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Editorial

On walking around the streets of Rome in the month of September one cannot fail to notice how the place begins to crowd with young religious from all over the world. Universities and police stations are packed with young religious filling up application forms and getting ready to begin their studies at some of the Pontifical Study Centres of the Church. Most of these young religious come from Africa, Asia and South America. They are eager to learn and experience the life of the Church at its Centre, Rome. They bring their respective culture, experience and hopes, and they seem a little overcome by the aura of the Holy City. Surely they will learn much and find many books to read. But ... will they forget and exchange their own cultural expressions for new ones? Will they be able to 'interiorise' and integrate what they learn with their own cultural spirituality?

Today we have chosen to look at **Christianity in Asia** mainly considering the deep social transformation that has been taking place over the past forty years.

Felix Wilfred, "*Christianisme asiatique et modernité*" offers a review of the document 'Gaudium et Spes' in the light of the fast socio-economic transformation, modernization and globalisation experimented by Asian Countries and the impact this has had on their cultural values. 'Christianism' in Asia is full of life and in a process of evolving away from 'Euro-centrism'. It should seize the opportunity to contribute to transforming the modern political order.

Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo, OMI, calls on religious to be "*Witnesses and Prophets Building Up the Local Church*". Proclamation of the Gospel by way of inculturation, the 'preferential option' for the poor and the call to be holy are the three dimensions proposed to religious as an integral part of their ministry.

Dan Xier invites us to take "*A Look at Religious Life in China*". After 35 years of blackout religious life is beginning to grow in China again. Many young women eagerly, generously and painfully group together to learn the meaning of religious life in China today. They are true examples of how the Spirit guides and makes the seed grow.

Judette Gallares, RC, concretises the situation of the women religious communities in China in a concise and comprehensive "*Report: China Mission*". Here Gallares reports on the life of the young sisters in their formation houses; what they do and what they learn, ending with some practical proposals for their formation needs.

From India, **Lazar Stanislaus, SVD**, shares with us his reflection on the Mission of the Church. "*Mission of the Church: A Liberation Theology Perspective*" sees this mission as a way 'to participate in Jesus' mission and to continue to actualise the Reign of God that Jesus brought by announcing, serving and witnessing to it to the people in our midst'.

From Sri Lanka, **Vicente Cajilig, OP**, reflects on the needs and challenges of 'adjusting' theology to the realities of the Sri Lankan context. "*Theology in Sri Lankan Context*" presents some basic principles for theological renewal for further discussion and study.

Fr Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP
SEDOS Executive Director

Christianisme asiatique et modernité

Quarante ans après 'Gaudium et Spes'

- Felix Wilfred* -

Des développements significatifs ont eu lieu en Asie après le Concile de Vatican II et la publication du document *Gaudium et Spes* (GS). Différentes parties d'Asie ont connu des développements rapides et surprenants dans les domaines politique, économique, culturel et social. Plusieurs pays asiatiques sont passés d'une situation de sous-développement à celle de nations en croissance des plus rapides, entrant en concurrence avec les pays développés occidentaux. Ce processus de modernisation et de mondialisation a créé de nombreuses contradictions dans la société asiatique.

Le christianisme asiatique, pour sa part, a fait, sinon des pas de géant, du moins des avancées significatives vers une plus grande connaissance de lui-même et de sa mission par rapport à l'accélération des progrès du continent. Il nous suffit de penser au parcours que des organismes officiels, telle la Fédération des Conférences épiscopales d'Asie (FABC) ou la Conférence chrétienne d'Asie (CCA), ont pu faire — tout autant que de nombreux mouvements chrétiens — face à la modernisation et à la mondialisation qui se développaient en Asie.

C'est donc à partir d'une Asie en transformation rapide et d'un christianisme asiatique en pleine évolution que nous souhaitons revisiter le document conciliaire *Gaudium et Spes*. Nous réfléchissons sur la signification de son esprit, de son contenu et de son orientation dans une situation asiatique en évolution et nous tenterons d'identifier ses limites. Dans une seconde partie, nous nous demanderons quels peuvent être, à l'avenir, les signes de la rencontre entre le christianisme asiatique et la modernité.

1^{ÈRE} PARTIE :

L'ASIE REVISITE *GAUDIUM ET SPES*

Un document de mission par excellence

En dépit de ses limites, *Gaudium et Spes* est probablement le document missionnaire le plus significatif pour l'Asie, quoique la mission ne soit pas son thème explicite. Il le demeure même après quarante ans. C'est un document qui fournit la base permettant un dialogue sérieux avec l'Asie.

Tout d'abord, sa méthode, son esprit et sa vision trouvent une résonance profonde avec les Asiatiques. Pour une simple raison, le triomphalisme qui est ressenti par les religions voisines comme une marque d'arrogance est absent de GS. Un esprit authentique de dialogue et un sens de la modestie, qui admet que l'Église n'a pas la solution de tous les problèmes de l'humanité, joints à un grand désir de coopération avec les autres, donnent le ton exact d'une approche adéquate de la mission en Asie. Le fait qu'un engagement de mission sérieux sur le continent asiatique ait été poursuivi davantage dans l'esprit de GS que dans celui d'aucun autre document est la preuve de sa validité actuelle pour le christianisme asiatique.

Deuxièmement, dans une perspective plus théologique, ce document fournit une approche plus significative de la mission parce qu'il n'oppose pas le «naturel» au «surnaturel», le naturel étant la réalité actuelle de la vie. Considérer les questions économiques, politiques, culturelles et autres comme intimement liées au processus de salut et d'émancipation équivaut à reconnaître en même temps le caractère

religieux et théologique de la réalité actuelle de la vie. Les problèmes d'économie, de politique et de culture ne sont pas de simples extensions de la foi chrétienne, ou des domaines dans lesquels on peut pratiquer sa foi, comme s'ils n'avaient rien à voir avec. À partir de cette situation, il est possible de construire une approche d'intégration, c'est-à-dire une approche qui mêle les réalités temporelles au spirituel. Ce pourrait être une sorte de résurgence de l'augustinisme politique. *Gaudium et Spes* ne suit pas cette voie. Ce qu'il fait est de relier le caractère religieux et théologique des réalités temporelles à l'affirmation de leur autonomie. Les conséquences en sont très importantes pour la compréhension et la pratique de la mission en Asie.

Un troisième aspect significatif de ce document pour l'Asie est la reconnaissance du rôle de l'homme et de l'agentement de ce rôle, se démarquant franchement des premières orientations qu'a connues l'histoire du christianisme. L'esprit de cette nouvelle orientation se retrouve dans le document traitant de la liberté religieuse (*Nostra Aetate*). Dans la première approche classique (qui est encore pratiquée de nos jours dans de nombreuses communautés chrétiennes), ce qui domine est que la vérité est perçue comme un ordre «objectif», complètement dissociée de l'homme, un ordre auquel il suffit d'adhérer. En termes plus simples, *GS* ne cède pas à la tentation d'une approche qui dissocie la vérité de la liberté. Cela a des conséquences sérieuses pour l'Asie, particulièrement dans ses relations avec les religions voisines, et sa collaboration avec elles pour la transformation des sociétés asiatiques. Une approche fondée simplement sur un ordre «objectif» aura toujours tendance à être dominante et doctrinaire — voire autoritaire — et fermée au dialogue qui n'est possible que lorsqu'est reconnu le droit de l'homme — individuellement ou collectivement — de rechercher la vérité dans la liberté. Cette dernière approche que préconise le document n'abandonne pas cette recherche de la vérité, mais il fait entrer en ligne de compte l'importance du rôle de l'homme et de la fidélité à sa conscience. Autrefois, cela n'existait pas sous prétexte que l'erreur n'avait pas le droit d'exister.

Nous pouvons discerner dans les orientations de *Gaudium et Spes* les bases d'une profonde théologie des religions. *Nostra Aetate*, ce document qui traite directement des relations du christianisme avec les autres religions, traite ce sujet dans une perspective théologique. Mais les bases anthropologiques et les préalables d'une telle théologie se trouvent, à mon avis, dans *Gaudium et Spes* et dans *Dignitatis Humanae*, qui traitent de la liberté religieuse. C'est capital pour le christianisme asiatique aujourd'hui et dans l'avenir. En mettant en lumière le rôle de la liberté et de l'homme, *GS* répond à la fois aux défis de la modernité et aux préalables d'une «*théologie de la religion qui soit en résonance avec les Asiatiques*». Il ne peut pas y avoir de compréhension correcte de la mission en Asie sans faire entrer en ligne de compte les deux facteurs importants que sont la modernité et les autres religions.

Un quatrième domaine significatif dans *GS* concerne l'affirmation de la destinée universelle des biens terrestres. Bien que cet aspect des choses ait été présent dans la tradition chrétienne et dans l'enseignement des Pères de l'Église, le fait que le Concile de Vatican II le mette en lumière dans les circonstances présentes est quelque chose de remarquable. La possession en elle-même est relativisée par rapport à la destinée universelle des biens de la terre. C'est un antidote à l'individualisme grandissant sous l'égide de la modernité et des philosophies de la concurrence et de l'autosatisfaction que développe la mondialisation. Dans ce domaine, nous pouvons faire référence aux coutumes et aux traditions, que cite le document, et qui existent chez certains peuples qui ont une vie communautaire forte, avec un grand sens de la solidarité.

Dans les sociétés les moins développées, il arrive souvent que la répartition des biens soit partiellement faite par un système de coutumes et de traditions garantissant un minimum à chacun... On ne peut pas faire table rase de coutumes respectables (*GS*, n. 69).

On peut penser aux tribus aborigènes de l'Asie qui ont incorporé de tels systèmes dans leur culture. Ils constituent une ressource importante pour ces peuples asiatiques, leur permettant de répondre à

l'individualisme grossier de la modernité, encore accentué par la mondialisation.

Les limites de Gaudium et Spes – un point de vue asiatique

La première limite de taille de *GS* se trouve dans son acception de la modernité. Cette acception remonte à l'héritage de l'Europe des Lumières et à sa conception du monde et particulièrement à son affirmation de la raison critique. *GS* est une réponse à un «monde adulte», qui a atteint sa majorité : le monde moderne. On peut étudier la «majorité» d'après ses conséquences historiques et culturelles. Historiquement, elles impliquent que le monde moderne n'est plus un enfant sous la tutelle de l'Église, mais qu'il s'est libéré de cet état de dépendance et de contrôle. D'un point de vue culturel et philosophique, elles signifient que le monde moderne est sorti de cet état par l'exercice de la raison critique. La technologie moderne, la science et tous les autres merveilleux développements sont vus comme venant de la raison critique, dominant et contrôlant la nature et sa puissance. En bref, la clé de la définition et de l'interprétation de la modernité est la raison critique, qui est aussi le principe conducteur du progrès humain. C'est à cette sorte de modernité et de progrès humain que répond le document.

En regardant le passé de l'Asie dans une perspective asiatique, nous remarquons que cette interprétation des progrès du monde (l'optimisme des Lumières) est insuffisante. Ce qui lui manque est l'exercice de la raison morale. Aussi longtemps qu'elle sera absente, le monde moderne ne pourra être considéré comme étant arrivé à sa majorité — un préalable dont part le raisonnement de *GS*. Que le monde ait dû répondre à la modernité, créée par la raison critique, a été une nécessité historique. C'est parfaitement compréhensible dans le contexte de l'immense écart existant entre la foi et le monde moderne. En face d'une rationalité incomplète, ce que recherche l'Asie est une «majorité» par l'exercice d'une raison morale, qui s'exprime par une quête éthique et humaine.

L'Occident a une tradition de critique de la modernité. Cette critique a été associée avec la prétendue «*théorie critique*» (Hoy et

McCarthy, 1994), ou, dans ses formes plus radicales, avec quelques versions de la théorie post-moderne. La critique asiatique, d'un autre côté, est dirigée contre la faillite de la modernité dans ses réponses aux demandes morales de l'humanité, spécialement celles des plus vulnérables, et à l'absence de l'esprit de solidarité et de responsabilité collective. Ceux qui critiquent la modernité en Asie ne sont pas, d'abord, des théoriciens, mais seulement les victimes de la modernité et de la mondialisation. Du fait de leur situation d'exploités, de marginalisés et d'exclus, les pauvres d'Asie sont les instruments les plus efficaces de la critique, qui met constamment au défi les ambiguïtés de la modernisation et de la mondialisation, construites sur la science et la technologie, sans aucune considération pour la responsabilité morale et la solidarité.

Une deuxième limite est le manque d'attention donnée aux questions des conflits, des luttes et des contradictions, en essayant de comprendre la modernité. Cela n'est pas surprenant dans la mesure où la préoccupation majeure du document est de combler le fossé entre la foi et le monde moderne. Approchant la modernité sous cet angle, le Concile de Vatican II s'est trouvé devant la nécessité de voir les réalités du monde avec optimisme, après s'être montré pendant une longue période plutôt négatif devant les développements de la modernité. De plus, le document est une tentative pour dépasser «l'augustinisme» qui subordonne les réalités temporelles à la réalité supérieure du surnaturel pour les amener dans «la Cité de Dieu». Ce contexte explique aussi l'importance donnée à l'autonomie des réalités temporelles, d'une part, et le peu d'attention, d'autre part, aux données incontournables des conflits, des luttes et des contradictions. Ces derniers aspects, que nous ne trouvons pas dans le document, sont importants à l'heure actuelle, pour que l'Asie donne une réponse à la modernité. Par ailleurs, *GS* n'apporte aucune considération aux questions cruciales du sens de la vie en Asie, que sont la pauvreté, l'ethnie, la race, les conflits religieux, les théories du genre (sexuel) et l'exploitation économique.²

Troisièmement, si nous entrons plus profondément dans cette question, roche de la société par *GS* est celle «du bien commun»

atteint grâce à la discussion et au consensus.³ L'approche «du bien commun» ne fait pas justice des expériences en Asie et dans d'autres pays du monde développé. L'orientation de base de l'approche «du bien commun» est l'harmonie. Elle ne prend pas en compte l'inégalité des conflits sociaux et des luttes de pouvoir, non plus que l'exclusion systématique de peuples et de groupes de la participation et du consensus. On peut le voir dans l'expérience asiatique des peuples marginalisés et systématiquement exclus comme les *dalits* («des intouchables»), les aborigènes et les groupes tribaux. Malheureusement, les préalables d'une approche «du bien commun», grâce à la discussion et au consensus, sont encore absents de la plupart des sociétés asiatiques. Ce que nous avons sont des expressions différentes de la centralisation, de la hiérarchisation et de l'exclusion, selon les sociétés asiatiques concernées. La compréhension catholique traditionnelle de l'État est liée à la recherche du bien commun. Cette doctrine traditionnelle se retrouve dans *GS*,⁴ mais l'idée de bien commun est vague. Elle est un point équidistant de l'individualisme et du collectivisme. Mais elle ne prend pas en compte les divisions profondes et les conflits qui caractérisent les sociétés asiatiques — qui sont encore aggravés par le processus de mondialisation. Sur ces problèmes de l'Asie, *GS* est de peu d'aide.

Finalement, il faut porter au crédit de *GS* le fait qu'elle ait rapproché l'Église du monde dans un esprit de dialogue, en reconnaissant que l'Église, seule, ne peut pas résoudre tous les problèmes de l'humanité. Le contexte de cet esprit et de cette affirmation est probablement dû au rôle des mouvements de pensée et des idéologies — y compris l'athéisme — dans la transformation du monde. Aussi important qu'il soit, il manque quand même quelque chose à ce document, à savoir l'affirmation du rôle des traditions religieuses dans la transformation du monde et la nécessité de collaborer avec elles pour y arriver. C'est un domaine dans lequel le christianisme asiatique peut être d'une grande aide, grâce aux expériences qui lui sont propres.

2^{ÈME} PARTIE :

LES INDICATEURS VERS L'AVENIR

Les premières rencontres du christianisme asiatique avec la modernité eurent lieu dans des circonstances historiques et dans des conditions différentes. Alors que nous ne manquerons pas de noter une certaine continuité dans le modèle de ces rencontres du christianisme avec la modernité, il nous faut reconnaître que ce que nous voyons actuellement fait référence à une nouvelle étape de rencontre.

Le christianisme comme point d'entrée dans la modernité

Il peut paraître étrange, mais c'est ainsi : le christianisme en Occident a été dissocié de la modernité et s'est même trouvé en conflit avec elle, alors qu'en Asie, il y a été intimement associé. Pour le dire plus simplement, pour les Asiatiques, être chrétiens c'est être moderne. De façon générale, le christianisme, en tant que culture et tradition, a été bien accueilli en Asie comme ouverture sur la modernité. Dans cet exposé, nous ne souhaitons pas savoir s'il y a continuité entre le christianisme et la modernité en Occident, ou si la modernité résulte d'une obsolescence du christianisme, ou encore si la modernité est une extrapolation du christianisme et de son esprit dans la réalité de la vie.

Remarquons plutôt que la perception des chrétiens asiatiques, dans le passé comme aujourd'hui, se traduit par une continuité plutôt que par une césure entre le christianisme et la modernité. C'est ce qui a suscité son intérêt. Lorsque Matteo Ricci a présenté ses respects à l'empereur de Chine et lui a offert deux pendules, l'intérêt était davantage tourné vers les pendules que vers tout autre chose. Quand les pendules se sont arrêtées, il a trouvé en Ricci un réparateur hors pair qui l'intéressait davantage que toutes les doctrines du Ciel qu'il pouvait lui annoncer. De la même façon, les cartes de Ricci suscitaient une grande curiosité. Nous voyons aussi combien les Chinois admiraient le missionnaire astronome Adam Schall von Bell lorsqu'il a prédit une éclipse entre 1623 et 1624, ce que les experts chinois ne savaient

pas faire (Neill 1990, p. 160). L'histoire nous apprend également que l'empereur Yongzheng, qui expulsa tous les missionnaires chrétiens, autorisa ceux d'entre eux qui étaient astronomes ou savants à rester. Ce schéma élémentaire d'une association entre le christianisme et les découvertes scientifiques et techniques semble encore valable à l'heure actuelle pour les «chrétiens culturels», pour autant que leur intérêt y trouve son compte, ces chrétiens qui lisent et étudient avidement le christianisme — c'est-à-dire, si tant est que l'abondance de la littérature qui prolifère sur le sujet soit une indication. En dehors du contexte idéologique de cette tendance,⁵ on trouve également la considération pragmatique de l'affinité entre le christianisme et les sciences et technologies occidentales.

