

Éditorial 34

Évangélisation et Internet 35  
*Fr Yves Bériault, o.p.*

Women in the Mission of the Church  
An Interpretation of John 4 39  
*Rekha Chennattu, RA*

Pékin est prêt à reconnaître aux religions  
un plus grand rôle dans la société pour autant  
que les autorités puissent exercer un meilleur contrôle sur elles 46  
*David Murphy*

Mission, Dialogue  
and Missionary Congregations 49  
*Edmund Chia, FSC*

Double Religious Belonging and Liminality  
An Anthro-Theological Reflection 55  
*Michael Amaladoss, SJ*

Topics for Articles, Conferences, Seminars 62  
*Bernard East, o.p.*

Coming Events 64

## Éditorial

À l'assemblée annuelle de Sedos tenue en décembre 2001, **Yves Bériault**, o.p., a prononcé une conférence intitulée *Évangélisation et Internet*. Nous reproduisons ici son texte, dans lequel il nous montre comment l'usage de l'Internet peut servir le projet d'évangélisation et décrit le profil de l'internaute qui s'intéresse aux sites chrétiens.

Consciente du fait que la femme n'a pas sa juste place dans l'exégèse biblique, la théologie, la vie et la mission de l'Église, **Rekha Chennattu**, RA, dans son article *Women in the Mission of the Church*, examine quelles étaient les préoccupations de la communauté johannique quant au rôle des femmes. L'évangéliste voulait authentifier et légitimer le rôle des femmes, rôle approuvé et apprécié par Jésus.

**David Murphy**, dans *Pékin est prêt à reconnaître aux religions un plus grand rôle dans la société pour autant que les autorités puissent exercer un meilleur contrôle sur elles*, brosse un tableau de la situation des groupes religieux en Chine, principalement celle de l'Église catholique.

Dans son article *Mission, Dialogue and Missionary Congregations*, **Edmund Chia**, FSC, montre comment peuvent être perçues par les autres religions nos visions et perspectives missionnaires, spécialement dans le contexte asiatique. L'auteur s'interroge notamment sur le sens que prend l'expression "dialogue interreligieux", en particulier pour les congrégations missionnaires, dans le cadre de l'évolution de la pensée et de la théologie de l'Église depuis le concile Vatican II.

Dans *Double Religious Belonging and Liminality. An Anthropo-Theological Reflection*, **Michael Amaladoss**, SJ, se pose d'entrée de jeu la question : est-il possible pour une personne appartenant à un groupe socio-religieux particulier de se sentir chez elle et de participer aisément à la vie d'un autre groupe de même nature ? L'auteur analyse la question d'un point de vue abstrait, philosophique, théologique, de même que sur le plan phénoménologique, plus particulièrement celui de la religion populaire. Il se penche sur le rôle du symbole dans l'expérience religieuse, ainsi que sur le pluralisme religieux.

En conclusion de ce numéro, nous présentons les thèmes d'intérêt que les membres ont exprimés à l'occasion des deux dernières assemblées générales.

Bonne lecture !

**Bernard East**, o.p.  
Directeur exécutif de SEDOS

\*\*\*\*\*

***SEDOS is a forum open to  
Institutes of Consecrated Life  
which commit themselves  
to deepening their understand-  
ing of global mission.***

***SEDOS encourages research  
and disseminates information  
through its bulletin and website,  
public conferences, working  
groups and its  
annual seminar.***

\*\*\*\*\*

*Schreiter, Robert J.,  
(edited by)  
Mission in the  
Third Millennium,  
Orbis Books, Maryknoll,  
New York, USA, 2001.*

*Available at SEDOS.*

Directeur exécutif : Bernard East, o.p.  
Secrétaire de publication : Ilaria Iadeluca  
Abonnements et comptabilité : Margarita Lofthouse

Correctrices des épreuves  
Langue anglaise : Philippa Wooldridge  
Langue française : Sophie Guichard



Fr. Yves Bériault, o.p.  
 Promoteur de l'Internet pour  
 l'Ordre des Prêcheurs (Dominicains)

## *Évangélisation et Internet*

*Conférence à SEDOS, le 4 Décembre 2001*

### Introduction

Chers amis des conférences de SEDOS, il me fait plaisir de me retrouver ici afin de partager avec vous quelques réflexions et quelques convictions qui me sont chères au sujet du monde de l'Internet et de ses implications pour l'évangélisation. Bien sûr, ce nouveau média suscite encore des controverses, il nous confronte à une surabondance d'informations devant lesquelles parfois nous ne savons plus où donner de la tête. S'agit-il d'une mode passagère, se demandent certains ? Ou encore partageons-nous la réaction de ce philosophe qui devant la masse d'informations qui l'assaillait s'exclamait : "Cette horrible quantité de livres imprimés qui m'arrive tous les jours sur ma table va sûrement ramener la barbarie et non pas la culture". Cette citation est du philosophe Leibnitz qui a vécu au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Nouveau siècle, nouveaux défis que nous devons assumer à notre tour, même s'ils perturbent notre manière de penser, de communiquer et de nous relier les uns aux autres.

Dans cette conférence intitulée "Évangélisation et Internet", je voudrais tout d'abord développer quelques convictions personnelles autour de la notion d'évangélisation, pour ensuite jeter des ponts entre cette action évangélisatrice et le monde virtuel de l'Internet.

### Évangéliser

Épître aux Romains 10, 13-14 : "En effet quiconque invoquera le nom du Seigneur sera sauvé. Or, comment l'invoqueraient-ils, sans avoir cru en lui ? Et comment croiraient-ils en lui, sans l'avoir entendu ? Et comment l'entendraient-ils, si personne ne le proclame ?"

Voilà un texte qui a une résonance toute particulière en ce début de millénaire où la question du dialogue interreligieux occupe une large place à la fois dans la société et à l'intérieur même de l'Église. C'est le défi du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans la suite de celui de l'Oecuménisme, toujours actuel, mais mis de l'avant au siècle dernier. Nous assistons depuis un siècle à un vaste mouvement de dialogue, de coopération et de rencontre, de

solidarité, tant au plan international, pensons à l'émergence de la Société des Nations qui a ensuite donné naissance à l'ONU, tant au plan interreligieux, pensons à la rencontre d'Assise initiée par Jean Paul II il y a 15 ans, et qui a constitué un nouveau point de départ dans le dialogue interreligieux.

Nous ne pouvons douter qu'il y ait là au cœur de ces dialogues qui s'amorcent, tant entre pays qu'entre religions, l'empreinte de l'Esprit de Dieu, une présence du Ressuscité qui ouvre devant nous des chemins, qui parfois nous font peur ; sur lesquels il y a bien sûr des risques objectifs d'égarement, d'affadissement de la proclamation du message évangélique. Mais la route qui mène en Galilée, celle que l'Ange du matin de la Résurrection propose aux disciples, est cette même route qu'il nous faut emprunter jusqu'à la fin des siècles et qui est une voie de rencontre avec l'autre, avec le distant, l'étranger, l'ennemi.

C'est là le défi de l'Évangélisation, qui en est un non seulement d'annonce explicite de l'Évangile, mais avant tout un défi de présence au monde, une présence qui relève d'une action que Jésus compare au levain dans la pâte, une action d'humanisation, de fructification, de bonification de notre monde.

L'Église ne sera jamais dispensée de sa mission première qui lui a été confiée le matin de la Résurrection : "Va annoncer que celui qui était mort est ressuscité !" Va annoncer ! Il y a un peu plus d'un an le document "Dominus Iesus" de la Sacrée Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la Foi avait créé un certain émoi dans les cercles interreligieux à cause de son affirmation jugée trop explicite de la valeur unique du christianisme. Jean Paul II, quelques semaines plus tard, avait soutenu ce document dans une lettre, mais tout en resituant avec beaucoup de délicatesse le sens même de l'action évangélisatrice de l'Église. Il avait répondu essentiellement ceci : Pour nous, annoncer le Christ c'est une nécessité, comment pourrions-nous cacher la joie qui nous habite.

Je dois bien avouer que c'est cette joie qui m'anime, cette foi dans le Christ au cœur même de mon existence,

qui me soutient dans cette entreprise de missionnaire de l'Internet. C'est le "*contemplata aliis tradere*" des dominicains qui justifie ma nouvelle vocation de webmestre, ce "*contemplata aliis tradere*" de notre tradition médiévale qui signifie ni plus ni moins de transmettre au monde le fruit de notre contemplation.

Pour saint Thomas, la contemplation est le but même de l'existence humaine, puisque qu'elle est tout orientée vers l'amour de Dieu. En ce sens, la vie contemplative est une voie de perfection, une voie de salut, car elle est une recherche incessante de Dieu. Elle fait sien le cri du psalmiste : "C'est ta face que je cherche mon Dieu, ne me cache pas ta face". Saint Thomas nous rappelle à juste titre que l'action d'évangéliser, qui s'enracine dans la prédication et l'enseignement, doit non seulement procéder de la contemplation, mais qu'elle en est son développement naturel. Pour saint Thomas, contempler c'est admirable, mais la contemplation qui devient prédication, évangélisation, est le sommet même de la vie religieuse.

"Ce qui était dès le commencement, ce que nous avons entendu, ce que nous avons vu de nos yeux, ce que nous avons contemplé et que nos mains ont touché du Verbe de vie... nous vous l'annonçons à vous aussi, afin que vous aussi vous soyez en communion avec nous. Et notre communion est communion avec le Père et avec son Fils Jésus Christ" (1 Jn 1, 1-3).

Saint Thomas l'affirme : "de même qu'il est préférable d'éclairer que de seulement briller, de même il est préférable de donner aux autres les fruits de sa contemplation que de simplement contempler" (IIa-IIae, q. 188). Voilà un beau sujet de controverse, mais qui n'est pas l'objet de cette conférence... Mais en apportant cette belle réflexion de Thomas d'Aquin, je voulais simplement mieux faire comprendre en quoi ce ministère d'évangélisation sur Internet rejoint pour moi non seulement la grande tradition de prédication de mon ordre religieux, mais la mission de l'Église elle-même, la vocation de tout baptisé.

Ainsi donc, mon ministère sur Internet est l'une des manières que j'ai trouvées afin d'actualiser dans ma vie de croyant et de prédicateur de la Bonne Nouvelle cet appel pressant qui traverse tout le Nouveau Testament comme un trait enflammé, et qui est la voix du Christ lui-même qui enjoint à ses disciples d'annoncer la bonne nouvelle du Royaume.

### Présence sur Internet

J'aimerais maintenant partager avec vous ce qu'a été pour moi depuis maintenant plus de six ans cette

aventure virtuelle et spirituelle, aventure dans laquelle je suis engagé plus que jamais puisque le supérieur de mon ordre religieux m'a demandé d'en faire mon principal apostolat en devenant le promoteur de l'Internet pour la famille dominicaine.

Au cours de ces dernières années, où j'ai œuvré sur Internet, j'ai eu l'occasion de travailler sur plusieurs types de projets et j'aimerais présenter maintenant cinq de ces projets afin de permettre aux néophytes parmi vous de mieux saisir les possibilités du média Internet, et aussi afin de vous donner des pistes d'échanges bien concrètes pour la deuxième partie de cette conférence. C'est aussi à partir de ces projets que je développerai mon constat personnel quant à la pertinence de l'Internet pour l'Église. Voici tout d'abord une simple énumération détaillée des principaux projets que j'ai mis sur pied. Chronologiquement, les sites que j'ai conçus sont les suivants :

1. Un site Internet pour l'aumônerie universitaire où j'ai œuvré pendant treize ans, le Centre étudiant Benoît-Lacroix (<http://www.benoitlacroix.org>), site sur lequel il est possible de trouver à la fois des textes de réflexion et, surtout, la liste des activités, les horaires du centre ainsi que ceux de notre communauté chrétienne universitaire. Ce site s'adresse aux étudiants et étudiantes de l'Université de Montréal, une université de plus de 50.000 étudiants.

2. Deuxième projet : un site pour la province dominicaine à laquelle j'appartiens, soit celle du Canada (<http://www.dominicains.ca>), et où j'ai commencé à offrir, en plus de toutes les informations pertinentes sur la vie de ma province et la vie dominicaine en général, des commentaires de l'Évangile du dimanche et surtout un service d'accompagnement spirituel, qui fonctionne toujours après plus de six ans.

3. Troisièmement : j'ai créé une fraternité dominicaine virtuelle, la Fraternité Sainte-Catherine de Sienne (<http://www.spiri2.com>), offrant à ses membres, en plus des textes de réflexion sur la vie dominicaine et la théologie en général, un forum de discussion, ainsi que la possibilité d'échanger des textes, la possibilité pour les membres de se présenter, de se faire connaître les uns aux autres. Je dois dire qu'assez rapidement certains membres de la fraternité ont souhaité s'engager davantage et qu'ils ont mis sur pied un service de "lectio divina", comme eux-mêmes l'ont appelé. Ainsi, les membres intéressés font parvenir aux autres membres leurs réflexions, leur méditation personnelle sur le texte de l'Évangile du dimanche. Certains membres européens se sont même donné un rendez-vous annuel en Suisse autour du Nouvel An. Un temps de retraite et de partage.

4. Quatrième projet : le site "*Spiritualité 2000*" (<http://www.spiritualite2000.com>), le projet sur lequel j'ai le plus travaillé jusqu'à maintenant. Ce site a célébré le 1<sup>er</sup> novembre dernier son premier anniversaire et reçoit plus de 425 visiteurs par jour. Il s'agit essentiellement d'un magazine de spiritualité chrétienne auquel collaborent avec moi, bénévolement, douze personnes, dont plusieurs membres de la famille dominicaine.

Le but de ce projet était d'offrir sur Internet un lieu de découverte et d'approfondissement de la spiritualité chrétienne. Ce site a repris le service d'accompagnement spirituel que j'avais inauguré six années auparavant et six frères reçoivent maintenant les demandes des visiteurs. Je me permets de mentionner le commentaire de l'un de ces frères qui a 80 ans et qui me disait : "Tu sais, ce ministère sur Internet constitue un nouveau départ pour moi, car ma surdité m'empêchait de recevoir des gens pour la confession ou l'accompagnement spirituel. Je me sens maintenant revivre". Il serait trop long de développer ici tout ce que l'on retrouve sur ce site de "*Spiritualité 2000*", mais je mentionnerais néanmoins la présence d'une galerie d'art chrétien, ainsi qu'une section offrant des textes de réflexion aux personnes aux prises avec un deuil, confrontées à la mort.

5. Enfin, le dernier projet fut celui d'un site ayant une durée limitée, soit un mois (bien qu'il soit toujours possible de le visiter). Il s'agit du site du Chapitre général des dominicains tenu l'été dernier à Providence (RI) aux USA (<http://www.providence2001.org>). Le but du site était de permettre aux membres de la famille dominicaine et à tous ceux et celles qui s'intéressaient à notre chapitre d'en suivre le déroulement via Internet. Le jour de l'élection du Maître de l'Ordre, la nouvelle, avec la photo du nouvel élu, était disponible immédiatement après l'événement et, ce jour-là, plus de trois mille visiteurs sont venus sur le site. Pour la durée du chapitre, ce sont près de 60.000 visiteurs qui sont venus.

