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EDITORIAL

In the first article of our March issue, we are able to present to you the full version of the conference Archbishop **Thomas Menampampil, SDB.** of Guwahati, India, gave to SEDOS at the end of February. He showed us that at the moment every religion on the Asian continent is undergoing a period of revival which presents a flexible, missionary Church with the opportunity to develop its proper personality within the richness of each Asian culture.

Our second author, Fr **Ernest D. Pyrins, CICM.**, a professor of religions at Tokyo University, has been working for many years in Japan. His very interesting reflection allows us to discover the enormous richness of the Japanese culture, both ancient and modern; and how an *Englobant Japanese Vision* of reality and a *Christian Vision* of reality are called to meet in a new understanding.

The Peruvian theologian **Felipe Zegarra** also works as a parish priest in a densely populated working-class area of Port Callao. In his pastoral ministry he sees how massive poverty threatens society with dehumanisation. Through lived solidarity in the Christian community, the poor can also achieve the fundamental social value of self-esteem.

Our last contribution comes from Dr **U.E. Umoren**, a Nigerian Professor lecturing in Port Hartcourt. In his article he looks at the nature of African womanhood in African cultures, and examines how the liberating Gospel can transform traditional patterns of bondage through inculturation.

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ASIAN CULTURES AND EVANGELISATION

Msgr Thomas Menampampil

The conference was given at the SEDOS Seminar on Friday, 28 February 1997, in Rome.

I have accepted an impossible task. Trying to deal with Asian cultures in a brief hour is like attempting to describe the universe in a few words. Asian cultures form a veritable cosmos. They differ. There is nothing that I could say that would not be challenged. Aside from being a geographical expression, does Asia mean something more? **Has it an individuality of its own?** Do the vast families of Asian cultures have something in common? Do the cultural boundaries of Asia coincide with the present recognised boundaries of the continent? (Arnold Toynbee finds it difficult to accept the gulf that is imagined between Asian and European cultures. He says "This fantasy has been begotten when some imaginative Hellenic minds had given a revolutionary change of meaning to the two traditional Hellenic geographical names 'Europe' and 'Asia'... the historian cannot lay his finger on any period at all in which there was any significant cultural diversity between the 'Asiatic' and the 'European' occupants of the all but contiguous opposite banks of a Bosphorus and a Hellespont...." [Arnold Toynbee: A study of History]). Or, does the cultural mantle of Asia rest lightly on the shoulders of Europe and Africa too? Or, has Europe, with its exuberance of the last half a millennium, made parts of Asia like unto itself?

Formation of Cultures

Cultures take their shape in societies as a result of their response to the geographical setting in which they live (desert, mountain, island, fertile plain) and the historic experiences they go through (compulsions to feed and defend themselves, the necessity to ensure internal cohesion and external security). **Small communities that live a long time in relative isolation develop a definitive individuality** and specific character traits. Partly by reason of biological nearness and shared history, and partly conditioned by the environment around them, they develop not only traditions that mark them off from others, but also attitudes, value-systems, meaning-schemes and world-views that clearly distinguish them from other communities.

Under threat of famine or enemy attack, people have migrated and settled in **river valleys** like those of the Tigris-Euphrates, Indus, Yangtse-Kiang

forming **composite cultures** under the patronage of unified political power. Founders of religious movements and architects of imperial superstructures have facilitated further sharing of ideas and institutions and assisted the formation of larger societies and the birth of civilisations (Sumerian, Indus Valley, Egyptian, Gangetic). Even in such highly composite cultures the original 'genes' of earlier simpler societies could be noticed in individuals or small social units, but these could hardly be identified with any measure of certainty or traced to their source.

As communities have merged and cultures have inter-related, new identities have resulted especially if the **new synthesis** found a unifying principle in a new **religious intuition**. It also happened that a relatively homogeneous society split into two or more units when different religious geniuses appeared on the scene, taking their adherents to their own diverse persuasions. As, often a dominant political force had brought together vastly varying societies, so too, a **homogeneous society broke into smaller political units** developing dissimilar cultural traditions. Whenever their relative isolation endured a long period of time even by reason of artificial boundaries, these separate cultural streams once again **developed definite individuality** and distinct character traits, and possibly also a new collective personality, a discernibly different psyche and a collective unconscious. So many forces contribute to the strength of the above-mentioned collective individuality: the duration of mutual interaction and shared history, the power of the original stimulus from a prophetic personality or a political visionary, the strength of the compulsions that imposed norms of internal cohesion on the community for its very survival, etc.

Asian Identity

Asia has witnessed all the cultural processes I have described above. There are still a vast number of cultures that have remained rich and colourful in relative isolation (on the mountain fastnesses of the Himalayas, the highlands of North

Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, and South China, or the islands of Indonesia. There are also the composite cultures that developed in the fertile valleys of the Tigris Euphrates, Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Yangtse-Kiang, Mekong and others. These latter group of cultures that were homogenised at one period of history through the political and religious unification of societies were again diversified through later political evolution and religious innovations. The composite cultures that are usually called civilisations are often known as the **“Great Traditions”** of Asia. These have received much attention in history and in current thought. But today even the so-called **“Little Traditions”** are calling for attention. I am working among the Little Traditions.

To begin with, characterising the Asian as spiritual, introverted, inclined to synthesising or subjectivity would be generalising too much (Hajime Nakamura); the same as describing all Westerners as materialistic, extroverted, analytic, objective, imperialistic, and capitalistic. The events of the last 500 years should not blind our vision of the total length of recorded history. For example, the West was very religious and traditional even a generation ago. And is still. And may become even more so in days to come.

Similarly, **internal differences** that exist both **within the Eastern and Western civilisations** cannot be ignored. The Greek and Hebrew elements, which are very different among themselves, combined to give shape to the Western civilisation. So the Brahminic and the Buddhist, the Confucian and the Taoist, and, the Hindu and the Islamic have gone together. Each of these pairs differ greatly. Hajime Nakamura says that while the Chinese and the Japanese are inclined to be intuitive, Indians have strong traditions of a logical and analytical approach. Max Weber thought Confucianism extremely rational and it inspired Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire and Wolff. The Chinese and the Japanese are often described as non-metaphysical and the Indians as extremely religious.

As all general descriptions of the East or West are always bound to fall short of accuracy, so too global characterisations of the Great Traditions of Asia will be found to be inadequate. There are sub-streams revealing different cultural trends quite contrary to the dominant society's main features. For example there are **4636 separate communities in India** according to a recent survey (Reuters, New Delhi, 13 June 1993). These are not only remnants of ancient and recent political groupings and religious

affiliations, but also the result of occupational specialisations and ethnic identities. Many of these communities have their own traditions, myths, codes, world-views, celebrations and worship, in some cases shared with others, in other cases all of their own.

Western society, homogenised by the long shared history of the Roman Empire and the discipline of the Christian Church, more easily **produced philosophies defining the rights of the ‘Universal man’** and set goals before him (human rights, liberation, egalitarian society, democracy). Whether these concepts were made to apply universally in that society is another matter, e.g., with regard to the Jews, Blacks, women, colonial subjects. But these form the core of what Modern man claims for everyone without distinction. On the contrary, **Eastern societies** that learned to accept and even **cultivate ethnic and cultural differences** should have developed **theories defending the rights of communities**. Whether they have done so or not on an elaborate scale, they have certainly evolved working norms and practical codes that regulate the relationships of communities, not all of them equitable.

Recently various remedies have been proposed. Some of the Asian constitutions reflect the reality of differences. *Pancasila* and other formulae have been worked out in various Asian societies. Reservation policies, scheduled caste privileges, etc. attempt to defend the weaker communities. Legislation takes into account the traditions of various communities. Censors black out news report that might be considered offensive to certain communities, or present it in guarded language. A greater recognition of minorities, of indigenous peoples and smaller societies is gaining ground in all countries.

Evangelisation of Communities

A cceptance of Christ on personal choice is the corner-stone of everything we believe about becoming Christian. In modern society, personal search, discovery, conviction, acceptance, and deepening of one's understanding of religious truths would be considered the stages of appropriation of faith. Quite legitimately too. What I want to ask is this: **do communities count in the midst of these individual choices?** Are there differences of approach to different communities?

May be, the Evangeliser in Asia is often trying to address the Gospel to the ‘Universal Man’ who does

not exist. Or, to **the ‘Asian’ or the ‘Indian’ on whom you cannot put your finger**. The carrier of the Gospel is forgetting the approach of Paul who made himself Greek to the Greeks and Hebrew to the Hebrews, to gain someone for Christ. It is fashionable for the Christian social activist to divide all of humanity into two clear categories: the oppressor and the oppressed. But in Asia other ways of classification are also important. The Asian person is a Sunni or a Shiite, a Hindu or a Muslim, a Han Chinese or one of an ethnic minority, Japanese or Ainu, Burmese or Karen, a Bangladeshi or a Chakma or a Mogh, a Yadav or a Kurmi, a Naga or a Kuki, or one of the very many ethnic groups that inhabit the Eastern Continent.

If the Evangeliser does not take into consideration the **configurations, strength and various dimensions of cultures** and communities to which the Asian individuals belong and address the Gospel in a different manner to different categories of people, making it intelligible to each community, he/she is not likely to make much headway. Here I am not so much referring to linguistic skills or mastery of the idiom. I am referring rather to the **‘psychological corridors’ of entry and the ‘key of compatibility’** between the Evangeliser and the community to which the Gospel is addressed. I am hinting at the Evangeliser’s ability to enter into the collective subconscious of a new community. I am referring to the need to meet the community amidst its own felt needs, priorities, perceived goals, world-view and offer the Gospel to its collective psyche.

Here I am out of my depth. These are concepts that do not allow easy analysis or concrete descriptions. What I am trying to say is that we cannot be mere transporters of ready-made theories or rigidly set **formulae**. I do recognise the value of these. But they ought to **be personalised, transformed and unified in you**, until you are able to bear **witness to your living faith in Christ** in the full context of the community with which you share the Gospel. Inculturation comes from your ability to be born again in the community which you are trying to serve and to express your religious commitment in a rich and powerful manner in a new universe. Even the very members of the community have to do this all over again in periods of transition, or when returning to their own community after a period of absence.

I would be unfair our best theories if I were to say that preparation is a negative asset. But I would not hesitate to say that **whatever type of preparation that sophisticates us is certainly a hindrance**. The

trouble with our evangelisation often is that we have grown heavy and rigid with the prejudices of the community we come from, our personal cautions, theological and ideological loads, that we have **lost the joy and simplicity of the Gospel**, we have weakened its direct appeal to people, and we, all unconsciously, have **thrown a veil over the face of Christ**. And a further trouble with our approach is that we are too frequently culture-blind and are not able to give a new form and identity to everything that we hold dear in a new cultural world. I am not suggesting that we wrestle with the authorities to sanction the needed change. There is already ample space for the above-mentioned endeavour. I am suggesting rather that we wrestle with ourselves and be creative in our approach, so that we can become all things to all men.

Evangelisation of the psyche is a topic by itself. Doctrines and theories do not form the centre of your strategy, but **RELATIONSHIPS** do. You educate not by rules and norms, but by relationship. You evangelise more by relationships than in any other way. In this method of approach, clearly formulated statements will be less important (at least at the first stage) than **spontaneous witness**, even casual remarks that give evidence of deep faith. You will always find that a planned and organised approach meets with resistance, but spontaneous faith expressions win attention. But spontaneity in sharing your faith can manifest itself only when it becomes a part of your personality. It comes so very natural to you, **it is just your own way of being Christian**. My emphasis here is not on being unprepared. It is on **allowing our faith to light up our lives**, not only the central zones of our conscious being, but also our subterranean recesses. It is our living faith that can build up another believer.

A community responds more easily to evocative symbols than to a well-developed thesis. But of this, a little later.

Respect the ‘Selfhood’ of the Community

Christianity has become a part of the collective self understanding of many communities in Asia. In many places, it still remains at the margin of their consciousness, but it is there. Christian communities may be working out a fragile existence in some of the Islamic countries, but in other regions they are flourishing. They manifest signs of abundant growth and are rich in vocations. They benefit from that general

atmosphere in Asia that fosters religiosity and respects spiritual values. While some among the Asian middle class may have become totally secularised, the masses are still religious. Religiosity is still a great Asian value. People live by their cultural traditions which they keep alive in their families. Such a climate assists even the Christian community and promotes vocations.

Most majority communities in Asia, while welcoming the Christian presence among them, seem to resent its growth. What is noticed is a love-hate relationship. **Christians are welcome for the services they render so efficiently, but are carefully watched** lest they grow in influence. Some look at Christianity as a threat. Others merely consider it 'alien', while esteeming its ideals, values and services. Others still consider it a useful minority, whose charism of service is good even for the majority community, but which should be kept within limits. Not many would concede to Christianity the same scope for development and growth that the majority community itself enjoys.

Is Christianity a threat to the selfhood of communities? **In what does this selfhood consist?** Is it in its culture, or language, economic interests, system of values, or the unifying dynamic principle that holds the community together, or in its philosophy of life and world-view, or even in its religious faith? In my view, though all these form a part of the 'Selfhood', some more intimately than others, **that elusive reality transcends all the above-mentioned things.** Though a community may choose any of these or other elements, even a peripheral item, to be the symbol of its selfhood at a given time, and fight to the last in its defence, the selfhood itself is something beyond the sum total of all these elements. People have, of their own choice, changed their ideologies, accepted new philosophies and world-views, adopted new languages, even surrendered their religion in preference for some other faith, and allowed their cultures to undergo radical transformation, but they have still preserved their individuality as a community. Ethnicity seems closest to the individuality of a community, but does it constitute it?

A community decides for itself with what it wishes to identify itself. There have been cases when

communities have chosen to perish rather than give up one of these elements. I do agree that Christianity can be presented as a threat to the selfhood of a community. But should it necessarily be? Can it be presented as, and can it truly be, an enhancement of the selfhood of a society? On the answer to this question will depend the future of the missions. We should not allow ourselves to be over-influenced by the wrong models we have in our minds of certain earlier periods. Every element mentioned above is a part of the selfhood of the community and deserves our respect. The less threatening you become and the

more love and esteem you offer, the more the defences come down one by one, and all the doors open before you. But your own defences still remain. Those too must come down. All you need to do at this stage is to **point to Christ.** The actual change that takes place

when one encounters Christ is a mystery. It is like a song to be sung, not a process to be described!

