment.

And how do we learn to distinguish the face of the Holy Spirit within this two-fold reality? By another rootedness: rootedness in Jesus Christ, because, as Fr Martin pointed out, for us it is Jesus who gives a concrete face to the Spirit of God.

## **ROOTEDNESS IN JESUS CHRIST**

The Asian Synod stated that: "It is the person of Jesus Christ who must be presented and not doctrines about him". This was said in the context of Dialogue with cultures and religions and inculturation in Asia. Fr Jacques Dupuis, whom Fr Martin cited picks up this statement in his article: "JESUS WITH AN ASIAN FACE" and develops it. He describes how, in the experience of the disciples, this was the order: they could not understand who Jesus was – that he was the Christ, the Son of God, until after the Resurrection. But the process had to go in reverse. It started when they could not grasp the meaning of the resurrection – how could someone dead come back to life, in a somehow different state? The Spirit inspired them to go back to their memories of the man

JESUS – his words, his actions, his miracles, his way of being with people, his clear preference for the poor – the *Ananims*, his prophetic stance against any form of injustice and oppression, his intimate familiarity with the Father, his passion for the Reign of God, his being God's presence itself, speaking with personal authority among his people. In the light of the Resurrection, they finally understood what they could not understand before: that he was truly the Son of God, whom the Father sent, to be with His people.

In the author's own words, "this memory of the historical Jesus played a decisive role in the genesis of the Christian faith of the disciples". "From disciples they became believers". The route led them from a personal companionship with the earthly Jesus to the realization of his mystery as the Christ.

The author states that this is the same route we must take for: "the Christian faith cannot but be based on a personal encounter with the man Jesus".

Finally, the author points out that the Jesus revealed in this "Jesuology" – the man Jesus the disciples went back to – reveals "features that are strikingly similar to the ways of presenting Jesus with an Asian face", as suggested by the Asian Synod of Bishops:

"Jesus Christ as the teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the compassionate friend of the poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One". It is this face that we are encouraged to present in our Dialogue of Life with the poor, other cultures, other religions.

In formation, do our formands encounter this person Jesus? Or do they learn about Jesus? We cannot share what we have not internalized.

## SUMMARY

You must have noticed by now that my presentation centres only on three challenges, summed up in the phrase: "To live as Jesus in the midst of people, sharing their lives", which I translated into the threefold rootedness:

1. ROOTED in the reality of our contemporary situation
2. ROOTED in the reality of ourselves interacting with these situations
3. ROOTED in JESUS CHRIST

I focused on the fostering of inner attitudes and dispositions in the formation setting in the context of these three forms of rootedness,

which I hope will lead to an integrated formation that will prepare missionaries to live as Jesus in the middle of the people, sharing their lives..."

I purposely presented formation in broad terms, not just because of the time limitation but also to get across what I wish to convey:

the importance of having a cohesive VISION of formation: where we want to go and why, against which we will evaluate what content we include, what approaches and processes we follow. The vision is the backdrop for daily discernment of the practical day-to-day aspects of formation.

## SOME PRACTICAL QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

However, let me briefly touch on some practical considerations:

In the light of the previous discussion, I would like to present some questions and considerations:

1. ROOTEDNESS IN CHRIST is what ultimately sustains the missionary through different situations, sticking it out, "for better or for worse". Is the attraction to Christ the motivation we primarily look for in the discernment phase of a vocation? At least the seeds of it? (I noticed in the survey of women congregations in the data referring to "Grounds for Non-admission" that nothing was mentioned by the respondents about motives. "Lack of educational qualification" was on top (79%). "Not emotionally and psychologically prepared" was a low 7%. There may be many ways to read these statistics, but I just wish to mention that there is research in psychology that links motivation and emotional maturity – under certain conditions – to perseverance and effectiveness in the consecrated life) (Indonesian experience on numbers; the survey: top concern 76% = "more vocations"; concern for more action on behalf of the poor and marginalized = 69%). Is our concern for numbers pursued at the expense of adequate attention to motivation and the candidate's capacity to live the radical demands of a prophetic vocation? And what may be behind our sometimes seeming obsession with numbers? (Joan Chittester's chapter on "Spirituality of Diminishment" in her book, *FIRE IN THESE ASHES*, p. 69).

So much stress has been laid by previous speakers on the importance of Being above Doing. In the initial formation, is the identity

in Christ effectively fostered, or is role identity or worse: identity based on status unwittingly fostered? (Note: the high status of priesthood in the country; seminarians' early preoccupation with wearing the soutane, seminary or formation house structures. How about the religious habit?).

Is the personal encounter with Jesus sustained throughout initial formation and through on-going formation? Are prayer experiences geared to "knowing Jesus", not just "about Jesus"? Does the "knowing about Jesus" lead to "knowing Jesus"?

(Exegesis along with "Praying with Scripture"). It sounds so elementary, but sometimes in working in-depth with people both formands and older religious I discover it may not be taken for granted (experience with the Deacon).

Does knowing Jesus lead to a change in attitude and behaviour that remains reasonably consistent through different situations?

Just an aside: the ability to dialogue with others whether with persons or cultures depends very much on the person's inner sense of security and identity. When I am insecure, I feel easily threatened by the otherness of the other: either I fear to be controlled or I fear to be absorbed by the other. Is the security we develop in formands a real security in Christ?

**2. ROOTEDNESS IN THE REALITY OF THE SELF:** Is the formation process existential and integrating: allowing the formands to come out early enough with their real selves, through real life situations – immersion, teamwork, working with the laity, with the opposite sex, etc., so that, and this is the second half: they can look at these real selves and evaluate and integrate them in line with the ideal of rootedness in Christ? This calls for greater flexibility and less structuredness especially in the postulancy, where the primary task is discernment of the call. Are our postulancies so structured that people already assume a role-identity even before they have enough knowledge about the vocation, the congregation, and their own motives for them to make objective and free discernment? ("little sisters", "little priests"). The same would hold true for our communities: do we stifle the Spirit by our over-structuredness? Are we more concerned with keeping the "forms" not the meaning? E.g. Liturgy.

Are the formands assisted in this integration process, according to their level of development? With the lessening of external structures, there should be a commensurate

development of inner structures in the formand (like self-observation and healthy criticality, formation in the values and attitudes of Jesus) to guide his/her discernment process. Is there adequate accompaniment by people prepared for the task? Again, how about the problem of numbers? (proportion of Formators to formands).

### **3. ROOTEDNESS IN THE REALITY OF CONTEMPORARY SITUATIONS:**

(Survey: great satisfaction over the changes in line with this aspect).

Attitude-formation was highlighted in line with this – a way of being with people especially the poor. Do our formation practices encourage internalization of attitudes and values rather than compliance? Are formands encouraged to think, to question, to reflect, or to comply? This includes self-questioning and healthy self-criticality along with growing trust and confidence in themselves. Does the person and style of the formator encourage this internalization process? Is the atmosphere too threatening for formands to be themselves? On the other hand, does it become *laissez-faire*, where limits are not set and formands are not helped to develop their own self-discipline?

Is there a balance between support and challenge in the formation process? ("blossoming" model: all-support and affirmation; Authoritarian model: all-challenge; both foster immaturity).

Asian culture in general: tendency to avoid challenge, confrontation. Can we balance our person-orientedness and feeling-sensitivity with commitment to truth? Do we foster the development of the "staying power of the person", in line with the prophetic nature of the consecrated life? Do we help formands develop endurance through trying and difficult situations? Like mission work in foreign countries? Like working with the Badjaos as was graphically described to us? Or staying in the monotony of institutional work? Is the Paschal Mystery central in our formation content and processes? "To live as Jesus in the midst of people" would also apply to Formators in their relationship with formands. Do we know our formands? Can we enter their world, so different from ours? Before we challenge them to lasting values, can we empathize with who and where they are, LISTEN to their reality?

There is also the complex process of interaction with communities:

Sometimes we encounter this scenario:

I am a scholastic or a junior sister, fresh from the novitiate, sent to my first apostolic

community. In this community I encounter a reality altogether different from that to which I was exposed in the novitiate. Life is too comfortable, even luxurious, isolated from the realities of the world today. When I raise questions in community meetings, I am met with put-down comments, like: “Sa novitiate lang ‘yan!” or “You are very idealistic!”.

What happens then?

- I find it too difficult to run counter to this cultural reality of community so if I can't beat them I'll join them: line-of-least-resistance response. I go malling weekly, and I watch TV till the small hours of the morning.

- I become self-righteous, blame everyone and act in a way that is isolating and alienating from the community.

- I become disheartened, disenchanting, disillusioned and leave.

- I seek compensations outside, like codependent relationships.

Or, as we have seen earlier in the examples of Sr Nisa and Fr Martin, I can struggle through the reality of the situation, the bigger reality of our world, the reality of my reactions, and finally evaluate these against my life in Christ and make a faith-response.

How well or poorly attitudes and values have been internalized could spell the difference.

However, the other side has to be considered too: how can we help our communities to “row in the same direction” so that they do not simply dismiss these ideals as only the “stuff of the novitiate?”. In the survey, I noticed that the highest rate of satisfaction with post-Vatican II changes is in the area of on-going formation. So much is being done now especially by women's congregations on this level. And yet, it seems that the greatest number of problems – mentioned by leaders and formators – remain in this level too. On-going formation. While not stopping to offer support and challenge to sisters, in terms of the threefold rootedness mentioned, can we also see a link between non-internalization of values and attitudes and such on-going problems? And consider that non-internalization is in turn linked to admission and formation processes? Can this be given more serious thought?

Conclusion: I confess that I always feel uncomfortable at seminars like this, when I raise questions for others to answer. Or, when I am on the listening side *naman*, I sometimes catch myself thinking of how I may apply these things in my work with others. Yet the principle for the process of growth and maturing still holds: I begin with myself.

As a Formator, as a listener here, how can I fall in love all over again with Jesus, that I may tell and re-tell the story of Jesus in a way that is credible to others?

In the film “JESUS OF NAZARETH” by Franco Zeffirelli, there is a scene that I can't forget. There was Peter bidding goodbye to his boat, mixed feelings written all over his face. The following night, he is restless, tossing wildly beside Matthew. Finally they talk. Peter says, “I promised her I'd be back in the spring”. Matthew shakes his head and says with a definite tone: “No, you are not going back in the spring”. Peter protests, but Matthew is firm. Then Matthew says slowly, “Once you've known him, there is no turning back”. “Knowing Jesus ...”. Knowing how it is to be loved by him. And to love him.

Once you've known Jesus there is no turning back. Is it still this way with me ... ?

I am a person of hope because I believe that God is born anew each morning,  
because I believe that he is creating the world at this very moment.

He did not create it at a distant and long forgotten moment in time.

It is happening now;

We must therefore be ready for the unexpected from God.

The ways of Providence are by nature surprising.

God is here, near us, unforeseeable and loving ...

I am a person (I hope, not for human reasons nor from any natural optimism,

but because I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church

and in the world, even where his name remains unheard.

I am an optimist because I believe the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of creation.

To those who welcome this Spirit, he gives each day fresh liberty and renewed joy and trust.

The long history of the Church is filled with the wonders of the Holy Spirit.

Think only of the prophets and saints who, in times of darkness,

have discovered a spring of grace and shed beams of light on our path.

To hope is not to dream, but to turn dreams into reality.

Happy are those who dream dreams

and are ready to pay the price to make them come true.

- Cardinal Suenens -

Ref.: Text sent by the author for the SEDOS Publication, in November 2006.

# *Human Rights: What Responsibilities and Commitments for International Catholic NGOs?*

- Fr Gabriel Nissim, OP -

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The Council of Europe (CE) is a good vantage point for observing the current state of human rights,<sup>1</sup> since the objectives of this international institution are the promotion and defence of these rights, of democracy and of the rule of law in Europe. It is also a good observatory for noting the place and commitment of the International Catholic NGOs for attaining these objectives, since it comprises some fifteen of these organisations which have “participative status” at the Council of Europe.<sup>2</sup>

This fact also shows one of the limitations of this paper: it considers, primarily, the situation in Europe. For Catholic NGOs with a world dimension, it would need to be looked at again and developed according to the situation on other continents.

## **I. Overview of the Current Situation of Human Rights**

At the end of the Second World War, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by the United Nations, gave rise to many different international institutions and treaties. In this context, Europe created continental institutions unique in the world which enabled outstanding progress to be made with regard to the respect for human dignity. Among these institutions, the Council of Europe represents a kind of “moral conscience”, one endowed with the means of exerting legal pressure, since its Member States were committed to applying the “European Convention on Human Rights” (ECHR). The pressure brought to bear by the Council of Europe on its Member States is modest given its insufficient means. It is “non-violent”, but it is constant and lasting.

1.1. Since 1989, it might have been hoped that this progress would encompass the whole continent and extend beyond European borders.

However, we are obliged to admit that the situation is very different. Today, we are

witnessing a true “change of paradigm” in this regard: “the bar concerning the guarantee of human rights has been placed too high” judge many European political leaders; “the rules are changing”.<sup>3</sup> In the face of the threats of terrorism, the Council of Europe encounters many difficulties in getting the public authorities of the Member States to agree that they do not consider Human Rights to be a “fair weather luxury” but maintain the essential rules of the respect for human rights, even when confronted by threats. In Europe we are, in fact, witnessing imprisonment without legal process, complicity with kidnappings carried out by foreign secret services, limitations of the freedom of expression, etc.

But it is especially “the spirit” of human rights that is losing ground in all our European countries. One of the reasons for this situation can be found in globalisation. This phenomenon, on the one hand, gives rise to reactions of individualisation (as shown, for example, by the use made of the mobile phone to remain in permanent contact with family and friends), and of withdrawal into identity-based groups (ethnic, religious, regional or interest or membership groups of all kinds). In addition, the intermixing of populations (to a degree that has never been known before), has produced xenophobic reactions of an increasing violence (even reaching the field of sport, for example). Hence, a refusal of solidarity with “others”: (“why should I pay for them?”). Hence also a concept where human rights are first of all considered as “my” rights that “others” and first and foremost political or other institutions, must guarantee.

In this new context, one of the major problems, if not “the” major problem with which we are confronted, is that of “**living together with the other who is different**”. Human rights precisely offer a basis for this living together over and above differences of any kind. It is, however, precisely

this common basis which is being increasingly refused both by political leaders and by citizens as a whole: belonging now counts more than our common humanity. “The other” is a threat, an “invader”; in the context of immigration we speak about “flood” or “wave”. Terrorism is the most violent and radical form of this denial of the other. Yet the victories that it has alas won by blind attacks hide a victory in attitudes that is infinitely more worrying. Every terrorist act provokes and increases reactions of xenophobic hatred, to the extent, for example, of legitimising torture to protect oneself. Many Governments are using these reactions, maintaining a true psychosis of fear on which they play.