Voici ce qu'on retrouve sur le site : des textes généraux et des statistiques sur l'Ordre, des albums-photos permettant de vivre les grands événements du chapitre, les liturgies, les temps de fête, de vie fraternelle. On y trouve aussi de nombreuses entrevues avec les capitulaires, tant écrites qu'en audio, et l'on y présente même une entrevue-vidéo avec notre nouveau Maître de l'Ordre, le frère Carlos Azpiroz Costa. D'ailleurs, quand le frère Azpiroz a téléphoné aux siens en Argentine afin de leur communiquer la nouvelle de son élection, toute sa famille était déjà au courant... grâce au site Internet.

Ce site a été l'occasion d'une grande convergence de la famille dominicaine autour du chapitre. Plus de

mille personnes ont signé le livre d'or du chapitre. De 50 à 100 personnes par jour nous ont fait parvenir leurs messages d'encouragement et de félicitation via le courriel. Un frère de 85 ans qui a visité le site, émerveillé, m'a dit : "Tu sais, c'est la première fois de toute ma vie religieuse que je vois ce qui se passe à un Chapitre général".

Voilà un survol rapide des principaux projets Internet sur lesquels j'ai été impliqué depuis six ans. J'aimerais maintenant vous partager quelques-unes de mes convictions suite à ces expériences au sujet de la pertinence d'une présence d'Église sur Internet.

### Le constat

Petite anecdote se passant au Moyen-Âge. Trois maçons qui travaillent sur un même projet sont à l'œuvre sur un chantier au cœur de la ville. Un passant s'arrête et leur demande ce qu'ils font : 1. Je suis tailleur de pierre, dit le premier, je taille des pierres. 2. Je suis tailleur de pierre, répond le second, je construis un mur. 3. Je suis tailleur de pierre, dit le troisième, je construis une cathédrale.

Pour moi, qui n'ai pas l'habileté d'un constructeur de cathédrale ni la prétention d'être un artiste, la conception de sites Internet vise néanmoins la création d'un lieu qui soit beau et accueillant pour le visiteur, car le site Internet est un lieu public. C'est la nouvelle place publique du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle et l'Église a besoin de bâtisseurs de cathédrales virtuelles où la foi puisse être dépeinte, contemplée, annoncée, débattue. La création d'un site Internet pour grand public est une œuvre d'art en soi, où se rencontrent à la fois les langages de l'architecture, de la peinture, de la musique, même de l'urbanisme (pensons ici à la navigation sur un site). Le webmestre devant son site est non seulement un architecte, mais il est semblable au peintre devant sa toile. La toile est virtuelle mais l'inspiration doit être au rendez-vous.

### L'internaute

Essayons de voir maintenant qui est l'internaute qui se présente sur les sites Internet et, dans le cas qui nous intéresse, qui se présente sur les sites chrétiens. Tout d'abord, ce visiteur inconnu n'est pas sans visage, sans nom, sans histoire, ni dépourvu d'une recherche de sens.

L'internaute qui visite un site chrétien est comparable à tous ces touristes en Europe qui passent une bonne partie de leurs vacances à visiter cathédrales, basiliques, églises, monastères, en quête de beauté, d'histoire, de spiritualité. Sont-ils tous chrétiens ou croyants ? Loin de là ? Seront-ils tous transformés par leur visite ? Certainement pas. Mais à travers les peintures, les

vitraux, les mosaïques, l'architecture, l'espace, la beauté, le silence, tous se sont approchés du mystère, d'un certain langage qui exprime à la fois l'ineffable et le mystère d'un Dieu trine : Père, Fils et Esprit. Pendant quelques minutes ou quelques heures, ces visiteurs se font pèlerins de l'Absolu. Pourquoi un tel voyage ne serait-il pas possible sur Internet ?

Les sites chrétiens sur Internet sont parfois comme des cathédrales virtuelles. Pour certains visiteurs ils sont l'occasion de s'approcher, anonymement, de la vie de l'Église. Une occasion de poser des questions sur un forum ou service d'accompagnement spirituel. Des questions qu'ils n'oseraient jamais poser à leur curé ! Le site leur offre une occasion soit de lire des textes sacrés, de fureter dans des livres religieux sans être vus ou même de laisser un graffiti injurieux sur la page d'un livre d'or. C'est déjà un premier pas vers un dialogue éventuel. Le visiteur a pu s'exprimer. Il a pu satisfaire une certaine curiosité, trouver réponse à certaines questions, faire la connaissance d'un accompagnateur dans son cheminement ou même laisser une prière.

Les sites Internet, en plus d'être des mines d'information, des lieux de regroupement pour des associations, peuvent aussi être des lieux de ressourcement, et tout particulièrement pour des chrétiens isolés. Je pense à cette chrétienne de Tunisie, seule en milieu musulman, me disant trouver sa principale nourriture spirituelle sur certains sites Internet.

Les sites peuvent être des lieux de catéchèse, de formation théologique : je pense à ce projet d'université sur Internet, DOMUNI (<http://www.domuni.org>), qu'ont mis au point mes frères dominicains de Toulouse. Ou encore les sites Internet peuvent aussi être des lieux de solidarité et d'engagement pour des personnes partageant une même cause. Je pense à une amie au Canada qui gère un site Internet pour venir en aide aux enfants d'Haïti (<http://www.projet oasis.ca.tc>), un projet virtuel qui s'enracine au cœur même de sa propre famille de cinq enfants, dont une jeune haïtienne adoptée, un projet qui s'étend maintenant à quinze classes d'étudiants dans les écoles de sa ville et qui commence à intéresser amis et voisins. Voilà un projet Internet qui rapproche des gens et qui devient une occasion d'engagement à l'endroit des plus démunis. Qui l'aurait cru ? On est bien loin ici de l'anonymat tant reproché à l'Internet, bien que cette facette du média ne soit pas un désavantage quand nous le situons dans un contexte d'évangélisation.

## Conclusion

Il y a à peine quelques semaines, soit le 21 novembre

dernier, le Pape Jean Paul II envoyait officiellement la lettre apostolique "*Ecclesia Oceania*" via Internet. Ce fut une première dans la vie de l'Église. Un événement médiatique qui ne fait qu'illustrer à quel point l'Internet est devenu un moyen incontournable en tant que média à l'intérieur même de la vie de l'Église.

Nous sommes en présence d'un outil de communication aux multiples possibilités et proprement révolutionnaire. Avec l'Internet nous assistons à une démocratisation sans précédent d'un outil de communication, grâce à son économie d'utilisation et sa facilité d'accès. Un média qui conjugue à la fois l'art épistolaire, le journal, le bulletin, le magazine, la vidéo, l'audio, la place publique via les forums, la communication en direct via le "chat" ou même la téléphonie. Dans la suite des moyens de communication tels que l'imprimerie, la radio, et la télévision, l'Internet à son tour constitue un rendez-vous à ne pas manquer pour l'Église.

Et pour les irréductibles sceptiques, une brève histoire pour terminer. C'est l'histoire d'un ancien hussard qui vivait dans la forêt. Las d'avoir guerroyé, il n'en sortait que pour s'approvisionner en détournant quelques passants. Il rencontra un jour un enfant dont le regard l'intrigua. Il lui tendit dix roubles en disant : "Ils sont à toi si tu m'indiques où est Dieu". L'enfant lui répondit : "En voici cent. Ils sont à toi si tu me dis où Dieu n'est pas".

Réf. : Texte de l'auteur.

\*\*\*\*\*



Rekha Chennattu, RA

## *Women in the Mission of the Church* *An Interpretation of John 4*

There is a growing awareness among us today that women are not given their rightful place in Biblical exegesis and theology, and in the life and mission of the Church. This exclusion has been often justified by recourse to Scripture. It is generally accepted that reading Scripture is not neutral and interpreters are not free of presuppositions. Moreover some biblical texts themselves are indeed ideologically biased against women; and some texts are mistranslated and misinterpreted by the exegetes. Hence, the Bible has become an important source and legitimizer of excluding and alienating women from the mission of the Church.<sup>1</sup> This makes it imperative for us, both women and men, to identify attitudes that are discriminatory and dehumanizing to women, especially when these attitudes are legitimized by Scripture. There remains of course the difficult question of attitudes to women in cultures other than our own, attitudes which appear to be questionable from our viewpoint; the difficulty is further compounded when they are interlinked with socio-cultural values which are different from our own. Though the present essay does not explicitly enter into this complex question the hope is that it may contribute indirectly to an answer since our discussion centres on a dialogue of two rival cultures.

The Gospel of John presents women positively, and they play significant roles in the narrative.<sup>2</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse all the pericopes in which women play important roles in John's Gospel. We focus on the Samaritan episode in John 4. In this missionary episode the evangelist makes a woman the protagonist. This is also one of the few texts in the Gospels where the issue of women is explicitly raised by the characters and responded to by Jesus. It not only reflects the socio-cultural reality of the Johannine community but also prefigures the modern ideals, aspirations and struggles of women in the mission of the Church. The example of the Samaritan woman, the critical and creative dialogue partner of Jesus, who actively participated in the apostolic ministry can be a model for the women of today. This is so because the episode challenges us to review our understanding of Church, so that our understanding that focuses on God's presence that leads to a fuller and more authentic humanization of all women and men.

### 1. The Johannine Community

The Gospel of John reflects the history, theology

and sociological concerns of the Johannine community. The evangelist reinterprets the "Jesus traditions" in the light of the life situation of the community. Even though the episode in Samaria is artistically and skillfully written with natural settings, the historical plausibility of the ministry of Jesus in Samaria is questioned by many exegetes.<sup>3</sup> Commentators generally agree that this episode has its real context in the history of the Johannine community rather than in the earthly ministry of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> It was composed on the basis of the mission that was actually undertaken by the Johannine community in Samaria after the Pentecostal experience. The mission of the Johannine community in Samaria is projected back into the ministry of Jesus. This missionary activity created tension in the community as it primarily consisted of Jewish converts. Through the Samaritan story, John conveyed the message to the apostolic Church that it should break down the old barriers of Judaism, and that Christianity could not be confined within Judaism.<sup>5</sup> This the evangelist does by attributing the conversion of Samaritans to Jesus himself and not to his disciples. Thus he legitimizes the Samaritan mission and tries to establish equality between the Jewish and Samaritan Christians in the Johannine community. The story is, thus, a polemic against those who object to the Samaritan Christian mission.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the basic purpose of the story is both "etiological", for it interprets the origin of how the Samaritans came to be an integral part of the Christian community, and "evangelical", as it encourages other Samaritans to accept Christianity by following the example of the Samaritan people from Sychar.<sup>7</sup>

However the Samaritan story reveals something more than just the legitimization of the Samaritan mission. This is one of those rare passages in the Gospels, in which the issue of the female gender is raised explicitly (Jn 4:9,27). In fact, the Evangelist makes a woman the central character in this missionary episode. What experience or circumstance in the community prompted the author to choose a woman as the central character of this story? Why did the community preserve it and accept it as part of Scripture? Because of the Gospel's normative authority, it is unlikely that the community would accept a fictitious account of a woman playing such a significant role in the apostleship as part of the Gospel. It seems more reasonable to suggest that there were Christian women who played important roles in the community, and that the

author wanted to authenticate and legitimize their roles as initiated, approved and appreciated by Jesus.

The interlude of the return of the disciples from the town and their shock at Jesus' conversation with a woman (Jn 4:27) gives us further insights into the reason why the author chose a woman as the central character and the reason why the community preserved this story. I say this because, in addition to the above significance of the pericope as a whole, this interlude reveals something more about the Johannine community, viz., the male resistance to women's participation in ministry.<sup>8</sup> R. Brown translates verse 27b, "the disciples were shocked" at Jesus' conversation with a woman.<sup>9</sup> In this verse the narrator gives us a piece of information which is in no way necessary to the story itself. Does it not indicate the male hesitations about women's participation in apostleship? S. Schneiders observes that the sequence with the disciples is "aimed at those traditionalist male Christians in the Johannine community who found the independence and apostolic initiative of Christian women shocking".<sup>10</sup> It seems to reflect the resistance to leadership roles played by women in the community.<sup>11</sup> The discourse of Jesus on his mission and its extension into Samaria refutes the male claim of having an exclusive role in the mission of Jesus. The response of Jesus in v. 38 is very significant because it reveals the mind of Jesus regarding the mission accomplished by the woman. "I sent you [the male disciples] to reap that for which you did not labour; others [the Samaritan woman] have laboured and you have entered into their labour". Therefore the male disciples are presented neither as the "originators", nor as the possessors, of the monopoly of the apostolic missionary activities of the Johannine community. They are asked by Jesus to participate and collaborate with the Samaritan woman in the apostolic ministry which she has already begun. After a lengthy analysis, Schneiders confirms that "whoever wrote the fourth Gospel had some experience of women Christians as theologians and as apostles, was aware of the tension this aroused in the community, and wanted to present Jesus as legitimizing female participation in male-appropriated roles".<sup>12</sup> Hence the hypothesis that women played significant roles and participated actively in the ministries of the Church in the Johannine community seems to be reasonable.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The Samaritan Woman: A Representative Figure

John 4 follows the general scheme of a type-scene of an encounter at the well in the Old Testament.<sup>14</sup> There are many OT stories in which a stranger meets a maiden at a well.<sup>15</sup> In the OT the meeting of a man with a woman at a well and their subsequent marriage is considered as a type-scene of betrothal at the well.<sup>16</sup> A striking difference between the Johannine account of the

encounter at the well and that of the OT lies in the fact that the essential element, the marriage, is apparently missing in John 4. While the OT scenes end with a marriage, John 4 concludes with a confession of faith in Jesus.

Why did the narrator use this *type-scene* in our text? In the OT, the relationship between God and the people of Israel is seen as that of husband and wife.<sup>17</sup> The *covenant* between God and the people of Israel is seen as a marriage between God and Israel. Therefore, our narrative, by following the pattern of the OT betrothal scenes, relates the event with echoes and overtones of a divine courtship.<sup>18</sup> In the confession of faith in John 4:42, the Samaritans express the re-discovery of their true and unique husband, Jesus, and the renewal of their old covenant.<sup>19</sup> How do we understand this new covenant? In chapter 3 John the Baptist identified Jesus as the true bridegroom to whom God has given the new Israel as bride (Jn 3:27-30). Now the new bridegroom, Jesus, who assumes the role of Yahweh, the bridegroom of Israel, comes to claim Samaria as an integral part of the new Israel, namely, the Christian community, especially the Johannine community. The Samaritan woman, the 'bride of Jesus', symbolizes the Johannine community.<sup>20</sup> The Samaritan story reveals something about the theology and the historical situation of the community rather than the personal life of the woman.

