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EVANGELIZATION and POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

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**SEDOS SEMINAR REPORT:
POPULAR RELIGIOSITY**

<u>CONTENTS</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME OF THE SEMINAR	144
2. RESOURCE PERSONS	145
3. POPULAR SPIRITUALITY IN INDIA Jyoti Sahi	146
4. POPULAR RELIGIOSITY AND EVANGELIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA Mgr. Samuel Ruiz	155
5. CHRISTIANISME POPULAIRE EN AFRIQUE Sidbe Sempore, OP	167
6. POPULAR RELIGION: SOME ASPECTS FROM EUROPE Breda Eustace, CP	177
7. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	APPENDIX I & II
8. NEWS, NOTICES AND COMING EVENTS	APPENDIX III

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME OF THE SEMINAR

Every one knows the phenomena we refer to when we speak of popular religiosity: pilgrimages, devotions, sacred times and places, ritual and ascetic practices, symbols, etc.

Customarily one tends to view them in a condescending manner either as opposed to the 'official' liturgy or as different from the religion of the cultural and religious elite. Recently one sees a more positive assessment of it as the religion of the poor and the oppressed as opposed to the religion of the rich and the powerful. How can we look at it and evaluate it in itself as the religion of the people? Do not more developed forms of religion have their roots in it? Is there not a popular dimension in each one of us?

How do we understand popular religiosity and its place in the life and culture of the people? The power of symbol and its roots in human-natural and socio-cultural conditions of existence have to be explored. Popular religiosity can be alienating. It can also be prophetic and inspirational. It can be a means of exploitation. It can also be a force for liberation. What are the criteria for discernment and animation?

Does popular religion disappear with the onset of secularization in the modern world? Or does it take new forms like gnosis, spiritism? How do we understand the New Religious Movements? Can we say that there is no popular religion in Europe and America?

In the project of building up the Kingdom through evangelization, how can we assess the role of popular religiosity? How can we tap its potential? How can we enter into an authentic dialogue with it, without marginalizing it? How can we inculturate the Gospel in a popular religious milieu? How can we enable the people to live their religious life meaningfully in view of the Kingdom? Are the people in the 'secularized' part of the world being starved of popular symbolic expressions of religion? How can we mediate between and integrate the popular and the elite, the popular and the official, the popular and the powerful?

The Seminar and the background reading that has been published in previous issues of the BULLETIN focus on three areas: a right understanding of popular religiosity, a socio-cultural and religious analysis of the same, and a reflection on its place in the project of evangelization as inculturation, dialogue and liberation. A good starting point may be Evangelii Nuntiandi 48 and Puebla 444-469.

RESOURCE PERSONS

on

POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

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He is fluent in all five Indian (Mayan) languages spoken in his diocese. Respectful of cultural diversities, he is very much involved in the diocesan process of empowering for lay ministry. He is known in the diocese as "Tatic Obispo" (Our father bishop) and is recognised as a prophetic figure in Latin America.

SIDBE SEMPORE, OF is from Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) in West Africa. He did his theological studies in France and Austria and received a diploma in Scripture from the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem. From 1972 to 1986 he did pastoral work, taught and conducted theological and biblical research in Benin, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. In 1986, he was appointed Novice Master in Abidjan, Ivory Coast and he continues to teach Scripture at the Faculty of theology.

He has published articles and studies on Afro-Christian Churches (see "Popular Religion in Africa: Benin as a Typical Instance" in Concilium, August, 1986).

JOTYI SAHI is an artist and theologian. He founded the Indian School of Art for Peace (INSCAPE) at Bangalore, as a center for reflection on the relation of Christian art to inculturation. Members of the center are seeking to develop an Indian Christian Spirituality. In 1976 he worked on the first Hunger Cloth for Misereor and published a series of Christian Mandalas for Missio.

He and his wife and five children live in a small lay ashram - a community of artists concerned with creative education.

BREDA EUSTACE is a Passionist Sister currently working in Dublin as Deputy Director of Kimmage Development Studies Programme. She teaches Counselling, Leadership Skills, as well as lecturing in Maynooth University Post-Graduate School. She is familiar with the issues facing men and women religious today through her work as General Chapter facilitator for a number of congregations.

She has worked in Argentina, Botswana, England and Ireland.

POPULAR SPIRITUALITY IN INDIA

Jyoti Sahi

The first time that I really came into contact with what might be called popular spirituality, or popular religiosity, was when my wife and I moved to the particular village where we are now living. Before that I was familiar only with the more intellectual approach to religion which I had first experienced within the reformed Hindu tradition of my father and then within the Catholic tradition after I became a christian. We would not call this intellectual approach to religion "popular religiosity". In fact, I have been struggling with these terms; what do we mean by popular religiosity? It is difficult to define in India. There is a popular faith in India which one could call a folk religion, and there is also a very philosophic religion which we call Brahmanic (from the Brahmins). This Brahminic religion has its own traditions which are comparable to Greek and Roman philosophic traditions.

Inculturation and the Great Traditions of India: One of the basic ideas in inculturation, going back to De Nobili and others has been that Christianity need not be presented to Asia only in terms of western philosophy or the thought processes of Aristotle or Plato which were used to communicate the Gospel in the West. Rather, these missionaries felt they could take advantage of the whole philosophic traditions of Brahmanic Hinduism, Buddhism or other Indic religions such as Jainism. These missionaries approached the religions of the east from a philosophic perspective. Today, there are many people in the Indian Church studying the relationship of Shankaracharya to Thomas Aquinas or comparing a Hindu mystic to a christian theologian. This is the level at which much inculturation has been done in India.

Folk and Tribal Religion. The irony of this approach has been the neglect of what we might call folk, tribal, or popular religion. They have been looked upon as superstitious or pagan and thus not much effort or study has gone into understanding them. In fact official Christianity in India has tended to relate to what we might call the great traditions and not to the folk and "little traditions". Yet the fact remains that the people who have become Christians in India have come largely from simple village and tribal backgrounds. They have not come from the great philosophic traditions. You could say that 90% of our Christians in India do not come from what might be called the "high caste" or "elite" group. Ironically, inculturation and dialogue has been directed towards this group and so little has been done with regard to folk religion and popular spirituality. Michael Amaladoss, SJ., and other theologians have pointed out this irony. The question is much debated in India because increasingly there is a realisation that the folk and tribal religions are very different from the great philosophical traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Characteristics of Folk Religion: When we talk about folk religion, what exactly are we dealing with? What are we discussing? This is a religion based on symbols, images and myths, folk stories and parables. These do not follow a systematic theological structure nor do they manifest a systematic theological approach. This symbolic approach to life is open not to propositional statements but rather functions through the processes of the imagination. This very basic aspect of what we call popular spirituality affords me as an artist an entry to folk religiosity. The functioning of symbols and the way in which the more imaginative and intuitive mind approaches reality is what interests me. The criticism of this imaginative approach to religious belief has been that it is superstitious, pantheistic, or animistic. These are categories which people like to use when speaking about popular spirituality. I would prefer to say that this spirituality constitutes a cosmic religion - a creational religion. It is concerned with images which have their origin in nature and a sense of the sacred in creation. I am uncomfortable with the way in which popular spirituality is spoken of as something merely childish. The people are often spoken of, from an elitist point of view, as children or very simple ignorant people who need to be schooled by those who have a "higher" religion. And so evangelization is often seen as a process whereby people who have this simple, almost childish religion are gradually brought to a higher form of spirituality. One of our important insights today is that there is nothing especially childish about folk religion. It follows a different process, a different way of experiencing reality and has an integrity and an importance all its own.

Who are the People? Rather than accept an elitist definition of the people who practice popular religion, we may ask ourselves "who are the people?" The people are those rooted in the experience of nature, the earth, the universe, the cycle of the seasons, the movement of sun and moon, the journey of the stars. Some may define the People as the poor. That may be after all true. The majority of the human race, the whole mass of beings who constitute in any nation "the people", are those who live close to the land, who are subsistence farmers, or food gatherers, relying for their daily bread on the fruits of the earth, and are therefore poor. They are poor in the proper Biblical sense--they are dependent on the bounty of creation, and that means ultimately the bounty of God. They have no 'tomorrow' because they always live in the 'now' of Divine providence.

COSMIC AND META-COSMIC RELIGIONS

In order to help us understand popular religiosity I will use the categories which have been developed by Fr. Aloysius Pieris, who distinguishes between cosmic and meta-cosmic religions. Cosmic religion which forms the basis for a popular spirituality is a Faith expression that relies on symbols, and the wholeness of human experience. It is not just intellectual--it gives meaning to the wholeness of life which includes feelings, the imagination, the psyche and physical experience of the human being, as much as the intellectual power of understanding and knowing. What characterizes this folk religiosity is its appeal to all that comprises the human experience of life.

What he calls the meta-cosmic are those religions or faith-systems capable of raising spirituality to a philosophic level which is more

speculative and abstract. So, for Fr. Pieris, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, are all meta-cosmic faiths.

All religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity also have within themselves cosmic and meta-cosmic dimensions and these exist together. How do they exist together? This is one of the questions which perhaps we should reflect about during this Seminar. I suggest that these two dimensions of any belief system are complementary in many ways, but I would insist that though they are complementary, we should question placing one above the other. I question whether we could say that the meta-cosmic is higher than the cosmic. I will come back to this question again and again.

Conversion From a Cosmic Faith: In India, where we are beginning to reflect on tribal theology not many people are conscious of the fact that 20% of the population comes from a tribal or non caste Hindu background. This represents a large number of people coming from a background which is either purely tribal, or 'tribal' which has somehow been absorbed into the outskirts of the Hindu system. We call this latter group Dalits, that means "the oppressed - but they are people who originally come from tribal background. These two together, the Dalits and the Tribals, constitute 20% of the Indian population. And it is largely from them that the 2% Christian population comes.

Aloysius Pieris argues that "conversion" takes place from the cosmic to the metacosmic, and generally there is no possibility of one meta-cosmic faith being converted to another--there only dialogue is possible. So, to give an example, a tribal group, having a Cosmic Faith can all become Christians, or Buddhists, or Muslims. But this kind of conversion will not take place from one meta-cosmic Faith group to another. Very few Brahmins would ever become Christian because they feel that their religious system is as great as the Christian religious system.

"Missions" from any one of the meta-cosmic Religious systems are therefore oriented to those who profess a Cosmic or creational Faith. Christianity is not the only meta-cosmic Faith concerned with evangelization and mission. Islam is involved in this process as is Hinduism and the Rama Krishna mission.

Challenges to Evangelization: One of the great challenges to evangelization and mission in the Indian context has been, that after 2000 years of mission activity during which time very great missionaries, some who have become central to the whole idea of mission, have come to India, have struggled and gone to great sacrifices only 2% of the Indian population has become Christian. This is a great shock to people in the church. What happened? What went wrong? And it hurts some Christians. Deep down it challenges Christians who tend to think that they have a much greater religion than anyone else. They see that in the large nation of India, there are a great number of people who are not ignorant of Christianity, who have seen plenty of missionaries and still do not feel that the christian religion is a superior religion. This is a great shock to many in the church, and it is in that context that we are working.

META-COSMIC WORLD VIEW

Meta-Cosmic Religion and Urbanization: We are now beginning to realise that the cosmic religion has a rootedness in the land or in the locality through an experience of the cycle of seasons and festivals which the meta-cosmic does not have. Meta-cosmic religions are universalistic and so are not rooted in the lived reality of ordinary people. In a way, you could argue that the meta-cosmic religions have emerged out of an alienation from the land and along with that alienation have come all kinds of problems. An example would be the growth of modern urbanisation, which is in a sense very closely linked with meta-cosmic religion. Hinduism also led to this phenomenon of urbanisation. The Brahmins are the caste to whom we owe the Brahmanic religion. They are people who believe they must not do manual labour, that is they must not dig, they must not dirty their hands. So there developed a group that is now no longer linked with the land. But the people who have the popular faith are farmers, food gatherers, people of the forest. They are not people of the cities.

Christianity as a meta-cosmic religion tends also to the same alienation from the land, preparing people for the process of urbanisation. All over India Christianity is rooted in the cities. Simple people who become christian tribals or farmers, seem to follow the same pattern. They move to the cities, because their new found faith is perceived as something closely related to the attitude of the meta-cosmic for which the land is not so important. Relation to the land and nature is seen often as something low; it is in that context that we are now becoming increasingly aware of certain negative points in the meta-cosmic world view.