Si nous nous tournons du côté de l'Inde, la conversion en masse des *dalits* et des castes inférieures signifie l'entrée dans le monde de la modernité et de ses institutions (éducation, santé, mobilité, égalité devant la loi, etc.). Ils se sont trouvés ainsi libérés du joug de la hiérarchie oppressive des castes. Aux yeux des groupes marginalisés, l'aspiration aux biens matériels et l'entrée dans le monde de la modernité leur étaient facilitées par le christianisme.⁶ Ce n'est pas tant par l'annonce de l'Évangile que par des moyens indirects que le christianisme a pu entamer la société. Les nombreuses institutions éducatives ou hospitalières, les réformes légales et autres en sont les exemples.

Mais nous nous trouvons aujourd'hui devant une nouvelle rencontre avec la modernité et sa forme évoluée de la mondialisation avec toutes ses ambiguïtés et ses contradictions, mais aussi avec les perspectives qu'elle ouvre. Il nous faut beaucoup réfléchir à cette nouvelle étape de la rencontre. Laissez-moi en souligner quelques aspects dans la situation actuelle, éminemment mouvante.

La société civile – le terrain de rencontre

Dans la plupart des pays asiatiques, la situation du christianisme est celle de l'isolement. Cela peut venir des préjugés, des

discriminations et de l'opposition qu'ont rencontrés les communautés chrétiennes dans la société du fait de l'origine «étrangère» de l'Église ainsi que de sa connotation coloniale. Mais il y a également des raisons intrinsèques qui ont transformé l'isolement de la communauté en repli sur soi. C'est un fait certain que le christianisme n'a fait que peu d'efforts véritables pour toucher la société et dialoguer avec elle. Le type d'engagement des communautés chrétiennes a donné l'impression qu'elles agissaient en parallèle avec les autres institutions, comme l'État. Le message tacite transmis par l'Église est qu'elle peut vivre par elle-même, sans avoir besoin des autres, et bien souvent, elle se considère meilleure que les autres. Nous pouvons donner sur ce point les exemples de l'éducation et des soins, domaines dans lesquels le christianisme a été traditionnellement impliqué. Les Églises chrétiennes ne sauront pas lire «des signes du temps» si elles gardent leur caractère fortement institutionnalisé, en dépit même de quelques adaptations marginales. Le christianisme pourrait faire plus pour répondre aux défis de la modernité et de la mondialisation. Choisir les pauvres dans cet âge de la modernité et de la mondialisation demande de nouveaux moyens, de nouvelles stratégies, d'autres intermédiaires (Wilfred ; 2003). C'est là que nous prenons conscience de la société civile et de ses possibilités d'intermédiation pour trouver des réponses efficaces.

La société civile est l'espace ouvert aux citoyens pour se rencontrer, discuter, faire connaître leurs avis et aussi, critiquer ou contester (Seligman 1992 ; Cohen et Arato 1999 ; Chandhoke 1995 ; Kaviraj et Khilnani 2001). La société civile, ou sphère publique, est d'une importance cruciale pour la démocratisation de la société à tous les niveaux, pour faire entendre la voix des pauvres et des marginaux et pour contrôler les excès de l'État. Les contours de la société civile et son mode de fonctionnement sont très variés et différents de pays à pays, suivant la nature de la société, sa composition et son histoire. La participation et le dialogue dans la société civile peuvent aider les chrétiens et les communautés chrétiennes à apporter leur contribution et ainsi avoir un impact sur la société et ses transformations.

La société civile en Asie donne une image multiple. Dans certains pays, elle est apparue comme étant très active, dans d'autres, dormante. Dans d'autres pays encore, elle est pratiquement absente du fait de régimes centralisés et autoritaires. Le devoir élémentaire des chrétiens engagés est de contribuer par leur participation à la création d'une société civile là où elle n'existe pas et de la rendre active là où elle existe. Par leur engagement dans la société civile, les chrétiens peuvent apporter leur contribution dans les importants domaines que sont l'exercice de la démocratie et la défense de la dignité et des droits de l'homme. Ils peuvent y faire des discours, former des opinions, en utilisant les moyens modernes de communication des médias. Tout ceci est réellement nécessaire devant la situation résultant de la modernité et de la mondialisation qui font que les pauvres d'Asie sont de plus en plus exploités et déplacés comme des émigrés ou des réfugiés. Un tel engagement dans la société civile est, en effet, un acte de prophétisme vis-à-vis des citoyens qui sont en dehors de leurs frontières religieuses. Les négociations sur le terrain de la société civile sont le plus sûr moyen de briser l'isolement général et persistant des communautés chrétiennes en Asie.

La société civile offre au christianisme l'occasion de faire entendre une voix critique dans le domaine politique. Étant donné la position minoritaire des communautés chrétiennes asiatiques, la confrontation avec l'État sur le terrain de la justice peut avoir de conséquences graves, si elle est faite au nom de la religion. Au contraire, si elle est faite dans la société civile avec d'autres citoyens, particulièrement avec des pauvres et des marginaux, elle aura l'effet majeur de tenir l'État en échec et de le mettre au défi de remplir ses obligations. Après tout, la totalité du bien de la société ne s'identifie pas avec l'État ni avec son rôle. Ce n'est pas un problème d'interférence directe avec l'État (compte tenu de l'indépendance des réalités temporelles, y compris celles de l'ordre politique) mais une question d'engagement pour le bien de la société, qui va au-delà de la sphère de l'État. Le christianisme asiatique doit aussi saisir l'occasion que lui offre la société civile de contribuer à la transformation de l'ordre politique moderne.

L'engagement dans la société civile peut aider le christianisme asiatique à dépasser les points faibles qui résultent de sa position minoritaire (Wilfred ; 2005). La situation minoritaire n'est pas nécessairement la signification d'une moindre capacité à apporter une contribution à la société. D'un autre côté, le problème des minorités et celui du droit des minorités a besoin de la médiation de la société civile. La société civile peut aussi aider à projeter une image correcte du christianisme dans ces temps modernes. En fait, il y a un décalage béant entre la vie d'engagement des communautés chrétiennes et l'image extérieure du christianisme. À l'exception de la marque d'appréciation méritoire du travail des chrétiens dans les domaines de l'éducation et des soins médicaux et humanitaires, l'image extérieure du christianisme est celle de son association avec le colonialisme et l'impérialisme. Participer activement à la société civile est le moyen de communiquer au public une nouvelle image du christianisme asiatique, et par là même, de dissiper les malentendus en ce qui concerne la mission.

Une réponse critique commune à la modernité et à la mondialisation

Le christianisme avec son immense héritage spirituel et sa longue histoire sera un acteur important et une force en répondant de façon critique à la modernité — une réponse déjà donnée par les victimes. Cela serait plus en accord avec la vision du Concile de Vatican II. Une position conservatrice en face des défis de la modernité asiatique pourrait isoler le christianisme en le séparant des réalités actuelles. En d'autres termes, au lieu d'adopter ce qui pourrait être une approche centrée sur l'Église, le christianisme a besoin d'adopter une approche de collaboration. Il est plus important de faire la route avec les autres que d'essayer d'atteindre le but avant eux, ce qui pourrait être aussi une position égoïste. Il est plus important de travailler avec les autres, même si les choses ne sont pas parfaitement faites, que d'essayer de faire tout parfaitement par soi-même. Si le christianisme en Asie adopte ce genre d'attitude, il ne s'exposera pas à l'isolement, il ne le sera pas non plus à la tentation du triomphalisme, à l'attitude du «plus saint que toi». En bref, en face de la crise

déclenchée par la modernité et par la mondialisation, le christianisme doit répondre conjointement avec les autres à une situation historique partagée en commun.

Ce que nous venons de dire pourrait être confirmé si nous regardions cette affaire plus simplement comme un problème de «*relation entre la religion et la modernité et la mondialisation*». Peter Beyer note, dans une étude intéressante, que, dans le temps présent d'une spécialisation croissante, les religions qui se voient comme un tout n'ont plus de place pour fonctionner. Elles pourront bien évidemment continuer leurs rôles traditionnels (rites, adoration, dévotion), mais elles n'auront plus d'influence effective sur les autres systèmes sociaux, ni dans la sphère publique. Il met ainsi en opposition la «fonction» de la religion et sa «performance».

Dans le contexte actuel, fonction se réfère à la «pure» communication religieuse. Par contraste, la performance religieuse apparaît quand la religion «s'applique» à des problèmes générés dans d'autres systèmes, où ils ne sont pas résolus, ou simplement ignorés. Ces problèmes sont, par exemple, la pauvreté économique, l'oppression politique, l'éclatement de la famille, la dégradation de l'environnement, l'identification personnelle. Par des relations de performance, la religion assoit son importance sur les aspects «profanes» de la vie (Beyer 2000, p. 80).

Une option viable pour une présence effective de la religion est l'alliance avec les forces sociales et les mouvements d'opposition. A la lumière de cette réflexion, l'approche qui serait la plus indiquée serait celle qui se concentrerait sur les implications morales et éthiques de la modernité, étudiées et analysées conjointement avec toutes les nouvelles forces sociales qui vont vers une plus grande humanisation du continent asiatique. En Asie, les réponses les plus effectives à la modernité et à la mondialisation viennent des institutions, mais elles leur sont en fait fournies par les mouvements élémentaires qui s'attaquent aux problèmes locaux qui touchent à la vie du peuple. La qualité de la réponse du christianisme asiatique à la modernité et à la mondialisation dépendra donc beaucoup de

l'intensité de sa collaboration avec ces mouvements élémentaires qui incarnent les aspirations des victimes du système.

Une théologie asiatique des religions en réponse à la modernité

Le maintien d'une théologie asiatique des religions n'est pas seulement un problème théologique. C'est un problème de modernité, et en fait, c'est une réponse à quelques-uns des traits de la modernité qui influe la religion et ses pratiques. Une de ses caractéristiques majeures est la relativité (ce qui n'est pas la même chose que le relativisme) comprise comme un principe dynamique d'interaction mutuelle qui comprend naturellement le domaine religieux. Ce que la théologie asiatique des religions pourrait faire est de contribuer à une vie harmonieuse de paix et de tolérance. Une théologie des religions erronée est une dangereuse source de fondamentalisme, de bigoterie et d'obscurantisme (anti-moderne ou pré-moderne), qui n'est pas respectueuse des sentiments religieux et des manifestations des peuples de fois différentes. Une théologie des religions dénuée de sensibilité est la source de conflits et de dissensions sociales, surtout en Asie, où les convulsions sont de base ethnique, linguistique et religieuse.

Donc, une théologie asiatique des religions sera critique de toute position théologique basée sur le «dogme de l'intolérance». En Occident, la naissance de la modernité a coïncidé avec l'essai du siècle des Lumières de dépasser les conflits religieux en mettant en avant les idées de tolérance et de paix (Wolfinger 1984, pp. 63-94). Cette idée a été développée plus avant dans des études comparatives sur les religions, menées selon des méthodes scientifiques modernes. Quand Vatican II a publié le document sur la liberté religieuse (*Nostra Aetate*), c'était une réponse tardive à l'un des défis des Lumières et de la modernité. Actuellement, la théologie asiatique des religions devrait se caractériser par un esprit de liberté religieuse et une recherche scientifique. Cela a des conséquences importantes pour la vie politique et sociale dans les pays d'Asie. Si toutes les théologies doivent

être responsables socialement, combien plus encore la théologie des religions.

La conscience de la diversité et de la pluralité (dans la vision du monde, dans les modes de vie, les expressions et les pratiques religieuses) est une autre caractéristique importante de la modernité. Mais de façon intéressante, cela a été la tradition millénaire des cultures et des civilisations asiatiques. En ce sens, l'Asie, par son affirmation claire de la pluralité et de la diversité, a été dans la modernité et la post-modernité depuis des millénaires ! Ce qui n'est arrivé en Occident qu'à travers des luttes et des conflits s'est imprimé naturellement dans les civilisations asiatiques. Nous pouvons ainsi parler d'une convergence de la modernité et des traditions asiatiques dans les problèmes de la diversité et de la tolérance, compris comme des réalités positives et interactives. La théologie asiatique des religions devrait ainsi être développée jusqu'aux exigences de la modernité, pour pouvoir répondre à l'esprit de l'héritage asiatique.

Il existe un deuxième aspect aux relations de la théologie des religions avec la modernité. C'est que toutes les traditions religieuses pourraient et devraient collaborer sur la modernité. GS voit la modernité essentiellement selon une perspective de l'Église. Le titre même du document est : *«La Constitution pastorale de l'Église dans le monde moderne»*. Il n'entre pas dans le champ de pensée de ce document de voir que la relation au monde moderne est de la responsabilité de toutes les religions. Nous avons compris en Asie que l'Église pouvait apporter une contribution beaucoup plus grande si elle se rapprochait des peuples de fois différentes. Faire face à la modernité en commun demande une théologie des religions qui soit au diapason de cette urgente nécessité des temps présents. Cela ne sera possible que par une reformulation de la sotériologie chrétienne traditionnelle et la compréhension de la mission et de la conversion.

Les études chrétiennes : une discipline à plusieurs tonalités

Nous avons besoin aujourd'hui d'une nouvelle discipline, à savoir, les Études chrétiennes, qui pourrait être une discipline à

plusieurs tonalités — un point de rencontre des nombreuses préoccupations et des nombreux problèmes relatifs au christianisme asiatique et à la modernité. Il me semble qu'une telle discipline est le vrai besoin du moment. Elle aura différentes frontières avec le christianisme dans les différentes religions et dans ses relations avec la société au sens large sur des questions spécifiques. Néanmoins, nous pouvons déjà imaginer certaines grandes lignes de ses orientations générales dans notre contexte asiatique.

Les problèmes et les questions auxquelles doit répondre un programme d'études chrétiennes sont celles qui ne sont pas correctement abordées par la théologie, la phénoménologie ou la sociologie des religions. Les études chrétiennes ne devront pas être une discipline poursuivant une approche purement confessionnelle dans le domaine de l'étude du christianisme. Elles comprendront l'étude du monde chrétien dans des perspectives historiques, culturelles, théologiques, sociologiques et phénoménologiques. Mais elles devront être encore plus que cela. Dans les sociétés pluriculturelles et pluri-religieuses, de plus en plus de gens aimeraient avoir une compréhension du christianisme, telle qu'elle se développe dans la société au milieu de débats intenses et dans les expériences religieuses des peuples de fois différentes.⁷ Cette discipline abordera des problèmes qui engageront le christianisme dans une relation avec la modernité, la mondialisation, la société civile et la sphère publique. Une discipline qui développerait une telle interaction avec la société serait capable, d'une part, d'aider les chrétiens à développer l'art des limites et, d'autre part, à rendre les personnes d'autres traditions religieuses plus à l'aise et à l'unisson de ses questions, de ses problèmes et de ses préoccupations.

Sous cet angle, une des fonctions importantes des études chrétiennes, telles que je les imagine, serait de focaliser l'attention des gens d'autres traditions religieuses sur l'interprétation du christianisme, des vérités chrétiennes, et de la spiritualité en général. Cette discipline prendrait aussi en compte leurs réflexions critiques sur le christianisme et son mode de présence dans les sociétés asiatiques en

modernisation. Enfin, elle aiderait à développer, d'un point de vue académique, une compréhension plus profonde et plus critique du christianisme, pendant que d'un point de vue pratique, elle encouragerait l'harmonie et la compréhension entre les religions. Dans ce sens, elle rendrait également grand service en stimulant la réflexion théologique dans le vaste horizon d'une Asie se modernisant et se globalisant très vite.

CONCLUSION

Vatican II a été vu en Asie surtout sur le plan culturel. En conséquence, le problème de l'inculturation a pris une place très importante durant les quarante ans de la période post-conciliaire. Le défi pour l'Asie du Concile de Vatican II dépasse largement le problème de la culture, qui pourrait amener — en dépit de toutes bonnes raisons de ne pas le faire — le christianisme à tourner en rond et à ne se préoccuper que de sa seule survie. Relier le christianisme à la modernité est une incitation à étendre l'approche du christianisme à la culture et à voir les sociétés asiatiques dans leur dynamisme et leur histoire qui évoluent vers de nouvelles interrogations, de nouveaux problèmes et de nouveaux horizons.⁸ Une telle approche est évidemment plus large et plus proche de ce que connaît actuellement l'Asie et de la compréhension de la mission dans ce continent.

Il nous faut répondre de façon critique aux défis de la modernité et de la mondialisation. Ce n'est malheureusement pas ce qui se produit. Cependant, il est réjouissant de voir que c'est ce qui passe à une toute petite échelle, mais de façon intense, au niveau élémentaire dans les communautés chrétiennes engagées. Ce qu'elles vivent donne de bons indices pour comprendre la relation du christianisme asiatique à la modernité. Cette relation est conduite dans de nouvelles directions non prévues par *Gaudium et Spes*, si riche par ailleurs de ses autres réalisations.

