

No.14/83

1st October, 1983

In this issue: Sedos Seminars in October and November 1983 will deal with two important areas, dialogue with Buddhists and with "Post Christians" neither of which were dealt with in the March, 1983 Sedos Seminar. This Issue contains an important Introduction by Marcello Zago to the forthcoming Seminar on Christian-Buddhist dialogue and a further instalment from his article asking whether the Gospel message has really been presented in such a way as to re-echo among Buddhists in Asia.

There is also an extract from the recently published English translation of Arnulf Camps' books dealing with partnership in dialogue in which he examines the understanding of *nirvana* among Buddhists to-day and possible contributions which Buddhism can make to Christianity in the process of dialogue.

There are some thought provoking ideas for 65 year old missionaries (and others!); an assessment of the situation in Mozambique by Fr. Salvatore Calvia, Superior General of the Comboniani (see Coming Events), and a note on the limits of language in doctrine.

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Coming Events:

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| Dialogue with Buddhists (All welcome) | Tuesday, October 11, 1983. Centro di Spiritualità e Cultura, Via Don Carlo Gnocchi.75. (62.40.860) |
| "Mozambique Up-date". Fr. Salvatore Calvia (All welcome) | Friday, Oct.14. 4.00 p.m. Comboniani Generalate, Via Luigi Lilio 80. Metro. Laurentina(59.11.450) |
| "Soudan Up-date". Sr. Giuseppina Tresoldi (All welcome) | Wednesday, Oct.19. 4.00 p.m. SVD Generalate, Via dei Verbiti, 1. |
| Sedos Executive Committee meeting | Oct.18. Sedos Secretariate 4.00 p.m. |
| Dialogue with "Post-Christians" (All welcome) | Tuesday, November 8, 1983. Christian Brothers' Generalate. Via Aurelia 476. (62.01.01) |

News:

General Chapters: Congratulations and good wishes to Peter Hans Kolvenbach S.J. of Holland who succeeds Pedro Arrupe as Superior General of the Jesuits. Also to John Malley O.Carm. of the U.S.A. who succeeds Falco Thuis O.Carm as Superior General of the Carmelites. We wish both of the new Superiors well and thank their predecessors sincerely for their generous collaboration in Sedos.

New Jesuit Assistants: The following were elected Assistants at the Jesuit Congregation: Simon Decloux, Belgium; Juan Ochagavia, Chile; Michael Amaladoss, India; John O'Callaghan, USA.

"Nrtyanjali": Francis Barboza, SVD, will present a programme of Classical Indian Dance (Bharata Natyam) illustrating biblical themes at the Augustinian Hall, Via del S. Uffizio, 25, on October 30 at 5.00 p.m. Nrtyanjali has been widely acclaimed by the press in India. Fr. Barboza has been giving dance recitals in Austria, Germany, Belgium, France and Holland. The Show in Rome is jointly sponsored by the SVD and the CIIS (Centre for India and Inter-religious Studies). Highly recommended.

Christian-Buddhist Dialogue. Further readings:

BOUDDHISME ET CHRISTIANISME; Concilium No. 136 (French language edition).

THE HEART OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION by Nyanaponika Thera

MANUAL OF ZEN BUDDHISM by D.T. Suzuki

THE ZEN DOCTRINE OF NO-MIND by D.T. Suzuki

(Rider Pocket Editions £(Sterling)2.95 each). "Almost clear-glass versions of well-tried manuals of eastern religion and philosophy, containing such delights as the "flowers of deliverance", "brushing off no-dust", "emanating from no-where", and the "practice of mindful walking". (Tablet, London).

DIALOGO CRISTIANO BUDDHISTA

Marcello Zago. OMI

(This is a very useful summary prepared specially by Fr. Zago, as an Introduction to the Seminar on "Christian-Buddhist Dialogue" which will be held on Tuesday, October 11, 1983. (See Coming Events). He outlines the principle forms of Buddhism, its world wide characteristics, the different forms of Christian-buddhist dialogue and the motivations for dialogue. He draws attention to a very useful Bibliography in his "La Chiesa in Asia Oggi", obtainable now in Rome bookshops. See Book Notes. Ed.).

Il buddhismo si differenzia secondo le scuole e secondo i paesi e questo ha un'incidenza sul dialogo stesso, anche se il Fondatore storico comune e il nucleo centrale del messaggio danno unità al movimento buddista.

Buddhismo Theravada: Il buddhismo del sud est asiatico, chiamato theravada cioè degli anziani o dei primi discepoli, ha un carattere prevalentemente monastico. I bonzi o bhikkhu sono i leaders naturali della comunità che è abbastanza unita prima di tutto sul piano nazionale e poi internazionale. E' la religione ufficiale della Birmania, Sri Lanka, Thailandia, Laos e Cambogia.

Mahayana: Il buddhismo dell'area cinese o dell'Asia centrale e orientale, chiamato Mahayana o della grande via, dà maggior spazio ai laici ed è meno compatto sia sul piano nazionale che internazionale. Ogni monastero e ogni scuola ha la sua struttura e i suoi adepti. E' diffuso in Cina, Mongolia, Vietnam, Giappone.

Tibetano: Il Buddhismo tibetano a nord-indiano e soprattutto nepalese è una forma maggiormente accomodata alla religione previa e alle culture di quei paesi.