Since the above analysis shows that the Samaritan woman is not a mere individual but has a representative character, it enables us to explore the possibility of considering her as a representative of women. As we move forward in the narrative, we perceive that the role of the woman develops from an individual level to a universal one. She is introduced first as *a woman of Samaria* (4,7), and then as *the Samaritan woman* (v. 9), but as the narrative progresses, she is portrayed as *the woman* or just *woman* (v. 21). Thus, the Samaritan woman gradually becomes a prototype of woman.<sup>21</sup> Therefore she is a representative figure not only of the Johannine community in general but also of women theologians and apostles, who are leaders of the community.

## 3. The Samaritan Woman: A Creative Dialogue Partner

The Samaritan woman openly questioned Jesus at every significant moment of the narrative. First of all, the request of Jesus in v. 7b: "give me a drink", is questioned by the woman in v. 9: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?". She challenges the religious association between Jews and Samaritans and the social association between men and women. Secondly, Jesus' offer of giving living water to the woman in v. 10 was also challenged by her. In this context, the woman's question to Jesus, "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" recalls Jacob's rolling the



stone from the well's mouth and watering Rachel's flock (Gn 29:1-12).<sup>22</sup> The text seems to presuppose allusions to Jacob's miraculous raising of water.<sup>23</sup> Since the well is so deep and there is no bucket, the only possible way to get water is to perform a miracle as Jacob did. The woman resorts to her own religious traditions to understand Jesus. Thirdly, the woman challenges Jesus' prophetic character by bringing up the issue of the right place of worship in vv. 19-20. In the words of Schneiders, "in this extraordinary scene the woman is not simply a 'foil' feeding Jesus cue lines. She is a *genuine theological dialogue partner* gradually experiencing Jesus' self-revelation even as she reveals herself to him".<sup>24</sup>

### 3.1. A Social Critic

The response of the woman in v. 9, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?", establishes a clear division between herself and Jesus.<sup>25</sup> She has the ability to give water to Jesus, but she raises an objection because of the social and religious prohibitions. The woman brings up the issue of the national antagonism between Jews and Samaritans. The reader who knows the Jewish traditions is aware that the request of Jesus is improper and undesirable. This aspect is reinforced by the comment of the narrator in v. 9.<sup>26</sup> The question still remains: how do we interpret the "surprise" of the woman in v. 9? Is she in agreement with the twofold prohibition? In v. 9, her own statement and the comment of the narrator indicate that this prohibition is a view of the Jews, perhaps more concretely the view of male Jews.<sup>27</sup> Does she abide by this prohibition? In the words of D. Patte, "She is surprised because she discovers that, in this regard, Jesus is like her".<sup>28</sup> By responding to Jesus and so agreeing to enter into dialogue with Jesus, she shows that she does not care about this prohibition. She had looked upon Jesus as a Jew like any other Jew. However, by dealing with her and talking to her, Jesus presents himself as someone who does not follow the religious and social prohibitions regarding interaction between Jews and Samaritans, and between men and women. It is very striking that instead of debating the issue of separation, Jesus changes the topic of the discussion.<sup>29</sup> By entering into a dialogue with Jesus, like him, she has also shown an openness which transcends social traditions. Her courage and freedom are great as she is completely unaware of the identity of Jesus. She moves from alienation to communion, from the socio-religious context of reciprocal contempt (v. 9) to the sphere of encounters and dealings between human beings.

### 3.2. A Contextualized Theologian

In the history of the interpretation of John 4, the standard approach considers it as a story of a whore

who is saved from her sexual sin by the progressive and dynamic revelation of Jesus. Some exegetes mainly focused on the Samaritan woman's immoral marital life. John 4:18 was interpreted as Jesus confronting the woman with her sinful life.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, other exegetes assert that there is no indication in the text that the evangelist wants to present Jesus as confronting the woman by revealing the secrets of her sinful life.<sup>31</sup> If we look at the story from the narrator's point of view, the details of the private life of the woman do not constitute the major thrust of the story. In fact, in his response to the woman, Jesus does not condemn the woman, rather he appreciates her truthfulness, by focusing on how 'well' (*kalos*) and how 'truly' (*alethes*) the woman has spoken.<sup>32</sup> Hence it is reasonable to conclude that the private life of the woman is not the point of discussion in verses 18-20.<sup>33</sup> Why did the author, then, bring up the issue of her marital situation in the dialogue? The reader perceives an irony as the apparent ignorance of Jesus is in opposition with his detailed knowledge of her marital situation. Her response to Jesus' query furnishes a good opportunity for him to manifest the 'divine knowledge' which is the nature of the Messiah. This manifestation of his nature functions as the pivot, the turning point of the dialogue. Jesus' extraordinary knowledge of her situation makes her realize that he is a prophet (v. 19).<sup>34</sup> Jesus is someone who has the special ability to know what is hidden (cf. Jn 1:48-49).

The dialogue between Jesus and the woman in verses 19-20 confirms our hypothesis that her sinful nature is not the centre of the story. It is the first time that the woman takes the initiative in bringing forward a new topic. Her initiative is an indication of her growing openness, freedom and confidence in Jesus. If her personal life were the central theme of the story, then, like the disciples of John the Baptist, very probably she would have asked a personal question: "what then shall I do?" (cf. Lk 3:10-14). On the contrary, what she brings forward is a national and religious issue pertinent to her people. According to the Scripture of the Samaritans, the Pentateuch, there is only one place of worship (Dt 12:2-12). They consider Mount Gerizim as the mount of grace and blessing, because Noah and Abraham offered sacrifice on this mountain.<sup>35</sup> In Dt 27:4 the Samaritan Pentateuch reads 'Mount Gerizim' instead of the 'Mount Ebal' of the Masoretic Text, thus Gerizim is considered as a sacred mountain, the place of worship and God's revelation. Hence, for the Samaritans Mount Gerizim is as holy for the worship of God as Jerusalem for the Jews.<sup>36</sup> This disagreement regarding the right place of worship was the most important and pertinent religious dispute that separated the Samaritans from the Jews. The Samaritans believed that the Messiah would settle this dispute regarding the right place of worship. In the words of T. Okure,

“the woman thus proves to be remarkably in touch with the current disputes between the two nations. As for finding a topic worthy of a Jewish prophet she could do no better than raise this long standing issue of Gerizim versus Jerusalem”.<sup>37</sup> Thus, these verses reveal the identity of the woman as a person who is well-versed in her religious tradition. She articulates the dispute from the perspective of the Samaritans: “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship” (Jn 4:20). Notice that instead of saying “we worship” she says “Our fathers worshipped”. By thus appealing to her ancestors, she seeks to strengthen the Samaritan practice in contrast to the Jewish one. She juxtaposes the tradition of the ancestors with the current practice and dogma of Judaism. From the perspective of history, the practices of the Fathers take precedence over the contemporary Jewish dogma of worship in Jerusalem which began only from the Davidic era (2 Sm 6). The Samaritan tradition rests on the authority of the patriarchs. The woman questions Jesus by holding on to the authority of the ancestors.<sup>38</sup> The Samaritan woman is depicted in our story as a ‘theologian’ who dares to confront a prophet and to discuss theological issues with him. And she does both these in the context of her own religious traditions. She is rooted in her traditions yet open to receive the revelation from Jesus. When she proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, she does it in terms of the expectation of the Samaritan, not Jewish, belief. She is portrayed as someone who initiates and encourages the need for dialogue and contextualization in mission.

### 3.3. A Committed Apostle

The journey that the woman makes from unbelief to belief in Jesus reflects the characteristics of a committed believer. At the beginning, she encounters Jesus with puzzlement because of her ignorance. However, she is open to participate more and more actively as the dialogue progresses. When we look at John 4 within the literary context of the section *Cana to Cana* (chs. 2-4), the Samaritan woman is clearly contrasted with Nicodemus (3:1-15), who is confused by Jesus’ self-revelation and disappears into the shadows. On the other hand, the Samaritan woman accepts the revelation of Jesus and brings others to him by her witness. She becomes a model of “mature discipleship”.<sup>39</sup> Her response, when she recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, is very significant. She abandons the water jar and goes into the city to spread the good news of her encounter with Jesus, the Messiah.<sup>40</sup> She fulfills the “standard characteristics” of an apostle by giving testimony to the people in the city, and inviting them to ‘come and see’ Jesus.<sup>41</sup> The statement of the Samaritans in v. 42 that “it is no longer because of your words that we

believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world”, does not denigrate the apostolic activity of the woman. The role of the woman, like John the Baptist or any other faithful witness, is relativized only in relation to Jesus.<sup>42</sup> Therefore the acknowledgment of the Samaritans in v. 42 does not belittle the witness of the woman, but rather confirms it.<sup>43</sup> The transforming effect of her apostleship is marked by the whole-hearted response of the people from Sychar.

## 4. The Role of Women in the Church

The Samaritan woman is remarkable for her openness, conviction, initiative and decisive action. She is not afraid of confronting a Jewish man, even though Jews looked down upon Samaritans. She is not depicted as a passive receiver, accepting unquestioningly all that is said by Jesus. Her theological background, personal interests and spontaneous appropriation of the role of an apostle to bear witness to Jesus in the city are very outstanding and significant. The Samaritan woman takes the initiative in the mission of proclaiming Jesus without looking for approval from anyone and without seeking the permission of anyone. Patriarchal cultures regard women as psychologically sentimental, intellectually inferior, socially marginal, religiously impure and culturally insignificant, and thus incapable of leadership. The qualities of the Samaritan woman, as presented in our pericope, refute this claim of the patriarchal culture. If we understand leadership as an animating role characterized by a critical attitude, creative initiative and committed action, the Samaritan woman is presented here as an excellent leader of her community.<sup>44</sup> The Samaritan woman actively engaged in theological discussion, freely witnessed to her faith in public, efficiently proclaimed the Gospel (good news of salvation) using the Samaritan categories (inculturated proclamation), and courageously assumed the role of the “originator” or the leader of the Samaritan mission in Sychar.

The story of the Samaritan woman could empower Indian women to awaken their dormant spiritual energy, the life-giving force. The rebirth of this spiritual energy will enable them to embrace a “hermeneutics of suspicion” of traditional spiritualities, interpretations of the Scriptures and understandings of the Church and her mission in society.<sup>45</sup> This awakening is needed for women to look at their presence and mission in the Church from a new perspective.

The Samaritan woman invites women in the Church to be confident and rooted in their religious traditions. She challenges them to be in touch with the current issues and problems of their people. She empowers them to break the barrier of the ‘male stereotype’, viz., that women are dependent on their male counterparts and require their permission and approval to embark

on any undertaking. She encourages them to take initiatives and participate actively in all the ministries of the Church, including leadership and decision making. Like the Samaritan woman all women are called to be both creative and critical dialogue partners and bridge-builders in the difficult and demanding task of dialoguing with 'others', 'strangers' and those of other persuasions.

## 5. A Challenge to the Church

After many centuries of invisibility, silence and alienation in many forms and guises, women are gaining confidence and rediscovering their strength. Our understanding of the Church needs to take into account this changing and challenging social reality more seriously. We cannot think of mission in the third millennium, without awakening our soul to the alienated experience of half of the human family. In this context, the mission of the Church from the perspective of women is "one of reconciliation, the overcoming of the fundamental sin of alienation between female and male".<sup>46</sup>

The Samaritan story envisages a community guided by the Spirit and characterized by radical egalitarianism, in which equality is presupposed, universality is assumed, unity is maintained, communion is understood and commitment is implied. This radical egalitarianism rejects all the distinctions based on gender, race and class. The mission of the Church needs to be a response and a radical commitment of persons inspired and infused by the Spirit to foster human dignity, equality, and freedom for all, both women and men. The breaking down of all gender and racial barriers will bring about a radical egalitarian understanding of the presence of the Church in the world.

In the Johannine model of the Christian community, all members are branches, the authority of the Twelve consists in the primacy of witness and not in the primacy of power and domination.<sup>47</sup> As Vatican II clearly states, in Baptism, all are called to participate in the mission of the Church and its ministries (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 33). Therefore, the appropriation of ministerial roles must be governed by gifts, abilities and aptitudes rather than by any static classification based on gender. We are called to rethink the structure of the Church in the light of the "signs of the times". The celebrative, group-oriented, enduring and hope-filled qualities, which are typically feminine characteristics, can transform the Church which is facing the serious problems of brokenness, despair and disintegration. Hence an inclusive leadership and animation can be a renewing force in the life and mission of the Church.

The bridge-building, constructive, dialogical approach of the story of the Samaritan woman can be a model for the Church in dialogue. In this dialogical process, there is no elimination of differences between

the dialogue partners. It allows a growth-promoting and enriching interchange, which is in no way detrimental to their identity, whether, male or female, Christian or Non-Christian. The Samaritan episode projects also a world in the process of a dynamic movement from personal alienation, social discrimination and religious exclusion to human solidarity, liberative communion and transformative integration.<sup>48</sup> Our understanding of the Church must be such that difference is perceived not as a cause of division but as a source of enrichment. If the Church has to fulfil her prophetic and liberative mission in the third millennium, that is, in a world marked by increasing pluralism, then it will be imperative that she discovers a new identity, that is to say, a new way of being, that is inclusive and a new way of functioning which is dialogical.

## Notes

\*Paper presented at the Conference on "Mission in Asia in the Third Millennium: Models for Integral Human Liberation", Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 14<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1999. The author <mailto:rekhara@hotmail.com> teaches Scripture at the Pontifical Institute (Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth), Pune 411014 and is at present doing doctoral studies at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.

<sup>1</sup>For this view, see S. M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, New York, 1991, pp. 180-182.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the Mother of Jesus in ch. 2; the Samaritan woman in ch. 4; an unnamed woman in chs. 7-8; Mary and Martha in ch. 11 and Mary Magdalene in ch. 20. Some may consider John 7:53-8,11 as an exception. However, this passage is regarded as a later interpolation. Even if we consider it as part of the Gospel, it is indeed a story about men who are challenged by Jesus rather than about 'a woman caught in adultery'.

<sup>3</sup>Jesus' ministry in Samaria is mentioned only in John. According to Acts 8:1-8, Samaria is one of the first missions undertaken by the disciples, including John, after the Pentecost. The confession made by the Samaritans in Jn 4:42, viz., that Jesus is 'the Saviour of the world' confirms this conclusion, since it uses a post-resurrection confessional title for Jesus. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, New York, 1966, pp. 175-176 and O. Cullmann, "Samaria and the Origins of the Christian Mission", in *The Early Church*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins, London, 1956, p. 192.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of this setting for the Samaritan story in John 4, see O. Cullmann, *The Johannine Circle: Its Place in Judaism, among the Disciple of Judaism and in Early Christianity: A Study in the Origin of the Gospel of John*, London, 1976, pp. 39-56; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, London, 1972, p. 192; F. J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading*



*John 1-4*, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 164; S.M. Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church", in *The Gospel of John as Literature*, ed. M.W.G. Stibbe, New York, 1993, p. 132. For a detailed discussion on the presence of the Samaritans in the Johannine community and their influence on the theology of John, see R.E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, New York, 1979, pp. 36-40 and 76-78.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bligh, "Jesus in Samaria" *Heythrop Journal* 3 (1962), 329-346, esp. 346. There are also other opinions, e.g., "in the final form of the Gospel it functions to allow the earthly Jesus to give a warrant for the suppression of Temple worship, whether on Gerazim or in Jerusalem". See C.H. Talbert, *Reading John*, New York, 1992, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> Lindars suggests that this resistance is on the basis of the prohibition in Mt 10:5 and Lk 9:51-56. See *The Gospel of John*, p. 175-176.

