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# SEDOS

## bulletin

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## IN THIS ISSUE

MGR. TEISSIER'S article acknowledges the real difficulties which occur in Christian-Muslem dialogue. The war in the Gulf may well increase these difficulties even though many Christian and Moslem leaders insist that this is not, and should not be allowed to appear, as a conflict between the two religions.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the Christian vision of the history of salvation and the Moslem concept of faith. Mgr. Teissier still sees many possibilities for continuing and deepening the contacts between followers of both religions, especially in the dialogue of life. His concluding paragraph, written well before the present tragic situation in the Gulf deteriorated into war, bears serious pondering both by Moslems and Christians:

*"The task has to be carried out. There is no future for religion or for humanity if the believers do not become people of peace and their leaders people of dialogue".*

We are grateful to the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies for permission to publish

this article. The original is in French.

The devotion of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to Our Lady of Guadalupe rivals their devotion to the major feasts of the liturgical calendar - and sometimes surpasses it! LEONARDO BOFF analyses the significant message of the Madrecita of Guadalupe - it is possible to be fully Aztec and Christian. Only by recognising this and acting on it will it be possible for an Amerindian Catholic Church to grow in the continent. The original is in Spanish.

The third article attempts to focus attention on some of the crucial elements which underpin the present consultations in preparation for the Synod of Bishops on Africa. Alfio Filippi bases his reflection on the work of the Symposium of the Episcopal Churches of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), and on the writings of some African Bishops and theologians from Churches of West Africa. The original is in Italian.

There are Mission Moments and some pertinent statistics from the Middle East and North Africa, and there are Notices.

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## ISLAMO-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

### A RENEWAL

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Mgr. Henri Teissier

(CRISLAM, which has its headquarters in Madrid, is an association of Christians and Moslems living in Spain. In February 1987 the Association sent a questionnaire to a number of people concerned with Christian-Moslem dialogue thereby involving them in a kind of "dialogue at a distance". This is Mgr. Teissier's contribution to this dialogue. He is Archbishop of Alger in Tunisia and throughout his life has been one of those most committed to Islamic-Christian dialogue in Arab countries. - Ed).

**CRISLAM** has asked us to "breach the wall which hinders authentic expression". That is why, as a Christian who seeks to relate to his Moslem counterparts, I believe it is possible to point openly to where, I believe, are the main causes of the actual deadlock in present-day Islamo-Christian dialogue.

I think it should be clearly understood that the present resistance to organized dialogue between Christians and Moslems must not detract from the richness of daily relationships between them in nearly all the countries of North Africa. I arrived in the Maghreb in 1946 and I thank God for my vocation to live a Christian life amongst the "people of Islam". I know too, that most of the active members of our Christian communities in the Maghreb, however long they may have been in the region, also experience great joy in discovering the riches of life which are hidden in this exchange between people who belong to the twin spheres of Christianity and Islam. The following remarks which may appear to be very personal, have as their aim to explain to my partner in dialogue where the present difficulties arise, not with a view to building a wall but, on the contrary, seeking to open new ways for Christians and Moslems to meet in mutual respect and friendship.

#### I SOME OBSTACLES ON THE PATH TO ISLAMO-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

##### (1) Dialogue and the critical knowledge of Christian and Moslem traditions

Mohammed Arkoun has led a patient and courageous struggle for the past twenty years. He invites the protagonists of Islamo-Christian dialogue to set their entire work on a new basis. He believes that the heritages of the two traditions must be seen in an altogether new light with the help of the considerable developments achieved by human science in the last decades.

One must remember that ever since the time of liberal Protestantism, or the crisis of modernism for Catholics, the Christian world of the West and, consequently the leaders of the Christian faith all over the world, have been constantly challenged. On the one hand there are the certitudes of the faith bequeathed by tradition, on the other the multiple questions posed by progress in all the human sciences, from textual biblical criticism to the history of ideas, from archaeology to semiology, from political economy to psychoanalysis.

Taha Hussein thought to engage the Moslem world in this great challenge by beginning with a critical study of the most ancient Arab texts contained in *Djahiliyya* poetry. The El-Azhar University crushed this project in embryo. Since then no systematic attempt has been made in this direction within the Moslem world.

Christians therefore approach their Moslem partners in dialogue, aware of the multiple relativisms which must figure in their complex historical discourse on the formation and development of a religious heritage. Even very cultured Moslems, it seems, cannot consider their tradition without seeing it in the total global aspect which Moslem thinkers of the first centuries have bequeathed to them. Moslems, naturally and initially, must undertake much of the preliminary work on the Moslem tradition before Christian and Moslem partners can begin any real exchange. Some groups have tried to overcome this difficulty by choosing partners who have the same university background as protagonists for dialogue. This foresight has allowed them to make progress together, something not achieved in other colloquies. But it is still not enough. Moslems, even those of a high scientific standard, once they accept their tradition, cannot in practice base their analysis on any critical work which has been already elaborated in the different branches of Islamic science.

New critical and scientific views can only be born after long collective work comparable to Christian exegesis of the Bible or critical history of the formation and development of Christian dogmas. There is no lack of Moslem Universities which are qualified to contribute to this great work because of their secular studies. In most countries at present, however, it would not be easy for them to publish

the results of their work in their communities. Public opinion would not allow it.

**(2) Christian and Moslem partners in dialogue do not receive comparable support from their respective communities.**

This is another difficulty which hampers Islamo-Christian dialogue at this stage in its development. Since the beginning of the twentieth century recent Christian history has progressively created a favourable climate for the encounter with Islam and Moslems. Decolonization too has contributed to acknowledging the importance of other cultures in societies of the Third World. Over the same period, development of the human sciences and of theology in the West, has created the necessary conditions for an interior acceptance of the 'other' and, in particular of the Moslem. Of course, for some years now, the excesses of Khomenism and of Moslem extremists have slowed the movement to openness and at times brought about a return of the old prejudices. Globally, however, the Christian mentality has changed and now accepts - at least informed Catholics do - that God's call echoes in all human consciences and in all cultures, regardless of the theological explanation given for this certitude.

On the Moslem side however, at least in the Arabo-Islamic area, the evolution of the last decades has been quite different. Nearly everywhere, decolonization has been followed by a return to radical cultural authenticity. The significant factor at this hour is recovery of its heritage rather than openness towards other religious cultures leading to a long-time enrichment. The discourse of the Moslem majority resembles the clamour of a besieged city rather than the prayer of a community of the faithful. Moslem religious leaders tend to regard the cultural pressure of modern

technology as the result of an Imperial-Zionist plot to tear the believer's beliefs from him. And, at this level, apologia, a vehicle for aggressive argumentation, continues to flourish.

Certainly, some Moslem voices have been raised, and are still raised, against this state of affairs. To cite one example from the Arab-Moslem world, it is sufficient to mention the call to Islamo-Christian dialogue made by Prof. Mohamed Talbi, or Abdelmajid Charfi's scientific research which elucidates the origins of the relation between Christians and Moslems. In 1954, in Egypt, Kâmil Hussein proved that in his capacity as a Moslem thinker he could formulate some questions of universal significance based on reflection on the life and passion of Jesus. In Algeria, Abdelmajid Meziane has often drawn attention to the fact that the great periods of Islam have coincided with its creative opening to other cultures, etc. ... But according to Ali Merad's view, nearly everywhere in the present stage of development of Arab-Islamic history, one must choose either to be in solidarity with the collective attitude of the community, or "solitary" in avant-garde positions. Moslems who seek to lead their community into dialogue with other communities are not followed by the religious leaders whether they be experts in Qu'ranic exegesis, or Islamic Law, or authorities on the Moslem cult. The pioneers whom we have mentioned are not yet understood by the mass of believers and are disowned by the political authorities for tactical reasons, and by the religious centres for dogmatic reasons.

### **Islamo-Christian Meetings discredited**

On the Christian side, Islamo-Christian dialogue is based on half a century of preparation. On the Moslem side, it now goes against the current. This has largely contributed to

discrediting the big Islamo-Christian meetings. Sincere Moslems who take part in them cannot get their communities to make significant changes in their outlook. As for the official Moslem representatives at these meetings they take a line which seems to be in contradiction to their practical actions in the community. Thus, after ten or fifteen years of meetings the Christians feel they have been misled by their partners. To give an example - following the Colloquy in Cordoue in 1974, Spanish Christians undertook to revise the content of the school books in order to remove any hurtful expression about Islam. Moslems agreed at this colloquy to do the same about Christianity. They did nothing. On the contrary, books disrespectful of the history and feelings of the Christian partner continue to be published in Moslem countries.

In short, Christian and Moslem partners in dialogue do not receive comparable support from their respective communities. Much work within the Moslem community, parallel to that done in the Christian community, still seems to be necessary before the representatives of the two communities can truly meet on the same footing. The few pioneers whose names we have mentioned cannot actually make their voices heard in their own communities. Thus the conciliatory statements made by Moslems at official meetings in no way correspond to any real change in religious policy, and especially not in regard to their relations with minorities.