The above description may sound too poetical and unreal. But communities have definitively opted for Christ on the Asian Continent and have found the experience enriching. How sad indeed that many an Evangeliser is more skilled in provoking the other to raise his/her defences than in helping him/her to lower them. Whether Christ is able to enhance the selfhood of a community is what many an Evangeliser is asking himself/herself these days. A believer has no doubt. **One who has experienced Christ knows what he is offering.** He is certain what Christ has meant to him and what He can mean for the rest of mankind.

The East Asian Genius

When Siddharta was born in the middle of the sixth century BC, Indian civilisation was already ancient. Possibly 1,500 years had elapsed since wandering Aryan tribes from central Asia crossing the Indus River came upon the Dravidian civilisation, already a thousand years old. The happy merging of the cultures of these two great peoples was to influence the rest of South, East and South-East Asia for all time. The key to its success is phrased in that hymn in the Rig Veda: "Truth is one; the wise call it by different names". The forests of the Gangetic plains and the lofty Himalayas were

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haunted by God-seekers, who fasted and meditated, and **asked what the human being was, what life meant and where destiny led mankind**, questions that still trouble human hearts on both sides of the Urals with varying answers.

Gautama Buddha, born of the Sakya clan of the great Mongolian stock, set himself to the pursuit of Dharma (meaning comprehensively Justice, righteousness, duty, nobility, truthfulness, loyalty and compassion), after having experimented with and rejected the rituals of the Brahmins and the austerity of the ascetics. Having been brought up in luxury, he was deeply impressed by the **transience of all things**. He was an intense and dynamic personality, and had watched courtesans in their glamour and in their disarrayed coarseness. He taught renunciation. **RENUNCIATION** is a key concept in Asia. It is an answer to the illusive nature of things. Selfish desire is man's greatest enemy. It must be overcome through training and meditation. When that is accomplished, he is fully **LIBERATED**.

Among Buddha's followers was a barber from Kapilavastu. Caste-hierarchy and Brahminic rituals (sacrifices) found no place under Buddha's dispensation. This was eminently a **TRIBAL INSIGHT**. Tribal people always believed in the **basic equality of the human being**. This tribal insight shook the rest of Asia. **May be, Asia needs today those correctives to her ancient wisdom that only tribal simplicity, and direct and pragmatic approach can offer**. We should not forget that it was an unknown descendant of a Tribal Chief in West Asia (Christ, the son of David) that shook the Western world and the rest of humanity with His Saving Insights. (The fact that a tribal chief from Mecca too made so great an impact on world society, makes us ask: Are the so-called, 'Little Traditions' so little? Have, on the contrary, the 'Great Traditions' to learn from the refreshing message that the Little Traditions can give even today?).

Buddha's **organisational skill** (Sanghas) can be traced back to his **tribal ancestry**. The son of this tribal chief of the Sakya clan was eminently **practical**. There is a touch of experience in all he teaches. He tells his disciples to try things for themselves before accepting anything, "know for yourselves" (A I 189). They were not to speculate too much, but be concerned about others, and show compassion. They were to avoid exaggerations and keep to the middle path. His teaching insisted that **to be human is to be a social being**. Coming from an **egalitarian society**, he recommended unanimity in

discussions, deference for elders, consensus among members.

Buddha's teachings were very different from India's mainstream perceptions (as tribal concepts are even today). And yet Buddhism won adherence. It was never presented as another religion, but as the Truth. Revolutionary as Buddhist concepts were, their fusion with native traditions was hardly noticed. Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Bon and Shintoism were generally accepted as the same, some teachers speaking of hierarchy of levels of acceptance and identification. This **eagerness to harmonise has conditioned the outlook of East Asian peoples**. A non-confrontational presentation of what is new is possibly their special genius.

West Asia may have had another perception. And yet, despite the perceived Islamic religious aggressiveness, it is interesting to note what Peter Hardy speaking in "The Religious Traditions of Asia" about the expansion of Islam in South Asia says, "Non-Muslims became Muslims more through slow acculturation by reason of a change in social belonging than through a dramatic individual change of attitudes and convictions...". And A.H. Johns referring to the growth of Islam in Indonesia speaks of an '**osmosis**' and recognises different levels of that religion's intensity among the population. Possibly a tribal psyche still underlies the consciousness of those communities and reveals an amazing openness to new options.

Against this background we may understand why we need to return to the point that we raised earlier: **Evangelisation through Relationships**. (This emphasis on Evangelisation by relationships does not mean to underestimate other forms of apostolate, including direct announcement and use of the media).

The New Face of Asia

From 1945 to 1995, half a century, East Asia reduced the poverty incidence from 400 million to 180 million. The World Bank has pronounced that nowhere and in no time in human history humanity achieved such economic progress, and considers that the East Asian story is an economic miracle. It is a miracle of the human spirit, not merely of economic effort, driven by an awakening to one's own potential and propelled by the power of determination, and of progress achieved by toil and sacrifice.

John Naisbitt in his 'Megatrends Asia' says, "The West needs the East more than the East needs the West".

About half a billion Asians are reaching the status of the middle class. That offers an enormous market. **Asian families are sturdy.** They are like wonderful foundations to build huge enterprises on.

China's economy doubled in six years. Ethnic Chinese are the largest cross-border investors, in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Overseas Chinese networks cover the globe.

"The developed world just can't carry the load any more" says Wayne Brooker, Ford's Asia-Pacific vice-president. "The future of the industry will depend on new markets". Asia offers new markets of extraordinary potential. The East is not just Japan and China, as many Westerners often thought. The countries of the ASEAN group — Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei and Vietnam — have a population of 450 million. India has a population of over 900 million. **There are three billion people in Asia, half of them under 25.**

A recent story in 'Washington Post' spoke of India having the fastest growing middle class in the world. In 1994 BMW found in **Vietnam high literacy rates and a strong work ethic** to begin their business there. Malaysia has been yearly going beyond their targets. Dr Mahathir Mohammed said in November 1994. "It's time for us all to **adopt prosper-thy-neighbour policies**". Such policies pay. Indonesia has been doing equally well, if not better.

Asia is reversing the brain drain trend. Opportunities are looking Eastwards. As a late-comer to development, Asia has a golden opportunity to install the latest models of infrastructure.

"The United States already exports far more to Asia than to the mature markets of Europe", says John Naisbitt. Many Asians are making **deprivation a motivating force** in their psychological and ethical makeup.

Asian peoples are products of their religious thought, which values family over all else. **There is a revival of religion in every Asian society.** Even the West is catching the fever: Yoga, Zen, Vipasana, Transcendental meditation, Taoist meditation, etc.

(Even a few years ago, social thinkers were very sure that religiosity and attachment to traditions were signs of an immobile antiquated society. Today it is impossible to hold such a view).

"How rich the World will be when both the cultures and the economies of West and East converge", asks John

Naisbitt.

Signs of Hope

(This last part is an extract from a report that the author gave to the Plenary Congregation of the *Dicastery for the Evangelization of Peoples*, 25 April 1995).

While the task of Evangelisation is more challenging than ever before in Asia today, there are many signs of hope.

1. Every religion on the Asian continent is going through a period of revival. While Islamic fervour runs high in West Asia and some of the Soviet republics, and, Buddhists are rebuilding pagodas in Cambodia and Mongolia, Hindu pilgrim centres are being crowded. In Thailand temple finances are sky-rocketing.

Among Christians too there is an evident revival of interest in religion as an experience. **Crowds gather around Charismatic preachers**, as though to show that a de-mythologised and a rationalistic type of religion proposed to them in modern times does not satisfy their religious needs. There is a hunger for God's Word and an eagerness to evangelise.

2. Countries with a strong socialistic association like Vietnam and China have witnessed the limitations of physical power, and seem to be greatly open to spiritual power and genuine religious influence.

Persons who have gone through troubled times and traumatic experiences and have asked themselves ultimate questions about life are amazed to find fellow human beings who manifest inner confidence and a sense of destiny because of their

rootedness in faith. Such powerful witness has a great convincing power.

3. Religious groups and Christian organisations that had been pursuing radical social goals during the last few decades, have begun **rethinking their philosophy of action**, partly due to the collapse of societies that had been radically restructured, and partly due to their own non-achievement despite their high hopes. Their very failure to achieve anything glamorously significant, and the emergence of the frustrated individuals and contending groups have occasioned a rethinking of their goals.

Many religious communities have experientially realised that **radical social goals alone do not adequately inspire and motivate** their members in any permanent fashion or help them to cohere. And if, building on the spiritual strength of an earlier generation that had a firm religious formation, they could go ahead for some period of time, they run out of that reserve strength in due course.

This awareness has led groups and religious movements to the central goals of Evangelisation. Some, though, are still in search, not knowing what ails them.

4. Asian people being extremely religious, it has been found that even social goals are better served with **religious motivation**. Even the best philosophy of economic growth and social development will not have half the force of religious inspiration among Asian people.

If in the past Christian workers have ignored this fact, they have before them an untapped potential.

5. Asian societies have by and large preserved several values that the modern secularised society has seriously questioned or outright rejected. Family loyalty is still important to the Asian. **Cohesion within his community is precious to him**. Sex is something sacred. The marriage bond has certain inner strength and stability.

The Asian has still preserved the **sense of the sacred**; the consciousness of sin; he yet has an awareness of the binding force of moral norms, of the **mystery of life**, of the transcendent nature of human destiny; he **recognises the Ultimate**.

6. We spoke of the revival of religions on the Asian continent. There is also an **openness to persons who symbolise service, or stand for**

values, or offer a prophetic message. While there is resistance to anything that is sectarian and dogmatic, there is respectful attention to anyone who transcends various human differences and speaks as a human being to fellow-human-beings on problems of perennial human interest. Pope John Paul II has given us an example of this form of ministry.

Any sharing about the Divine of an **experiential nature wins attention and regard**. Generosity and authenticity in a person are the strongest arguments in favour of what he stands for.

Conclusion

I will end this paper with a brief personal reflection. In the recent past, the presentation of the Christian message inclined to be intellectual, theoretical, doctrinal, historical. Without denying the value of this method in the least, we may observe that the **approach to the Asian mind** in the field of religion should probably be different: **personal, experiential, symbolic, poetic**. At present even some Asian Christian thinkers who are most eager to be assertive of their Asianness unconsciously follow another path. They are too argumentative and occasionally contentious. That is not the Asian way.

The **person of Christ** is highly regarded in Asia.

Anyone who shares his/her lived experience of his/her faith wins a hearing.

Symbols convey a message not merely to the mind of a person, but to his **psyche**... in fact, to the whole person. Modern culture with its worship of precise sciences has nearly banished symbols from the average man's cognitive processes. The commercial and the technological mind considers the use of traditional symbols archaic and outmoded. Myth and mystery have given place to the computer and the calculator. This may have its practical advantages. But the consequence is that the mystery of religious realities has no place in the modern man's psyche.

Every effort to evangelise through verbal formulation is bound to meet with partial success only, because mystery cannot be fully captured in precise vocabulary. **On the contrary, symbols both reveal the Truth, and leave you with a sense of wonder** at the inexhaustible hidden dimensions of the same Reality. They grip you and commit you to the greatest causes. Symbolism is the language of the inner man, in which insight and intuition play the

greater part. And faith is not far from thence, in these areas of human life and activity, the scholar has no advantage over the average person. And excessive logic and rationality may merely act as a drag.

Christians of an earlier era were assisted by sacred art, religious music, seasonal celebrations, feasts and fasts and change of colours. Along with various forms of demythologisation has come in recent years, a dull, drab, colourless, prosaic view of life and of human realities, leaving **no space for a sense of mystery, admiration and wonder**. In an effort to satisfy the consequent hunger, with none to help him, the human person swings either in one direction to various forms of 'FUNDAMENTALISM', or on the other to some sort of esoteric spiritual experiences.

The Asian psyche that is resistant to cold logic and arguments about historicity, is **open to symbols, figures, signs, persons, experiences**. When 'inculturation' will not be merely a theologian's exercise, but a community's manner of expressing its faith in stirring symbols, a new phase of Evangelisation will begin in Asia. It is enough to see how **people crowd to sacred places, shrines, rivers, mountains, healers, and holy men**. Prophetic personalities are like '**LIVED PARABLES**' for Asians. One may think of a Mahatma Gandhi or a Mother Teresa.

Asians understand the value of fasts, austerity of life, renunciation, service. But all these should not merely be things accomplished, but symbols of and pointers to spiritual realities. We should not rejoice solely in the number of children we educate, or sick persons we heal in our missionary institutions. We cannot be fully satisfied with the enormous amount of social work done or social goals achieved by our missionary personnel, or even with the increasing number of priests and religious we form to take up the missionary tasks that lie ahead. **Can all these visible achievements be made 'SYMBOLS' of Transcendent Realities, and reminders of Abiding Truths?** Can they be made to speak of, teach, describe and point to something beyond what is 'visible', to higher things than those that can be counted and measured and calculated? A praying community, for example, would be a pointer to the Eternal. The future of Evangelisation will depend greatly on this undefinable quality of all our life and work.

Gordon Bowles ends his book 'The People of Asia' with these few lines: "Every continent, and doubtless, every ethnic group has added a part, no

matter how small, to the accumulated store of human knowledge and experience. Possibly the people of Asia have even contributed the lion's share. While it might be said that Asia lost the lead with the commencement of the Renaissance, the age of discovery and later the Industrial Revolution, the people of that continent have already begun to meet the challenge of the modern world. There is no way of predicting in what directions and to what lengths their creative ingenuity may carry them, particularly if they heed the admonitions of **many of the teachers and sages** of Asia's great civilisations. Many times in the past the **people of Asia have taken the leadership**. There are signs that they could do so again in the future".

A great future awaits on the continent of Asia, where the **pursuit of Truth is the highest human ideal**, for conveying the message of the One who said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life".