<sup>7</sup> For this opinion, see Talbert, *Reading John*, p. 111.

<sup>8</sup> Many exegetes consider the interlude on the disciples as a later interpolation into an already existing story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. This section is considered as a later addition to the text for the following reasons: 1) in the Sinaitic Syriac version, verse 8 is placed after verse 5; 2) in the introduction, vv. 4-6, and the conclusion, vv. 40-42, Jesus is alone with the Samaritans; 3) the disciples do not contribute to the story of Jesus and the Samaritans, in other words, the story of the Samaritans is complete without the involvement of the disciples; 4) the discussion with the disciples actually interrupts the sequence with the Samaritans. See, Boers, *Neither on This Mountain Nor in Jerusalem*, Atlanta, 1988, pp. 2-6. Bultmann considered the dialogue between Jesus and the Woman as the original core of the chapter, which had been taken from the *Semeia* Source. See his *The Gospel of John*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 178-80; Fortna's view is identical with that of Bultmann: see R. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 193-194.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, p. 167.

<sup>10</sup> Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church", p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> For a general discussion on women and the Evangelists, see Ben Witherington III, *Women and Genesis of Christianity*, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 225-236.

<sup>12</sup> Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, p. 192.

<sup>13</sup> Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church", pp. 123-143. See also Brown, "Role of Women in the Fourth Gospel", in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, pp. 183-198.

<sup>14</sup> A Type-scene is a narrative that follows a recognized biblical pattern. See R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York, 1981, pp. 51-62. The connec-

tions between the OT betrothal scenes and Jn 4 have long been noticed. There is sufficient evidence in the text for such an understanding. For a detailed analysis, coming to this conclusion, see D.F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, Philadelphia, 1972, p. 308; P.J. Cahill, "Narrative Art in Jn IV", *Religious Studies Bulletin* 2 (1982), pp. 41-48; J. L. Ska, "Dal Nuovo all'Antico Testamento," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1996 II, pp. 14-23; T. Okure, *Johannine Approach to Mission*, pp. 87-88; and J. Bligh, "Jesus in Samaria," p. 336. For a comparison between the OT type-scene stories and John 4, See P. D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta, 1985), pp. 101-103 and C.M. Carmichael, "Marriage and the Samaritan Woman", *NTS* 26 (1979-80), pp. 332-346, esp. pp. 336-338.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Isaac's servant and Rebekah in Gen 24,10-19; Jacob and Rachel in Gn 29:1-14; and Moses and Zipporah in Ex 2:15b-21.

<sup>16</sup> A detailed analysis is offered by Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 51-62.

<sup>17</sup> It is well known that *ba'al* in the Canannite language can mean both husband and lord or god. Cf. Hos 2, 16-17. See also Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Peabody, 1979, p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> Ska, "Dal Nuovo all'Antico Testamento", p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> The inclusive and universal dimension is one of the characteristics of the renewed covenant in Jesus. It is open for all and transcends all the boundaries of sectarianism and casteism. The Samaritans are welcomed by Jesus as an integral part of the new community.

<sup>21</sup> Cahill claims that the use of a woman in v. 21, reflects not only the same word in 2, 4 but also foreshadows the woman in Revelation 12; see his "Narrative Art in John IV," pp. 47-48.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. B. Barnhart, *The Good Wine: Reading John from the Center*, New York, 1993, p. 203.

<sup>23</sup> J. H. Neyrey, "Jacob Traditions and the Interpretation of John 4:10-26," *CBQ* 41 (1979), pp. 423-424 and J. R. Dias, "Palestinian Targum and the New Testament," *NovT* 6 (1963), pp. 76-77.

<sup>24</sup> The italics is mine. See Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, p. 191.

<sup>25</sup> B. Olsson claims that the symmetrical use of participial construction, in the Greek text, in reference to Jesus on the one hand and the woman on the other hand emphasizes this separation. See his *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel: A Text-Linguistic Analysis of John 2:1-11 and John 4:1-42*, Lund, 1974, p. 177.

<sup>26</sup> For two contrasting views on the comment of the narrator in v. 9b, see D. Daube, "Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: The Meaning of *sugchraoma*", *JBL* 69 (1950), pp. 137-47; and D.R. Hall, "The Meaning of *sugchraoma* in John 4:9", *ExpTim* 83 (1971-72), pp. 56-57.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of John*, p. 170. also D. Patte,

*Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics*, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Patte, *Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics*, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> So the reader could ask: Why did not Jesus explain to her that he was not bound by this social or religious custom? Why did she not give water to Jesus? This lack of interest on the part of Jesus gives us an indication that the point of the story is not the drinking of water, but something else. If she had given water to Jesus, then the narrative would have probably been different. Jesus' thirst could be interpreted as his desire to do and accomplish the will of his Father, like the hunger implied in vv. 31-34. Here, it is the will of God that Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah to the Samaritans. The expression, "he had to (*edei*) pass through Samaria", is not a geographical necessity, for, if Jesus was in the Jordan valley (3:22) he could easily have gone through the valley, and then through the Bethshean gap to Galilee. See Brown, *The Gospel of John*, p. 169. See also Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, p. 85 and Gail R. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 55. John almost always uses *edei* with the sense of theological necessity (cf. 3:14. 30; 9,4). For the use of *edei* in the NT, see W. Grundmann, "*dei*", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2, pp. 21-25.

<sup>30</sup> Jesus aims at laying bare to the woman "la conscience morale au contact d'un homme de Dieu". See M.J. Lagrange, *Evangile selon Saint Jean*, Paris, 1936, p. 110. Jesus exposed the sins of the Samaritans and of the world through the sins of the woman, E. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, London, 1940, p. 243.

<sup>31</sup> For this opinion, see Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, pp. 110-111 and E. Haenchen, *Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar*, Tübingen, 1980, p. 242.

<sup>32</sup> Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, pp. 109-110. G.D. Kilpatrick translates the v. 18b as follows, "This which you have said is true". He takes *alethes* as the main predicative. See "Some Notes on Johannine Usage", *The Bible Translator* 11 (1960), pp. 173-77, esp. p. 174. For the same opinion, see Moloney, *Belief in the word*, p. 148. But there are others who consider this statement of Jesus as an ironic one, see F. Godet, *Commentaire sur L'Evangile de Saint Jean* (Paris 1864) p. 486; and Julius Graf, "Jesus und (sic) die Samariterin", *BK* 6 (1951), p. 107, quoted by O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 131 n. 48. O'Day herself considers it as a "biting sarcasm", p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> There are some who consider the whole question of the marriage and the five husbands of the woman as symbolic, Josephus, *Antiquities*, 9:288. They are seen also as the five foreign cities who brought their gods to Samaria; see 2 Kgs 17:27-31. For more extended discussion, see C.R. Koester, "The Saviour of the World (Jn 4:42)", *JBL* 109 (1990), pp. 665-680. The symbolic reading of our text is also widespread among scholars who consider the Samaritan woman

as the representative figure of the Samaritans. See O. Cullmann, "Samaria and the Origins of the Christian Mission", pp. 187-188.

<sup>34</sup> Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>35</sup> J. MacDonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans*, London, 1964, p. 406.

<sup>36</sup> The belief in Mount Gerizim was one of the articles of the Samaritan creed; see J. Bowman, *Samaritanische Probleme*, Stuttgart, 1969, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission*, p. 115.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>39</sup> For a comparative study of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, see M. Pazdan, "Nicodemus and the Samaritan Woman: Contrasting Models of Discipleship", *BTB* 17 (1987), pp. 145-48, who considers the Samaritan woman as a model of "mature discipleship" while Nicodemus represents "initial discipleship" (p. 148). See also D.A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, Sheffield, 1994, pp. 65-66 and Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1-4*, p. 144.

<sup>40</sup> This resembles the standard way of responding to the call of discipleship in the synoptic Gospels. Cf. leaving the boats in Mk 1:16-20 and leaving the tax stall in Mt 9:9.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. John 1:35-51.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. John 3:25-30.

<sup>43</sup> Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, pp. 188-197.

<sup>45</sup> Some of the characteristics of the emergence of this spiritual energy (*Sakti*) in women are articulated by A. Gnanadason: see "Women and Spirituality in Asia", in *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, ed. Ursula King, New York, 1994, p. 355.

<sup>46</sup> S. S. Maimela, "Seeking to be Christian in Patriarchal Society", *Voices from the Third World*, 19 (June, 1996), p. 176.

<sup>47</sup> John speaks of the Christian community in terms of a flock (10) and a vine (15): a community attached to Jesus, and abiding in Jesus.

<sup>48</sup> At the beginning of the story there existed no dealings between the Jews and the Samaritans (v. 9). The confession of faith in Jesus as the Saviour of the world (v. 42), and not just of the Samaritans alone, confirms the movement to communion which transcends all secretarian boundaries.

Ref.: Text from the Author.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Pékin est prêt à reconnaître aux religions  
un plus grand rôle dans la société  
pour autant que les autorités puissent  
exercer un meilleur contrôle sur elles*

*NDLR – Préserver la “stabilité sociale” semble être un des objectifs majeurs des dirigeants chinois actuels. Le président Jiang Zemin a annoncé en juin dernier que les entrepreneurs privés pourraient désormais entrer au Parti. Au mois de décembre 2001, les plus hauts dirigeants du Parti et de l’État se sont réunis pour discuter de la question des religions. Tout en étant prêts à reconnaître aux religions un plus grand rôle dans la société, ils chercheraient le moyen de s’assurer que le contrôle des autorités sur elles demeure. L’article ci-dessous, du journaliste David Murphy, est paru dans la Far Eastern Economic Review datée du 27 décembre 2001 - 3 janvier 2002. La traduction est de la rédaction d’Églises d’Asie.*

“*Plus près de toi, mon Dieu*” n’a jamais fait partie des slogans attitrés du Parti communiste chinois. Toutefois, parce que la stratégie des dirigeants chinois actuels est d’élargir au maximum les soutiens sur lesquels le Parti peut compter et de renforcer le contrôle exercé sur la société, Marx et Dieu tout à coup ne paraissent plus incompatibles.

Une réunion de travail au plus haut niveau au sujet des questions religieuses s’est tenue le 10 décembre 2001 à Pékin. D’une durée de trois jours, cette réunion a rassemblé les sept membres du Comité permanent du Politburo et est considérée par des diplomates et les milieux religieux comme particulièrement importante. Le *Quotidien du Peuple* lui a consacré une large couverture et elle est analysée comme faisant partie intégrante de la politique du président Jiang Zemin qui vise à étendre l’influence du Parti jusqu’aux secteurs les plus dynamiques et porteurs de la société chinoise.

Selon des diplomates et des sources appartenant aux milieux religieux, un résultat concret de cette conférence est qu’il va devenir plus facile pour les Églises et autres organisations religieuses de s’enregistrer auprès des autorités étatiques. L’objectif recherché est d’amener les groupes religieux, qui agissent aujourd’hui de manière indépendante, dans la sphère de contrôle de l’État ; ainsi, quelques-uns des millions de membres des Églises “clandestines” pourraient être officiellement enregistrés comme “*croyants*”. Cela pourrait permettre de réduire le risque d’être pris et arrêté lors des campagnes menées par les autorités à intervalles réguliers et qui visent à empêcher les rassemblements religieux non autorisés. Mais, simultanément, cela pourrait aussi signifier un très net accroissement des risques que courent ceux qui sont laissés en-dehors du champ officiel.

Bien que les cinq grandes religions officiellement reconnues en Chine soient concernées par la réunion du 10 décembre, ce sont les Églises protestantes qui devraient en être les principaux et immédiats bénéficiaires. Aux termes de la législation actuelle, les communautés catholiques et protestantes doivent être respectivement enregistrées auprès de l’Association patriotique des catholiques chinois et auprès du Mouvement des Trois autonomies. Mais l’histoire des relations entre les Églises “officielles” et “clandestines”, faite, entre autres, d’acrimonie, a créé des barrières quasi infranchissables, de nombreux membres des communautés “clandestines” considérant que l’enregistrement auprès de ces Associations patriotiques est synonyme de reddition. Dans le cas des protestants, des dénominations particulières sont comme dissoutes au sein du Mouvement des Trois autonomies. Nombreux sont ceux qui ne veulent pas s’enregistrer parce qu’ils craignent que les caractères spécifiques de leur dénomination soient dilués dans le Mouvement. Désormais, les nouvelles règles proposées permettraient leur enregistrement en tant qu’entités distinctes auprès du Bureau des Affaires religieuses — sans avoir à s’enregistrer auprès de l’Église officielle. Cela devrait donc leur permettre de conserver leur statut propre en tant que dénominations particulières.

Ce projet de règles nouvelles est destiné en premier lieu aux Églises protestantes mais, selon certains observateurs, il pourrait également concerner ceux des catholiques “clandestins” qui refusent de sortir au grand jour pour s’enregistrer auprès de l’officielle Association patriotique mais seraient prêts à être enregistrés directement auprès du gouvernement. Dans l’éventualité d’un rapprochement entre Pékin et le Vatican, ces



nouvelles règles pourraient contribuer à guérir les blessures nées de la division de l'Église catholique en Chine. La Chine a expulsé tout le clergé missionnaire et rompu ses relations avec le Vatican dans les années 1950.

Comme pour les autres réunions au plus haut niveau du Parti, la pleine signification de cette réunion n'apparaîtra véritablement qu'au fur et à mesure que les discours à venir du président Jiang et du Premier ministre Zhu Rongji permettront aux cadres d'étudier à tous les niveaux de la hiérarchie la signification et la portée de ces nouvelles mesures. Si les notes et études politiques qui ont circulé avant la réunion du 10 décembre survivent telles quelles, sans que leur contenu soit altéré, cela pourrait bien former *“le développement le plus significatif en matière de politique religieuse depuis la fin de la Révolution culturelle”*, estime Jason Kindopp, de la *Brookings Institution* et spécialiste des questions religieuses en Chine.

Il semble évident qu'en mettant l'accent ainsi sur le rôle de la religion en Chine, Jiang Zemin poursuit l'élaboration de la vision du Parti de demain qu'il a ébauchée avec ses *“Trois représentations”*. Le 11 juillet dernier, à l'occasion d'un discours prononcé pour le 80<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du Parti, Jiang Zemin avait introduit cette nouvelle théorie, ouvrant la porte du Parti aux entrepreneurs privés. Il avait aussi loué les anciens ennemis de classe du Parti pour leurs contributions à la société.