1.2. **Migration** is currently one of the most sensitive sectors concerning the respect for human rights.

How can the rights of migrants be respected without inevitably welcoming all those who knock at our door? Admirable work is carried out at grassroots’ level by many NGOs, Christian ones in particular. Extensive know-how is being developed in this field, but less quickly than are the problems and the difficulties of living together. The right of asylum is being less easily granted. Many Governments modify the rules in this field without warning. The trafficking of women and children has increased with the increase in the flow of migrants. Yet the States of the European Union refuse to grant these trafficked persons the status of victims so as not to be obliged to give them a residence visa.

In order to receive these migrants, is it necessary to adopt an Anglo-Saxon type of strategy which counts on “multiculturalism”, with the risk of developing “communitarianism”? Would it not be preferable, on the contrary, to aim for an “integration” based on the Latin model? How can children who come from countries with very diverse cultures be educated in order to enable them to live where they are welcomed? What can be done when, in a “Catholic” school, almost all the pupils are Muslim or when, in an Italian primary school, a large number of children are of Asian origin?

1.3. The current situation of the “**defenders of human rights**” in Europe, as shown by a recent Council of Europe Symposium, has considerably deteriorated. Whether it is a case of official institutions (Ombudsmen, Mediators, National Human

Rights’ Institutes), NGOs or individual persons, the defenders are exposed to a great

deal of harassment. Certain Governments and unofficial pressure groups adopt techniques of intimidation: threats against them or their families, loss of employment, physical attacks – and, as could be seen recently, the murder of a person used as a technique to silence all those who act in this field.

In the face of these threats, it is particularly useful to create support networks. This is first of all a way of reinforcing the person or the NGO. It also shows the adversaries that the person or the organisation is not isolated. It makes it possible to mobilise the media, on the spot and elsewhere. Some people can play the part of guardian angels to the threatened defenders. This can prevent physical attacks.

This network can include Embassies. They can be warned that such or such a person or organisation is to be supported: the presence of a representative of an Embassy at such a meeting makes it clear that if the NGO meets with problems, there will be repercussions. Finally, it is important to note that certain countries grant short-stay visas to some persons and/or their families so that at least, in the event of a more precise threat, he/she/they can disappear for a certain time and protect themselves.

It is nevertheless a source of surprise that in Europe, even today, those who simply defend elementary rights are subjected to such pressures and continue to be considered disturbing elements! This is eloquent of the situation in certain European countries – not to mention other continents.

1.4. It is customary to distinguish two main categories of human rights: on the one hand, civil and political rights and, on the other, economic, social and cultural rights.

*Civil and political rights* are those for which States and public authorities, which are responsible for guaranteeing these rights to their citizens and to all those living in their territory, must answer. It is also those rights which are guaranteed by the United Nations Declaration, the ECHR and a certain number of international instruments.

*Economic, social and cultural rights* cannot be guaranteed in the same way because they very often presuppose adequate financing and depend on factors for which the public authorities are only partially responsible. The effective implementation of these rights will thus depend on the wealth of the country. It is one of the reasons why international

solidarity must be exercised, with a view, precisely, to ensuring that these totally fundamental rights, such as the right to life, health and education, can be guaranteed even where national resources are limited.

Today, there is a great deal of discussion on the question of knowing whether or not it is necessary to maintain the distinction between these two types of rights. Western States have always given priority to the first category of rights whilst the communist countries privileged the other category.... It is obvious that there are many bridges between them but it can also be noted that their legal treatment cannot exactly be the same. Just as it is possible and desirable to take advantage of civil and political rights before the courts, such as the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, so is it desirable to have recourse to these in the case of economic, social and cultural rights. Nevertheless, alongside the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms which concerns civil and political rights, there exists the European Social Charter, which guarantees economic and social rights and which can give rise to complaints or even “judgements” on the part of different States when this Charter is not respected.

It could also be asked whether a certain disaffection with regard to human rights amongst citizens does not come from the fact that these latter are much more interested in the second category, which directly concerns everyday life and well-being, than in civil and political rights.

1.5. The above diagnosis on the situation of human rights should be completed and corrected by a look at what is happening **on continents other than Europe**, and particularly **in the countries of the “South”**. Let us give just a few elements here.

In the majority of these countries, *the basic right that must be guaranteed is the right to life*. Although in Africa, for example, life is regarded as extremely precious (living, and even more giving life), life on this continent is

constantly threatened. And to add to this, there are the problems of eating and perhaps even more of drinking; the right to health, threatened by multiple pandemics, malaria and AIDS.

Also, how is it possible to ensure that elementary human rights are guaranteed in all these countries exposed to wars or conflicts

which devastate too many parts of the African or Asian continents? How can the citizens of these countries establish peace when powerful countries, mainly of the “North”, sell weapons, exacerbate conflicts, intimidate the civic authorities and seek to corrupt them for reasons of power, as well as for their own specific economic objectives?

As far as *civil and political rights* are concerned, the major issue that arises in Africa and Asia is that colonisation more or less sought to transplant human rights and democracy (which is creditable in itself) in the colonised countries, but under the Western operating model and without taking the cultural differences into account. This is still sometimes the case in other contexts, for example in Iraq.

It is therefore necessary, on the one hand, to affirm without restriction the universality of the 1948 Declaration, because it expresses, over and above the place and the moment at which it took form, the fundamental oneness of mankind. This universality is to be reaffirmed and defended: neither cultural diversity, nor, in fact, any diversity, whatever it may be, can justify a theoretical or practical calling into question of any human being who exists or of the essential rights which result from this. It is not permissible, in the name of a local culture, to call into question (as some people are currently doing) all or part of these basic rights.

For all that, and in spite of it, it should be recalled that the universality of human rights has been achieved through the diversity of cultures. It is therefore necessary, at the same time, to state that it is the responsibility of each culture to undertake a task of true inculturation in this respect. Stating this is in no way intended to depreciate or discourage the work of so many people in these countries to establish respect for the basic rights of every human person. This work is necessary, as everywhere, but it is precisely up to these people themselves to find, in their own cultures, original ways which they have already adopted or could adopt for respecting the dignity of each person. Far from reducing or depreciating basic rights, this will, on the contrary, enrich the understanding and the implementation of these human rights and democracy, for the benefit of all humanity.

As regards access to *economic and social rights* in the “Least Developed Countries” (LDC),



on the other hand, it is now necessary to take into consideration the effects of globalisation. If this latter can be defined as “the process which puts an end to the compromise between work and capital *in a national framework*”;<sup>4</sup> this means that access to these rights can no longer be guaranteed in this national framework alone. The question of the development of the LDCs can therefore no longer be dealt with as in the 1970s or 1980s, but, on the contrary, requires international solidarity. Would it not be precisely a necessary and useful approach to deal with them from the viewpoint of human rights? In the same way, should the example of what has been carried out in the European Union with the “structural funds”, (which enabled both the economic and political development of countries such as Portugal or Ireland), not be a source of inspiration for dealing with the question of co-development?

1.6. What, in any case, emerges from this overview is that the respect of the dignity of the human person is **never achieved once and for all**, in any cultural, national or international context. Even in countries with a longstanding humanistic and Christian tradition, we are witnessing serious and repeated violations of human rights and democratic principles.

Concern about human rights is a permanent combat and the urgency to devote efforts to their defence and their promotion is always topical.

What place therefore should the Churches, Christians, and particularly Catholic NGOs have in this combat?

## II. The Catholic Church and Human Rights

### 2.1. A controversial situation

Our age is paradoxically presented not only as the one in which Human Rights have become a type of generalised ethical reference

but also as the age of secularisation.

Everything is happening as if – even where Human Rights were born – Christianity and reference to Human Rights were progressively excluding each other. In the same sense, many countries which called themselves Christian, many political regimes with which the Catholic Church appeared closely linked (Francoism, for example, or

the Videla regime in Argentina) did not hesitate deliberately to violate human rights.

Human Rights seem to be increasingly “replacing” religion. Where there is less faith, human rights provide a substitute conviction. They represent a kind of universal ideal, a reference marked by a transcendent character, over and above positive law and founding this latter. Their expression, not only in a “Declaration” but also in international treaties and legal conventions, fosters their implementation and obliges States, at least to a certain extent, to provide explanations in the event of violation, which was obviously not the case in previous ages, even at the finest times for Christendom.

However we, as Christians, know that Bible revelation and Judeo-Christian thought are undoubtedly at the origin of taking into account the dignity of each human person. It is not by chance that the concept of human rights was born and developed in Europe. However, it is a fact that today they are completely secularised. This is the result of a conscious and deliberate choice. Even if the idea of the universal rights of every human person was developed at the origin by theologians (at Salamanca University, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century), these rights rapidly developed in the Age of Enlightenment when research was carried out to find the basis of a society in which the reference to religion would no longer afford the foundations of living together.

A short historical reminder, which would need to be qualified and validated by specialised historians, could clarify the current situation.

### 2.2. A historical rereading

For a historian such as Bronislaw Geremek, the first moment of tension appeared in the Middle Ages at a time when, in a whole series of European countries, there existed an awareness of forming a “Christendom”. This awareness was accompanied by a rejection of “the other”: the Muslim, the Jew and the heretic, even with the use of weapons. The Crusade, initially directed at the liberation of the Holy Places, then set itself up in Europe, for example with the “Albigensian Crusade” in the south of France, or the persecution of the Vaudois in Italy. The Spanish “reconquista” was aimed at driving out the Muslims. It was also a period of development of anti-Judaism. Christendom unconsciously became a kind of “Babelian” project if, in the episode of Babel, we highlight the desire “to all speak with the

same tongue” and note the will to oppose God. There is, in fact, the permanent temptation of unity by uniformity, a kind of Christian totalitarianism, contrary to Pentecost, where unity comes about in diversity and the respect of the freedom of each and every one. This period reached its peak in 1492, when Muslims and Jews were killed or expelled from Spain if they did not convert to Christianity.

But it was also at this time, with the discovery of the Americas, that another approach was undertaken, which took the defence of the Indians, in the name of common humanity. For many Spanish “conquistadors”, it was permissible to reduce these Indians to slavery, exploit them without limits, maltreat and kill them, if they were not baptised. It was the quality of “Christian” which conferred a dignity to be respected, not that of being human. Through important events, such as the famous Valladolid Controversy, and thanks to the commitment and reflection of de Las Casas, Francisco de Vitoria and others, a successful conclusion was reached in the assertion of “natural” rights for all human persons, founded on reason (and not on biblical Revelation) “*Etsi Deus non daretur*”, “as though there is no God”, according to the formula of Grotius. Thus reason was able, autonomously, to establish such rights.

This step, taken five centuries ago, was decisive for us as Christians, in our way of looking at human rights. It is unfortunately still far from being achieved today in the Church. The fact that these rights are to be recognised outside any reference to the faith, far from being seen as a weakness of the faith, is, on the contrary, to be taken as the mark of the resemblance of man with God and in particular, of the fact that reason has an affinity with the truth. In giving man reason, able to understand the nature of beings, God is not weakened. On the contrary, one has to guard against considering God and Man as being in competition with each other.

This last remark is critical with regard to the Christian position concerning human rights. One of the reasons why, today, too many people, whether Christians or not, whether believers or non-believers, consider human rights as being opposed to God, or even opposed to the “Rights of God” comes from a concept in which God and Man are actually considered to be in competition with each other. The weakness of Man would be the pledge of maintaining the recognised

authority of God. The strength of Man would be a demiurgic-type of pride. The more the field of power and autonomy of Man is extended, the more it would encroach on the field and the capacity of God. No, Man and God are strong together. It is the glory of God and His joy to note the strength and the intelligence of His children. When first human reason, then lay and secularised institutions, recognise and promote the natural rights of all human beings, it is clearly the will of God that is accomplished through the tools that He Himself has given us to use.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century which thus saw the birth of human rights, was also, unfortunately, the one in which these rights continued to be severely flouted in Europe.

The Reform, in fact, introduced a schism within Christendom, which had sought to be unified since the Middle Ages. Just as soon as Christendom finished expelling those who were regarded as “foreign bodies”, Muslims and Jews, it was confronted with a fracture in the very heart of Christian faith. What place should therefore be given to “the other”, heretic, schismatic? As long as the “deviants” were only small minority groups, it was not too difficult to reduce them to silence. When, on the contrary, Christendom split into two groups of more or less equal importance, the solution was not self-evident.

However, in this Christendom, instead of viewing each other as Christians, and simply as human beings to be respected, we mutually excluded each other according to an inexpiable process which above all took the form of the Wars of Religion.

It was here that the principle of “*cujus region, ejus religio*” was established, by which each and every one had to adopt the religion of the person who ruled the country in which he lived. If he refused, his only solution was to go into exile or be killed. Germany, with its structure broken up into small principalities, was thus divided up into Catholic States and Lutheran States. France, after a period of violent persecutions and religious wars which culminated in the terrible Saint Bartholomew’s Day, found a *modus vivendi* for a time, to which Louis XIV, under the pressure of certain members of the Catholic Church, put an end with the disastrous Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. These conflicts have left lasting traces in memories up until today. England, which also suffered in the Wars of Religion, invented Parliamentaryism to cope with difference through a social contract which was the

beginning of the distinction between what belongs to the public domain and what to the private domain.

The most outstanding results appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and were in line with the conclusions of the Salamanca School, although based on a completely different starting point. Since the religions proved to be unable to ensure either the freedom of conscience of each and every one, or a minimum of mutual tolerance making it possible to live together, this living together would no longer be founded on religion, as it was too dangerous. Experience has amply proved this!

It was consequently necessary to base mutual respect on reason – by recognising that all human beings “are born free and equal in dignity and rights” – and on human liberty, equality and fraternity.