Il est intéressant de noter qu'alors qu'en Occident la modernité a tendance à provoquer un processus d'aliénation au christianisme, en Asie, la modernité amène un grand nombre d'Asiatiques à s'en rapprocher. Il s'y développe une recherche croissante des valeurs éthiques et même de

la «transcendance» pour répondre à la crise que provoque la modernité dans la vie de beaucoup de gens. Dans certains pays, et particulièrement dans ceux de l'Asie de l'Est, les gens se tournent vers le christianisme, parce que, à leurs yeux, la modernité est associée intimement avec le christianisme, qui peut offrir une solution à la crise de la modernité et de la mondialisation. Ils recherchent dans le christianisme les moyens de dépasser cette crise, même s'ils n'appartiennent pas, au sens traditionnel, à la confession chrétienne. Ce qui se passe est la tentative des Asiatiques de découvrir par eux-mêmes dans le christianisme un système de valeurs, une éthique et des orientations qui peuvent les aider à rencontrer la modernité. L'intérêt croissant des «chrétiens culturels» en Chine et dans d'autres pays d'Asie est, en quelque sorte, la manifestation de cette recherche.

Finalemment, une des grandes contributions de *Gaudium et Spes* est la compréhension qu'il a donnée du christianisme, qui veut apprendre beaucoup du monde et de la société. En fait, ce document, comme celui sur la liberté religieuse (*Nostra Aetate*) sont des exemples de l'influence que l'histoire et ses développements ont exercé sur la pensée de l'Église. Seul un christianisme qui sera désireux d'apprendre quelque chose des réalités asiatiques, de ses traditions séculaires et de son histoire sacrée, pourra attirer l'attention des Asiatiques. Le sens de l'Église dans l'Asie de demain dépendra des ouvertures morales et éthiques qu'il apportera dans les structures traditionnelles et les modes de vie des sociétés asiatiques. Pour y arriver, nous aurons à être à l'écoute des voix de l'Asie dans ses différentes langues et modes d'expression. Seul un christianisme qui s'efforce d'apprendre sera capable d'apporter sa contribution aux sociétés modernes en développement du continent asiatique.

Notes

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¹ Il suffit de penser aux débats de 1950 sur le «catholicisme politique» le «catholicisme d'État» ou «l'Espagne» du général Franco — sans parler de la chrétienté médiévale (cf. Congar 1966 :312-32).

² Cf. *Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century*, Office for Human Development, FABC, Manila, n.d.

³ Pour le contexte de ce concept, son histoire et son usage dans la théologie et la tradition chrétienne, voir Hollenbach, 2002.

⁴ «La communauté politique existe bien pour ce bien commun» (GS, 74).

⁵ L'origine de ce phénomène de «chrétiens culturels» remonte aux intellectuels persécutés sous la Révolution culturelle. Il y avait, d'une part, une déception quant à l'idéologie marxiste communiste et, d'autre part, de sérieux doutes sur la capacité de l'héritage chinois traditionnel à répondre à la crise de la société chinoise. Cette situation culturelle et intellectuel particulière les ont fait se tourner vers le christianisme et sa tradition philosophique et théologique, qui leur a paru plus apte à répondre aux questions de base de la vie humaine dans un monde de techniques et de sciences (cf. Evers 2003, pp. 125 et ss).

⁶ La position d'Ambedkar, le plus important chef *dalit* des temps modernes, s'établissait selon ces principes. Il acceptait la modernité et ses institutions (la démocratie, les systèmes éducatifs et légaux, etc.) comme un moyen important de la libération des intouchables de l'Inde du joug durable de l'oppression des castes dirigeantes traditionnelles. Le christianisme était vu par beaucoup de *dalits* comme le médiateur de la modernité (cf. Omvedt 1994).

⁷ Il eut un intérêt croissant en Chine pour l'étude du christianisme. Voir Xinping 2003:49-61.

⁸ Cette sorte d'approche était bien intentionnée et avait ses avantages compte tenu du caractère extérieur du christianisme sur le continent asiatique. Cependant, ce que je suggère, c'est qu'en agissant ainsi, le christianisme a suivi une trajectoire occidentale où les sociétés non occidentales sont étudiées comme des entités culturelles. C'est en contraste avec l'étude de

l'Occident en termes de société. On pourrait le voir aussi avec l'usage d'«anthropologie» pour les sociétés en développement, alors que le terme de sociologie est utilisé pour les sociétés développées occidentales ! L'hypothèse sous-jacente est qu'alors que les sociétés en Asie et dans le monde développé sont stagnantes et statiques (d'où l'objet de l'étude d'une anthropologie dé-historicisée), l'étude des sociétés dynamiques de l'Occident se fait par la sociologie.

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Witnesses and Prophets Building Up the Local Church in Asia

- Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I., D.D. -

Introduction

May I thank the organizers of this important symposium for inviting me to present some reflections for your kind consideration.

My task, as I see it, is not to develop one or several particular tasks that Consecrated Persons have to do toward the building up of the local church. I wish, instead, to suggest a perspective, a vision if you will, and some general directions for pastoral ministry in the local Church. From this perspective or vision, consecrated persons in Asia could then view their missionary and pastoral tasks.

Allow me to state this perspective at the very beginning. I am going to suggest that Consecrated persons see their role as credible and effective witnesses as well as courageous prophets in the building up of the local Church in Asia.

Some Preliminary Notes

But first a preliminary note on the terms “local” and “particular” Church. We usually understand the term “local Church” to mean a particular limited ecclesial territory, such as a parish, an apostolic vicariate, prefecture, a diocese or archdiocese. In other words, a physical space in which the Church grows. We usually refer to the head of such an ecclesiastical territory as the “local Ordinary”. Or perhaps we might even use the term “local Church” to mean a regional grouping of dioceses, such as those belonging to a particular “Oriental rite” in a region. This is differentiated from the “universal Church, or the church as a whole”. The Second Vatican Council uses the term “particular Church” (24 times) more than it uses the term “local Church (8 times) or a grouping of churches. Thus in Vatican II the two terms are usually used synonymously. However in these reflections I shall use the term “local Church”.

In this reflection I shall also use the terms Consecrated Person and Religious interchangeably. Admittedly, members of some societies of apostolic life do not have an explicit commitment to the evangelical counsels,¹ although they are generally considered “Religious”.

I. The Local Church, a Theological and Socio-Cultural Reality

Many of us would probably understand the “local Church” in terms of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and territory, a physical geographical space in which a particular church would grow and prosper. With this understanding we might plan on building the local Church by increasing the number of church and Mass attendance, the number of people receiving communion, the number of baptisms especially of adult catechumens, and the number of educational or charitable or social service institutions, and the like. We might also plan on giving more pastoral care to families, children, women, and migrant workers. And of course, we might want to intensify our vocation programmes in order to increase the number of seminarians and candidates to the religious life. As a pastoral consequence Religious would be called to build the local Church by helping provide or train and form catechists, social service workers, family life workers, teachers, nurses or primary health care workers. Religious would thus have to work not only in their own institutions but also in diocesan socio-pastoral programmes, even at the level of formation, coordination and supervision.

All these pastoral strategies are certainly valid. They are, indeed, necessary in building up the local Church. But to limit religious ministry and apostolate to these pastoral strategies would, I believe, miss the most important point.

A local Church is much more than a geographical reality. A local Church is a theological and spiritual reality with concrete socio-cultural dimensions. It is after all the insertion of the mystery of Christ's Church in a local culture. The First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference in 1974 provided a felicitous description of the local Church: "... the local Church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time".² Or even more fully:

"The local Church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own".³

II. Evangelization by the Mode of Inculturation

This theological reality of the local Church has a fundamental postulate. It presupposes that the message of Christ has to be "truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our people". Therefore, FABC I would conclude, "The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church".⁴ Thirty years after FABC I this statement, I believe, is still valid. We have a long way to go in building up the local Church. I do think that we are far from being "a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue ... with all the life realities of the people". This task remains the "primary focus" of evangelization.

The key biblical images of the theological and socio-cultural reality of the local Church are the image of the "People of God" in pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God and the image of "the Body of Christ". As God's people the Church is a small flock in Asia. But Christ established it as "a communion of life, love and truth" and took it up as "the instrument for the salvation of all, as the light of the world and the salt of the earth".⁵ In the image of the Body of Christ the local Church is understood in Eucharistic terms: "Because the bread is one, we, though many, form one body, all of us who partake of the one bread" (I Cor 10:17). In this way all

of us are made members of his body (*cf.* I Cor 12:27), "but severally members one of another".⁶

III. Missionary and Pastoral Implications for Religious

The theological and socio-cultural reality of the local Church has significant missionary and pastoral implications on the role of religious:

- a.** They have to insert themselves genuinely as members of the one Body of Christ in the local Church. (Sometimes this is not easy to do because you have your own institutions).
- b.** They have to help build up the local Church as a communion of life and love.
- c.** They have to help build it up as the sign of unity and fellowship.
- d.** In the local Church Religious have to be engaged in the triple dialogue that the Church in Asia has long advocated: dialogue with other faiths, dialogue with cultures, dialogue with the poor. Religious are often better formed and equipped to do this triple dialogue.

Such pastoral implications would require creative insertion of religious congregations into the life-realities of the local Church, insertion into its pastoral vision and its pastoral thrust. Here there would truly be a dynamic and fruitful interplay between religious charism and ministry in the local Church.

Likewise necessary would be the collaboration of Religious toward the envisioning of a common pastoral vision in the local Church and the building of structures of communion. Such structures would include those of governance toward a more participatory church as well as structures of coordination. This is so in order that the diversity of gifts in the members of the Body of Christ that find their expression in diverse pastoral programmes in the local Church might come together due to a unified direction toward a common pastoral vision.

IV. Witnesses and Prophets of the Spirituality of Communion

Above all, the role of religious in the formation of the People of God in the local

Church toward communion of life and love/unity and fellowship is necessary.

Religious have long been recognized as “experts of communion”. This well deserved reputation recognizes that building communion is a fundamental call to Religious *vis-à-vis* their religious communities.

Religious are witnesses and prophets of communion. That is part of their identity. It is their life. To be authentic a religious community has to teach and form its members to be in communion with one another, to share with one another, to love and serve one another. *Vita Consecrata* states, “Consecrated Persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practice the spirituality of communion as ‘witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design’”.⁷

Beyond their religious community, Religious are to be in communion with the rest of God’s people. Their identity as Consecrated Persons in community impels them to teach and form others toward communion. This communion flows from the Trinitarian God, finds its most sublime expression in the Eucharist, and is reflected in the unity and fellowship that should characterize the People of God.

The most lasting contribution that Religious can provide involves the “task of *spreading the spirituality of communion*, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries, by opening or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially where today’s world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence”.⁸ This is the “particular task” that the “Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life”.⁹ Its prophetic value is evident in a world of social dissonance, violence, and discordance.

I shall not dwell on the pastoral implications of the triple dialogue on Religious in the local Church. In this symposium there are forthcoming reflections on evangelization and interreligious dialogue that could surely pick up the first two kinds of dialogue (with diverse cultures, with other faiths).

V. Dialogue with, and Preferential Option for, the Poor

Here I shall emphasize the dialogue with

the poor. By now, some forty years after Vatican II, we all realize that the Church is called to be authentically conformed to Christ. His preference for the poor demonstrates the nature of our loving God in Jesus as God-made-poor. Especially in an Asian world of immense poverty and intensifying marginalization, the disciple-Church has to be the true image of Christ-made-poor for the sake of the poor.¹⁰

In living the Lord’s disconcerting paradigm of Gospel poverty, Religious have a privileged place.¹¹ Evangelical poverty is their daily religious norm and commitment. They have to live it daily. This connotes a profoundly humble form of servanthood at the service of the needy and poor. It requires a clearly visible form of dispossession and austerity so that the “poor might become rich”. Further, by the very nature of religious life, the commitment to, and the living of, evangelical poverty is not only individual. It is also communal.

And there’s the rub. We need to look deeply into ourselves as Church or as Religious and ask in the depths of our hearts whether we are indeed evangelically poor. Surely we can give a new meaning of the vow of poverty as a commitment to share or a commitment to be available to those who are poor. But the evangelical poverty of Christ-made-poor surely goes beyond these descriptions of sharing and availability. He lived as a poor man, he called the poor and proclaimed the Gospel to the poor. He walked with them and called them to be his disciples. He identified himself with them. This identification and solidarity with the poor powerfully challenges the whole Church, especially Bishops who are Vicars of Christ. It likewise strongly challenges those who have vowed to follow the poor Christ as the radical norm of their daily life in order that they might be in deep and effective communion with the poor.

VI. Missionary and Pastoral Implications

Because evangelical poverty is a distinctive sign of Consecrated Persons and their communities, the following would be a few of the missionary and pastoral implications:

a. In the context of Asia’s multitudes of

poor people, Religious need to review their lives, religious structures, missionary and pastoral commitments in the local Church and undertake the necessary steps for genuine renewal. Speaking to us through the faces of the poor, the Lord is calling us daily to continual conversion.

b. A missionary and pastoral commitment to a preferential option for the poor impels Religious to reach out to new faces of the poor in the local Church and care for them. Such are the faces of oppressed women and children, broken families, marginalized indigenous peoples, AIDS victims, migrant workers and their families. New ministries have to reflect a vision of the local Church as the sign of the poor Christ's saving and healing presence. Truly deserving of our deep gratitude are consecrated persons who "were able to leave the security of *the known* to thrust themselves into unknown places and works.... Wherever they are, they have constituted a link between the Church and marginal groups and those not reached by ordinary pastoral ministry".¹²

c. Today in various parts of Asia the local Church is envisioning a "new way of being Church" through the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities/Basic Human Communities.¹³ Religious congregations need to contribute their own time, talents and resources generously in community formation among the grassroots. Such sharing could be to train and empower lay leaders, to teach people how to listen to the Word of God through prayerful reading and reflection, to develop inculturated liturgy, and build fellowship and solidarity. These goals would certainly require the setting up of new ministries and the development of modules of formation for their own members.

VII. Witnesses and Prophets of the Call to Holiness in the Local Church

The *raison d'être* of the mission of evangelization and the task of inculturation is the one universal call of God to holiness. This is the reason for the Church's existence, the reason, therefore, for the local Church. This is why the Lord intended the Church to be the instrument of salvation for the world.

Indeed, the urgent call to Religious today is to teach and help form the People of God in the spirituality of communion. Religious are to help us become saints. With Pope John Paul II, I believe that holiness is the first priority in the Third

Millennium. Ushering in the Third Millennium, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* contains "fundamental themes already mentioned in the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: Christ, the centre of life for every Christian, the pastoral practice and teaching on holiness, its demanding character, its *high standard* of ordinary Christian living, the widespread need for spirituality and prayer realized principally in contemplation and in listening to the Word of God, the irreplaceable effects of the sacramental life, the spirituality of communion, and the witness of Love which is expressed in a new *creativity of charity* towards those who suffer, towards a wounded world enslaved in hatred...".¹⁴

There is no doubt that Asia today faces growing materialism and secularism, the enormous pressure of economic and cultural globalization that at present is a marginalizing phenomenon of incredible magnitude. In this context Religious by their very calling are "*to focus primarily on spirituality*".¹⁵

Within the Church Consecrated Persons are witnesses and prophets of a world beyond this world, but a world that challenges the people of this world to become truly an image of God. The very life of Consecrated Persons as totally dedicated to God dramatizes the primacy of God and the life of grace. How especially evident this is with regard to the contemplative life as well as to life lived prayerfully and actively on the frontiers of mission! Such lives demonstrate total openness and vulnerability, total faith-dependence on God. Truly a life in the Spirit, a life of intimate communion with the Triune God!

Such a life cannot be sustained unless nourished by prayer and contemplation, and especially by the life-giving sacrament of love, the Holy Eucharist. For surely the Eucharist, the very Body and Blood of Jesus, is "a privileged place of encounter with the Lord. There he once again makes himself present in the midst of the Disciples, he explains the Scriptures, he warms the heart and enlightens the mind, he opens eyes and allows himself to be recognized (*cf.* Lk 24:13-35)".¹⁶ The Eucharist is "the source and summit of existence and apostolic action", where we become "*one with him*" in full intimacy and communion.¹⁷

VIII. Missionary and Pastoral Implications for Religious

In the light of the consecration and

communion that are at the heart of Religious Life and identity, the primary focus of the Third Millennium on holiness calls Religious to assist in the formation of God's people in the local Church toward holiness.

a. Religious are in a privileged position of leadership in exploring the inculturation of Christian Spirituality as it draws from the religious and cultural heritage of the local Church in Asia, e.g., Asian ways of approaching the Divine and ways of praying. Religious are to help instruct lay people in the ways of the Lord, in approaches to prayer that consider their active involvement in secular matters. They should help "lay people to relate the Word of God to the events of their daily lives".¹⁸

b. They should take a leading role in evaluating and renewing popular devotions and practices of popular piety.¹⁹

c. They are to invite lay collaborators to deeper communion with them and with the Lord by associating them more closely with the spiritual life of their congregations, in a creative manner that is in accord with their state of life.

It is most commendable that many religious men and women are assisting members of the diocesan clergy toward a deeper appreciation and love of their own ministry in the local Church. Religious are also helping to develop an authentic spirituality that emerges from pastoral experience and in turn responds to the many challenges of active ministry.

Conclusion

This presentation has reflected on three dimensions in the life of the local church: (1) the proclamation of the Gospel by way of inculturation; (2) preferential option for the poor; and (3) the call to be holy. It has presented a number of missionary and pastoral implications for Religious.

The three dimensions are not three separate tasks. Rather they are fundamental features of the birth, growth, and mission of the local Church. They are essential characteristics that should suffuse the life of every member of the local Church. They should be part and parcel of every apostolate and every ministry. Finally, every Religious should see these dimensions from the perspective of witness and prophecy.