Exploiting Land and People: We realise that from the point of view of ecology which is becoming more and more a vital concern all over the world the philosophic assumptions underlying the meta-cosmic religions are often negative to nature. In India, as much as anywhere else, if we look to the basic assumptions which have led to the ecological crisis in our country, these assumptions often come from meta-cosmic religions. Personally I think that the blame cannot be laid only at the door of the Christian and Judaic attitude towards nature in which human beings are supposed to rule over nature. The idea of domination over nature is also to be found in Islam and Brahmanic religions. This kind of alienation from the land has led to a sense that it is all right to exploit the land and along with exploiting the land to exploit the people who are connected with the land. Let us not forget that ecological issues, especially as we see them in the third world, and especially in India, are not just issues concerning trees or the way in which desertification is taking place, but also concern for people. The people who are very close to the earth and who now no longer have firewood or drinking water, are precisely the ones who suffer the most. So attitudes towards nature are also representative of attitudes towards whole groups of people, people who are close to the land. There is a relationship between issues of social justice and the whole ecological crisis.

Is the Meta-Cosmic Better? This poses the question: Is the meta-cosmic better than the cosmic faith of popular religion? Communal tension and conflicts between religious groups all over the world are legitimized by dogmatic religious pronouncements. We

are very conscious of this in a multi-religious nation like India where we can see how religious fundamentalism leads to communal violence i.e. Muslims and Hindus, Hindus and Christians. So it could be suggested that much of the world's violence is related to meta-cosmic propositional statements. I feel that there is much truth in Hans Kung's belief that peace will only be possible in our world if there is peace and dialogue between religions. I have found that in folk religion there is a kind of dialogue going on at both the human and spiritual level. This is much easier because folk spirituality is not based on dogmatic statements. One of the aspects of folk religion is that it is basically human and therefore links all people together. One of the observations we made when we went to live in the small Catholic village where we are now - a small village in an ocean of folk, Hindu, and Muslim villages - is that at this popular level there is much less religious tensions than in the cities.

DIALOGUE OF LIFE

In folk spirituality, there is a lived dialogue and sharing in each others' religious practices. In Bangalore we have a Basilica dedicated to Mary and every year on the Feast of Our Lady, special busses are put on to handle the crowds that come from all over the countryside to the Basilica to celebrate the Feast. Large numbers of Muslims and Hindus will be among those celebrating! In the same way, Christians in the villages, will on occasion visit certain Hindu shrines if they feel that they would get some healing or some blessing from so doing.

Christian villagers go to a shrine to have their child's hair cut off and dedicated to the shrine in the same way that Hindu families dedicate their child's hair to the temple. This is all part of folk religious practice.

In our village there are also many folk practices connected with the cycle of human life; e.g. when a baby is born there will be rituals to receive the baby into the community or again at marriage or funerals. At each stage in a person's life there are popular folk practices to sanctify the moments of passage.

Borrowing of Traditions: At the folk level, there is a constant inculturation of Christianity taking place. Let me give you some examples: the way in which people bury their dead or the way festivals are related to the seasons, to the blessing of the harvest all have links with local village Faith. At Christmas time in our village the people will plant different seeds in a pot to sprout. These are then put near the crib and used later during the year for planting. This is actually a folk tradition which is found also in Hindu folk practice. The people will sprout the grain in pots for the new year and these are the same grain which will later be sown in the fields. This new year ritual is seen to be a blessing on the harvest and assures a healthier crop. At this level you find a borrowing of traditions which are common to all agricultural people.

Meanwhile, at the level of a more intellectual, elitist dialogue we may note that it is becoming more and more difficult for Hindu, Muslim and Christian intellectuals to discuss and share. This is because of growing suspicion between the meta-cosmic faith systems, which presents

a great challenge to our whole understanding of what mission and evangelization are about.

In India, a country with both cosmic and meta-cosmic religions, inculturation presents yet another challenge to our understanding of evangelization.

INCULTURATION

Inculturation can be seen in different ways: Firstly, according to De Nobili and other famous missionaries, inculturation has been seen as a means towards evangelization. Secondly, inculturation has also been seen as a means towards dialogue. The two views and objectives do not always work well together. In India, Hindus are upset regarding the whole inculturation movement especially the Ashram movement. In their criticism they say, "You tell us it is dialogue, but in fact what you are really up to is converting Indians from our Faith to yours! You know you are just pretending to dialogue by wearing orange clothing which are the clothes of the Hindu Sanyassi but the whole purpose of this is to dress yourselves up like wolves in sheep's clothing. You are really getting into the Indian community as fifth columnists."

Inculturation and Integrity Within Oneself: Inculturation presupposes an appreciation of a plurality of cultures and a relationship between culture and faith. Leaving aside the question as to whether a Christian is going to convert someone else or spread the Gospel to someone else, the Christian is faced with his or her own conversion. Deep down within each Christian there are many levels of belief and these derive not only from the Christian faith which an individual embraces but also the whole history of belief going back to one's ancestors. Since I became a Christian while in my teens, I hold very strong Hindu values and beliefs. The challenge is to relate in my own individual personality these different dimensions of Faith. So inculturation is not primarily about converting others but about creating an integrity and wholeness within oneself. Inculturation is a process of creative self-expression which enables Christians to be true to their history and particular culture within the local Church. I, as an Indian, have a right to express myself authentically and creatively in my local context. Therefore, I should be able to use my culture in that effort.

Liberation from Colonization: Inculturation is, therefore, a process of radical humanization. We all need to be inculturated in order to discover what it means to be truly human. Inculturation is a process of liberation from colonization or enslavement to the culture of another nation. There are many people in India who say that what we are really dealing with when we talk about inculturation is de-colonization. We have been colonized by the British, by the Portugese and before that by the Syrian peoples of West Asia. Conquerors have used culture and religion not only to spread the Gospel but also to come and oppress our indigenous peoples and drain the Indian economy. Therefore, when we speak of popular spirituality we are also dealing with what we may call counter-cultural movements.

Inculturation can be called counter - cultural in the sense that popular spirituality represents resistance to those meta-cosmic forms of religion which have often supported directly or indirectly the

colonizing efforts of the dominating group. The counter-cultural element of popular spirituality is one which insists on the localness and on the authenticity of the incarnated reality as opposed to something that comes from outside. The meta-cosmic tends to stress the "universal", whatever that is, and marginalize what is specific and local.

Inculturation and the Feminine: Inculturation as counter - culture is linked up with movements which we would now call women's movements. For example, in India there has been a realization that women's movements are the ones closest to what we are terming popular religion. Women all over the world have a closeness to popular religion and this is in large part due to the elements in popular religion which stress the feminine aspect of faith and deity. These aspects have been marginalized by the meta-cosmic religious systems which tend on the whole to be male dominated. All the meta-cosmic religions are culturally male dominated.

Ecological movements or movements concerning peace and justice are linked to popular spirituality and are counter-cultural. There is a relationship between popular spirituality and all these counter - cultural movements.

Scripture and the Cosmic World View: In the context of what we can see happening in the world around us, where meta-cosmic organized religions are contributing much towards global tension (in the form of growing fundamentalism, and religious intolerance) and also the ecological crisis by rejecting the natural as only having meaning in the light of humanity's higher spiritual aims, we can now no longer be so complacent about the "superiority" of the meta-cosmic. There are evils in the meta-cosmic understanding of reality as dangerous to the future of this planet earth, as anything to be found in the "superstitious" or "pantheistic" beliefs among tribals or village people. In fact, there is now a growing feeling that the cosmic Faith systems have much to teach us, about how society should live in harmony with nature. A new Tribal Theology is emerging which does not think it is necessarily a step forward to adopt a meta-cosmic world view. For example if we look at the list of "core values" of the Tribals as suggested by Bishop Nirmal Minz and Ram Dayal Munda, we get a rather comprehensive picture of what we might call "gospel values". This may even bring us to question how far the Biblical Faith is itself "Cosmic" rather than meta-cosmic--certainly a very important central Core of the Old Testament's teaching concerning Creation, and the relation of the People to the Land, is firmly based on what we might call a Cosmic world view, as we find it in Tribal, or folk religious values all over the world.

POPULAR RELIGIOSITY AND TRADITION

In addition to being counter-cultural, we must recognize the fact that popular religion is also very tradition-bound. We must be concerned with the lack of prophetic vision in folk tradition. Folk tradition is not self critical in the way that the meta-cosmic is. We find this clearly manifest in folk art. Folk art is a very tradition-bound art. This art is in many ways wonderful, and has an integrity of its own which many creative artists have gone back to, to find the sources of their own imaginative life. But folk art is also rigidly traditional,

resisting at every stage creative innovation and evolution. Popular spirituality functions as the real conserver of traditional symbols. That is very important, because without this conservative world of meaning, symbols themselves easily become alienated; hijacked, so to speak, by individual interpretations which lack the real authority to communicate. Symbols, if they are to be channels of communication, must be rooted in a tradition. This was clear to thinkers like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. What he speaks of as constituting a "Christian and oriental philosophy of art" is precisely a culture rooted in tradition, and that means a cosmic world view. But is art only to be traditional? Is not the function of art also to be a counter culture... a tradition of dissent? Does not the individual conscience, and by extension the consciousness of a whole society, only grow through a dynamic questioning of the tradition? What we are calling the Cosmic world view does not have a power of self criticism, given the parameters of its own cosmic symbols. For that we need the intervention of the meta-cosmic.

Tradition and Oppression: The cosmic world view, which we find in popular spirituality, has been exploited by those who seek to control the masses, precisely where it is most tradition bound. Nothing serves better the interests of the rulers than popular spirituality. And so, those who seek to lay special stress on "mass movements" and the importance of the "common People" as against the governing "elite", can easily destroy their own argument in favour of liberation, when they fail to notice the liberative dimension of the "meta-cosmic" which they might simply categorize as the belief system of a powerful elite and therefore irrelevant to the struggling, marginalized masses. By an irony which is itself at the very heart of what we might term the dynamics of culture, the cosmic culture of the people is itself in constant need of revitalization and re-interpretation by that critical culture which has given power to an elite, but which also carries in itself the potential to empower the people. A tradition cannot grow, or live, unless it is questioned.

WHO IS THE PERSON?

If we are turning today towards popular religion to understand better in what way spirituality can empower ordinary people, we must do so by also looking at the personal responsibilities of an individual to the whole of creation.

Earlier the question was asked "who are the people?" We must conclude by asking "who is the person?" There can be no liberated people without liberated persons. This is the challenge for a Cosmic Faith needed for our time. Such a Faith must address not only the future planet, but also the evolving Person. Processes of democratization, which have all over the world profoundly influenced people's political consciousness, have also given a new meaning to the importance of the individual person as a responsible being. There must be a vital dialogue between traditional popular religiosity and modernity. Liberation movements must take into account the cosmic, earth affirming - spirituality of those who live in intimate solidarity with the earth, but on the other hand the folk spiritualities must develop a prophetic voice which is critical of the tradition in a positive way.

Re-Evaluate Our Popular Spiritual Sources: All the major religions of the world need to re-evaluate their popular spiritual sources, not simply as a "lower" element to be tolerated for the sake of the ignorant and simple, but as preserving a real insight as to what it is to be truly human. We need what some call a "democratisation of mysticism"--the insights of the great mystics must be given back to the poor of the land in a way that both empowers the ordinary people, and also links the professionally religious to the living traditions of the whole community.

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POPULAR RELIGIOSITY AND EVANGELIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Mgr. Samuel Ruiz

Until recently, popular religiosity was not considered a significant issue by those involved in theological reflection or pastoral planning. Even Vatican II documents which inspired widespread renewal throughout the Church did not explicitly mention such now familiar terms as Popular Religion, Popular Catholicism and People's Religion.

Popular religiosity has always existed in the Church. From earliest times the Christian faith has been concretely expressed in the essential message of the gospel and in a synthesis of the religious practices and beliefs of the people - be they Romans, Greeks, Germans or slaves.

History shows that as long as popular religiosity remains passive and develops without questioning 'the established order', it is tolerated. When it protests and challenges a worldly and rich Church, then popular religiosity and its "prophets" are silenced or persecuted.