This is what the French Revolution did. Politics alone and no longer the religious aspect became the basis of the social bond. “From then on, no one could be prevented from taking part in political life because of his religious beliefs and the denomination to which he belonged (...). Religious minorities gradually received all the rights associated with citizenship”.<sup>5</sup> In the face of the “deep-rooted violence of the social and political confrontations inspired by religion”, the State proposed to institute “the ideal union of power and reason. The State imposed itself as an abstract and rational authority, able to establish the laws of reason and guarantee freedom of conscience”. In the majority of European countries, it was a question of ensuring a “separation” of religion and the State, but in France, this went much further. Unlike the movement of the Enlightenment in other European countries (particularly the German *Aufklärung*), the aim became “to rescue consciences, in the name of freedom of thought, from the influence of any religion”. It was up to the individual subject, and not to the authority of an ecclesiastical magisterium, to decide for himself, through his reason, what was moral. What was at stake, as it developed all through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became the monopoly of truth, and the “exclusive control of the relationship with transcendence” on which this truth was guaranteed. “The confrontation of the Church and the State came down, in the French case, to a non-resolvable contest for the exclusive control of the reference to transcendence”.

### III. The Catholic Vision of Human Rights

The appeal to respect human dignity was launched by the Catholic Church at the same time as what is called the “Social Doctrine of the Church”. “*Rerum Novarum*” in 1891, already referred to this. Pius XI talked about it in the face of Communism and Nazism. Pius XII spoke of it in a Radio Message of 1941. John XXIII spoke about it at greater length in “*Pacem in Terris*”.

Vatican II referred to it in “*Gaudium et Spes*”. In the Declaration “*Dignitatis Humanae*” (which was, very significantly, one of the most controversial texts of the Council). The Second Vatican Council made this dignity the basis of religious freedom. It was by this means that the idea of “freedom of conscience” and the respect of human dignity at last found its ‘official’ place, so to speak, in the doctrine of the Catholic Church. In other words, it was necessary for religious freedom to be refused or called into question for Catholics for the Catholic Church to really deal with freedom of conscience – not without strong reservations! It has continued, up until today, to make religious freedom the touchstone of the respect of human rights.

But it was especially John Paul II who officially recognised the importance of human dignity and, more significantly, of its expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and even at the United Nations (2 June 1980). He returned to this on several occasions during his pontificate.

3.1. The fundamental factor on the basis of which the Catholic Church finally totally embraced the humanistic vision of human rights was the dignity of the human person: a dignity **without limitations, inalienable, and unavailable** in the legal sense of the term (that is, of which no one can dispose as he wishes). This is the basis of the rights

which every human person enjoys, without

any exception, in all his or her relationships with others and in society, whatever the political form or the culture of this society.

It indeed means a “person” and not simply an “individual”. The concept of person includes a source of conscience, freedom, values, relational capacity and moral decision.

Correlatively, rather than speaking of human “groups” the Catholic Church prefers to situate the “person” in human

‘communities’ where each and every one finds his or her place, not in practice, but in principle, and can exercise responsibility. These communities come together, over and above this, within the “human family”. In other words, these communities are not solely formed on the basis of shared interests, nor on a geographical, linguistic or clan-orientated basis, nor on the basis of a culture, but in freedom and the sharing of responsibilities.

For monotheistic believers, this dignity finds its ultimate foundation in the conviction that each human being is created in God’s image:

*“We read the words ‘are born’ of the Declaration [of the United Nations in 1948], as ‘created’. Our capacity to link the ‘are born free and equal’ to ‘are created children of God’ is the locus of our testimony, in conjunction with others who will give a different meaning to this ‘are born’, but this is our part and a part that we must assume”.*<sup>6</sup>

However, and let us not forget this, there is no need to be a believer to recognise this dignity: it is established by reason, at least in theory. Yet this dignity needs to be effectively recognised by each and every one in the way he or she looks at others, whoever they may be, over and above any kind of difference. This is never automatic because I often feel this difference as a calling into question of my own identity, or even as an aggression. One of the major problems with regard to human rights is to recognise that others can enjoy them. They cannot be claimed only for myself or for the group to which I belong. Each and every one, before the other who is different, must therefore learn to make the transition from fear to the recognition of a fraternity within a same and common humanity. One of the ways which allows such a transition is the word, because “the word is addressed to a face” as stated so well by the philosopher E. Lévinas.<sup>7</sup> Whilst knowledge is possession, “the face is inviolable”. In speaking to the other, I recognise him in his very fragility:

*“Every person is seized and appropriated immediately by the perception of the other and his presence (...). In its nudity, its weakness offered, its incapacity to hide that it is powerless, the human body shows at one and the same time that it is vulnerable and inviolable”.*<sup>8</sup>

And Lévinas goes on to stress that it is in

the absolute resistance of the other to being possessed that “is found the temptation to murder”, the ultimate negation of the other.

*“For in reality, murder is possible, but it is possible when we have not looked the other in the face. The impossibility to kill is not real, it is moral”.*<sup>9</sup>

In other words, it is the face of the other, in its fragility, which disarms in me the temptation to kill him. With the “Thou shalt not kill” that I hear in looking at this face, the radical basis of the respect of the dignity of every human person is laid.

3.2. Human Rights are the object of **recognition**. It is not a public or moral authority or any order which ‘confers’ them.

Such recognition is not automatic – it is enough to be convinced when we see how much time it took to achieve this recognition! Indeed,

*“It is not an empirical observation, because the facts speak of human plurality. But the Declaration [of the United Nations in 1948] attests that, under this plurality, even before it – not chronologically but fundamentally – there is ‘the man-being’. This is signified in the Declaration by the term ‘are born’. (...) Admittedly, men and women are equal nowhere. They are unequal in multiple ways: culturally, physically, etc., but the equality that is asserted here, which ‘is declared’, is that of having an equal right to claim. I would say that the underlying affirmation of this Declaration can be summarised as follows: ‘our life is worth as much as mine’. This equal dignity is marked as being constitutive of the fundamental human condition”.*<sup>10</sup>

Thus human rights do not rest on a contractual basis, but on a “natural” basis. We do not grant them to each other by goodwill. We recognise them as being “already there” and we have, in spite of the appearances of diversity and inequality, to recognise them and attest to them. And if someone is isolated from this recognition, for any reason at all, it means leaving the way open to denying them to others.

This precedes all positive law and is fundamental to it, as law makes us go from “the affirmation of what is fundamental to the challenging of what is real, historically”.<sup>11</sup> What actually happens is all too often the non-recognition of the dignity of persons, or inequalities of all orders, or even fundamental injustices such as the lack of water or bread. However, noting the disparities between these situations and what we wish to affirm, we then question such situations, and call for a legal standard, a positive law, which explicitly

recognises the dignity of each and every one, translates this affirmation into laws, and helps to make it become reality:

*"It will be necessary, in a way, to spell this dignity out. Spell it out and also challenge it, in an enumeration which presents specific characteristics and also difficulties, because of the multiple characteristics of these rights. The idea of law is to some extent diluted because of a multiplicity of situations and misfortunes".<sup>12</sup>*

In the case of positive law, this can legitimately have a contractual basis, as can be observed in the Anglo-Saxon type of law, unlike the European continental type of law. Anglo-Saxon law is founded on the "gentleman's agreement" in a very pragmatic spirit and one that is very attentive to the freedom of each and every one. Once agreement has been reached on a series of mutual elements, each one sticks to this consensus, and for the rest, each person is free to do what he or she wants. If this contract is no longer appropriate, it can be renegotiated until a new consensus is reached. In a "Latin" context, on the contrary, the positive law expresses 'principles'. Even if laws are voted democratically, they are supposed to express these principles as effectively as possible. They are imposed from 'above'. Depending on the circumstances, a better way could be found to translate these principles into laws, but the principles remain.

In the case of "human rights", on the other hand, there cannot be this different approach. They do not depend on a contract or on a negotiable private consensus. These rights are "the expression of an order of relationships etched in the people themselves",<sup>13</sup> outside the diversity of ages and cultures. This is why the Catholic Church speaks of "natural law", which takes precedence over positive law and is at its foundation. Thus "human rights are founded on human nature".<sup>14</sup> In other words:

*"Certain rights are so closely linked to the humanity of man that they can justifiably be stated as being natural and universal, whatever the cultural and social environments in which a person is immersed".<sup>15</sup>*

3.3. Care must be taken, however, **to avoid having a fixist concept** of this "natural" human reality or of the rights which flow from it. In fact, "the perception of the natural law evolves with time and circumstances". It is therefore not "a transcendent law established once and for all, being imposed from the exterior without men and women taking part in its formulation and owning its

cogency". The natural law is not a law of a biological order, it is "an ethical order to be discerned". Every age, every culture, every type of society will clearly have to concern itself with expressing this reality of the respect for human dignity according to circumstances. And in all cases, it will be a question of admitting "that there is a limit beyond which is a drift towards the inhuman". This limit is appreciated by human persons and it can vary according to cultures and times, but to admit such a limit is "to recognise that non-negotiable values are imposed upon us, such as the life and dignity of persons".<sup>16</sup>

### 3.4. Human Rights and the Problem of Evil

As we observed at the beginning of this chapter, it is precisely at a time when the Catholic Church has rallied to the cause of human rights that we can note the rise of secularisation. This leads to a kind of substitution for a large part of the European population: human rights are replacing Christianity as a universal ethical reference.

One instance can throw light upon this phenomenon: the particular acuity with which the problem of evil was posed at the time of the Second World War.

On the one hand, in fact, as many people noticed, it was the violation of human rights which gave rise to their "Declaration". The United Nations' Declaration in 1948 was a "calling into question" (see the position of Ricoeur above) of the way in which Humanity disavowed its own 'humanity' during these terrible years and particularly in the Shoah. It was not by chance either that the first Pope to give so much importance to this United Nations' Declaration was John

Paul II, who had personally suffered from this dark period, in himself, in his country and amongst his closest family and friends.

But on the other hand and at the same time, this unchaining of Evil, the terrible and unacceptable suffering, led many people to ask the question: "while all this was happening, where was God?". Admittedly, "the question of Evil" is certainly a recurring question for believers and non-believers, but it is posed in our times with a new acuity. In the Wars of Religion of past centuries, the Churches were blamed. Today it is God himself. Everything is happening as if the effort to mobilise humanity for human rights wished to "answer" the fact that apparently God remained silent and allowed this to take place.

Furthermore, for the past twenty years or so in Europe, suffering itself is increasingly considered as contrary to human dignity. Evil, in all its forms, with the suffering it causes, seems increasingly unacceptable. There is a kind of exacerbation of the “question of evil”, and thus an ever more insurmountable obstacle in relation to the faith. It would consequently not be impossible to seek one of the causes of secularisation precisely in the Second World War, perceived as a time of silence on the part of God, all the more so as rare are the Christian voices which have been raised to denounce these violations of human dignity. Consequently, if God let this take place, if believers were far too few to do anything, God is to be regarded as useless.

And if, moreover, as the Church has preached so much, this God is a God who “likes suffering”<sup>17</sup> then this God is not only useless, He is really dangerous for the dignity of man! Fighting for the respect of the dignity of every human person, fighting for human rights, appears therefore to many of our contemporaries as something more urgent, useful and salutary than believing in such a God. A confirmation could be found of this with regard to the position of the Catholic Church on the ending of life, a position received with incomprehension by public opinion, precisely in the name of the respect of human dignity, judged by the majority of our contemporaries as incompatible with the suffering at the end of life. These are two concepts of the respect for this dignity which are in opposition with each other.

We should therefore not be surprised that the reference to human rights goes hand-in-hand with the rise of secularisation: attitudes to both aim to ensure that the dramas which bathed the 20<sup>th</sup> century in blood will not happen again.

#### **IV. The Role of Catholic NGOs in the Promotion of Human Rights**

4.1. A certain number of Christians active in the international institutions, the Council of Europe amongst others, **question the Churches** and religious leaders: “What are you doing for Human Rights?”. On the one hand, in fact, they note that religions continue to fuel violence here and there in Europe and sometimes become accessories to violations of human rights. On the other, as believers, and Christians in particular, they know that the religions have a message that essentially concerns universal peace and fraternity. Why

then do they not mobilise their efforts to be more in coherence with this message that is theirs?

Our first responsibility, as Catholic NGOs, is to relay this question to the whole of our Church. Just as in the entire social apparatus, what we call “civil society”, the associative sector is becoming increasingly important, along with the NGOs, because of its proximity to the grassroots – just so, in the Church, we have the possibility and the responsibility to draw attention to a certain number of emergencies regarding respect for human dignity. This is why it will not be enough for us to address Christians to ask them for financial assistance or moral support for our action. It is clearly much more a question of encouraging all Christians to mobilise themselves, wherever they are, for human rights, human dignity and for a fraternity that is both effective and universal.

#### **4.2. This mobilisation has a circumstantial motive and a structural motive.**

**A circumstantial motive:** the importance today of “intercultural and inter-religious dialogue”. Undoubtedly, this mobilisation can give rise to ambiguity. But it aims at responding to the reality of an intermixing of populations and a cultural and religious intermixing that we have never experienced until now. It is known that such an intermixing often causes reactions of rejection of the other, hostility and xenophobia. Human rights are directly concerned with such a situation; they are indeed the essential basis for managing difference in society: difference, be it sexual, generational, cultural, religious or racial, never exhausts what unites us in the same humanity.

Furthermore, after 11 September 2001, political leaders realised that religion is a considerable part of culture. This is why they are concerned today not only about dialogue between cultures, but also between religions. In the face of the disastrous image of religions which the media transmit<sup>18</sup> in public opinion, it appears urgent not only for religious leaders but also for all believers to raise the question as to whether they should continue to affirm their own identity in a unilateral way, or seek to look in-depth at this identity through open dialogue. With the same stones, one can either build fortifications, or build bridges, in the words of Cardinal Ortega, Archbishop of La Habana, Cuba.

**A structural motive** nevertheless: indeed the problem of fraternity, challenged by differences, forms part of our biblical tradition and our central concerns as believers:

Our reading of the Book of Genesis reveals the difference right from the beginning of God's creative project: in the creation of the plants and animals, as well as in the creation of human persons, "man and woman". Unity, in the biblical sense of the term, is never of the order of uniformity, as the interpretation of the episode of the Tower of Babel shows, in comparison with the account of Pentecost. The unity of humanity always contains an infinite diversity, the reflection of the infinite richness of the Creator and this diversity in unity is found, according to Christian faith, even in the bosom of divinity itself.

In the Book of Genesis again, the human condition appears from the outset as being marked by fratricide:

*"The capacity of murder is in a way primitive. Human history starts with a fratricide. This means, at the same time, that fraternity is not only a biological factor. Abel and Cain are blood brothers. But, after the murder, there is a task to be achieved: that of becoming brothers. It is no longer a biological fact, it is a cultural factor. In this sense, the struggle between Cain and Abel leads us from fratricide to fraternity, to 'becoming brothers'."*<sup>19</sup>

Thus, mobilising ourselves for fraternity and therefore human rights is urgent in a human condition that is constantly marked by the risk of murder, and that constantly has the capacity to make the transition to a true fraternity, not in practice, but in recognition, justice and hope – a task and a responsibility which are entrusted to us, to each generation and to each society.

