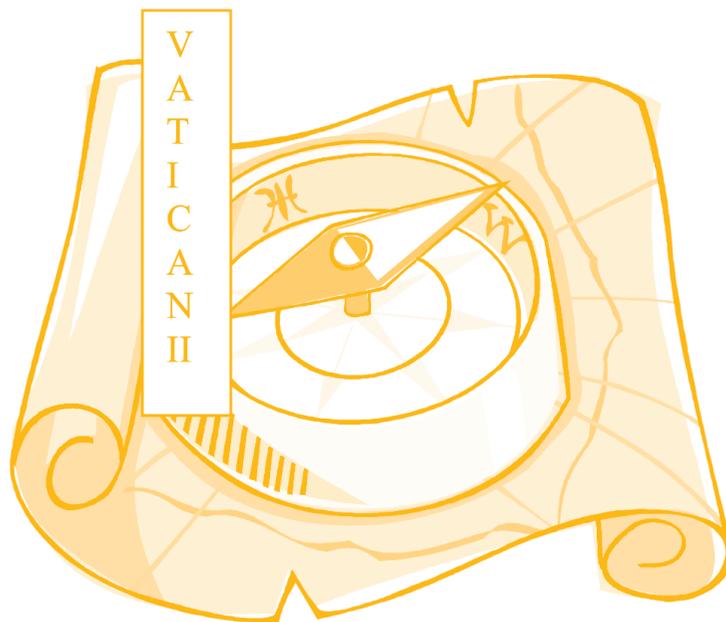




# SEDOS

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## Editorial

The writing of the Editorial for the September–October Bulletin coincides with the celebration of the Holy Mass by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Opening of the Synod of Bishops on: “**The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith**”, and the proclamation of St John of Avila and of St Hildegard of Bingen as “**Doctors of the Church**”.

Thursday, 11 October 2012, marks the fiftieth anniversary since Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council that revolutionized the Catholic Church. “**The Council was a time of grace in which the Holy Spirit taught us that the Church, in her journey through history, must always speak to the people of today. But this can only happen through the strength of those who are deeply rooted in God, who allow themselves to be guided by him and live out their faith with purity**” (Benedict XVI to the Bishops who participated in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, 12 October 2012)

Pope John XXIII emphasized that the Council was pastoral in nature, not doctrinal. He wanted that because the Church is called **to teach Christ’s message in light of the modern world’s ever-changing trends**. These trends are still the same and maybe they have not only increased in number but are more challenging.

The pastoral dimension of the Council has lost something of its flavour because of the insistence on the doctrinal aspect of her mission. **Fr. Antonio Eiguren, OFM**, who speaks three Asian languages (Korean, Thai and Chinese-Mandarin) fluently, also has a good knowledge of Asian countries. He loves Asia and its multifaceted population. Fr. Eiguren presents a very comprehensive re-reading of his missionary experience in Asia: “Vatican II and Mission: Some Comments from the Periphery” and, with some nostalgia, he states that Christianity has failed in Asia because the Church failed to use an appropriate language and approach to make the Gospel attractive.

**Fr. Alexander Jebadu, SVD**, asserts that a critical and sincere dialogue between Christianity and the Traditional Religions paves the way to an enthusiastic and authentic encounter between the two. The veneration of the Ancestors is not an obstacle to Christianity. The Gospel has the capacity to enliven the believers of the Traditional Religions and they, in keeping with the positive values of their culture, will let themselves be transformed by Jesus. Faithful to reading the “signs of the times” the Church has set out on **the “New Evangelization”**, which is “directed principally at those who, though baptized, have drifted away from the Church and live without reference to the Christian life. The Synodal Assembly which opens today is dedicated to this new evangelization, to help these people encounter the Lord, who alone can fill our existence with deep meaning and peace; and to favour the rediscovery of the faith, that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family and **social life**” (*Homily*, Benedict XVI, 7 October 2012).

The study of **Fr. Juan Gorski, MM**, on “De la “Misión” a la “Nueva Evangelización”. El origen Latinoamericano de Nuevo desafío pontificio” allows the SEDOS Readers to become aware and learn more about the origin of the concept of “The New Evangelization”; Juan Gorski challenges the Readers to first deepen the dynamic development and meaning of “Mission” before shifting to “Evangelization”.

**Fr. Hugues Louis**, from Haiti and who is writing his doctorate thesis on: “L’évangélisation en Amérique latine à la lumière des cinq Conférences Générales du CELAM”; adds not only

complementary insights to the content of the Seminar 2012 but gives some interesting historical background.

**This is the "favourable time" for all of us, SEDOS Members**, to prepare ourselves to harvest the fruit of the events of the year 2012: the Synod of Bishops, and the Year of Faith. **"Aggiornamento"**, this prophetic word that summarizes the intuition of Blessed John XXIII loudly speaks to us today and conveys this hope-filled message: "Christianity must not be considered as **"something of the past"**, nor must it be lived with our gaze ever turned back, because Jesus Christ is yesterday, today and forever (cf. Heb 13:8). Christianity is marked by the presence of the eternal God, who entered into time and is present in all times, because **every time is brought forth from his creative power, from his eternal "today"**. This is why **Christianity is always new"** (Benedict XVI, to the Bishops who participated in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Presidents of Episcopal Conferences, 12 October 2012).