### **(3) The difficulty of getting to know the 'other' such as they wish to appear and say who they are.**

Another difficulty tends to bring any progress in exchanges to a standstill. With the exception of some eminent Moslem personalities, whose names have already been mentioned, our counterparts disregard what Christianity stands for and is understood to be today. One might

object that many Christians' knowledge of Islam is equally slight. But any dispassionate observer must recognize that for several decades now, Christians themselves have made greater efforts to make known the Moslem tradition and what it stands for. When Roger Arnaldez seeks to portray Mohammed's personality, two-thirds of his work is based on the documents of the Moslem community. And many Moslems, for example, so appreciate the care with which Louis Gardet has presented their tradition that they have had his books translated into Arabic for the benefit of their community.

It is true that the Moslem partner, in contrast to the Christian, is faced by a theological difficulty particular to Islam. In fact the Book of Islam, the Qu'ran itself, contains a certain number of affirmations which reproach Christians for their infidelity to the teaching of Jesus. Thus the whole Moslem tradition tends to consider that Christianity in its present form does not conform to the faith of the first group of Christ's disciples. This position has important consequences for dialogue. In general, Moslems consider that they have no need to interrogate Christians because they know Christ's true message from the Qu'ran. Criticism of the sources of this Moslem tradition is known but is not yet accepted in Islamic societies. Consequently, for the vast majority of Moslems, including the educated, the Qu'ranic presentation of Jesus is a dogma which dispenses with any research, for example, about Jesus' historical death on the cross, etc.....

As a consequence, even educated Moslems, tend on the whole, to ignore the Christian vision of God, man and salvation. Many Moslems who are well-intentioned towards Christians believe that the Christian and Muslim Messages would coincide were we only to renounce some beliefs they consider to be secondary, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation and the

Redemption. Of course, before meeting Moslems it is not necessary to expect them to admit these Christian mysteries. This would signify for them to cease to be Moslem. However, we can rightly expect them to admit that these mysteries are absolutely central for a Christian, that they give a special significance to the figure of Jesus and to all the prophetic figures of the long biblical preparation.

#### **(4) A difficult problem - the right to freedom of conscience**

Yet another obstacle to Islamo-Christian relations stems from the difficulty of putting into practice the right to freedom of conscience. The partners in dialogue must condemn proselytism, meaning indiscreet behaviour aimed at alienating the partners in dialogue from their respective traditions without taking into account their personal backgrounds and their fidelity to God's call. This rejection of proselytism is part of our wish to respect the partners' consciences.

However, our respect for the conscience of our interlocutors also obliges us to recognize the right to a religious evolution, even to the point of the conversion of the person who feels freely called upon to take this step. Today one understands that it is impossible to reconcile respect for the human person and for God using the methods employed by Christians at the time of the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Moors. Mohammed Talbi writes the same in regard to the Moslem tradition which prescribes death for a convert of Moslem origin. The death sentence as such has indeed been abolished except in some countries, but "social" death (by ostracism), "civil" death (by loss of rights) and at times even physical death at the hands of the family, can still happen.

It is particularly baffling for a Christian attending an Islamo-

Christian Colloquy to find the Moslem party includes some converts from Christianity in its delegation (cf. Colombo, Cordoue III), while the same Moslem party will not recognise that converts from Islam may speak on the Christian side. Dialogue implies the possibility of revealing publicly the unexpressed motivations which block the relationship in dialogue. The problem of the freedom of conscience is an important example and must be taken into consideration openly.

## II

### A PROPOSED SOLUTION

**(1) Include in dialogue those central convictions which the partner in dialogue has difficulty in understanding.**

We have spoken of the impression Christians have of not being taken for what they are. The great Christian mysteries (the Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption) must be presented to the Moslem partner, if the two interlocutors are to get to know each other. Obviously, the reverse is equally necessary: Moslems must be able to make the Christian party understand what they consider to be misunderstood by their partners in the dialogue (the meaning of the Shar'ia for example, etc. ...).

**(2) Enter into dialogue with the authorities of the Moslem party about the principle of reciprocity.**

Moslem emigrants in Europe for example, have the right to the use of places of worship. This is regarded as a specific application of the freedom of worship. We do not wish to question going back on this or denying this freedom, but reciprocity should be demanded in Saudi Arabia and other places where Christians are deprived of their right to freedom of worship.

Another example is dealt with above. Traditionally Christian

countries must respect the freedom of conscience of Westerners who become Moslem; but the same freedom of conscience must be recognized for converts of Moslem origin.

For some decades now Christian publications have made a point of avoiding anything that might offend Moslems. It would seem natural for Moslem publications to follow suit as regards Christian sensibility. However, a noticeable trend to the contrary is now observed, even in official school textbooks.

Contradictions between the statements made by the authorities at Islamo-Christian colloquies and the behaviour of the same authorities in practice, discredits the dialogue. This cannot go on any longer without the good intentions of those organizations responsible for fostering Islamo-Christian dialogue being deprived of any meaning. The question of reciprocity can no longer be waived without losing all official credibility with the religious and political authorities.

All these questions must now be broached with Moslem authorities at the beginning of Islamo-Christian meetings if the handicaps which weigh on Islamo-Christian dialogue at present are to be removed.

**(3) Seek to deepen the dialogue of life where Christians and Moslems are real partners sharing a common experience.**

Fortunately there are partners in dialogue other than the official authorities within the two communities. I refer to all the Moslem and Christian believers who actually live and work together at so many different levels such as in social action, professional solidarity, university research, politics, common interest in a particular art form, sport, discussion groups etc. ... They have created a climate of mutual trust by means of this co-operation thanks to which community prejudices

have become secondary. These people represent a chance for Islamo-Christian relations to open up. They have recognized each other's common aspirations and particular traditions. Since they are believers they can do much to set Islamo-Christian relations in motion again.

It is actually easier to arrange meetings between members of the two communities than between their respective religious leaders. It is not a Congress of religious men, for example, that should be organized as was done in Colombo in 1982, but a meeting between Christians and Moslems who are already working together in the area of human rights, the protection of the orphan, etc. ... It should be acknowledged that in many places, Christians and Moslems are closer to each other when they are both engaged for example, in social work, for human rights, in university research or common scientific research, than when they meet on the religious plane. One ought to have the courage to say that at the present stage in the history of relations between the two communities, religion tends to divide rather than to unite.

One often notices that relations are better between people who have a "humanistic" objective than between religious authorities. This is to recognize the role of religion in separating human groups and to seek to find a way to surmount it through the solidarity of those who believe in a "humanistic" culture.

**(4) Promote Islamo-Christian research between independent believers who have an equivalent university education.**

We drew attention early on to the difficulties which come to the fore when "men of religion" enter into dialogue because Moslems have not yet at their disposal a critical knowledge of their sources and history. However, there are Moslem universities which have undertaken

this initiative in the framework of their non-religious studies. Meetings between these students and Christians having an equivalent university education can help dialogue to progress. But we have not yet found ways to impart the results of the work of these experts to their communities, as I have explained above. (I.2.)

Perhaps this type of initiative could be enlarged by organizing, between universities, an exchange of professors specialized in religious sciences. This was done in 1986-87 and in 1987-88 between the University of Ankara and the Gregorian university of Rome. Obviously, this initiative implies that a critical elementary study be carried out in each of the Islamic sciences. At various times Mohammed Arkoun has suggested that Christians undertake this work themselves "in order to gain time" (See I.1. above) However, if one wants it to bear fruit within the Moslem community, it seems to be impossible for any but Moslems to carry out this research. It is not a question of neutral scientific research which could be undertaken by any qualified person, but an effort of a believing community to re-evaluate its heritage in modern times. This work must be carried out by the community which is itself concerned.

**(5) Support meetings between spiritual members of both traditions.**

Despite all the divergences that we have enumerated above, fortunately there are true encounters between spiritual Christians and Moslems. They take place on very varied levels, sometimes between religious groups, like monasteries and fraternities, but more often between simple people of the two traditions drawn together by life. In our particular situation in the Maghreb, there are thousands of people who know they are spiritually close, and want to be so, who pray for each other, who are loyal to their own traditions but



loyal also to believers of the other community. This daily communication between Christians and Moslems enriches the meeting between the two communities.

Unfortunately, this spiritual sharing between simple believers often seems to run counter to their religious leaders. Once these leaders exert influence on their own faithful, one often has the impression that they prevent any communication between the believers of the two traditions. For example they forbid sharing of the feast-day mutton with the "infidel"; anyone who has attended a prayer meeting with the faithful of the other community, or who has read some passages of the Scriptures, is made to feel guilty.

In his work *"La rose de l'Imam"*, Father Marius Garau gives an example of what spiritual sharing between Christians and Moslems can mean for both in the Tunisian context. Should it not be one of the tasks of the leaders of organized dialogue between communities, to make known and understood as occasions for spiritual emulation, all that God has already given us in the daily life of the two religions? Might not a meeting between witnesses of this very simple but often very deep exchange, serve to glorify God and His work in the hearts of sincere believers, and from thence go on to give new impetus to Islamo-Christian dialogue between the "leaders"?