Both Protestantism and the Enlightenment - with its heirs liberal capitalism and dialectical marxism - have looked on popular religiosity with contempt. It was accused of ignorance, idolatry, obscurantism, sentimentalism and alienation.

In attempting to ameliorate the negative effects of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, the official Church created and promoted devotions which we now would consider traditional i.e. Marian devotions, devotion to the Sacred Heart and to particular saints. From the perspective of the official Church one of the purposes of these devotions was to improve the popular expression of religion which was seen to be dominated by feeling and emotion. The emphasis was thus put on the objective and the rational. The liturgical movement and biblical - based renewal programmes were also directed towards this goal. During the world wars, the Catholic Action movement aimed at deepening the popular understanding and expression of faith by encouraging the social involvement of christians in their society.

From 1950 to 1970 popular religiosity was the step-child of Catholic pastoral workers. Though it was relentlessly opposed it simply would not die. On the contrary it continued to blossom.

Positive Attitudes Emerge: Gradually, new and more positive attitudes began to replace the former negative ones. Pope Paul's encyclical "Evangelii Nuntiandi" was the first papal document that dedicated special attention to the topic of popular religiosity.

In Latin America the parameters of the new attitude are history and culture. Using these two parameters rather than a strict criterion of orthodoxy, popular religiosity in Latin America today is seen as a hope for the future. The 3rd General Assembly of the Latin America Bishops in Puebla, 1979 declared:

"By the religion of the people or popular religiosity or popular piety, we mean the whole complex of underlying beliefs rooted in God, the basic attitudes that flow from these beliefs, and the expressions that manifest them. It is the form of cultural life that religion takes on among a given people. In its most characteristic cultural form, the religion of the Latin American people is an expression of the Catholic faith. It is a people's catholicism." Puebla, No. 444.

After Puebla popular religiosity had its "identity card" with Roman approval. Previous to this it was a suspect movement, a devalued evangelization, a hodge podge of superstitions, something which needed to be transformed and purified.

Puebla's Assessment of Popular Religiosity: The characteristics of this popular religiosity are described in various numbers of the Puebla Document from 444 on. Puebla speaks of the essential historical identity of the Latin American continent; it says that this popular religiosity even if it is lived out in a preferential way by the poor and simple, takes in all social sectors uniting them together in spite of their multiple diversities. It says that popular religiosity is a wisdom which responds to the great questions of life; that popular religiosity is a christian wisdom which enables the people to discern and sense when they are being given the authentic gospel or when there are other hidden interests which are called gospel but which are something else.

Popular religiosity is capable of bringing together multitudes, in this way giving the Church, especially at the shrines where the people gather, a vision of universality on the one hand, and on the other hand an opportunity for a deeper evangelization of the masses.

Popular religiosity is also an active way in which the people evangelize themselves. It is, on the other hand, a movement of implicit and sometimes explicit protest against the fact that social justice has not been fully lived out and that the demands of being children of God are not reflected in the structures of society.

The lack of concern for popular religiosity and its abandonment by pastoral agents explain the weakening, deformation and deterioration that took place in popular religiosity because there was no real pastoral effort to accompany this religiosity. A new evangelization is called for.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

Let me now move on to a point which I consider fundamental. In Latin America what is called popular religiosity coincides most specifically with the religious manifestation of the indigenous communities. Who has not heard of or looked at photographs or illustrations of the cult of Chichicastenango in Guatemala? The religiosity of the indigenous people sometimes runs parallel to official religion, sometimes it is outside it or even beneath it.

At this historical movement we are in the presence of a completely new situation in the Latin American continent. It can be called the emergence or the rise or the irruption of the poor in the continent but it is also the rise or the emergence of the indigenous people on a continental scale. It is interesting that some indigenous groups have

recently called on linguistic anthropologists to investigate their language. They were forgetting their language and realised it was important to preserve it. They are becoming aware of the fact that they have something new to give to society. Their community consciousness and their personal disposition to serve in the community, are elements which are constitutive of being indigenous. This essentially communitarian dimension of indigenous populations is characteristic not only of Latin America, but also of the whole of North America from Canada in the north to the south.

I experienced an extraordinary example of this some years ago. One day an eight year old boy was given a sweet by his teacher. The following day he had to go on a long errand and he kept the sweet all day. Only on the following day when he met his school friends again did he eat the sweet - sharing it with them. Three days! But the strong community consciousness of the indigenous people is such that he could not allow himself to eat the sweet alone. Let me remind you that this is not a value that was transmitted by evangelization. It was there before the gospel arrived. The indigenous people are aware today that because of the values of their culture, they can contribute a lot to answering the questions which arise in the search for a new society.

EVANGELIZATION AND DOMINATION

This same growth in awareness also leads the indigenous peoples to look realistically at the tragedy and conflict in which the evangelization of the continent was carried out. A meeting was held recently in Ecuador in connection with the projected celebration of the 5th centenary of the evangelization of Latin America. There it was said:

"We, the indigenous representatives of thirty nationalities and fifteen countries in the 2nd Ecumenical Consultation of the Latin America Indigenous Pastoral Apostolate in Quito, Ecuador on July 6 1986, declare our total repudiation of these triumphalistic celebrations of the five centuries of evangelization for the following reasons: genocide, the war of occupation, the violent usurpation of our territorial dominions, the disintegration of our organizations etc..."

And they went on to ask something special from the United States and from the Church. They asked that the Churches put an end to the types of evangelization and pastoral practice which have been allied to a dominating, genocidal and ethnocidal system. They asked for an authentic evangelization of accompaniment, dialogue and unity among the Churches which professed themselves to be Christian so that they may work and act together in a united way.

Cultural Diversity. Thirty years ago I arrived in Chiapas. It was my first contact with a strong nuclei of indigenous communities. I came in contact very soon with the diversity of their cultures and customs. When I visited Chamula, one of the largest communities, during the carnival celebrations at the beginning of Lent, I wished to greet the indigenous Chamulas. About four thousand of them were gathered there but not one shook hands with me! The priest who was with me said, "My Lord Bishop, people do not greet one another like that

here. Here they bow their heads so that you can touch them with your hand". In recognition of the dignity of each person, they bowed in veneration of the pastor.

A few days later I went to a place where the people spoke a dialect of the same language but they were a different tribe. I had my hand ready to greet them by touching their heads but the greeting was quite different there. People greeted first with the right hand and then with the left. So for two hundred people I had to give four hundred handshakes. I went to another region and this time I was ready to take off my shoes or to greet the people with my nose, but in that particular place one did not begin with the greeting at all! First, one had to have a conversation and develop a human relationship in order to get to know one another and only then was one able to say "Good day" or "Good evening".

Cultural Uniqueness. Culture is a human phenomenon, specific to humanity. It is transmitted in different ways, - through education and also through accumulated experience passed on through human language. Animals too accumulate experience but they have no language to transmit it. We could define culture as

'the ensemble of responses which a community gives and transmits to others with regard to questions posed about transcendence, (about the one we like to call God) - about human relationships with other groups and with one's own group, and about questions which arise from contact with nature'.

The questions which arise from these three areas - transcendence, human relationships and relationships with nature, and the responses to them that are transmitted from generation to generation are what we call culture. We could say more simply that culture represents diverse ways of being a human person.

Each human group which is aware of being a human group has a culture. No matter what degree of development a particular group has the culture which they have been taught from childhood is a culture validated by that particular group. It may not be valid for another human group. If we know one culture we cannot say that we know other similar cultures. If I know Peter it does not mean that I know John even though he may be his brother. So each culture has its own personality and internal unity. The culture which is best for a human group is the one which is its own, which is the fruit of its historical journey, and not a culture which comes from the outside even though that one might seem to be better.

Civilization. What we call civilization is something different from culture. It is characterized by the subjection or control of natural forces, and by technical development. The values of a culture do not have their origin in technical development although they may be involved in some way in technical civilization. So a human group, both theoretically and practically speaking, could have a very developed technical civilization and a rather precarious ensemble of cultural values. The opposite could also be true. A human group could have very great cultural wealth and a poverty of civilization which nevertheless is necessary for the survival of that human group.

Ambiguity of Terminology. Coming to indigenous people we enter into an area of ambiguity. It begins with the very terminology. Spain in its conquest of our continent, (or invasion, to give it its proper name, with all due respect for the Motherland!) - sought economic betterment. It sought a new merchant route to bring from the East Indies the materials the Spaniards needed for their markets. Christopher Columbus reached land he supposedly believed to be on the way to India. He therefore called it "The Indies." Some suggest, however, that Columbus, being astute, realised that the land which he had reached was indeed not India, but to promote his travels and satisfy his ambition to seek new worlds he gave the wealth which he found there as a strong incentive for support for a second journey. The subsequent invasion brought us life, but it also brought us death.

"Indian" is the terminology of the dominator. There were no Indians in our continent before Columbus came. There were ethnic groups - Quéchuas, Guaymies, Guaranecs, Mexicas, Olmecas, Toltecas - many different ethnic groups. The word 'Indian' is a term of domination, a term used by the people who crushed others. Being indigenous or an "Indian" in the sense of having a determined culture is not a biological phenomenon. A similar situation exists in Brazil today for the numerous Japanese who live there. Biologically they are Japanese but they are Brazilian because many of them were born in Brazil.

Advanced Knowledge: The Spanish were really amazed at the cultural development of the peoples whom they met. Their descriptions of the social organization and development they found expressed their wonder. I lived in a place where the culture of the Guaymies is still alive. These people used the zero in numbers before the Europeans did, enabling them to elaborate sophisticated calculations such as stellar distances. Twice a year some ancient buildings in the middle of Yucatan, cast a shadow which is the image of a snake at sunset. For the indigenous people this is a vivid reminder of the mythic story of a divine snake which descends from heaven to earth. The precise calculations used in these buildings presupposes a very advanced knowledge of heavenly bodies. There is no doubt today that these people had quite a profound technical development and knowledge of nature.

CULTURAL EFFECTS OF EVANGELIZATION

What was the effect of the process of evangelization when it was partnered with a process of domination? The first priests who arrived were chaplains of the conquistadors. Only afterwards did missionaries arrive. They did not have independent means of transport and could only use the means provided by the state, so they arrived on the ships of the Empire. But not only did they arrive on the same ships as the conquistadors but they depended on imperial power to evangelize. What happened was sad. Refusing to be evangelized meant refusing submission to the Emperor. Bartolomeo de las Casas wrote to the Emperor telling him what was happening. The Emperor issued an edict to protect the people. However, in order to circumvent this so as to take over the lands of the people, gold mines included, the Emperor's edict was proclaimed outside the towns where the people were living, at two or three o'clock in the morning, and in a language the people did not understand. They had to submit to the Emperor. If they were reluctant to submit they were forced to do so. The alternative was to leave where they were and form new

groups in new towns.

"Sandwich Religion". Quite simply, political domination was carried out and it was accompanied by a religious domination. Not only was there no dialogue between the religions, natural and revealed, but there was imposition by force. Monuments, codes and writings of the indigenous people were destroyed in order to wipe out every trace of their religion. The result was a 'sandwich' religion. On top there was a light covering of Christianity, and at the bottom there was a hidden natural religion which emerged to accept or to reinterpret the religion which had been imposed officially.

"The Father and Mother Sun". Let me give you an example of this sandwich religion: There is a Mayan myth about the world not unlike the one we find described in the Bible except that the Biblical world was circular and the Maya world was cubic.

There was the land and there was a woman with two sons. We are just told that they were born of this woman, we do not know anything about the father, - a mystery of the culture. The older son was called Benguil and the younger was called O'osh. They went out together and found a tree with honey. The older son, Benguil, said to the younger son O'osh, "You go up the tree because you are lighter and get the honey and we will eat it together". So O'osh, the younger brother went up the tree; he chewed the wax, got out the honey and then gave his brother the chewed wax. Benguil took the wax in his hands and with it made mice and other animals who began to eat at the base of the tree until the tree fell and his younger brother was killed.

When Benguil returned, the mother, with feminine intuition, asked: "Where is your brother O'osh?" Benguil replied that O'osh was coming after him. Since it was taking him a long time to come, he made pigs out of the wax and these pigs started crying his brother's name, "O'osh, O'osh, O'osh" And then the younger brother appeared.