BUDDHISMO NEL MONDO

In Occidente: In Occidente il buddhismo sta avendo centri considerevoli e con una certa incidenza in gruppi importanti. Si ispira a tutte le forme sopra indicate, ma mette l'accento su metodi di meditazione. Negli Stati Uniti ha imparato ad organizzarsi anche finanziariamente e in funzione di incidere e proselitizzare.

Nei paesi Comunisti: La situazione del dialogo varia secondo i paesi. Innanzitutto nei paesi a regime comunista non è ammesso il dialogo al di fuori del sostegno incondizionato comune alla politica del governo. Le limitazioni sono ovunque presenti, anche se in Cina c'è una certa liberalizzazione.

(Continued on Page...276)

EVANGELIZATION TO THE BUDDHISTS.
HAS THE GOSPEL RE-ECHOED IN ASIA?

Marcello Zago O.M.I.

PART II

B. IN SEARCH OF THE BUDDHIST ENDEAVOUR

(Il s'agit ici d'une deuxième partie de l'article de Marcello Zago. Il comporte une brève analyse de l'esprit de l'enseignement de Buddha, qui mène vers une libération définitive. Cet article indique ensuite un essai d'esquisse du contenu et de la méthode d'une éventuelle présentation du message chrétien aux Bouddhistes).

If the message is to be the "Good News to the Buddhists", it must link up with the fundamental aim of Buddhism. It must be inserted into the most authentic development of this human and religious quest.

To adapt oneself to Buddhist categories without attaining to its spirit and without validating the inner hope that quickens its search would be to invite Buddhists to don an outer garment which attracts them by the beauty of its colours but in no way changes their lives. Consequently, we must strive to understand and recognize the spiritual tension of Buddhism, so that we may be ready to be summoned by it, to appropriate it into our Christian experience and to present it in terms of its own fulfilment, realized in and by Christ. I believe that this project can be detected in the experience of the "Founder", in his fundamental message and in the achievements of his best disciples.

The Founder, Siddharta Gautama, having previously known the riches, honours, pleasures and satisfactions of life, abandoned everything and set out as an ascetic in search of liberation. His relinquishment of pleasures was radical. He rejected all vocabulary connected with them; he even rejected the perspective of a salvation realized through heavenly pleasures, which he regarded as an alienating sublimation.

Having studied and practised the quest for salvation in the school of the great masters, Siddharta Gautama also abandoned this path. In that very act he rejected or went beyond the search for liberation on a speculative, scholastic, ritual and communitarian plane. Each person must fashion his salvation by his own efforts, without relying on the help of others and by seeking his own path. To follow another can only be a beginning.

Austere exercises: He then set out on the path of yoga and practised the most austere exercises. After six years of rigorous mortifications Gautama understood that extremes were to be avoided, that external control did not suffice, and that spiritual powers were ambiguous and dangerous. Taking the middle path he proceeded towards an interior progress, which is expressed in various stages of "meditation" or *bhāvanā*. This inner progress transcends the search for good and evil in order to attain to man's ultimate depth, his intention, which must be wholly cleansed of every root of evil. After terrible ordeals Siddharta Gautama, sitting beneath a tree, attained the liberating awakening whereby he permanently became known as the Buddha, the Awakened, the Enlightened One. The Buddha was aware of the wretched, impermanent and inconsistent nature of everything that exists and can be taken up into our human experience. He discovered that the deep-seated cause of this lies in ourselves. He discovered a true liberation for which he definitely opted, and he experienced its qualities. He saw the path which must be covered in order to realize it, the only path valid for men.

This perfect liberation was the fulfilment of his quest; he could have stopped there. Having hesitated a long time, the Buddha decided to proclaim the Good News of the liberation he had achieved and which was possible for other men. Out of compassion for men and the gods the Buddha spent the next forty-five years as an itinerant missionary and the master of a growing community, in order to witness to his experience and to show the path of liberation. This last phase has been developed in the schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism and it is emphasized by modern thinkers of the Theravāda School who seek the selfless dimension demanded by the present situation. Finally, the Buddha attained *paranirvāṇa*, leaving to the world his teaching and the example of his disciples.

This experience of the Founder remains an example and a paradigm of the spiritual experience of Buddhism, a figure of the Buddhist endeavour, a call and a manifestation of the hope of Buddhists, within which his message must be understood.

The Four Noble Truths: The Buddhist message, expressed in the four Noble Truths, is addressed to the man in search of salvation. It discloses to him that alienation and liberation are within his power and within him. By that very fact the message in its explication and its means of realization invites him to advance beyond the domain of rites and beliefs, of cosmogenies and heavens, of sacralizations and theologies - in short, to transcend every self-grasping and alienating expression, which it regards as a camouflaging of the real human problem. Man remains the point of departure, where there is the deepening and fulfilment of the quest for salvation and its realization.

As a first step we must note especially through meditation, that misery, suffering and impermanence are not simply external to us but have their roots in our inmost depths. Their cause also resides in us. The Buddhist message reminds man, who always tries to run away from himself and always seeks the cause of evil externally, that he must now look for it within himself and his own actions, and finally within his own intentionality. This cause is variously expressed as desire, ignorance,

attachment: terms which must be interpreted within the Buddhist perspective.