May the Blessed Mother, Star of the new evangelization, be our light: **"Ven con nosotros a caminar, Santa Maria Ven!"**.



Sr. Nzenzili Lucie MBOMA, FMM  
SEDOS Executive Director



*Ref. : the graphic of the cover page refers to John Paul II who considered the Second Vatican Council as a "compass by which to take our bearings in the vast ocean of the third millennium" (NMI, nn. 57-58 - also cited in the SEDOS Bulletin, September-October 2011, editorial).*

**Antonio Egiguren, OFM**  
**Vatican II and Mission:**  
**Some Comments From the Periphery**

### **Introduction**

Fifty years ago Pope John XXIII opened the Council on 11 October 1962 in a Public Session and read the Declaration *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* before the Council Fathers and the expectations of the whole world. In various discussions before the Council actually convened, Pope John had often said that it was time to open the windows of the Church to let in some fresh air. He invited other Christians outside of the Catholic Church to send Observers to the Council. Acceptances came from both the Protestant denominations and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The whole world watched the events holding its breath hoping for the dawning of a new era, a new Axial Age of religions.

What has happened during these 50 years in the field of mission? Do the results match the expectations raised then?

As someone profoundly in love with the person of Jesus and his liberating praxis and message, and who has been and is personally and actively involved in missionary activity in Asia during the last thirty years, I am persuaded that I can contribute something to the reflection on how the missionary activity of the Church has been carried out since the Second Vatican Council. I believe that this type of reflection is necessary. Without any claim to possessing the absolute truth, I just wish to share my vision and my reflection based on my own missionary experience. The theological locus from which this reflection is offered is Asia.

I teach missiology at several higher educational institutions in the Philippines, China and Thailand. Wherever I lecture my first leading question is based on the following historical context: **"Asia has been the continent bound to be Christianized since Apostle Thomas**, supposedly travelling along the Silk Road eastwards, arrived in India and established a well-organized community well before the third century. Later the Nestorians came, following the same Silk Road, who reached Ch'ang-an (Sian/Xian), China, in 635. This missionary expansion saw the arrival of the Franciscan Monte Corvino in Beijing, in 1292. The Portuguese and Castilians, who came by sea, spread to South East Asia in the early years of the age of the great Voyages of Discovery in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Then the Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans landed in China and Japan, and several centuries later, after the Opium War in 1848, China (and by extension other large parts of Asia) was **"invaded"** by **Christian missionaries** of all the Christian denominations from the known Western countries... All of whom, bringing huge human and financial resources, were committed to building religious, social and intellectual institutions with the overall aim of **"implanting" Christianity (*implantatio ecclesiae*)**. If we look at the results of such a huge effort, we notice that Asia, which accounts for two thirds of the world population, has only 3% of Christians (roughly 1% Catholics). Were I a businessman, I would consider such a result a failure. Mission in Asia has failed. The leading question, then, is this: what went wrong?

In this reflection I shall use the method See-Judge-Act. In **See** I will share my personal observations based on my experience in Asia. In **Judge**, I will draw inspiration from Jesuit Henri Boulad's<sup>1</sup> letter to the Pope in 2007; **Ralf Caspary's interview with Hans Küng**<sup>2</sup> on 30 July 2011, and a paper Giovanni Franzoni<sup>3</sup> **delivered at a conference in Madrid in 2011: "Vatican II: Lost and Betrayed"**. Now, Franzoni is one of the few surviving "Council Fathers", so in him we have before us an eyewitness and as such I will let him speak loud and clear (I shall make no

*glossa* of his words). Then in **Act** I will try to sketch a few paths forward, also by way of conclusion.

## See

My **first** personal **observation** of the Asian countries, where I worked as a missionary or have visited frequently, is that most of the Christians of Chinese origin belong to minority ethnic groups. The former (Pakistan, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines) with a strong Chinese and Portuguese ethnic presence, and the latter (India, Pakistan, Thailand, *inter alia*) where Christians belonging to small ethnic minorities feel a strong need to affirm their identity clearly in the face of a majority ethnic group which is often not very understanding, even abusive, of small ethnic minorities.

A **second** general observation has to do with how Christianity is spread out. In most of these countries where Christianity is a minority group, the growth is endogamic. The Church feeds it from the inside. Thus, Christian communities have more or less been able to maintain a steady number but in the last thirty years, due to the fact that Christian families are smaller, the number of Christians has decreased. It often happens in these countries, that when a Christian (woman) marries a non-Christian (man), their kids, if girls, are allowed to be baptized, whereas if boys they are not. In some countries (Thailand and Myanmar for instance) while ethnic Chinese Christians are decreasing in number, those of ethnic groups in the mountainous **areas seem to be growing, also among the "montagnards" in Vietnam. So this phenomenon is** a feature of those groups in need of external aid for survival and protection against local laws which discriminate against them.