LA RENCONTRE DU MESSAGE DE JESUS ET DE LA CULTURE JAPONAISE

Par Ernest D. Pyrins

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Réfléchir sur le message de Jésus d'un côté et la culture japonaise de l'autre n'est pas chose aisée en soi. Il est difficile d'exprimer le cœur du message parce que ses racines plongent dans l'Ancien Testament. Bien plus, il a été transmis à travers un long processus historique d'inculturation, à des peuples différents. L'histoire, processus toujours en marche, impose une empreinte indélébile à l'humanité tout en lui donnant les moyens d'appréhender la réalité. C'est pourquoi, le message s'exprime toujours dans des concepts et des termes issus de ce même processus historique.

Il est de même difficile de dire quelque chose de clair sur la culture du Japon, non pas parce qu'elle est unique mais parce qu'elle est autre. Toute culture est unique quand elle exprime l'homme en tant qu'individu impliqué dans la société et le monde pris dans un contexte particulier. Quoi qu'il en soit, comme pour beaucoup d'autres, nous pouvons dire sans hésitation que la culture japonaise n'est pas facile à étudier.

Elle se poursuit tout au long d'une longue tradition et son fil conducteur nous fait remonter au commencement de l'histoire du Japon et des pays voisins. En même temps, elle va toujours de l'avant, se renouvelle elle-même et assimile toutes les influences venues du monde entier. Néanmoins, tradition et modernité se mélangent souvent et, au milieu d'une telle stupéfiante complexité, chercheurs et étudiants se demandent dans quel laboratoire culturel ils sont immergés.

La même chose peut se dire des religions du Japon qui, originellement, sont extrêmement diverses. Mis à part certains éléments de base qui appartiennent au "Shinto" (la voie des dieux), la plupart proviennent d'une religion étrangère ou d'un complexe religieux remodelé selon l'expérience fondamentale qu'ont les Japonais du sacré et du Shinto. Elles sont à l'origine du bouddhisme, du taoïsme, du confucianisme ou du christianisme japonais aujourd'hui.

Toutes les religions et toutes les représentations du monde ou de la vie des Japonais sont étroitement liées dans l'inconscient populaire et aboutissent à un étonnant syncrétisme. Du point de vue philosophique, ces systèmes religieux ont été enrichis ou cooptés par l'esprit japonais et les forces politiques. A tel point que le syncrétisme religieux japonais se pose comme base philosophique permettant l'incorporation dans l'unique complexe japonais de maints éléments étrangers au Japon et même l'incorporation de tous les systèmes religieux, para-religieux ou philosophiques.

En somme, l'esprit religieux et la vie de tous les jours auront, sans aucun doute de multiples aspects. Ils sont faits de flou, de croyances et de pratiques magico-religieuses. Beaucoup sont des survivances ou les successeurs d'éléments archaïques et primitifs encore vivants aujourd'hui. Ces éléments demeurent fondamentalement non systématiques, en théorie comme en pratique, tout en étant reliés les uns aux autres par le biais des religions structurées.

Il existe chez les Japonais tout un ensemble d'attitudes tant intérieures qu'extérieures, ressenties très profondément par le peuple, nourries par lui, transformées et transmises de génération en génération. Les gens semblent croire que leur vie requiert certains actes, cérémonies ou fêtes, souvent en lien avec plus ou moins de magie et de tabous. On pourrait dire qu'il s'agit d'une simple religion folklorique, mais ce ne serait pas tout à fait exact, car c'est toute la population du Japon qui se sent concernée.

Un exemple pourra nous éclairer. Les Japonais sont connus pour leur attachement à la nature. Alors que bien des villes sont laides et désordonnées, la nature y est d'une stupéfiante beauté et d'une variété prodigieuse. Quelquefois la nature est terrifiante et dévastatrice avec les tremblements de terre, les typhons, les glissements de terrain, etc. Mais sans aucun doute, chaque saison de l'année possède sa splendeur propre et il y a peu de peuples au monde comme les Japonais pour se réjouir devant un de ces

sites magnifiques. Ils aiment le clair de lune, les cerisiers en fleurs et le rouge des érables. En même temps, ils savent qu'il faut être prudent avec la nature et attentif aux tremblements de terre, aux incendies et aux raz de marée. Ces fléaux ont donné à ce peuple la conscience de la fragilité de l'homme et de la nature, de leur contingence et de leur évanescence. La beauté et l'aspect menaçant de la nature ont leur source dans le shintoïsme et le bouddhisme, et sont mêlés à un amalgame de sentiments et de sensations dont l'ensemble se retrouve tant dans le domaine de la culture que dans l'expérience religieuse.

L'amour de la nature peut suffire comme exemple mais n'est pas exhaustif. Une citation de deux courts textes peut aider à comprendre cette double réaction. L'un est tiré du *Manyôshû* (Recueil des dix-mille feuilles), une compilation de poèmes par Tachibana no Moroe vers 750 et l'autre, du *Hôjôki* (Souvenirs de ma petite hutte), écrit par Kamo no Chômei (1155-1216). Le premier est très influencé par le Shinto et se compose de poèmes écrits par divers amoureux de la nature. Le second est vraiment bouddhiste.

Le *Manyôshû* observe: *“Il neigeait hier — et aujourd'hui il neige. J'ai fait des marques sur la prairie pour préparer l'herbe de demain”*. La première des pensées du *Hôjôki* est: *“La rivière coule sans cesse et l'eau n'est jamais la même, elle entraîne l'écume toujours renouvelée du bassin et s'en va, jamais tranquille un seul instant. De même l'homme et sa demeure”*.

L'amour de la nature n'est qu'un aspect de l'arrière-plan général d'où la culture, l'expérience religieuse, les religions et les conceptions de la vie tirent leur origine. Ce qui montre par l'un ou l'autre biais, que la rencontre du christianisme avec le Japon aura ses propres passerelles comme ses propres barrières.

Réfléchir au processus d'une rencontre du message chrétien et de la culture japonaise comporte un certain risque. Qui nous protégera d'une surestimation ou d'une sous-estimation de l'un ou de l'autre? Où trouver le juste équilibre? Faut-il chercher les similitudes ou insister sur les divergences? Il est douteux que l'un et l'autre puissent correspondre à un projet d'évangélisation ou même à un dialogue interreligieux. L'un et l'autre ont leurs limites et leur partialité et il faut toujours craindre l'outrance des positions.

Culture et religion: principes généraux

La forêt des définitions est déroutante quand il s'agit de culture. Comme outil de travail, je propose la paraphrase suivante: la culture n'est pas seulement une entreprise élitiste limitée aux beaux-arts, à la littérature et à la philosophie, mais plutôt la façon globale dont une société humaine répond à son environnement. Cela inclut les coutumes caractéristiques du groupe social; l'hérédité sociale d'une communauté particulière; les significations, les coutumes, les valeurs, les normes, les actions et les liens de parenté, les croyances, les lois, les traditions et les institutions d'une société; la religion, le rituel, le langage, le chant, les danses, les banquets, l'habillement, les métiers, les outils, et tout ce qui est particulier à ce groupe social. La culture est un ensemble de facteurs qui fait d'une personne une individualité membre d'une communauté. Cela s'acquiert par la naissance et par le fait qu'on est une personne insérée dans l'univers des hommes. On est programmé, éduqué et endoctriné dans un certain comportement humain suivant que l'on est Japonais, Chinois, Scandinave ou Brésilien. A la lumière de cette paraphrase, une distinction est possible entre deux aspects fondamentaux de la culture, l'un étant l'immanence et la profondeur, comme une sorte de soubassement, l'autre la manifestation extérieure. Cette distinction affine notre paraphrase sur la culture et est importante pour éclairer notre conception de la mission et de l'évangélisation comme nous le verrons plus tard. L'immanence peut être vue comme une élaboration intérieure de l'esprit, une certaine façon de penser, un sentiment particulier d'appartenance à une société donnée et à une race. C'est à partir de cette dimension intérieure profonde que s'élaborent les manifestations extérieures de la culture. C'est la somme totale de ces réactions physiques et mentales et leur activité qui façonnent le comportement d'une société ou d'un groupe racial dans leurs relations au milieu.

Existe aussi un lien intime entre ces deux aspects eux-mêmes. Ils ne peuvent pas être vus comme superposés, l'un au dessus de l'autre, parce qu'il y a entre eux un continuuel mouvement d'aller et de retour. Les deux sont sujets au changement bien que l'on puisse dire sans se tromper que, pour ce qui est de l'immanence, les changements se font beaucoup plus lentement que ceux qui se produisent régulièrement au niveau de la manifestation externe. Ce côté immanent de la culture explique en particulier qu'une individualité la considère comme faisant partie de lui et soit toujours quelque peu ethnocentrique. Tout le monde se voit, lui ou elle-même, comme un membre spécifique de la

communauté qui fait partie d'un peuple dont il parle la langue et dont il a adopté le mode de vie. Donner un nom à cette manière de mesurer toute chose par les principes propres à un peuple ou à son génie, nous permet de parler d'ethnocentrisme ou de particularisme comme d'une attitude commune à toute l'humanité.

En même temps, il est évident que nous ne pouvons pas parler d'ethnocentrisme sans faire référence à la relativité culturelle. Ceci signifie qu'il existe une multitude de formes culturelles dans lesquelles l'ethnocentrisme s'exprime ou se contredit lui-même. En ce sens, l'ethnocentrisme en lui-même n'est pas un phénomène péjoratif. Il devient un facteur négatif ou dangereux quand la tension entre particularisme ou ethnocentrisme d'une part et universalisme ou pluralisme d'autre part devient si forte que l'ethnocentrisme dégénère en nationalisme étroit et hostile. Ceci conduit inévitablement à un orgueil exagéré, à un égoïsme collectif et même à la guerre.

Conformément à cette conception de la culture, on peut admettre que la sensibilité au sacré ou à l'au-delà du réel soit quelque chose qui s'enracine dans ce côté immanent de la culture. Ceci peut s'appeler religiosité (à ne pas confondre avec la religion folklorique ou la religiosité populaire). Quand cette religiosité se manifeste elle-même de façon plus ou moins structurée, nous pouvons parler de religion en tant que telle. Ces manifestations peuvent être de formes variées comme les mythes, les rituels, les croyances, les théologies, etc. Il est clair que cette conception de la religion est beaucoup plus large que celle à laquelle nous sommes habitués. Philosophies, idéologies et conceptions de la vie appartiennent à la réalité religieuse parce que toutes expriment comment l'homme essaie de transcender l'aujourd'hui de sa condition et désire un destin meilleur et plus élevé pour la fin de sa vie. Cette fin est précisément le but à réaliser et pas encore atteint. C'est ce que nous préférons, nous, nommer "l'au-delà de la réalité" dont les synonymes sont Dieu, Yahweh, Allah, Mahatman, le Bouddha, la Société sans classe, l'Humanisme, etc.

Cette variété de mythes, rituels, croyances, théologies, philosophies, etc. reflète l'expérience du sacré et par conséquent suppose la recherche de l'être, du sens et de la vérité. C'est cette conception de la religion qui nous permet de tout rattacher, par l'intermédiaire de la religiosité, à ce côté immanent de la culture. Il est ainsi clair que la religion n'est pas seulement un segment de la culture mais un de ses éléments qu'on retrouve partout. Il est également

vrai que religion et religiosité sont inhérentes à l'homme et intégralement humaines.

Les modifications dans l'immanent et l'extériorisation de la culture ont des répercussions sur religion et religiosité et vice-versa. De plus, depuis que toutes les sphères de la culture sont en relation mutuelle, un changement en religion ou en religiosité a un effet sur l'ensemble de la culture. Par conséquent, une certaine culture peut être bouleversée ou refuser une religion autre que la sienne propre, si cette nouvelle religion se présente elle-même comme très élaborée, faisant un tout, avec l'intention de s'implanter dans une culture particulière. La raison en est que, non seulement il s'agit d'une culture qui a sa propre religion mais que deux complexes culturels se trouvent face à face.

Ceci débouche sur cette très importante question: que faut-il proclamer au Japon? Serait-ce la religion chrétienne ou le message du Christ en vue de construire une chrétienté japonaise, enracinée dans le Christ et la culture du Japon? La question se pose pour toute activité missionnaire et toute évangélisation parce que tous les peuples du monde, au milieu d'un universalisme grandissant qui pousse à l'unité, insistent sur la spécificité de leur culture. Même en concluant que le christianisme au Japon a atteint un certain niveau de maturité, comme le montre par exemple le rôle des écoles chrétiennes, des intellectuels et autres croyants chrétiens, sommes-nous pour autant autorisés à dire que la religion chrétienne est devenue une part ou pour le moins une parcelle de la culture japonaise?

Il semble qu'il nous faudrait fouiller davantage en profondeur pour être plus pleinement obéissant au mandat du Christ de proclamer son message au Japon. D'ailleurs, tout ce que nous venons d'écrire de la culture et de la religion nous conduit à la conclusion qu'une rencontre plus en profondeur avec le message du Christ doit prendre sa place au niveau de l'immanent de la culture et non à celui de son extériorisation. Si cette sorte de rencontre se réalisait, un réel christianisme japonais pourrait naître.

Le message de Jésus Christ

Quel est le message de Jésus-Christ? Proclamer le message du Christ est une forme d'activité voulue par l'idéal du Royaume de Dieu dont le Christ lui-même est le prototype de par sa vie, sa mort et sa résurrection. Son message est centré sur la Bonne Nouvelle de Dieu, son plan salvifique pour l'humanité et pour le monde: *"Le Royaume de Dieu est*

a portée de la main; convertissez-vous et croyez à la Bonne Nouvelle” (Mc 1,15). L’accent est mis sur la venue et son immédiate proximité. Le Royaume signifie que Dieu se révèle comme le libérateur qui vient combler définitivement nos espérances. Il signifie que Dieu est Abba, le Père, qui a créé le monde et signifié un amour inconditionnel pour nous pécheurs qui cherchons la rédemption. Le Royaume signifie la fiabilité radicale de Dieu, le don de lui-même qu’il nous fait et qui nous accorde un avenir, en dépit de toutes les expériences contraires.