In his actual experience of this cause man has a glimpse of dis-alienation or liberation, this final goal of his designated by the terms *nirvāṇa* (extinction), *bodhi* (illumination), *vimuddi* (liberation). In the face of the ultimate meaning of human life it is not important to uncover its nature, to describe its characteristics or to form a clear idea of it. The message asserts that we have to set out on a path for its attainment; in short, to adopt an attitude that is existential, not speculative. This inward and progressive advance is indicated by the last noble truth, which can be expressed in different ways: by taking the eightfold path, or by the triple duty (*śīla-pannasamādhī*), or finally by the opposition of wordly-transcendent (*lokiya-lokuttara*) which stresses the primacy of intentionality.

It is within this fundamental message that one must understand Buddhist philosophy as a whole and some of its assertions, like: "There is no Atta or Atman on the individual or universal plane"; "everything is suniatta or void"; "salvation is extinction or nirvāṇa", etc. All this has a spiritual meaning, even if non-spiritual men of every religious tradition seek to absolutize these concepts and hence to shield themselves.

The enterprise of definitive liberation, realized by the Master and expressed in the Buddhist message, continues to be the ideal and hope of countless Buddhists. The members of the Buddhist monastic order (*sangha*) see in the aim of their lives. In effect, they are spiritual men who try, especially through the practice of meditation to transcend an ethical practice based on the search for merit, who seek progressive interiorization and the purification of every root of evil in man's heart. The majority of Buddhists remains ritualistic and animistic, and yet are responsive to the values of interiority, as expressed in the current saying: "Hell is in the breast, paradise in the heart". For them, too, man remains the centre of the problem of salvation.

According to Buddhist conception and the fundamental hope of Buddhists the ultimate meaning of human life resides neither in happiness, which is alienating and false, nor in a cosmological order (that is, in worlds similar to our own called the heavens), nor in the desire of reward, which is a worldly and selfish interest, nor in the domain of explicative knowledge, which is often an evasion, nor in a change induced by external activities, such as rites and yoga positions, nor in a gift received from without which is a substitution for human commitment, nor in a cosmic automatism which can only be alienating.

The realization of human life's total meaning is perceived as a definitive liberation from everything that 'exists' and is "wordly"; as an opposition to everything that is conditioned; a purification of everything that is polluted; an immediate knowledge that frees man from all illusion.

Man, who is the centre of the quest and its advancement must make a fundamental, interior and existential choice in order to realize in his inmost depths that Transcendent (*lokuttara*) which is the only definitive liberation.

This objective, which, is the fundamental value of Buddhism, conditions the meaning of the speculative categories and the language adopted in the Buddhist setting. That is why God, who is too often presented in "worldly" and anthropological categories, is not perceived as the Absolute and as the Goal of man's ultimate quest. Christ is seen as an "existent" who has not yet attained final liberation. Christian salvation is seen as a "worldly" and non-definitive stage and Christianity as an external religion that is worldly, materialistic, and so on.

IV. THE PRESENTATION OF THE MESSAGE

Having analyzed the problem of language and sought the components of a solution, we indicate in broad outline the content and method of a kerygma which can be addressed to Buddhists, so that they may grasp the validity of the Christian message, and have the opportunity to recognize that they are summoned - and therefore are free - to make a personal choice which can lead them to a self-fulfilment in line with their own interior behaviour.

This presentation can also help Christians express their witness in a Buddhist setting, to manifest in a knowledgeable way the hope they carry within them, and to accept and purify within themselves a religious growth that seems harmonious with their cultural traditions.

And finally, this brief survey, which is necessarily limited and defective, can provide a new viewpoint and a new starting point for a more detailed presentation of Christianity to Buddhists, and for a catechesis, as well, addressed to Christians. It is in this direction that I would sometime like to pursue my own research and reflection.

In order to present the content of the kerygma in a Buddhist perspective I shall start with man, his conscientization and his search for salvation, having as my aim a listening to the summons of Christ, who "reveals" to us the Ultimate Goal, which Christians call God, and who invites us to enter into the experience of this definitive liberation with him. For each of these points I shall indicate the lines of presentation; then I shall explain the "why" of this approach; and finally I take note of certain questions which still remain.

1. STARTING WITH MAN'S SEARCH

a) Man, that is to say, each one of us, acquires an experience of misery, limitation, impermanence, imperfection and evil. Around us, in world and society injustice, egoism, slavery and misery prevail. In what we find surrounding us there can be no true refuge; there is no total and authentic liberation. Likewise, each one of us is affected by misery; the experience of suffering touches every man through illness, old age, death. But this misery lies within us, as our dissatisfaction and the impermanence of our feelings and of our joys make clear. It touches our very existence, which is transitory and also incapable of being a definitive refuge.

The roots of this misery are not simply external to us; they lie mainly within us, in an attachment which is alienating for us and our

experiences, in a blind and never satisfied concupiscence, in a disquieting aversion to many things and persons, in a laziness and an **indecision** which prevent us from seeing the path of liberation and following it. It is because of these deep roots of evil that there is so much misery in the world and in ourselves, despite changes in socio-political and religious structures and despite programmes of betterment and the good will of men. And yet, deep down each one of us feels that it should be possible to achieve true liberation and that an escape must be within our reach.