This is why it should be said that human rights, or more precisely the service of human dignity, **form an integral part of our "mission", as the Church of Christ.** Today, we often hear people say that even though human rights are to be defended of course and even though admittedly the concern for "justice and peace", should not be neglected, in the end it remains that our specific mission as Christians is our responsibility to evangelise.

This, in the sense in which we are speaking, would be a serious error of perspective. Evangelising, in fact, is not only "announcing" Christ. It is just as much and above all "to follow" Christ. It is to proclaim

the Good News as Christ himself did. In what and how does the service of human dignity form an integral part of following Christ, of the mission and of evangelisation? Would it only be in "proclaiming" to men and women that they are children of God? Is it possible to make such an announcement without testifying in practical terms to what this quality of children of God involves in terms of the respect for the dignity of each and every one?

Let us note how, in the beginning, the Church did not conceive her mission in this way. Every time that she deals with a new missionary field, she places herself at the service of life and the dignity of people – healthcare services, education, etc. It is not only to gain a kind of credibility in the eyes of those whom she addresses, even if today, and including amongst non-Christians, figures such as Mother Teresa and Abbé Pierre have an unequalled aura.... It is above all because "announcement" always implies "testimony" – practical testimony. If I come to tell you that God is calling you to communion with him, then how could I, his witness, not already experience communion with you and testify by my own attitude to communion with you? How can I not be a witness by my own attitude to that friendship with him to which God invites me? How then is it possible not to be a witness to human fraternity?

"This is why, when Jesus, in Chapter 10 of Saint Luke, sends the disciples out on missions, he enjoins them to start by first saying "peace" be to the houses into which they will enter. Much more than a simple greeting, it means wishing a peace which is "shalom", the plenitude of life in the sense he himself meant when he said, "I have come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). The disciples have, in fact, to show that their concern in thus coming as envoys of Christ and like him, is that their listeners would attain this plenitude of life. They must also, in a sign of fraternity and communion, eat and drink with the people, then cure the sick. They will then be able to announce that: "the Kingdom of God is come among you".

If it is really God's purpose that the dignity of His creatures and His children be respected, defended and promoted in all ways, it is our task to announce it by our very attitude in their regard.

4.3. **In the international institutions,** this

testimony and this commitment in favour of human rights must have three characteristics.

Given **the international character** of these institutions, we can place ourselves at the outset in the field of a fraternity without frontiers. Admittedly, neither the United Nations, nor UNESCO, nor even the Council of Europe, are directly places of “fraternity”. Nevertheless, they are places of exchange, and solidarity, perhaps still far from being achieved, but constantly to be carried out and made to progress. It is thus a “natural environment” for the Catholic Church. And this is what the Holy See has understood in its high profile presence in these bodies through its many representations and interventions. It is our task to be present also in these bodies, at our own level, providing competence in our particular field. It will be highly appreciated. It could also be hoped, with regard to the presence of the Church in these institutions, that there will be better coordination between the representatives of the Holy See and those of the Catholic NGOs which work in these bodies.

Furthermore, it is crucial, from the viewpoint of the mission of the Church, for her to show that her goal, in participating in these institutions, is not to defend her own prerogatives, but to put herself at the service of the whole of humanity. If, while being present in these institutions, the Church seeks first of all to serve herself, to maintain her influence or her power, she is not faithful to Christ who did not come to be served but to serve. Moreover, under these conditions, the Church will not be listened to. On the contrary, if the Church and, in particular, Catholic NGOs, are present in these institutions, participate in the service of humanity as a whole, and above all of the dignity of each and every one, they will thus have placed themselves in the continuum of Christ and will be generally listened to with attention and respect.

Finally, we meet in these institutions a large number of **“women and men of goodwill”** who show an impressive commitment to human dignity. It is an opportunity for us to be able to form links of friendship with these people, sharing responsibilities and mutual recognition in this common concern and service of all those whose dignity is flouted. This is one of the places where believers and non-believers, Christians and non-Christians, find

themselves, shoulder to shoulder, in a mutual testimony. There are not many places in Europe today where such encounters take place in a positive way and without reservations.

This testimony and this meeting could therefore be, and I can testify to this personally, an act of thanksgiving to God. It is up to us as Christians to present Him with this service for the dignity of His children, a service carried out with such an enormous amount of generosity.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>The French expression “Droits de l’Homme” (Rights of Man), unlike the English expression “Human Rights”, has the disadvantage of not making the distinction, given the use of the word “man”, between the human person in general and the human person of male gender. Unfortunately, in French, it is the expression “Droits de l’Homme” which took precedence historically and legally, as long as “Homme” is written with a capital letter.

<sup>2</sup>The Council of Europe (which should not be confused with the European Union) is an intergovernmental organisation located in Strasbourg which groups 46 Member States, that is, almost all of the European countries, including Russia and Turkey. As its basis, the Council of Europe has the “European Convention on Human Rights”, which the different bodies of the Council, particularly the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (not to be confused with the Court of Justice of the European Communities in Luxembourg) are responsible for implementing. The Council grants “participative” status to almost 400 international NGOs, which makes the “INGO Conference” the fourth “pillar” of the Council, alongside the pillars represented by the Committee of the Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly (composed of the members of the national parliaments of Member States) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

<sup>3</sup>*Cf.* the end-of-mandate Report by Mr Alvaro Gil-Roblès, the Council of Europe’s first Commissioner for Human Rights. The overall diagnosis on the current situation of Human Rights owes a great deal to this Report which can be consulted on line on the Council of Europe’s Website: [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

<sup>4</sup>Zaki Laïdi, *La gauche doit-elle craindre la mondialisation (Should the Left Fear Globalisation)*, *Esprit*, n. 329, November 2006, p. 119, note 2, (*c’est nous qui soulignons*).

<sup>5</sup>D. Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme, la fin d’un monde – Catholicism, the End of a World*, Paris,



Bayard, 2003, pp. 56-57. The quotations in this paragraph are taken from this work, pp. 55-66. D. Hervieu-Léger herself refers to the works of Mr. Gauchet, particularly *La religion dans la démocratie. Parcours de la laïcité* (*Religion in democracy. The Itinerary of Secularity*), Paris, Gallimard/Le Débat, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricœur, *La déclaration des Droits de l'Homme* (*The Declaration of Human Rights*), Address to FIACAT, in *Responsables des droits de l'homme*, Annual Report 1998, Paris, Bayard Editions/ Centurion, 1999, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficile liberté* (*Difficult Freedom*), Paris, Albin Michel, Biblio Essais, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Roger-Pol Droit, *L'autre avant tout* (*The Other Above All*), (Commentary on the work of Lévinas), *Le Monde*, Friday, 6 January 2006, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> E. Lévinas, *ibid.*, pp. 20-23.

<sup>10</sup> P. Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> Roland Minnerath, *Pour une éthique sociale universelle. La proposition catholique* (*For a Universal Social Ethics, the Catholic Proposal*), Paris, Cerf, 2004, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> For the quotations in this §, cf. R. Minnerath, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-29.

<sup>17</sup> It is not by chance that François Varone published a book some years ago entitled "Ce Dieu censé aimer la souffrance" (This God Supposed to Love Suffering) (Paris, Cerf, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> We clearly say "transmit", as they transmit what happens in reality: religions are, in fact, parties to many conflicts in the world. Even if they do not create them, they do not always seek to calm them. They often privilege an attitude of identity-based reinforcement rather than of receptiveness to other religions.

<sup>19</sup> P. Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

Ref.: Text sent from the author for the SEDOS Publication, in February 2007.

"Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 41).

# Our Earth – Our Mission

- Thomas Malipurathu, SVD -

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## 1. Globalized Present, Endangered Future

Through her haunting 1962 book, *Silent Spring*,<sup>1</sup> Rachel Carson inadvertently set in motion a great movement. For Carson the book was the concrete expression of her life-long advocacy of nature and environmental ethics. It is widely credited with starting the modern environmental movement. Thanks to this movement, many people — although their percentage is still somewhat small — today are aware of the serious implications of a degenerating environment. It is unfortunately true that most people still think of the ecological problem as somebody else's problem and as something that affects the far-away polar regions and outer space! Others, vaguely aware of some of the issues involved, by and large limit themselves to thinking that planting more trees in their compounds and keeping their backyards free of litter are all that is required of them to ensure the health of the environment. But more dangerously, many people who are aware of the seriousness of the issue, deliberately seek to downplay its relevance because they feel threatened by the life-style changes that some of the remedial measures might demand.

The immediate aim of the author of *Silent Spring* was to alert the public to the disastrous consequences of the uncontrolled production and indiscriminate use of pesticides. Concretely she focused on the gradual disappearance of the American song birds. But the book had a much wider scope that went far beyond the mere voicing of a sharply-defined caution against the agricultural and domestic use of certain poisons. By taking on the powerful chemical industry, this courageous woman raised important questions about humankind's impact on nature. *Silent Spring* made people think about the environment and during the four decades in which it has been read and re-read, the book

has exercised a profound impact on many an environmental enthusiast.<sup>2</sup>

The image of a devastated earth that the title of the book conjures up is truly chilling. A spring without chirping birds, humming bees and the murmur of the gently swaying trees is both repellent and fearsome. Widespread and continued use of highly toxic pesticides has already resulted in the extinction of many rare species of birds and numerous species of insects and microbes — slowly but surely paving the way for a silent spring. Given the fact that every living organism on the face of the planet is part of an interconnected web, loss of one or more links in the chain progressively weakens the entire system. Carson pointed this out in her book with compelling narrative force.

Carson wrote her monograph long before the process of globalization had assumed the savage force that we experience today. This process sometimes reveals itself as something that goes beyond the realm of economic activity, a predatory process that has no regard for environmental concerns, national boundaries or cultural sensibilities. It considers profit as the sole driving force of all economic activity. A mindless exploitation of nature which feeds the frenzy of production and consumption is generally recognized as the hallmark of globalization. The culture of consumerism that globalization has produced considers consumption as the main form of self-expression and the chief source of identity. “I consume, therefore I exist!” seems to be the principle that has the highest approval rating in our day. The truth is that the economic and social dynamics that result from this stretches the eco-system beyond the endurance level, giving rise to a series of lethal consequences.

In the past couple of years a series of weather-related natural disasters that caused heavy losses to life and property in different parts of our planet profoundly shocked the

world. There are many in the scientific community who believe that such devastating events are closely linked to the mindless exploitation of nature expressed in such ways as the ongoing destruction of rain forests and the undertaking of developmental projects that ignore the ecological impact. A good number of people think that these are wake-up calls that Nature gives us.

The recent scare caused by the rapid spread of the bird flu infection, although it was mostly limited to birds, had once again set the world thinking about environmental issues and about the human misuse of Nature's bounty. Discerning people have been pointing out for a long time that interfering with the laws of nature to maximize production and profit can lead to disastrous consequences. The sudden outbreak of hitherto unknown strains of deadly viruses and their ferocious manner of attack are causing sleepless nights for medical researchers and healthcare experts all over the world.

Many, for instance, see the bird flu infection as a result of the callousness with which poultry is raised — or rather mass-produced — in most countries. Huge numbers of birds are forced into tiny cages, where they have no room to move and are forced to stand constantly on their legs. These horrifyingly unhealthy living conditions experienced by many generations of birds, they contend, have resulted in the deadly H5N1 strain of virus. Foot-and-mouth disease and the mad cow syndrome, prevalent in farm animals in many of the developing countries, are widely believed to be the consequence of the indiscriminate use of hormone injections to boost the quality and quantity of meat production.

The introduction of the Genetically Modified Seeds is frequently hailed as a breakthrough in scientific research. The use of GM to boost agricultural production is now common in many countries. It appears that we are stepping into the age of 'designer' crops. But what remains to be seen is what kind of effect it will have on the metabolism of humans and animals consuming grains and pulses produced by this breakthrough method. Sane but isolated voices are already advising caution.

Bird flu and foot-and-mouth disease are

just two of the more evident examples of nature getting back at us for our total disregard for its laws. Many of the ecological problems that we are facing today can ultimately be traced back to the same disregard exercised in ways both evident and subtle. Air and water pollution that impairs the health of vast sections of the population, depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, shrinking biodiversity as well as the unusual and often harmful weather fluctuations are foreboding signs. Add to them such potential threats as the rapidly dwindling stocks of non-renewable sources of energy, the gradual disappearance of wetlands and water bodies, diminishing water-tables, the melting of the polar ice-caps, expanding deserts, the mindless destruction of rainforests for cattle-raising especially through illegal logging and large-scale erosion of topsoil, and the picture becomes dismal.

The point is this: the process of globalization, although it has been beneficial in many ways, has accelerated the degradation of the environment, inexorably pushing the earth to the brink. The situation is fast becoming critical, because at stake is the ability of the planet to support life.

## 2. International Initiatives for Environmental Protection

Isolated voices like that of Rachel Carson gradually became a chorus around the early 1970's and the International Community began to take notice. There were now more and more people who were convinced that environmental degradation mortgages the future of humanity. The world slowly woke up to the realization that economic development is not an unmixed blessing and that it can give rise to disastrous consequences if pursued indiscriminately. The 1972 **Stockholm Conference on Human Environment** was the first initiative that the world community took to address the matter. It marked the formal acceptance by the world that development and environment are inextricably linked. It gave impetus to research and study projects that greatly improved understanding and awareness of critical environmental issues, paving the way for much national, regional and international environmental legislation worldwide.

The most concrete outcome of this

Conference was the setting up of the international agency known as the **United Nations Environmental Programme** (UNEP). The Conference had proposed the creation of a global body to act as the environmental conscience of the UN system. Acting on this proposal the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on 15 December 1972 by which the UNEP was created. It acts through a Governing Council which has 58 members elected for four-year terms by the UN General Assembly. With its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, the agency is responsible for assessing the state of the global environment and establishing programme priorities. The UNEP's mission statement<sup>3</sup> gives the full picture of its role: "To provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of the future generations". It is mandated to keep the global environment under review and to bring emerging issues to the attention of Governments and the International Community for action.