Dans le Royaume, Dieu règne. Dire que Jésus est complètement accaparé par nous est vrai, mais il faut immédiatement corriger et préciser qu’il est complètement accaparé par nous parce qu’il est complètement accaparé par Dieu, qui est Dieu-pour-nous-avec- nous. Cette offre d’amour immense demande une réponse, une conversion que Jésus appelle “conversion”, ou retournement de tout l’homme vers Dieu. Cette conversion n’est pas une facette de notre vie parmi d’autres, elle est réellement un mouvement positif et décisif pour se détourner du péché, un retournement vers Dieu en vue du Royaume.

Quand nous nous tournons vers le Royaume, un puissant mouvement de réalisation personnelle et sociale commence qui balaie toute l’histoire et a des répercussions sur toute l’humanité. Une nouvelle relation s’est créée avec Dieu: Dieu oublie nos péchés et nous étreint de son amour. Cette relation avec Dieu se caractérise par l’exigence d’une absolue loyauté de notre part et de sa promesse d’être avec nous dans toutes les situations de notre vie. Nous recevons une nouvelle jeunesse, une nouvelle intégrité, une dignité, la liberté, un dégageant de toute aliénation.

Le Christ ressuscité est le modèle de l’humanité nouvelle appelée à de nouvelles valeurs: la paix du coeur en contraste avec l’observance servile de la loi, l’amour, la charité, la prière et le sacrifice vécus devant Dieu et libres de ce que les gens peuvent penser de nous. Ce ne sont pas les observances rituelles qui nous font bons ou mauvais. La vraie vie n’existe plus quand on la vit dans l’égoïsme. Elle nous est donnée gracieusement quand nous sommes prêts à la perdre. Jésus lui-même est l’incarnation du Royaume. Par sa vie, sa mort et sa résurrection, il devient notre rédempteur, le prototype du Royaume, l’homme nouveau ou l’humanité divinisée. En lui nous découvrons ce que signifie le salut: être accueilli par Dieu, le Père bien-aimé, avec tendresse, être transformé sur le modèle du Christ Jésus. C’est ce que nous pouvons considérer plus ou moins

comme les principes de base du message du Christ. On les trouve d’évidence dans le Nouveau Testament qui est l’accomplissement de l’Ancien. Ils sont le résumé de la révélation de Dieu à son peuple Israël et culminent dans l’incarnation du Verbe (Logos) en la personne de Jésus de Nazareth, qui, par sa crucifixion et sa mort, est devenu le Seigneur Ressuscité.

La rencontre du message chrétien et de la culture japonaise

Que signifie tout cela pour un peuple qui possède bien d’autres religions et qui n’a jamais été touché par Dieu? Quand le monde connu à l’Ouest se limitait à l’Europe chrétienne, la question ne se posait pas. Mais la découverte d’autres continents a poussé à l’étude des cultures et des religions non occidentales. Depuis le siècle dernier, nous sommes devenus pleinement conscients de l’immense pluralisme du monde qui va des plus archaïques aux plus sophistiquées des cultures et des religions. Cela nous pousse à repenser l’action de cette présence de Dieu, de sa providence dans le contexte de la solidarité entre tous les peuples et des conséquences sotériologiques de son action.

A. Leçons reçues des Pères de l’Eglise primitive

Un large courant existe dans la théologie chrétienne qui tente un retour en arrière en vue d’une étude renouvelée de la Bible, des Pères de l’Eglise primitive. Laissons de côté l’exégèse biblique, et voyons ce que nous disent les théologiens. Ils trouvent leur inspiration dans le prologue de l’Evangile de Jean qui se réfère au Logos, le Verbe de Dieu, ce qui plus tard donnera la théologie du Logos. Ils insistent sur Dieu Providence et le don de la grâce qui, depuis le commencement du monde, joue le rôle du pédagogue en vue de l’avènement du Christ.

La théologie du Logos trouve son expression devenue classique chez le martyr Justin (100-165) qui essaie d’exprimer la fonction et la personne du Christ dans le contexte du monde méditerranéen. Justin dit que le Logos divin, dans sa plénitude, apparaît dans le Christ mais que la semence de ce Logos était répandue à travers toute l’humanité longtemps avant qu’il ne se manifeste en la personne de Jésus de Nazareth, lequel a été relevé de la mort. Tout homme dans son esprit possède un petit germe du Logos, et non pas seulement les patriarches et les prophètes mais aussi les philosophes païens.

Toutefois leur con-naissance était incomplète et souvent contradictoire.

Aujourd'hui, un courant toujours grandissant de réflexion théologique insiste sur la valeur de cette théologie du Logos pour bâtir des ponts vers les peuples de foi et de culture différentes, sans pour autant négliger les évidentes barrières. C'est ce que dit Vatican II de façon explicite: *"L'Eglise catholique ne rejette rien de ce qu'il y a de vrai et de saint dans ces religions... qui souvent reflètent un rayon de la Vérité qui éclaire tous les hommes"*. Ce point de vue sur les autres religions a été négligé depuis des siècles par les théologiens chrétiens à l'exception de quelques isolés tels que Raymond Lulle, Nicolas Cusin, Juan de Lugo, Pic de la Mirandole et d'autres. Il y a beaucoup de raisons à cette attitude négative, par exemple la conception plutôt pessimiste de l'humanité coupable et l'écrasante influence du processus d'inculturation européen sur le message du Christ. Les opinions de la théologie catholique et protestante sur la nature humaine ont joué un rôle énorme dans ce négativisme. Le message a fini par s'exprimer de manière tellement exclusive dans le contexte européen que le Dieu révélé par Jésus est devenu le Dieu tribal de la chrétienté occidentale. Les missionnaires sont partis partout dans le monde propager la chrétienté sans savoir qu'en fait, c'est la chrétienté occidentale qu'ils propageaient, gagnant des non-chrétiens à l'Eglise d'Occident et enseignant la théologie occidentale comme si elle était la forme définitive de la foi chrétienne. Bien sûr, pour nous, nous attaquer aux méthodes et à la théologie du temps passé relève de l'indignité. Ces missionnaires servaient la cause du Royaume avec les moyens dont ils disposaient. Une critique dure et sévère ne peut servir la présente tâche d'évangélisation.

L'incarnation culturelle de la foi

Quand nous voulons expliciter la foi chrétienne, nous usons toujours de mots et nous devons être conscients que nos efforts humains ne peuvent pas l'exprimer complètement. La foi, quand elle est une foi humaine, a besoin de mots, de symboles et d'images qu'on appelle croyances, et ces croyances sont nécessaires par ce que c'est par elles que les peuples peuvent partager leur foi et agir comme instruments de Dieu pour la communiquer et former une communauté. Les croyances sont des expressions de la foi et sont toujours liées à une culture. Bien des peuples partagent la même foi mais possèdent des croyances différentes accordées à leurs cultures respectives, chacun à son niveau et dans le moment particulier de son histoire. Voici ce que dit Congar: *"On est une*

personne dans une société avec d'autres. On est un croyant, dans l'Eglise, avec d'autres. La foi et ses célébrations, ses pratiques ont donc ainsi leur expression dans un espace culturel donné, dans une communauté de culture, dans une histoire et un destin. Ces expressions sont dans et à travers l'art, la littérature, la poésie et les chants, les coutumes, les fêtes et les rituels, demandées par le caractère communautaire de l'ensemble. Elles sont nécessaires pour le rayonnement social et signes de vitalité". D'où il ressort qu'exprimer le contenu de la foi chrétienne devrait se faire en utilisant le contexte particulier du Japon. Ceci est tout à fait clair quand nous considérons ce qui, de toujours, appartient au peuple japonais, et est le produit de sa culture spécifique, qui répond à Dieu librement par ses offrandes.

La proclamation du message du Christ de quelque manière que ce soit et la pratique d'une adhésion fidèle doivent se situer à l'intérieur de la culture et des religions du Japon. Nous devons toujours avoir à l'esprit l'aspect immanent de la culture et de la religiosité japonaises, là où la sensibilité et l'appel du sacré sont enracinés.

Retournons au processus de la rencontre du message du Christ avec la culture et essayons de voir ce que signifie l'inculturation. On peut voir comment le message révélé dans un contexte culturel particulier produit une authentique expérience de la vie chrétienne. Cette expérience trouve son expression non seulement à travers les éléments propres à une culture mais aussi comme un principe qui vivifie, rafraîchit, dirige et unifie une culture, transforme et refait, devient comme une "nouvelle création". La culture ainsi est régénérée par une rencontre avec le message du Christ sur le Royaume de Dieu et ses valeurs individuelles et communautaires, qui s'impriment dans l'immanence de la culture et en conséquence, dans la religiosité elle-même. C'est en pensant à cette sorte d'inculturation que nous posons la question suivante: faut-il, au Japon, proclamer le christianisme comme religion ou le message de Jésus sur le Royaume en vue de construire une chrétienté japonaise? Il est évident que le message est premier, surtout au Japon où la religion structurée est certainement moins attrayante pour l'individu.

Bien sûr, personne ne peut nier que le processus d'inculturation est déjà en place. Par un ou l'autre biais, le message change le Japon et on ne peut pas nier que la médiation de l'Eglise, par ses prêtres japonais, le personnel expatrié et la communauté chrétienne elle-même, est très importante et efficace dans ce processus. Si nous avons insisté sur une inculturation toujours en expansion, nous sommes tout à fait conscients qu'il ne faut pas nous attendre à

des résultats spectaculaires en un court laps de temps. Ce que nous devons garder à l'esprit c'est la nécessité d'insuffler dans la culture japonaise les valeurs évangéliques, si bien que les communautés chrétiennes qui sont le signe réel de la venue du Royaume en deviennent les héritières. Ces communautés chrétiennes deviendront chrétienté japonaise.

Le piège du syncrétisme?

L'inculturation ne nous conduirait-elle pas dans un piège? Ce danger a toujours préoccupé les théologiens soucieux de préserver la vérité du message du Christ. Mais pourrions-nous dire qu'il n'y a pas une religion qui ne soit syncrétique au sens large du mot? User des termes et des notions d'une autre culture et d'une autre religion n'est pas dangereux aussi longtemps que le message originel est préservé. Un exemple serait la totale identification de Dieu avec la nature de Bouddha. Quoi qu'il en soit, le syncrétisme n'est pas à évacuer inconsidérément. La solution de ce problème demande une grande vitalité dans le dialogue avec le Verbe de Dieu et des concepts plus authentiques. D'un autre côté, nous ne devrions pas nous effrayer d'une possible assimilation de notions et de termes si cela devait favoriser fécondation et croissance. Par exemple, la très forte teneur d'immanentisme du bouddhisme et la notion d'absolue réalité du Shinto pourraient enrichir la notion traditionnelle chrétienne de Dieu transcendant qui, virtuellement, n'a rien à voir avec la réalité intérieure de ce monde. Les chrétiens non occidentaux ont ici un rôle très important à jouer. La sensibilité à leur propre culture est très présente chez eux, plus que chez les missionnaires étrangers. Leur rôle est donc très important dans le processus d'inculturation par une combinaison spontanée entre leur sensibilité japonaise innée à l'immanence de l'ultime réalité et une possible recherche de la transcendance de Dieu du christianisme occidental. C'est à un enrichissement qu'aboutit la révélation du message et non au syncrétisme. Le message touche en même temps l'aspect immanent de la culture et la religiosité.

Y a-t-il un message purement chrétien?

Une autre difficile question est à aborder: culturellement parlant, existe-t-il un message du Christ originellement pur? Ou bien: son message n'était-il pas déjà inculturé, même dans sa forme la plus dépouillée? L'incarnation de Dieu ou de son Verbe le conduisait à une inculturation dans la communauté juive chrétienne, suivie par d'autres inculturations dans les mondes

grec, romain et occidental. Prenons l'exemple de Dieu que Jésus nomme "Père". Est-ce une expression liée à la culture? Pouvons-nous dire qu'elle est vraiment pertinente à des cultures où des non chrétiens, fidèles croyants, essaient de donner un nom à l'inexprimable ultime réalité en la nommant "Mère"? Sommes-nous vraiment sûrs que le romancier japonais Shûsaku Endô s'est complètement trompé quand il écrit sur la mère--culture du Japon qui embrasse tout? IL y a beaucoup de cultes de la fertilité où l'absolue réalité est appelée "Mère". De plus, ne pouvons-nous pas nous demander si oui ou non, Dieu comme "Père" est encore tout à fait signifiant pour le monde occidental. Et que dire de l'explosion récente de la théologie féministe?

Il n'est certainement pas possible de relancer le processus japonais d'inculturation à partir de ce que l'on appelle le message primitif et originel du Christ, en effaçant tout ce qui a précédé, c'est-à-dire la tradition de l'Eglise qui est, depuis le temps des apôtres, un témoignage sur le Christ. Cela ne signifie pas pour autant que l'inculturation occidentale du message soit si providentielle que le christianisme occidental en soit la forme définitive et que le message lui-même ne puisse accepter rien d'autre que cette structure culturelle occidentale.

Ceci nous montre que l'inculturation n'est pas qu'un problème théorique mais qu'elle est aussi un problème théologique et pastoral. Un message du Christ déculturé n'existe pas, même dans ce qu'il a d'essentiel. Il est toujours transmis dans le cadre de la structure culturelle de celui qui le transmet. Cela vaut pour l'intermédiaire japonais pris entre sa propre culture et le christianisme occidental aussi bien que pour les étrangers qui ne peuvent se débarrasser de leur contexte occidental. Il semble que le processus d'inculturation passe par plusieurs phases succes-sives. L'histoire montre qu'il s'agit tout d'abord d'une phase de dissonances et d'oppositions cul-turelles pour, graduellement, atteindre la phase des consonances. Non seulement aucune de ses phases ne peuvent être séparées l'une de l'autre mais elles sont complémentaires. En phase terminale, celui qui reçoit s'ouvre à un nouveau mandat et à une nouvelle vie dans le Christ. Il trouve des modes d'expression pour témoigner dans la fidélité à sa propre culture et au message. Ceci montre aussi la nécessité d'une formation personnelle pour ceux qui ont à transmettre le message. Des orientations théologiques, spirituelles et pastorales peuvent favoriser ou gêner l'inculturation.