I pray that this reflection may help you to understand more deeply the important and indispensable role that you play in the local Church. May we always be in profound communion with the chaste, poor, and obedient Christ. May his Mother, herself poor, chaste and obedient be our daily companion and guide so that our efforts in building up the local Church may with God's grace bear abundant fruit – fruit that lasts.

Endnotes

Archbishop Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I., D.D. was born on 11 March 1939 in Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. He was ordained priest on 5 June 1964 and appointed Bishop of the Prelature of Kidapawan on 23 July 1980. He was also appointed and installed Archbishop of Nueva Segovia in 1986. He was appointed and installed Archbishop of Cotabato.

¹ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 11.

² FABC I, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 9; see also FABC Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), Theses on the Local Church, Part III, "The Birth, Life and Mission of the Local Church", particularly Theses 5–8.

⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 7.

⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 51; cf. "Starting Afresh From Christ", n. 29.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁰ See *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 34.

¹¹ See *Starting Afresh From Christ*, n. 34; *VC*, n. 82.

¹² *Starting Afresh From Christ*, n. 36.

¹³ FABC TAC, Thesis 9, describes BEC's as "especially significant 'places' of inculturation and the building up of the local Church".

¹⁴ *Starting Afresh From Christ*, n. 4.

¹⁵ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 26.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Homily* of 2 February 2001, cited in *Starting Afresh From Christ*, n. 26.

¹⁸ TAC, Theses on the Local Church, "Pastoral Corollaries and Recommendations, VII.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, VI.

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A Look at Religious Life in China

- Dan Xier* -

Introduction

A few years ago there was a pop song in China whose words: “Money is fluttering in the wind; we have no ideals”, expressed clearly how the youth were affected by the wave of rampant materialism. A survey conducted in 1995, “On life style and consumption” showed that young people were more concerned with their own lives than with their country or society. They underlined three issues as matters of concern: career prospects, income, and family. It added that youths were mostly obsessed with their primary needs: satisfaction of appetite, shelter, sexual desires and material needs. For many of them, the goal of human development was “self-actualization”, putting the emphasis on *self*.

In spite of this phenomenon, a variety of faith expressions were trying to fill the deepening void. People fall back on their spiritual roots and morals as a way to find more meaning in life because of emptiness of spirit and, in some cases, because it looked Western and fashionable.

In the past few years the Chinese Government, in a rush to prevent the decay of society’s morals and ideals, has fostered a kind of propaganda to follow the national heroes’ example. In 1996 China launched a campaign to win the hearts of the young by presenting outstanding role models. A book “Models Since the Founding of the Republic” was published as a text book.

Yet, not everybody had those aspirations in life. At that time there were also young Chinese women who were deciding to dedicate their lives to serve the Church and society. When I refer to religious life in China I mean

the religious life of female congregations within the Catholic Church. Many religious sisters with some experience and leadership in religious life were formed in the 1990s, right at the time when Chinese society was being shaken by deep and critical changes at all levels. Until now the numbers of women joining religious life continue to increase. This raises the question, “What impels these people not to focus on the ‘self’ but to consecrate their lives to serving the needs of others?”.

1. A bit of history

Religious life, in its various forms, has taken root in China at different periods when the many attempts to bring Christ to the Middle Kingdom took place. The last attempt was in 1949 when the Communists came to power. Religious life then was blooming.

According to available statistics, at that time there were nearly 5,000 religious sisters in China. Male religious were also abundant. However, the Communist Government that came to power in 1949, not only brought the Church countless hardships but also persecution, and it pointed out clearly from the beginning its intention to wipe out of China any manifestation of religious life. Foreign religious personnel were soon expelled from the country and religious institutions outlawed. At the same time their properties, such as orphanages, schools, churches and hospitals and houses for the elderly were confiscated.

Almost two decades without any visible sign of institutionalized religious life in China was a big blow to the Church because it did not have a type of life to show the Church’s best side. Local religious personnel had nothing good to say about their stay in China. Most of them landed up in Maoist

prisons and concentration camps, some for as long as 32 years. Yet, their indomitable spirit proved that although their faith was tested, from the embers of their suffering and endurance, the torch of a new era of vocations to religious life eventually emerged in the late 1970's.

When everybody might have thought that the visible signs of religious life had been buried by the uncompromising, harsh policies of the Maoist Governments, a new era was starting for the Church, and very especially for religious life. It all started again. After, as it were, a long and harsh winter, the old Sisters returned to the dioceses.

Religious life for women, slowly sprouted with the impetus and power of the Holy Spirit, from the embers of the Cultural Revolution's disastrous decade. In its beginnings, there were no structures. Neither were there places in which to establish and refound religious life. Yet, the mere presence of the old sisters having returned to their dioceses gave a new signal to the vitality of religious life. The Church in China, in a special way religious life, had paid the price of persecution, torture and martyrdom. It was a martyr-like Church that emerged from the ostracism of the fierce decades of persecution. Hundreds of religious personnel who had suffered humiliation and torture of different kinds for Christ and the Church, started recounting their experiences in concentration camps and Maoist prisons. In spite of everything, most of them emerged with the purity of the lotus flower that emerges from the mire and mud to show its beauty in a unique and unexpected way. The Church started becoming autonomous. With the Government's rather more tolerant approach, the Chinese Church began showing its presence like the grain of wheat showing its shoots after the long and harsh winter and emerging ready for a fruitful harvest.

The new task of re-founding religious life began. It was something felt by the Church. With little means, bishops felt the need to give space to the old sisters. Most of the time informally, convents were slowly forming. New congregations were emerging and old ones refounded. There was no time to think or plan how to start. The Spirit was blowing and the presence of the old Sisters

was signaling that religious life was back in place. In the meantime, with the coming of the Communists to power, male religious congregations were slowly being outlawed, while convents started functioning under the diocesan bishops. This fact will continue in some cases, to create tensions and difficulties as to how to harmonize and implement the jurisdictional role of the bishops and the leadership and authoritative role of the superior of the Congregation.

The re-foundation of religious life in China was particularly challenging as most of the Sisters had in their past the undoubted mark of persecution and no reference to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

2. Religious life at the cross-roads

From the 1980's to the late 90's, religious life in China experienced great achievements, some challenges and a lot of tension.

These were proofs that the world in which they were living had substantially changed from that of the past. It also pointed at the changes felt in the convents, which wanted to find ways both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, to make religious life felt and meaningful in China's fast changing society today. In other words, it appears that from the beginning and because of the circumstances surrounding its formation was, and still is, a vital aspect of religious life that is being addressed in different ways. It deserves the involvement of more energy and, from my point of view, to be made a priority. At the beginning of the 80's, convents were recruiting members to join their ranks. Initially, what mattered most for someone entering religious life, was to serve Christ and the Church. Discovering one's own identity was probably at that moment not so much felt nor was it a priority. In most convents the old Sisters played a vital role but the form of religious life they introduced was similar to the 1940's. In fact, there was no other point of reference for religious life because the directives of Vatican II had not reached the Church of China. However, as society evolved and prospered, the young Sisters who entered the convents have felt the need for new ways and expressions in their religious life more in accordance with a fast changing society.

Right now, we see that the leadership of sisterhood is in the hands of sisters who began their journey in religious life together with the older generation. It has been a long journey in which they have walked together. Obviously they could not receive a solid formation. Coupled with the challenges of society, they still feel, up to now, that their journey in religious life has not been ideal. In fact, nobody is to be blamed because at that time the situation was what it was.

The issue emerges more and more often as religious sisters ask themselves about their identity. It will be of great benefit if religious congregations in China can face this challenge and find ways and means to address it. Formation is key to helping them discover and elaborate their own spirituality and constitutions. For most congregations, their charisms might not be all that clear. Such is the case because in China a young Catholic girl who wants to enter religious life is almost always bound to choose the congregation that is present in her diocese. A congregation's field of action is bound to fit within the same framework as all other congregations, due to the restrictions of Government regulations.

An emphasis on formation will enable religious sisters to find new ways to be present in society, more in line with the aims and spirit of their congregations. The fact that China is a society passing through rapid changes requires religious life to be well prepared to face the challenges of this new society that is emerging.

3. What does life look like at the convent?

The Church in China is spread throughout the country's vast territory. If we compare the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of the Xian Diocese in Shaanxi Province with its 300 members and more than 20 years of history with, for instance, the Sisters of the Congregation of St Maria Assunta, in Yuci Diocese, Shanxi Province, with its less than ten members and no more than four years of history, the differences are evident.

A general look at the situation of

women's religious life brings us a multi-faceted picture. It is difficult to generalize, as there are many factors that bring about differences in their situation, such as the number of members and each congregation's history. While some congregations, because of their connections and number of members, are economically strong, others live with little financial means. While in some dioceses, the relationship between sisters and the bishop is of mutual collaboration, support and understanding, the opposite, too, happens in some dioceses. It appears that the better the relationship between the bishop and the sisters, the faster the congregation grows and makes its presence felt both within the Church and in society.

Vocations, too, abound in dioceses where sisters have found their way of life and are able to collaborate smoothly with the bishop.

The fields of work of women's congregations vary. Some congregations have to rely on the financial help of the diocesan bishop.

Some run their own dispensaries or clinics to earn their living. Others make liturgical vestments, run clinics and hospitals, make herbal medicines, run shops of religious articles and statues, kindergartens, cultivate their fields, do pastoral work, visit Catholics and spread the Gospel in the parishes they belong to, etc. Some others work with lepers or are involved in different kinds of social work or are in mass-media related activities. Some also work with AIDS patients.

So, life in convents varies from one place to another and from one congregation to another. Let me give you an illustration. It is Sunday noon in the garden of the Convent of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters, in Hongdong Diocese, Shanxi Province. A young girl who is graduating at a secondary school this coming June, approached Sr Liu, Superior of the convent. On the other side of the convent four old sisters walked along the veranda of the convent enjoying the sunny day. The scene reminds me of the three generations of sisters that cover the spectrum of religious life in China. Sr Liu passed on to me a letter that the teenager had just given to her, a kind of application to enter religious life. I go through it and I cannot but wonder both at the beauty of its

content and its true motivations. A young girl accompanied by two friends, was requesting to enter religious life. What attracts young women to join religious life? In this world in which many youngsters, victims or products of the one-child policy, are only concerned about their careers and income, some go against the tide of society. In other words, while many youngsters in the cities in China seek to satisfy their own needs, others seem to have different aspirations. Instead of self-seeking, their motivation in joining religious life is to serve others and the Church.

Is this a manifestation of the strength of the Spirit making his way into an atheist political system? How genuine are the vocations to religious life in China? What type of life awaits this enthusiastic young woman with a seemingly true and genuine motivation and unquestionable desire to follow Jesus in religious life once her application is approved?

The family background of Sisters in China is quite similar. The prototype reflects a type of Sister that belongs to a devout Catholic family, mostly from rural areas, old Catholic family, with several brothers and sisters and a rather short academic formation. Only more recently there are Sisters who are new converts without a Catholic family background.

4. Statistics

In the past few years, one arrives at a convent where one finds three generations living under the same roof. The few old sisters are still present in some convents. They are the link with the past that provides a sense of identity for the younger generations. Their role has been a vital one. Undoubtedly, the younger ones can benefit from their experience as they are a vital source for rediscovering their own spirituality and charisms, even if at times the generation gap might have created some tension.

There is another group, the middle-aged sisters who were first recruited after the opening reforms started. Coming usually from the countryside, they entered the convent, did not have much formation and followed the path laid out for them by the older sisters. Some of them were better prepared in different fields. In their hands is the leadership of religious life in China

today. They are the ones holding the position of Formators. Therefore, their role is vital in the development of religious life in China. It appears that the handing over of authoritative roles in female religious congregations is smoother than the shift of authority from the old generation of bishops to the new generation of young priests.

A third group, composed of young Catholic girls whose motivation in entering religious life may vary from dedication to Christ and the Church, to serve the people, following the example of the older sisters to other more subtle motivations. It is undoubtedly true that they mirror the middle-aged Sisters in the work and attitudes they show in society and in relating to people. Most of them come from rural areas. At times some are looking for a sense of security to escape the hard life of the countryside. It is accepted by all that life in the convents recognized by the Government is better organized than that in underground communities. The reasons are obvious.

It is difficult to give statistics in the complex situation of the Church in China. Estimated statistics regarding sisters were issued by the Holy Spirit Study Centre of Hong Kong in 2003 showing the following:

Number of sisters: In the open Church: 3,500; in the underground 1,700.

Number of novitiates: In the open Church: 40; In the underground church 20.

Number of sisters in formation: In the open Church: 800; In the underground 800.

Novices in 2002: 1,800; Religious sisters in 2002: 6,700;

Religious congregations of sisters: 60.

5. Paradigms in religious life

The leadership of religious life in China has been passing its transitional period with relative calm. The generation gap easily visible in the 1980's, until the beginning of the nineties, is less perceptible nowadays, where middle-aged sisters are taking the leadership roles in the convents.

a. The balance between identity and mission

In the first period, in the early 1980's, the

Sisters confined themselves to their convents and to the parishes in which convents started flourishing and changing. In the early nineties, Sisters began playing a more relevant role both in the Church as well as in society, due partly to the Government's more lenient approach towards religion.

If their identity in the convent was not completely clear, neither could their presence and type of mission, in a society the Church had not been in contact with for decades, be clear. The need for balance between identity and mission was felt in many female religious congregations. The outcome allowed them to implement a variety of roles, works and missionary approaches. The fields of action in which the Sisters have worked since their re-foundation are mainly the following: clinics, orphanages, parish work, teaching catechism, teaching catechumens, teaching singing, visiting the sick, widows and Catholics in general. In fact, the poor and the marginalized were the ones who opened their way into society. Even though religious congregations could not run hospitals or schools as these fields are reserved for the Government, nevertheless, nowadays in some places, religious congregations have found a way to make their presence felt, at least in the field of health services, as in Handan Diocese, Hebei Province, and in Xin Li, Shanxi Province.

Another field of action that has opened horizons and made a positive impression in society is the involvement of women religious with leprosy patients. Interesting initiatives are being carried out in this regard. Running orphanages has shown the caring side of the Church for the less privileged in society. To this, we can add the world of AIDS, in which several congregations are involved. Through these initiatives, Sisters are sending a message to society that is peculiar and very much at the heart of religious life: that of being with those in need and marginalized by society.

So, we can say that sisters have been moving slowly but steadily from the hidden and unknown places of the post-cultural revolution, to a more prominent presence in the dioceses, steadily showing a visible

and significant presence in society. Their missionary desire in reaching out to non-Christians is to be appreciated in a particular way. However, their desire to be present in society is at times undermined by their lack of a proper formation and preparation to relate to people they might consider more educated than themselves.

Nevertheless, we can say that in the past few years the formation of sisters has become a priority for many congregations.

A risk is felt in some religious communities when "work" gains the upper hand, and relegates prayer and community life to second place at times because Sisters have to earn their living. However, one thing is appearing more and more clearly and it is the visible and courageous presence of sisters in society. The situation and different living conditions of religious communities play a very important role in the way religious communities view themselves and their presence as well as the type of mission to carry out. A good formation preparation to confront society will, no doubt, help sisters make their presence in society more felt. According to a survey carried out in China's convents by Fen Xiang, it emerged that in some communities some Sisters felt a certain fear of dealing with and confronting people in society. Some others felt that due to their short history, they still lack the missionary experience of how to bring the Good News to society.

b. The compromise between autonomy and collaboration

Another challenge women's religious communities face in China is their lack of autonomy. Most religious congregations are under the supervision and jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop. This might, at times, cause some problems on how to combine the role of the Bishop and that of the Superior of the congregation. Where the relationship between both is good, this has a positive impact on the congregation at all levels. However, the contrary is at times also true. How to combine the autonomy of the religious congregation and the role the local bishop should play, is not an easy task to delimit.

Related to this is the elaboration of a set of rules or constitutions at all levels under

which Sisters can rule their lives in a way they feel most suitable to them without the interference of other forces. This task is not an easy one, as in many convents they lack personnel qualified to do it.

c. Formation of Sisters, a pending issue in a fast changing society

Even though religious life is slowly finding its own way to cope with the lack of appropriate formation, such a lack is a delicate and sensitive one. This is, I guess, a matter in which collaboration within the different congregations in China and from abroad is seriously needed.

It is difficult to find convents where formators of postulants and even novice mistresses become so almost immediately after making their religious profession, without any kind of preparation. Added to this, is the fact that in some convents, recruited aspirants lack proper basic human formation, which slows down whatever formation programme might be implemented in postulancies or novitiates.

Putting aside good will and strong faith, a basic and clear formation about the meaning of religious life and aspects related to it, are to be considered irreplaceable. Formation in many convents is still deficient and when sisters finish their period of basic formation, they are assigned to places and to ministries where they will rarely have any chance of continuing any kind of on-going formation.

The times of relying on an old Sister, as an example of determination and commitment to the Lord, are almost gone. The need of a kind of formation that is in line with the signs of the times is a task religious congregations have to deal with. Some initiatives in this field are springing up, giving hope for the future. Some centres of formation at regional, and even national levels, are coming up with the clear scope of filling that void. The Xian's Sisters Formation Centre, established by Bishop Li Duan, has set an example for other provinces. Recently, in September 2004, two more Centres for the Formation of Sisters opened in Hebei and Shanxi Provinces. Thus, at present, there are about 170 Sisters being trained, outside the traditional periods of postulancy and novitiate.