### CONCLUSION

It is clear that in the decades ahead the relationship between Christians and Moslems will be one of the principal spiritual ingredients for peace in the world. Research directed towards positive communication between the two communities is therefore necessary in order to promote understanding between the two communities. As has been said, religious dialogue is only one of the forms which this communication can take. Good relations, neighbourliness and

friendship, solidarity in the struggle for human rights, are other areas for communication in daily life. These are very meaningful. But, the fact is that the leaders of the two religious communities strongly influence the life of the believers of both traditions. There will be no real progress in Islamo-Christian relations if the Christian and Islamic religious leaders do not work in this direction.

### Fundamental differences

The task should not be underestimated. The doctrinal divergencies between Islam and Christianity are not the result of diversity of approach regarding a common source, as is the case in ecumenical relations between Christians. We do not have a common Book like the Jews and Christians. There is, in effect, a fundamental difference between the Christian vision of the history of salvation and the Moslem concept of faith. The reason why we dispute with each other is because of our respective loyalties and what is for each one the revelation of God. If the Trinity and Redemptive Incarnation have been revealed by God Himself, as Christians believe, Islam has no meaning as a Word about God or man. Inversely, if it is true that Mohammed is the seal of the Prophets, then Christianity, such as it is, has no reason to exist any longer and could never have emerged from the Message of Jesus. Perhaps it is because the religious authorities are more acutely aware of this fundamental difference that they have difficulty in actually meeting.

However, the task has to be carried out. There is no future either for religion or for humanity, if the believers do not become people of peace, and their leaders people of dialogue.

Ref. Islamochristiana 15 (1989).  
PISAI, 89 Viale di Trastevere,  
00163 Roma.

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## THE AMERINDIAN GOSPEL: THE LIBERATING METHOD OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

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### Breakup of the Aztec civilization

It is not possible to understand the newness and originality of Our Lady of Guadalupe's method of evangelization without considering the socio-historical breakup of the Aztec civilization under Spanish rule.

The long drawn out agony and death of the Mexican culture began on Good Friday April 22, 1519. On that day Herman Cortes landed on the shores of Mexico with his 600 soldiers, 16 horses and artillery. On August 13, 1521, he captured Tenochtitlan after a long siege. The number of dead warriors is estimated at 240,000. An anonymous writer from Tlaltelolco, writing in *Náhuatl* around 1528, describes the following sinister scene:

"Along the roads lie broken spears, scattered hair, wrecked houses, their walls in flames. Worms abound on the streets and city squares and the walls are stained with pieces of smashed brains ... We have eaten grass mixed with nitrate, pieces of adobe, lizards, rats, dust and above all, the worms." (1)

Leonardo Boff

According to Aztec belief, the divinities were also involved in the defeat. A lament of 1523 acknowledges this.

"Cry, my friends. Know that, with these happenings, the Mexican nation is lost. Our water has become sour, and so has our food. This is what the giver of life did in Tlaltelolco." (2)

In the famous dialogue of 1525 between "the twelve apostles", (the first Franciscan missionaries who arrived in 1524) and the Aztec wise men, the Aztecs said:

"Where should we go? We are simple folk; we are perishable; we are mortal. Leave us to our death. Let us perish, because our gods are already dead." (3)

This was the context of the Aztec nation at that time, - agony, despair and death.

### Our Lady Appears to Juan Diego

On December 9, 1531, ten years after the defeat of Motecuhzoma, Our Lady appeared on Mount Tepeyac, on the outskirts of the capital, where *Tonantzin*, the "revered mother", was venerated.

She appeared to Juan Diego, an Aztec Indian who was then following catechism lessons in Tlaltelolco. There is no space here to describe all the details of the apparition and the message of the Virgin-Mother for the Bishop, Juan de Zumárraga about the construction of the temple dedicated to Mary in Tepeyac. We will dwell only on those elements which relate to our theme of evangelization

as a method of encounter between culture and the Gospel.

### **ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CULTURE AND THE GOSPEL - A NEW EVANGELIZATION**

#### **She appears as a mestizo**

In the first place, the Virgin-Mother appeared with the countenance of a mestizo, symbolizing the encounter between Spaniards and Indians, but favoring the Indian contribution because it is to one of them that she appears. Furthermore she adopts the symbols of their culture. (4)

Then she speaks, not in Spanish but in *Nahuatl*, the language spoken by the Aztecs. She uses a religious form of the Aztec language, a form which they use to signify God: "I am the Mother of the truest God, for whom one lives, the creator of persons, lord of the near and the immediate, lord of the sky and the land."

#### **- uniting masculine and feminine**

She appears as one uniting elements both masculine (the sun) and feminine (the moon and the stars). Divinities were always masculine and feminine for the Aztecs. Mario Rojas has already shown that in the ancient Aztec religion, the expression "mother of God", "our mother" conveys the feminine aspect of divinity, God with a motherly face. (5)

In fact the Virgin-Mother of Guadalupe appears on the background of the sun, whose rays surround her from all sides; underneath her is the moon; on her mantle are the stars which, according to some interpretations, correspond to the astral map of days on which she appeared in Tepayac. Sun and moon were the great Aztec divinities. Mary takes both unto herself.

#### **- in a pale red tunic**

The tunic has a pale red colour, which is the colour of

*huitzilopochtli*, the supreme god, the god of life. It is also the colour of the East where the sun rises victoriously every morning after surviving the mortal dangers of the night. This colour is quickly perceived by Juan Diego as the colour of the blood which all Aztecs offer daily in order to keep the sun alive, so that it, in turn, could give life to all living things.

#### **- and a blue-green mantle**

The flowers that ornament the tunic are of Tepayac where the Mother-God was venerated. The mantle is blue-green. These are the colours of the divinities of the sky (blue) and the fertile earth (green). Only the king and the divinity, according to the Aztecs, could wear these two colours together.

#### **She Appears with Child**

Mary appears with child, wearing the symbols of two black ribbons which Aztec women carry on their bellies. With these there is a small Indian cross (*quincunce*) which, for the Aztecs, signifies the meeting between the road traveled by humans and that taken by the gods. It looks like a rose with four petals. It is the road taken by humans, held together by a central circle, the way of the gods. This fundamental symbol of the Aztec culture is found on Mary's womb, as if to say that the one she bears and who will be born is the meeting between God and people - in Jesus. On the other hand a Christian cross hangs on the neck of the Virgin-Mother's tunic as if to say, "while she is inserted into the Aztec culture, she continues to be the Mother of the crucified Son for our liberation."

#### **- carried by an angel**

An angel with the typical wings of a bird found in the Mexican tropics (*Tzinitzcan*) carries the Virgin-Mother and signifies the divine origin of the person who is to appear. Moreover, according to the

Aztec calendar, as with the famous sun-stone, each important era is introduced by a celestial being.

In this way, Mary signifies both a new era of salvation through Jesus and the Spirit who brings about his birth in Mary. Here she carries both: the eternal Son in her womb and the Spirit who creates a humanity beginning with Mary herself.

**- to a marginalized native**

To whom does Mary appear? Not to a Spaniard or to somebody from the ecclesiastical institution. She appears rather to a marginalized native. The Virgin-Mother says to him at the beginning of their encounter: "Juanito, my son who should have been treated with the highest respect, but who in fact is marginalized, where are you headed for?" Juan mirrors the negative image that had been made of the Indian. He recognizes that he is a "poor little indian", a mere farmer, a despicable person, a dried leaf of a tree ("*soy mecapal, soy parihuela, soy cola, soy ala, un indito*").

**- as a compassionate and little one**

Mary does not wish to be addressed after the fashion of an aristocratic and feudal European christianity - '*Notre Dame*', '*Nossa Senhora*', etc. She refers to herself rather as "*niña*" (child), "*Virgencita*" (little Virgin), "*Muchachita*" (little girl), "*Hija mia menor*" (younger daughter), "*Señora*" (lady), "*Madrecita*" (little mother), "*la madre compasiva del pueblo*" (the compassionate mother of the people). She thus places herself in the affective and linguistic world of the people and of the poor. She makes an option for the impoverished and disgraced Indian. She occupies a place on the outskirts and not at the center. (6)

She does not speak from the palace of the bishop Zumárraga in the

capital city which had been built with materials from the destroyed pyramids. She speaks from Tepeyac, an unknown place at the periphery. She chooses Juan Diego, whom she affectionately calls "*Juanito*", "*Dieguito*", the poor "*Indito*" (little Indian). It is this native, subjugated by the conquerors who will evangelize the bishop at the center. He will not come with violence, the way the Spanish conqueror came to the Aztecs, but with convincing words, and, at the end, with flowers which he carries in his *poncho* and lays at the bishop's feet.

**She makes an option for the poor**

The evangelical mission of Juan Diego reminds us of Puebla's phrase, "the potential of the poor for evangelization" (#1147). The message which the Virgin-Mother sends the Bishop supposes a movement from the center to the periphery because it asks for the construction of a temple at Tepeyac. There she wants the "people to know God with all my personal love, with my compassionate look, with my assistance, in my saving presence, because I am in truth your compassionate mother." Mary reveals her mission among the poor: "I want to listen here to your cry and come to meet you so that I may bear your griefs and your pains."