Since the creation of UNEP in 1972, a number of environmental conferences and conventions were organized to address such issues as conserving endangered species, controlling the movement of hazardous wastes and reversing the depletion of the ozone layer. Among these, one may specially mention the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora** (1973), the **Bonn Convention on Migratory Species** (1979), the **Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer** (1985), the **Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes** (1989), the **Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit** (1992), **Convention on Biological Diversity** (1992), the **Millennium Summit** (2000) and the **World Summit** (2002).<sup>4</sup>

Among the various environment-related documents that emerged from the many international forums of deliberations the first to be mentioned is the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, entitled "**Our Common Future**". This Commission is also known as the Brundtland Commission after its chairperson, Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former prime minister of Norway. It was set up by the UN General Assembly in 1983 and it submitted its report in 1987. One of its

major contributions was the concept of "sustainable development" that it proposed. What its chairperson, Mrs. Brundtland, said in her introductory comments has had a reverberating significance: "Environment is where we all live; and development is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable".

It was on the suggestion of the Brundtland Commission that the UN Convention on Environment and Development — the Earth Summit — was organized in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It brought together an enormous number of people concerned with the question of ecology: representatives from Governments, civil society (including countless NGOs) and the private sector. Its aim was to elaborate the strategies and measures to halt and reverse the effects of environmental degradation in the context of the strengthened national and international efforts to promote sustainable and environmentally sound development in all countries. It managed to create a tangible sense of optimism that at last an atmosphere was being created for global change. People everywhere were becoming increasingly aware of the ecology question. It also provided inspiration for the creation of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, a kind of watch-dog agency that critically assess development projects in all parts of the world. The Earth Summit brought out two important documents: *The Rio Declaration* and *Agenda 21*. The former reaffirmed the International Community's commitment to the Stockholm principles. The latter gave the world an action plan for building sustainable development into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With its groundbreaking synthesis of social, economic and environmental elements into a single policy framework, *Agenda 21* was able to give new direction to the work of UNEP. It called for increased involvement of civil society in promoting sustainable development and private sector initiatives to improve environmental performance.

Other influential documents include the **Montréal Protocol for the Protection of the Ozone Layer** (1987), the Millennium Declaration (2000), the **Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change** (2005) and the **Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building (2005)**. The **Millennium Summit** (2000) took place in

New York amidst the widespread perception that the environment and the natural resources base that supports life on earth continue to deteriorate at an alarming rate and that there is an alarming discrepancy between commitments and activities related to sustainable development. At the forum the UN Secretary General frankly admitted as much when he said, “The challenges of sustainable development simply overwhelm the adequacy of our responses. With some honourable exceptions, our responses are too few, too little and too late”. The participants formulated the **Millennium Declaration** against this background. It contained a set of internationally accepted, time-bound objectives and measurable targets, collectively known as the **Millennium Development Goals**.<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable that environmental sustainability is held up as a goal in itself and it is widely recognized as a major factor underlying the attainability of the other goals.

Thus a sweeping survey of the efforts undertaken by the International Community over the past three decades provides us with an idea of the growing awareness regarding the issue of environment. While it makes us aware of the enormity of the task on our hands, it also makes us see that every human being has a role to play in safeguarding the environment, in halting the process of its degradation and in reversing some of the damages already inflicted on it.

### 3. Christian Mission and Environmental Activism

It is now commonplace knowledge that mission theology has been constantly evolving. Some would say that this evolution is visible already in the different layers of

the New Testament tradition. It has surely come a long way from the days when the focus was on an expansionist agenda progressing in tandem with the Western colonial enterprise. Through the providential intervention of Vatican II the process of reinventing was accelerated, and today the concept of mission is developing along the lines of dialogue. Dialogue in this context is to be understood in a very broad sense. Normally people tend to think of dialogue as an exchange of ideas between

two or more parties which is almost exclusively carried out through the exercise of the human vocal chords. But when dealing with the topic of mission, dialogue is to be understood as a comprehensive process of respectful interaction with the other. It is making space for the other in our scheme of things. It is an effort to put ourselves in the shoes of the other. It is trying to see reality from the point of view of the other. Looked at from this angle, dialogue has less to do with speech and more to do with an attitude: of inclusiveness, of solidarity, and of respect. Some would designate this process as the dialogue of life.

It is from this perspective of looking at mission as an activity inspired by an attitude of dialogue that we can establish our initiatives for protecting the integrity of Creation as a genuine act of witnessing to the Reign of God. If we proceed from the starting point that an attitude of dialogue must permeate every aspect of our missionary outreach, we can easily see that the whole Creation, with its divinely ordained richness and diversity, becomes our partner in dialogue. It is instructive to note that ‘ecology’ is derived from the Greek word ‘*oikos*’, meaning house or home. Every act that in some way contributes to the restoring of ecological soundness is in reality an act of caring for our home. It is true that missionary outreach is primarily addressed to human beings in all situations of need. But human beings are intimately linked to their physical environment. Our desperately endangered environment deserves to be considered as a situation of need calling for committed action.

In the Bible’s first story of Creation, the Book of Genesis makes it clear that God created the universe for the sake of human beings and indeed placed humans at the head of Creation. That is the unmistakable meaning of the creation of humans at the end of a graduated process (*cf.* Gn 1:1-25). It is made explicit through clear statements, first in God’s own words in direct speech (*cf.* Gn 1:26) and then in indirect speech in the words of the narrator (*cf.* Gn 1:27) — a double affirmation that human beings are created in God’s image. Subsequently God entrusts the whole of creation to humans in words ringing with significance: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living

creatures that move on the earth” (Gn 1:28).

God entrusted humanity with the noble task of being the steward of Creation. Now, a steward is someone who takes care of things for the owner. God is the owner of Creation and God passes it on to us humans for safe-keeping. In the same act of being appointed stewards, we are also endowed with the supreme liberty of subduing Creation and making use of it for the advancement of the common good. There are certain limits and responsibilities implicit in the process of subduing and making use of creation. As we all know, freedom entails a corresponding responsibility. Perhaps initially we were mindful of those limits and responsibilities, but somewhere along the way the human family lost sight of this important dimension of God’s generous act of trust.

There are many who point out that today’s humans have lost the sense of wonder that was so much a part of life in earlier stages of history. This is assumed to be one of the main reasons for the thoughtless exploitation of nature and its bounties. Today’s humans think of themselves as well-informed and sophisticated in an unprecedented manner, with the result that nothing in the created world inspires a sense of wonder. When we are deprived of this vital sense of wonder, we end up abusing the gifts of nature. The grave ecological crisis on our hands is its inevitable consequence.

The restoration of a healthy attitude towards the environment perhaps has to start with the rekindling of this sense of wonder. Some of the damage that we have inflicted on nature is irreversible and therefore we have to live with the consequences. But determined action now can still apply the healing touch to the wounded earth and make it safer for future generations. This is precisely where Christian mission has a role to play.

It is in this context that the whole of Creation, considered as a corporate personality, emerges as a dialogue partner. It is true that the description of Creation as a partner of dialogue has to be understood in a modified sense as we are not dealing with a person with self-determination and free will. But just as missionary outreach is essentially an effort to care especially for those in situations of dire need, the wounded earth

becomes an eminently worthy target. Mission thus also involves the task of promoting the integrity of Creation and bringing it back from the brink. Missionaries as leaders and animators of communities at the micro-level can and should make a serious effort to motivate people to care for Mother Earth.

“... Determined action now can still apply the healing touch to the wounded Earth ...”.

On the macro-level missionary institutes and congregations can lend their weight to impress upon lawmakers and rulers to accept the concept of “sustainable development” as an imperative of economic growth and social engineering. The Brundtland Report (*Our Common Future*) had already in 1987 defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs”. It is based on the principle that growth should be carried out in such a way as to recycle physical resources rather than deplete them, keeping the levels of pollution to a minimum.

Spreading awareness is surely the first step. Most people, even the well-educated, are blissfully ignorant of the environmental problem and its perilous implications. Making people aware of the issues, starting with what may be immediately present to them — the contamination of water sources, streets strewn with non-biodegradable plastic objects, bulging dump sites, etc. — is an achievable target. Awareness of a problem

is often half way to its solution. By sustained efforts even people with little or no formal education can be conscientized regarding this matter.

The example of the “Chipko Movement” is very illustrative in this context. It is an initiative started mostly by the rural women of the erstwhile north-western State of Uttar Pradesh in India (parts of which are now found in the new

State of Uttaranchal), who were deeply concerned about the alarming destruction of the forest around them through commercial logging. 'Chipko' literally means 'to embrace' or 'to hug'. These

highly motivated women, known as 'tree-huggers', tried to protect the trees by physically posting themselves between the tree and woodcutter's axe. This eventually grew into a powerful movement, and the Government was forced to intervene and to decree stringent rules to protect the forest.

Adopting and persuading others to adopt an eco-friendly lifestyle is crucial. There are numerous little ways in which we can contribute to the process of healing the earth. Sparing use of water and electric power, preferring public transport to private vehicles, creating car pools, opting for recycled paper, refraining from the use of disposable carrier bags, opting for environment-friendly consumer products, etc., are small but very significant steps towards environmental protection. Small steps *now* are infinitely better than megaplans for later implementation.

It is time that the human community as a whole pay closer attention to an eco-friendly lifestyle. It is time, then, that we use every available forum to lobby for upgrading the integrity of creation as a top-priority issue. It is time, above all, to begin sustained efforts to raise humanity's collective consciousness to the optimum level to ensure that decisions made today do not diminish resources and opportunities owed to future generations.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> A Google-aided search on the internet for "Rachel Carson" comes up with a staggering 1,460,000 entries and for "Silent Spring" with another 746,000 entries! This gives us an indication of the book's enormous influence. Within a short time of its publication, despite the concerted efforts of the chemical industry to question the veracity of the book's claims, it became a runaway best seller in the USA and elsewhere. Widely read, it spent several weeks on the New York Times best-seller list.

<sup>3</sup> The mission statement and the other details about the agency reproduced here are from its website.

<sup>4</sup> The last two forums had a scope that went beyond environment-related issues.

<sup>5</sup> Both the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals dealt with matters more comprehensive than strictly environmental. But the emphasis placed on environmental sustainability as a foundational idea makes them significant for the environment question.

Ref.: Text sent by the author via e-mail, in December 2006.



www.qumran2.net

# *À Taiyuan, des catholiques font l'expérience d'une prière en communauté et d'un partage de la foi*

- Églises d'Asie -

*[NDLR – La société chinoise contemporaine évolue rapidement. Les modes de vie changent. Parmi ces changements, on note une hausse importante du nombre des divorces. Les catholiques n'échappent pas à ces changements et, dans un certain nombre de diocèses, des prêtres et des laïcs mettent en place des initiatives dans le domaine de la pastorale du couple et de la famille. Dans une démarche d'évangélisation, ils s'adressent aussi bien aux couples catholiques que non chrétiens. Dans l'article ci-dessous, tiré d'une dépêche de l'agence UCANEWS, publiée le 16 juin 2006, on trouvera un compte-rendu de l'expérience menée dans le Diocèse de Taiyuan, situé dans la Province du Shanxi].*

*Teresa et Joseph (les prénoms ont été modifiés) sont des paroissiens de la Cathédrale de l'Immaculée Conception, à Taiyuan, capitale de la Province du Shanxi. Joseph est issu d'une famille catholique depuis plusieurs générations ; à l'âge de se marier, ses parents ont refusé qu'il épouse celle qu'il aimait, parce que la jeune fille en question n'était pas catholique. Présenté à une catholique, Teresa, ce fut elle qu'il épousa finalement en 1990, mais les disputes entre les deux jeunes mariés étaient fréquentes. « Il a continué à la fréquenter », explique Teresa, en parlant du premier amour de son mari. « Il désertait le domicile conjugal, parfois durant six mois », poursuit-elle, en précisant qu'elle a toujours refusé de quitter son mari parce que « les couples catholiques ne divorcent pas ». Lors de la naissance de l'unique enfant du couple, une fille aujourd'hui âgée de 12 ans, « j'étais seule », se rappelle-t-elle encore.*

**D**esespérée, c'est en 2000 que la jeune femme a trouvé un soutien spirituel, en commençant à fréquenter un groupe de prière dans sa paroisse. Les rencontres, pour des temps de prière, de partage de l'Évangile et de mise en commun des expériences, étaient régulières et les intentions de prière pour la famille fréquentes. Moins d'un an plus tard, ce fut au tour de Joseph, le mari, de prendre conscience que sa relation extra-maritale blessait sa femme et sa fille. « Je suis revenu à moi-même et j'ai senti que l'Esprit Saint était à l'œuvre et que des gens priaient pour moi », témoigne-t-il aujourd'hui. Après avoir mis fin à sa relation, il a rejoint sa femme et pris part aux réunions de prière.

Aujourd'hui, Teresa n'hésite pas à confier que l'intimité entre elle et son mari « a grandi ces dernières années ». En décembre 2004, ensemble avec quelques dizaines d'autres couples catholiques, le couple a participé à une célébration sur le thème de l'anniversaire de mariage, organisée le jour de la fête de la Sainte Famille. « C'était plus joyeux que lors de notre mariage », se rappelle-t-elle.

Maria et Paul, un autre couple dont les prénoms ont été modifiés, connaissaient eux

aussi des difficultés. Maria, catholique, témoigne qu'à un certain moment de sa vie de femme mariée, elle n'éprouvait plus que de la colère et du ressentiment, s'en prenant amèrement à son mari. Dieu l'avait abandonnée, elle et sa famille, pensait-elle alors et, en conséquence, elle n'allait plus à la messe. C'est en 2003 qu'elle a rejoint un groupe de prière. Après avoir entendu les uns et les autres partager, « j'ai été touchée et j'ai peu à peu pris conscience de mes propres erreurs et manquements ». Parallèlement, la jeune femme a suivi un cours de formation catéchétique « pour renforcer [sa] compréhension de l'enseignement de l'Église et [sa] foi ».

Son mari, qui n'était pas catholique, a été interloqué par les changements positifs qu'il constatait dans l'attitude de son épouse et il a commencé à l'accompagner aux réunions de prière. Un an plus tard, il demandait le baptême, reconnaissant que son mariage s'était grandement amélioré. Pour Maria, le chemin parcouru a été un chemin qui lui a permis « d'apprendre à aimer les autres ».

Selon Bai Xuemei, coordinateur du groupe de prière de la cathédrale, les couples



sont nombreux à Taiyuan, en milieu catholique comme chez les non-catholiques, à vivre des vies conjugales peu satisfaisantes. «La plupart des paroissiens ne comprennent que peu de chose au sacrement du mariage et à l'enseignement de l'Église», témoigne-t-il, et, faute de formation, ils ont du mal à vivre l'enseignement du Christ dans leur mariage. Beaucoup hésitent à divorcer, comme l'illustre le cas de Teresa, mais ils ne savent pas comment s'y prendre, ni où s'adresser pour résoudre leurs difficultés.