A "childish" story like this shows that the material for creating animals was cosmic, just as in the bible humankind was made from the earth. To continue the story - the mother then said to her older son that the world was full of sin. Benguil with his power then tied a rope to the four cardinal points of the world and with his mother climbed this rope to where they found a shining mirror which had such power and light that they made the sun and moon out of it. Every day, the sun, Totil c'ac'al has a meeting with the Totil Meiletic, the Father/Mother, and with the elders of the community.

Indigenous people see Totil Meiletic as a father and mother because they love the people with the love of a father and mother. In the mountain caves it is they who look after the animal protectors of each man/woman. An animal of some kind is born on the same day as every human person and has a common soul with that human. It is called "chanul". This soul which belongs to both a person and an animal means that if the animal gets sick so does the person. And if the person gets sick or dies, then the animal gets sick or dies. So when the conduct of human beings is irregular in some way, Totil Meiletic in their daily meeting with the sun at mid-day pass judgment on their conduct. God then dictates what punishment is to be given to those who have behaved badly. This punishment is not given directly. It goes through Totil Meiletic to the animal protector of the person. The animal is deprived of food or drink so that it gets sick and the person gets sick also. This myth

which belongs to the whole Mayan region is today sometimes told with a Christian meaning and so is a 'sandwich' myth.

The Saints. The people also have the Santo'etic, - the saints. Their life stories are not exactly the same as the ones we know. They have a lot of variations but like the Father/Mother, they are mediators with the sun and moon, with Christ and with God. The behaviour of people in relation to the celebration of feasts is judged and also presented to God. When there is bad behaviour sentence is passed. Then the intervention of the priest, invested with power by the bishop, is sought to free the person from the punishment imposed for misconduct in the spiritual area. Thus punishments in the material order and in the spiritual order become joined together in an interesting synthesis of what we call 'sandwich' religion.

MISSIONARIES - CULTURAL SHOCKS

The missionaries' attitude when they arrived in an indigenous community, was unfortunately ethnocentrist. They judged our culture by the criteria of their own culture which they considered to be the only one with the right to exist, the only valid one.

Clothes. Given their ethnocentricity the missionaries experienced cultural shock - for example the shock of finding people naked. The missionaries made moral judgment on their lack of clothing rather than seeing it as a natural response to the hot climate of the region. They insisted that the indigenous people wear clothes and this had unfortunate consequences. Firstly, many people died since they did not have the economic means or development to buy new clothes. Thus the clothes caused infections which resulted in the death of many people from diseases they had never before known. Secondly, communication in the community suffered because men and women communicated with a language written on their bodies in tatoo. When a woman appeared at the door of her house with a special tatoo, her husband knew immediately that the supply of meat was finished and he had to ensure a further supply. With the putting on of clothes, such communication ceased.

Food. Food also caused great cultural shock. In Bolivia, the food called 'masato' is prepared by using a leaven which has been produced by being chewed by the oldest woman of the community. After the leaven is chewed it is put in the dough to make it rise. The cultural shock from this is in reality no greater than the shock caused to indigenous people by seeing others drink cows milk or eat horse flesh. Indigenous people react differently from others when they see a tarantula. They chase it, catch it, kill it, cook it and eat it. Needless to say, some stomachs react differently from theirs when they see this happening.

Time. Time is perhaps the cause of the greatest cultural shock. "Coffee break" is a norm in modern life. It does not matter what we are doing we must have our coffee break. The indigenous people do not regard time thus. Time is at their service. If there is something they are not going to be able to complete then they do not begin it. But when they do begin something they will finish it even if they have to stay at it for two or three days consecutively. Time is thus quite important.

Evangelization based on ethnocentrism results in a westernization of indigenous peoples. Pockets of Europeanized or westernized indigenous people are created in various places. The Bishop of Morocco told me how sad it was that when the missionaries had to leave that country none of them spoke the language even after so many years of evangelization. The Churches had been filled with French people but not with local people. The missionaries had not helped to develop the local Church. Something absolutely fundamental had been neglected.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN 'TO EVANGELIZE'?

This is a very real question. What does it mean to evangelize, taking into account that cultures differ so much and that gospel and culture are not identical? Does evangelization mean changing the natural religion of the Indian into a Christian religion? Does it mean destroying the natural religion which is the basic nucleus encompassing all the cultural factors of the people? That is destroying a culture but it is not evangelizing. Does it mean just joining our hands in prayer and contemplating the culture of the people to whom we are sent without doing anything else but looking at it? That is not evangelizing. Or do we have to rebuild the culture so that it will rise up again with its pre-colonial splendour? That would be archaeology, not evangelization. Or perhaps because people have a destiny which goes beyond this world and time we should destroy the various cultures and build up a monoculture which is universal? Why did Jesus become a Jew, a Galilean which was a sub-culture, fulfill the Jewish law, speak Aramaic and act according to the customs of his people? Why did God permit the existence of so many rich cultures if they were all destined to be destroyed in the process of evangelization? What is evangelization really?

The "Seeds of the Word". Great thanks must go to the African bishops who did so much to produce the document on the missions AD GENTES during the Second Vatican Council. They protested until the document was re-written for the 7th time. Finally it was passed with the highest vote in the whole council. It was a long, painful, slow process. (See 2-15 of Ad Gentes).

Throughout history God had a universal plan of salvation. But this plan did not just remain in God's heart. God acted in history by means of the incarnation of Christ who became one of us and by means of the Church which continues the mission of Christ, and by means of the action of the Spirit. It is that Spirit who inspires, accompanies and anticipates the presence of missionaries. So in the salvific presence and plan of God in human groups, we find what the Greek Fathers called the "seeds of the Word" which exist in the cultures of all peoples in their search for the transcendent.

These "seeds of the Word" are not just a pedagogical tool for Christianity; they are already part of the content of the proclamation even though this content will become more explicit through a gospel proclamation based on years of faith experience.

So before proclaiming the word to a culture where the gospel has not yet arrived the Church and the missionary have the task of sitting down and listening, observing and understanding the culture in order to be able to say, "The Lord be with you", or "The Lord IS with you". In

order to be able to know how the Lord is there, the missionary must know how God's presence is being lived out in the people and how the people approach the divinity. The Church, discovering all this through its missionaries, should insert itself in the human group in order to incarnate itself just as Christ inserted himself in humanity. A gradual liberation of the people will be brought about in this process of incarnation with a growing intensification and purification of the values and counter-values which exist in every human culture.

Missionaries must have Humility above all, as well as patience and not try to modify the culture of the people to whom they are sent. They must try to discover the "seeds of the Word" in the culture of the people. They must try to understand the totality, the inner cohesion and the integrity of the culture. It is the converted people themselves who will transform and EVANGELIZE the culture.

The serious way in which the people hear the gospel message brought by missionaries and interpret it in their own culture is shown by the way a group reacted to the catechesis of a Dominican priest on the theme of reconciliation. This event occurred during the year that our diocese devoted to that theme in keeping with the Synod on Reconciliation. The Dominican had reached the penitential service in a Mass but the indigenous people were deeply divided within their tribal group. They stopped the Mass and took three days to work through a reconciliation process before they could say they were ready to go on with the rest of the Mass. Here we see the depth of the penitential act based on their cultural understanding of the word of God perceived in its fullness.

Autochthonous Churches. This brings us to the birth of autochthonous churches, churches that will be established with their own ministers and ministries which emerge from the culture. In these churches there will be a reflection on the faith not from the perspective of Greek and Thomist philosophy but from the mythology with which that particular group reflects its own life. They should evolve their own expressions of faith. They are not expressing the faith of others but the faith of their own community. Therefore, they should use their own symbols and cultural signs in a liturgy which is their own and not just an adaptation of an imposed liturgy. It should be liturgy which expresses the faith of that community with its own rites and signs which are intelligible to the people. Finally, evangelization should be an enrichment of all that is held to be the final goal and objective of their culture. These principles are nothing new. They are a repetition of what we already know.

While we were preparing for the Medellin meeting in 1968 we had a cultural shock because of the talks of two anthropologists who spoke to us in terms like those in which I have just been speaking to you. Although I had signed all the Vatican documents it was only then that I realised the implications of what had been said. And so we sent thirteen missionaries to study anthropology for one year in order to be able to appreciate our peoples' understanding of the values of their own cultures so that they might begin an incarnated evangelization. Now we have 7000 indigenous catechists whose formation we look after from within the community. It is they who now bear the weight of evangelizing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

Cultures are not islands separated from history. Some cultures have been dominated and destroyed in history, others because of their geographical situation have been protected but will soon be dominated and oppressed by the West. In Latin America, as far as the Indians are concerned, there really is no history because history as it has been taught in schools dates only from the conquistadors. The people do not know their past as Europeans do. They have been obliged through the school system to look for their points of reference in Europe. So they run the risk of forgetting the myths, the life experiences, the richness of the ancient peoples. Now things are changing and history is beginning to be written from the point of people who were conquered rather than from the point of view of the conquerors. The Church too is beginning to look at the documents of the indigenous people to see how they viewed evangelization and the conquest.

When a people has no history there is a problem with Christianity which is a history of salvation rather than a religion of rules and regulations. How can we build the Church when the people have no history, when they have no autochthonous heroes, celebrations or feasts? They celebrate the feasts of Saints imported from Europe! Now pre-Confirmation catechesis tries to give a historical view of events in the community in order to awaken the peoples' awareness of history. People have also begun to celebrate anniversaries of diaconate-ordinations and other events.

Dialogue Based on History and Experience: I once knew a lay sister in a convent. She was the cook. She did nothing but cook year after year - twenty years or more. I suggested to her that she should write out her recipes and make them available to the people. She took up the idea and began to do this. A year later I met her. She was a changed woman. She had become pastorally involved with the indigenous people through her recipes which were a great help to them. She was now entering into debate and dialogue with the missionaries about indigenous customs and culture. She had enough confidence to correct a Jesuit theologian at a meeting and he said she was right. They could speak on equal terms about pastoral involvement.

If we dialogue and debate with the people on the basis of their history and not on the basis of orthodox formulated religious ideas there is a potential richness. It is no longer a debate between an elite and a poorly instructed people. It is rather a commitment to an historical manifestation of the religious experience of people whose lives are given in the service of others. Now the indigenous people with their popular religiosity give themselves in service to a transformation of history and the elite can understand them and even change their points of view in a dialogue of love, commitment and service.

CATECHISTS

There was a time when the catechists had diplomas from our catechetical academies. They had followed a lot of courses, but in fact their catechesis proved to be in their own image and likeness. That stage is now past, thank God. At a meeting of two hundred catechists, we asked the question. "What does it mean to be a catechist"? They

answered, "To give good example"; "To preach the word of God"; "To seek the good of the communities". But we replied: "Does not every christian have to do all this"? "So what is a catechist really?" Then, when they thought further about it they said: "Well, to be a catechist means gathering the harvest of the thoughts of the people on the word of God" - and that really changed their objective. Now they go with the Scriptures and with two or three prepared questions, not only to teach but to share their reflection with the people. They receive the peoples' sharing. Catechesis becomes something which they not only give but something which they receive too.

Catechesis. The plan of their catechesis is very simple: What is God's plan? How do people respond to this plan? How can we live faith, hope and charity in realising the plan of God?

This plan of God is understood in a triple dimension. They discuss what God's plan is in economic affairs, in politics, in their culture. They discuss how people respond to God's plan in these three areas. How can faith be lived in politics, in economics, in culture? The replies which emerge are really extraordinary. It is said about charity: "Charity cannot be defined, charity is lived". We could say the same about faith.

Conversion happens first on a community level, then on a family level and lastly on an individual level. Then the people become politically aware and become involved in politics. Cooperative movements emerge.

Ministries and the Holy Spirit. Catechesis is of course only a step.

Ministers also have to emerge from the community. There are traditional ministries which have to be revised on the basis of a people's life of faith.