**- bringing a new meaning to evangelization**

The apparition and the mission to the bishop entrusted to Juan Diego reveal a new understanding of evangelization. It is no longer an institutional mission coming from a position of power, above the Indians and for the Indians. It is rather an evangelization starting from the poor and open towards all. When one evangelizes from the position of power, it is assumed that the natives are ignorant and static. One evangelizes them by transmitting content. This involves an action done by some people to others, who echo the voices

of others. Because of this action people are led to change and come to live as Christians.

On the other hand, evangelization which starts from the people, as shown by Mary of Guadalupe, involves everybody. Both Juan Diego and Bishop Zumárraga have to hear the Virgin's message, uproot themselves and be attentive to the poor whom the Virgin wants to console. Evangelization will not be an expansion of the ecclesiastical system but rather a creation of communities around a message. All are called by Mary to leave the center, Tenochtitlan-Tlaltelolco, and move to Tepeyac at the periphery. This journey permits persons and institutions to have an Abrahamic experience. They allow themselves to be evangelized, living with the poor and making available the good news of life and salvation for them.

#### **- and a message of liberation**

The uncle of Juan Diego, called Juan Bernardino, is a curious figure in this story. He is sick and dying. Guadalupe cures him. We know that in the Aztec culture, an uncle is a most respected person. His property does not go to his children, but to his nephews and nieces. He symbolized the nation. And he is sick and prostrate, just like the whole Aztec nation. Now, with Guadalupe he pulls himself together. He is resurrected. This is the good news that Mary gives to the native culture. It is the native gospel of liberation.

The Aztecs understand the message and the symbols coming from the Virgin-Mother, as well as the importance given to Juan Diego and his uncle Juan Bernardino. They convert as a mass. The hopes of the people are revived. The gods did not die after all! Now, with the person of the Virgin-Mother of Tepeyac there is salvation, there is strength to resist and courage for liberation.

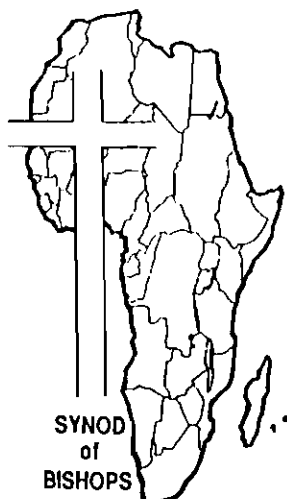
## **OUR CONCLUSION**

The Latin American Church still has to learn the lesson of Guadalupe. It has to go beyond the merely pietistic and ecclesiastical interpretation. It needs to look back at all the elements. There is a lesson to be learned, namely, that it is possible to be fully Aztec and Christian at the same time. The Virgin-Mother demonstrated this. It is important to continue with this creative method of Guadalupe. Only then shall we have an evangelization characterized by liberation, which permits the growth of an Amerindian Catholic Church in our continent.

(Ref. Leonardo Boff, OFM. *Exigências Teológicas e Ecclesiológicas para uma Nova Evangelização* (Theological and Ecclesiological Exigencies in a New Evangelization), REB, 1988 (?), pp 146-149.)

## **End Notes**

- (1) Cf M. Léon-Portilla, *A Conquista da America Latina vista pelos Indios* (The Conquest of Latin America as seen by the Indians), Petrópolis, 1985, p.41.
- (2) Id., 48
- (3) Id., 20
- (4) Puebla says: "It is the Gospel, fleshed out in our peoples, that has brought them together to form the original cultural and historical entity known as Latin America. And this identity is glowingly reflected on the mestizo countenance of Mary of Guadalupe, who appeared at the start of the evangelization process." (#446)
- (5) Nican Mopohua (meaning, "Here it is told"), Mexico, 1978.
- (6) See the important work of E. Hoornaert, *A Evangelização segundo a tradição guadalupana* (Evangelization in the tradition of Guadalupe), in REB 34 (1974), 524-545.




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## A SYNOD for the MANY FACES OF AFRICA

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Alfio Filippi

### I ANNOUNCING A SYNOD

The celebration of a synod on Africa was announced by John Paul II at the Angelus of January 6, 1989. He also proposed a title: *"The Church in Africa towards the III millennium."* At the time of the announcement, John Paul II also created a **"preparatory commission"** made up of presidents of continental and regional organizations of African bishops. The commission met twice - in January and March 1989, - to discuss the theme, the level of participation, the time, the place, and the way to channel the work of the synod to the entire African church. On June 21, 1989, the Pope also instituted, "in preparation for the special assembly of the synod of bishops in Africa, a **council of the general secretariat (of the synod).**" Eighteen bishops were chosen and added to those of the general secretariat for a total of 22.

On June 23, 1989, John Paul II met the entire council of the general secretariat and outlined the work to be done. "Your first task will be the preparation of the *"lineamenta"*, in order to *promote common reflection* on the general topic... which will have to include all the important aspects of the life of the church in Africa and, in particular, evangelization, inculturation, dialog, pastoral care through social involvement and mass media."

Twenty years after the church declared the value of the theology of local churches and over twenty years after the independence of most African countries, it is important to ask: Are the African churches autonomous or dependent? What are the indications of a common journey? What relations have they with the various social environments in which they live?

In attempting to come up with some answers we have (1) looked at the themes dealt with during the last 20 years by the continental assembly that coordinates the African churches, the Symposium of the Episcopal Churches of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), and (2) we have then taken a look at the better known results of African theological debate, convinced as we are that theology is the expression of how a church thinks and communicates with the rest of the world.

### II THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF SECAM

It is necessary to go back to Vatican II to have an idea of the activities leading to SECAM. During the council the bishops of Africa and Madagascar had organized a pan-african conference, with its own secretariat (in English and French), under the direction of Card. Rugambwa, who was then the only African cardinal. The group, however, did not outlive the Council. At the time it seemed more important and urgent to organize episcopal conferences in the various countries. This has been proposed by the Council

itself as the expression of the local churches.

Meanwhile, however, the African bishops were finding it necessary to meet more regularly to implement post-conciliar decisions, to plan for the various synods of bishops, to face the creation of pontifical commissions and the internationalization of the Roman Curia. The result of these meetings was the realization that it was increasingly important to plan a common pastoral approach to face common problems in various regions.

### III THE PUSH FROM KAMPALA

The first answer to that need was a gathering of the presidents of all the national and regional episcopal conferences, called and signed by Card. Zoungwana, at the urging of the "council of 24" (the African bishops called by Paul VI to the Congregation for Evangelization).

The initiative gained momentum, thanks to the first visit of Paul VI to Uganda in Africa (July 31-August 2, 1969). The Pope had asked to see the widest possible representation of African bishops. Forty-eight bishops, representing the 28 episcopal conferences, plus the "council of 24", met in Kampala on July 28-31. All of Africa and Madagascar, with the exception of the Portuguese colonies, was represented. Card. Rugambwa opened the assembly, and Card. Zoungwana introduced the programme. Paul VI presided over the closing session.

The allocution given by Paul VI is always quoted because of the strong words used to underscore the necessity of an African Christianity:

"We have only one desire, to promote what you already are, Christian and African... You, Africans are now missionaries to yourselves... Namely, you Africans must continue the building of the church on this

continent... a young church, called to offer itself to a culture which is already open to the gospel, such as your African culture... to adapt the gospel, the church, to the African culture.

"The expression, the language, the way of showing the one faith may vary and become, therefore, original and adapted to the language, the style, the nature, the originality, of the culture of those who profess this faith. In this regard a pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable. The adaptation of Christian life in the pastoral, ritual, educational field is, not only legitimate, but desirable.

"There will have to be an incubation of the Christian "mystery" in the originality of your people, so that in the future its native voice, clearer and more sure, may join in harmony with the various voices of the universal church."

The call for this "original and enormous task" - these are also words of Paul VI - marked the birth of SECAM in Kampala.

### IV THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FOCUS OF SECAM

The name "Symposium" was kept to indicate that "this is not a juridical structure, but a vehicle of communication and cooperation between the various episcopal conferences, a meeting place to exchange ideas and experiences, to reflect and study, and to plan common action in the face of the major problems that beset the churches of Africa and Madagascar." (Card. Zoungwana). Let us, therefore, follow the path traced by SECAM through its assemblies, its documents and the directions it has taken.

The general assemblies of SECAM are held every three years. What follows is a list of the themes that were dealt with. Kampala, 1969:

general problems of the church in Africa; Abidjan, 1970: clergy and catechists in Africa; Kampala II, 1972: formation of the laity; Rome, 1975: evangelization in Africa today; Nairobi, 1978: family and Christian marriage; Yaounde, 1981: the church and human promotion in Africa; Lagos, 1987: identity and structure of SECAM and the future of Christian mission in Africa.

Most topics have been strictly pastoral or internal to the church. Such have been also the topics indicated by John Paul II in his talk to the council of the general secretariat. In reality, already from the very start in Kampala in 1969, the bishops had to deal with social problems, by drafting two declaration on peace and on development. Here they are.

#### **On Peace**

"Africa has a great need for peace, because it is oppressed by violence, ranging from all-out war to guerrilla war. There are also more subtle forms of violence, such as political oppression, denial of basic human rights, discrimination based on colour or tribal differences. All these violations of justice are seeds of conflict and obstacles to peace. Peace, in fact, must be based on justice."