Passerelles et barrières

Comme nous l'avons dit plus haut, la rencontre du message du Christ avec la culture du Japon, va toucher d'abord, avant tout, au côté immanent de la culture et de la religiosité. Nous présumons qu'en fait le message a un rôle critique. Il accepte et perfectionne ce qui est bon. Il rejette ce qui est faux, guérit ce qui peut être guéri. Il appelle à la conversion et au repentir. Jésus en a fait le cœur de son Evangile. Il demande un retour de quelque chose vers autre chose. On se détourne de son ancienne vie, non qu'elle soit coupable dans son ensemble, mais seulement parce qu'elle est très relative. Les valeurs les plus profondes de la culture japonaise et de sa religiosité doivent être préservées et purifiées parce qu'elles sont de Dieu. Un non-chrétien ne vient pas à Dieu les mains vides. Les valeurs qu'il ou elle porte doivent passer au crible du message. C'est en même temps le côté "virage à prendre" de la conversion. On se tourne vers le Royaume de Dieu. Ce qui fait que la conversion chrétienne est différente de celle des autres religions, c'est le Christ. La conversion devient la découverte et l'acceptation de l'Être suprême, la Vérité et la Vie en lui. On se détourne d'une forme de vie jusqu'alors autonome pour s'ouvrir au Royaume qui vient et qui est déjà là dans le Christ. Nous avons à nous défaire de cette idée que nous arriverons à nous réaliser par nous-mêmes.

Ceci nous amène à aborder la question des passerelles et des barrières qui existent entre le message et le Japon. Une approche phénoménologique est très utile quand il s'agit d'une richesse littéraire. Une réflexion théologique devra suivre et compléter la phénoménologie. Mais il y a un risque quand on parle de façon radicale de passerelles et de barrières, comme si la distinction entre les deux était évidente. En bien des cas, une passerelle peut ressembler à une barrière, pas toujours insurmontable, certes, et comportant quelques aspects tout à fait acceptables.

Comment la religion japonaise voit la réalité

Nous avons ici à regarder la difficile condition humaine ou comment elle est perçue dans les religions et les philosophies. L'exemple du Japon nous aidera. En général, tout le monde a une certaine idée de la vie, de son contenu, des ultimes questions et de l'ultime réalité. Cette dernière peut se nommer concrètement Dieu ou dieux (les divinités Shinto). Les déités bouddhistes, ou les noms très vagues de Bouddha, du Ri céleste du confucianisme ou du Tao du Taoïsme.

Qu'y a-t-il d'évident dans la condition humaine? Premièrement, la vision de ce que nous pensons être nous-mêmes et de ce qui nous entoure: famille, école, milieu de travail, société japonaise et plus largement, le monde. En bref nous occupons une place concrète dans le monde présent. Deuxièmement, nous avons une idée de ce que nous pouvons et voulons devenir plus tard, à la fin de notre vie, si cette fin est une vie au-delà de la vie. Troisièmement, les possibilités que nous avons de passer de maintenant à plus tard. Ces trois éléments sont précisément ce que nous appelons la condition humaine ou la situation de défi où se trouve l'homme. Ces trois points révèlent que l'être humain a non seulement la conviction d'une certaine vérité capable d'expliquer le sens de la vie et de ses développements, mais aussi que ce même être humain est pris dans une action. En termes chrétiens, nous sommes concernés non seulement par la doctrine mais par la praxis. Et Jésus ne nous appelle pas seulement à une vérité religieuse mais à une vie illuminée par son message. Ceci est important pour les Japonais qui disent souvent que religion et éthique sont deux domaines différents de la vie et qu'ils se mêlent rarement l'un avec l'autre. C'est un fait que le domaine religieux au Japon renferme le côté éthique de la vie et que, ainsi, religion et éthique ne sont pas séparés l'un de l'autre mais mélangés. Ce qui apparaît clairement quand on étudie ensemble les religions traditionnelles du Japon et les nouvelles religions. La prétendue séparation entre religion et éthique est artificielle et ne tient pas quand on observe la vie dans le concret. Une vie vécue dans un ou l'autre contexte religieux ou dans un contexte multi-religieux comme au Japon, signifie participation directe des convictions au contexte social. Donc, entre l'Evangile et le Japon, il n'y a pas de barrière essentielle pour ce qui est de la religion et de l'éthique, du moins au niveau des principes. Ceci n'exclue pas pour autant de sérieuses différences entre l'éthique chrétienne et les religions du Japon dans certaines situations concrètes.

Vision japonaise englobante de la réalité — Vision chrétienne de la réalité

Revenant à la condition humaine telle qu'elle apparaît au Japon et dans le message chrétien, il semble que des différences existent entre l'anthropologie chrétienne et l'anthropologie des religions du Japon. Ces dernières sont la cristallisation de la religiosité japonaise telle qu'elle apparaît clairement à travers sa culture. Elle peut se caractériser par une vue englobante de la réalité. Généralement parlant, il ne s'agit pas d'une

division de la réalité en plusieurs catégories différentes. Les Japonais réagissent à coup sûr spontanément en refusant toute dichotomie ou dualisme. Appliqué à la vision de l'absolue réalité, être le kami du Shinto ou le Bouddha, veut dire que le sacré est ancré dans le monde des phénomènes. Ceci est de grande conséquence quand il s'agit de la position de l'individu dans le groupe, du péché et de la culpabilité, du domaine de la connaissance par opposition à l'intuition, des réalités spirituelles ou matérielles, etc. L'impression d'ensemble est qu'il ne semble pas y avoir de très nettes alternatives aux valeurs. Le substrat de base est le même dans le Shinto, le bouddhisme, le confucianisme, le taoïsme ou les nouvelles religions.

Quelle que soit son origine, le "*kami nagara no michi*" (la voie des dieux), qu'on appelle Shinto, après des contacts avec la Corée et la Chine, est considérée comme la religion du pays. "L'aujourd'hui" de quelqu'un est d'être un dieu en puissance. Son "après" est d'être un dieu par la foi, laquelle ne s'apprend pas mais s'acquiert par intuition. Elle se manifeste par des visites au temple, par l'observation d'un certain nombre de rites, par la participation aux "*matsuri*" (fêtes) ou célébrations pour honorer les dieux. Le salut, c'est la réalisation de sa nature de *kami* (dieu) personnelle, en prenant, après sa mort, sa place dans l'assemblée des *kami*.

L'anthropologie bouddhiste enseigne que tout ce que nous sommes possède la nature englobante de Bouddha, bien que nous puissions l'ignorer pour l'instant. Mais si nous arrivons à travailler avec diligence à notre salut, en suivant les huit chemins, nous parviendrons à la connaissance, celle d'être semblable à la nature de Bouddha et de disparaître en lui. Le confucianisme vise la conformité avec le Ri céleste (raison). Cela doit se refléter dans une conduite personnelle concrète dans le réseau de nos relations sociales. Le taoïsme cherche l'unité avec le Tao qui englobe tout, éternel et principe le plus haut du monde naturel et moral. On doit le trouver se reflétant dans la volonté de non-agressivité ou celle de ne vouloir rien imposer aux autres, à l'imitation des sages taoïstes. L'anthropologie des nouvelles religions du Japon n'est pas très différente parce qu'elle est plus ou moins une simple mise à jour des religions traditionnelles.

Tout ceci n'est pas toujours présent consciemment dans l'esprit des Japonais mais sous-jacent et bien vivant dans le cœur du peuple. Ce que nous avons exposé en termes philosophiques et théologiques est pour une part présent dans le cœur des japonais et se manifeste de lui-même quand il le faut.

Tous ces implications de la nature humaine font que les gens ont vaguement conscience qu'ils sont faits pour le sacré. Ils sont supposés s'approfondir et grandir toujours davantage dans cette identité réelle pré-donnée et cette unité ontologique avec le "*kami*", la nature de bouddha, le ciel et le Tao. Ils deviennent et sont eux-mêmes l'ultime réalité jusqu'à ce que, finalement, ils se dissolvent dans l'éternité sans laisser de trace. Ce qui demeure de leur existence personnelle n'est qu'un pieux souvenir. En fait, ils sont annihilés, absorbés dans la réalité sacrée. Ceci est très différent de la condition chrétienne. Le christianisme dit que l'humanité et le monde ont été créés, sont des entités issues de l'amour d'un Dieu personnel. Ils sont limités, soumis et souvent mutilés par le péché, ils ont besoin de la rédemption qui vient du Verbe de Dieu, incarné dans ce monde, la personne historique de Jésus de Nazareth. Par lui, l'accès à Dieu est assuré et le salut accordé. Le salut procède d'une collaboration entre Dieu et les hommes. Celle de Dieu est un don libre, une grâce (en réalité rien d'autre que la propre vie de Dieu). La contribution de l'homme est l'amour de Dieu et du prochain. C'est notre divinisation, signifiant que Dieu est devenu homme pour que nous puissions devenir Dieu et participions à sa vie divine.

Passerelles et barrières, mais dans quel sens?

Nous avons à nous demander ce que signifie ce qui précède en terme de passerelles et de barrières. Dans le contexte de la situation japonaise et chrétienne, nous pouvons faire les quelques observations suivantes.

1) L'accomplissement

Nous expérimentons nous-mêmes que, comme êtres, nous n'avons pas encore atteint notre plénitude. Nous sommes en devenir, ouverts au futur, ouverts à l'ultime réalité. En somme, nous sommes capables de grandir. Cette progression n'a rien à voir avec l'âge mais avec notre situation existentielle.

En prenant en compte l'arrière-plan religieux japonais, devenir plus humain et homme accompli au sens japonais chrétien, est la plus riche et la plus complète expérience qu'un être humain doué d'un tel potentiel salvifique puisse faire. Les Japonais ont un sens très vif de la fragilité, de la cassure, et de la contingence hérité du bouddhisme. Le message évangélique peut s'appuyer sur cette conscience fondamentale. Il peut dire notre penchant vers la faiblesse et la contingence, approfondir notre

conscience plutôt superficielle du péché et rassembler tout cela dans notre vocation d'être enfants de Dieu. La modernité elle-même vient au secours du message. La recherche montre clairement que la conscience du péché grandit chez les jeunes Japonais. Par là, nous devenons des êtres plus humains. De plus, contingence et sentiment d'aliénation, sous-produits de la modernisation, ont leur origine dans notre existence de pécheur. Par nous-mêmes, nous sommes incapables de devenir de véritables êtres humains précisément à cause de notre condition de pécheurs et d'êtres créés. C'est ici que Jésus-Christ, vrai homme et vrai Dieu, prend sa place. Seul le vrai Dieu sans péché peut exister au plein sens du mot. C'est Jésus-Christ, authentique personne humaine, qui par sa vie, sa mort et sa résurrection a redonné aux fragiles pécheurs d'être de véritables êtres humains. L'homme achevé est authentifié en Jésus-Christ, lui, l'homme vrai. C'est en lui que la divinisation des êtres humains ou leur relèvement s'accomplit.

2) L'apport d'une dimension verticale

Ce Jésus-Christ est aussi la manifestation de Dieu sur terre. Il n'est pas seulement une manifestation du sacré comme le sont beaucoup de *bosatsu* (bodhisattvas) du bouddhisme, ou une trace visible laissée sur terre pour aider les gens à trouver la voie qui conduit au salut en Bouddha. Il n'est pas ce genre de manifestation qui apparaît un moment et qui, sa tâche achevée, se retire dans l'intemporel de la nature cosmique de Bouddha. Jésus-Christ est le point culminant de la manifestation de Dieu dans une personne historique et non une figure mythologique. Il reste avec nous tout au long de notre vie et du déroulement de notre histoire humaine. L'incarnation de la vie de Dieu et du Verbe dans le Jésus de Nazareth de l'histoire montre aussi ce qui peut advenir quand il s'anéantit lui-même (*kenosis*). Il participe à nos joies, à nos souffrances et passe par la mort et la résurrection. Il devient notre Sauveur, Seigneur glorifié, prototype de ce que peut devenir vraiment le "pas encore achevé" et "l'être humain en devenir". Ceci montre la nature transcendante de Jésus en tant que Fils de Dieu. La propre nature transcendante de Dieu, à cause de l'incarnation de Jésus de Nazareth s'enfonce au cœur du monde des phénomènes. Ce même Jésus qui devient Seigneur brise l'horizontalité de ce monde et lui donne une dimension verticale, le soulevant vers sa source, le Dieu créateur. Jésus, le ressuscité, devient le point d'intersection de l'horizontalité et de la verticalité.

Accès vers Dieu

Par Jésus-Christ nous avons accès à Dieu, notre but ultime. Quel que soit son enseignement, Jésus se réfère toujours à Dieu. Son message doit rendre clair que Dieu ne peut être déterminé par un anthropomorphisme comme dans le Shinto. Le dieu du Shinto est surtout présenté comme un surhomme fondamentalement homme. Nous devons insister sur le caractère théocentrique du message. Dieu manifeste sa divinité dans une personne humaine et appelle toutes les dimensions de la vie de l'homme à s'ordonner à la divinité. Ce n'est pas une créature humaine qui détermine qui est Dieu. Dieu se fait connaître à travers la nature, les événements, les personnes et particulièrement celle de Jésus. Dieu est personnel ou mieux transpersonnel, au dessus de l'humain mais en même temps impliqué, mêlé à l'histoire des hommes. Le côté intériorité au monde de l'ultime réalité des Japonais doit être corrigé comme doit être évité l'ancienne conception de Dieu trônant au sommet de toute réalité humaine. Mais il serait également faux de vouloir suivre la conception japonaise et de présenter Dieu comme trop immanent et comme une pure fonction de la réalité terrestre. Dans ce cas, Dieu serait réduit à la condition humaine et à ses dimensions. Le Japon d'aujourd'hui semble vouloir changer son ancien polythéisme et ses dieux anthropomorphes en un vague monothéisme, monothéisme mal conçu certes, mais qui, ici, doit être considéré comme positif.