I would like to illustrate the peoples' attitude towards ministries by a simple anecdote. We were discussing the diaconate in a catechists' meeting one day. The facilitator asked them; "Brothers, suppose the bishop called away all the priests from the mission. Or suppose all the priests and religious were traveling in a bus which crashed and they were all killed. What would happen?" There was silence. Then the father of one of the permanent deacons got up slowly, scratched his head and said: "Listen: What you are saying to us is very serious. You have been preaching the word of God to us for the last twenty years and you are afraid that the Church will come to an end just because you leave. What have you done so badly that you are so afraid"? And then he said, "I don't think that you have given us the Holy Spirit. Although Jesus Christ had only had three years to preach he gave his Church the Holy Spirit and that is why it was able to continue. Your preaching is all about Christ. The Holy Spirit - the dove - has escaped!"

I recalled that at the Vatican Council, even though we were sometimes half-asleep, when someone spoke we knew immediately if the speaker was eastern or western by the emphasis he placed on Christ or on the Spirit.

This community reflected for a year on the diaconate based on the Acts of the Apostles. As a result, the role of the Holy Spirit in the

christian life was seen as something vital and dynamic even though the Spirit as such had never been part of the catechesis they had received.

Priests. I know a community which could not have Mass because they had no priests. They were simply too far away from a centre and priests could not get there. They had no bread or wine either. Yet they managed to make bread and wine from what was available to them. They had bread and wine and permanent deacons and they wondered why they could not have the Eucharist, why they could not have Mass? The difficulty of passing from the diaconate to the priesthood is almost incomprehensible for the indigenous people. There is great frustration here. There exists a fundamental cultural problem which they want to try to explain to those in power. The Council says that ministers have to emerge from the autochthonous people. Good - but in all the indigenous cultures which I know, no young person has authority. And what is a young person? A person is young when he is not married and has no children. He may be thirty years of age but if he is not married he is considered young. He cannot have authority. If we want priests emerging from the autochthonous community we must have priests who have wives and children. And if we cannot have a Church for the people, made by the people, how can we call the Church catholic?

Notes (1) In reply to a request for clarification of what he meant by by "seeds of the word" in indigenous communities Bishop Ruiz gave three examples: 1) The deep sense of service to the community. In indigenous groups each person has to spend one year in the service of the community. 2) The deep sacredness of keeping one's word. No "Indian" cultural group has papers to prove they own land - but they respect the honor of their spoken word. 3) Their community sense - there are no orphans - no unwanted or unowned children.

(2) To a question about his contrast between "popular" religion and "official" religion he referred again to the Puebla description of popular religion. Evangelization of the "Indians" was incomplete - there was little or no bridge built between the "official" religion and the peoples' religion. A western dressing of the gospel message was given to the people.

(3) A question about the early missionaries pointed out: the Holy Spirit was also active in the 16th Century. Many mistakes were made but would there be Christians in Latin America to-day if the heroic people of that time had not gone there. Are we perhaps too hard on them? Some have described that century as the greatest of centuries not least because of the bringing of Christianity to the Americas. Is it too easy for us to look back with the insights of the twentieth century and see the mistakes?

The Bishop responded that this was true - but even then Bartolomé de las Casas was not alone in condemning the imposition of religion on the people. Neither was he alone in protesting that the people must be left free to accept or not. It is urgent that we now correct the mistakes and wrong attitudes which are continuing even today.

CHRISTIANISME POPULAIRE EN AFRIQUE

Sidbe Sempore, O.P.

On a raison de dire que l'Afrique est une "terra religiosa" : sous toutes les latitudes du Continent, la religion demeure pour la quasi totalité de la population, une réalité vivante qui influe sur les mentalités, les comportements, les projets, les destins. Tant au niveau collectif qu'individuel, le fait religieux inspire les réactions et régit les options, et l'on peut constater que le fond de religiosité qui imprègne depuis toujours les traditions et les coutumes se manifeste sous des formes tenaces et typique dans la manière de comprendre et d'assimiler les religions nouvelles telles que l'Islam et le christianisme. On essaiera ici de montrer que le christianisme de la grande majorité des chrétiens s'alimente à la source du Message reçu et des traditions vécues.

REGARD SUR LE PASSE

Quand les premiers missionnaires arrivèrent au Congo à la fin du XV siècle, ils n'eurent point trop de peine à baptiser le roi et ses sujets. Mais trois années après avoir reçu le baptême, le roi Joao Ier devait retourner à la religion de ses ancêtres, et son fils, Afonso Ier, le roi "très chrétien", ne réussit guère à maintenir son peuple dans la religion des missionnaires. Un vieux chroniqueur nous rapporte que le roi entreprit avec les missionnaires une campagne contre le paganisme des chrétiens du royaume : "En moins d'un mois, écrit-il, furent apportés à la cour les idoles, les diableries, les masques, tous les objets que l'on adorait et que l'on tenait pour dieux...Le feu y fut mis et tout brûla. Ensuite, le roi Afonso rassembla tout le peuple et, en lieu et place des idoles, il distribua des croix et des images de Saints apportées par les Portugais".

Le drame de cette première évangélisation du monde noir connut son épilogue au XVII siècle avec KASSOLA, et au XVIII siècle avec dona BEATRICE, tous deux Bakongo du Royaume du Congo et de l'Angola. Quand, en 1632, le néophyte Francisco KASSOLA se sépara du père Jésuite Pero TAVARES pour fonder le premier mouvement autochtone de l'Afrique noire, il draina derrière lui des foules subjuguées par la fougue d'une prédication aux accents nouveaux (utilisation de la langue et du langage des Bakongo), attirées par sa réputation de thaumaturge d'un type nouveau (comme guérisseur et devin, il s'appliquait à délivrer de l'emprise de la maladie, de la peur des sorciers et des fétiches, de l'angoisse de l'avenir), et rassurées par son indulgence vis-à-vis des coutumes ancestrales tenues pour sacrées (culte des ancêtres, sacrifices aux esprits, observance des tabous et interdits...).

Moins d'un siècle plus tard, en 1704, une jeune Mukongo de 21 ans, Kimpa Vita, alias dona BEATRICE, pratiquait une sérieuse brèche dans l'oeuvre missionnaire des Capucins du Congo et de l'Angola en fondant le mouvement dit des Antoniens. Cette jeune prophétesse, qui fut brûlée vive en 1706, réussit non seulement à restaurer le royaume tombé en décadence et à susciter un sentiment d'identité nationale, mais surtout à acclimater en terrain chrétien des conceptions et des pratiques traditionnelles difficilement compatibles avec le christianisme des missionnaires. Tout en rejetant certains aspects des croyances et de la

doctrine du christianisme reçu (un contemporain de BEATRICE, le Père Colomban de Bologne, rapporte que la "fausse sainte" interdisait le jeûne en carême, récusait la pratique de la confession individuelle et la célébration de l'eucharistie, brisait les croix et les icônes importées, autorisait la polygamie etc...), la prophétesse en récupéra certains éléments qu'elle intégra habilement au paysage religieux mukongo. Tout comme KASSOLA, elle perçut que le christianisme ne peut durablement prendre qu'en se greffant sur les racines du monde religieux et culturel des Africains.

LE FOND PERMANENT DE L'UNIVERS RELIGIEUX AFRICAIN

Il est périlleux de risquer une présentation schématique du monde religieux africain : les conceptions et les pratiques varient d'un peuple à un autre, parfois au-delà de la simple nuance. D'autre part, les contre-coups subis dans la confrontation avec les religions importées et la modernité ont ici ou là entamé les croyances et affecté les pratiques. Enfin, malgré la coloration africaine des expressions et du sentiment religieux, il faut éviter d'accorder à l'Afrique un monopole ou une spécificité dans un domaine qui constitue un patrimoine commun de l'humanité.

Dieu vivant. Sans perdre de vue ces limites imposées à toute approche du monde religieux africain, l'on peut dire que les religions africaines reposent fondamentalement sur une relation existentielle au Vivant, à Dieu dont la présence réelle au monde et à l'homme est perçue et vécue dans la discrétion. En général, tout ce que l'Africain sait de Dieu et attend de Lui s'exprime à travers les contes, les proverbes, les noms théophores, les souhaits quotidiens, les invocations et les prières. Le culte du Dieu Suprême n'emprunte qu'occasionnellement la voie des sacrifices rituels. Il est important de souligner l'aspect cardinal de la vision africaine de Dieu comme Source et Garant ultimes de vie. Les religions africaines apparaissent comme des religions du Dieu Vivant.

Puissances invisibles. Le chemin privilégié de la pratique religieuse africaine passe par la relation au monde des puissances invisibles. En effet, la vision africaine du monde postule l'existence d'une hiérarchie d'êtres invisibles présidant au gouvernement du monde et influant sur le destin des hommes. Ce monde ambivalent des puissances invisibles comprend aussi bien le large éventail des forces et des génies d'en-haut et d'en-bas, que la lignée infrangible des morts-vivants, i.e. des ancêtres. A ces êtres amphibies participant de deux mondes et invoqués comme des intermédiaires est voué un culte accompagné selon les besoins de sacrifices de conciliation, de conjuration ou de réparation. Nous touchons là à une des dimensions clés des religions africaines, celle qui non seulement résistera à la puissance d'assimilation de l'islam et du christianisme, mais encore constituera, sous la forme du candomblé au Brésil et du vaudou en Haïti, le cœur même de la religion des noirs depuis quatre siècles.

L'homme et ses aspirations. Enfin, les religions africaines prennent en charge l'homme et ses aspirations ici-bas en lui proposant des issues et en lui dictant des comportements. La morale, avec ses tabous et ses interdits, est foncièrement hédoniste et inséparable de la vision religieuse du destin. L'angoissant problème du

mal trouve des exutoires dans la tragique croyance aux sorciers, et dans le recours obstiné au devin et au guérisseur. L'affirmation de la dimension trans-terrestre de l'homme se lit dans l'importance accordée aux rêves, aux phénomènes de trances et de possession, à la croyance en la réincarnation...

On peut synthétiser comme suit l'essentiel de la vision et de la pratique religieuses africaines :

Dieu: Source et fleuve de vie, il est considéré comme Maître de tout et Père, i.e. "fons vitae", source de vie. La relation à Dieu se caractérise par une extrême sobriété du discours sur Dieu et du culte qui lui est rendu et qui ne comporte que peu d'actes sacrificiels et presque pas de temples. L'homme extériorise peu sa relation à Dieu uatrement que par une attitude foncière de reconnaissance et de soumission.

Puissances invisibles: elles sont considérées comme ambivalentes, versatiles: tantôt tutélaires et bienfaisantes, tantôt irascibles et vindicatives, elles sont l'objet d'un culte de dulia de la part des humains dont elles hantent la vie. Des relations de communion et de consécration peuvent parfois unir les hommes à certaines d'entre elles (exemple des "vodunsi" au Bénin et des hommes et femmes voués aux "orishas" et aux "loas" au Brésil et en Haïti). Ces relations se traduisent parfois par des phénomènes de possession, de trances...Le culte des ancêtres tourne constamment l'homme vers sa Fin et donne à sa vie une dimension eschatologique.

L'Homme: sa vie est une recherche de plénitude, de bonheur ici-bas et dans l'après-mort. Cette recherche est conditionnée:

- par l'acceptation et l'observance des coutumes sociales dans leur intégralité;
- par l'exécution des prescriptions religieuses qui comportent:
 - * des actes sacrificiels accomplis par soi ou par d'autres en faveur des génies ou des ancêtres. Ces actes cultuels procèdent autant de la vénération que de la crainte;
 - * le devoir de protection de la vie, menacée par l'intrusion et la jalousie des puissances invisibles, et par les maléfices de certains hommes.

Ce devoir s'accomplit:

- par la consultation du devin à toutes les phases de la vie, de la conception à la mort en passant par les temps de crise (maladie, pénurie, adversité) ou d'abondance;
- par l'application d'un code de pureté et d'un rituel de fécondité;
- par l'utilisation permanente de moyens et d'objets de protection investis de forces d'en-haut.

LE CHRISTIANISME DES MISSIONNAIRES

Pour comprendre la religion du peuple chrétien d'Afrique aujourd'hui, il faut, non seulement examiner le terrain d'accueil, mais aussi la réalité telle quelle fut proposée à l'origine. Sans remonter jusqu'au contenu de la première évangélisation du Congo à laquelle nous avons fait une rapide allusion, il est bon de jeter un regard sur le XIX siècle finissant pour constater que le christianisme apporté en Afrique

par les missionnaires de ce temps était avant tout un christianisme rural, fortement marqué par le legs spirituel et doctrinal du moyen-âge et des siècles de la Renaissance, et par la mentalité paysanne des campagnes européennes d'alors. La religion était enseignée au peuple sous forme d'abrégé:

La catéchèse était un condensé du catéchisme de Trente débité en formules simples et brèves;

La Bible, dont la lecture était interdite au commun du peuple, se résumait au digest des Quatre Evangiles en un. L'accent était mis plutôt sur la pratique de la morale et sur les pratiques cultuelles et dévotionnelles.