Generally speaking, there is a wide variety of experiences and ways to go about establishing and implementing formation. It varies from an almost non-existent to a well-organized and articulated formation programme. In most convents, studies are done with the help of the local bishop or priest and occasionally by some sisters. Subjects vary, but generally speaking, much stress is put on Catholic Doctrine and Scripture through different types of didactic material that reach convents such as books, articles, CDs, etc.

On the one hand, more and more young Sisters are also being prepared in the areas of nursing, accounting, computer science and Chinese medicine. On the other, some even have the chance of going abroad to study Missiology, Religious Life, Spirituality and relevant matters related to Religious life.

The values underlined in the initial formation period aim at helping candidates to understand the meaning and value of religious life through the three vows. A certain lack of understanding on the meaning of the vows creates confusion and puzzlement in some convents. Spirituality is also vital in the formation programmes. Work on one's own character and personality, how to do missionary work and the importance of prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament are also stressed as well as the spirit of sacrifice. Other guidelines in formation foster the importance of loving people, experiencing God in one's own life and community life.

In the survey conducted by Fen Xiang, the Formators' achievements and frustrations were expressed. In some congregations no one was in charge of formation and the tension of combining knowledge as well as helping candidates to grow spiritually, in order to answer to God's call and to society's challenges, were not clearly addressed. Most formators interviewed did not have any preparation before taking on their responsibilities. In performing their roles, they tried their best but on the whole they had more disappointments than joys. All of them realized that the guidance of a good formator will inevitably benefit the candidates. The Formators also underlined that there was a quick turn-over of Sisters assigned to this role because of the other roles given to them.

However, there has been a shift in the past few years in the way formation was viewed. In the 1980's, formation was based on rules and regulations, stressing unity within the community, being faithful to one's own vows and giving good witness. Little attention was given to the growth of the person and contact with society. In the nineties, some changes were felt and missionary work and the needs of society were more stressed, as part of a convent's life and the Sisters' training.

Nowadays, young sisters may not be so eager to follow traditional practices in religious life. Some — although they live in the convent — have their hearts outside it due perhaps to their deep involvement with work in society. Community life is less felt and the offering of their lives is less perceived as a motivation to be stressed in religious life.

In some convents, together with a poor background in theology and doctrine, the voluntaristic approach prevails, although young sisters are reluctant to follow this path. A more holistic approach is being implemented in places that are more exposed to outside influences and the new trends of the theology of religious life. It is not rare to find Sisters experience a kind of inferiority complex when they have to address people whom they know are better educated than they are.

Another area of formation — according to the sisters interviewed — is the field of psychology and affectivity. The world of feelings is rarely touched on in the formation period. The participation of Sisters in programmes of religious formation outside China, particularly in Manila, at the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia, holds great hope for religious life in China. Their specialization in fields so dear to the religious, as imparted in that Institute, such as Spirituality, Religious life and Missiology, opens new ways to enrich religious life and to bring a renewal to religious life in China.

6. Looking into the future

Young women still choose to live their lives as religious, not only to express their love for Christ and his Church as well as to replace the old sisters, but also to give witness to their awareness that the Spirit of God is guiding them and calling them to a style of life that makes God and people a

priority in their lives. They have been touched by the witness of other Sisters, and influenced by their work, dedication and love of the people. However, the motivations to seek admission to religious life are not always genuine. Many enter in order to take refuge from the harsh life of the countryside, to find security in life, and change through opportunities to study, etc. These motivations might at times influence them in making an option to enter religious life.

There is no male religious life as such in China. However, according to the findings of Fen Xiang, the young seminarians in some dioceses have shown a vivid interest in the religious life, as it is traditionally understood with its community flavour and accountability to others, among other elements. The way remains open and it might prove that, even though it is not allowed by the Government in China today, perhaps in a less distant future this might emerge through the power and strength of the Spirit of God.

The issues are there and so is the will and determination by most women religious congregations to work on their charism and spirituality. A more competent and incisive role in society will be achieved through a witness of service to the underprivileged.

Note

* Dan Xier is a missionary priest who has been working among the Chinese for the past 14 years. He travels to Mainland China from time to time and is interested in the developments of the Church in China and especially in the way religious life — mainly female — is developing in the unique context of China. He writes often for other missionary magazines on topics related to China's social and religious themes.

Ref.: *Religious Life Asia*, April-June 2005.

Report: China Mission

(25 May - 12 June 2005)

- Sr Judette Gallares, RC* -

Objective of Mission

The Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA) wished to gain firsthand knowledge of the situation of the Church in China and of consecrated life there and to explore how the Institute could help to support the formation and updating of religious in China. In order to achieve this Fr Dan Xier, on behalf of the Fen Xiang Project for Mainland China, organized the mission and accompanied the ICLA representative, Sr Judette Gallares, RC.

To realize the above objective, the pair visited several communities of Sisters, centres of formation, leadership training initiatives and social services offices in the four Provinces of Shanxi, Hebei, Liaoning and Shaanxi. The visitors also attended the religious profession of Sisters in two Provinces (Hebei and Liaoning). Sessions were scheduled with small groups of Sisters and informal talks with the Major Superiors of at least eleven Institutes. These were mostly focused on the complex situation of women's religious life in present-day China.

I. Sisters' Formation Centres

In this mission, Fr Dan and Sr Judette visited three existing Sisters' formation centres in the Provinces of Shanxi, Hebei, and Shaanxi. A fourth centre is being established in the Province of Liaoning by September 2005. Except for the one in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, which has been in existence since 1995, the centres in Shanxi and Hebei were only started in 2004. Thus their programmes are still lacking in organization (curriculum and faculty). Here are some details about the three existing formation centres:

A. The Catholic Church Sisters' Formation Centre (Taiyuan, Shanxi Province)

(1) Established in September 2004, occupying one wing of the old seminary building;

(2) Directress: Sr Clara Liu of the Sisters of Divine Providence;

(3) Number of Students: 36 religious women in their 20s and 30s from different congregations and dioceses;

(4) Two-year Residential Programme: First Year is focused on basic theological studies mostly taught by the seminary Fathers, while the Second Year which is still to be implemented for the school year 2005-2006 will focus on religious formation, such as the vows, community life, spirituality, etc. (They have had three non-Chinese guest lecturers during the second semester);

(5) Expressed needs: to have programmes facilitated by religious women who are competent teachers/facilitators on basic human and religious formation, psycho-spiritual approach to the vows (not academic, but more practical and perhaps more workshop style), spirituality and vocation discernment; and for ICLA to supply the centre with articles and other reading matter for translation on such topics.

B. The Sisters' Formation Centre (Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province)

(1) Established in September 2004, occupying the pre-revolution minor seminary building;

(2) Directress: Sr Li of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady;

(3) Number of students: 35 religious women in their 20s and 30s from different congregations and dioceses;

(4) Two-year Residential Programme: basic theological and biblical studies to

prepare them for mission, with most courses taught by the seminary Fathers (however, since the seminary is not nearby, they have to adapt to whatever available free time the seminary Fathers can give them);

(5) Expressed needs: for professors/facilitators to teach/facilitate seminars on religious life and the vows, human and spiritual growth, vocation discernment, etc.; and for help in designing a certificate programme (through ICLA) that will grant their graduates an equivalent of a pre-university or associate degree (most sisters only have the equivalent of a High School diploma).

C. Religious Formation Centre for Sisters (Xi'an, Shaanxi Province)

(1) Established in 1995 and located in the seminary compound; the separate building was constructed in 2003 as a residential centre for Sisters.

(2) Directress: Sr Jing Rou He of the Sacred Heart Sisters;

(3) Number of students: a total of 91: 43 (second year who will be graduating this year); 48 (First Year);

(4) Two-year Residential Programme: basic theological and biblical courses are taught by the seminary Fathers, such as catechism, spirituality, church history, moral theology, Bible, and ecclesiology. Sometimes they have visiting professors who teach: missiology and spirituality (including religious life). They also have classes on: music, liturgy, computer science, finance and management. In the academic year, they try to invite two visiting professors or lecturers from other countries (either Chinese-speaking or English-speaking), however this has not been easy because of the omniscient presence of officials from the Patriotic Association.

(5) Expressed needs: translations of recent articles and materials on religious life and formation.

D. Sisters' Formation Centre in Shenyang (Liaoning Province):

(1) To serve the Dioceses of Shenyang (Liaoning Province), Jilin (Jilin Province) and Harbin (Heilongjiang Province). This is already in the final stage of planning. The Bishop aims for it to begin in September 2005.

(2) Expressed needs: resource persons

to give programmes on religious life, psycho-spiritual formation, and spirituality.

II. General Situation/Specific Needs of Religious Congregations

We visited a total of 10 institutes and talked to 11 Superiors General as well as Sisters in their different mission assignments. Here are some general observations on their situation and needs:

(1) Except for the names of their institutes, there does not seem to be any substantial distinction between them. They seem to have a common ministry as diocesan congregations: running clinics, taking care of orphans and the elderly; pastoral ministry, such as preparing catechumens for Baptism, visiting families. From my observation and conversations, they do not seem to have a clear understanding of religious life and charism. Their concept of service is focused on work and productivity.

(2) More recently, some institutes have been allowed by the Government to run kindergartens as well as running centres for HIV-AIDS awareness/education.

(3) Some congregations are more creative in engaging in income-generating projects such as: making liturgical vestments and art work (e.g. statues), printing and book-binding of prayer books and music.

(4) Increase in number of catechumens and adult baptisms are attributed to the pastoral and evangelizing work of Sisters who are zealous in visiting homes and working with families, especially in the rural areas.

(5) Bishops have founded women's religious institutes, but often they do not have an adequate understanding of what religious life is. Although there is a designated Superior General among the Sisters in a number of the Dioceses, in practice it seems that the Bishop is the Superior. This was what we observed in one of the religious professions we attended. In the rite of religious profession the Bishop was the one accepting the vows of the Sisters.

(6) The Bishops likewise give them their congregation's name; frequently these names do not have any bearing on their spirituality or charism. Many are confused as to what their spirituality or charism is. Although those with older members (who have rejoined or regrouped after the cultural Revolution) are able to reclaim something

of their history and charism as a congregation, there is no real and updated religious formation, not even an appropriate understanding of religious life. The “returnees” were only in their very early initial formation (postulancy or novitiate) when religious life was suppressed. They tended to pass on to the post-Revolution generation of Sisters an “outmoded” understanding and practice of religious life.

(7) Most of the institutes are dependent on the Bishop while the Sisters assigned to parishes are dependent on the parish priest for their subsistence, i.e. board/lodging and food. The monthly personal allowance of each Sister ranges from 80 to 100 yuan (more or less equivalent to US\$10-12.50). In some institutes, sisters can use the money for their personal needs; others require the allowances they receive from the Bishop or their parish priests to be contributed to the congregation.

(8) Congregations provide: 1 year postulancy, 2 years novitiate, 5-6 years temporary profession (with the last 6 months for final vow preparation. Several institutes are now including individually directed 30-day retreats as part of their final vow preparation, however this depends on the availability of trained directors from Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore.

(9) Most institutes do not have a Budget for formation, whether initial or ongoing. Many sisters feel that the formation they have received is often inadequate. Most have only reached high school before entering. Consequently they feel inadequately prepared to meet the challenges of the mission.

(10) An increasing number of study opportunities abroad are available for Sisters through various grants and scholarships (e.g. U.S.A., Rome, France, Germany and the Philippines). However some congregations, especially the more organized ones who have international contacts, are able to take advantage of these opportunities, while the smaller, newer congregations are not.

(11) There are still many Sisters who have chosen to remain in the underground but we do not have accurate information as to their exact numbers. We know from the two or three whom we have met, and those in the open churches who have contacts with them and have supported them in some way, that their living conditions and formation programmes lag far behind those of the open convents.

(12) Common concerns expressed by many, especially by superiors and formators: integrated human and religious formation (cost and opportunity), adequate preparation of sisters for the mission, spirituality and spiritual guidance to help the Sisters deepen their spiritual life and religious commitment.

III. Proposals

To address the common concerns and expressed needs of women religious in China, I would like to present the following proposals:

A. ICLA Scholarships and Fen Xiang Support

(1) That ICLA offer a full scholarship to those Sisters who have the potential to be teachers/professors in the three specializations offered by the institute: Consecrated Life, Spirituality, and Missiology on condition that their Superiors allow them to teach in the above-mentioned formation centres for a certain number of years. Fen Xiang has agreed to collaborate with ICLA by providing subsidies for non-academic expenses, such as language studies, pocket money and annual retreats. The directresses of the three existing formation centres will recommend the candidates they consider have the necessary gifts/potential and inclination to do further studies and to engage in the ministry of teaching (ICLA will have to come up with criteria for awarding a scholarship, i.e. multiplier effect, etc.).

(2) That ICLA students be encouraged to write their thesis on topics that will greatly enhance the practical understanding and living out of religious life and the vows in the context of the Chinese culture, such as “how the culture influences the understanding and living out of the vows”.

B. Resource Persons from ICLA and the Cenacle; Programme of Study Leading to a Degree

(3) That ICLA send resource persons to the Sisters’ formation centres to conduct 2-3 weeks modular courses per semester on: formation topics such as psycho-spiritual dimensions of human growth and religious formation, religious life and the vows, spirituality and spiritual direction. This can be

a collaborative project between ICLA and the Cenacle Sisters.

(4) That ICLA send resource persons for special training programmes for formators and spiritual directors.

(5) That ICLA help the formation centres come up with a standard programme of study (not patterned on the curriculum of the seminary) that can lead towards a diploma or degree, perhaps equivalent to an “associate degree”. The Sisters will be required to write a paper or project that will fit the kind of work they will be doing in the future. Based on the Chinese culture, a degree or diploma is important to qualify them to do something more for the future.

C. Resource Materials and Networking

(6) That ICLA begin sending articles and materials on consecrated life, formation, spirituality, etc., to the Catholic Church Sisters’ Formation Centre which will ensure these materials are translated into Mandarin. The translated materials will be shared with the other formation centres.

(7) That ICLA initiate the creation of links between the formation centres in China and encourage the directresses of these centres to meet on a regular basis to share ideas and resources.

* Sr Judette Gallares is a member of the Religious of the Cenacle. She did her graduate studies in biblical spirituality at the Catholic Theological Union (Chicago) and her M.A. in Religious Studies at Fordham University (New York). She did her doctoral studies in ministry, majoring in Scripture, at the University of Oxford Summer Programme in Theology (England) through the Graduate Theological Foundation (Indiana). At present she is professor of Spirituality at the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (the Philippines) and a guest professor of Biblical Theology at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. She is also the author of several books and articles on women in the Bible, Spirituality, and Formation.

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Mission of the Church: A Liberation Theology Perspective

- Lazar Stanislaus, SVD -

Introduction

Liberation theology began in Latin America and it has continued to gain prominence over the years in the Church. It has not remained the same, and now in Latin America it has undergone many changes. Its first formulations often mirrored attitudes prevalent in the late 1960's and early 1970's. These years were, in Gutierrez's words, a time of great "revolutionary ferment". Seeing the relevance of this theological expression, it spread to other countries too, but not in the same way. The theologians of Africa and Asia reflected their conditions along with their people and expressed many more liberation theologies – Black theology, African theology, Asian theology, Min-Jung theology, Planetary theology, Buffaloes theology and so forth. In this article, some pointers of Liberation theology from Latin America are explored. Then I shall try to highlight some nuances of the Indian theology of Liberation and draw some orientations from this for our missionary task in India.

I. Liberation Theology from Latin America – Some Pointers

Liberation theology arose out of a profoundly disturbing experience, the experience of the Christian faith confronted by the misery of the masses of poor in Latin America. The Medellín Document says, "that misery, as a collective fact, expresses itself as injustice which cries to the heavens" (*Justice*, n. 1). Leonard Boff and Clodovis Boff in their book, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, begin with two stories that illustrate the agony of poverty in Latin America (1987:1-2).¹ Medellín says, "When speaking of injustice, we refer to those realities that

constitute a sinful situation" (*Peace*, n. 1). According to Segundo, it increased awareness of the situation which in turn evoked a sense of urgency to respond. The first line of Liberation theology stressed the conversion of the middle class because they need to commit themselves to liberate the poor. Theologians developed a second line of Liberation theology which sought to learn from the poor. Others would say that the response to poverty arose quickly when the priests and religious began to reflect with their communities on the living conditions of their people. Gustavo Gutierrez has given his own account: "I discovered three things, I discovered that poverty was a destructive thing, something to be fought against and destroyed, not merely something which was the object of our charity. Secondly, I discovered that poverty was not accidental. The fact that these people are poor and not rich is not just a matter of chance, but the result of a structure. It was a structural question. Thirdly, I discovered that poor people were a social class. When I discovered that poverty was something to be fought against ... it became clear that in order to serve the poor, one had to move into political action" (see Bonino 1976:278). While knowing and studying the situation, Gutierrez articulated his vision and methodology for liberation.

1. Social analysis

Liberation theology takes into account, the context of the situation, pays special attention to the root causes of the present situation, and considers them from a historical perspective. Liberation theology is not expected, nor is it competent, to propose solutions, strategies or political alternatives, but it seeks the help of the social sciences. Many analyses have been proposed by various theologians, some of which have been accepted and others rejected or taken partially. The Dependence Theory based on

class struggle and Marxist theory are very commonly used. But the rejection of Marxist theory in its totality is well accepted, though a few prefer to use the tool of Marxian analysis excluding some of his categories. Gutierrez says, “atheistic ideology and the totalitarian world-view — are certainly to be discarded and rejected from the point of view of our faith, from a humanistic perspective and from the point of view of a sane social analysis” (see Paikada 2000:237).

To analyze society, certain scientific methodologies are important. Liberation theologians have mainly used Marxism, the Dependency Theory, the effect of capitalism and the impact of socialism. Not all theologians use the same theory in a similar way, and not all of them use all these analytical methods.