En privilégiant les groupes de partage, en faisant en sorte que les homélies permettent d'établir un lien entre leur vie et l'Évangile, en insistant sur l'importance de la prière enfin, des hommes et des femmes mariés, des couples peuvent dépasser bien des difficultés, explique ce laïc, qui précise que c'est en 1994 que le Diocèse de Taiyuan a mis sur pied des groupes de partage centrés sur le couple. L'initiative avait alors été lancée à l'inspiration de la Communauté de l'Emmanuel, issue du Renouveau charismatique. Aujourd'hui, les groupes de prière et de partage de l'Emmanuel sont au nombre de six sur la paroisse de la cathédrale, et comprennent chacun de six à huit personnes. Ils se réunissent toutes les semaines ou tous les quinze jours au domicile de l'un ou l'autre de leurs membres. «Nous cherchons à faire une rencontre personnelle avec Jésus et, en même temps, nous recevons encouragement et inspiration des autres membres du groupe», explique Bai Xuemei.

Pour le curé de la cathédrale, le P. Paul Meng Ningyou, des groupes comme ceux inspirés de la Communauté de l'Emmanuel contribuent à faire grandir la foi des paroissiens. Ils poussent aussi la paroisse à aller de l'avant et c'est à partir de la demande formulée par ces groupes qu'un parcours de formation a été lancé en mai dernier. «Trois cents catholiques y participent», témoigne le prêtre.

Réf.: *Églises d'Asie*, n. 444, 1<sup>er</sup> juillet 2006.



# **“Le chemin à parcourir est long, mais il y a des raisons d’espérer”**

## **- Un entretien avec le président de la FABC à la suite du Congrès missionnaire asiatique -**

### **- Églises d’Asie -**

[NDLR – Du 18 au 22 octobre 2006, un millier de délégués venus de vingt-cinq pays d’Asie ont pris part, à Chiang Mai, en Thaïlande, à un «Congrès missionnaire asiatique», le premier du genre (voir EDA 450). Dans l’interview ci-dessous, accordée à l’agence d’information catholique UCANEWS, à cette occasion, le secrétaire général de la Fédération des Conférences épiscopales d’Asie (FABC), Mgr Orlando B. Quevedo, OMI, donne son point de vue sur la signification pour l’Église en Asie d’un tel congrès. Archevêque de Cotabato, aux Philippines, Mgr Quevedo, OMI, a été président de la Conférence épiscopale philippine de 1999 à 2003 et est depuis vingt ans engagé dans les travaux de la FABC. A Rome, il a assumé des responsabilités au sein du Conseil général du secrétariat du Synode des évêques ainsi qu’au Conseil pontifical ‘Justice et paix’. La traduction est de la rédaction d’Églises d’Asie.] UCANEWS : Que voyez-vous sortir de ce premier Congrès missionnaire asiatique ?

**M**gr Orlando B. Quevedo, OMI : Dans les pays de l’Asie, les fidèles auront moins peur de leur identité de chrétiens, de «petit troupeau». J’espère qu’ils seront moins sur la défensive et que, dans le respect, l’humilité et le courage, ils pourront mener leur vie de chrétiens au milieu de croyants d’autres religions, tout en travaillant avec tous pour le bien de la justice et des valeurs du Royaume. Ensuite, la conscience de la mission a grandi et cela vaut au-delà de l’Asie. Enfin, la compréhension de ce qu’est la mission, dans tous ses aspects, a crû, notamment le fait que la mission par le témoignage de vie est ce qu’il y a de plus important. Il y a une meilleure compréhension du fait que la mission n’est pas simplement d’aller en-dehors, à l’étranger notamment, mais peut être vécue dans la réalité de son propre pays. Le temps présent appelle à un dialogue accru avec les croyants des autres religions et, en même temps, à une meilleure prise de conscience et une confiance accrue en sa propre identité.

#### **Comment qualifieriez-vous ce temps présent que vous évoquez ?**

Je veux dire par là la confrontation entre les cultures, entre les religions, la suspicion. Le terrorisme peut être un révélateur mais il ne s’agit pas que de cela. J’ai à l’esprit le

changement qui est cours dans les mentalités au sujet de la religion, des religions. Le rôle et la place que les religions ont dans les sociétés modernes qui sont sécularisées, sont l’objet de débats. En Occident, les chrétiens évangéliques et les protestants, ce que l’on appelle «la majorité morale» ou la droite morale, sont désormais présents dans l’espace public et ils pèsent sur la scène politique car ils votent selon ce qu’ils décrivent comme des critères de choix moral.

#### **Comment la FABC peut-elle promouvoir la mission ?**

Au sein de la FABC, les grands thèmes de l’inculturation, du dialogue interreligieux et du dialogue avec les peuples, tout particulièrement les pauvres, sont autant de lignes directrices. Il est du ressort des conférences épiscopales de mettre en œuvre ou de suivre les recommandations émises par les différentes assemblées plénières (de la FABC). Toutefois, on constate que l’impact de la FABC, tel qu’il a pu être évalué pour l’évaluation préparée en vue de l’assemblée plénière tenue à Manille en 1995, n’est significatif qu’au niveau des évêques et, éventuellement, à celui des prêtres. Il n’y a pas eu de véritable impact à la base.

A Mindanao, dans le sud philippin où je suis évêque, l’impact de la FABC en ce qui concerne le dialogue interreligieux ou les

autres thèmes liés à l'inculturation et au dialogue avec les pauvres, est réel. Il peut même être qualifié de fort là où les Communautés ecclésiales de base (BECs) et les communautés humaines de base ont pris racine et se sont développées, à Sulu notamment (à l'extrême sud de la province). Les documents de Vatican II y sont utilisés et il en est de même, peu à peu, avec ceux produits par la FABC. Sur place, de nombreux responsables connaissent le contenu des messages issus des assemblées plénières.

Dans son ensemble, l'Église aux Philippines et sans doute dans un certain nombre d'autres pays n'est pas allée aussi loin. Au sein de la FABC, nous avons encore beaucoup de travail pour faire connaître et rendre vivant au niveau de la base l'ensemble des directives au sujet du dialogue interreligieux et de l'inculturation, par exemple. Toutefois, les règles de fonctionnement de la FABC n'autorisent un contact qu'avec les seules conférences épiscopales. Il n'est pas possible d'agir directement au niveau des diocèses avec des programmes concrets, à moins d'y être invité pour un séminaire ou une action concrète et précise.

### **Quelles sont les bases sur lesquelles la FABC étaye son travail en ce qui concerne le dialogue dans la mission ?**

Au chapitre IV d'*Ecclesia in Asia*, sur lequel s'est appuyé ce congrès missionnaire asiatique, le pape Jean-Paul II écrit que la compréhension de la vérité se fait de manière graduelle. Il évoque un style d'évangélisation qui évoque plutôt qu'il ne provoque, un style progressif et graduel. On peut évangéliser en racontant la vie de grandes figures de la foi. On peut évangéliser par son propre style de vie. On peut évangéliser par un partage de foi en racontant des histoires et ceux qui appartiennent à d'autres religions racontent leurs propres histoires, liées à leur propre croyance. Pour l'Asie, le pape lui-même (Jean-Paul II) disait que la proclamation du Seigneur Jésus n'est pas la seule manière possible d'évangéliser ou d'annoncer le Christ. De fait, dans de nombreuses régions d'Asie, cela se fait ainsi. Le dialogue interreligieux est une manière d'évangéliser, de partager la foi, sa foi et d'annoncer notre croyance personnelle en Christ.

Les tensions apparaissent lorsque vous pensez sans cesse l'évangélisation en termes de proclamation explicite et qu'il n'y a pas place pour un autre style d'évangélisation, qui

passer par l'évocation. C'est là un extrême. L'autre extrême serait de mener un dialogue interreligieux uniquement comme une manière de se faire des amis, sans aucun partage de conviction. Mais lorsque vous considérez le dialogue interreligieux comme une voie d'évangélisation, je ne vois aucune tension. C'est ainsi que j'observe ce qui se passe en Asie. On doit entendre ce que dit un théologien lorsqu'il dit que nous avons à proclamer Jésus comme Seigneur et Sauveur. C'est là un rappel du fait que vous ne pouvez délaissier vos convictions.

### **Quelles sont les voies concrètes du dialogue en Asie ?**

La première occasion de dialogue interreligieux, c'est lorsque les gens, les laïcs, vivent côte à côte, se mêlent et partagent les épreuves de chaque jour avec leurs voisins. Le chrétien agit de telle ou telle manière en fonction de sa foi et de la croyance en ce que le Seigneur Jésus guide sa vie.

La deuxième chose que les laïcs peuvent faire est, lorsqu'ils constatent des difficultés dans leur voisinage, des problèmes très concrets comme des ordures ménagères non ramassées, des pauvres délaissés, ils agissent pour venir en aide à ceux qui sont dans le besoin, lors de catastrophe naturelle par exemple. C'est là un autre stade du dialogue interreligieux : des personnes de religions différentes agissent ensemble pour une action charitable ou travaillent ensemble pour une action de justice. C'est ce qu'on appelle le dialogue de l'action.

Un autre niveau de dialogue interreligieux est lorsque, dans des moments plus calmes, des personnes de religions différentes se regroupent pour un moment de prière œcuménique ou interreligieuse. Elles prient le même Dieu et, de cette prière ensemble, elles peuvent commencer un partage sur leurs croyances respectives. Le chrétien peut dire : «C'est ainsi que nous prions car c'est ainsi que Jésus nous l'a enseigné : 'Notre Père qui êtes aux cieux...'.» C'est alors – et alors seulement – que ces personnes peuvent partager leurs expériences religieuses. C'est le partage dans la prière.

Les personnes peuvent aussi partager les enseignements de leurs fois respectives, comme nous le faisons, nous évêques des Philippines, qui entretenons à ce genre de dialogue interreligieux avec les protestants et les ustad (responsables religieux musulmans).

Une fois, nous avons évoqué comment le Coran parlait de la paix et comment était considéré le développement humain. Un ustad a témoigné et il m'a été demandé de dire comme la Bible parlait de la paix, du développement social et de la promotion humaine. C'est là un dialogue d'enseignements et nous le menons afin que les gens comprennent que ce que nous faisons et ce que nous croyons est issu des Textes sacrés. Ensuite, les théologiens peuvent se réunir pour commencer à débattre de ces choses avec les universitaires musulmans.

### **Que l'Église doit-elle faire pour que le dialogue porte du fruit ?**

Je citerais les laïcs car ils sont souvent laissés de côté. Il est nécessaire de développer une catéchèse pour les gens qui vivent parmi des croyants d'autres religions, la manière dont ils doivent respecter les autres religions et en même temps être convaincus de leurs propres croyances, la façon de partager leurs croyances sans se montrer agressif ou militant, que ce soit dans l'action, la vie de tous les jours ou la prière.

Pour les prêtres, il en va de même, mais une approche plus systématique est nécessaire. Très souvent, les prêtres dans les séminaires abordent les questions doctrinales comme quelque chose qui est enseigné uniquement à ceux qui sont croyants, mais la doctrine doit être intériorisée de telle manière que les prêtres soient en mesure de partager leurs convictions de manière humble et respectueuse avec des personnes qui ne partagent pas leur foi.

De ce point de vue, les catholiques peuvent apprendre des évangéliques. Ils connaissent leur foi. Ils peuvent citer la Bible. Mais nous ne devons pas imiter les manières de faire de certains évangéliques qui tiennent un discours agressif, sur un ton militant, et qui a pour conséquence de fermer les gens et de les dresser les uns contre les autres. Il est important que nous trouvions un juste milieu, dans la modération, l'humilité et le respect. Nous devons développer notre capacité à connaître la théologie de la création, la paroisse, la théologie de la mission, nous montrer capable d'intérioriser cela pour être ensuite en mesure de le communiquer de différentes manières.

**Selon vous, quels sont les signes concrets d'espérer en matière de dialogue interreligieux en Asie ?**

Une raison concrète d'espérer est, par exemple, le dialogue qui existe entre les évêques et les oulémas au sein de la Conférence des évêques et des oulémas. Il y a peu, des évêques et des oulémas indonésiens se sont rendus à Mindanao, aux Philippines, pour observer ce qui se vit au sein de cette conférence.

Un deuxième signe d'espoir pourrait être les initiatives prises dans certains diocèses philippins pour faire descendre ce dialogue interreligieux du niveau des évêques et des oulémas à celui des imams, des ustad et des prêtres. Quelques paroisses à Mindanao entretiennent un tel dialogue au niveau de la base, la paroisse de Pikit par exemple dans l'archidiocèse de Cotabato, où le dialogue interreligieux a permis de bâtir une communauté d'harmonie et de paix. De tels exemples devraient être généralisés partout où des gens appartenant à différentes religions vivent côte à côte. Le chemin à parcourir est long, mais il y a des raisons d'espérer.

Par ailleurs, parmi les évêques récemment nommés en Asie, on trouve de plus en plus souvent des religieux ou des professeurs de séminaire. Bien souvent, la perspective d'un prêtre diocésain est celle de son Église locale. La perspective d'un religieux va au-delà de l'Église locale et les professeurs de séminaire ont à cœur le besoin de formation des prêtres pour répondre aux attentes des temps présents et à celles des âmes qui leur sont confiées. Il y a donc des signes qui indiquent que Rome, par les nominations qui sont faites, se montre attentive à la mission et à la formation continue des prêtres.

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# Sharing Our Spirituality and Charism With the Laity

- Fr René T. Lagaya, SDB, MTD\* -

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I have heard it said that ex-religious make excellent parents but hopeless spouses. In trying to verify this assertion I have observed that ex-sisters tend to be overly domineering wives. Former male religious instead seem to exhibit a certain ambivalence. A few appear to be very dominant husbands. But many become subservient to their wives. Before they might have been obedient by vow; now they are obedient by force.

The reason behind this phenomenon seems to be the lack of the capacity of religious for authentic partnership. Religious formation is apparently effective in the training of candidates for leadership in the Church. Such religious training also seems to be successful in inculcating the principles of genuine obedience. But the formation that religious receive fails to equip them for the task of dealing on equal terms with their partners in mission, particularly with the laity.