Des individus en communauté

La conversion au Royaume de Dieu en Christ nous apporte une relation unique avec Dieu le quel nous fait nous rencontrer et nous réconcilier avec nos frères et nos sœurs. Il nous rassemble autour du Christ ressuscité et crée une communauté qu'on appelle Eglise. Un mot plus approprié pour désigner l'Eglise serait: chrétiens ensemble. Cet ensemble n'est pas fondé sur un tribalisme étroit ou un clan. C'est une communauté où le chrétien doit expérimenter le salut. Le salut dans les religions primitives, et c'est encore le cas du Shinto et de certaines de ses extensions, comme la fameuse "japonité" en général, est accordé sur la base de l'appartenance au groupe sacré. La collectivité elle-même est sujet de religion et le salut est accordé et réalisé parce qu'on est né, qu'on a été élevé et que l'on vit dans le groupe. Cela est donné presque automatiquement. Le groupe est considéré

comme une sorte d'entité sacrée qui l'emporte sur l'individu. Il s'ensuit que le concept de "personne" n'est pas complètement développé parce que le "groupe tribal" avec ses propres dieux ne permet pas de pouvoir maintenir un individu au dessus ou contre les autres. Il faut souligner que ce type de tribalisme est totalement différent de l'ethnocentrisme déjà mentionné plus haut. Dans les religions universelles, le salut est accordé sur la base d'une situation personnelle quand fait défaut tout système de salut. Cette caractéristique structurelle, distinctive des religions universelles n'est pas pour très longtemps la collectivité comme seul sujet de la religion, car, très vite, c'est l'individu qui lui est substitué. L'individu se considère comme ayant perdu le contact avec le sacré, et cela s'exprime par la conscience d'une cassure et du péché (christianisme) ou d'une illusion et d'une ignorance de sa propre nature ou de celle de quelqu'un (bouddhisme). La passage des religions tribales aux religions universelles se manifeste par un profond changement dans l'existence humaine et dans la manière dont on envisage les relations à son milieu. Une personne se voit s'échapper des frontières du groupe sacré et se faire des relations avec d'autres et son environnement réel. Comment quelqu'un crée des relations avec d'autres et comment ils forment une communauté dépend de la perception qu'il a de l'appel du sacré. Dans le bouddhisme mahayana, l'individu poursuit seul le chemin du salut et le cherche en solitaire. Dans le bouddhisme mahayana on doit être un *bosatsu* ou un sauveur pour les autres. Dans l'islam, le "*umma*" ou la communauté globale de tous les musulmans ensemble est très important. Il dépasse les classes sociales et les frontières. Dans le christianisme, créer des relations et former une communauté est quelque chose de très fort parce que c'est souligner non seulement la dignité d'une personne libre et unique mais également mettre en valeur son existence en la propulsant dans le grand tout, l'Eglise universelle. Christ lui-même dit que nous avons à aimer Dieu et notre prochain comme nous-mêmes. Dans l'Evangile, nous trouvons la vie communautaire et même certains éléments institutionnels. L'évolution des religions claniques en religions de type universel n'a rien d'un processus irrévocable allant de la collectivité à l'individu parce qu'il s'agit de religions universelles douées de structures communautaires innées. L'islam en est peut-être le meilleur exemple. C'est aussi le cas du christianisme.

Que le christianisme s'écarte consciemment ou non de la communauté dépend de la compréhension correcte ou incorrecte du message du Christ dans telles conditions historiques données. En effet, il y a toujours un danger à céder à une tendance trop individualiste comme le montre l'histoire du christianisme. Quoi qu'il en soit, il est urgent pour nous d'équilibrer le côté individuel du salut par une volonté d'être ensemble avec les autres dans la foi, et d'appeler ceux qui ne participant pas encore à se joindre à la communauté autour du Christ ressuscité. C'est ici que témoigner du Christ et de son message prend sa place et manifeste un esprit missionnaire explicite. Beaucoup de récents exposés théologiques redécouvrent que l'Eglise entière, comme chaque chrétien, est missionnaire de par sa vraie nature. Nous devons nous tourner vers les autres avec l'espoir de partager le salut reçu du Christ, renouveler le monde et célébrer la communauté qui nous a acceptés et de qui personne n'est exclu. Seulement, essayons de construire une communauté où personne ne puisse rester dehors et dans laquelle tous sont invités à pouvoir se réclamer d'une maturité crédible.

Il est clair que, quand on en vient à une évaluation de la culture et des religions, il s'agit de la culture et des religions du Japon, nous ressentons de la sympathie ou de l'antipathie. Nous avons tous à être serviteurs obéissants du message du Christ et du peuple japonais. Notre rôle est d'être de bons instruments utiles à la rencontre en profondeur et dans le dialogue du Christ et du Japon. La vocation missionnaire des chrétiens et la réceptivité du peuple japonais méritent une approche respectueuse. C'est ainsi qu'il est important de ne pas regarder la culture et la religiosité seulement comme si ce n'étaient que des données purement objectives sans aucun lien hors du Japon. Nous nous devons de les regarder, autant que possible, avec les yeux et le cœur même des Japonais, spécialement les étrangers qui se familiariseront avec la vie aussi bien que la culture du Japon, ses religions, ses saintes écritures, ses doctrines, ses rituels, etc. Mais le plus important demeure l'intériorité, c'est-à-dire ce que ces réalités disent au cœur de l'homme. C'est ici que prend place la quête de l'être, du sens et de la vérité.

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POVERTY AND SOLIDARITY

Felipe Zegarra

Felipe Zegarra is a Peruvian diocesan priest, Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of Peru and Pastor of a huge working-class parish in the dock area of Port Callao, Lima. The following is his reflection on the evangelical values and their contribution to social issues.

The starting point of this reflection is the growing level of personal and community awareness within the new context, which, I feel, makes it necessary for us to rethink our concept of ethics, using solidarity as the central or principal organising element of life. Solidarity is a good alternative for the overused word “compassion”, allowing us to recover the original meaning of the deep and passionate love of the God of the Bible and his “allies” who identify with the passion of others. I want to stress Pope John Paul II’s valuable insistence on an issue that has been present in his writing from his first Encyclical to his 1996 Lenten message. I will return to this point.

I believe it is necessary to make a clarification: I am a middle-class Christian with a good ability to read and a university education. I am almost 60 years old and for the past 20 years I have lived in a poor neighbourhood in Callao. It is the second poorest neighbourhood in the metropolitan area of Lima, according to the 1981 and 1993 national censuses. The following pages, while not perfect, contain the personal and pastoral experiences I have lived over the years.

The poor today

Discussing poverty is absolutely pertinent if we agree with Puebla that this serious problem is not merely economic (“extreme poverty”), but human (“concrete faces”) and Christian (“suffering faces of Christ”). It is also decisive because many people have learned that by confronting this issue they can objectively evaluate the situation in which we live and the way we react to it.

Who are the poor today is a question that not only needs to be added to the list of “faces” of the conferences in Puebla and Santo Domingo, but the poor need to be identified with more precision: who are they, how are they, how do they think culturally, who are their potential allies? I do not, however, intend to answer all these questions here. I believe

that we need to prioritise some groups. While this list is not exhaustive, I am going to mention some groups that we see on a daily basis.

- * Among the elderly, those retired people, who have worked hard all their lives and who suddenly find their possibilities of survival jeopardised because their professional and economic contributions, as well as their family responsibilities, are no longer being taken into account.

- * Children under the age of seven who are not incorporated into the educational system, which has been demonstrated in some urban zones and rural areas through the comparative indices of illiteracy in children over the age of five. These children run the risk of being abandoned and left behind.

- * The terminally ill, many times forgotten by their families and the health care system, and in many cases simply treated as burdens. Among these we see people with tuberculosis — Peru has the highest rate of tuberculosis infection in Latin America — and people who have AIDS, a serious disease made worse by some who say it is a “curse from God” and others who, despite the information on infection, avoid people with the disease more than they would those possessed by the devil.

- * Real and presumed gangs of youngsters who are blamed by adults, for so many social ills without analysing the personal and generational causes that push young people toward this in urban areas, “the gloomy uprising” that José María Arguedas wrote about. In reality, they are the young faces of exclusion and frustration, faced with a lack of options and possibilities.

- * Although they are not closeby, I remember the peasants at every meal and see it as a duty to include them in this list, particularly those in the isolated areas of the country, who are forgotten by the stubborn will of “total domination”.

What is certain is that beyond determined categories or groups of people, who live in a marginal district in greater Lima, there is a notable and growing difference of what is talked about and experienced there and what can be seen in one of the Wong supermarkets or in the upscale Camino Real shopping mall. While I am not going to include precise information and analysis, I want to point out that world-wide in 1960 the income difference between the richest 20 per cent of the population and the poorest 20 per cent was 30 times, by 1990 the difference was 63 times — it has more than doubled. In Peru, this difference is evident. Poverty and exclusion are realities that intertwine.

Poverty threatens society with increased dehumanisation. Although there is stubborn opposition to admitting it, poverty is not only an economic issue, but it affects people in every sense and at the most intimate level — their dignity. “Total domination” is poverty’s principal characteristic because it humiliates and annuls one’s will. Phrases we hear so often, “that’s the way it is”, “it’s God’s will”, and “what could I do?” show that the people who are excluded believe that it is practically impossible to think about alternatives and even less to create them.

Happily, there are people who are searching and there seems to be a growing awareness in respect to poverty. The following document demonstrates this awareness.

The reality of hunger: stigma of the world today

In his 1996 Lenten Message, the Pope wanted people to think about the extensive reality of hunger. The text that gives the article its title (Mt 14:16) does not correspond to the liturgy for Holy Week. The Lenten liturgy from Matthew (25:31-46), which is alluded to, appears on Monday of the first week of Lent. In addition, the date of the document is surprising early, it was released nearly six months before Ash Wednesday. All of this indicates that the document was meant to communicate to a wide audience the Pope’s huge concern.

The Message places us within the context of Christian definition and demand by referring to the “Lenten journey” as a period of renovation. The Pope is even more precise when he talks to us about “a path of dynamic and creative reflection” and “a

path of love that opens the spirit of believers to their brothers and sisters, guiding them toward God”. He sets forth the fundamental issue of following Jesus Christ, which the Latin American Church has recovered in recent years, for a new spirituality and authenticity in the life of Christians.

Discussing the problem of hunger does not stop the Pope from having a broad vision that is also tied to daily life: “In our daily lives we have the chance to come across the hungry, thirsty, sick, marginalised and the emigrants. During Lent we are invited to look more closely at the faces of the suffering, faces that give witness to the challenge of

poverty in our time”. It is easy to find in this document the influence of the Puebla and Santo Domingo conferences and the inspiring passage from the parable of the last judgement.

The issue is massive and the Pope does not try to skirt the problem. He reminds us that Matthew, Mark and Luke mention “give them to eat” in their recounting of the “multiplying” of the bread. The Pope adds: “All of us today ... probably do not have sufficient means to attend to the needs of close to 800 million people who are hungry and malnourished, who are fighting to survive on the threshold of the 21st century”. He continues with a recognition of the challenge: “What should we do then? Leave things the way they are, resigned to our impotence?” It should not be like this. “The mass of hungry people, made up of children, women, the elderly, emigrants and the unemployed raise their cry of pain to us. They beg us to hear them. How can our ears and hearts not attend to this cry, offering up those five pieces of bread and fish that God deposited in our hands. We can all do something for them”. It is urgent, then, that “we carry out significance and concrete acts that are capable of multiplying the few pieces of bread and fish that we have”. The Pope invites us to recover our ethics, the effectiveness of love itself. “How can we not feel in our souls a sense of intimate rebellion?” “How can we not feel affected by a spontaneous impulse to Christian charity?”

Isolated and individual efforts, however, are not enough: the enormity of the drama (we can remember Rwanda) demands the organised responses of society. More precisely, “to offer generous support to the organisations and movements that spring up to alleviate the suffering of those who run the risk of dying because of a lack

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of food". The insufficiency of governmental or international programmes leads the Pope to once again call for a strengthening of civil society and its characteristic institutions, both old and new.

The answer of an organised society is possible because "the earth is blessed with the necessary resources to feed all of humankind". We need to unleash all of the energies of intelligence while incorporating the values of justice, particularly solidarity. We are not talking about a utopia, in terms of a dream that cannot be achieved, because there exists a strong Gospel call to conversion. "This project of participation and solidarity is an extraordinary reality", which is demonstrated by the work of many people, above all women in their soup kitchens, Glass of Milk programmes, community health posts, informal education groups for children, self-management workshops, micro enterprises, etc.

I am thinking about a woman who is just over 40. She is the mother and grand-mother to three children. Today she is fighting against two illnesses that are serious and are pitted against each other and which should have forced her to stop all of her activities. She is resisting because habits die hard. She began 15 years ago in a Mothers' club. She became one of the new breed of leaders, with solidarity, democratic and with a great desire to learn. She began working in a grassroots health care post, and when the crisis worsened she joined a soup kitchen. In 1990, with the difficulties getting worse, she was called to form part of a parish Caritas group. She came down with the more serious of her diseases when she was working in the soup kitchen, health post and Caritas simultaneously. I forgot to say that from the beginning she was part of the parish catechetics programme, worked with the adult confirmation programme and in 1995 on the First Communion for young adults programme. She is one of a kind, but she makes me think of many other women and young people.

The Lenten Message concludes with a comment, which is a long-term commitment. "Authentic solidarity is not improvised, it is achieved only through patient and responsible work that is undertaken from infancy, the kind of work that becomes a mental habit of the person and involves different fields of action and responsibility. There needs to be a general process of awareness raising that is capable of reaching the entire society". Awareness, formation, etc., are terms that highlight perspectives for the long term, they are more historic and current, and the churches and Christians need to understand them

through faith with creativity and initiative, and together with all people of "good will".

Reading this important obligation makes us remember the energy with which the Pope offered the inaugural address at the meeting of the Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo, which marked the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the first Europeans to the Americas: "We need to give value to the new ideal of solidarity in the face of the old will of domination". Because of his repeated reference to the same issue it would seem that Pope John Paul II is campaigning. In the Christian demand there is good reason for this.

"Recover the meaning of the human person"

In the end, this is what it means and it is the goal that solidarity points to every day. Located on the ethical plane, it corresponds to an act of interdependence and is characterised by the "common good" in its contemporary sense that benefits each and every one of us without any kind of discrimination.