#### **On Development**

"The top priority of the present age is the struggle for the development of peoples and for peace. The bishops of Africa and Madagascar, meeting in Kampala, cannot ignore without being found wanting in their mission, the destitution, the hunger, disease, ignorance, the attacks to freedom, the tragic consequences of racial discrimination, the ruins of war and oppression, that weigh heavily on too many people in the Third World. The Third World is the victim of fragrant injustices, often

caused by the selfishness of wealthier nations."

In the course of time the church found it necessary, due to the social developments of Africa, to get involved in the dramatic results of decolonization. In 1978 SECAM published a declaration on "Justice and peace". In 1981 it dealt with the problem of refugees.

At this 1981 assembly the superior general of the Jesuits was asked to give a report on refugees. "In 1980 the UNHCR helped 3 million refugees in Africa. For the most part these are rural people and the camps are equipped to help them. This number does not take into account the hidden refugees. According to the Pan-African conference on refugees, held in Arusha in 1979, over 60 per cent of all refugees live outside the camps. They have trickled into other human concentrations, where they are mostly ignored and where they do not receive any help. Therefore, we all agree that the gravity of this problem is not yet fully known. We estimate the number of refugees to be above 5 million, namely one out of every 200 Africans. If we use the term "refugee" in a wider sense, than the number is much higher."

#### **On the "Evils of Africa"**

In 1988 it produced a worried report on "the evils of Africa." Here are some sample passages.

"Foreign powers are no longer satisfied with giving money, weapons and logistic assistance to warring parties on our continent. By getting involved in ideological differences, in agreements and disputes over borders, they are turning Africa into a battlefield in which they dump their own conflicts.

"In South Africa we witness an escalation of the fight for liberation and a lengthening of the struggle against apartheid. Unless a



just solution is found in the near future, we will be running headlong towards a terrible bloodbath.

"The continent is suffering under an increasing political instability, because the political world is only concerned with party interests. Since 1960 there have been 43 coups in Africa...

"In some countries we see fanatic proselytism or all out religious persecution, often disguised under political and ideological motives."

The list of the "evils of Africa" was put together by SECAM in 1988, with clear references to certain regimes and countries and included poverty, disease, hunger, political instability, military dictatorships, denial of individual and social freedom, racism, refugees, tribalism, exploitation of women, conflicts between Islam and Christianity.

At this point we are reaching a first conclusion. The history of SECAM can be followed along two paths, the problems of inculturation and the problems of African society. We could add that, during and immediately after the Council, the African churches were concerned with africanizing the church, but the social and political events of the continent compelled them to follow a schedule that had not been planned.

## V

### A THEOLOGY OF INCULTURATION

The African bishops who took part in the Synod on Evangelization (1974) put together a document on "Evangelization and Coresponsibility". In it they dealt with the problem of religious inculturation, examining the ties between the old churches that have been sending missionaries and the young churches who want to be more and more autonomous. "We consider totally outdated a certain theology of adaptation and

favour a theology of incarnation." And they clearly proposed "financial independence" on the part of the local churches.

The meaning of this "proclamation" is summed up by bishop James D. Sangu, of Mbeya in Tanzania. The African bishops ask "that they may be allowed to work at the incarnation of Christianity within the African culture, to adapt to local conditions and circumstances, to africanize the church, so that it may be an authentic African church, instead of being an imported western church, modelled on the churches that have been sending missionaries." He also says..."

"The localization of the church covers various areas: africanization of personnel, of theology, of the way to proclaim one's faith, of the liturgy and worship, of church law and discipline, of moral law, of administration and of church institutions."

### Implementation a Problem

Paging through publications emanating from SECAM, and from African theologians of inculturation, especially those who are gathered around the theological school of Kinshasa, with its "theology weeks," and from what appears in magazines such as *Bulletin de Théologie Africaine* and *Revue Africaine de Théologie*, one has the impression that the substantial programme proposed by the bishops is not easily implemented in practice. The proclamation of a right to an African theology is quite strong, but the signs of practical or even theoretical approaches are still in an embryonic stage.

It is easy to find expressions such as "African theology," or "African anthropology," and there are even signs of the cultural and psychological starting points, but there is nothing to indicate that these premises are being translated into pastoral plans. Thus, by way of

example, the auxiliary bishop of Kinshasa, T. Tshibangu, in a report to SECAM on the pan-african meeting on the laity in Accra, in August 1971, wished to introduce "some general doctrinal reflections in the context of an African theology and anthropology." In the report he even spoke of "our theology of creation." Yet, his summation did not show any particular depth.

### **Pedagogical and Cultural Guidelines**

The proposals dealing with pedagogical and cultural guidelines have more substance, mostly because they give a glimpse of the enormity of their consequences. Bishop P.K. Sarpong, of Kumasi, Ghana, writes:

"Africans know their religion through initiation, observation, participation in religious ceremonies, etc. Sermons, in the shape of monologues attempting to revive a religious spirit of the faithful, are foreign to them, unless they are priests or belong to a community that demands this type of formation.... We cannot continue to allow that Christianity be taught as it has been done in the past."

"Africans mark with certain religious rites the three main steps of their lives.... We all know the magic rituals that surround birth, stepping into adult life and death. Each one of these steps may be further divided into several parts. When we speak of birth, we include conception, pregnancy, biological birth, primary child care, the care given by the mother, without mentioning the name-giving ceremony. These steps can be treated separately in a mystical-religious sense, because the rite of birth is accompanied by a combination of a certain number of specific rites. In the same way, the religious ceremonies accompanying adult life may include what is done to persons when they are entering physical maturity, when they are initiated and at the time of marriage. The rites of

death include what is done for a person who is sick, then at the time of agony and finally at the time of death. Then there follow the way to dress the deceased, to show the body, to bury it, and to celebrate the funeral.

"If indeed there are rites that need our undivided attention, these rites of passage, as they are called, are the ones. They offer a wealth of information and deeply rooted values, that should be utilized in our efforts to form the laity."

### **Marriage**

The above long quote is of particular importance because it allows us to understand the frame of mind with which the African churches look at traditional marriage. It is noteworthy that the theme of marriage and the African family appears twice in the agenda of the general assemblies of SECAM. Note also how bishop Sangu, in his declaration quoted earlier on, speaks of "africanizing morality." Western culture - and theology - sees as the center of the legal, moral and social obligation the moment when the consent is given between two individuals. African culture instead sees marriage as a rite of passage, extended in time, involving all sorts of relatives in legal and moral consequences that are not easily perceived by western culture.

On various occasions the thorny problem of how difficult it is to find a meeting point between the two views, has been underlined by the African delegates to the synods of bishops. A solution has not yet been found. The consequences according to Bishop Sarpong, are that:

"For many reasons, to be a good Christian in Africa requires heroism. Our family-rules at times are the total opposite of what is considered - rightly or wrongly - a Christian principle. Marriage continues to be the number one problem for the church

in many parts of Africa. The problem is further complicated by the fact that, for diverse reasons, it is a problem also in various African societies. Concubinage is rampant. Polygamy is much valued in practical life. What kind of help can we offer to our people in order to make things easier for them?"

### **Liturgy**

So far there have been meager results of the work of theologians mentioned earlier and of the churches that have tried to follow their guidelines. The Zaire rite of the Mass has been so far the most acclaimed sign of change. On April 30, 1988 the Congregation for Divine Worship approved the "Roman Missal for the dioceses of Zaire" - a timid liturgical innovation, because, when all is said and done, after thirty years of research and dialogue with Rome on inculturation, all that Zaire has obtained is a Roman missal!

### **African identity; *Negritude***

The decades of colonial rule and of independence have changed the picture of African experience with events and trends of massive proportions. It is sufficient to think of urbanization, refugees, the "new churches", the radio and the western or Marxist models of life. Theologians of identity, who supported the concept of *negritude* have been stopped cold by the similarities between modern black society and western society. These theologians are unable to go beyond seeking a right to an indigenous theology. In practice they find out that they are speaking of an Africa and of a culture that no longer exist.

## **VI**

### **A THEOLOGY FOR THE CHALLENGES OF AFRICA TODAY**

We hear it said that, to bear fruit, theology must begin from the challenges that the concrete development of the continent throws at in-

dividuals and at church organizations. A group of theologians, mostly from Cameroon, is being moved by the changes and by the bitter experience of independence. Their challenge is often called "African liberation theology," even though the term is not used properly. Among these theologians we find **Jean-Marc Ela**, **Elio Messi Metogo**, **Meidard Ebga** and **Bénézet Bujo**, who is from Zaire.

### **African Culture and the Heart of the Conflict**

Their position is clearly presented by Ela:

"We see the risks of dealing with antiquities in a world in which, as Chinua Achebe, writes "Things Fall Apart." We live in a time of transition, when African identity is not clear. Is it not true that the penetration of a foreign world into African life has upset its entire universe? Independent churches, sects, possession and the return of witchcraft are directly related to a critical period in African culture and society. Since there is no theology that is detached from the history of humankind and from the movements in which it is submerged, the temptation to "capture again" tradition can be a very dangerous alibi.