There may really exist a certain feeling of superiority among religious *vis-à-vis* the laity. This superiority complex is seemingly rooted in the mediaeval concept of the religious life as a state of perfection. St Thomas Aquinas asserts:

“... the state of perfection requires a perpetual obligation, with a certain solemnity, to those things that pertain to perfection. Both of these are verified in religious and bishops. Religious bind themselves by vow to abstain from worldly things which they could lawfully use, in order to dedicate themselves more freely to God, and this constitutes perfection in the present life”.<sup>1</sup> Since it constitutes a state of perfection, the religious vocation is superior to all other vocations.<sup>2</sup> Hence some contemporary religious, still infected by this mediaeval virus, consider themselves superior to the laity.

In my more than a decade of teaching experience however I have come to realize that many lay people are superior to seminarians and religious in a variety of ways. It is enough

to listen to how some priests preach and to how some religious speak in order to realize that many of the laity have indeed had a better basic education. Some lay leaders, due to their superior theological acumen, have even challenged their pastors and religious pastoral workers. Vatican II has denied the existence of a superior vocation. In Chapter IV on the laity, *Lumen Gentium* states: “Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph 4:5). As members, they share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ. They have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope, and one undivided charity. Hence, there is in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3:11)”, (n. 32, Walter M. Abbott’s translation). In fact, if the ordering of chapters is any indication, Vatican II treats the laity in the *fourth* chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, whereas it deals with the religious only in the *sixth* chapter. In other words, if ever some sense of superiority exists, the bias of Vatican II seems to be for the laity and not for the religious.

## I. THE IDENTITY OF THE RELIGIOUS VIS-À-VIS THE LAITY

In the great classic of Yves Congar entitled *Lay People in the Church*,<sup>3</sup> we find the word *laikós* being contrasted with the term *kléros*. The biblical word *kléros* primarily means lot, portion or heritage. Hence it refers to an élite group qualified to perform some special task. The word *laikós* instead is non-biblical. But is it derived from the biblical term *laós* which refers to people, specifically the People of God, “a sacred people in opposition to the peoples who were not consecrated”.<sup>4</sup> The Old Testament *laós* referred to the Jews; the

New Testament *laós* refers to Christians. But in contrast with the *kléros*, the *laikós* refers to that segment of the People of God that is not qualified to perform special tasks (cf. Congar, pp. 3-4). Etymologically therefore we can assert that the term *laikós* has a positive sense whereas the word *laikós* possesses a negative significance.

Vatican II partially shares this negative connotation of the laity. “The term ‘laity’ is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those in a religious state sanctioned by the Church” (LG, n. 31.) But the Council definitely has a very positive understanding of this portion of the People of God. This positive sense of the laity revolves around its uniqueness which is summarized in the word secularity. “A secular quality is proper and special to laymen .... the laity, by their very vocation, seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven” (n. 31).

The Lord Jesus Christ has compared the Reign of God to leaven and it is in this that the laity find their unique contribution to the realization of the Kingdom. Vatican II states: “They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. In this way they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. The layman is closely involved in temporal affairs of every sort. It is therefore his special task to illumine and organize these affairs in such a way that they may always start out, develop, and persist according to Christ’s mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer” (*ibid.*, n. 31, cf. Mt 13:33).

Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, quoting from Pope Pius XII’s discourse of 20 February 1946, says: “The faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the front lines of the Church’s life; for them the Church is the animating principle for human society. Therefore, they in particular ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth...” (n. 9).

From all these considerations we can come to the following conclusions regarding the identity of the laity:

(1) The laity are an integral portion of the People of God.

(2) The laity are on the frontline of the Church’s endeavours for the realization of the Reign of God, immersed as they are in the concrete realities and challenges of this world.

(3) The laity perform their God-given task in a hidden and unobserved manner, but definitely effective and fruitful, after the image of the leaven in the whole mass of dough.

If these are the laity, who then are the Religious? Are they a mere appendix to the People of God? Are they the well-protected reserve forces of the Church who refuse to be involved in the concrete problems of human life? Are they the evident and glaring signs of the workings of the Kingdom, but whose activity may not be truly effective and fruitful?

It would indeed be sad and disheartening if religious were compelled to give a positive reply to these queries. It would mean that there might be truth in our aforementioned observation that the vocation to the religious life is inferior to that of the laity. We are thus prompted to delve deeper into the uniqueness of the vocation to the religious life.

The Second Vatican Council sees the profession of the “evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty, and obedience” (LG, n. 43) as at the heart of the identity of the religious. Some theologians however have some reservations about this thought. “The call to poverty, chastity and obedience, although basic to the form of Christian life nowadays called Religious life, stands at the heart of *any* form of life which claims to be modelled upon the life-style of the poor, chaste and obedient Jesus of Nazareth. It is obvious that all Christians have been called to the perfection of love and that Baptism has inserted us all into the mystery of a Church and a life of grace where this is made possible. The vocation to *walk behind, to follow* (cf. Mk 1:16-20) Jesus of Nazareth, poor, chaste and obedient, could not possibly be the special privilege of only *some* of the baptised.... As this is the case, it is my opinion that we should not speak of evangelical *counsels*, as if they were something in the Gospels which may or may not be followed. Poverty, chastity and obedience — if they are Gospel values — are evangelical *imperatives* for all those who wish to follow Jesus of Nazareth...”<sup>5</sup>

Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal

Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, agrees with Moloney's remarks: "In fact, all those reborn in Christ are called to live out, with the strength which is the Spirit's gift, the chastity appropriate to their state of life, obedience to God and to the Church, and a reasonable detachment from material possessions: for all are called to holiness, which consists in the perfection of love" (n. 30). But the Holy Father is quick to add that there is a radical difference between the way the laity live these evangelical imperatives and the way religious observe them. "But Baptism in itself does not include the call to celibacy or virginity, the renunciation of possessions or obedience to a superior, in the form proper to the evangelical counsels. The profession of the evangelical counsels thus presupposes a particular gift of God not given to everyone..." (*ibid.*).

*Lumen Gentium* sees the uniqueness of the religious mode of living the evangelical counsels from the lay mode from the eschatological standpoint. "The profession of the evangelical counsels, then, appears as a sign which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfillment of the duties of their Christian vocation. The People of God has no lasting city here below, but looks forward to one which is to come. This being so, the religious state by giving its members greater freedom from earthly cares more adequately manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed here below. Furthermore, it not only witnesses to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ. It foretells the resurrected state and the glory of the heavenly Kingdom" (n. 44).

The most common eschatological position is the *ALREADY and NOT YET* interpretation of the Reign of God. Joachim Jeremias, Rudolf Schnackenburg, Oscar Cullmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann are the major protagonists of this position. The Reign of God is neither *present* nor *future*. It defies any single time frame. It is *both* present *and* future. It is both *already* and *not yet*. Both laity and religious form part of the Reign of God. Hence they both share in its eschatological dimension. It is really a matter of emphasis. The laity emphasize the *present*, the *already*; the religious stress the *future*, the *not yet*. The relationship however between these two emphases can be best explained by having recourse to Pannenberg's ideas.

Wolfhart Pannenberg advocates the *proleptic* nature of the Kingdom of God. This

means to say that the future has the *ontological priority*. In other words, "it is the future that has an imperative claim upon the present and the present should be seen as an effect of the future" (John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, p. 67). From the standpoint of the discussion at hand, we have to say that the religious, who emphasize the future, set the direction for the laity, who in turn stress the present. Without claiming any superiority over the lay vocation, the vocation to the religious life enjoys some kind of ontological priority. In other words, the religious life sets the tone for all other forms of Christian life. The way of life of the religious presents the goal which all ways of life in the Church must reach.

## II. THE RELIGIOUS-LAY PARTNERSHIP

As it is difficult to conceive of the Reign of God where there is the absence of the partnership of the *already* and the *not yet*, so too it is hard to imagine ecclesial life where the *religious-lay* partnership is wanting. This partnership must have three elements: (1) communion; (2) collaboration in mission; (3) joint formation.

### 1. Communion

Oftentimes the religious-lay partnership is tackled from the point of view of how to work together in some apostolic undertaking. The document *Christifideles Laici* however puts communion (chapter II) before mission (chapter III). This means to say that communion enjoys precedence of importance. We can take a cue from the understanding of religious poverty. The key biblical passages for insight into it are Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-35. The early Christians "owned everything in common" (Acts 2:44-45) that "none of their members was ever in want" (Acts 4:34). Poverty for its own sake is alien to the evangelical spirit. Evangelical poverty is in view of communion. Therefore poverty that is divisive of community cannot be considered religious poverty (*cf.* Moloney, pp. 18-73).

Religious cannot impose their spirituality on the laity. Religious spirituality is *proleptic* in nature, like the Kingdom of God. In other words, it shows the way to go. The way to go is only one: communion. Religious spirituality varies from lay spirituality. "I ask you, Philothea, is it fitting for a bishop to want to live a solitary life like a Carthusian? Or for

married men to want to own no more property than a Capuchin, for a skilled workman to spend the whole day in church like a religious, for a religious to be constantly subject to every sort of call in his neighbour's service, as a bishop is? Would not such devotion be laughable, confused, impossible to carry out?" (St Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 1,4; cf. *CL*, n. 56). But despite the great diversity there is only one single goal: communion. Communion is shared through the process of osmosis. Religious living in communion and harmony infectiously bring about communion among the laity. In the partnership of religious with the laity, there is no substitute for a united religious community.

Building communion is essentially building ecclesial communion. Religious are not an appendix to the People of God. Religious are an integral part of the Church. Hence fostering communion among the laity is necessarily fostering ecclesial communion. Now religious who strive to make of their community a prototype of the Church are better equipped to discern the presence or absence of the criteria of ecclesiality for lay groups. Pope John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici* enumerates five such criteria:

- (a) The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness;
- (b) The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith;
- (c) The witness to a strong and authentic communion;
- (d) The conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals;
- (e) The commitment to a presence in human society (cf. n. 30).

The laity look to the religious for assurance that the way of life they lead is authentically evangelical. Religious living in communion experience and manifest the Church in a concrete time and place. The document *Congregavit Nos in unum Christi amor* asserts the essential link between the religious community and ecclesial communion: "fraternal life in common has always appeared as a radical expression of the common fraternal spirit which unites all Christians. Religious community is a visible manifestation of the communion which is the foundation of the Church and, at the same time, a prophecy of that unity towards which she tends as her final goal" (CN, n. 10). This same document strikingly and, if I may say so, embarrassingly calls religious "experts in communion" (n. 10). Communion is one of "the deep aspirations of the heart" (SDB

Constitutions, 49). The reason for this is what Vatican II has stated in *Gaudium et Spes*: "God, who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (n. 24). Religious, divided among themselves and in total disarray, are a contradiction in themselves. But religious who exhibit genuine communion need not think of extraordinary ways of serving the laity.

Their spirit of communion is more than enough to assist the laity in realizing that they are Church and in attaining the fulfilment of their deepest and noblest longings.

## 2. Collaboration in Mission

There are two big bodies of water in the Holy Land: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The former is fresh and teeming with fish; the latter is extremely salty and totally devoid of life. Apparently the reason is the fact that the Sea of Galilee has the Jordan River for its outlet which makes the land fruitful. The Dead Sea for its part is contained in itself and has no outlet whatsoever.

A religious community that is truly united gives itself wholeheartedly to the discharge of its God-given mission. Failure to do so would mean the disintegration of the community itself. Every realistic religious knows that the apostolic mission proper to the charism of each order and congregation demands much more than what the religious community can do. Sharing the apostolic mission with others is a must. If I may be allowed to cite my Founder, St John Bosco, I am going to share with you a reflection of our 240<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of 1996: "In the first draft of the Constitutions Don Bosco foresaw the existence of Salesians who could belong to the Salesian Society while living in the world, without professing the three vows but striving to put into practice that part of the Regulations compatible with their age and condition. But since he was unable to succeed with this plan because of the juridical difficulties of the time, the Saint founded the Pious Union of Cooperators which he considered of the greatest importance as 'the soul of the Congregation'" (SDB GC24, no. 73).

This citation shows how this particular Founder ardently desired that the mission entrusted to him by the Lord should be shared with the laity. But the laity should not feel that they were mere mercenaries or auxiliaries. The laity, in the original plan of Don Bosco, were meant to be full members, living in equal partnership with the Salesians. The Salesians however were to live in the religious



community; the laity in their homes. The Salesians were bound by the profession of the evangelical counsels; the laity by their attraction and commitment to the Salesian mission on behalf of young people. Thus Don Bosco wanted that his communities be truly welcoming (*cf.* SDB Constitutions 56) and open (*cf.* SDB Constitutions 57).

However, the realization of this ideal of Don Bosco is meeting a lot of resistance and difficulties. I am now going to enumerate these problems regarding collaboration in mission and I suppose that you would see your own experiences mirrored in many of them:

(a) Some religious communities do not always have the necessary flexibility in their lives in order to accept innovations and to react positively to stimuli coming from lay people. In some situations a defensive attitude prevails among religious which makes the laity feel hampered in their apostolic initiatives.

(b) Some religious feel threatened by the presence of lay collaborators and resist all forms of power-sharing with them. The religious must always have the last say and no initiative of the laity may proceed without their definitive approval. This is especially true when it comes to decisions on personnel, projects and financial disbursements. These religious may accept the laity as subordinates, but never as partners.

(c) Some religious and their lay collaborators disagree on such matters as apostolic goals and pastoral methods. Differences in background and formation may be at the root of such conflict.

(d) Some religious are still hounded by a kind of superiority complex *vis-à-vis* the laity. Such pride breeds haughtiness and a judgmental attitude whereby all activities of lay collaborators are subjected to undue scrutiny simply because they (the religious) know more than them (the laity).

(e) Certain male religious in particular find it hard to deal with women, to integrate them into the works of the congregation and to consider them as partners. It has to be admitted that many lay collaborators are of the feminine gender (*cf.* SDB GC24, nn. 30,31,33).

The problems confronting the religious-lay collaboration in mission are varied and complicated. The solutions to these problems are likewise varied and complicated. But all the solutions seem to be rooted in one thing — formation.

### 3. Joint Formation

Pope John Paul II insists on the formation of the laity in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. He describes it as “the call to growth and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit” (n. 57). In order that the laity may become able partners of the religious in ecclesial endeavours they must have adequate preparation and genuine formation. This formation entails two important elements: vocational discernment and integration of life.

The Holy Father says: “The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful is an ever-clearer discovery of one’s vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfill one’s mission.... However, only in the unfolding of the history of our lives and its events is the eternal plan of God revealed to each of us. Therefore, it is a gradual process; in a certain sense, one that happens day by day” (n. 58). This vocational discernment process necessitates a truly spiritual orientation in life. The same Apostolic Exhortation on the laity states: “To be able to discover the actual will of the Lord in our lives always involves the following: a receptive listening to the Word of God and the Church; fervent and constant prayer; recourse to a wise and loving spiritual guide; and a faithful discernment of the gifts and talents given by God, as well as the diverse social and historical situations in which we live” (n. 58).