They use social analysis because liberation in the socio-political sphere is not to be completely separated from the salvific message of the Gospel. Leonard Boff says, “the main scheme of liberation is the socio-political realm, because it is there that we most keenly feel the stings of alienation and sin, of oppression and lack of freedom. It is certainly true that the liberation of Christ and God is something more than just socio-political liberation. But it is also socio-political liberation” (1979:128). Scannone has been one of the first to highlight the significance of the cultural sphere and the necessity to include it in the socio-analytical mediation.

2. Preferential option

The poor occupy a preferential place in the proclamation of the Reign of God, they together with others who show solidarity with them become agents for the realization of the Reign of God. “The fact that the starting point or ultimate principle of the option for the poor is to be found in faith in Christ is a statement of theological ontology — considering the thing itself, objectively. From the subjective or anthropological standpoint (be it logical, pedagogical or political), the option for the poor can be based on motivations other than that of faith” (Pixley and Boff 1989:116).

Leonardo Boff names three necessary mediations to be used in Liberation theology, namely the socio-analytical mediation, hermeneutical mediation and the mediation of pastoral practice. These help

people to see the reality with the eyes of the poor, to analyze the situation in the interests of the poor, and to join them in their struggle for liberation. This involves a clear option for the poor, political, ethical and evangelical. The God of the Bible, through the prophets and finally through the incarnation of the Son of God, made a preferential option for the poor, the poor people living at the time in Canaan and Egypt, and later in Palestine and Israel.

For Christians, faith in Christ leads to the poor, and commitment to and with the poor leads us into the mystery of Christ. Jesus makes us discover the poor and their greatness, and they lead us to Jesus and his Reign. Between the two poles there is what Paul VI called an “unceasing interplay” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 29). The option for the poor has a Christological aspect from a theological basis. One cannot ignore that it also has a *pneumatological* basis and the importance given to the Spirit and the poor, it has also a *mariological* aspect, these theological considerations need longer explanations.²

As believers in Christ, we need to respond to the situation of the poor. This option thus prompts all to work for human dignity. It can be done mostly with the poor and the oppressed and the Church has to be with them in their struggle and this is the challenge for the Church, “Wherever there is oppression, there will be struggles to win life-sustaining conditions — struggle between classes, between races, between nations, between the sexes. This is simply an observable fact, not a moral imperative or a scientific conclusion. We can see the just struggles of the oppressed going on around us, and we cannot see any other way out of the vast problems that afflict humanity at the close of the twentieth century” (Pixley and Boff 1989:242).

3. Faith in action

Awareness of the reality of poverty and its effects triggered responses of Christian compassion and indignation. Liberation theology asked how the Bible addressed these situations and how Christians ought to respond to the world of poverty, suffering, and oppression that surrounds them? The response has to be more than just praying for the poor, it must involve action. Thus, from the outset, Liberation theology involves a **commitment**

to the poor, and a liberating praxis. A clear thinking and action of Black theology is, “an unqualified commitment to the Black community as that community seeks to define its existence in the light of God’s liberating work in the world” (Cone 1970:33).

Theology follows in a distinctive manner the pastoral action of the Church and is a reflection upon it. Theologians have insisted that the first and fundamental objective of the commitment of Christians, is action. Gutierrez says, “The Christian community professes a “faith which works through charity”. It is real charity, action and commitment to the service of others. “Theology is reflection, a critical attitude. Theology follows; it is the second step” (1995:9). Again he insists, “A privileged *locus theologicus* for understanding the faith will be the life, preaching, and historical commitment of the Church” (1995:9).

Commitment to the people, specially the poor, plays an important part in theologizing. Faith is a commitment to God and human beings, then, in today’s world a commitment to the process of liberation is vital. The participation in the process of human liberation is the way of being in the world. It is necessary for Christians to have an understanding of this commitment and thus involve themselves in the process of liberation.

Theology is defined as “a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word”, it does not mean that wisdom and rational knowledge are replaced with praxis, rather these two are taken to have a more explicit ecclesial praxis. This theology is a theology of the future, but in practice it must be a critical appraisal of the historical praxis, in the sense the people would like it to be. Moltman says that theological concepts “do not limp after reality.... They illuminate reality by displaying its future” (1967:36). Praxis in action is praxis of love or love in action. This call to action has to take into consideration the changing socio-economic and political *scenarios*.

4. Biblical Themes

God is the **liberator**, this theme is powerfully explored by various scholars interpreting the Bible texts. Although there is no consensus on the interpretations, the central theme: God is the liberator is clearly brought forth in their exegesis. The exodus event serves as a powerful paradigm to

understand God as the liberator. The exodus was the central event in Israel’s history; it does show God responding to the cries of the poor; it did involve liberation from physical suffering and oppression, and not just salvation from personal sin. Yahweh, the God of Israel, brought them out from the oppressed society to form them into a new society, a contrast society where there will be equality, peace and no social stratifications. According to Lohfink, Yahweh did not work through political change but removed the Israelites from Egypt; they were taken away from the structure. Moreover, the Israelites did no violence to the Egyptians, did not even fight against them. ‘Yahweh will do the fighting for you; you have only to keep still’ (Ex 14:14). The violence done ... was brought on by Yahweh, not by human actions; the Israelites view the exodus as a miracle, as the work of God alone” (Mc Govern 1993:69).

Liberation theologians insist that God’s concern goes far beyond compassion and charity; it involves **justice**. The prophets and their message has one central theme—justice. To know God means to do justice otherwise one does not know God (*cf.* Hos 4:1-2). Miranda’s *Marx and the Bible*³ explores the connection between knowing God and doing justice. He insists that doing justice is a manifestation of knowing God who inspires, motivates and is part of our life. Through our words and deeds we communicate to others that we know God. Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah know only one decisive theme—justice and they communicated this theme vigorously to the people in spite of the opposition and failures of the people.

Liberation theology does not speak of a transcendental principle extracted from the Bible and then applied to concrete situations. It does not interpret reality philosophically, but starts from the concrete situations of society, its problems, freedom of people, and the oppressive structures. The social problems and contradictions are considered and not the reconciling conceptual opposites.

An Asian Liberation theologian, Aloysius Pieris, reiterates “that the biblical basis of Liberation theology is not a transcendent principle derived from reason and confirmed by the Bible but the very foundational experience that gave birth to the Bible, a canon within the canon, by which the Bible itself

is criticized internally. This foundational experience is the election of the oppressed class as God's equal partners in the common mission of creating a new order of love, a mission that can be shared by anyone who becomes one with God by being one with the oppressed class. Each concrete situation that reveals a new class of oppressed — women, minorities, and the like — is a continuation of this biblical revelation" (1989:308).

5. Questioning ideologies

All faith expressions have some ideology and all ideologies presuppose some underlying faith and Segundo rejects any viewing of Christianity simply as faith or of Marxism simply as an ideology. Both have values and the question is how these values are expressed and recognized. As the years went by, the Liberation theologians had various views on ideology, but lately they recognized that an ideology is not just negative connotations, but has different points of view. One can say, "the distinctive method of Liberation theology as a challenging of ideological elements in traditional modes of expressing reality and Christian truths, leading to a new understanding from the perspective of the poor" (Mc Govern 1993:43). But various works on liberation reveal that the major themes in Liberation theology with some form of deideologizing, prevailing ways of thinking, interpreting and articulating always sought the expression in the light of poor and the suppressing and dehumanizing situations. From the criticism of ideologies, the new paradigms emerged to understand the situation and the way to interpret the message of the Gospel, and Boff calls them: *The Socio-analytical Mediation*, *The Hermeneutical (Biblical –Theologica) Mediation* and *The Practical Mediation*. In all these Boff admits that he has borrowed the methodological pointers from Marxism, but not the dogmatic political aspect or as a strict scientific method or as a philosophy.

Segundo in his book *Faith and Ideologies*⁴ brings out clearly these two elements. He contends that theology contains ideological elements and often reflects the language and the values of the dominant, prevailing culture of the rich, the mental frame of the oppressors, and the life pattern of the ruling class. Theology refers not only to the past but more so to the present.

Hence he proposed the methodology of the hermeneutic circle. This involves interpreting the word of God afresh in the light of present conditions, striving to change reality, and then reinterpreting the word of God again. The "hermeneutic circle" involves a suspicion of ideological elements which are given to the people as Christian message (see Segundo 1976:7-38). In this way, deideologizing theology can take place giving new meaning and interpretation to the present context in the light of the Gospel.

6. Clarity on Controversies

Undoubtedly Liberation theology faced opposition from many people, especially from the hierarchy on the various ideological adaptations and interpretations. Liberation theology makes use of Marxist concepts but these concepts do not retain the same meanings. 'Praxis' connotes the living out of the Christian faith, not Marxian tactics of change. 'Class struggle' expresses the reality of social conflict in Latin America, not to a programme to stir up hatred or to eliminate some ruling class. 'Poor' denotes the landless peasants and the oppressed in society and the Marxists focus mainly on the industrial proletariat that are viewed as the bearers of emancipation (Mc Govern 1993:230). Some theologians used Marxian analysis for understanding society, some used it only as one of the tools of analysis. Now, there is a general shift from accusing capitalism, and socialism too does not remain as an unquestioned paradigm for liberation aspirations.

Liberation theology certainly elucidates the political involvement for liberation. Does it reduce faith to politics? Politics has two senses: first, the global and historical efforts of the human race to realize its potentials and second, politics in the narrower sense of orientation towards power. Gutierrez asserts that "all is colored politically", hence the liberation perspective has this element which cannot be overlooked. But all theologians do not attribute politics in a same strand. Over the years, it has changed. Now they talk about a "participatory democracy" from within civil society.

7. Spirituality

Liberation theology has always laid stress on spirituality, this spirituality involves both a call to follow Jesus in working for and with the poor, but is also a profound reflection on

what the Christians learn from the poor about God and his power. "To commit oneself to the process of liberation is for a Christian a new way of identifying himself or herself with Christ and constitutes a novel Christian experience, full of promise and possibility, but also of difficulties and disappointments. In fact for many Latin American Christians, liberating commitment corresponds to an authentic spiritual experience in the original, biblical sense of the term: It is living in the Spirit who causes us to acknowledge ourselves in a free and creative way to be Children of the Father and brothers and sisters to each other" (see McGovern 83-84).

Prayer and spiritual reflection are important and the contemplative element takes the person to experience God, but one cannot truly confess faith in God without service to the Reign. But we are called upon to respond to the actuality of the Reign. This needs commitment, purity of heart, letting go our egoism and always being open to what the Spirit is saying to us.

The preferred method to develop the spirituality of liberation varies from one theologian to another. John Sobrino in his *Spirituality of Liberation* states that prayer sustains the people in their struggle and helps them to move ahead in the process of liberation. Gutierrez develops the spirituality in his book *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, where the Church has to immerse itself among the poor and find God who liberates the people. A spirituality of liberation calls for a spirit of courage in the face of persecution, a spirit of quest for the truth, a spirit of fidelity and a spirit of holiness.

II. Indian Liberation Theology

In India, there is no single liberation theology, as multiple oppressive forces work upon various communities, such as the Dalits, Tribals, Women, fisher-folk, bonded labourers, etc. Hence we have Dalit theology, Tribal theology, Feminist theology and some others in the forefront that voice their own theological stand. Here, we present only some important pointers which focus on liberation. The diverse Indian theologies are not treated separately.

1. Integral approach

In the theology of liberation, constant

efforts are made to understand integral liberation which is a matter of inner freedom and inner liberation but these are interlinked to the social, economic, political and cultural liberation in history. Ultimately this integral approach is rooted in the Indian world-view in which the other worlds mutually interpenetrate. An integral liberation consists of spirituality, which is the force of our action. This spirituality is developed with the vision of the reality of the divine, human and cosmic nature. The praxis of liberation "is viewed simultaneously as a process of liberation of the self, society and nature – all organically linked together by common bonds of unity" (Wilfred 2002:99).

The situation of oppression cannot be analyzed simply in terms of class in India. There are ethnic, racial, linguistic, cultural, religious and caste factors which are central to any proper understanding of our societies. It is true that in India one cannot apply the same methodology of analysis, be it economic, or cultural theories to analyze and propose similar pointers to diverse groups. The complexity of liberation lies in this aspect, we need a holistic approach, but the approach itself may vary from place to place.

Economic and political analysis just gives the situation of the oppressed people, but in the Indian context, the cultural analysis is very important. Culture gives identity, values, and meaning to social groups. When the cultural structure has an oppressive system, then the people are trapped in a particular mind set. "While a sociologist can never see that a reality of social injustice is sin — rupture with God and with fellow men, faith sees sin at the core of the ruptures of fraternity of human beings pointing to exigencies of behaviour and options" (Paikada 2000:232).

Religious stories, myths, proverbs, popular stories, similes and metaphors are some of the aspects of culture. "The 'mythos' over against the 'logos' has been a strong point of Indian ethos. India has understood her logos always in relation to mythos, and never without it" (Wilfred 2002:102). But through the transmission of values, the oppressive values and meanings are transmitted. The caste system has social, economic and political aspects which have made people suffer continuously. The dehumanization is

sanctioned by religious interpretation, so the social structure gets strengthened. Similarly, women in particular are victims of a certain value system in the Indian society. The qualities the ideal woman is supposed to have are shyness, decency, obedience, service, dependency, fearfulness and the like. A wife is supposed to consider her husband a god, always subservient, obedient and at the service of her family. This cultural system is perpetuated by the rich and the middle classes in their own interests and they manipulate the system to a large extent for their own advantage. Hence, the liberation of the oppressed in the light of Gospel values would be to dismantle the cultural system itself. Jesus disobeyed the laws, questioned the accepted practices of that time and refused to accept that lepers and sinners were 'untouchables'. He respected the excluded and the outcasts. His touching and healing them gave dignity, and they were accepted as equals in society.

The option for the poor implies also an option for a just socio-economic world order that guarantees and promotes freedom and equality. In the process of liberation, people become the centre. "A greater cooperation and dialogue with the protagonists of integral humanism and ecology will prove to be beneficial in this respect. This aspect can no longer be set aside as being outside the purview of theology" (Paikada, 2000:405-6). The preferential option for the poor is rooted in the *kenosis* of God and his self-emptying love which is central to the Paschal Mystery of redemption.

2. Dialectical approach and compassion

Latin American theology has brought the knowledge of the liberative process in bringing the historical and the dialectical dimensions of reality into the understanding of the Christian faith. In India too, we use this dialectical method, taking the history of revolutionary movements of protest, resistance to oppression, *morchas* and *dharmas*, etc. With the understanding of Asian religions, compassion to the other is important, the expression of the divine flows through this to the other. Hence "both dialectics as well as compassion are part and parcel of Asian history and ethos, and the Asian way to liberation is in its unique combining of what would appear to be mutually exclusive polarities. Dialectics is the

other side of compassion. This integration and harmony between dialectics and compassion has something to offer to all those forms of theology which share the Indian concern of liberation" (Wilfred 2002:104).

Through the compassionate attitude, one moves beyond pity. The liberative approach is "not about pity. It's more about passion. Pity sees suffering and wants to ease the pain; passion sees injustice and wants to settle the score. Pity implores the powerful to pay attention; passion warns them about what will happen if they don't. The risk of pity is that it kills with kindness; the promise of passion is that it builds on the hope that the poor are fully capable of helping themselves if given the chance" (*Time*, 26 December 2005, p. 27). Passion moves people to act. Compassionate action respects people and enters into the people's perspectives.

3. Inter-faith projects

The formulation of the faith-praxis axiom has to be set in the context of other faith traditions. This is a great challenge. This can be done only when we develop the theology of religions and make much progress where we genuinely share the truth, the understanding of the divine, the meaning of suffering, the salvation and the meaning of life and make interfaith dialogue a meaningful reality. The poor, the oppressed and the marginalized Indians are the active subjects of the process of liberation. The poor in India belong to all religions, and when faith is put into practice, the various faith traditions are to be considered. In India, liberation must be an *inter-religious project*. "The multi-religious character of the liberation projects sets the various religious partners in dialogue with one another. Therefore, an ongoing inter-religious dialogue is in the very texture of Indian Liberation Theology" (Wilfred 2002:95).

When the other religious traditions are considered for the liberative task, the scriptures too are taken seriously. From the Biblical tradition, the exodus event, the prophets, the concept of justice, the liberative praxis of Jesus are meaningful propositions. Similarly, there is an active ferment of liberative thought and praxis articulated by Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. We need to refer to and take into account the sacred writings of our neighbours and what they tell us about freedom and liberation. "The

traditions of our people with all their symbolic expressions in folklore, myths, festivals, celebrations, stories, rituals, etc., with the key concepts like *dharmā, mukti and lokasamgraha* in the sacred scriptures of India as well as in the life of great liberative personalities and movements, will be made to interact with the situation and the struggle. The Indian theological reflection will thus try to discover their liberative and their oppressive potential. Thus, a new hermeneutics for the interpretation of the Indian religious scriptures and symbols will evolve a holistic vision of reality, and an integral approach to liberation will be decisive in their approach” (*ITA Statement* 1986: n. 48).

This is the special contribution and challenge to Indian liberation. Christians are only 2.3 per cent of the total population of India. Christian theology is but a drop in the ocean and it cannot penetrate the ethos of India alone. Only together with other religious traditions can the liberative potential be explored. This calls for inter-faith liberative principles and methodology.

III. Mission of the Church

Liberation theologians and the popular movements they support need to move beyond identifying the causes of poverty and oppression, there is enough evidence and awareness is created among the people. The challenge for the Church is how the poor can become more effective agents of social change. The mission dimension must evolve from reflection on the experiences of the poor, specific aspirations of the poor, the culture of the people and the various celebrations, the myths, folklore and stories, to equality with others and respect in society.