La mentalité religieuse sous-jacente au christianisme des missionnaires insistait sur l'aspect mystérieux et transcendant de la religion, et affichait une croyance spontanée et indiscutée en l'existence des anges (esprits bons et tutélaires) et des démons (incarnation vivante du mal). On soulignait également l'efficacité des sacrements et des sacramentaux, l'influence de la prière et des actes rituels sur le cours du temps et les volontés humaines, le rôle prépondérant des intercesseurs invisibles dans le drame du salut. Ce christianisme populaire, qui investissait le temps et l'espace par son rituel saisonnier, par son culte quotidien des saints, par la vénération et l'utilisation des icônes (images, statues, médailles...) à des fins spirituelles et temporelles, par ses temples, ses objets de culte, sa hiérarchie d'officiants et la magie de sa langue, un tel christianisme fut facilement reçu et remodelé par une mentalité africaine fascinée par l'efficacité d'une religion dont les rites, la langue et les protagonistes semblaient, par leur étrangeté même, tomber du ciel!

L'on peut dire avec quelque vérité que, malgré les différences d'inspiration et de formes, le christianisme populaire pré-conciliaire et les religions africaines puisent aux mêmes sources et manifestent les mêmes tendances dans leur conception de Dieu et de l'univers.

CHRISTIANISME POPULAIRE AUJOURD'HUI EN AFRIQUE

Le christianisme populaire en Afrique, c'est la réponse du peuple dans son ensemble à l'évangélisation et la manière dont il comprend et incarne le Message. Cette réponse se fait à partir de la mentalité religieuse du peuple et des apports spécifiques de la religion nouvelle. Il y a donc rencontre, appréhension et acclimatation d'éléments d'origines diverses en sol religieux africain. La foi des simples, qui forment la grande majorité des chrétiens, mérite considération et respect et doit être prise au sérieux, même si elle surprend et déroute par ses débordements, ses simplismes et ses déviances.

(1) UN PEUPLE QUI PRIE

Le christianisme a toujours été populaire en Afrique, en ce sens qu'il a toujours rassemblé les foules pour le culte et la prière. Autant l'Africain était discret, avant son baptême, dans l'extériorisation de sa vie de relation avec Dieu, autant le chrétien fait montre d'une assiduité peu commune dans la prière. Depuis une vingtaine d'années,

celle-ci connaît un regain de pratique et de ferveur. Partout en Afrique, de très nombreux groupes de prière sont nés, spontanément ou à l'initiative des pasteurs et des associations chrétiennes. A sa manière, la grande masses des chrétiens maintient aussi vive l'ardeur à la prière.

La plupart du temps, il s'agit de prières de demande, d'appel au secours, d'imploration et de supplication. Aujourd'hui comme jadis en Palestine, les mêmes besoins arrachent les mêmes cris: Seigneur, que je voie, que j'entende, que je marche; ma fille est malade, mon enfant se meurt, mon fils unique est la proie d'un démon; juge entre mon créancier et moi; fais que mon frère partage avec moi notre héritage...C'est la foule de ceux qui, ayant dépensé tout leur avoir auprès des médecins ou des marabouts, quêtent la guérison auprès de Dieu et de ses Saints, ou au bord de fontaines miraculeuses. La plupart des chrétiens recourent à la prière, aux pratiques dévotionnelles et aux objets de piété pour obtenir et garantir les biens de la vie et de l'amour: santé, fécondité, richesse, sécurité.

Dieu. Convaincu de par la tradition africaine et de par l'Evangile que Dieu, Source et Maître de la vie, détient la clé du bonheur de l'homme, le chrétien s'en remet à Lui, dans la prière, pour les besoins essentiels de sa vie, mais comme à un ultime recours. La mentalité sous-jacente est teintée de fatalisme, comme elle l'était du reste chez l'Israélite de la Bible: Dieu fait ce qu'il veut, il distribue aux hommes la chance et la malchance selon ce qu'il décide. Il peut cependant se laisser fléchir, amadouer. Pour y parvenir, l'orant doit passer par les intermédiaires de tous ordres, les Esprits et les Saints, plus proches de l'homme et partant, plus immédiatement accessibles et efficaces.

Marie. Occupe une place privilégiée dans le coeur du peuple chrétien.

Elle est la mère universelle, puissante auprès de Dieu pour obtenir toutes grâces. Beaucoup possèdent des images ou des médailles de la Vierge, certains ont chez eux des statuette de Lourdes, tous ont le chapelet, même si très peu le récitent régulièrement. Peu importent les scrupules des théologiens et des pasteurs : pour beaucoup, entre la Mère et le Fils, entre la statue de la Vierge et le tabernacle, le choix est vite fait. Peut-être revit-on spontanément avec Marie la relation africaine à la mère avec qui s'établissent de profondes et infrangibles complicités.

Comme la maman africaine, Marie, silencieuse, discrète, et pourtant présente et agissante, apparaît comme la Mère du perpétuel recours, toujours prête à toucher le coeur de Dieu en faveur du protégé et de l'adopté. "Advocata nostra"...Tout ce qui touche à Marie - sanctuaires, objets, images, dévotions - est censé protéger efficacement contre les mauvais coups du sort. Bien plus, Marie est considérée comme un des éléments les plus réels et les plus fiables de la religion chrétienne, du fait qu'elle apparaît souvent aux hommes, sous tous les cieux, et qu'elle délivre des messages précis pour le bien des hommes. D'où l'immense succès des apparitions et des sanctuaires mariaux (Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorje, Kibeho...), des associations et des dévotions mariales.

Jésus. En oublie-t-on pour autant Jésus ? Que non! Mais là aussi, la piété populaire africaine a fait des choix spontanés. Jésus,

Fils de Dieu, Verbe, deuxième Personne de la Trinité, on le sait pour l'avoir appris au catéchisme. Mais, après tout, ce qu'il est ne regarde que lui. Par contre, ce qu'il fait touche au destin du chrétien, et celui-ci s'arrêtera volontiers aux aspects de sa Personne qui font véritablement de lui le Serviteur, attentif et réceptif aux besoins de tous. Dans la jungle des puissances hostiles qui entourent l'homme, l'Hôte mystérieux du tabernacle constitue une présence rassurante. L'eucharistie est vénérée et reçue comme une force mystérieuse et redoutable, capable de neutraliser les puissances maléfiques à l'oeuvre dans l'homme et dans le monde. Même si bon nombre de ceux qui ne peuvent plus recevoir la communion parce qu'ils ne sont "pas en règle avec l'église" n'en souffrent pas outre mesure, la plupart cependant continuent de voir en elle une force mystérieuse d'un genre unique.

La piété populaire africaine est également attirée par les dévotions qui présentent Jésus en condition de faiblesse ou de solidarité avec la condition humaine : l'Enfant-Jésus, la Crèche, le Chemin de Croix, la Sainte Face, le Sacré Coeur et, bien sûr, Jésus en Croix. L'humiliation du Christ, ses souffrances et le sort injuste qui lui fut réservé rencontrent un écho tout spécial dans le coeur du chrétien africain si prompt à compatir à un destin qui lui rappelle le sien. Cette piété apparemment doloriste, qui frémit à l'évocation du Serviteur-lépreux d'Isaïe 53 ou du Supplicié du Calvaire, est une tentative instinctive pour trouver une issue à la souffrance humaine et échapper au dilemme de la révolte impuissante ou du fatalisme annihilant.

La sensibilité et la réaction du chrétien africain face au drame du Salut ne sont pas sans rappeler celles des chrétiens occidentaux du bas moyen-âge qui centrèrent leur spiritualité, leurs dévotions, leur production littéraire et artistique sur la passion du Christ et les souffrances de la Mère des douleurs. L'aspect du mystère pascal qui focalise de façon privilégiée la foi du chrétien africain est la "kénose du Vendredi-Saint, l'abaissement volontaire du Fils de l'homme, folie pour les Disciples d'hier, scandale pour le chrétien africain d'aujourd'hui. Le Chemin de Croix du Vendredi-Saint est revêtu par les foules comme une liturgie sacramentelle à nulle autre pareille. Au Bénin, au Burkina et ailleurs sans doute, la commémoration en acte de la Passion du Christ se termine par de poignantes funérailles à la manière ancestrale.

La résurrection, malgré l'éclat de la liturgie pascale, est perçue comme une réhabilitation et une réparation, une revanche posthume de l'Innocent. Le Vendredi-Saint reste, dans le coeur de beaucoup, le plus grand jour de l'année religieuse : ce jour-là, élevé de terre, le Christ attire à lui les foules africaines éplorées et compatissantes. S'il est vrai, comme l'enseigne Séraphin de Sarov, que "c'est chaque jour Pâques", la constatation du Pape saint Grégoire prend cependant, pour le chrétien africain, un relief particulier : "La vie du chrétien sur la terre, disait-il, est un continuel Vendredi-Saint". Enfin, ce déplacement d'accent opéré par la piété populaire ne pourrait-il signifier une identification inconsciente du peuple des petits avec le Christ souffrant, et une protestation silencieuse de ceux qui achèvent en leur chair la Passion toujours actuelle du Christ ?

(2) UN PEUPLE QUI LUTTE POUR SON BONHEUR

Pour le peuple des baptisés, la quête du bonheur terrestre fait partie intégrante de la démarche religieuse. Dans sa lutte pour la vie pleine et heureuse, le chrétien africain se sent démuné et exposé. La partie lui apparaît d'emblée inégale. Aussi utilise-t-il tous les atouts de la religion et les armes du christianisme pour se fortifier et se couvrir.

Les saints, qui font l'objet d'un culte dans l'Eglise catholique, sont invoqués comme des alliés providentiels. En Afrique, nous avons hérité des Saints du calendrier romain, ainsi que des particularités dévotionnelles attachées à leur culte. Généralement, le chrétien ne sait rien -ou presque rien de leur vie. Il lui suffit d'entendre dire que tel Saint est puissant et efficace, pour aussitôt recourir à lui dans ses vicissitudes. Les Saints sont vénérés avant tout comme des intercesseurs et des protecteurs. On se contentera, la plupart du temps, d'utiliser les prières et les objets importés pour s'adresser aux célestes Bienfaiteurs. Et si l'on sait lire, heureux sera-t-on de tomber un jour ou l'autre sur une des ces prières dites infaillibles, efficaces et miraculeuses qui circulent çà et là et qui -croit-on- assurent santé, succès dans les entreprises, bonheur dans le foyer, protection contre les accidents, les sorciers, les mauvais sorts, la foudre, et même l'enfer!

Pour se protéger ou pour réussir, on peut choisir, entre autres pratiques : les neuvaines à Sainte Brigitte et la méditation de ses révélations; l'invocation de Saint Antoine ou de saint Christophe, la récitation du chapelet de Saint Michel, des prières de Sainte Marthe ou de l'oraison de Saint Charlemagne, le culte de Saint Jude, l'usage à des fins multiples de "la clé des Psaumes" ou des ouvrages de l'abbé Julio...

Objets de piété. A cette pratique de la prière ou de l'invocation, il faut joindre l'utilisation par beaucoup des symboles et objets de piété aux seules fins de protection et de bien-être : le chapelet dans la poche ou dans la sacoché, la médaille miraculeuse au cou, l'eau bénite ou l'eau de Lourdes à portée de doigt, les images pieuses et les reliques portées sur soi, dissimulées dans un livre ou sous l'oreiller, les statuetteS protégeant les maisons ou les rameaux bénis éloignant la foudre, les pentacles de conjuration brisant les assauts de l'ennemi, bref, tout ce que le rituel chrétien de l'occident ou les marchands de piété offrent d'appuis concrets à la foi est réquisitionné pour servir de panoplie de protection.