Our good will alone does not suffice to achieve this liberation. Because of our imperfection and blindness, we need a guide, a master, who shows us the path and also points out the final goal and the means that are equal to this individual and social transformation. All peoples have had spiritual men; these have testified that this liberation is possible and realizable. Those who followed their teaching have undoubtedly progressed in goodness and have attained salvation. But although many men affirm that they have a master, fundamentally they do not take the trouble to understand his teaching or to follow his example; they are content to belong to a religion or to follow an easy religious practice, without wishing to change their hearts. This does not suffice.

Today, because of our means of communication and because of cultural changes - and especially because of new problems - every man must choose his master anew in order to accomplish this liberating journey. The Buddha, whom we all admire and honour, was a great master. He helped and continues to help countless people to avoid evil, to do good, to purify their hearts.

b) The presentation indicated here proposes to start with man in order to respect and build upon the spiritual development of our Buddhist brethren, who themselves start with man, discover in him the roots of evil and recognize that liberation is possible for him only by eliminating passions, transcending ethical practices, opting for the Absolute, aiming at the Goal with pure intention, and progressing in the interior life. We must therefore begin by respecting the fundamental hope of Buddhists and their basic design about the ultimate meaning of human life. We do not start with God, because he is not the first experience and especially because such an approach would be interpreted negatively in Buddhist tradition. We do not speak of original sin, because the Buddhist seeks the origin of evil within himself and other men; to seek it elsewhere would be to avoid personal commitment.

c) The questions raised with regard to the presentation proposed here are many. One may ask whether it is opportune to invoke the memory of the Buddha, either as a witness to the possibility of salvation or as a guide. One can undoubtedly use the Buddhist message in its bearing upon spiritual development but would it not also be wise to point out at the same time its limitations or ambiguities? Every people has had its own path to salvation. Yet we may ask ourselves how we should present the here and now in which a choice must be made before Christ. Does it suffice to remind our listeners of the social changes which permit of a choice. Should we indicate that this is the propitious time willed by God - which would bring us back to the impasse that we are seeking to avoid? Should we allow the option for Christ to remain on the same plane as the option for the Buddha?

BUDDHISM: EXPERIENCING THE TRANSIENCY
OF ALL THINGS

Arnulf Camps

(Le livre récent d'Arnulf Camps "Partners in Dialogue" a comme sous-titre: "Le christianisme et les autres religions". Nous reproduisons ci-dessous un extrait du chapitre consacré au Bouddhisme, où l'auteur pose brièvement la question si le Christianisme est dans une situation lui permettant d'entrer en dialogue avec le Bouddhisme.)

EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

In the teaching and practice of the Buddha is there a God or something divine that stands over against humanity? If so, what does that signify for human beings? Christian tradition, the thought of Western Europe, and all humanity are interested in this question, as the history of religions teaches us. The Buddha himself is silent on this question, yet it is not proper to call him an atheist. Certainly he is not an atheist in the sense of modern materialism, which actively opposes God. The Buddha never did that; he simply kept silent.

We can talk about the Buddha's a-theism, in the sense that we find no conception of God in his teaching. There is certainly no notion of a personal God who addresses and summons human beings, who chooses to appear as their partner. Neither is there negation or denial on this score. The Buddha's attitude is that right now the issue is of no importance because human beings must free themselves from suffering and enter nirvana. What comes later is something we shall see later.

Nirvana: To be sure, nirvana is presented in negative terms. But this wholly Other in which human beings are to lose themselves is merely the negative expression of an infinite fulfillment. Thus it also signifies hope and happiness, even though there are no proper words for it in human language. So clearly the Buddha's silence has nothing to do with modern atheism, and his nirvana is not the nothingness of a nihilistic materialism devoid of hope. As one might imagine, various schools and currents of Buddhism have sought to explore these issues more deeply over the course of time.

I should point out that the Buddhist does indeed live an experience of transcendence. The reality of infinite fulfillment, which signifies hope and happiness, has served as the inspiration for many thoughts.

Whereas the monastic Buddhism which took shape in Hinayana Buddhism has concentrated on one's personal experiencing of this transition, the emphasis is different in Mahayana Buddhism. Widespread in the Far East, the latter reveres those who postpone their entrance into nirvana in order to bring as many other people as possible into nirvana with them. They are known as bodhisattvas. One could say that in the nothing the Buddhist seeks something.

Sometimes a universal Buddha is placed above the historical Buddha. Sometimes there is talk about an Absolute Buddha. Male and female bodhisattvas help people to get to nirvana, to the Absolute Buddha. In Japan we find many deities entering the picture, of which I will mention two here. Amida is the Buddha of Boundless Light. Jizo is a bodhisattva who delivers the souls of the dead from suffering in hell. Thus one could say that the closer Buddhism has drawn to the average person, the more it has felt a need to answer the ultimate question.....

So the result has been pietism and reform movements, which in turn have been challenged by such later movements. It simply means that the problem has not been solved, that questions remain on people's minds. We find many such developments in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, not only in the past but even today. People are studying whether there is something transcendent in Buddhism and what it is exactly, and various efforts are being made to discuss and write about the matter.