"If the tragedies, the internal tensions, the challenges of today are the seedbed of a culture which is born from the struggle of a people to recover its identity and its dignity, then it is absolutely necessary to establish bridges between Christian theology and African culture, which is deeply shaken by the socio-historical dynamisms of today's Africa".

Seeing that "things are falling apart" in Africa Ela believes that the gospel must be placed "right in the heart of the conflict". He continues: "If indeed the Lord's death is the center of the church experience and of faith, then it harkens back to historical conflicts where God is always on the side of

the weak... Jesus died to keep man alive. This is the central point of the gospel message. In order to live this message in a radical way, we must not hide the reality of the conflicts in our existence and in society... The liberation of the poor is therefore the fundamental challenge that the death of Jesus offers to Christians and to the church, since they must align themselves with Jesus for the life of the world.

### **Liberation and Tradition**

Benézet Bujo's position is more detailed. His studies are rooted in "the conviction that African religions have always had a liberation role and that today's African theology must restore this dimension in a modern context." (African Theology) He is concerned with recovering the positive aspects of tradition to add life to the effort of liberation. In his christology he wants to reconcile past and present in a united effort of liberation, starting from the "theology of the ancestors" and defining Jesus as the "proto-ancestor." The term is used in the same way as the ancient christological attributes: Kyrios, etc.

"The place that the ancestors and the elders have in the life of an African must stimulate the theologian to create something new and to awaken in the African the need to find new messianic titles for Jesus, so that there will be a new theological language. In my opinion, a way of creating this new language is to give to Christ the title of ancestor par excellence, so that he will be seen as the "Proto-ancestor." (Ibid.)

From this principle he draws ecclesial guidelines, that are in tune both with the local African premises and are also able to include the tenets of traditional catholic ecclesiology. He does not lose sight of present African society. The past is a memory, which is being brought back in order to face the problems that beset today's church and society.

From this point of view, he develops further reflections on the character of the priesthood in Africa, on the role of bishops, on marriage, death and the care of the dying. On tradition and liberation he writes:

"When we spoke of liberation (in traditional African religion) we did not mean simply a socio-political revolution. Liberation in Africa... was and is such, that it leads to the fullness of life. In this respect the rules of the ancestors, that are repeated in signs and words, are very important... This repetition (of the past) is not static. It is not only a matter of giving shape to the future by taking up the past. There is much more. It is possible to create a new tradition with an event that breaks into the "tradition of the ancestors" and represents a new beginning." (Ibid.)

### **VII**

#### **SOUTH AFRICA: A THEOLOGY FOR ACTION**

A different view of the development of ecclesial life, is given by the communities living in South Africa or in direct contact with Islam both north and south of the Sahara. The uniqueness of the situation created by apartheid has left a mark on all the Christian churches in South Africa. It has torn apart the Reformed churches, either in opposition to, or in support of racial discrimination. It has given rise to a black theology of liberation similar to the one developed by black American theologians, "Black Power." It has also determined the journey of the group "Contextual theology," which is inspired instead by Latin American liberation theology. In this group, based in Braamfontein, we find theologians and leaders such as D. Tutu, A. Nolan, Chikane, Maimela.

#### **Contextual theology**

Their programme is outlined in the document, "What is Contextual Theology?" It could be defined simply

this way: "A conscious attempt to do theology from within the context of concrete life in the world." The group is aware of the fact that "in one way or another all theologies are contextual." However, the peculiarity of their theology is that it is "aware from the very start of having come to life within and from a particular context, a particular life situation," a situation of "active involvement in the struggle for justice and liberation, understood as a way to preach the good news of the kingdom of God."

"We can easily sum up what the Institute is trying to do here in South Africa: 1) It wants to do theology very explicitly and consciously within the context of real life in South Africa; 2) It wants to start from the fundamentally political character of life in South Africa; 3) It wants to keep in mind to the end all the various forms of oppression present in South Africa, such as racial oppression, workers oppression and the oppression of women; 4) Finally, it wants to start from the concrete experience of the oppressed."

If we compare these quotes with the public activity of the Anglican bishop D. Tutu, and the Catholic Episcopal Conference, which has known prison and trials in its President and in its Secretary General, we see how the writings and the activities reflect each other.

## VII

### Islam: dialogue and conflict

Relations with Islam involve the churches above and below the Sahara. There is a significant presence of both Islamic and Christian communities in the countries south of the Sahara. The Catholic Church lives in an atmosphere of competition, sometimes dramatic, as for example in the Sudan and in Nigeria. The Church's action tends to defend the

right to religious freedom, calling on the model of a pluralistic state. In concrete cases the churches have systematically opposed the imposition of Islamic law as state law. In Islamic countries along the Mediterranean Sea the Church is a small minority, deprived by local laws and customs of its freedom to evangelize, to the point that a single conversion can be dangerous to individuals and to the community.

In this context the proposal of dialogue with Islam, included also by John Paul II as a topic for the upcoming Synod, is problematical. In it the Pope states:

"The Catholic Church in Africa lives next to other religions. Vatican II encouraged Catholics who live in such conditions to give witness to their faith and their Christian life with prudence and charity, through dialogue and cooperation with people of other religions. At the same time it encouraged them to acknowledge, protect and promote the positive spiritual, moral, social and cultural values of these religions. The church is bound to proclaim without ceasing that Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life." For this reason there must never be opposition between dialogue and mission."

### Western African Bishops' Guidelines

Guidelines of the bishops of English speaking western Africa (Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) coming from a special assembly held in Lagos in October 1986, offer friendship and experiential dialogue to Moslems but also mention worries and sufferings caused by the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.

"We pledge ourselves to explore all the lawful ways to promote and to maintain good relations with our brothers and sisters of the Islamic faith in our regions... Let us not forget, however, the great

differences that exist concerning the person and the salvation role of Christ. We also want to point out that words such as salvation, democracy and politics, often have a different meaning for Christians and Moslems. We are aware of the fact that, in our regions, there is great diversity in the relations between Christians and Moslems...."

Meanwhile the Pope has met with King Hassan II and with the Moslem youth in Casablanca (1985), and there has been the peace initiative of Assisi in 1986. However, these occasions of dialogue, together with the acceptable situation found in Jordan and in Egypt, have no impact on the concrete life situation of Christian communities that are either emarginated, as in Algeria, or openly threatened, as in Nigeria, or under war and persecution, as is the case in the Sudan.

### CONCLUSION

The first big push toward indigenization came from Vatican II. It was a church problem. But the Church in Africa, has since found it necessary to move more and more towards issues of survival that have faced African society over the last few decades. The prevalence of civil emergencies has brought about some rough times for the internal life of the Church. Local pastoral process has been scarce. The churches of Africa have not africanized. They are faced with increasing burdens. Autonomy has not been achieved. New forms of dependence have sprung up.

Many, even among the bishops, recognize that the lack of financial autonomy is one of the causes for the evils that still plague the African churches, both because of the ever present danger of Rome's centralizing tendency and because of the "begging syndrome." The churches become more and more part of an Africa which is dependent on the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - an Africa exhausted by foreign debt, kept hostage by the West at the economical, social and ecclesial level.

Relations with Islam, both north and south of the Sahara, confirm that Christianity in Africa is seen as a European religion. It is a widely spread conviction that Islam is arrogantly expanding in Africa because in the eyes of the people it is not foreign. Even though it is imported, Islam has the ability to blend perfectly into black culture. It is not so with Christianity which is seen as a cultural, theological, ritual and legal universe coming from outside.

It is the same challenge which confronts the churches in Africa in facing Islam and African culture. They must divest Christianity of its European face, take it away from the exclusive domination of one continent and make it universal. African churches are everyday more aware of these problems. The fact that they are facing them in different ways shows that the era of easy solutions is over.

Ref. REGNO-ATTUALITA, No. 18/1989.

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## MISSION MOMENTS

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### EXPLORATORY APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

(PHILIPPINES)

Our most recent missionary venture is a response to the crying need of people at "earth's remotest end." Kalinga-Apayao is the northernmost province of the Cordillera Region in Northern Luzon, a region of mountains, forests and narrow plains whose rugged topography has seriously hampered the development of land and people.

Almost a year ago, Bishop Ernesto Salgado, sounded the call to missionaries to help the more than 50,000 inhabitants of this area. The people have never experienced in their lives what it is like to have sisters around. Moreover, the town of Luna, with more than 13,000 inhabitants, has been without a priest for the past ten years. It has also suffered from the lack of trained pastoral leaders and catechists. Re-evangelization will be the order of the day for any missionary group that ventures to this area.

Bishop Salgado figured out that if no religious congregation could afford, personnel-wise, to start a community, he would request a contribution of one sister from the congregations he would approach for help. The situation called for a sister who is perpetually professed and able to speak Ilocano, the dialect of the place. Many an

ICM wanted to apply but the personnel situation of the District dictated that only one sister could be sent.