Dans le discours qu'il a prononcé lors de la réunion de travail sur la religion, Jiang Zemin a loué le rôle dans la société des *“grandes masses de croyants”* et souligné les contributions sociales des religions, y compris dans le domaine des aides d'urgence aux régions touchées par des catastrophes naturelles. En écho à ses propos, on pouvait lire dans le *Quotidien du Peuple* du 12 décembre le commentaire suivant : *“Les travailleurs, les paysans, les intellectuels, les techniciens et les scientifiques de différentes croyances religieuses travaillent dur à leurs postes respectifs de travail”*.

Dans leurs discours lors des trois jours de réunion de décembre dernier, Jiang Zemin et Zhu Rongji ont appelé à la formation d'organisations du Parti parmi les croyants de base des religions, au renforcement du rôle dirigeant du Parti sur le travail religieux et à une gestion plus étroite des affaires religieuses en zone rurale. *“L'approche de Jiang Zemin sur ces questions est similaire à celle qu'il avait développée au sujet du secteur privé dans son discours de juin, analyse un observateur étranger. Il s'agit d'exercer un contrôle. Le fait qu'un grand nombre de Chinois, et de Chinois influents, se trouvent en-dehors du giron du Parti, est considéré comme dangereux pour le Parti”*.

L'attention portée au plus haut niveau aux religions

découle en partie du désir de séparer ce que le Parti considère comme les religions légitimes, qui peuvent contribuer à la stabilité sociale, des mouvements tels que le *Falungong*, étiqueté par les dirigeants chinois comme *“secte maléfique”* et qu'une très sévère répression cherche à éradiquer. Pékin semble également motivé par des événements tels que ceux du 11 septembre aux États-Unis et la guerre menée en Afghanistan qui a suivi — événements qui sont analysés comme entretenant un lien avec une pratique religieuse extrême. *“Leur compréhension des questions religieuses est que la religion est source de conflits. Par conséquent, ils tiennent à conserver un œil attentif sur ces questions”*, commente une source appartenant aux milieux religieux.

Les nouveaux textes régissant l'enregistrement des groupes religieux donnera au gouvernement un meilleur contrôle sur les groupes ecclésiaux mais ils ont aussi des conséquences importantes sur la position du Mouvement des Trois autonomies, lequel va voir son monopole remis en question dans de nombreuses régions. *“Dans certaines régions, [les fidèles des Églises protestantes “clandestines”] sont largement supérieurs en nombre aux membres du Mouvement des Trois autonomies ; ils peuvent parfois se montrer dominants”*, affirme une source religieuse. Cela pourrait, à terme, signifier la réapparition de réelles distinctions au sein des différentes dénominations protestantes.

De fait, cela fait plusieurs années que des enregistrements distincts ont lieu dans nombre de villes. À Yanji, par exemple, ville proche de la frontière avec la Corée du Nord, un séminaire protestant est enregistré de façon distincte de l'Église protestante rattachée au Mouvement patriotique des Trois autonomies. Dans certains districts de la province du Yunnan, il n'existe pas de représentation officielle de l'Église et pourtant plusieurs Églises chrétiennes sont directement enregistrées auprès du Bureau des Affaires religieuses, rapporte une source religieuse. Il apparaît que le gouvernement cherche à adapter sa politique aux réalités du terrain.

Par ailleurs, les progrès réalisés au début de cette année à propos de la question des relations entre le Vatican et la Chine semblent marquer le pas. *“La politique et l'attitude [des autorités] sont les mêmes. Nous n'avons pas noté de changements fondamentaux dans ce domaine”*, assure un universitaire chinois. Des sources de l'Église catholique font part de leur déception face à la réponse de la Chine aux excuses du pape Jean Paul II pour les erreurs commises par des membres de l'Église par le passé en Chine. En insistant sur le fait que le pape doit demander pardon pour la canonisation de 120 martyrs de l'Église en Chine le 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 2000, jour

anniversaire de la prise du pouvoir par les communistes en 1949, Pékin semble vouloir pour l'heure s'en tenir au statu quo. Ces canonisations "*ont été un camouflet à la figure des autorités chinoises et un désastre tant politique que diplomatique pour l'Église en Chine*", assure un prêtre basé à Pékin.

Mais la demande de pardon formulée par le Pape à l'occasion de la célébration du 400<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de l'arrivée du jésuite Matteo Ricci à Pékin a donné au gouvernement chinois tout ce qu'il voulait, sauf des excuses pour les canonisations, analyse un diplomate. Selon certaines informations, le Vatican a fait part, via de discrets canaux de communication, de ses regrets pour le choix de la date retenue pour ces canonisations mais Pékin demande des excuses officielles pour les canonisations elles-mêmes, un geste qu'il serait de toute évidence très difficile au Pape de faire.

Il y a eu des signes avant-coureurs que Pékin cherchait à freiner le processus d'amélioration des relations avant même que cela ne devienne évident. Une délégation composée de l'ancien Premier ministre italien Giulio Andreotti et de délégués du Vatican était attendue à Pékin et devait assister à un colloque organisé à propos de Matteo Ricci, et ce deux semaines avant la tenue du colloque à Rome où le Pape a prononcé son discours d'excuses à la Chine. Mais, selon des sources de l'Église catholique, Pékin, craignant que les événements ne s'enchaînent trop rapidement à son goût, fit savoir que Giulio Andreotti et les délégués du Vatican n'étaient pas les bienvenus et que leur visite était par conséquent annulée. Des sources de l'Église catholique en Chine sont désormais nettement moins optimistes quant à une éventuelle normalisation imminente des relations entre le Saint-Siège et la Chine qu'elles ne l'étaient avant la célébration de l'anniversaire de Matteo Ricci.

Et pourtant, les contacts se poursuivent entre la Chine et le Vatican. Un article publié en novembre dans la revue chinoise — et très officielle — *La Vie hebdomadaire* donne du crédit à une information d'origine française selon laquelle l'ambassade de la République populaire de Chine à Rome et le Vatican auraient eu plus de 20 contacts l'an dernier. Des sources proches de l'Église catholique et des diplomates affirment qu'un diplomate de haut rang en poste à Genève a été impliqué dans les négociations. Ces mêmes sources font aussi référence au rôle d'émissaire joué par deux prêtres chinois qui étudient en ce moment à la bibliothèque vaticane.

Dans le même temps, l'établissement de liens entre la partie "officielle" et la partie "clandestine" de l'Église catholique en Chine se poursuit, malgré ce que certains

analystes décrivent comme l'opposition très amère de certains éléments de l'Église "clandestine". Le Vatican incite les membres de l'Église "clandestine" à se réconcilier avec ceux de l'Église "officielle" dans l'espoir que cela rendra plus aisée la conclusion d'un accord avec Pékin. Des discussions ont eu lieu entre les deux parties dans des diocèses de Chine récemment. Des sources de l'Église catholique estiment qu'au moins 70 % des évêques ["officiels"] chinois sont à la fois reconnus par la Conférence épiscopale "officielle" et par le Vatican et qu'un nombre de plus en plus important cherche à obtenir l'aval du Pape avant de recevoir l'imprimatur de Pékin.

Réf. : *Églises d'Asie (EDA), Far Eastern Economic Review*, janvier 2002.

\*\*\*\*\*

## *SEDOS Conference*

**Risk Taking:  
The First Challenge of a Missionary  
A Peruvian Missionary's Experience of Evangelization in the Amazon, Koribeni.**

**by Daniel Wankun Vigil, o.p.**

**Tuesday, 26 February 2002  
16:00 hrs**

**The Brothers of the Christian Schools  
Via Aurelia, 476 - Rome**

**The Conference will be in Spanish.  
Translations in English, French, Italian**

**Entrance Fee: Euro 4,00**

Edmund Chia, fsc

## *Mission, Dialogue and Missionary Congregations*

In keeping with the Asian contextual, inductive and experiential methodology of doing theological reflections, please allow me to begin this paper by sharing with you a letter written by two missionaries in Asia which was sent to their Christian friends back home:

Dear Brothers in Jesus Christ,

First of all we want to thank you for the sacrifice you put on the altar of God which has kept us going for the past ten years. We thank you in the name of Jesus Christ for the support you have given us until now. The water of life is free, but the bucket costs. We have committed ourselves to bringing the water of life to the many people here, but we can't do it by ourselves. We are happy for the wonderful support which you and your community have always given us. Be assured of our prayers and know that God will grant you everlasting happiness for your help has allowed us to proclaim the Good News of God's salvation, His glory among the nations, and His wonders among all peoples (I Chr 16:23-24).

Our work here in Boogaloo is going on well. We have a very beautiful Church which stands out in this little village as the most beautiful building. We thank the Lord that our members and our friends are now able to give praise and worship to Him in His sacred house ("friends" refer to the unsaved people who attend church services). We also have a very beautiful community centre located just behind the Church. It has served us well. During the week, we run a school which caters to more than 300 children, about 90 per cent of whom come from families who are still unsaved. We are happy to add that all the students (even those who are unsaved) are able to read the Word of God daily as we make sure that all our teachers are Christians.

The community centre also serves as a health care and counselling centre. Many of the local people come to see us as our services are free of charge. We believe that our acts of Christian love

break the religious and social barriers and open the door for sharing the Gospel of Christ with these people. What an opportunity to tell the people that Jesus Christ is both Saviour and Healer. It is through these ministries that many have been born again and come to accept Christ Jesus as their personal saviour. To God be the glory, great things He has done!

We have to add, however, that there are still many who even after having heard the Word, continue to cling on to their pagan idols rather than offer themselves to the real Word of God. We have never ceased to pray for these friends who continue to be bound to the world and we believe that the Holy Spirit will one day open their hearts to receive the Lord, who is the way and the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). We also pray that the Lord will send us more labourers into the harvest (Mt 9:38) for the Gospel must be preached to all peoples before the Lord comes (Mk 13:10). Our message to the people is that Jesus Christ, the eternally begotten Son of God, came down from heaven, died for our sins according to Scripture, was buried, and that he was raised from the dead according to the Scripture for our redemption (I Cor 15:1-4).

We ask you to pray for the success of the School of Evangelization which we are having for the children next month. This is an annual ten-day live-in programme which we discovered as a very important means to reach the unsaved. Children, as we know, have a very gentle way of influencing each other. They are free from the prejudices which adults have. Let me share with you just one incident: Last year, the parents of one of the children came to say that their child refuses to go to school anymore unless he first receives baptism. This, apparently, was due to the Lord opening the heart of the child (Acts 16:14) through his classmates. That is not all. A few months later, the parents of the boy themselves asked to be baptised. Praise the Lord! For through him all things are reconciled to God (II Cor 5:18).



Once again, we thank you for the love you have for us and for the unsaved people of Boogaloo. We promise to work harder so that more will be saved. If the Lord leads you to support us financially, you may do so by sending your gift before Christmas. Also, please help by passing this letter to other brothers in your parish. May God bless you all.

With the love of Christ,  
(signed) Joseph and Joseph

### Three hypothetical situations

Supposing you, as a Christian, had received this letter personally. What would you do? Would you respond to the request for assistance? Would you pass the letter on to your friends? What are your thoughts about the ministry of the two Josephs?

Let's take another situation, which we shall call situation two: Now, supposing you are not a Christian. Perhaps you are a Buddhist, or a Hindu, or a Muslim, and you receive this same letter. What would you do? Would you respond to the request for assistance? Would you pass the letter on to your friends? What are your thoughts about the ministry of these two Christian friends of yours?

Let us explore a third hypothetical situation: Supposing you, as a Christian, received a letter which is very similar to the one just read out but not exactly the same. Instead of the letter's salutation being "Dear Brothers in Jesus Christ", it was addressed to "the sons and daughters of Allah". And, instead of the letter being signed by the two Josephs, the letter was signed by Yusof, or Abdullah, or Osama. And, in place of the Biblical verses you find Qur'anic verses, such as, "Allah has indeed shown grace to the believers in sending them a messenger from among themselves who recited unto them His revelations" (Sura 3: 164), or "Whoever obeys the Prophet [Muhammad], he has obeyed Allah" (Sura 4: 80). What would you do? Would you respond to the request for assistance? Would you pass the letter on to your friends? What are your thoughts about this ministry of your Muslim friends?

### Hypothetical situations come alive

Some of us, I am sure, must have received appeal letters such as these before. If you, like myself, have your name and address listed in Catholic directories which are readily available to the general public, appeal letters such as these are bound to appear in your

mailboxes. This becomes more frequent especially towards the end of the year, as we approach Christmas, which is supposed to be the season for giving. Thus, the first hypothetical situation, where I asked you to reflect upon what you would do if you were to receive such a letter, is by no means uncommon.

The second hypothetical situation is probably not as common as the first. This is when a person who is not Christian receives such appeal letters, sent specifically to promote the Christian cause, at times at the expense of the other religions. However, even if Christian missionaries do not or seldom send such appeal letters to persons who are not Christians, it is not too far-fetched to suggest that these letters do fall into the hands of persons who are adherents of other religions. The letter above, for example, is not completely fictitious. Even if I have made a lot of editorial changes, the letter was actually a combination of the sentiments and actual words of several letters which I had picked up over the internet. Yes, these ideas do represent what our Christian friends have been posting on Christian websites, which, as all of us know, are readily available to peoples from all over the world. In other words, it is in order for me to suggest that such letters are in the full public view of our brothers and sisters of other religions. Thus, how they respond to such appeals and strategies should be of utmost concern to us and ought to inform our own orientation towards Christian mission. Likewise, if we feel it inappropriate that these letters should reach the hands of our brothers and sisters of other faiths, then the important question we would need to reflect upon is "why is it inappropriate?"

This second hypothetical situation is by no means an exaggeration. You might have noticed that the letter above was signed by "Joseph and Joseph". I acknowledge that the names were made up and artificially inserted. But, this is not without reasons. For indeed, within our own Catholic Church, there are two Josephs who have been sending messages which reflect similar orientations. The first is Cardinal Josef Tomko, who, for many years was the Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, or Propaganda Fide, as it was previously known. He very recently retired. The second is Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who, also for many years has been the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, or the Inquisition Office of yester-years. Both these Josephs have been at the forefront of promoting a theology which calls on Catholics to strengthen their evangelistic fervour. They have often emphasized the importance of converting peoples to Christ, and seem to suggest that evangelization in Asia has not been altogether successful as Catholics continue to number

no more than three percent of the population. In other words, success in mission seems to be measured by the number of baptisms. Holding two of the most powerful positions in the Vatican's Roman Curia, their influence on the Holy Father and on the whole Church cannot be underestimated.