The "Great Doubt"; the "Great Death". I shall cite only one such discussion here, that of a noted Japanese philosopher of religion. Professor Keiji Nishitani of Kyoto writes about the "great doubt" which arises in human beings as they experience the negative realities of life: e.g., human worthlessness and death. This raises the question of the meaning of existence, of one's own life and that of others, and one succumbs to all the distress associated with the issue. The process goes so deep that one loses the distinction between the doubter and what is being doubted, between the subject and object of doubt. That distinction is transcended, and the human being itself becomes the "great doubt." The person thus enters into the "great death," where the big change or turnabout takes place.

Once the great death takes place, the whole universe is made new. Under the great death lies the great enlightening, and Professor Nishitani talks about transcendence in this connection. It is an enlightening of the self, but in such a way that the ego is no longer the operative force. Joy and rejoicing enter the picture. Standing before the abyss, one lets go with both hands, falls into the deep, and thus the self is annihilated. One thereby escapes slavish bondage and finds liberation. From this basic standpoint Professor Nishitani offers his critique of the philosophy of being and of interpersonal relationships.

In the last analysis it is a matter of carrying through a radical negation to the end in order to arrive at the ultimate reality. This ultimate reality lies beyond and outside all such oppositions as beginning and end, existence and nonexistence, something and nothing. Otherwise it would entail limitation of some sort. It is hard to say much about it, but it is something like an absolute nothing in which a

a wondrous state of being or existence is revealed. But this state of being should not be viewed in dualistic terms as something possessing ontological priority over against nonbeing.

From such remarks it is clear that we cannot maintain that those who came after Buddha have not gone any further in trying to reflect upon nirvana. It is we who will have to re-examine and revise our notions about the nothingness of Buddhism. Certainly it contains an experience of transcendence. The real question is whether we, with our Western notions, can really grasp and comprehend it aright.

IS CHRISTIANITY IN A POSITION TO ENTER A DIALOGUE WITH BUDDHISM?

What contribution does Buddhism have to offer in any open dialogue with Christianity? Buddhism can make us Christians receptive once again to the notion that all existing things possess no ultimate worth. Even our own being and personhood, viewed in themselves, are not irreducible or underived values. Buddhism can stimulate us to give deeper consideration to the words of Jesus: "Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt.10:29). It can help us to see what a truly kenotic way of life means, what it means to live wholly for others, and particularly for the Father.

Buddhism may help us to see more clearly what it means to be truly light, an image that is often mentioned by John the Evangelist and Paul: "You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord" (Eph.5:8). It seems to me that a Buddhist will have little difficulty in understanding the kenotic attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Paul describes it: "His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the conditions of a slave, and became as men are; he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names". (Phil. 2:6-9).

In dialogue with Buddhism, therefore, we can recover a lost aspect of Christianity. We can recover a healthy asceticism bathed in the light of kenosis or self-emptying. This will lead to a deeper self-knowledge. Such self-knowledge was evident in St. Francis of Assisi, who is greatly admired by Buddhists. Empty of all craving and desire, Francis opened up to his Lord and discovered him in all his creation in some mysterious and ineffable way.

There is a second point with which Buddhism can help us to get on the right track again. Our Western mentality and our Western philosophy and theology are riddled with affirmative pronouncements about God. We know how to define God so well, and we can fill whole treatises on the subject. Buddhism teaches us to be cautious and circumspect. The mystery of the Ultimate is really incomprehensible and ineffable. It can only be alluded to in a negative way. When we think or talk or meditate about God, we can usually be found guilty of an excessively anthropomorphic approach. There is much for us to learn from a dialogue with a worldview that describes the Ultimate as Nothingness or Emptiness. For all too long we have shuddered over such an approach, or merely shrugged our shoulders at it. Only now, after much experience and study, is it becoming possible for us to glimpse what Buddhism is really driving at. Real dialogue can now begin, and it promises to offer us unexpected fruits.

Christianity must also ponder the image and example of the bodhisattvas. They postpone their own attainment of salvation as long as possible, in order to bring as many other human beings as possible along with themselves. One cannot avoid the impression that modern Christians are so preoccupied with fashioning their own identity and developing themselves in courses and training sessions that they never really reach out or touch others. But Jesus' words remain true: "Anyone who loses his life...will find it.".....

Ref. Partners in Dialogue: Christianity and other World Religions.
 Arnulf Camps. New York. Orbis Books, 1983.

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PSYCHOSOCIAL AGING

Joseph M. Picardi, M.M.

(Les Missionnaires de Maryknoll sont en train d'accorder une attention spéciale à leurs membres avancés en âge. L'un des Pères de Maryknoll nous présente quelques aperçus intéressants sur les phénomènes liés au vieillissement.)

Walt Whitman said it best,
 "Youth large, lusty, loving-
 Youth full of grace, force, facination,
 do you know that old age may come after you with
 equal grace, force, fascination?"

IF YOU ARE ACTIVE AND INTERESTED AT 30,
YOU WILL BE MORE SO AT 70.

Recently, a study was completed in which individuals were interviewed along with their close relatives over a period of 40 years. This study illustrated that people adapt from youth as healthy personalities or as personalities that will find themselves agonized over being old. In short, if you are active and interested at 30, you will be more so at 70.

Society has taught us that 65 years of age signals the beginning of the end. What makes 65 magical or rather disastrous? It is simply that this age which was chosen arbitrarily as a time when people should be rewarded for long years of service, has been turned into a negative aspect of our lives.