Unified by these efforts of looking for the common good, together with the Pope we can talk about different ways of doing this: solidarity among workers (a huge number of human beings) and among the poor and poor nations; and solidarity "with" the poorest of the poor, which is only possible when there is a clear awareness of the dignity of each human person and an effective recognition of abilities. This is central in the message of Jesus Christ and in the best tradition of modernity.

The Letter to the Hebrews is radical when it calls on us to remember that "we have blood and flesh in common" (2:14). Based on the Christian tradition that was common to them, and alluding to the discussion between different concepts of law (positivists, naturalists), the Anglo-Americans affirmed in 1776 that "all men are born equal". And the member States of the United Nations stated in 1948, from a perspective that was more plural, that all human beings "given that they possess reason and consciousness, should act fraternally to one another". It is true that there is a huge gap between what is said and what is done, and that many decades have passed since this last document was signed, so we need to ask ourselves honestly how much has been done and how much more do we need to do to value ourselves and our neighbours, and our dignity as rational beings, created by God in his own image and whom he calls his children.

Questioning our attitudes and initiatives is even more intense if we add a theological dimension of profound biblical roots: a commitment to the poor, which has extended to all Christians from the reflection of the churches in Latin America and which is placed in the hearts of Christians as a fundamental criteria.

From the excluded

According to the humane passage in Matthew, “the smallest”, the despised, are recognised as “my brothers” by Jesus Christ, who invites us to do the same with each human being and with even more force for believers (cf. Mt 25:40). The rapid and genuine attention to the needs of the poor is a criteria by which we are measured: “In the autumn of life we will be judged by love”, commented St John of the Cross.

Despite the well-publicised process of globalisation, the often-mentioned crisis of paradigms, etc., and beyond appearances, the preferential option for the poor continues to be valid. This is seen by the insistence with which Pope John Paul II and the national and continental churches continue to return to the issue.

Meeting in Puebla in 1979, the Latin American Bishops, before citing Matthew 25:40, said clearly that it was “from the poor” that we would arrive at a universal truth, an inclusive movement, that would bring us all together: “Our pastoral concerns for the humblest members, filled with a human realism, does not exclude from our thoughts or hearts other representatives of the areas in which we live. On the contrary, they are serious and opportune warnings that the gaps should not be allowed to grow, and the Spirit of God is not forgotten in the Latin American family. And because we believe that the revision of the religious and moral behaviour of men should be reflected in the political and economic processes of our countries, we invite all people, without distinction of class, to accept and assume the cause of the poor as if they were accepting and assuming their own cause, the cause of Jesus Christ himself”. The principle of universality from the particularity that the God of orphans, widows and strangers highlighted in the history of salvation and which

constitutes a series of warnings against visions and actions of naive universalism that is not aware of the reality of poverty, humiliation and exclusion.

Social value of self-esteem

The first thing that must be done “with works and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18) is to encourage the affirmation of the individual. But we need to be careful that self-esteem, an issue and contribution of contemporary society, does not lead to individualism. Hobbes and his followers during their times, the broadest philosophical tradition from the end of the 18th century, is aimed at understanding that subjectivity is not equal to intimacy, but is the true foundation of inter subjectivity, of valuing others, of health and desirable interpersonal relations.

“Love of self” and “general will” (Rousseau), the human being as an end (Kant), self-awareness and mutual recognition (Hegel), reciprocity of consciousness (Nedoncelle), life in dialogue (Buber), personalism (Mounier), humanism from the “condemned of the earth” (Fanon and Sartre), “from the other” (Levinas), communicative action (Habermas), neo-communitarianism (Scannone), are good examples of this.

One of the texts that is weighed down with modernity proposes: “work in such a way that you take humanity, both in your own person as well as in any other person, always as an end and never as a means” (Kant). Reading this it is easy to call upon the “golden rule” of love: “Always treat others as you would like them to treat you; for this is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 7:12). In the end, the first expression of the rule of love applies: love your neighbour as you would yourself (cf. Mt 22:39); he who loves and accepts this without serious complexes is capable of loving others and is called to do so. In the development of revelation, the demand that is made of Jesus is a phase whose completion, animated by the Spirit of God, leads to the ultimate invitation of the Easter mystery: “love each other as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34) in which the force of the demand is far outweighed by the recognition of the gift received: a love “to the extreme” (Jn 13:1; 15:12-13).

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In search of human realisation

The economists of our time and some international organisations are proposing a more integral and radical vision, which is more human in its development. The proposed objective is not the mere multiplication of goods, but the recognition of personal beings who are protagonists in their own history. They talk, with new accents, about human development from the perspective of multiple needs and a wide spectrum, and of abilities that are diverse and valuable. The challenge should be assumed without exception, as the old maxim says: “if some do not enter the city I remain outside”, far removed from all exclusive systems and mechanisms. Jesus himself gave us an example: “he suffered his Passion *outside* the holy city” (Heb 13:12).

The challenge to those who want to confront poverty is very great because it means getting involved for life and “investing” professional and personal skills in an open war against poverty and in solidarity with the poor. The vision of those who still believe that “nothing good can come from the poor” is distorted. Civilisation was built thanks to contributions of the barbarians, the thoughts and actions of people who were supposedly savages. Maybe Pope John Paul II and the Bishops thought of them when they called on us to build a truly alternative development: “set the foundation for an economy that is solidarity, real and efficient without forgetting the corresponding creation of socio-economic models that bring together free initiative, the creativity of people and groups, the moderating function of the State”, taking into account the most vulnerable groups of humankind.

“Capable of governing, capable of reasoning”

Through an association of ideas I will conclude by returning to Bartolomé de las

Casas who, when nearly 80 years old, summarised his *Apologetica Historia Samaria*, saying to all the Spanish conquerors who had contact with the American Indians: “As barbaric as they are, so are we”.

This phrase retains all of its force now that ethnocentrism has reared against “Latinos” and “Sudacas”, and is even more evident when we take into account how people feel, how others who “are nor like oneself” for reasons of skin colour, ethnicity, social class and, above all, economic position.

I am convinced that those who have shown themselves capable of tenacious resistance and who have even appropriated cultural elements from those who have come from outside; that is, those who are backed by authentic culture (as Arguedas affirmed and proved), are able to grow in intelligence and humanity in this new moment in history. The condition is uniting the wills and abilities of many people (why not of everyone?) around a great project of “learning to learn” and above all “learning to be” carried simultaneously with the free expression of each one of us and the unleashing of abilities and values in the task of trying to solve the authentic needs of the human species.

The Pope has called us to this as church and as individuals. It is urgent and necessary, but also valuable and gratifying (in the strong, theological and spiritual sense of the word) to continue looking together, day after day and for primordial and contemporary reasons, for the paths that will allow us to move toward a more profound life of solidarity, fellowship and, finally, in communion.

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ENCULTURATION AND INCULTURATION: THE GOSPEL OF LIBERATION AND THE CULTURE OF AFRICAN WOMANHOOD

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

First let us define our central terms as they are used in this article: “Enculturation”, “Inculturation”, “Gospel of Liberation”, the “Culture of African Womanhood”.

Enculturation, an anthropological term coined by J.M. Herskovits (cf. J. M. Herskovits, *Man and his Works, the Science of Cultural Anthropology*, 1948, New York: Knopf, particularly pp. 39-48. Margaret Mead has however redefined the term by grounding enculturation in the particular culture. She says enculturation is “the process of learning a culture in all its uniqueness and particularity”. cf. “Socialisation and Enculturation” in *Current Anthropology*, 1963, Vol. 4, p. 187.), means a process of learning from infancy till death, the components of life in one’s culture. The contents of this learning include both the material and non-material culture. The latter refers to the values, attitudes, beliefs, etc., of a culture and the corresponding behaviour patterns; the former refers to artifacts such as a hoe or mask. In the said process of learning, a person grows into a culture, acquires competence in that culture and that culture takes root in that person and becomes the cognitive map, the term of reference for acting.

In this study, inculturation (cf. Umoren, U.E. “Inculturation and the Future of the Church in Africa” in Ukpong, J.S. et al (eds.) *Evangelisation in Africa in the Third Millennium Challenges and Prospects*, 1992, Port Harcourt: CIWA, pp. 63-65.) refers to the missiological process in which the Gospel is rooted in a particular culture and the latter is transformed by its introduction to Christianity. Christianity and culture are thereby mutually enriched. The Gospel of liberation here refers equally to the person of Jesus Christ, his spoken and dynamic message of setting human beings free (liberation) so that these human beings may have life in abundance (development).

By the culture of African womanhood this article refers to the total life style and social legacy of women in Africa (South of the Sahara) embodied in the symbols and meanings by means of which

human beings can learn and perpetuate certain ideas and patterns of behaviour towards womanhood in Africa.

The question arises: what roles can the anthropologist’s *enculturation* and the missiologist’s *inculturation* play in carrying out the project of Jesus Christ, to set the women of Africa free from their cultural bondage that they may have life and have it to the full? (cf. Jn 10:10).

First we will sketch the contents of the African women’s cultural bondage and argue that these were learnt in the process of enculturation. We then suggest that the process of inculturation should relate the Gospel of Liberation to that content and transform it. Both the relating event and the construction of a new culture of African womanhood are to form part of new enculturation contents leading to the integral development of the liberated African women.

THE CULTURAL BONDAGE

The cultural captivity that calls for the liberating force of the Gospel is situated in the general context of the culture of African womanhood in all of what Peter Hammond (cf. *An Introduction to Cultural and Social Anthropology*, 1978, New York: Macmillan, pp. 12-13.) calls the seven anthropological categories. These categories are social organisation, political organisation, economic organisation, technology, art, religion and language, itself the vehicle of culture. These categories constitute the context of enculturation, that is, the context of the process of the African woman being taught and she herself learning both consciously and unconsciously the derogatory-positive components of life in the culture of African womanhood. Largely because of social pressure she as a child internalises not only the positive but also the derogatory components of attitudes towards women.

The African child is born female or male. The girl child (our focus) grows up as an African girl and later becomes a woman through the said process of enculturation. This enculturation process has both cognitive and emotional elements. The girl child who later becomes a woman learns and internalises both. This learning-to-become is comprehensive in the sense that one learns and internalises both the derogatory and positive concepts, judgements and attitudes towards womanhood. This learning takes place through example, direct teaching and in patterns of behaviour, in songs, proverbs, wise sayings and folktales. What is learnt directs towards corresponding patterns of behaviour.

Whatever positive or negative cultural attitudes there are of African womanhood are further concretised in the kind of woman one is thinking of. The following are some of the several kinds of women in Africa: the western educated woman, the uneducated or illiterate woman, the rural woman, the urban woman, the *élite* woman, the common folk woman, the married, the single woman, the married child bearing, the married barren, the single woman parent, the single childless woman, the divorced woman, the widow, the working woman, the home maker, the professional (lawyer, engineer, medical doctor) the non-professional, the non-Christian, the Christian woman, the professed religious woman, and the non-professed.

The African culturally made derogatory attitudes towards the woman are concretised around these different kinds of women. The physical or psychological violence directed against the woman, the socially induced feminine low self image, political, economic and even religious intolerance and exploitation, the depriving of women of educational opportunities, denying them the chances to develop their full potential as human beings, the perpetuating of customs and laws that not only discriminate against women but also mutilate or completely eliminate their common right to avail themselves of the opportunities of modern science and technology — all these are calculated attempts at blacking out women, rendering them invisible. They are forms of human degradation that can be identified in varying degrees in the existential experiences of all the above categories of women in Africa.

Let us now focus on one of the many issues of the culture of African womanhood so that we can relate faith to it in depth, namely social organisation.

KINSHIP AND THE CULTURE OF BONDAGE

Our focus is on the form of social organisation based on blood and marriage, namely kinship (cf. P. Hammond, *op.cit.*, pp. 220-237). Here we look at the culture of African womanhood in polygamous, levirate marriage, early marriage, widowhood, and divorce.

Looking at polygamy as a cultural phenomenon, John Mbiti (cf. *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1969, London: Heinemann, pp. 142-143.) observed that it helps satisfy the African quest for many children, increases the sense of corporate existence, it is source of labour and an economic asset; it also reduces unfaithfulness of husbands. He acknowledges also the existence of its inherent negative aspects: the inter wives rivalry, quarrelling and fighting.

African women theologians (Odooye, M.A. and Kanyoro, M.K. (eds.) 1990 *'Talitha Qumi' Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians*, 1989 Ibadan: Day Star Press, pp. 208-209.) however see polygamy as part of the African oppressive structure against women, constructed primarily for the benefit of men. These theologians say that the polygamous social structure confers on men more than women, social, political, economic, even sexual gains. Polygamy denies women the human right to the undivided love of a husband. While the wife cannot share her love with other men, the man can share his with other women in the system. It turns women into an appendage, a property of the man — one of the man's labourers. (A new and vocal group is advocating revisiting polygyny as a vital African cultural value).

Another aspect of African marriage that robs the woman of her human dignity is levirate marriage, the marriage between a woman and the brother of her deceased husband. Levirate emphasises the position of the bereaved woman as the property of the husband and his family. Therefore at the husband's death she is generally expected to stay on (as property of the family) without any choice in the matter. She raises children to immortalise the deceased husband's name. With the absence of choice, levirate is more dehumanising than polygamy.

Other forms of human degradation of women abound in African marriage: early marriage that gives the girl no right of mature choice based on love, bride price that is so exorbitant today that it gives the impression of the woman being sold out to the highest bidder and is the source of tensions in the

family, divorce which discriminates against women. The African social structure is so traditionally set up against the woman that she is always blamed for the breakdown of the marriage. If divorced, she is not given a fair share, if anything at all, of the wealth or property acquired with her as a contributor. Another area of dehumanisation for the African woman is the issue of fidelity. A husband can commit adultery many times over and get away with it without being divorced or subjected to public ridicule. A woman cannot. Indeed tradition in some parts of Africa requires that at child delivery she should name any man or all the men who had slept with her. Her guilt is publicised.