For instance, when Pope John Paul II went to New Delhi two years ago, in November 1999, to proclaim the document *Ecclesia in Asia*, in no uncertain terms did he call for a new drive of evangelization. Specifically, his statement — which was reported in secular newspapers all over the world — was that just as in the first millennium Europe was evangelized, in the second millennium the Americas and Africa were evangelized, thus it was his prayer and hope that Asia will turn to Christ in the third millennium. Imagine how this message would sound to you if you were a Muslim or a Hindu or a Taoist or a Jew living in Asia. You would be no more than an object and a target of the Church's evangelization. You would have to constantly watch out for all those militantly aggressive evangelizing Christians, to ensure that no one would suddenly pounce upon you and splash water over your head to have you baptised. Is it any wonder, then, that some religious fundamentalists in India reacted very strongly to and protested against the Pope's visit? Is it any wonder that Christian missionaries all over India continue to be the targets of fanatical violence?

Likewise, a recent document related to interreligious dialogue issued by the second Joseph, through his Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, entitled, *Dominus Iesus*, stirred many controversial and negative reactions. Released in September 2000, the document's principal objective was to reaffirm the Lordship of Christ, and to reiterate the main tenets of our Christian faith. Of course, there is certainly nothing wrong with this. Every religious community is entitled to reaffirm its own faith and reiterate that which encourages greater commitment and discipleship. But, when the document goes on to describe the Christian religion as "faith in revealed Truth" while at the same time describing other religions as mere "beliefs" which are "still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God", then it has certainly crossed the boundaries of appropriate interreligious relations. Likewise, when the document declares that God is also present to other religions, but in the very same breath implies that these religions contain "gaps, insufficiencies and errors", then it would certainly have aroused negative reactions. But, when the document asserts unequivocally that "it is also certain that objectively speaking [other religions] are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of

salvation", then, it is like an open declaration of war on other religions. Such statements seem to be very similar to and of the same genre as statements made by President Bush and his declaration that "we [viz. the American people] are a compassionate people, we are the kind people, and they are the evil ones, they are the evil doers" or his call to the rest of the world that "you are either with us or you are with the terrorists". Such assertions, both that of President Bush's as well as that of *Dominus Iesus*, cannot but evoke a situation where civilization is dichotomized into "we versus they" camps, which then leads to an "us versus them" mindset. "We are the saved, and they are the unsaved", "we are the believers, they are the infidels", "ours is the true faith, theirs is just a belief". Such sentiments, I suppose many of us would agree, cannot but fuel the "clash of civilizations" which Samuel Huntington speaks about.

Let us now turn to the third hypothetical situation. This third situation is perhaps even more significant as it is instructive. If you, as a Christian, were to find out that a group of Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists have established a mission in Boogaloo and are appealing for donations, how would you react? Of course, if we did not know anything about Boogaloo or where it is, then perhaps the event might mean very little to us. However, what if Boogaloo is a centuries-old predominantly Christian village, which is renowned for its simplicity, peace and holiness? Or, what if Boogaloo is your very own hometown, where many of your best friends and relatives still live? Perhaps, the appeal letter would then mean very much to us. We would then want to know if any of our own Christian relatives and friends are attending the school run by these Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim missionaries. We would then want to know if any of our friends and relatives have become members or "friends" of these missionaries. We would then want to know if any of our relatives or friends have been "saved" by these Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist missionaries. We would then want to know if any of our friends or relatives have had their children attend the annual School of Evangelization.

Incidentally, this story of the School of Evangelization did not come from the websites, but is not altogether fictitious either. I actually heard it related by one of our own Catholic Church leaders, who was ever so enthusiastic about it and encouraged its promotion. I wonder if he (*sic*) would be equally enthusiastic if his own niece came home one day to say she won't go to school anymore unless she is first converted to become a Muslim, or a Hindu. I wonder if this Church leader would praise the Lord with such enthusiasm if he heard that this

niece's parents had also asked to be converted to Islam or Hinduism, or Buddhism.

At this point, it would be instructive to be reminded of this quotation: "Do not unto others what you yourself do not want others to do unto you". This, I am sure most of us will recognise, is no more than the Golden Rule, and comes from the teachings of the great master of China, Confucius, as found in the Book of Analects. Jesus, of course, did teach something very similar, except that he phrased it in the positive rather than in the negative. Thus, Jesus taught: "Do unto others whatever you want them to do unto you". Likewise, the holy book of the Hindus, the Mahabhrata, also teaches: "Do not unto others which if done unto you would cause you pain". The Jewish Talmud has it as: "What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow human being", while the Greek philosopher Socrates has once said: "Do not unto others what angers you if done to you by others". In short, practically all the religious and wisdom traditions teach us to love and respect others the same way we expect to be loved and respected. It is thus a universal law, a Golden Rule, applicable to all and applied by all. It transcends religious boundaries. Thus, in our missionary endeavours it will do us well to be mindful of this rule, not only because we do not want to offend others but so that we can be more faithful to that which is Truth and to the essence of our evangelizing mission.

### What happens then to Evangelization?

In the context of the preceding discussions, what then can we say about the mission of evangelization? Is it not our Christian duty to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (ref. Mt 28:19)? Wasn't that the Final Commission which Jesus gave and something which we ought to obey if we are to be regarded as good and faithful disciples? Would we not be regarded as lax and mediocre Christians if we were ashamed of proclaiming the Good News to our friends, neighbours and all others whom we meet? These, and similar other questions, are by no means insignificant. They are often central to any discussion on interreligious dialogue. It is unfortunate that there has been a tendency to create a dichotomy and a divide between the mission of evangelization and the mission of interreligious dialogue. The two are often brought into contradistinction one with the other. It is as if interreligious dialogue would spell the end of evangelization or that for evangelization to be successful we have to put an end to interreligious dialogue.

This view, of course, has the weight of centuries

of tradition behind it. It operates out of the medieval theology where the Church believes herself to be the one and only bastion of truth. Hence, the famous axiom, "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" (outside the Church no salvation), provided the guiding principle and interpretative framework for Christians in their dealings with peoples of other religions. Other religions were simply regarded as in error at best, but demonic at worst. Since error has no right to exist, the Church regards it her moral obligation to conquer, to dominate and to replace these religions. Thus the crucified Christ became the conquering Christ. Jesus and Christianity had all the answers, even if the questions had not yet been asked. The question of dialogue with other religions was not even considered since there was really nothing to dialogue about if the other religions were in error in the first place. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that the word "dialogue" was never ever used in any Church documents before the Second Vatican Council. Mission and evangelization meant nothing less than preaching the Good News in view of bringing as many to the salvation of Jesus Christ, which can only be effected through baptism and membership into the Church. This mode of operation, therefore, is often regarded as the "conquest" mode, where the ultimate aim and goal of all Christian mission is the conquest of all that is not of God, as represented by the conquest of the other religions for the sake of the salvation of the unsaved.

Things took an about turn, however, at the Second Vatican Council. With Pope John XXIII's declaration that the Council was to be truly an *aggiornamento* or a renewal, the bishops at Vatican II saw it fit that the renewal began first and foremost with the renewal of the Church's theological orientations. Hence, the Church began to reshape her theology, especially *vis-à-vis* her attitudes and relations with the world, including with the other religions. With the 1964 document, *Ecclesiam Suam*, Pope Paul VI, who succeeded John XXIII, introduced the theme of "dialogue", especially the dialogue with the rest of the world which owes no allegiance to the Church. Thus, the notion of "dialogue" entered into the Church's vocabulary. Dialogue, as we all know, presumes a certain respect and regard for the partner-in-dialogue. No one engages in a dialogue with another who is regarded as unworthy or inferior. Thus, if the pre-Vatican Church operated on the premise that "outside the Church there is no salvation", Vatican II ushered in an era where, according to the landmark 1965 document, *Nostra Aetate*, the Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in the other religions. Moreover, *Nostra Aetate* also urges all Catholics to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Thus, with



Vatican II, the Church's attitude towards other religions shifted from the "conquest" mode to a "dialogue" mode. The crucified Christ has now become the dialogical Christ, and the Church's evangelization is now effected through the praxis of dialogue.

Thus, with Vatican II, the Church not only became open to the mission of dialogue, but had her entire understanding of mission and evangelization renewed and broadened. Besides dialogue, evangelization is now also seen to include the mission of witness, the mission of service, the mission of human promotion, the mission of prayer and contemplation, as well as the mission of proclamation. Notice that I have just described various forms or aspects of mission. Hence, the post-Vatican II Church can no longer regard the proclamation of Christ as the one and only saviour as the sole aspect of mission. Instead, this proclamation must be complemented by witness, service, human promotion, prayer, contemplation as well as dialogue. Put another way, the proclamation of Jesus is no longer the one and only aspect of mission, but one of its many aspects. Equally important is for us not so much to proclaim Christ, but to discover Christ, who is already present in the peoples of other religions, long before the arrival of the missionary and the Church. In other words, mission is now conceived of as an integral and all-encompassing task, and which certainly cannot be reduced to proselytism or calling to membership those who do not yet belong to the Church.

### **What does dialogue really mean?**

This renewed understanding of mission and evangelization has profound implications on all of our works. Specifically, in asserting that dialogue is an integral dimension of the Church's evangelizing mission, Vatican II seems to imply that Catholics not engaged in interreligious dialogue are not really living out the fullness of their Christian mission and discipleship. This, I am sure most of us would agree, is a rather strong statement, especially since many of us might not see ourselves as being engaged in interreligious dialogue. Moreover, many of us might also construe of interreligious dialogue as an activity reserved for the experts, the scholars and the theologians. This arises from the common misperception that interreligious dialogue refers to events which take place in seminar rooms where doctrines are compared and belief systems evaluated.

However, if we were to look at interreligious dialogue as more about fostering relationships and sharing of life and works with persons of other religions, then we would more readily accept it as part of our mission. Even so, it might be the case that some of us have seldom or have never ever participated in such a mission.

Too often, Catholic organizations – like many other religious organizations – are wont to keep to themselves rather than to reach out in partnership and collaboration with persons of other religions. Even if the tasks at hand may be the same, we seem to find it more convenient to operate on our own rather than to work together and with other organizations, especially if they are of another religion. Even when we do come together, very often our coming together is motivated more by common human grounds rather than by religiously motivated ones. Sometimes called the "human" or "secular" approach, we find it less cumbersome to relate with persons of other religions on purely human issues – such as justice, peace, human rights, AIDS, environment, education, etc. – rather than on specifically religious ones. This, of course, is indeed laudable in and of itself. The fact that adherents of different religions can come together to address common human concerns ought to be encouraged.

However, such coming together ought also to be seen as merely the first step. Many more steps need to be taken. In particular, Catholic organizations need also to be able to share with and relate to Buddhist, Muslim or Hindu organizations on specifically religious grounds. Otherwise, each will continue to be suspicious of the other's religion, since in the absence of knowledge and communication, suspicion tends to take over. In other words, unless there is mutual sharing of each other's religious motivations and fundamental beliefs, we have no choice but to rely on stereotypes, misconceptions, media reports and prejudices. Religions, unfortunately, are very susceptible to abuse and manipulation, especially for political and socio-economic gains. Thus, in our efforts at building global civil societies, attention has to be given to interreligious dialogue so that we can usher in a culture where persons can be comfortable sharing their religious beliefs, religious motivations, and religious practices with others who do not belong to their religion. Likewise, the ability to share has to be equally complemented by the ability to listen and to learn and to accept what the other is sharing. In cultivating attitudes of authentic openness and sincere appreciation, the tendency to view the world in terms of "we versus they" or "us versus them" will then be minimized. What is more important is that it will then bring about a culture of interreligious harmony, which is a more feasible alternative to the parochialism and segregation which so often characterize multireligious societies. This, therefore, is as much an ideal and a need as it is a demand and a challenge for the Church in general and missionary congregations in particular.

### **Implications for Missionary Congregations**

Since Mission Societies and Religious Congrega-

tions are official organs of the Catholic Church, the mission of dialogue, therefore, ought to constitute a primary component of their programmes and agendas. In other words, every missionary is more or less duty-bound to contribute towards a culture of dialogue, since Vatican II has spelt it out as integral to the evangelizing mission of the Church. Thus, as missionaries, whether we be in the fields of education or health care, advocacy or social services, we have to take seriously the challenge of our witness to the evangelizing mission of the Church. And, in the context of Vatican II, this evangelizing mission has to include the mission of dialogue.

As can be seen from the preceding discussions, the mission of promoting a culture of dialogue is indeed a challenge to each of us, as Catholic missionaries. This challenge, of course, comes with serious implications, four of which I will briefly suggest, by way of conclusion, and as points for further reflection: Firstly, before people can come together for the sharing of faith, they ought to have reached a certain level of comfort in their social and working relationships. It would be disastrous for persons who do not even have secure or trusting working relationships to attempt to come together for the purpose of sharing their faith experiences. For, not only will they feel insecure in the sharing of their faith, the experience might compound their feeling that the lack of trust in their working relationship is on account of their differing faith. Thus, religion could be blamed for a fundamentally interpersonal, human and social problem. The implication of this is that missionary congregations must work ever harder to enhance their working relationships with their counterparts and colleagues who belong to other religious organizations.

Secondly, even before such working relationships can materialize, it is important that the prejudices and negative attitudes we have about other religions be set aside first. It would be disastrous for a Catholic who harbours negative feelings about, say Hinduism, to venture into a collaborative arrangement with a Hindu, for the prejudices would inevitably colour and influence the working relationship. Thus, should the collaboration not work out, the chances are that the initial prejudices and misconceptions would be invoked to explain the sour relationship. The implication of this is that each of us has to work harder at eradicating, or at least minimizing, the prejudices and negative attitudes we harbour against persons of other religions. A practical guide for this is to commit ourselves to not being the source of spreading anything which contributes to negative feelings people have about other religions or their adherents.

Thirdly, if one were to engage in interreligious dia-

logue one has also to work on finding out more about what the dialogue-partner stands for. Thus, the importance of reading up more on the religion and faith which nourishes our partners-in-dialogue. The implication of this is that we have to take time to discover more about our neighbours' faith, learn more about it, so that what we learn directly from them can be supplemented by the knowledge which we discover from books, websites and other resource materials.

Finally, since interreligious dialogue is as much about learning as it is about sharing, it would be important for us to be able to share our faith not only sincerely, but intelligently as well. Hence, the need for us to be personally conversant with our own faith, especially in a more mature manner, both theologically as well as spiritually. In other words, interreligious dialogue calls on us to be able to share from both our knowledge as well as our practice of the faith. The implication of this is that Catholic missionaries ought to have some degree of theological education, beyond the Sunday-school levels, as well as to be serious practitioners of their faith, beyond the Sunday-obligation levels.

### Conclusion

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, the mission of interreligious dialogue is by no means a simple or mundane task. It is at once integral to our being a more authentic Christian as it is integral to our becoming a more authentic Christian. In other words, in exercising our mission of dialogue, we are at the same time developing ourselves in Christian discipleship. Christian discipleship, as we had discussed earlier, is an all-encompassing task, involving the various elements of mission and evangelization. This, of course, owes much to the renewal or change brought about by the Second Vatican Council, which, of course, is but a response to the change which was taking place in the world of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. This change continues and will take more radical forms in the present 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Religious Congregations and Mission Societies, if they desire to remain relevant, have no choice but to respond to such changes.