The coveted choice fell upon a veteran, Aurea Sandil, who was engaged in Christian community building among the barrio folks of Bauang, La Union. Aurea has worked for many years in Tabuk, Kalinga. She had also been an effective Rural Missionary for a good number of years and knows fully well what inter-congregational living and apostolic engagement mean. Badette of the CFIC (Franciscan) and Mila (of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart - Tuding) complete the trio. Sr. Maria Daels had already lent her expertise in the renovation of the old school building that will serve as the sisters' quarters. June 14, 1990 marked the day when the three sisters met with Bishop Salgado for orientation and planning. After a stint of one year there will be an evaluation of this exploratory community.

The sisters and the people express eagerness and excitement. The sisters' coming marks the dawn of a new epoch for lower Apayao. Catechesis for young and old, Christian community building, initiatives towards total human development. The field is vast. We wish our three missionaries an abundant harvest!

Ref. I.C.M. Focus XI/4.  
December 1990.

### A VERY SPECIAL "WAY OF THE CROSS"

(UGANDA)

We adore you, O Christ, as you carry your cross along the dusty roads of Uganda. We make the way of the cross in the homes and at the bedsides of those with AIDS. We bless you because through this suffering you have redeemed the world.

#### 1. Jesus is condemned to death

He sits shocked, unable to speak. His hands tremble. Marko has just been told he has AIDS. "I'm going to die," he says.

#### 2. Jesus takes up his cross:

He is weighed down with the knowledge that he has AIDS. How will he tell his children? He tells his brother, sells some land, arranges for his children. It's hard. It's a heavy cross Vincent carries.

#### 3. Jesus falls the first time:

He cannot stand alone. The abscesses are too painful. Peter is too weak. With help, he makes it home and to bed where he begins the difficult task of regaining strength so he can pick up the cross of living with AIDS and continue his journey.

#### 4. Jesus meets his mother:

Regina has just learned she has AIDS and is dying. She lies there waiting for her mother to return. She wants to tell her mother. As they meet,

a look of pain and love passes between them. "I have slim." Her mother takes her into her arms and they weep.

#### **5. Simon helps Jesus carry his cross:**

Richard has so many decisions to make. How can he go on? When his brother comes, he tells them he is too scared to go on. They comfort him; arrange to take him home; plan to help him tell his wife; promise to provide transport so he can return for treatment.

#### **6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus:**

She lies there, too weak to clean herself. Her clothes are dirty and soiled because the diarrhea is almost constant now. She's alone, pushed into a corridor so the smell won't disturb the others. A young nurse comes, washes her, changes her clothes. Rose smiles.

#### **7. Jesus falls the second time:**

He's begun to have diarrhea, no longer wants to eat. Sleep doesn't come and he's afraid. The illness is getting worse, Peter has to stop work. It's hard to keep living with AIDS.

#### **8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem:**

Jane has no land. Mary has no milk for her baby. Scovia's husband sent her away when he learned she had AIDS. Juliet was put out of her rented room. Betty works in a bar to support her children, providing "favours" for men to get food for the children. The plight of poor women and AIDS. Jesus weeps.

#### **9. Jesus falls the third time:**

His head feels as if it is bursting; nothing brings relief. Peter lies in bed unable even to open his eyes. As the end nears, relatives arrive to move him from his rented room where he has suffered alone for many months. One more step along the way.

#### **10. Jesus is stripped of his garments:**

They put her out of the house. They kept her clothes, saying they wouldn't fit her wasted body. They told her to go to her grandmother to die. Once there, she was again rejected stripped of everything, even her right to belong. Juliet was returned to the hospital like an unwanted thing.

#### **11. Jesus is nailed to the cross:**

He cannot move, finds it hard to breathe; must wait for someone to care for him totally. An AIDS-related tumor has nailed James to his bed; his mother keeps watch.

#### **12. Jesus dies on the cross:**

Rose, Peter, John, Elecha, Kaonde, William, Joseph, George, Grace, Paulo, Goretti... Jesus' body dying of AIDS.

#### **13. Jesus is taken down from the cross:**

The wailing begins; the car reaches the homestead. As men rush forward to carry Paulo's shrouded body, a woman comes out of the house. She reaches out to touch the body of her son.

#### **14. Jesus is placed in the tomb:**

A grave dug on hospital land, only staff for mourners. Her nine-month old child cries, not understanding. The grave is filled. All go away. Rose is dead.

#### **15. The resurrection.**

#### **WE WAIT IN HOPE...**

Ref. Sr. Kay Lawlor, MMM  
in Kitouu Hospital.  
IMPACT. A Newsletter from  
the Zambia Catholic Sec.  
Nov. 1990, No. 125

#### **THIS IS MY SPIRITUALITY... (INDIA)**

For the past 8 years, I have been trying to live out my personal call to mission among the people of the villages of Siwan and Bhagwanpur, in Bihar, India. Prior to this, I was involved in mission for 22 years in Kurji Holy Family Hospital.

I began to reflect that so far I had treated and cared for people who came to me for help in the clinic. Why not go out to them? I was moved by a strong desire to go out to people, to meet them in their own village situation, to respond to the whole person in their own environmental setting and to be part of their culture, customs, celebrations, joys, and sorrows. I began to dream of going to Siwan and living among the people there. This dream became a reality in 1982.

As health coordinator I set up a small health clinic, visited people in their homes, and conducted adult education classes for women. The liberation of women had the uppermost priority in all my undertakings. As the health coordinator of the diocese, I



conducted seminars and get-togethers for the health workers. I also organized seminars on immunization and health care.

In 1989, together with Sr. Antoinette de Sa, we started our new mission in Bhagwanpur. Through home visiting, health teaching, conducting literacy and conscientization classes, and training and tailoring, we hope to raise the awareness of women regarding their plight and the injustices meted out to them so that they can claim their rightful place at home and in society.

My life among the people has affected and transformed me. The most significant experience is the acceptance we have as part of the village community. We have become part of the life of the people. They love us. My whole life has been a continuous response to God's call in whatever way He wants me to be an instrument of His healing presence and love. My prayer is very simple. God is Life and I respond to Life. I see life in people and I reach out to them. This is my spirituality. If I reach out and touch at least one person in his or her sorrow, then that is good. I do not solve many problems, but reach out in love. I enjoy people, children, flowers, nature. In short, I enjoy Life.

Because of illness, I am no longer able to be active among the villagers, but I continue to pray for them. If I have pain, I offer it for the mission. When I do that it is like the joy of being there in person.

Ref. Intercontinent. Fall 1990  
Medical Mission Srs.

## **SOUTHERN AFRICA - QUO VADIS?**

**(BONN/GERMANY)**

Though they had no ambition to be prophetic, they were continually tempted to foretell the future when confronted with the question: "Southern Africa - Quo vadis?" (Where are you going?). It was the main topic discussed by representatives of the Media Commission of the German Catholic Missionary Council and of the working committee of German Missionary Orders during their second Media Hearing in Bonn, November 7, 1990.

Fr. Anton Meier, provincial of the South African province of the Comboni Missionaries, described the situation in the region as being similar to that "shortly before a conflagration". To the question: "Who are the arsonists?" he replied: "The fox is hiding behind the wolves". This was an allusion to the agitators who are fomenting dissent and destabilizing the process of the gradual dismantling of apartheid. He considers it to be an obligation of the Church to frustrate the attempt of those who are trying to prevent any form of reconciliation between whites and blacks.

However, at the end of his talk Fr. Meier wound up predicting that the crisis in South Africa with all its concomitant symptoms - for example 25 murders in a single weekend - would get even worse before any true reconciliation would occur. He recommended the Churches in South Africa to clearly identify those who are promoting violence in the country, to collectively form a commission for the investigation of such crimes, to be

present wherever violence is breaking out, and to be solidary with the victims and those who suffer.

On the political level, Fr. Bernhard Nordkamp, since 1985 Vicar General of the diocese of Windhoek, suggested to bring the United Nations into the reconciliation process in South Africa, similar to what happened in Namibia. He believes it to be impossible to find a peaceful solution for the manifold problems of South Africa without foreign intervention and assistance.