L'adoption des objets et symboles religieux venus d'ailleurs se fait comme tout naturellement. La mentalité religieuse traditionnelle y prédispose, elle qui déploie un trésor d'ingéniosité pour confectionner amulettes et gri-gri investis des forces d'en haut. Le fait de se sentir perpétuellement menacé conduit l'Africain à se "blinder", c'est-à-dire à rechercher sécurité et invulnérabilité auprès des Puissances. La même mentalité demeure sous-jacente dans la vénération des Saints et l'utilisation des objets de piété.

Sacrifices. Ainsi, de même que des sacrifices étaient fréquemment offerts aux morts, aux ancêtres et aux génies pour obtenir paix, bien-être et sécurité sur terre, de même cherchait-on à s'assurer

les mêmes faveurs auprès des Bienfaiteurs célestes en offrant des messes, en accomplissant des pèlerinages, en s'entourant d'objets de piété, en faisant certaines prières et certains rites, en brûlant cierges et encens... Les messes sont très prisées; certains leur préfèrent les neuvaines. A l'occasion, messes et neuvaines servent à la satisfaction des obligations coutumières ou familiales vis-à-vis des morts.

Le culte des "âmes du purgatoire" procède d'un sentiment de piété, d'affection ou de pitié pour les morts; peut-être aussi d'un sentiment de crainte vis-à-vis de disparus qui se sentiraient négligés. Il est symptomatique à cet égard qu'on prie pour les âmes les plus délaissées du purgatoire. Jadis, négliger le culte des ancêtres attirait des ennuis aux humains. D'où un sentiment diffus de culpabilité vis-à-vis des morts dont le culte par endroit revêt un caractère contraignant et inflationniste. Il faut noter à ce propos que dans certaines églises d'Afrique de l'Ouest et de l'Est, la piété populaire préfère pour ses morts les messes de Requiem chantées en latin : cela ajoute au mystère de l'Au-Delà...

En définitive, dans tous les secteurs de sa lutte quotidienne pour le pain de la terre, la fécondité de la vie, l'intégrité de l'être et l'harmonie des relations, le peuple des croyants puise sans exclusive ni parti pris dans l'ancien testament des religions africaines et dans le Nouveau Testament du christianisme importé, réalisant à sa manière une inculturation spontanée du Message du Nazaréen.

UN CHRISTIANISME INCULTURE

La rencontre du christianisme missionnaire et des religions africaines a produit chez les gens simples une religion populaire qui s'exprime, on l'a vu, en des formes variées, mais avec une exubérance et une originalité particulières dans les églises afro-chrétiennes fondées et dirigées par des Africains. Ces innombrables églises indépendantes offrent un espace où la foi populaire africaine peut s'exprimer et évoluer en totale liberté et spontanéité. Une fois dépassé l'aspect quelque peu folklorique ou même aberrant de certains éléments et de certaines pratiques, on découvre dans nombre de ces églises les traits saillants de ce qu'il faut bien appeler un christianisme typiquement africain :

La prière y est conçue et vécue comme une activité qui re-situe l'homme au sein de l'univers et de la société, et qui met en branle les puissances spirituelles. L'orant n'est pas seulement en relation avec Dieu. Il entre en contact avec un réseau de Forces, et la prière devient une manifestation de Puissance qui peut déclencher en l'homme perturbé la transe qui est, selon les cas, un phénomène de libération (expulsion des puissances maléfiques) ou de possession (inhabitation des Puissances tutélaires). Toute prière est une expérience renouvelée de la vulnérabilité et du néant de l'homme (conscience de son indignité et de son impureté) en même temps que de la puissance salvatrice et libératrice des Forces spirituelles. Une telle conception de la prière saisit l'homme dans toutes dimensions et mobilise le corps, le coeur, l'esprit, l'espace et le temps.

Visions et songes. On accorde une importance particulière aux visions et aux songes, canaux par lesquels Dieu et les Puissances spirituelles communiquent avec l'homme et lui révèlent, symboliquement, la voie qui mène au bonheur. Les cultures africaines enseignent que le rêve ou le cauchemar contiennent toujours un message que les "visionnaires" dans certaines églises indépendantes s'efforcent de décoder. Par ailleurs, ces "visionnaires" accomplissent un véritable ministère de consultation en répondant tant bien que mal aux besoins et à l'angoisse d'un flot continu de consultants.

Salut et santé. Le lien étroit existant traditionnellement entre salut et santé est fortement affirmé dans ces églises afro-chrétiennes. Dans la perspective africaine, très proche en cela de la mentalité biblique, la maladie est une agression et la guérison, une victoire. La maladie est un défi lancé à Dieu par des Puissances occultes, ou une épreuve envoyée par Dieu pour aguerrir ou pour punir. La prière, le jeûne et la confession des péchés préparent le terrain pour une intervention salvatrice de Dieu. La guérison, même obtenue avec association de médicaments indigènes ou occidentaux, est facilement attribuée au bras étendu du Dieu de l'Exode ou à la main forte et puissante du Nazaréen. La guérison est accueillie comme un haut fait, un miracle, un signe que Dieu est avec l'homme. N'est-il pas significatif que l'Eglise catholique aujourd'hui encore, pour s'assurer que Dieu est avec un chrétien qu'elle veut mettre sur les autels, demande des miracles et des guérisons ?

La solidarité. Enfin, une constante africaine assumée dans la foi et les structures des églises afro-chrétiennes est la solidarité vécue dans un esprit de fraternité et, surtout, de miséricorde envers le faible. Dans la pure tradition africaine, on y exalte l'esprit de partage et de tolérance, donnant au christianisme un contour moins rigide et plus....?

QUEL AVENIR POUR LE CHRISTIANISME POPULAIRE EN AFRIQUE ?

Comme on peut le constater, il y a dans les églises indépendantes une inculturation spontanée et voulue du Message chrétien. Cette inculturation est beaucoup plus timide et malaisée dans l'église catholique, et cette situation accule bon nombre de fidèles à des pratiques clandestines et contestables. On dit parfois en Afrique : "Nous faisons des chrétiens, et la vie nous les enlève. Et récemment un évêque du Rwanda constatait : "Beaucoup de Rwandais restent de bons païens baptisés, heureux d'être doublement religieux". L'attraction des "sectes" et des églises indépendantes amène certains à pratiquer plusieurs confessions à la fois. Comme le note si justement le Document romain sur les nouveaux mouvements religieux :

"Les sectes vont à la rencontre des gens, là où ils sont, de façon chaleureuse, personnelle et discrète, sortant l'individu de l'anonymat, promouvant la participation, la spontanéité, la responsabilité, l'engagement, le suivant de manière intense par de multiples contacts, des visites à domicile, un soutien et une direction continus. Elles les aident à interpréter leur propre expérience, à réaffirmer leurs propres valeurs et à affronter les questions essentielles...Elles font habituellement un usage convaincant de la parole : prédication, littérature, massmedia, forte

insistance sur la Bible, et souvent aussi ministère de guérison.

Le christianisme populaire en Afrique, le christianisme tout court, est appelé à un *aggiornamentro* et à un renouvellement permanents. Ses faiblesses se résument en un double manque :

- manque d'assise biblique solide ; le christianisme, religion du Livre, doit redevenir pour la masse des illettrés la religion de la Parole ;
- manque d'enracinement africain, à cause d'une superstructure doctrinale et canonique trop occidentale ; l'inculturation pourrat-elle dépasser le simple stade de l'adaptation et du folklore ?

La conversion permanente à laquelle l'Evangile invite le christianisme en Afrique implique rupture et changement d'un côté, solidarité et enracinement de l'autre :

- Rupture d'avec les structures de péché et d'aliénation de sociétés en quête de salut ;
- Changement de mentalité et retournement de perspective dans la conception du bonheur et la relation à l'homme ;
- Solidarité avec les aspirations et les luttes des individus et des peuples ;
- Enracinement dans les cultures et le génie des populations d'aujourd'hui.

UNE TRIPLE QUESTION

La question que pose l'avenir du christianisme en Afrique, plus précisément du catholicisme, est triple : l'église aura-t-elle la volonté et la liberté :

De dire Dieu et de lire l'Evangile à sa manière, de prier Dieu et de le célébrer à sa manière (rites africains ou rituel latin africanisé ? -calendrier, art...) ?

D'incarner et de pratiquer l'Evangile à sa manière (discipline morale et pastorale sacramentaire en contexte africain, spécialement questions touchant au baptême, à l'eucharistie et au mariage) ?

De se structurer et de se gouverner à sa manière (réorganisation et adaptation des structures ecclésiales, des ministères et du droit) ?

En définitive, la tâche de l'inculturation, qui incombe à toute l'église, a pour but de rendre le christianisme plus populaire et plus évangélique, en fidélité inconditionnelle au Message du Christ, et en sympathie de coeur et d'esprit envers l'homme et son milieu. Cette démarche d'authenticité évitera l'écueil du repliement sur soi et invitera instamment à l'ouverture à la mission et à l'engagement dans le monde tel qu'il est, avec ses gigantesques défis planétaires et son immense espérance.

POPULAR RELIGION: SOME ASPECTS FROM EUROPE

Breda Eustace, C.P.

For a long time popular religion has tended to be pushed to one side. It has been considered too simplistic a way of expressing faith, and the general aim has been to replace it with a more sophisticated gospel - oriented spirituality. The various forms of pious devotions, places of pilgrimage, holy associations and processions were thus expected to disappear and to be replaced with a liberating understanding of the gospel. However, as evangelizers, we are just beginning to see that it is perhaps we who have been simplistic in our understanding of popular religion and in our lack of appreciation for it.

DESCRIPTIONS OF POPULAR RELIGION

Let me try to offer a working definition of what I mean by popular religion. Bob Schreiter, on whose theory I will draw heavily, distinguishes three terms as possible descriptions for the phenomenon under consideration:

- 1) Popular religion - "of the people" usually of the poor majority class.
- 2) Folk religion - In the romanticized version of folk religion we have a body of wisdom, in tales, proverbs and general folk-lore transmitted orally from generation to generation by simple peasants.
- 3) Common religion - Emphasizes the fact that the more theological or doctrinal understandings of religion are usually the province of a smaller section of the population, which has been entrusted with the maintenance of religious institutions.

All three terms cover general religious experience and imply a relation to or contrast with formal religion.

Popular Contrasted with Official: When popular religion is contrasted with official religion the implication is that official religion consists of the prescribed beliefs and forms of an institution which are monitored and promoted by a group of religious experts or specialists, while popular religion is perceived to have alternate beliefs or no clearly understood beliefs at all.

Popular Contrasted with Elite: Sometimes too there is a contrast made between popular religion and elite religion. The elite religion will be thought of as having a more literate and sophisticated approach, and the popular religion as being the expression of an illiterate and enthusiastic group, with expression taking precedence over understanding.

In this type of contrast the popular religion group will very often be seen as the uneducated, voiceless masses, while the elite group will be seen as identified with power and the control of resources. And so

popular religion may be perceived as different from elite religion on the institutional, social, and intellectual levels.

The Questions We Need to Ask: For whom is popular religion an issue?

Why is popular religion an issue? Why is it confronting us? Has it become intrusive in our experience or has our formal religion become intrusive in the field of popular religion? Where is the problem coming from? Is popular religion an issue mainly because it is difficult to analyze? Do the officials of institutional religion wish to analyze it in order to gain more effective control over it? Why are we scratching our heads trying to figure out what popular religion is? Are we doing this with a view to reaching a conclusion that it must stay or it can go? Is the official religion desperately trying to make contact with the ideas underlying popular religion, and missing the fact that popular religion is much more a way of life than a way of thinking?