The urgency of the liberative mission of the Church has been expressed many times, but we need to reiterate again and again: “The liberation and empowerment of the marginalized who form more than half of the people in our countries, and the healing of our ravaged planet, have to be at the top of the agenda of a concerned Church. The Church is called to embrace the afflicted with a cosmic compassion that reveals the face of Jesus who fed the hungry thousands (*cf* Lk 9:12-17), gave speech to the dumb and sight to the blind (*cf* Lk 7:21-22). These actions manifest Jesus’

mission to promote God’s rule in the world. The Gospel impels us to take sides with the poor and challenges us to follow Jesus in his self-emptying love and solidarity with the victims of history” (*Conclusions* 2001: n. 10). Many documents, religious congregations’ chapters, Catholic religious groups and many others have been explicit, but the effect is not fully seen by the people. Although various factors could be involved for not having vibrant works, the Church must again and again relaunch the project of liberative tasks among people.

Salvation involves liberation from sin, whether individual or structural, and this means societal transformation, economic equality and rights, political freedom and ensuring overarching human dignity and rights in a community or region. Salvation is both individual and communitarian, all are called to participate in “a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace”, as the Preface for the Feast of Christ the King so beautifully expresses it. “Genuine liberation is therefore possible only if there is both a change of structures and change of hearts; if personal conversion complements social change; and of a cultural revolution leavens a sociopolitical one” (Soares-Prabhu 1992:113). The Indian Theology of Liberation concerns structural change as well as the personal conversion and transformation of specific concerns. The symbiosis of these concerns will have to be taken up by the people for holistic liberation.

1. Liberation of the poor and prophetic compassion

In the light of Liberation theology, love for the poor leads to liberation of the poor. Christianity is seen as a religion which is compassionate to the poor, but liberation of the poor from the perspective of socio-economic and political spheres would mean more than just loving talk and caring service. Love would imply more than the niceties of relationship. Love in the fuller sense would lead to embracing all the spheres of society. Christian love can have far-reaching political and social implications and consequences, then it calls for effective orientation, **prophetic compassion**. This whole implication is also called ‘**culture of prophetic love**’

(Wilfred 2002:245-247). The prophetic sense of mission is the urgent need, the emergence of a prophetic Church is the current need. One or two individuals can make a difference in a particular place. The Local Church as a whole could promote this culture of prophetic love or prophetic compassion, so that the liberation of the poor can be experienced. This is a process, the freedom and liberty will not take place in a short span of time, but the whole culture of the people or the Local Church emerge with this sense of urgency to liberate the Dalits and Tribals, the light of freedom will be seen by the people.

In the light of our work among the Dalits, the Indian Theological Association says, "The Church will become an authentic witness to the Gospel and symbol of God's liberating initiative in Jesus Christ when it works towards the total emancipation of the Dalits. The active involvement of the Church with Dalits in their struggle for liberation, social justice and human dignity while constituting an essential aspect of the Church's mission in India" (*Statement of ITA* 2005: n.16).

While reflecting on the condition of women in India, all are called to work for gender justice. The dehumanizing situation of women is an integral part of the cultural system, the non-equal status is meted to women in the Church in the structure of the Church itself, and the marginalization erodes progressively because of the societal system itself, hence, "taking human life seriously, men and women are challenged to identify and resist forces negating the well-being of women and to recognize their dignity, worth and contribution in all spheres of life" (*Statement of ITA* 2004: n.28).

The prophetic stand must liberate the Dalits, Tribals, women and other disadvantaged groups and involve them in the process of gaining their human rights and human dignity: "the strength of the mission will be proportionate to the strength of the prophetic challenge we are able to pose to individuals and the structures of Satan and Mammon.... If mission is a prophetic task and if it is to be exercised in collaboration with others, it means that the call to this task is addressed to all who participate in God's mission" (*Conclusions* 2000: nn. 19-20).

2. Corporate mission and Dynamic Involvement

Understanding the complexities of globalization and its impact, there is a tendency to resign oneself to it, or give into it. Its impact is great and difficult to withstand, the flow of capital and the marketing system engulf the people, and the poor bear the brunt of the effects of globalization through unemployment, completion, and unskilled spectrum. The change could come about through the corporate mission, meaning that the whole Church in the county should focus its mission endeavour against the evil effects of globalization. The power of collective bargaining has to be exercised by the Church. This calls for involvement. Instead many people bypass the uncanny things which happen in society as onlookers, when our faith demands us to show its depth, and to become involved. **Non-involvement** is the biggest sickness of the people or for that matter of the Indian Church.

The *Antoyodaya*, the rising of the least, evident among the Dalits, Tribals, Women, and fisherfolk, is a sign that they awakened and that the Church, by its guiding hand and cooperation, can strengthen these rising organizations. Although the rising is seen, it is neither consolidated by the people nor by the Church. The rising of the least has an impact on the majority community, the political powers, the controllers of economic systems and the money powered upper *élite* castes. This would also mean that these powerful communities should empathize with the rising of the least and have the heart to get involved to help them to assert their dignity.

The awakening of the masses for their liberation challenges the Church to reorient its institutions and services to work for liberation. The educational, health, and social welfare institutions should have this special concern for the poor and the oppressed and this has to be part of the vision and practice of the institutions. The educational institutions should reserve a certain percentage of places and adopt a stable practical policy towards their treatment of the marginalized. Indeed a fixed percentage of monetary help for the poorest sections in the social service sector would be of immense help to these people. Hence, efforts have to be made by all the bodies of the Church and all the people, calling for

corporate mission. The collective bargaining power in society in favour of the poor and weak needs a corporate mission perspective.

Liberation theologians stress the Good News to the poor, but the non-poor are not only to be challenged, but they need to have a conversion of heart. The goal of the Reign of God includes all, the poor and the non-poor and we are moving towards the Reign where justice, fellowship and freedom would prevail. Hence, the recognition of mission to the rich, and the oppressors should not be left out. "If we want to work with the non-poor then our language will have to change. Mere prophetic denunciation will not help. A call to revolution, especially violent revolution, may even be counter-productive, radicalizing divisions and letting the emotions dominate practical reason. We will have to be reasonable. More important still, we will have to look for good-willed collaborators in the dominant group" (Amaladoss 2005:731) Christian involvement in politics is very necessary, and it has to be promoted, but one has to move with caution and it has to be with the other peoples' movements that are also committed to justice. Christian involvement in politics has to be holistic in nature taking into consideration the weak and marginalized of all religions as well as other concerns of society. This involvement has to be both prophetic and messianic.

3. Diversity and asserting identity

India is pluralistic in the areas of culture, religion, ethnicity, language, etc. Every linguistic or ethnic group needs space to grow. The growth of the people needs recognition and encouragement. There are also many vested interests in blocking the rights of other ethnic groups for political or economic reasons. Hence, liberating these groups is the urgent need today and by asserting their identity as a group in the pluralistic context, they can hope for a better future. Hence, to reread the biblical sources from the perspective of pluralism and diversity which define to a large extent our commitment to liberation. The big challenge is to reread the scriptures of various religions from the perspective of liberation for the freedom and liberty of the multi-ethnic or religious groups.

Every group can and should promote its particular identity. The question is asked whether it is the goal or the means. This

cannot be the end of each group and this alone cannot attain liberation. Each group with its distinct identity should merge also with other regional communities or the national community. It cannot look on the other as the enemy. Multi-culturalism in a country is welcome, but ways should be found to integrate them to live as a larger community where justice and peace is established. Dalit and Tribal theologians are stressing the importance of people asserting their identities, but at the same time they have to think of integrating them into the wider identities at the regional and national levels. The challenge to the mission of the Church is to keep the balance between the assertion of the oppressed groups' identities and at the same time to integrate them into the larger identity of the Church and society.

4. Working for justice

The most significant change at the theological level has centred around two factors: **(a)** Social justice is now seen as an integral part of Christian charity, and involvement in the struggle for social justice is considered inseparable from evangelizing activity; **(b)** Dialogue and cooperation with the believers of other religions for the promotion of justice and peace are seen as a *sine qua non* for the Church and have been accepted as the way of life, in keeping with the Church's vocation to work for the Kingdom of God and for the welfare of the poor (Paikada 2000:161).

In Indian history, the perpetrators of injustice continue and often it is passed on from generation to generation even without questioning the structure, tradition, or the mode of treating the simple and weak people. Hence, a constant effort has to be made to identify the oppressors in the cultural system, structural practices, and even in the political and bureaucratic framework. Opposing these oppressors and denouncing corrupt practices, and demanding that rights based action be coordinated for better results in society. The Methodologies are important in order to relate with them or dialogue with them without hate. "In our following of Jesus the prophet we denounce injustice; and in our following of Jesus the self-emptying servant we are reminded that in denouncing we must never hate and cut off the possibility of

relationship and dialogue with the oppressors” (*Conclusions* 2001: n.18). The mission of the Church calls for the self-emptying of the *kenotic* path. It denotes a Church of the poor characterized by a visible solidarity with the victims at the same time as it relates with the oppressors.

Reconciliation is a significant task in society, it is always attentive to affirming the dignity and rights of every individual. Reconciliation should not be used to derail the process of establishing justice. “As followers of the prophetic Christ we seek justice; as followers of the self-emptying Christ we seek reconciliation. Our efforts to pursue justice must take place, and find direction, through our efforts to pursue reconciliation” (*Conclusions* 2001: n.17). Here, one can reiterate the restorative justice over retributive justice.

5. Liberating dialogue

The poor, the oppressed and the marginalized Indians are the active subjects of the process of liberation. The poor in India belong to all religions, and when faith is put into practice, the various faith traditions are to be considered. In India, liberation cannot but be an *inter-religious project*. Dialogue with other religions is an important and coherent part of the mission. Other religions possess immense goodness for transforming society with its truth, (*marga*) and way of life. But this dialogue also paves the way to critical collaboration. We dialogue with other religions, we are also learning to affirm our faith in Jesus and his message of the Reign, in this process, mutual discovery, self-criticism, and enrichment is possible and can be of great help for the renewal of the religions. This dialogue also paves the way to peace or harmony in society. Hence, dialogue has to be a liberating dialogue for the people. This leads to protest against the forces of communalism and fundamentalism which are on the course of monologue. Hindutva ideology has far-reaching consequences in society dividing and segregating the people and with its ideological framework systematically pushing aside the Dalits and Tribals.

Mission’s call is to “oppose all tendencies of cultural nationalism and intolerance of pluralism whereby the rich variety of our country is sought to be wiped out by the

wealthy who are the protagonists of the inadmissible monoculturalism” (*Conclusions* 2000: n.22). The dialogue is also geared towards the liberation of all people, hence a radical critique of religions has also to be undertaken, which would give hope for an alternative society. All religions should be involved in a serious dialogue to bring about a just social order and this is the challenge of interfaith dialogue to the Church as well as to the other religions.

6. Education of the oppressed

Our preferential option is for the Dalits, Tribals, oppressed women, orphans, differently-abled people, children, widows, prisoners, AIDS patients and other economically poor children. It is actually an obligatory category of people. Educating them is one of the paramount tasks of the Church to share the process of liberation with them. In the context of the paradigm shifts in theology and praxis, new strategies have to be evolved and then, our education ministry becomes, a mission. *Education is mission* and we need to move ahead with this vision to give awareness, motivating people by showing them different paths to liberative action. “The search for fresh goals and the commitment to renew options will motivate us to seek answers to tomorrow’s problems with a stout heart, prophetic zeal and greater enthusiasm to participate fully in this sublime mission of the Church. This new consciousness will enable us to situate our excellence in terms of our relevance to the needs of God’s Reign, rather than situating it in terms of an excellence irrelevant to the majority of God’s people” (*Conclusions* 2004:41).

Conclusion

The mission of the Church is to participate in Jesus’ mission and to continue to actualize the Reign of God that Jesus brought. In service to this Reign the Church finds its identity (*cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 14). Here, the Church is called to announce, serve and witness to the Reign of God. According to the signs of the times and the context, the importance of this service and witness to the Reign become more demanding and gain prominence. This does not mean neglecting proclamation of the Good News.

The problem of Liberation theology

does not come from outside forces. "The problem is internal to Christianity: what was early Christianity? Why did Christianity change? How to return to the roots of Christianity? The poor do not question the Church from outside, as do the Indigenous or Blacks. The poor are within the Church, and by every right, are the Church. So why are they not in fact what they are by right?" (Comblin 1998:215).

What Liberation theology has already achieved is of great significance. It has drawn the attention of the Church, the civil leaders, the politicians, the lukewarm Christians and others. The poor have become prominent. The poor can have hope and see the future with optimism. Liberation theology strives to keep alive the hopes embodied in Jesus' central message of the Reign of God. The mission of the Church is how to actualize this Reign of God which is alive and active here and now and shows the horizons of the Reign which will bloom to the full.

As long as the poor are continuously oppressed, the mission of the Church cannot turn away its focus from the liberation of the poor. To be effective, it has to find a creative way to cooperate with other movements. Liberation theology itself has to find new ways to articulate itself according to the changing *scenario* of the world and the mission of the Church has to adopt creative ministries to bring transformation to the world, so that all people can move towards a new heaven and a new earth.

The Church's concerted action is very important, looking ahead with confidence and doing concrete liberative actions is called for. "There is not going to be any new Medellín in the near future. Nor will there be any new Vatican II in the near future; it would not have anything new to say because the Church is not yet ready to receive a new impulse.

The social movement that led to social reform and to the Welfare State started around 1870. Vatican II came ninety years later. A new social movement to respond to the new wave of economic revolution has barely begun. Now is the time to begin to work out new responses to the new challenges" (Comblin 1998:217).

Medha Patkar, the well-known social worker while addressing the priests and religious at Ishvani Kendra in January 2005, said that the Christians are doing good works

in our country, but they can still do much more. For the transformative works on which the Church is now engaged, she said that it does not need the mighty institutions which it has at present. The fight against material poverty requires that individuals and groups be liberated from possessiveness and acquisitiveness. The constant challenge has been, how the Church can identify with the struggling sections of society and share the suffering of its people, the Church's identity and insertion lies in the process of inculturation. The Church moves on, but may not keep up with the fast changing *scenario* or problems of the world. The proportionate response of the Church to the conditions of the people is to be desired far more.

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Footnotes

¹The first incident tells of a woman who confessed that she received communion, even though she came too late for Mass, because she had not eaten for three days and she literally hungered for the host. The second story tells of a Bishop who vowed to assist some hungry person each day after he met a woman who tried to nurse her baby from a bleeding breast that contained no more milk.

² Cf. J. Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1989; I. Gebara and M.C. Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, Kent: Burns and Oates, 1989.

³ Jose Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, New York: Maryknoll, 1974.

⁴ J. Luis Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies, Vol.1*, New York: Maryknoll, 1984.

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Theology in Sri Lankan Context

(A Case of Doing)

- Vicente G. Cajilig, OP -

One day the author was handed a book entitled “*An Introduction to Theology*” by Kuncheria Pathil and Dominic Veliath, authors of: Indian Theological Series (Bangalore: Theological Publication of India, 2005, 231 pp). The volume has the copyright of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India. It is a rather comprehensive work. Then I was asked to consider whether the portion on local theology could be adjusted to the realities of Sri Lanka. I was challenged by this inquiry. But I thought that I could only give principles for the renewal of theology which is really the concern of the National Seminary in Kandy. Other elements must be worked out by the best thinkers in the said institution.

Given the above, the first important task is to work out the aims, if this project is to be pushed through. And there can be many. Above all, Sri Lankan Theology must aim at the transformation of the person and society. This must be the main guideline for ‘doing theology’ in a country where the faithful count only about seven per cent of the total population. Although theology in Asia may follow a highly abstract and rational approach, with books containing specific details for teaching theologians in highly sophisticated language who are known to be a vanguard in the day to day dealing of the subject, and are presented in the most recent publications of a theological society or a theological school.

I remember how Henri Nouwen, a theologian well accepted in Protestant and Catholic circles was like a frog jumping from one highly recognized theological school to another, in Canada, United States, Europe, Africa, etc., but in the last period of his profession he partly settled in a community

of handicapped, if only to give more meaning to his endeavours in the early part of his life. No current issue, no talk of liberation theology, no support was left unaddressed, such as the socio-political issues for which Martin Luther King gave up his life (Roberta Jonas, Introduction in *Modern Spiritual Master Series*, New York: Orbis Books, 1998, pp. xiii ff).

Similar efforts are still useful for the Catholic Church, and it is expected that they will continue, but one question stands out: does this really bring about transformation in the person and society?

When a theological school like the one in Sri Lanka makes an effort to update theological formation, it has to choose its own orientation. Native minds are not lacking that have attempted to contribute to advance the understanding of formulated truth, but somehow find themselves in a predicament, either because they find it hard to get support, or because they are suspect prophets whose audience is on the tip-toe. A new-comer is certainly not sufficiently equipped to handle the nitty-gritty details. Those whose task it is to maintain the orthodoxy traditionally held by the Catholic faith in a country where over seventy per cent are ardent followers of the great teaching of the Lord Buddha, fulfil their role with much concern. We acknowledge their inalienable right, and even duty, to do so. On the other hand, there are noble souls who ask: what the great religion of Buddhism and the great culture of the people can offer to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth?

Any effort that helps a person advance and eventually change society, where peace

is most wanting, will serve the common good. Certainly, an effort may not be definitive, but an effort can raise valid questions that deserve valid answers. Hence, if it is in order for a theologian just to attempt to search for a way of handling a body of doctrine, with a sense of fidelity to orthodoxy, firmly based on surrounding Christian believers with the specific colour of Catholicism: what are the key ingredients of a contextual, acceptable theology to enable the Church to become inculturated? (cf. Dias, Mario, Ed., *Rooting Faith in Asia*, Bangalore: Claritian Publications, 2005, pp. 321 ff).