Perhaps the most abhorrent treatment of the African woman is the ritual of widowhood. From a recent empirical study of widowhood practices of the Okrika, Ahoada, Ogoni, Nembe and Ikwerre all in Nigeria by Ngeri Mwagha, (cf. *Widowhood practices of the Rivers State*, 1990, pp. 2-8; and Oduyoye, M.A. and Kanyoro, M. op.cit., pp. 189-191.) one can identify the following common characteristics of the ritual of widowhood:

- sitting on the floor for a number of days before and after burial;
- keeping the hair unkempt for a period before complete shaving;
- being forbidden to take a bath for a period of seven days or more;
- confinement almost imprisonment within the deceased husband's homestead;
- compulsory wailing and recounting of husband's virtues;
- wearing black cloth;
- being forbidden to inherit husband's property;
- being forbidden to have sexual intercourse for a year after burial;
- public confession of guilt should one have an affair and then a sacrifice to appease the deceased husband;
- presentation of items such as a goat, fish, drinks, plantain, yams, to the elders of the family to be permitted to terminate the mourning ordeal.

In some of the unique cases in Nigeria, for example, in Ogoniland, the widow's ordeal begins with the people's suspicion that the widow is responsible for the husband's death. She is adjudged guilty until her prolonged swearing by ancestral shrines and an oracle consulted by elders exonerate her. Among the Ikwerres the widow cannot trim her toe or finger nails nor wear shoes during the mourning period.

While the widow is subjected to these indignities a widower is not. He remarries, if he so wishes, at will.

These acts of oppression, humiliation and dehumanisation of women identified in one aspect of African culture, namely social organisation, are observable in other aspects of culture and are themselves part of the culture of African womanhood with which inculturation is to engage the Gospel of Liberation in meaningful dialogue.

INCULTURATION AND THE GOSPEL OF LIBERATION

Having looked at the nature of the culture of African womanhood we now examine how inculturation is to relate the Gospel of Liberation to the culture of bondage and, transforming it, sets the African woman free for integral development. Inculturation is a two way process: it roots the Gospel in a culture, and introduces that culture to Christianity. To root Christianity in a said culture is to initiate two events. The first is to transform the African culture of oppressing women.

The second is to develop the culture's latent potential towards the human development of the woman, created like her male counter-part in the image and likeness of God. The other aspect is to introduce the woman and her transformed culture to Christianity, for example by allowing the woman a meaningful place among the agents of inculturation. We will return to this later.

But first introducing the gospel of liberation into the culture of women means allowing that gospel to be read and understood in the context of the culture of women, their joys and sorrows, their hopes and disappointments, their achievements and failures, their language. It means infusing the realities of women's life with Christian values. It means Christ being allowed to be born into that culture and coming into that culture to tell the African woman "Talitha Qumi" — Daughter Arise — and thereby liberating her from the dehumanising conditions, that she might have life and have it in abundance. It means the Body of Christ, the Church, preaching against the evils of polygamy, levirate, early marriage. It demands educating people against the ill treatment of widows and the divorced. It challenges the Church to form supportive groups to help widows stand up for their rights.

Inculturation here means infusing the culture of African womanhood in bondage with the Christian eschatological hope of liberation, a hope meant to energise, motivate the woman in bondage and the Church to work towards the hoped for liberation.

Eschatology, the science of last things is highlighted by both Christ's proclamation of the Kingdom of God and by his Resurrection. Christ declares in Luke 4:18-19.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

By the resurrection of Christ, the latter's authenticity and claims are confirmed and as the theologians of hope explain, (cf. Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 1967, London: SCM Press especially pp. 15-19; 21-26; also Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope*, 1970, New York: The World Publishing Company, pp. 24-50.) our hope for a future restoration of things is established. Christ's Resurrection is source of hope. This hope is dynamic, subverting the present order to receive a future kingdom where degradation, misery and exploitation shall be no more, a kingdom where justice has brought peace, a kingdom of love and freedom. There we shall be masters of our destiny, masters of our land. As Isaiah 65:21-22 says, the people

shall build houses and live to inhabit them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit, they shall not build for others to inhabit or plant for others to eat.... My chosen shall enjoy the fruit of their labour.

The kingdom is incompatible with a humanity that is not every inch human according to the image and likeness of God. It is incompatible with the humiliation of widows and the divorced. But it is the hope given us by Christ that urges us to work perseveringly towards the restoration of human dignity and humanity in general and the African woman in particular as God meant it to be at the end of time, namely, a person, a being in the image and likeness of God. That hope urges the Church to make decisions that will help the woman to find herself and come to terms with herself as a being with equal opportunities in education, employment and salary, with access to the property she jointly acquired with her husband before becoming a widow, or a divorced person. That hope motivates the Church as sacrament of the Gospel of Liberation to form the laity so well

that the latter can fight to abrogate laws that discriminate against women, laws and customs that enslave women, rituals of widowhood that contradict the human dignity of the woman.

Liberated, her culture of bondage transformed, the African woman and her transformed culture can be introduced to Christianity, to the Church, the milieu of inculturation. There in the Church she herself is to contribute her quota to the on-going, never to end, project of inculturation.

Introducing her transformed culture, that is, total lifestyle and social legacy into Christianity will have the salutary effect of increasing the image and revelation of Christ, our Christology. A hitherto predominantly masculine Christology will become integrally feminine-masculine Christology. It has to be, since Christ came to redeem both man and woman, and is relevant to both. Moreover, the two were created in and unto Christ.

LIBERATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN OTHER ASPECTS OF CULTURE

Introducing the transformed culture of African womanhood as well as the liberated woman herself into Christianity in the process of inculturation is to embark upon the integral development of the transformed and the liberated. (Liberation is not an end in itself. Cf. Pope Paul VI's authoritative statement on integral development in his work: *On the Development of Peoples*, 1968, Washington DC: US Catholic Conference). We shall examine one aspect of this development, namely, the African woman theologising, African — womanly, developing and actualising the potentials of the woman as a person. We shall be informed here by P. Hammond's categorisation of all the aspects of culture into social organisation, political organisation, economic organisation, technology, language, art and religion (P. Hammond, op.cit., p. 12.). Let us now relate the project of women's theology to these categories.

In social organisation as an aspect of culture let her faith enter into intellectual reflection on the complexity of the concept of womanhood in Africa, polygamy, marital love and self-actualisation, child bearing, dowry and the marriage covenant, widowhood, divorce, levirate. In politics let her bring her faith to bear upon the role of the woman in contemporary politics. African history, as N.E. Mba (cf. *Nigerian Women Mobilised*, 1982, Berkeley (California), University of California.) shows of Nigeria, is decorated with prominent women politicians especially in the

process of resistance to colonial rule and the search for political independence.

In economics what does the faith contribute towards the humanising roles of women in the production and distribution of goods and services in Africa? The African woman was traditionally identified with dehumanising forms of labour. How can we redefine theologically female labour to stimulate the concept of self-realisation or self-creation of the woman?

How should modern science and technology be handled to enhance and develop the life of the woman without destroying her authentic religious values and without opening the way for Western forms of the death of God movement or secularism? How can the African languages enrich the language of feminine theological discourse? (cf. M. Oduyoye, *The Vocabulary of Yoruba Religious Discourse*, 1972, Ibadan: Day Star Press). What role does the woman theologian assign African art in the development of a feminine oriented liturgy? Finally, the vast area of African Traditional Religion (ATR) is to be seen as the most crucial source of women's theology to help the African go from the enslavement, exploitation and marginalisation of the woman that are depicted, and perpetuated in ATR. Think of the taboos, the rituals, the supernatural powers that control woman's mind and life. Let the woman theologian bring her theological training to bear on these. Let the woman theologian help design a programme of enculturation with a section containing specially selected positive elements from ATR, which the new generation of both boys and girls from infancy till death can learn and internalise, that are creative of attitudes favourable to womanhood. This programme can be incorporated into a catechetical scheme.

What can the Church leaders do about inculturating the faith in the culture of womanhood and introducing that womanhood to Christianity? We suggest that there should be massive financial and moral support for the training of African women theologians, the organisation of conferences by women, and the publication of works by women. Let the theology of femininity be taught in the major seminaries where priests are trained. Let there be seminars, workshops on that theology for older priests to increase public awareness and create support for this new brand of theology.

Let the African women be allowed meaningful roles in the Church. The world is changing, developing, with women playing significant roles in politics, the legal sector, education, and business.

ENCULTURATION PROCESS AND THE NEW CULTURE OF AFRICAN WOMANHOOD

We affirm that just as enculturation served the purposes of learning, teaching and passing on the contents of the culture of African women in bondage, enculturation is now to be used for learning and perpetuating the culture of the African women as liberated and developing.

A well articulated programme to teach the positive values, attitudes and beliefs about womanhood should be worked out and taught to the African from infancy till death.

ENCULTURATION AT PRE-SCHOOL STAGE

At this stage the family and the Church as agents of enculturation are to teach the said positive values through proverbs, the personal names given to baby girls, folktales, rhymes, biblical stories. Take the first two: proverbs and personal names. Both proverbs (cf. Umoren, U.E., "Some Nigerian Proverbs for Cultivating Discipline; A study in the Symbolism of Proverbs" in *Ogele Journal of Humanities and the Social Sciences*, 1987, Port Harcourt, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 61-69.) and personal names (Africans use names to uphold and pass on certain ideas and cultural values; also *Annag, Efik, Ibibio Personal Names: A Cultural Study*, 1975, Owerri (Nigeria): Black Academy Press.) are powerful symbolic expressions with meanings that direct action. Such wise sayings or proverbs and personal names abound in Nigeria. An Ogoni proverb says: "A daughter is the mother's sunshine". For the Labari people, "A family of girl children never gets exhausted". The Andoni people teach that "when the big rat grows old it sucks the breast of its children". Each of these sayings extol the use of female offspring. For example the Andoni proverb teaches the value of girl children by emphasising the milk of human kindness and the deep sense of concern associated with girl children towards their aged parents. As to personal names, the following are examples of positive attitudes towards female children. The Ogba (Nigeria) name AJUMKECHUKWU: "I don't reject my share of gift from God" is given to a girl to emphasise acceptance of a girl child as God's gift. The Ekpeye (Nigeria) name UNYOMATADHEWE (No woman is useless) means a daughter is useful. Many other similar names help teach acceptance of girl children. Such names should be given to girls in a new context of a well thought out programme of

enculturation for African women's liberation and development.

While the child is helped to learn positive attitudes toward womanhood, the parents who constitute the first teachers should be helped through seminars and film shows to strengthen their own favourable attitudes. The early years of acculturation are most crucial in laying the foundation on which subsequent learning will be built.

SCHOOL STAGE AND ENCULTURATION

It should be mandatory for all teachers to take a course and pass a written examination on femininity in the training colleges before teaching at any level of the school system.

From nursery to University, a course on the positive aspects of womanhood should be built systematically into the school curriculum. Competitions on essay writing and behavioural patterns regarding positive femininity should be encouraged with prizes.

Since admittedly the Catholic Church has a big role to play in enculturating people with positive ideas of womanhood, special attention should be directed towards the formation of the clergy in femininity in the seminaries on all levels. Seminars and workshops should be organised for elderly priests to orientate them towards the new and positive contents of the culture of African womanhood.

The point we are making is that the culture of African women in bondage was learnt in the process of enculturation. Let the desired culture of liberation from discrimination, victimisation, marginalisation and subjugation be learnt through a systematic programme of enculturation. Let the laws of the Church and those of the civil society sustain the culture of women's liberation.

But liberation is not an end in itself. It clears obstacles, breaks fetters and opens blind eyes and then the beneficiaries of liberation can develop integrally or in Martin Luther King Jr's parlance, develop the three dimensions of the human being: length, the inner person of oneself; breadth, inter-personal relationship; height, relationship with the supernatural. We should see the Gospel of Liberation in this context as liberation from bondage to integral development, the development of the whole African woman.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to identify what the anthropologist's enculturation and the missiologist's inculturation can contribute to the project of preaching Jesus' Gospel to liberate the African woman from her cultural bondage so that she can develop integrally. After defining our central terms of enculturation, and others, we sketched the nature of the cultural captivity particularly in social organisation from which women are to be liberated.

We then showed how inculturation was to relate the Gospel of Liberation to transforming cultural bondage and set women free to march on to integral development. Liberation is not an end in itself. Just as the people of Israel were set free from bondage in Egypt to march into the promised land, women's liberation leads to integral development. To make this possible the culture of liberation and development is to be learnt from infancy till death. What emerges from all this is that, just as the culture of female bondage was learned and internalised manifesting corresponding patterns of behaviour (including woman's acceptance of her very marginalisation as of divine origin), in the same way, it is possible for woman to learn and internalise, through enculturation the culture of liberation and development with their corresponding patterns of behaviour, that she has the ability to realise her potential and create the new woman who takes her destiny into her own hands.

Ref. *C.U.E.A.*
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COMING EVENTS

WORKING GROUPS

8 April Pacific 16.00 hrs. at SEDOS

17 April Food, Land, and Hunger 15.30 hrs. at SEDOS

SEDOS AFTERNOON SEMINAR

THE FUTURE OF PALESTINE —
THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST
Afif Safieh

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCHES IN LEBANON TODAY
Helene Haigh, RJM

Tuesday, **22 April**, 15.00 - 18.30 hrs.
Brothers of the Christian Schools, Via Aurelia, 476.

TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE IN MISSION —
WAYS OF HEALING THE MISSIONARY
Dr. Robert Grant, Australia

Friday, **2 May**, 14.00 hrs.
Brothers of the Christian Schools, Via Aurelia, 476.

SEDOS ARICCIA SEMINAR 1997 (20 - 24 May, 1997)

(The Residential Seminar is *ONLY* for Member Congregations)

A SPIRITUALITY FOR MISSION INTO THE NEXT CENTURY

Ian Linden, Director CIIR, (London)

- 1) Global Justice: Essential Element in the Mission of the Church Today
- 2) A Spirituality for a Post-Modern Society — The Missionary Challenge of 'Politics in a Secular World'

Marie-Angèle Kitewo, SND (Zaire)

- 3) La Spiritualité de l'Église en Afrique et le ministère de guérison
- 4) Une Spiritualité Africaine — Défi à la Créativité d'une Église

Fr Samuel Rayan, SJ (India)

- 5) A Spirituality of Mission in an Asian Context
- 6) Local Cultures — Instruments of Incarnated Christian Spirituality