THERE IS NOTHING MAGICAL NOR
TRAGIC ABOUT BEING 65.

When Bismark was setting up the welfare state in Germany he believed that people who were elderly should be somehow rewarded by the state for long years of service and of life. Since at that time so few people reached 65 years of age, he chose it arbitrarily as the point where people would be rewarded for long life. While not putting a burden on the state, since so few people reached that age, the impression would be given that the elderly were being rewarded and taken care of. Later on many countries and societies adapted 65 years as the time when retirement should formally begin, thinking that the age cutoff had been well researched. However, history, science and our own experience has taught us that there is nothing magical nor tragic about being 65. Being 40, 50 or 65 in itself says nothing about how a person is aging or how they have achieved the lif-long goals that they set out for themselves. Nor does it signal a time when mental, physical or social abilities are beginning to diminish. The fact remains that we are all aging from the time of our birth and the way we age to a great extent depends upon choices that we make throughout our entire life or upon choices that we make to change our life-style for the better at some point in our adult years.

EACH SET OF YEARS HAS ITS
OWN SPECIFIC GOALS AND GOODS

We fear growing old. We have certain negative perceptions about aging and the elderly and these very fears and perceptions will dictate the way we ourselves age. If our attitude is one that life continues throughout the years and that each set of years has its own specific goals and goods, we will remain people who are interested, active and thinking throughout our life span. If we look at the years as causing steady decline in body, mind and emotions we will begin to close ourselves off early in life from the possibility of growth. We will fulfill our own prophecy of doom.

We must dare to explore and to retain control of our lives. We must enjoy the opportunity to feel, to think and to be no matter what age we are. Joy and sorrow are partners. From pain comes a greater appreciation of pleasure. The highs and lows of life are water marks to measure the points in-between.

The longer a body works on developing fitness and the longer a mind explores, the longer one forestalls the deterioration of aging. It is never too late to begin. We must dismiss the stereotypes of old age. We must continue to actively pursue goals, to take up new responsibilities and to live.

We must continue to forbid negative stereotypes of the elderly. We must accept the contributions of the elderly because we must anticipate the fact that they have a great deal to contribute. If we reject their contributions because we anticipate none we lose the lessons of their survivorship.

OLD AGE IS NOT A DISEASE

Old age is not a disease; old age is not mindless; old age is not sexless; old age is not useless; old age is not powerless. Living calls for a full measure of doing. It is boredom that is the fatal disease. Feeling is essential. Life itself is an adventure in forgiveness. Being hurt is not the worst thing that can happen. Never having experienced hurt is far worse.

TO LIVE IN THE PAST IS TO SETTLE FOR STERILITY

Living in the past and talking about the way things used to be is not living. Relying on old habits and never attempting to learn anything new is not living. We must remember earlier experiences but not live them. To live in the past is to settle for sterility.

Everyone needs a direction in their lives. We must all help others through and example to achieve joy. It is not limited to the young to work for this goal, nor to experience the emotions. Goals can be set and must be set at any age. We must take charge of our own lives. Life has no time limit upon it. No one ever died of old age. Realize that the elderly have a future as well as a past. The elderly are not unpeople nor are they expendable.

The elderly half believe the myths that people perpetrate upon them. They are indoctrinated into the prejudices that society has against the elderly before they are even old. *It is fact* that there are more social effects to aging than there are biological. Aging has no effect upon us as persons. "Oldness" is a political institution and a social convention based on a system which expels people from useful work after a set number of years. We are created "old" by society. Cicero said, "foolish and thoughtless men charge old age with weaknesses and faults that are really their own." He went on to say, "it is not by the strong back or the nimble foot or the muscular physique that important questions are settled, but by consultation, by personal influence, by expression of opinion, and from these activities old age is not ordinarily cut off; on the contrary, it usually acquires an even greater store in them." And furthermore, "this is how old age becomes an honorable estate: by standing up for its own rights, by refusing to sell out to anyone."

Go to scripture. Look at Abraham and Sarah, look at Anna the Prophetess and Simeon who saw the dawn of Salvation. These people, held up before our eyes as examples of faith, tell us that aging and old age are not the end but new beginnings. We are never old unless we wish to be. We are elderly because of our years and because of our ability to survive.

Ref. Maryknoll Formation Journal. Vol.4, No.2, Summer 1983.

MOZAMBICO: QUALE FUTURO ?

P. Ezio Sorio, MCCJ

IL SUPERIORE GENERALE IN VISITA AI COMBONIANI DEL MOZAMBICO

(Fr. Salvatore Calvia, Superior General of the Verona Fathers, has just returned from a month-long visit to Mozambique. In this short notice he describes the tactics of the guerrillas who, with the active support of Pretoria, are attempting to strangle the government of Samora Machel. He testifies that missionaries have identified themselves more and more with the people and share their lot and is all the more surprised at the imprisonment of the Portuguese missionary, Fr. Manuel dos Anjos Martins. Fr. Calvia will shortly meet interested members of Sedos for a first hand account of the situation in Mozambique as he saw it. (See Coming Events. in this Issue and also Sedos Bulletin 82/No.9, 82/No.15 and 82/No.18. Ed.)