Ref.: Text from the Author (e-mail: edchia@pc.jaring.my).

\*\*\*\*\*

Michael Amaladoss, SJ

## *Double Religious Belonging and Liminality* *An Anthro-Theological Reflection*

Is it possible for a person who belongs to one particular socio-religious group to feel at home and participate in another? Exploring this question at an abstract level either sociologically or philosophically the answer would probably be no. Each religion considers its worldview and doctrines as absolutely true. It seems unthinkable that some one can profess at the same time two such truth systems. Sociologically speaking, religion is a deep source of personal and social identity, even in the so-called secularized societies. Therefore it seems questionable that a person can assert his/her identity with two different socio-religious groups at the same time. But phenomenologically we come across people who do seem to feel at home in two different religious traditions. So I think that this question should not be explored in the abstract but rather with reference to some concrete examples.

Anthropologists and theologians, for example, speak of the phenomenon of double or parallel religion in popular religiosity.<sup>1</sup> Some well-known examples are the Afro-Brazilian cults in Brazil and many Independent Churches in Africa. In the Afro-Brazilian cults, for example, groups of people who would identify themselves as Christian invoke saints who both have Christian and African names. Outsiders think of them as syncretistic or parallel religious systems. But their practitioners seem comfortable with them.

A combination and even integration of local cosmic religiosities and pan-local meta-cosmic soteriologies are seen, not only as normal, but even inevitable and necessary by theologians like Aloysius Pieris of Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> These phenomena are found all over the world when the so-called 'great religions' spread across new geographical areas. The cosmic and meta-cosmic nature of the different elements do not make their coexistence or even integration a problem. People actually live in different symbolic worlds and seem to move from one to the other with a certain ease. The coexistence, if not integration, between the two is often marked by local historical and social conditions. Various studies of popular religiosity in different continents have shown that, side by side with the official and approved liturgies of the Churches, people invoke

other powers – often spirits and ancestors – in times of need for protection from danger, for healing from physical, mental and social maladies and for establishing favourable relations with the powers of nature and society.<sup>3</sup> Such rituals seem prevalent at times of the rites of passage in individual and social life. These practices are variously condemned, tolerated or even encouraged in the form of popular devotions by the official Church. Sacred places and times, powerful mediators living and dead and pilgrimages and special penances are common all over the world even today.

At a more *élite* level, in recent years we have the practice of oriental methods of meditation and concentration by many Christians. A method is not simply a technique. It leads to an experience. These experiences have particular spiritual-theological meanings in a given religious tradition. Some can use these methods in a superficial way to discover a certain mental calm and feel happy that these seem, at a certain level, non-religious. They could even be promoted as such. Some others may remain firmly rooted in their religious tradition, but seem to profit by some beautiful texts or symbols or practices of another religious tradition, which they seek to integrate in their own tradition. Double belongingness is not a problem here. But there are others who also struggle with their spiritual-theological meanings, as for instance, Swami Abhishiktananda.<sup>4</sup> People like Gandhi seem to have had a certain ease in relating to Jesus and the Gospels, without ceasing to be Hindu.

When people belonging to a particular religious tradition encounter another tradition at a certain depth and find its scriptures and spiritual practices inspiring and attractive the normal tendency is to try to integrate them into one's own tradition through a process of reinterpretation and/or adaptation. But in recent years we have examples of people who seek to experience both traditions seriously without seeking to integrate them too quickly, but living rather in tension. How can we understand these experiences?

It may be helpful, first of all, to distinguish between different kinds of rituals. Socio-religious sym-



bolic actions or rituals seem to be of three kinds. Some are need-based and cater to the ordinary problems and tensions of life. At this level people do not seem to have any problem in crossing religious boundaries. Pilgrimage centres and sanctuaries as well as ceremonies of healing celebrated by pentacostal or charismatic groups attract crowds of people from different religions. A certain use of methods of meditation in traditions like yoga, vipassana and zen too need not go beyond this level of meeting a particular need for mental and personal peace. They focus on restful postures, exercises of breathing, and techniques of quietening mental activity and agitation through concentration on breathing or a verbal, pictorial or sound image.

Other rituals mark the relation of an individual to a social group at important moments of his/her life. These are called *rites de passage*. These are so closely related to a community's identity and integration that no one who does not belong to that community seeks to practice them. This is particularly true of the rituals that accompany the mysteries of birth and death and the event of initiation into adulthood. Cut off from the community they will have no meaning either. It is significant that even in societies that are secularized in which people are no longer practising their religion in any significant way, people still are faithful to the rituals surrounding birth, initiation to adulthood and death. There seems to be a need to mark these events with some gestures of transcendent meaning on the one hand, and on the other feel and even celebrate one's belongingness to a community that is constituted by such meaning.

A third kind are ritual of transcendence that relate a person-in-community to the Ultimate. These are celebrations of praise, thanksgiving and intercession. They relate in symbolic action to the Transcendent in and through, but beyond, the socio-cultural structures and limits of a particular group. The festivals of most religious traditions, pilgrimages and rituals of worship like the Eucharist point primarily to the Transcendent, relativizing in the very process the symbolic structures through which it is done.

People would not feel free to participate in the *rites de passage* of another religious group. But at the level of the rituals that are need-based focused around 'sacred' objects, places and persons of power and of the rituals of transcendence people seem ready to cross boundaries. In a broad way, this readiness seems to indicate that people are able to distinguish between the Transcendent and the various social-symbolic worlds through which it is mediated and made present in history. Such readiness to cross boundaries in rituals that are not strictly socio-structural is worth reflecting upon.

Let us look a little more closely at this symbolic dimension of religion.

### Religious Experience is Symbolic

Humans as spirits in bodies living in community are symbolic beings. All human experience, including religious experience, is symbolic. It is mediated through symbols. Anything in nature or in human life could become symbolic when it is given a special connotative meaning in a particular context by a group of people. Social action too can become symbolic in this manner. An action in a human group involving communication is necessarily mediated through symbols. Some would say that all thought and human activity even when a person is alone is symbolic. Even experiences of emptiness seem to be negative correlates of positive symbols. But we need to go into this issue here.

No one experiences God or the Ultimate as such; only God can. God is experienced by humans as manifested in a particular personal or social experience or event in which they are involved in some way, at least as observers. This happens always in a particular historical and cultural context. The experience is therefore lived, given expression to and communicated through symbols. Such experiences are often self-authenticating. People who have had the experience may try to explain it to others. But they themselves need no proof of it. Neither can proofs or demonstrations induce an experience.

Symbols are not arbitrary, conventional products like signs. They are related in some way both to the reality experienced, the person-in-community who is experiencing it and the context in which the experience is happening. Symbols are therefore rooted. They are not like words in a language or conventional signs in science that can be picked up and used by any one anywhere. Symbolic actions as events often take the form of narratives. Symbols can also be real/physical and/or personal/relational.

Every religion has certain primordial or foundational experiences that are embodied in narratives (myths and/or scriptures) and social-symbolic actions (rituals). Religious practice then becomes a tradition that seeks to relive and reactualize such foundational experiences. Memory therefore plays an important role. Tradition is a socio-historical experience that is rooted in a particular community.

Since religious experience is symbolic, it is limited. It is an experience of Ultimate reality. But it is not an experience of that reality as such, but mediated by the

social and historic circumstances of its manifestation. It is a true experience of the Ultimate. But it is not the experience of the Truth or the Ultimate as such. Every symbol embodies a correlation between the reality experienced and the person-in-community experiencing it. It is an absolute-in-the-relative. It is a relation that holds in tension the Reality experienced and the community experiencing it. It is this rootedness in a relationship that saves it from being merely relativistic. Relativism is normally subjectivistic. But relationship always supposes a link with an object which holds in check the pure creativity of the subject.

Every symbol has an apophatic dimension built into it. This means that even when one is tied down to the symbol, one knows and feels that the Reality is beyond the symbol. One does not relativize the symbol. But one experiences it as limited. This experience makes space for other symbols. Such new symbols may be encountered in one's own life and experience if there is a search or progression in it. But in some cases, it is possible, of course, that one does not have this experience till one meets another person or group with a different symbolic system.

Since symbols are limited in this way, a pluralism of symbols of the same reality, even within the same religious tradition is possible. The pluralism can also mark a progression or development in tradition. All the symbols in a tradition may not be equally adequate to the reality. They may not be equally significant for the tradition. Some may have a key role. One may not feel comfortable with all the symbols even in one's own tradition. One may also be selective with regard to the symbols one encounters in other ecclesial or religious traditions. We can differentiate between respecting some one who follows a particular symbolic tradition and ourselves feeling at home in it, precisely because symbols are rooted in a socio-historical context. An experience of a different socio-historical context may be necessary before being able to appreciate the symbols that go with it.

### **Symbols and the Pluralism of Religions**

Different religions are different symbolic experiences and expressions by different human communities in different historical and cultural contexts of the same Ultimate Reality. We do believe that there is only one God or Ultimate. The fact that different religions relate to the same Ultimate does not mean that they are the same or have equal merit, etc. Therefore comparative statements like "All religions are the same" or "All religions are equally true" should be avoided. Certainly they cannot be made *a priori*. It is doubtful

whether we would make them *a posteriori*.

Some times we hear people say that the mystics have the same experience of God, though their symbolic expressions of their experience are different. I think that not only their expressions, but their experiences themselves are different. This difference comes from two directions. The historical and cultural contexts of the experiencing individuals and/or communities are different. That is, the symbolic mediations are different. Symbols affect not merely the expression but also the experience one has of the reality, since every symbol touches only one aspect of the reality. Secondly, the Ultimate Reality itself, especially if we believe it is personal, can manifest itself differently to different people in different social and historical circumstances.

Each religion is adequate to its followers in so far as it mediates an experience of the Ultimate to them. The different religions can be seen as different paradigms of divine-human encounter. I do not think that there are any religions that represent purely human efforts reaching out to the Ultimate. This would be against the universal presence and action of God in the world.

Some religions claim a special revelation from God. But in order to be understood by the human group God has to speak in a particular language in a particular socio-historical context. Secondly, God may choose the aspects of God's self that are being revealed to this particular group of humans. Thirdly, the humans in expressing and celebrating the revelation that they have from God are limited by the symbolic structures and the socio-historical contexts of their celebration. This is what makes possible an increasing understanding or deepening of revelation. No particular revelation can be totally adequate to the infinite and inexhaustible mystery of God.

Since a human community is involved in the symbolic experiencing and expression of the Ultimate, not only limitations, both of the human agents and of the symbolic mediations, but also human sinfulness in many forms can influence the symbolic structures and their use. Socio-political or even economic structures may condition both the mediations and their celebration. But there are always prophetic individuals or groups in each religious tradition that challenge and seek to reform such limitations.

If different religions are different symbolic experiences of the Ultimate, one particular symbolic experience cannot become the criterion to judge the authenticity or adequacy of the others. We can however

speak of a negative criterion. If every symbolic manifestation has some authenticity, they cannot be mutually contradictory — though such contradiction should not be too easily and quickly assumed. Common criteria for judgement should be evolved through dialogue.

Every religious tradition is unique in its own way. Beyond this, if a particular religious tradition claims a certain uniqueness in the context of the whole, this can only be an affirmation of faith, not a comparative statement. As an affirmation of faith, it is obviously not intelligible to the others. However, even this faith must be made meaningful in a historical context, if it has to have any significance for the life of the community and not remain an abstract *a priori* statement. And such a search for meaning cannot be at the expense of other religious communities. But in practice, every great or meta-cosmic religion claims to be the best, if not the only, way to God. Its effort to convert others to its own way has sometimes been aggressive.

Conversion from one religious tradition to another is however not excluded. But it is never the result of a comparative study of the different traditions. Every religion mediates a relationship between the divine and the human. Therefore a conversion can only be a response to a call by God. We may explore the socio-historic conditions of such a call, but the call itself is ultimately a mystery that concerns the freedom of God and the freedom of the individual or group called by God. In history, conversions from a cosmic religion to a meta-cosmic soteriology have been common. Such conversions are normally group conversions. Conversions from one metacosmic soteriology to another is rare. People with some experience of such cases say that it is never a smooth passage from one to the other religion but involves a rupture of some kind. For instance, a person who is alienated from one religion for whatever reason suddenly discovers the meaningfulness of another religion in the course of a search for meaning.

No religion can claim that its own symbolic structures are not symbolic, but real, representing Ultimate Reality as it is in itself, while other religions are only symbolic. Religious pluralism is not relativistic because their ground of truth is not the limitedness of humans as subjects, but the absoluteness of the Ultimate. Combined with the community's response in faith-commitment it can have an absolute normative value for the community, because it is the way that God is reaching out to it.

### Inter-religious Encounter

In such a context of the pluralism of religious symbols how do we understand inter-religious encounter? I think that we have to avoid two extremes. One ex-

treme would be to say that each religion is not merely a different symbol system but also a different socio-cultural group of humans. They are not really compatible. Such incompatibility is further complicated by the absolute claims that each religion makes. The rise of religious fundamentalism makes the situation even worse. Inter-religious encounter, where and when possible can focus on mutual knowledge and removal of prejudices and lead to mutual tolerance. Even mutual respect would be problematic. Any further closeness between religions would smack of syncretism.

The other extreme would be to say that the different religions are merely different symbol systems of one and the same reality. They mediate the same experience. Though one's own religious practice is normally limited to that of the community to which one belongs, participation in other symbolic celebrations of other religions is not only possible, but even welcome. All religions lead to God like all rivers lead to the sea. Symbols may be different, but they lead to the same God.

While the first extreme exaggerates the differences, the second does not take them seriously. The differences between the religions are obvious. We have rather to be clear about the underlying unity that links them in some way. This unity has two dimensions.

On the one hand we believe that there is only one God and that this God is present and active in all religions, though the symbolic mediations of this activity may be different. We believe further that all religions seek to meet similar fundamental human needs for meaning and wholeness in the midst of the evil prevalent in the world and in human life. On the other hand, people belonging to different religions in most parts of the world today belong to the same civil society and are committed to provide a common moral and spiritual foundation to public life in collaboration with other believers and all people of good will. Conflicts between religious groups are not wanting in today's world. But we believe that such conflicts have to be overcome in a spirit of harmony and peace. It is in this socio-religious context that I would like to set the phenomenon of inter-religious encounter.

While the religions have a common goal and a common orientation and play a common role in society, they are different. They are not merely different symbols of the same reality; they are different relationships of different groups of people with God. These differences being socio-cultural they constitute the socio-personal identity of the people. This identity may grow or change. But it must be taken seriously. This would seem all the more important if these differences are due to the freedom of God and of hu-



mans. The proper attitude to other religions seems to be respect and a readiness to dialogue in the pursuit precisely of a common social goal. But in the process the religions discover each other and an interaction, not merely at the social but also at the religious level, becomes possible.