Ref: Information  
Missionszentrale der  
Franziskanerev. Nov 1990,  
No.11

## **THE CALL TO MISSION**

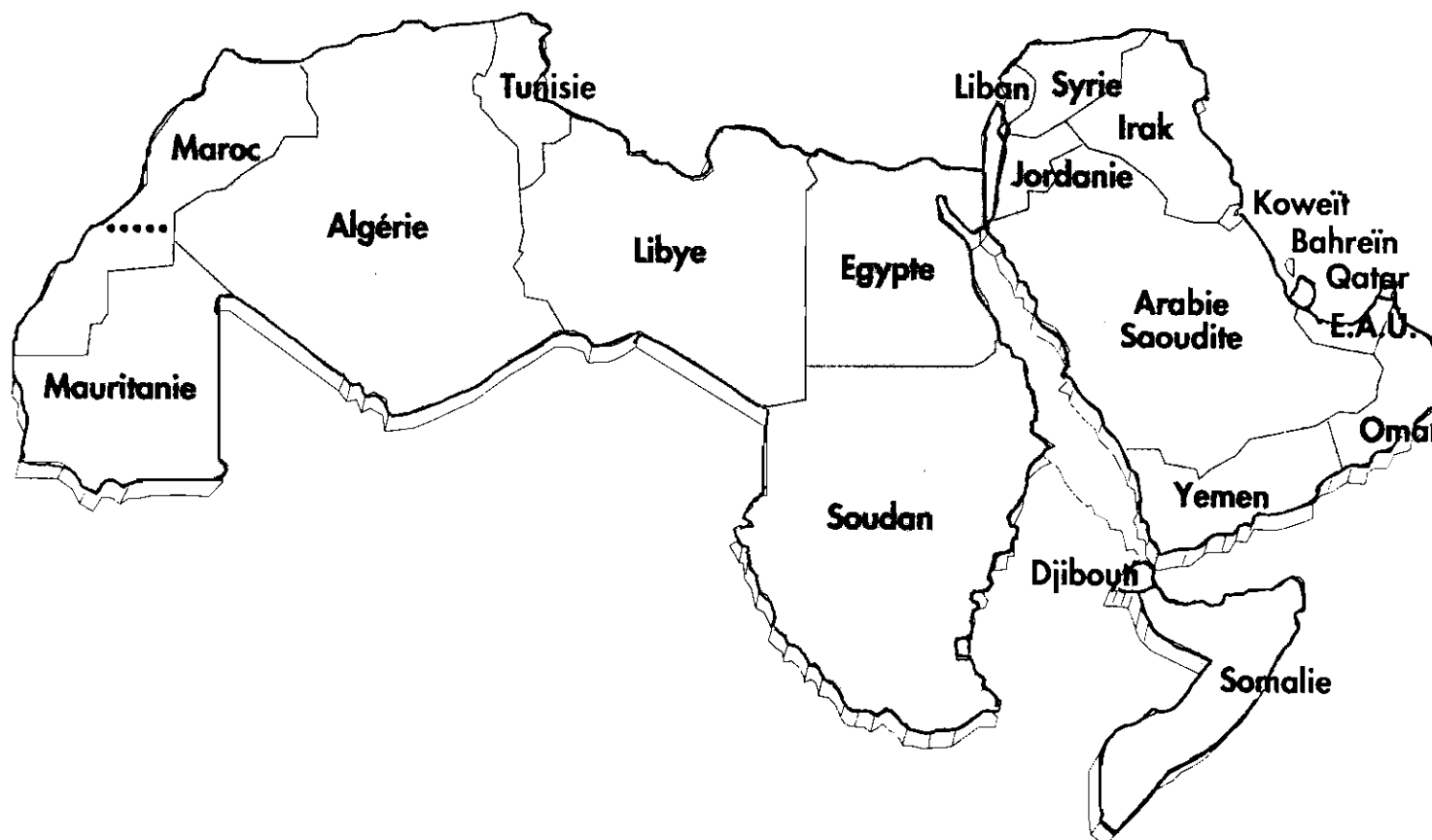
**(ROME)**

"The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second Millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God: "For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (Cor. 9:16).

In the name of the whole Church, I sense an urgent duty to repeat this cry of Saint Paul.

Ref. Opening of the Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate.

## THE ARAB WORLD: FROM THE GULF TO THE ATLANTIC



### POPULATION, TYPE OF GOVERNMENT, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS STATISTICS

Egypt: Population 52.9 millions  
 Gov. Presidential regime  
 Eth. Arabs: 99% Nubians: 160.000  
 Rel. Sunnite Moslems: 94%  
 Christians (Copts): 6-7%

Tunisia: 7.9 m.  
 Gov. Presidential regime  
 Eth. Arabs: 97% Berbers: 3%  
 Rel. Sunnite Moslems: 99%

Iraq: 18.7 m.  
 Gov. Military regime  
 Eth. Arabs: 72% Kurds: 22% Turkmen et al: 6%  
 Rel. Shiite & other Moslems: 51%  
 Sunnite Moslems: 46% Christians: 3%

Morocco: 24.7 m.  
 Gov. Constitutional monarchy  
 Eth. Arabs: 66% Berbers: 33%  
 Rel. Sunnite Moslems: 98%

Libia: 4.3 m.

Gov. Military regime

Eth. Arabs: 92.2% Berbers: 5.4%

Rel. Sunnite Moslems: 98%

Mauritania: 2.2 m.

Gov. Military regime

Eth. Arabs (Moors): 62% Berbers: 20%

Coloured: 8% Foulanis: 5% Others: 5%

Rel. Sunnite Moslems 98%

Syria: 12.6 m.

Gov. Military regime

Eth. Arabs: 89% Kurds: 8%

Rel. Sunnite Moslems: 75% Alaivites: 11%

Druzes: 3% Christians: 10%

United Arab Emirates: 1.5 m.

Gov. Absolute islamic monarchy

Eth. Arabs: 99% (of indigenous people)

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 87% Shiites: 13%

Lebanon: 3 m.

Gov. Parliamentary democracy theoretical

Eth. Arabs: 98%

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 22% Shiites: 25%

Druzes: 8% Christians: 45%

Jordan: 3 m.

Gov. Parliamentary monarchy

Eth. Arabs: 98.5% Circassians 1.3%

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 96% Christians 4%

Oman: 1.5 m.

Gov. Absolute islamic monarchy

Eth. Arabs: 98% (of indigenous people)

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 40% Ibadites: 60%

Yemen: 11.5 m.

Gov. Military regime

Eth. Arabs: 99% in North, 96% in South.  
99% in South.Rel. Moslems: 99% Sunnites: 54% in North,  
99% in SouthSudan: 24.9 m.

Gov. Military dictatorship

Eth. Arabs: 39% Fours: 13% Dinkas 12%

Bedjas: 6% Naubas: 5.8% Nuers: 4.5%

Nubians: 3.5% Zandes: 2%

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 72% Animists: 24%

Christians: 4%

Saudi Arabia: 13.9 m.

Gov. Absolute islamic monarchy

Eth. Arabs: 99% (of indigenous people)

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 97% Shiites: 2.5%

Kuwait: 2.2 m.

Gov. Parliamentary islamic monarchy

Eth. Arabs: 100% (of indigenous people)

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 79% Shiites: 21%

Bahrain: 0.5 m.

Gov. Absolute monarchy

Eth. Arabs: 99% (of indigenous people)

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 60% Shiites: 40%

Qatar: 0.4 m.

Gov. Absolute islamic monarchy

Eth. Arabs: 99% (of indigenous people)

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 90% Shiites: 10%

Djibouti: 0.4 m.

Gov. Presidential regime

Eth. Arabs: 6% Issas: 47% Afars: 37%

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 100%

Somalia: 7.6 m.

Gov. Republic

Eth. Somalis: 96% Bantus &amp; South Asiatics: 3%

Arabs: 1%

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 99%

Algeria: 25.4 m.

Gov. Presidential regime

Eth. Arabs: 78.5% Berbers: 21.5%

Rel. Sunnite moslems: 98%

**NEWS**

**SOUTH AFRICA TODAY.** What is happening? At a SEDOS Conference on February 11, 1991 Casimir Paulsen, CMM gave a sobering account of President F. W. de Klerk's much acclaimed opening address to this year's session of the South African Parliament. How much of it was a declaration of honest intent and how much was a propaganda campaign designed to gain publicity in the media and to give an excuse to those governments only too ready to abandon sanctions against 'apartheid'. The chorus of warnings emanating from South Africa, from Bishop Desmond Tutu, from the South African Bishops' Conference, from the A.N.C., from Mr. Mandela, from the Institute for Contextual Theology, leave little doubt that the "black-violence" which is bringing death and suffering to hundreds of thousands of blacks is a well planned con-

spiracy. The violence has been systematically and deliberately exported from Natal - where both sides were Zulus. In township after township the violence was deliberately sparked off by mysterious people and by certain white policemen. The effect - to show the world that it is impossible to arrive at a "one person one vote" in South Africa. President de Klerk's declaration should be read and interpreted with great caution.

**TWO YEAR CORRESPONDENCE COURSE: MISSIONARY  
FORMATION ON MISSION FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM**

For information apply to Fr. Mario Bianchi, IMC., Secretary General of the PMU; 1 via di Propaganda; 00187, Roma. Tel. 678.15.68

**COMING EVENTS IN SEDOS**

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND  
and  
RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS  
of the  
GULF WAR**

SPEAKER TOM MICHEL, SJ  
February 21, 1991; 4.00 - 6.30 p.m. SVD COLLEGIO

**MISSIONARY OUTREACH OF THE  
OCEANIAN/AUSTRALIAN CHURCHES**

TEAM PRESENTATION  
February 26, 1991; 4.00 p.m. SVD Collegio

**STRUGGLE IN ISLAM -  
UNDERSTANDING JIHAD**

SPEAKER TOM MICHEL, SJ  
March 21, 1991; 4.00 - 6.30 p.m. SVD Collegio

**MISSIONARY OUTREACH OF THE  
ASIAN CHURCHES**

April 10, 1991; 4.00 p.m. SVD Collegio

**PROPHETIC MISSION IN A CHANGING WORLD**

May 17 - 21, 1991; Villa Cavalletti, Frascati