GUERRIGLIA ASSURDA

Per comprendere lo stato d'animo dei missionari, occorre sapere che cosa sta succedendo in quello che ora é il piú povero dei Paesi dell'Africa australe.

Una guerriglia silenziosa ma feroce, sostenuta da ribelli sotto il nome di RNM (Resistenza Nazionale Mozambico) sta insanguinando e portando allo sfacelo economico nove delle dieci province del Paese.

La nascita della RNM risale agli anni della decolonizzazione dei territori portoghesi in Africa australe, ed é legata ai nomi di Jorge Jardim, Orlando Cristina (assassinato il 17 aprile scorso) e Evo Fernandes, tutti compromessi con il regime salazarista e ferventi anticomunisti.

Il Ruolo di Pretoria: I rebelli non pretendono creare "zone liberate" nel Paese ma strangolare l'economia, colpendola nelle vie di comunicazione. Sostenuti in questo da Pretoria, si limitano ad azioni di sabotaggio, attaccano gli impianti della grande diga di Cabora Bassa, assaltano treni, distruggono linee elettriche, ponti e depositi di carburante, sequestrano i residenti stranieri, saccheggiano i villaggi terrorizzando la popolazione. Il taglio delle orecchie, del naso e delle labbra, quando non si tratta degli organi genitali, é una pratica diffusa.

Per contrastare validamente la guerriglia, che opera su un territorio di Km² 783 mila e i cui effettivi sono valutati da 10 a 12 mila uomini, sarebbe necessario - secondo gli esperti militari di

Maputo - un rapporto di 7 soldati mozambicani per ogni combattente della resistenza, mentre l'esercito dispone di appena 35.000 uomini e di un armamento pesante, di fabbricazione sovietica, poco adatta all'antiguerriglia.

Samora Machel reagisce con i mezzi che ha a disposizione. Ha inviato le sue truppe migliori, addestrate da un migliaio di consiglieri sovietici, tedesco-orientali e cubani, a presidiare l'oleodotto di Beira che raggiunge lo Zimbabwe. Ha ottenuto dallo Zimbabwe 1.500 soldati per pattugliare la strada e la ferrovia Beira-Mutare che collegano i due paesi. Ha lanciato con successo una campagna militare nelle province di Maputo e di Gaza. Ha assunto personalmente la guida delle forze armate e ha inviato come governatore nella provincia "calda" di Beira il numero due del FRELIMO, Marcelino dos Santos.

Ma il tempo stringe. La guerriglia trova terreno fertile nel malcontento che serpeggia tra la popolazione, delusa del fallimento dei piani economici del governo. E Pretoria sembra decisa a non allentare la presa, per dimostrare alla maggioranza nera sudafricana l'inconsistenza del regime socialista di Samora Machel e per vincolare il Mozambico ai suoi interessi commerciali.

MOLTI CAMBIAMENTI DAL CROLLO SALAZARISTA

La stampa occidentale, oltre ai lavori forzati delle cosiddette "aldeias do povo" (villaggi del popolo), depreca unanimemente certi metodi del "socialismo scientifico". Non solo il ritorno dello scudiscio usato anche per anziani e donne, già detestato nel periodo coloniale, ma anche condanne a morte eseguite in pubblico, perfino davanti agli scolari costretti a presenziare e a danzare per ore scandendo slogan "progressisti".

"Non si può negare lo sforzo che il governo intende fare - commenta P. Calvia - per migliorare le condizioni del popolo. Molti cambiamenti sono avvenuti dal crollo salazarista, ma a volte non si è proceduto nel modo giusto, come osservano gli stessi capi della rivoluzione. Si sono sacrificati, a mio parere, valori troppo cari alla tradizione del popolo mozambicano.

Io stesso ho assistito, nel mio viaggio, a situazioni di fame e di squallore; ho visto strade minate e soprattutto una diffusa insicurezza e spesso il terrore nel volto della povera gente, che si vede isolata e senza futuro".

I Missionari: P. Calvia non lamenta tanto il fatto che le scuole, chiese, case dei missionari siano state incamerate. "Per un verso questo fatto ci ha resi poveri nel senso evangelico e, senza strutture, la parte migliore dei cristiani ha preso le proprie responsabilità per mantenere il dono della fede. Non è neppure proibito ai missionari di entrare nel paese e di realizzare un certo ministero apostolico, anche se limitato rispetto al passato. I missionari hanno reagito con coraggio e spirito di fede. Inserendosi ancora di più nella vita semplice e povera del popolo, vivono ora nelle stesse case, dello stesso lavoro. Cooperano alla ricostruzione del paese in tutti i modi, mentre si preoccupano di far nascere "piccole comunità ecclesiali" preparando dei leaders, chiamati "anziani".

Sono la speranza della Chiesa mozambicana, che emerge da una dolorosa purificazione".

IN CARCERE DA QUATTRO MESI

Ciò che ha maggiormente sorpreso il superiore dei comboniani è stato un certo comportamento contraddittorio delle autorità. Emblematico è il caso dell'imprigionamento del missionario portoghese, P. Manuel dos Anjos Martins. "Ho potuto vederlo" - dichiara P. Calvia - "per due volte, anche se mai da solo. Ho avuto tra mano copia della lettera che gli avrebbe meritato la prigione. Una lettera, a mio avviso, innocua e che aveva indirizzato, e mai resa pubblica, al capo distrettuale, con copia al governatore sollecitando interventi per gli affamati della sua parrocchia. Ammetto che qualche espressione dello scritto abbia potuto ferire la suscettibilità di un regime totalitario; comunque non era affatto infamante per il governo".