A dialogue between different religious traditions that goes beyond mutual understanding to mutual challenge and enrichment seems therefore possible. The ground for this is the realization of the limits of one's own historical and cultural experience when one cultural-religious community comes into a living, non-polemical contact with another. But the growth has to come from within the tradition. When people belonging to a particular religious tradition encounter another tradition at a certain depth and find its scriptures and spiritual practices inspiring and attractive the normal tendency is to try to integrate them into one's own tradition through a process of reinterpretation and/or adaptation. One speaks, for instance, of a 'Christian Yoga' or a 'Christian Zen'. These are seen as techniques to quieten the mind before engaging in serious prayer or contemplation.

### Double Belonging

But in recent years, we have examples of people – some of them writing in the later chapters of this book – who seek to experience both traditions seriously without seeking to integrate them too quickly, but living rather in tension. How do we understand this experience in the context of what we have been saying?

I would like to exclude a superficial approach which looks on the religious world as a super market in which one goes round picking up the best methods and elements that one finds useful for one's own purposes. I would also exclude people who claim to use the symbols of different religious traditions, freely moving from one to the other. This is syncretism. These people do not know what religion means. Probably they are not rooted in any religion. They treat symbols as disincarnate shells that can be filled with any meaning which one wants. They move from Guru to Guru, from cult to cult, from practice to practice. With such an attitude they will not find anything permanently satisfying anywhere. Anyway, I am not talking about them here.

I am not talking either about popular religiosity in which people relate to centres of spiritual power for healing. They remain at a cosmic level of religiosity which is below the level where religious belongingness becomes an issue and a problem. Going to a ritual specialist for healing or other material benefit is like going to a doctor. There is no personal and social meaning involved. There is no faith commitment.

Rituals and symbols are used insofar as they 'work'.

There may be others who, in a situation of living together and of dialogue, try to reach out to the other and understand the other from the other's point of view. This is very praiseworthy. It helps one to free oneself from prejudices. But this is not a problem of double belongingness.

I think that double belongingness enters into the picture when people really feel called to be loyal to two religious traditions. One example I know is Abishiktananda who discovered the Hindu spiritual tradition in the sacred mountain of Arunachala and sought to experience it from within and struggled to come to terms with it as a Christian. He claimed to have had the advaitic experience of non-dual oneness. But at the same time he was faithful to the psalms and the Eucharist till the end of his life. I have the impression that, till a short time before his death, he was not able to reconcile harmoniously his double belongingness. It was a life-long struggle. One of the reasons for this may have been that he lacked the theological principles and tools to find a positive meaning in the situation. I think that the concept of *liminoid* phenomena may help to make the experience meaningful. Let me explain this concept.

### Liminality and Communitas

Anthropologists analysing the *rites de passage* point to three stages in it: separation, margin and aggregation. These are particularly evident in the rituals of initiation. The adolescents are separated from the group of which they formed a part till then, kept at the margins of society and given a rigorous training initiating them into the secrets of the social group and then integrated in the society of adults. *Limen* in Latin means 'threshold'. The period of intense training at the margins is called a liminal period. It is compared to being in the womb or dying before being born or rising again. During this period the group is unstructured and egalitarian. There are no status differences among them. Even sexual differences may be downplayed by adopting a loose common dress. Liminality refers to this intermediary stage in a process of change from one state of society to another. It is as if an artist reduces a statue to a lump of clay before reshaping it into another. There is a passivity which is a source of new creativity. The Noviciate in religious Orders and Congregations can be said to be a liminal period being a transition and training (re-creative) period between life in the world and life in the religious Order. Liminality is characterized by *communitas* — an experience of equality and togetherness — which is contrasted to structure.

A similar stage of transition can be seen in festivals like the carnival in the West or the *Holi* in India where the traditional social structures seem to break down during a period of time in a cathartic gesture. Similarly, during a pilgrimage a certain amount of penance, renunciation and fraternity establishes itself in the group of pilgrims who are on the way to the sacred sanctuary.

The term has also been used in a wider sense to indicate a contrast society symbolized either by an individual or by a social group. Victor Turner, who has developed this notion of liminality extensively, mentions people like the Buddha, Francis of Assisi and Gandhi as liminal personalities. Creative artists also tend to be persons at the margins of society. Turner continues:

The category of liminality is useful in understanding such cultural phenomena as subjugated autochthons, small nations, holy mendicants, good Samaritans... monastic orders and many more.<sup>5</sup>

What is important here is to note that liminality here refers no longer only to the transitional stage of a group but also to persons and permanent groups like the monastic orders in so far there are contrast societies at the margins of a well-structured social order. However it is such marginal or liminal groups that “frequently generate myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art”.<sup>6</sup> Structure and *communitas* balance each other not only diachronically in ritual, but also synchronically in social life. The groups that embody *communitas* may acquire a prophetic role in society.

In the life of the Church one can also discover aspects of *communitas* in sacramental celebrations like the Eucharist. At the Eucharistic table, ideally, every one participates equally going beyond all status distinctions of caste and class. The Eucharist therefore becomes a celebration of *communitas*.

We are now in a position to understand the descriptions of liminality and *communitas* provided by Victor Turner.

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.<sup>7</sup>

The bonds of *communitas* are undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, extant, nonrational, existential, I-Thou. *Communitas* is spontaneous, immediate, concrete, not abstract.... It does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms, though this is necessarily a transient condition if society is to continue to operate in an orderly fashion. It is the *fons et origo* of all structures and at the same time their critique... *Communitas* strains towards universalism and openness, it is a spring of pure possibility.<sup>8</sup>

### Double Belonging and Liminality

I think that at the level of socio-religious identity controlled by the *rites de passage* people belong to a particular religion. This would normally involve a basic loyalty to its symbolic world, though some may feel a certain freedom to distance themselves from some elements of it and eventually to go beyond it.

But a few people may be called to cross the boundaries and enter into the symbolic world of other religions. They do not belong simultaneously to both religions sociologically. I think that double belongingness in this sense is not possible. But, though they may belong to one religion sociologically, they are at the margins of both religions and they belong to both religions symbolically and experientially. I think that they should not make any effort to reconcile them superficially by discovering analogies, much less to integrate them. One does not live in two symbolic worlds formally at the same time. The religious symbol systems are like paradigms: they hang together. But one feels free to move from one to the other. In the process one would tend to relativize both of them not in relation to one another, but in relation to the Absolute in an apophatic sense, without abandoning any of them. Double belonging in this sense seems possible. They may be able to pass from one symbol system of experience to the other, either through the practice of particular techniques like yoga or zen or through the company of the members of another religious group. In the context of emerging inter-religious encounter they have a prophetic and creative role in their own community. They are able to facilitate, not so much an integration of both the religious systems in some higher, third religious, entity, but a dialogical flow that leads both the religious communities towards a co-operative convergence rather than conflict.

### The Need for Liminal Persons

This paper may give the impression that I have

built up an argument to justify the idiosyncratic behaviour of a few eccentric individuals who have occasionally crossed religious borders and that such liminality in the area of religious identity is a rare thing. On the contrary, such a ministry of mediation between religions is not uncommon and seems today more necessary than ever.

First of all, there has been a progressive opening up to the other religions by us Christians after the Second Vatican Council. From a negative assessment of other religions we have now come to accept the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in other religions. Dialogue with other religions also has become official policy. Over the last twenty five years the Christians in India have discussed, favourably, the possibility of using the scriptures of other religions, not only in private prayer, but also in official worship and also the possibility of sharing worship with members of other religions in both directions. Use of Asian techniques of *sadhana* or spiritual effort like the yoga, zen, vipassana, etc., have become common, not only among Asians but among Christians all over the world, in spite of official reservations. Though the official Church has not been able to go beyond, for various reasons, inviting members of different religions to come together to pray for peace in Assisi (1986; 2002) and in Rome (2000), live-togethers in which people of different religions read their scriptures together, share their thoughts and problems and pray together have been regular in various parts of India since the Vatican Council. While we cannot say that such practices are being taken up by Christians everywhere, the number of people who do so is considerable. All these will be liminal Christians in some way, though in various degrees.

Secondly, in spite of such dialogical activity on the one side, religions are increasingly in conflict everywhere. Such conflicts are caused by religious fundamentalism, and communalism which makes use of religion as a political tool. People are searching for their identity. In such a situation dialogue between religions has become urgent and imperative. Liminal persons, of the kind that we have described above, can play an important role in promoting such dialogue, counter-balancing the influence of fundamentalism.

## Conclusion

I think that such a double belongingness is possible because of a strong belief in, if not experience of, the oneness and transcendence of the Ultimate. I think that one does not become a liminal person by deciding to become one. I have been saying that religion is a divine-human relationship. It is a response to a call and a commitment. Therefore crossing religious

boundaries would be a response to a special call and not a way that one chooses for oneself lightly. It would be disastrous to link this to a kind of post-modern pluralism which discourages all kinds of meta-narratives, because its roots are precisely the oneness of the Ultimate and a belief in the basic harmony of all things and all religions. It is not a superficial scenario where all religions are said to lead to God as all rivers lead to the sea. It takes the symbolic world seriously and appreciates and respects its human, historical and cultural roots. The phenomenon of double belongingness itself can be seen as a symbol of the call to transcendence and convergence leading to ultimate, eschatological community and harmony.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), pp. 144-158.

<sup>2</sup> Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), pp. 69-86.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Bamat and Jean-Paul Wiest (eds), *Popular Catholicism in a World Church*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999)

<sup>4</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depths of the Heart*. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Victor Turner, *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage*. (New Delhi: Concept, 1979), p. 150

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Victor Turner, *Process ...* p. 150.

Ref.: Text from the Author. Also published in *Vidyajyoti (Journal of Theological Reflection)*, January 2002.

\*\*\*\*\*



## *Topics for Articles, Conferences, Seminars*

During the General Assemblies of 2000 and 2001 we asked the participants to suggest some topics that they would like SEDOS to treat: at conferences, in articles in the *SEDOS/Bulletin*, on our web-page, or in our working groups and seminars.

Here is a list of what was suggested. You are invited to send us your ideas. Actually, we would much appreciate it if you could suggest some members of your community, from different backgrounds, who would be prepared to talk or write on any of the topics listed below. It would be especially good if the speakers were Rome-based in order to cut down costs. Perhaps you know of someone from abroad, passing through Rome, who would be pleased to address SEDOS?

### A

Active non-violence: its spirituality, its biblical foundation especially in the New Testament, our prophetic role.

Criteria for judging current events, reaction to the Church's ambiguity and silence in the aftermath of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

Culture of peace and non-violence starting with one's own communities.

Dealing with extremism: strategies and ways of communion and how to find common ground.

Developing Alternatives to terrorism, violence and war.

The Church and the crisis in the Great Lakes region.

Violence in areas of mission.

Violence in the midst of the mission.

### B

Formation of Missionaries.

Formation of women for effective participation in mission.

### C

Asia: dialogue with other religions.

Conversations around *Dominus Iesus* and the documents on Reconciliation.

Dialogue between religions on understanding and approach to mission.

Dialogue with Asia.

Dialogue: religious tendencies in the light of *Dominus Iesus*.

Good News or good life: what is our message?

Inter-religious dialogue.

Islam in Africa.

Theological dialogue in Asia: bring representatives to an Ariccia-style event.

Theological dialogue with migration.

### D

A Vision of the Missionary Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Application of *Ad Gentes* in the context of Europe and North America: the concept of *Ad Gentes*, its importance for the North, and how to apply it to these areas.

Evangelization, meditation of salvation.

Globalization: Mission as inculturation, migration.

How to be a Missionary Church (through dialogue, understanding, beatitude-based evangelization, epiphany).

Mission in local Church: alternatives to parish.

Relationship with bishops in the particular areas: taking on responsibility.

Space for sharing about concrete experience of

new challenges in mission.

The Church in Asia in the Third Millennium.

The question of silence: is mission being hampered because of silence over injustice?

Transculturation of missionaries (because they are coming from mission countries and going into mission countries).

Vows in the context of Mission.

Youth and Mission.

Youth, evangelization and mission.

The use of Internet in evangelization.

## G

Charity and Justice — real questions.

Ecology, environmental questions.

Education for Dialogue and Peace for all including for children.

## E

Conflict transformation: healing of memories.

Human cloning and the meaning of life.

Medical Ethics and mission.

Medical ethics. Evangelization in a broken world in need of healing.

Medical Ethics: the Aids problem.

One day conference on Medical Ethics.

## H

Globalization.

Globalization: mission as inculturation; clarity and politics — invite outsiders; mission to migrants and refugees.

Marginalisation of women in a globalized society.

Migration, refugees in Mission.

Refugee services with migration.

## F

Conversations around *Dominus Iesus* and the document on Reconciliation.

Dialoguing with fundamentalists (including Catholics).

Evangelization via Internet.

Fundamentalism in our religion and in others.

Looking for the human face of the Church.

The outcome of the Jubilee Year — reconciliation and liberation.

## I

Laity.

New form of Consecrated life: values appreciated by young people: openness, flexibility, temporality.

The new Church of the Laity.

The spirituality of the missionaries.

Youth.

\*\*\*\*\*

*"Mission Project Service announces the Pre-Publication Sale of the 6th Edition in English, French and Spanish of "Agencies for Development Assistance — Sources of Support for Community-Based Socio-Economic and Religious Projects in Less-Industrialized Countries". Nearly 300 agencies profiled, including some 50 new ones. Sale price \$40 plus \$10 shipping and handling, until 31 March 2002. Then \$50 plus \$10 s/h.*

*For more information visit our web site at: [www.missionprojectservice.org](http://www.missionprojectservice.org)*

*E-Mail: [MissProjSer@aol.com](mailto:MissProjSer@aol.com)*

*Tel: 315-649-3716 Fax: 315-649-5665,*

*Address: PO Box 100, Chaumont, New York 13622.*

*New location after 1 July 2002: 139 N. Kanady St., PO Box 288, Cape Vincent, NY 13618 Tel: 315-654-2447 Fax: 315-654-4721.*

*One can order on line or pay by check drawn on a US bank".*

## Coming Events ---

### *Ariccia Annual Residential Seminar for SEDOS Members*

14-18 May 2002

#### ***Our Vision of a Missionary Church From Dream to Reality, Vision in Action***

We will follow up our effort of Ariccia 2001 with the help of:

**H.E. Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận**

President of the *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*

**Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S.**

Professor of Theology at the *Catholic Theological Union*  
in Chicago

President of the *American Society of Missiology* and  
of the *Catholic Society of America*

**Enrique Marroquín, C.M.F.**

Sociologist

Promotor of *Justice and Peace* for the Claretians Fathers.

Simultaneous Translations in:  
Italian, Spanish, French and English.

### *SEDOS Conference*

*See page 48*

### *Working Groups*

Thursday, 14 February **Debt Group** 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**

Wednesday, 13 March **China Group** 15:00 hrs at **SEDOS**