This effort is certainly to be taken as an initial step, but with much attention to what **Ecclesia in Asia** is trying to convey (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Special Synod of Bishops for Asia, Vatican City, New Delhi, 6 Nov. 1999). *Ecclesia in Asia*, or the faithful of Church in Asia, is taken here as a community trying to become a *communio*. The call for the reign of the Kingdom cannot be separated from the call to form a community of communities. The new way of being Church in Asia is intertwined with the very efforts exerted in the local (national) and particular (diocesan) Churches.

The grounding principles are:

1. *Fidelity to Reality*: The point of departure is to develop a theology for, and in, the local Church taking into account the surrounding circumstances which divine Providence allows to happen in a community striving to be better. The reality is the point of departure for a new way of being Church in Asia (Quevedo, Orlando, *Inculturating Church Leadership and Governance in Rooting Faith in Asia*, pp. 342, ff). It may be otherwise, but it seems that what was attempted before is not really bringing abundant fruit. The reality was Jesus' point of departure. His preaching and teaching were historically situated. He knew the culture of the Jews. He knew their tradition, good and not so good. He knew about the environment. The fields he was walking through. The stones and the rocks his feet touched. The sea he navigated with his Disciples was part of his sermon. He

preached on the Mount. He knew the rich and the poor. He attended to the needs of the hungry and the sick.

One interesting Parable for us is about the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:28-37). It is actually at the basis of our conviction that one principle to be considered in doing theology is the lesson from this story: A priest passed by a man who had been abused along the way and left there. He passed him by; yet the priest was not moved by the reality. Another person passed by, this time, a Levite. He served the temple in certain ways; yet he passed by the man who had been abused: yet he seemingly failed to notice his neighbour in need. But then the Samaritan, a no-good person, in traditional Jewish estimation, saw a different neighbour: one in need of his help. He attended to him; he took him to an inn; and he left an amount to be spent in case of further needs. Who is the true neighbour?

In daily life, when we do things, in the name of faith, in the name of ministry, the first thing that the great Master wants us to do is to attend to the reality — to real needs. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences has seen in every mission related and evangelization effort, the need to attend to the reality of Local Churches. So it organizes surveys, consultations, investigations, and what not, just to see what is happening. Even the preparation of the Asian Synod in 1998 did not fail in this. A *Lineamenta* for the Synod of Asia was disseminated. A thorough preparation was done by way of consultation in all Asian countries to be presented at the holy gathering.

This leads us to observe that, the task of ministry done in a diocese, parish, village, home, or seminary, in fidelity to reality is a *conditio-sine-qua-non* consideration.

Admittedly, the process is difficult and tedious, but it has to be done. If there are efforts to contextualize theology, and attempts to do 'Doing Theology', then the reality has to be attended to.

2. *Fidelity to Faith*: Those with the serious obligation to preserve and faithfully keep the authentic contents of the Creed we received

from our forefathers and from the original teaching of the Apostles, subscribed to by the Catholic Church as in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, cannot allow anything to threaten the fundamental doctrine we are privileged to receive and enjoy. The word *enjoy* is interesting. Our faith must really bring us joy. And this joy must be seen in the faces of the believers, first the minister's, then of all the faithful. For our religion is the one of Resurrection. The joy of seeing Jesus again after the crucifixion was the element that sustained them afterwards. It is the confession of the Resurrection of Jesus that sustained Paul of Tarsus. Falling from his horse and meeting Jesus made Paul a very different person (Acts 9:1-9; see R. Brown *et al.* Editors, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Bangalore: Theological Publication of India, 2004, no. 44:54).

The Catholic Church does not fail to point out the orthodox contents of our belief when called for. The excitement at the discovery of the *Gospel according to Judas* was not met simply with denial. Serious research has been done. Putting this discovery into the correct perspective, for the document has historical importance, was immediately attended too. Even lay believers, conscious of upholding what they believe, rooted in the first century belief of the early Christian communities, joined in the effort to determine the value of this discovery: only to find that the document contains the profession and life of the Gnostics (Green, Bernard in *The Truth about the Gospel of Judas*, Catholic Truth Society: London, 2005 pp. 1-50). The community that held Gnosticism perished in time. And we know now that the New Testament prevailed and excelled as the true source of our faith which we find contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

3. *Theology and Globalization*: This is the place to make a general reference to terminology no one may escape: *globalization*. From the most advanced cities to the most distant tribes of Asia and Africa, globalization has been felt: both its positive and negative aspects. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* faces this contemporary issue squarely (Manila: *Word*

and Life Publication, 2004, pp. 222 ff). While there is a dream of solving poverty in poor countries, there is mention of the fact that the international debt serves as a chain from which people can hardly escape (John-Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 January 2001, Vatican City, no. 14). The harvest brought by fast communication, the printing press, the radio, the television and/or technology in general cannot be ignored. The media is a vehicle for good catechesis but it can also be used as an instrument to destroy the original morality of a people. What makes the difference is who handles them, the minds that receive them, and the hearts that embrace them. If the media makes theology, history, authentic culture, and faith its basic message, then the media is a very useful tool. But it can bring, as it has, other disturbing messages.

One should note that globalization follows the laws of economics. It has little respect, if any, for other aspects of life, like culture and authentic human and social ties. The goal of globalization is to have profits and more economic power.

Theology is basically the presentation of the core of revelation. Man does not accept his faith on authority alone; that faith must be reasonable. Faith and reason compliment one another. *Fides et Ratio* are two wings for humanity on its journey to the Kingdom (John-Paul, *Encyclicals*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005, pp. 53-154). In fact for theologians this reference to the two wings of development not only in faith but also in social and economic progress may bring true excitement. All are products of one divine mind: the mind itself, the heart that feels, the feet that walk, the hands that build or destroy, and the matter and all the elements that make it up in its most elementary form, call them atoms, neutrons, positrons — all are created by one Universal Creator. One and the same author of life and creation is central in the major religions.

Christianity is the only religion whose Founder claimed to be the Son of the living God. His word is the word of the Father. His mission is to bring the love of the Father.

His Spirit is present in a place even before the coming of a Christian missionary. And Jesus was born in Asia. He was an Asian and belongs to the whole of Asia and the world. He was sent not only for his people Israel. He was sent to all places. His Disciples followed his command. His present-day disciples should still follow his divine command. Theology cannot but help in discovering ways to fulfil the wish of the Master. When theologians come together, it is to discover, as a collegial body, what each can contribute to the progress of understanding faith. It is as if, each one tries to discover the window, where one can look out, or shout from.... The contents cannot be but our original faith. Thanks to so many theologians who have gone before our time. Thanks to contemporary theologians who venture to think differently, but with a clear and strong desire to serve the Kingdom. Joys and sorrows will always be the lot of the faithful servant of Christian belief.

4. *FABC Statements — Core Values*: The eight Plenary Assemblies held so far by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. When a local theologian deals with the statements of an assembly, he must look into the constitution of the gathering, then the present historical environment and situation, along the lines of the recent Documents issued by the Vatican. When the delegates consider the issues at hand during the meeting, they always take into account the guidance that comes from the Holy See. I remember that since the Bandung Plenary Assembly in 1990 (Indonesia), the delegates always desired to suggest to the Holy Father to issue one specific document just for Asia. The general document that is intended for the Catholic Church does not seem to have impact on the Asian Communities. The language is not understandable to the youth of Asia to whom the Pope also intends to reach out. In meetings organized by the Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy, there is a demand for a language that fits their psychology and culture.

So far there have been eight assemblies attended by mixed delegations. While everyone can participate, when it comes to drawing up the Final Statement, the Bishops

present have to put their final seal to it. So the result has the authority of the official Shepherds. The eight assemblies had the following themes: FABC I, Evangelization in Modern Asia (1974, Taipei); FABC II, Prayer – The Life of the Church in Asia (1978, Calcutta); FABC III, The Church the Community of Faith in Asia (1982, Bangkok); FABC IV; The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia (1986, Tokyo); FABC V, Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium (1990, Bandung); FABC VI, Christian Discipleship in a Mission to Asia. Today: Service to Life (1995, Manila); FABC VII, A Renewed Church In Asia: A Mission of Love and Service; and, FABC VIII, The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integrated Life (2004, Daejeon).

In an analysis done in a research on contextual theology, one notices that the themes evolve. No assembly put a final period to a certain point or issue. For the teaching in an assembly is brought to the local Church by corresponding courses of action. For no assembly is purely instructional. Every assembly is destined to revolve around the recommendations made. Some recommendations are for the regions, others for the national Church, others are for particular groups. I remember the specific instruction for the formators (rectors and spiritual directors) to meet and discuss the aspects of formation in seminaries. FABC then called, with the support of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, five meetings just for the personnel in the houses of formation.

The value of the contents of the statement of an assembly is not the same as the statement of an *office* by reason of extension in participation. There are nine offices in the FABC, namely: Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy (OESC); Office of Human Development (OHD); Office of the Laity (OL); Office of Inter-religious and Ecumenical Affairs (OIEA), Office of Social Communication (OSC), Office of Evangelization (OE); Office of the Clergy (OC); Office of Consecrated Life (OCL). Each Office has a corresponding chairman and executive secretaries. A committee helps every office.

Every office plans its course of action, with a sense of openness to any other office. Collaboration takes place in many meetings. But the value of a particular meeting by an office lacks that seal of the big assembly where the Presidents of all the Episcopal Conferences are to attend. Yet no one can underestimate the value of the statement of a meeting organized by an office. The Bishops in charge of the national commissions are to attend. Often other experts are sent to contribute their wisdom and experience in the field or topic dealt with.

It has to be noted that the Federation of Asian Bishops, whose office is based in Hong Kong, would publish other particular papers read during a meeting held by an Office. These are the papers of experts with an appropriate background and special expertise. Many schools of theology in Asia or elsewhere use these FABC Papers. We have received in our office inquiries about how to find copies of these articles.

Therefore, when it comes to the quality of the teachings, the document from the General Assemblies surpasses others, without diminishing the usefulness of one single paper published in series form by the FABC. Students of theology writing their licentiate/masteral or doctoral researches from universities, either in Europe, America, or Asia have availed themselves of the contributions that come from the said series of publications.

5. *Pastoral Letters of CBCSL (or Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka)*: Melchor Cano, considered a prince of theology in modern times, made a categorization of the *loci theologici* (sources of theology). The original sources are Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Tradition. The safe-keepers and Preachers are: Teaching Church, Councils, and Roman Pontiff. The witnesses and investigators are: The Fathers, Doctors, and Theologians. And the less important sources are: Human Reason, History, and Philosophy. The orderly categorization serves as the basis of any theological work even before modern times; but putting them in order makes the theological science more understandable.

Today, when it comes to making contextualized theology, one cannot escape from these categories. But now the question is: where would the culture and religious experience of people of other faiths fit it, if it is taken as the locus of local theology? Certainly, we cannot do away with them. Maybe as we cannot just call it less important, it should belong to the first principle called: *fidelity to reality*.

The Pastoral Letters issued by a National Episcopal Conference have major significance. These documents are very important. I know of a National Conference that has put all the Pastoral Letters into one volume. The motivation for issuing a Pastoral Letter for the country is due to a specific condition and situation. The case of Sri Lanka cannot be different. Where are the Pastoral Letters on catechesis, the social situation, dialogue, etc? It is important for all students of theology and for the faith to have the contents of these in their hearts. The teachers of theology must make reference to these guiding and instructional letters.

The shepherding role of the Church today is made explicit in the guidance by the Shepherds. A reference is well accentuated in the job of the Bishops who are also in need of satisfaction (Nicholas Marcos Fernando, *Shepherding Role in the Church Today*, Living Faith, Vol. 3 no. 2, December 2002, pp. 1-4). When the Bishops exercise their role well, they inwardly enjoy satisfying sentiments.

6. *Aim of Doing Theology: Transformation of Person and Society*: A review has been made on the volume entitled: *An introduction to Theology*. It is part of the Indian Theological Series. The volume presents many objectives. When consulted about attempting to undertake a 'doing theology' in the context of Sri Lanka, I thought that the focus should really be on the transformation of the faithful. But of course the first transformation should take place in the person of the Church leaders.

The aim is not easy to achieve. And the aim will take time to achieve. But the mercy of God is beyond our grasp. Anything, according to our belief can be achieved under the provident design of the Author of creation. This will require risk, discovery of

new methods, reviving spirits, and discerning the signs of the times that is usually given to people who think differently. There is no danger from this as long as every gifted person is willing to submit self, conviction, and belief to the authorities whose task it is to guard *fidelity to faith*.

Fr Leopold Ratnasekara has made a good reading of theology in the Asian context (*Theology in the Asian Context*, in "Living Faith", Vol 5. no. 2, December 2004, pp. 7-19). He has identified elements of a 'doing theology' which would produce the transformation of the person and society. Efforts in doing catechism will help this. The Federation of Bishops' Conferences has made an effort look at faith beyond 2000 (Cajilig, V. Ed., *Catechesis for Asia: Toward Year 2000 and Beyond*, Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy: Manila, 1996, p. 283).

7. *Inculturation and Dialogue in the Sri Lankan Context*: A meeting was held by one office of the FABC in the first half of 2006. It was on Catholicism in Dialogue with Taoism, Confucianism and Folk Religions in the context of the countries in East Asia (FABC-OESC Newsletter Vol XVIII, no. 2, August 2006). It was held on an island off Taiwan not too far in size compared with Sri Lanka. Sixteen countries were represented. Taiwan is gifted with a culture Chinese in character, basically, the mixture of Taoist and Confucian traditions. But it is a culture which is well grounded in Folk Religions, like piety for Guan Dong and Cult for Mazu.

Elements which serve as points for encounter where identified: **1)** Encounter takes place on the *local level* for life encounters happen where the people are without diminishing other encounters in which institutions and groups take part. **2)** *Sacramentality* is one thing to consider: For culture brings with it visible expressions of the inner reality, through the arts and symbols. One has to recognize that the visible expressions of piety in places of worship, rites, music and festivals, with colour and designs found in houses of faith. **3)** *Dialogue* with other faiths is one frontier of evangelization. It is a frontier where respect of religious traditions is given to every participant; otherwise there is no reason to call

for dialogue. The spirit of *Nostra Aetate* should be kept every time there is dialogue worth its name (The Documents of Vatican II, Walter M. Abbott, SJ, Edition).

The dialogue and inculturation sessions called for by the Church as avenues of progressing in relationship with the Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim traditions take place on an island gifted with much grandeur in the past. The different kingdoms in Sri Lanka must have left clear footprints in the lives of the people. Even the Christians could not escape from the native cultural influence. Fr Vimal Tirrimanna puts it this way: "Culture is an essential of, and a challenge to, Christian Faith" (*Living Faith*, Vol. 7 no. 9, October, 2006). But how the purification of cultures takes place among the believers in Christianity, and how the same believers may profit from native traditions, with shortcomings of their own, if not failure, is a tedious area for serious research. Furthermore, monks in Sri Lanka are reflecting deeply on the works of Catholic mystics, like Meister Eckhart (a good study on the text of mystics can be interesting: see for example *The Rhineland Mystics*, Davies, O., Ed. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989, pp 27-62).

Above all, an effective effort in dialogue, is witnessing. While endeavours take place in big halls, in educational institutions, and elsewhere, witnesses could speak loudly, through life and example, and through their commitments. Examples speak louder than what comes from the lips. The life witness of those who once belonged to another faith persuasion or tradition and now embrace the way of life of Jesus is what is needed more than mere teachers and preachers.

The leadership of the present Church of Sri Lanka has expressed the serious efforts planned to be exerted to help the Church advance in the first and second decade of the third millennium. This can be done with collegial effort, with professors in the National Seminary taking leadership. It is said that the laywomen and laymen are waiting for materials that can help them understand and progress in the Catholic faith.

Should the effort to pursue the case of

'doing theology' in the national context continue, local research should have a good view of Modern Day Sri Lanka, and a good reading of how the leaders and the faithful can work together to be a *New Church* in Sri Lanka. Moreover, work for the culture of integral life as envisioned in the 2004 Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences will have to take place (FABC Papers No. 111. *The Asian Family Toward the Culture of Integral Life*, 82 pp.).

The bibliography on Modern Day Sri Lanka includes the following:

1. Discipleship Today: Help from the Method of Pastoral Spiral;
2. Communication and Faith;
3. Challenges of Politico-social Concerns;
4. Inter-Faith Dialogue: Beginning, Progress and Projection;
5. Steps for Ecumenism: Education and Values;
6. Ecological Spirituality;
7. Silence in Sri Lankan Religio-cultural Context.

Being *New Church* in Sri Lanka would consider:

1. Communion as Church Paradigm;
2. Catechesis and Youth;
3. Adult Catechism;
4. The Bible in Domestic Church;
5. Youth as Evangelizers;
6. Seminary as Home and School of Communion;
7. The Clergy and Continuous Programme of Formation.

Finally, working toward integral life of the faithful should count on:

1. What Besets Today's Family: Toward Pastoral Care;
2. The Strength of Sri Lankan Families;
3. Inter-marriage of Couples with Different Faiths;
4. Spirituality and Mission of Catholic Family;
5. Pastoral Care: Encounter of Persons in Marriage;
6. Telling Beautiful Stories of Encounters with Jesus by Spouses

7. Living Eucharist in Sri Lankan domestic Church

The aforementioned paradigm cannot be taken as the only paradigm in the effort to do theology in a country like Sri Lanka where there are a good number of minds that can present other and even better alternatives. But the present article is set against the background of the country at the moment.

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