"Mi riesce soprattutto incomprensibile il trattamento che viene usato verso il prigioniero. Da oltre quattro mesi P. Manuel si trova senza nessun processo, in uno scantinato che fa da carcere e da cui non può uscire neppure per una boccata d'aria. Gli si proibisce di dire Messa e perfino di pregare con il breviario o con la Bibbia. Per me è troppo delicato entrare in particolari, anche perché vorrei che P. Manuel possa essere messo al più presto in libertà. Per questo mi sono dato d'attorno presso autorità civili e religiose, italiane, portoghesi e mozambicane. Ci sono delle speranze, ma non da parte di queste ultime, che si trincerano dietro il segreto professionale. Non ci resta che pregare perché P. Manuel possa tornare presto in libertà a al suo ministero missionario".

- end -

Throughout Latin America Christians are reading their Bibles. These are not beautiful leather-bound volumes in which a 400-year-old translation is printed so small that it requires a magnifying glass. No: these are cheap paper-backs, earmarked, underlined and battered, in which the teachings of Jesus Christ are related in a language that ordinary people can understand. What is lost in poetry is gained in understanding, and Christians are discovering that:

We were given a Gospel that was a wild tiger, we tame it and domesticate it into a pussy cat.

Thomas Cullinan, OSB.
If the Eye be Sound

Ref. Quoted from, Sheila Cassidy: *Audacity to Believe: An Autobiography*. London. Collins 1978. P.309

- end -

Nei paesi Democratici: Nei paesi democratici il dialogo è lasciato alla iniziativa degli adepti delle diverse religioni. La Thailandia e Sri Lanka favoriscono un certo dialogo religioso per la pace sociale; il governo di Sri Lanka si è fatto propulsore di un libro sulle religioni per tutti le scuole per favorire una certa conoscenza mutua e una piattaforma comune di valori.

TIPI DI DIALOGO CRISTIANO BUDDHISTA

- Piuttosto che soffermarmi alla situazione dei singoli paesi, richiamo alcuni tipi di dialogo cristiano buddhista.
- C'è il dialogo propriamente religioso; per conoscenza mutua religiosa
- a livello di esperti
 - a livello di gente religiosa ordinaria
 - a livello di responsabili religiosi
- C'è il dialogo della collaborazione
- sia per motivarla con i valori religiosi comuni
 - sia per realizzarla nel rispetto reciproco
- C'è il dialogo esperienziale religioso
- condividendo esperienze religiose specifiche, come meditazione
 - condividendo esperienze comuni
- C'è il **dialogo** della vita
- **fatto** nei problemi concreti e nei contatti concreti
 - nella collaborazione e nel rispetto quotidiano

I MOTIVI DEL DIALOGO

- L'esperienza del dialogo e la riflessione conseguente evidenziano i motivi del dialogo e la sua necessità:
- per la mutua comprensione e per il rispetto
 - per la collaborazione nei comuni problemi umani
 - per l'inculturazione del messaggio e della Chiesa
 - per l'evangelizzazione comprensibile e interpellante
 - per rendere la chiesa segno e strumento di salvezza in vista del Regno già presente e più ampio della Chiesa stessa e in vista del Regno escatologico.

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DOCTRINE AND THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

(Excerpt from "Evangelisation" by Laurent Magesa in AFER Vol.24, No.6, December 1982).

As a statement of basic human feelings of God-relatedness and longing, doctrine can never be completely accurate or exhaustive in giving this longing expression because of various limiting factors. One of the most severe is the limitation of language. It will be easily appreciated that "even our most strenuous efforts at neutral description are stamped by the history that forms us".

This appreciation of the limits of language has important consequences for the preacher-hearer dialectic. It means that while not giving up Christ as the Way to a true, conscious God-relatedness for man - for this is his most central claim - the evangelizer will respect the fact that different people will respond to identical human gut-feelings about God and the world in different ways. They will also use symbols and words to express these feelings. In consequence, the evangelizer will be most ready to 'relativize' and 'revise' his formulation of doctrine faced with this fact. Because he claims for his doctrines universal validity, the foolproof test for their Christian character will be seen in their recognition by the hearer as "self-evidently true", meaning by this that they will command from the hearer "immediacy of assent". Doctrines are well formulated if the hearer becomes aware of a correspondence between them and his basic feelings of God-relatedness.

The evangelizer must also bear in mind that doctrine cannot but be selective of experience. Doctrine is coloured by the history and locality of the people formulating the doctrine. It depends on what factors of this experience of their history they choose to emphasize as being central to their relationship with God and thus befitting of doctrinal enshrinement. Obviously, other people of a different world and history have had experiences of relatedness to God which, quite understandably, have escaped 'our' doctrine as it stands now. This is where the evangelization-conversion dialectic as dialogue becomes evident. The hearer listens, evaluates and gains in that he is now aware of his life orientation.

The preacher listens, evaluates and becomes richer in his belief, in that he has, thanks to the other party in the dialogue, discovered aspects of human life related to God which have hitherto been unexpressed in his statements of belief.

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