As for the living of a totally integrated life, Pope John Paul II says: “In discovering and living their proper vocation and mission, the lay faithful must be formed according to the *union* which exists from their being *members of the Church and citizens of human society*” (n. 59). This balancing act makes the formation of the laity truly complex. The laity cannot leave behind the structures of this world. In fact, they are called upon to be disciples of the Kingdom amid worldly concerns. They are more prone to leading a split-level Christianity. *Christifideles Laici* asserts: “There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called *spiritual* life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called *secular* life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life, and in culture” (*ibid.*).

Vatican II already insisted on this *unity of life*. “This Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. They are

mistaken who, knowing that we have here no

abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more than ever obliged to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 43). Thus the Council insists that “this split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (*ibid.* n. 43.) It is precisely for the fostering of this unity of life among the laity that Pope John Paul II says that any lay formation must be a formation in *spirituality*, in *doctrine* and in *culture* (*cf. CL*, n. 60).

The question now is how can religious help in the formation of the laity. It must be said outright that religious too are in need of formation. Scanning the situation of contemporary religious life in the Philippines, we can easily conclude that in general religious are better formed than the laity in doctrine. But definitely in spirituality and in culture the laity have the edge on the religious. Thus religious can assist in the formation of the laity by, first and foremost, being better formed themselves in their areas of deficiency.

Presuming however that religious are adequately formed in spirituality, in doctrine and in culture, there still seems to be a lacuna to be addressed. This is their ability to be partners with the laity in the Church. I would dare to say that this is rooted in the inadequate sexual formation received by religious. Let me explain what I mean by this deficient sexual formation of religious.

We gather from the Book of Genesis that human sexuality has two dimensions. The first chapter of Genesis presents the Priestly Account of Creation with its insistence on the *procreative* dimension of human sexuality. The second chapter contains the Yahwist Account of creation with its emphasis on the *unitive* dimension of human sexuality. Religious tend to care for people because their pastoral formation is highly biased by the procreative dimension of human sexuality. But they find it hard to be partners with the laity for the simple reason that the unitive dimension of their sexuality is not being properly addressed. Wholesome human intimacy enables the religious to look at another person not as a subject but as an equal, with all the respect relationship

between equals entails. Therefore formation towards religious-lay partnership is a joint affair.

### III. THE ITER TOWARDS RELIGIOUS-LAY PARTNERSHIP

As we come now to the conclusion of this paper, it may be useful to suggest a kind of *iter* to follow in order to bring about this desired religious-lay partnership. This iter should contain four elements: (1) Broadening the involvement; (2) Sharing of responsibility; (3) Fostering communication; (4) Qualifying the formation.

#### **1. Broadening the Involvement**

Sharing our spirituality and charisms with the laity demands from us religious a deeper understanding of the laity. On their part, the laity also need to know us better. Thus religious must get more involved in the lives of the laity. In a similar fashion the laity must be allowed to get more involved in the lives of the religious. This broadening of involvement would beget the necessary mutual understanding for adequate partnership. Contacts therefore must be established; gates must be opened; walls must be breached. In this matter the religious are called to take the first step (*cf. SDB CC24*, nn. 107-116).

#### **2. Sharing of Responsibility**

Moral Theology has it that a person can be responsible only for an act that can properly be qualified as human. Human acts must be characterized by three things: (a) knowledge; (b) freedom; (c) Christian perspective. In the sharing of responsibility with the laity therefore religious must truly acquaint the laity about their ecclesial endeavours. Then they must allow the laity ample freedom of action. But they must also assure the laity of deepening the Christian faith in order that their perspective in life may truly be that of Christ Jesus. Religious should truly love their lay collaborators. If they truly love them, religious should not be afraid of sharing responsibility. As John beautifully puts it: “In love there is no room for fear, but perfect love drives out fear” (I Jn 4:18) (*cf. SDB GC24*, nn. 117-127).

#### **3. Fostering Communication**

Communication begins with awareness of the presence of the other. It also entails acceptance of the other as he/she is. It also necessitates faith that God has sent this person

to us and recognition that he too is a recipient of the same vocation we have received, with the variations imposed by our different states of life. Finally communication can truly be fostered by our delight in the gift of this other person. Communication is the key to the attainment of communion and communion is the goal of genuine partnership (*cf.* SDB GC24, nn. 128-137).

#### 4. Qualifying the Formation

Definitely formation must be planned. But the formation plan needed for the issue at hand must possess the following characteristics:

(a) The plan must take the problem of vocation seriously. Both religious and laity must come to the conviction that they are being called by God for the realization of a particular project for the Kingdom and have been made sharers in a specific charism.

(b) The plan must bring about the integral formation of both religious and laity. The spiritual, doctrinal and cultural issues must be adequately addressed.

(c) The unitive dimension of human sexuality must be enhanced. Adequate training in human intimacy must be given in order to foster a real capacity for partnership in ecclesial endeavours (*cf.* SDB GC24, nn. 138-148).

### CONCLUSION

This endeavour to explore the dynamics of the relationship between religious and laity has truly been challenging and rewarding. Certain unexpected insights have emerged in the course of the writing of this paper. As I have personally benefited from the preparation of this work, I hope that you have derived some good, no matter how little, from this discussion. May we religious truly show the laity the way towards fulfilment in the Reign of God.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> S.Th. II-II, q.184, a.5.

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* Paul D. Holland, *Vocation*, in *THE NEW DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY*, eds. Joseph A. Komonchak *et al.*, p. 1090.

<sup>3</sup> Original edition: 1956; revised edition: 1964

<sup>4</sup> Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *A Life of Promise*, pp. 15-16.

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15 February 2007

***Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,***

For the past six years we have joined many groups, churches, and individuals calling for the cancellation of the unjust burden of debt of some of the poorest countries in our world. Each year when the leaders of the G-8 countries gather for their Summit meeting they hear from us!

We invite you to join us once again in our annual letter writing campaign. This is a significant and symbolic year as it is another Jubilee Year, seven years after the Millennium Jubilee. It is also the half-way mark in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, since 2015 is the year by which to attain these goals.

This is also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope Paul VI's Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. In reading the document 40 years later we can say it was, and continues to be, a "sign of the times" in its strong call for justice.

We want to be clearly understood: the present situation must be faced with courage and the injustices linked with it must be fought and overcome. Development demands bold transformations and innovations that go deep. Urgent reforms should be undertaken without delay (#32).

This is what we ask of you:

1. Distribute the attached letter to the G-8 leaders to the members of your Congregation and ask them to send it to one or more of the G-8 leaders. (See attached list for names and addresses)
2. Encourage your membership to use the "Mobilization Toolkit for Make Aid Work. The Poor Can't Wait" [www.make-aid-work.org](http://www.make-aid-work.org) available in English, French and Spanish in their ministries. The kit includes a post card to the German Government who will be hosting the G-8 meeting this year.
3. Read *Populorum Progressio* and discuss its relevance for our times with friends.

Thank you for participating in this important campaign.

In solidarity,

Joint Economic Justice Working Committee of *Caritas Internationalis*,  
SEDOS, Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Promoters in Rome

Le 15 février 2007

***Chers Frères et Sœurs dans le Christ,***

Depuis six ans, nous nous sommes unis à beaucoup de groupes, d'églises et de personnes qui appellent à supprimer le poids injuste de la dette pour plusieurs pays parmi les plus pauvres du monde. Chaque année, quand les dirigeants du G-8 se réunissent pour leur Sommet, ils entendent parler de nous.

Nous vous invitons à nous rejoindre une fois encore dans notre campagne de lettre annuelle. Cette année-ci est particulièrement significative et symbolique puisque c'est un autre an de Jubilé, sept ans après le Jubilé 2000. Il se situe aussi à mi-chemin de la réalisation des Objectifs de Développement de l'ONU pour le Millénaire. C'est en 2015 que ces objectifs devraient être réalisés.

...../

Cette année verra aussi le 40ème anniversaire de l'encyclique de Paul VI «*Populorum Progressio*». En relisant ce document 40 ans plus tard, nous pouvons dire qu'il était et est toujours un «signe des temps» dans son appel puissant en faveur de la justice.

Qu'on nous entende bien : la situation présente doit être affrontée courageusement et les injustices qu'elle comporte combattues et vaincues. Le développement exige des transformations audacieuses, profondément novatrices. Des réformes urgentes doivent être entreprises sans retard. (n° 32)

Voici ce que nous vous demandons :

1. Distribuez aux membres de votre congrégation la lettre ci-jointe adressée aux responsables du G-8 ; demandez-leur de l'envoyer à un ou à plusieurs responsables du G-8 (cf. ci-joint il y a une liste de noms et d'adresses).

2. Encouragez vos confrères et consœurs à utiliser dans leur ministère les documents disponibles en anglais, français et espagnol de la « Campagne de mobilisation pour rendre l'aide efficace. Les pauvres ne peuvent pas attendre » sur le site [www.make-aid-work.org](http://www.make-aid-work.org). Ces documents comprennent une carte postale au gouvernement allemand, qui accueillera cette année les membres du G-8.

3. Lisez «*Populorum Progressio*» et discutez avec des amis de sa pertinence pour notre temps.

Merci pour votre participation à cette importante campagne,

En solidarité,

Le Comité de travail pour la Justice Economique, réunissant la Caritas Internationale, le SEDOS, le groupe des Promoteurs de JPIC (Justice, Paix et Intégrité de la Création) à Rome.

## ***Participant in the G-8 Meeting in Germany June 6-8, 2007***

We, members of the Religious Debt Coalition, a group of 83 congregations of Roman Catholic women and men, and *Caritas Internationalis*, with its 162 member organizations worldwide, join our voices with many other groups in again calling the G-8 leaders of the richest industrial nations to cancel the debt of impoverished nations in this Sabbath Year, 2007, the mid-point for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015). We want to remind you that the MDGs were signed by all G-8 nations in the year 2000 – it is the responsibility of G-8 members to act now to honour this social and ethical commitment.

According to Judeo-Christian traditions, the Sabbatical Year, the Year of Jubilee, requires that every seven years debts be cancelled and those enslaved because of debt be freed, restoring equal relations among community members and preventing ongoing exploitation in which the rich accumulate ever more wealth at the expense of the poor.

We see this Sabbatical Year action of the cancellation of debt as essential to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), global commitments to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015. Debt cancellation would free billions of dollars which could, in turn, be used to fund programmes related to the implementation of the MDGs – funds for education, pre-natal care, health, water and its depuration, sanitation services.

Debt cancellation has already positively impacted many poor countries. In Tanzania, primary school fees have been abolished, resulting in a 66% increase in attendance; in Mozambique, children are receiving free immunizations; in Mali, 5,000 teachers are now receiving a monthly salary – all this as a result of debt relief.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, host of the G-8 meeting in Heiligendamm, Germany, has pledged to put world poverty at the centre of the Agenda of the 2007 G-8. We urge you, as a member

of the G-8 group, to do more than simply increase funding for the poor – make debt relief an imperative, so that the excruciating burden of debt which continues the cycle of disease, hunger and death can be broken.

We urge you as a leader of a G-8 nation to implement policies for the cancellation of debt. This action will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, a commitment to reduce poverty and to restore persons to a life worthy of their human dignity.

Yours sincerely,

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## ***Participant de la rencontre du G-8 en Allemagne, 6-8 juin 2007***

Nous, les membres de la Coalition des Religieux et Religieuses Contre la Dette, un groupe de 83 congrégations d'hommes et de femmes catholiques, avec *Caritas Internationalis* et ses 162 organisations membres du monde entier, joignons nos voix à celles de nombreux autres groupes pour appeler de nouveau les gouvernants des nations industrielles les plus riches du G-8 à annuler la dette des pays pauvres en cette septième année, 2007, à mi-chemin du temps imparti à la réalisation des Objectifs de Développement du Millénaire (2000-2015). Nous voudrions vous rappeler qu'en l'an 2000, les ODM ont été signés par tous les pays du G-8 – il incombe donc maintenant aux membres de ce G-8 d'agir pour tenir cet engagement social et éthique.

Selon la tradition judéo-chrétienne, l'Année Sabbatique, Année de Jubilé, veut que tous les sept ans, les dettes soient annulées et toutes les personnes réduites à l'esclavage à cause de leur dette soient libérées, afin de restaurer ainsi des relations d'égalité entre les membres de la communauté et d'empêcher que ne se poursuive une exploitation qui aboutit à ce que les riches accumulent encore plus de richesses aux dépens des pauvres.

En cette Année Sabbatique, nous considérons l'annulation de la dette comme un pas essentiel vers les Objectifs de Développement du Millénaire (ODM), engagements globaux à réduire de moitié l'extrême pauvreté d'ici 2015. L'annulation de la dette libérerait des milliards de dollars qui pourraient alors être utilisés pour financer des programmes liés à l'accomplissement des ODM – pour l'éducation, la protection maternelle et infantile, la santé, l'eau et son assainissement.

L'annulation de la dette a déjà eu un impact positif sur de nombreux pays pauvres. En Tanzanie, les droits d'inscription à l'école ont été supprimés, ce qui a permis une augmentation de fréquentation de 66% ; au Mozambique, les enfants sont désormais vaccinés gratuitement ; au Mali, 5,000 professeurs reçoivent maintenant un salaire mensuel – tout ceci à la suite de l'annulation de la dette.

La Chancelière Allemande Angela Merkel, hôte de la rencontre du G-8 à Heiligendamm, Allemagne, a promis de mettre la pauvreté dans le monde, au centre de l'ordre du jour du G-8 de 2007. Nous vous invitons instamment, comme membres du groupe du G-8, à faire plus que simplement augmenter l'aide aux pays pauvres – considérez l'annulation de la dette comme un impératif, pour cet insupportable fardeau qui continue d'alimenter le cycle de la maladie, de la faim et de la mort, puisse être supprimé.

Nous vous invitons instamment, en tant que gouvernant d'un des pays du G-8 à appliquer les directives d'annulation de la dette. Cette action contribuera à l'accomplissement des Objectifs de Développement du Millénaire, un engagement à réduire la pauvreté et à redonner à chaque personne une vie conforme à sa dignité d'être humain.

Sincèrement vôtre,

## ***Seminar 2007***

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

***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”

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***N.B. The Seminar is fully booked***



*Happy Easter !!!*