ELEMENTS OF POPULAR RELIGION

The following elements are characteristic of popular religion:

1. Notion of God: In popular religion God is seen as the provident, all-seeing creator fully involved in the affairs of the individual and of the entire world. God is there, deciding. God sees everything, nothing happens by chance. Perhaps it is from a distortion of this notion that the more superstitious and fatalistic explanations for the tragic events of life are derived. In other words, if nothing happens by chance and if I fall then perhaps I had it coming to me - I deserved it. I did something bad. I was horrified in Dublin last week-end to hear somebody in our parish who was organizing the Confirmation day respond to my pleasant greeting, "I hope you have a nice day" by answering, "I believe they get the day they deserve". There must be something of popular religion lurking under the official religion hat of that particular person!
2. Mediators: Please remember that in popular religion I am choosing to focus on the poorer classes and they are the victims of oppression. The poor classes are the people who have in some way missed out. These are the people who are used to having bosses and landlords - the laces of whose shoes they are unworthy to loose. Therefore, their tendency is to put a great emphasis on mediators. They would not presume to go directly to God. Instead, they find an effective mediator who will intercede on their behalf. The two most effective mediators are seen as Jesus and Mary. Jesus would be seen under two aspects: Jesus the infant in the crib and Jesus the crucified, the man who hung between earth and heaven. These are two specific moments in the life of Jesus and therefore we see him at a peak moment of intercessory power. In the first he has come to do the will of the Father. He is the perfect example of surrender - gentle surrender. In the second he is the embodiment of surrender when confronted with the greatest violence that can be offered, the scandal of the Cross.

Mary is the Mediatrix par excellence. She enjoys as many or more shrines than Jesus. She has the reputation of appearing. She is always welcome. We have a shrine to Mary at Knock, in Ireland, and an international airport as well that will take you from your international dwelling places right to the door step.

There are many places where statues of Mary enjoy love, friendship, caring and the simple communication of presence from the faithful. Mary's nature invites the story of the lives of these people. The mother Mary in her gentle way then relates that story back to her Son and brings about some effective intercession.

We also love saints as mediators. Saints protect us against dangers. There are also saints who do things for us like St. Anthony who helps us find things, or St. Jude who looks after the hopeless cases. So, the saints have their job to do as mediators with the almighty, all-knowing God. This God is to be approached through a third party. The mediators will intercede for us if asked to do so.

3. Social Activities: The whole community comes together to celebrate the feast days of important patrons as well as significant moments of human passage: baptisms, marriages, and funerals.

Seasonal celebrations such as the harvest or seasonal crises such as floods or drought bring people together for the purpose of expressing solidarity with each other. They are thus united in prayer and in working for the improvement of the condition against which the community feels itself helpless.

Since Vatican II developments in sacramental theology have encouraged the participation of the community in the sacraments. Thus, the reception of an infant or an adult into the Church now takes on community significance. The community welcomes the new member and affords him or her a home in its world.

4. Devotional Activities: These activities express the more private dimension of popular religion, as for example, when a person goes on pilgrimage as an individual to seek a certain favour. The individual almost enters into a pact with God to do something. He or she makes a promise. Many of us bargain with God - I will do this if you do that. There is a sense in which we pitch our own resourcefulness against that of God! The degree to which bartering becomes a part of this has often raised the question of the validity of popular religion. But I would put it to you that bartering is not one hundred percent the case. The nature of the prayer of these devotional activities is the prayer of intercession. The petitioner praying to the almighty, all bountiful God who can resolve problems is really seeking favours for himself/herself and for loved ones.

5. Additional Mediations: These are blessings, relics, rosaries, holy water, candles etc. These are tangible objects that assure us we are in continuing contact with God. I wonder how many of you who live in Rome have been asked to obtain papal blessings for people? I am sure your gift was graciously received and treated as the next best thing to a handshake with Pope John Paul II. These are more mediations. You do not have to belong to the underprivileged to foster this. Maybe I do not believe in this, but I know somebody who does, and I give it to that person and it does something for her or his faith.

Mediators are objects of piety and tangible reminders that there is a contact even a hot-line to God. There is a communication going on. I am in touch with God. I am confident that God is aware of my problem and my dilemma. Therefore, through my devotion, I'm pressing God into the service of rendering favours to me.

6. Associations: Confraternities, Sodalities, Children of Mary. These are an important dimension of popular religion insofar as they provide cohesive group parameters. They are lightly structured community groups through which much of the community's enthusiasm and initiative are channeled.

7. View of the World: How do the people who practice popular religion view the world? Basically, they see the world as a controlled place. It is a little like Browning's line. "God's in his heaven and all's right with the world". Except that I believe something of the optimism is missing. God is up there controlling: the world is being controlled. Things are in order. Good behaviour is rewarded, bad behavior is punished. That is the expectation. For the poor there can be two responses to the belief that God is in control. One involves seeing everything as pre-determined which results in a certain fatalism and the absence of an effort to bring about change. On the other hand, certainty that God is in Heaven looking after things may enable the poor to survive the more serious forms of oppression knowing that there is a time and a place for everything.

Another view of the world has to do with concrete concerns. The favours requested are very specific and straightforward and are usually directed at an immediate need. It is not a long anticipatory thing but the satisfaction of an immediate need. This brings a sociological dimension into popular religiosity because the poorer classes have less opportunity/inclination to postpone. They will take the smaller satisfaction immediately rather than the greater satisfaction at some later date.

Another aspect of the view of the world of those who practice popular religion is the preoccupation with death. It is seen in terms of going back to God. Death is seen as one of the biggest moments of life and therefore there is a concern for how will my death be. The individual's death is often in his or her consciousness. We may argue that this stems from the fact that for the very poor, and the not so poor, death is something that raises its head frequently in so far as survival and the means to survive may not be readily available.

People who practice popular religion maintain that the afterlife will depend on how one has lived in this world. We will get our just desserts.

8. Relation to Official Religion: The prescriptions of official religion are not observed in popular religion except when they coincide with the activities of popular religion. The prescriptive requirements of official religion are not treated as something that must be adhered too, for example, Mass attendance every Sunday. The Mass will, however, be celebrated to crown a popular religion feast.

Another interesting aspect of popular religion is the ambivalent role given to the clergy. They are largely seen as coming from an elite group and as having a specialist function. They are necessary for certain aspects of more formal celebrations and in their mediating role in the sacramental life of the person. However, in the event that they are present, their input/influence is only as good as its content.

In popular religion the shrines are more important than the church buildings which are significant in official religion. The church buildings may have a great significance in terms of the statues or images they house. But the shrines and images are more important than the church building.

9. Forges an Identity: The symbolic potential of popular religion is significant, especially in its ability to forge an identity for a people who would otherwise be denied it by a ruling class. More often than not, through the living out of popular religious activity the community derives its identity which gives it confidence in its own existence. The ruling class might be slow to afford or offer an identity.

Together these characteristics of popular religion make up the framework for the religious experience of the majority of Catholic Christians. For many people these phenomena provide a communication system with the divine powers.

A PASTORAL APPROACH TO POPULAR RELIGION

Understanding the Context: One of the basic tenets of psychology is that each person must always be understood in the context of his or her environment. We speak, behave and experience in the context of our own environment. So it is with a community. To the extent that the popular religion of a particular community legitimately contextualizes their experience of God we must respect it. We must not forget that all experiences of God are contextual.

Some questions regarding a pastoral approach to popular religion:

* Does the popular religion of a particular group need to be changed? For whom is it a problem? For whom is it inadequate? For whom is it tending toward the superstitious and the magical?

* Religion is best understood as a way of life rather than a view of life. In terms of popular religion one must first look at what is done before one tries to understand what is said. The verbal side of popular religion is not its strongest aspect. The behaviour aspect is the strongest demonstration of what it is attempting to do vis - a - vis the divine.

* Popular religion represents the form of religion in a specific class - not just the poor class. We could talk of popular religion existing in different classes. Do the practices of popular religion enhance the identity of a group? Earlier, I suggested that they do, but it is a question that needs to be explored further. Do the practices enable the members to become more Christian?

* What does the practice of popular religion have to say with regard to justice? Does it facilitate a fuller human existence? Does the practice of popular religion facilitate a keener emphasis on the dignity of the human person?

* Do these practices lead to freedom as understood in the culture? Do they free the members for a wider use of choice with regard to resources? Do these practices free the members for fuller participation as a member of the community?

* How do the religious practices help to reinforce the best values of popular religion? What would we describe as the best values of popular religion?

* How can the gospel and popular religion enlighten each other? To what extent do we endanger both by introducing change without due preparation?

Evangelization and Popular Religion: The theme of this seminar is really inviting us to consider a dynamic interaction among gospel, church and culture. If we look to the scriptures especially the New Testament we will find the answer to our questions on how to evangelize. If we really delve into the New Testament writings we will become aware of the extent to which the evangelists were writing for a particular community. The scripture texts are geared to the communities for which they were written. In other words, there was a sensitive appreciation of the communities to whom and for whom the evangelists were writing. So maybe we need to learn our biggest lesson from the evangelists themselves.

- end -

APPENDICES

PERSONNEL OF THE SEDOS SEMINAR APRIL 1989SEDOS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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 Mary Slaven, SFB (Vice-President)
 Sean Fagan, SM, Treasurer (Treasurer)
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OFM	OSWALD GILL Order of Friars Minor, via S. Maria Mediatrice 25, 00165 ROMA.	SCJ	JACQUES STEFFEN Sacerdoti del Sacro Cuore di Gesù, via Casale S. Pio V, 20, 00165 ROMA.
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NEWS

NEW SEDOS MEMBER. We welcome to membership of SEDOS the Marist Brothers. The Superior General is Charles Howard, FMS and their address is Fratelli Maristi, Piazza Champagnat 2, 00144 Roma (tel. 5924456)

CONGRATULATIONS to PATRICK HARRINGTON, SMA, who was re-elected as Superior General of the SOCIETY OF AFRICAN MISSIONS and to SMA SEDOS REPRESENTATIVE WILLI VAN FRANKENHUIJSEN who was elected to the General Council with responsibility for Justice and Peace.

COMING EVENTS

PERU UP-DATE

The Violent Situation in Peru: the experiences and responses of members of our institutes.

SEDOS SECRETARIAT - TUESDAY JUNE 6, 1989; 4.00 p.m. - 6.00 p.m.

REPORT ON SAN ANTONIO CONFERENCE

YOUR WILL BE DONE: MISSION IN CHRIST'S WAY
WCC WORLD CONFERENCE ON MISSION AND EVANGELISM

SPEAKERS: FR. JOHN MUTISA, Pont. Coun. for Promoting Christian Unity.

SR. PATRICIA STOWERS, SMSM, UISG Representative.

FR. JAN LENSSEN, MA, USG Representative.

FRATELLI CHRISTIANI, FRIDAY JUNE 23, 1989; 3.30p.m. - 6.00 p.m.
SIMULTANEOUS TRANS: ENGLISH, FRENCH, ITALIAN.

NOTICES

USCMA CONFERENCE

The U.S. Catholic Mission Association will hold its Annual Mission Conference at the Hyatt Lisle, in the Chicago area, on November 3-4-5, 1989, on: THE CRY OF THE EARTH: CHALLENGE TO GLOBAL MISSION. Missionaries are becoming increasingly aware that a new ecological age is upon us. From every side, we see air, water, soil, forests--along with our people--being devastated. How do we as missionaries respond to this new cry of the earth, fostering stronger bonds in the human community and deepening a new sense of interdependence with the earth community? For additional information, write or call: USCMA, 3029 Fourth Street, NE, Washington, D.C. (Tel: 202-832-3112).

COMING EVENT

WORKSHOP ON
PEDAGOGIES FOR THE NON-POOR

Presentors: BOB EVANS and ALICE FRAZER EVANS are authors of three Orbis Books: Pedagogies for the Non-Poor; Human Rights: A Dialogue Between the First and Third World; and Contemporary Ethics. They have conducted workshops under the auspices of the Association of Theological Schools of North America, the Programme on Theological Education of the World Council of Churches and the Association of Theological Schools in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Tanzania etc. They have conducted workshops in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

FOCUS

The day's workshop will focus on the case method approach specifically for use by missionary personnel in interpreting their work in the field when they return to their home dioceses and congregations. It has been our experience that there is a communication gap particularly when one is working in Third World settings and attempting to communicate those settings to a First World parish. The case method becomes an extremely effective means for beginning to pierce the cultural cocoon that each of our First World congregations has in relationship to issues of global justice. The morning would be the actual teaching of a case taken from one of our last three major research projects. It would also involve teaching the basic skills of how such a pedagogical instrument could be used within one's own constituency.

In the afternoon we would want to focus particularly on the frontier research on the Pedagogies for the Non-Poor. It is our judgment that we have identified some of the fundamental behavioral components that appear in persons who are non-poor when there is a transformation to a new Christian perspective on issues of justice.

MONDAY, JUNE 26, 1989; 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

SVD GENERALATE

ALL WELCOME !

Please call SEDOS and indicate number attending