My **third** observation is that Christianity and Chinese ethnicity (or Portuguese) go hand in hand with business, shops, or middle-class jobs. Business was, historically, what made the Chinese contact the Portuguese and Castilian sailors in Goa, Myanmar, Thailand, Macau, and all around the Strait of Malacca. So, was becoming Christian an advantage for their businesses? It is my persuasion that it was. This also proved to be true in Indonesia, one of the most tolerant Muslim countries in the world, till the aftermath of 9-11 when the USA **President Bush declared "war on terrorism". This led to "Christians against Muslims" and** provoked many Muslims to turn against the Chinese Christian businessmen. One should add to this that often people in Asia expect to get something out of the Church, considered to be rich or at least resourceful. A young Catholic priest of the Diocese of Udon Thani in Thailand, **complained bitterly a few years back about the "bad" attitude many "converted" people had.** He complained that while they were Buddhist they would all go to the temple bearing **something in their hands, an offering to the monks, in order to obtain "merit", but once they** became Catholic they always demanded something from the priests. Many Christians in Asia **"expect" to get** something from the Church. Many also enter religious congregations **expecting to get something: financial help, health assistance for parents, studies, travel abroad....**

What shall I say about Korea, so often referred to as the most Christian of Asian countries after the Philippines? I love Korea because I spent my priestly youth there, and I have never abandoned my task of serving Korean Catholics wherever I went after I left Korea in 1989: 9 years with them in Bangkok, 4 years in Ottawa, Canada, and now 11 years in Brussels, Belgium. The mass Baptisms of the 1980s and 90s do not seem to be the case now, although the numbers are still high (much less than Protestants). Many Korean Catholics seem to have become *nengdamja* ("frozen", non-practicing) almost in the same proportion to the new incomers, which in fact, leaves Christian practice at 50%. Many Catholics leave the Church on account of the accumulation of the parish dues. Yes, the Church is dynamic, active, well organized (in a Confucian manner) and financially generous. The huge financial burden in the wake of building new parishes and parish houses has also resulted in the increase in the **"nengdamja". Most of the Catholics who come from a shamanistic background have to cope** with an authoritarian and demanding clergy. Women carry out most of the duties at the parish level such as teaching the Catechism, leading districts (*kuyokjang*), and visiting patients. But the extremely authoritarian and absolutist behaviour of the clergy does not make the Korean

model of Catholicity appeal to the rest of the world. The Korean Church would do itself an immense favour if it would return to the model of its 17<sup>th</sup> century forefathers: indeed they **applied a kenotic mission method (see my book "True Confucians, Bold Christians", Rodopi 2007): serving all for the transformation of society. It had a political dimension. That's why** those martyrs paid with their lives. Yes, this kenotic method is Asian and could well serve as a model of mission for the Third Millennium for the whole Church. I shall make a more concrete reference to this in my conclusion (**Act**).

In the main the Church in Asia may be considered as ethnic and very European-centred with some local cosmetic aspects such as the liturgy, local music and paraphernalia. The hierarchy is European educated, wears clothes and uses symbols of power that are totally foreign to Asian culture; is very authoritarian and keeps absolute control of the finances; is often nepotistic (cardinals or bishops whose uncles were or are also cardinals and bishops, although this happens elsewhere such as in Spain, Honduras, etc.). Such a hierarchy does not welcome dialogue but acts more as a doctrinarian, imposing authority, and as a servant of the Vatican Curia in control of the Church. It is interesting to note that the appointment of bishops of the so-called developed countries depends on the Secretariat for Bishops in the Vatican **administration, while those of the "Third World countries" depends on "Propaganda Fide". As if to say: "Poor" leaders of the Third World! They need extra protection and care! You cannot trust them totally, you know? They are still immature!**

In this context I find the situation of dialogue with the other Churches (ecumenical) and religions (inter-religious) worrisome. In many parts of Asia, the relationship between Catholics and Protestants is less than friendly. I shall never forget a visit I made to a dying man during my missionary work in Thailand. When I arrived to baptize him *in articulo mortis*, he shouted at me saying that the God of Christians could not be good, because ever since Christianity entered his house (he had only two daughters: one became a Catholic and the other a Protestant) hell entered too. Needless to say that I left without baptizing him.

I also feel obliged to say something about China and Christianity in this vast country. Since I am able to speak three Asian languages fluently (Korean, Thai and Chinese-Mandarin) my knowledge of the country entitles me to make a few comments about this country I have loved since I was a child (my aunty had been a missionary in Anhui for 25 years before she moved to Taiwan in 1955, and I grew up listening to her stories about China and Taiwan). Ever since then I always wanted to go to China, and the God Lord has led me that way.

One can say that Christianity has had five different periods in China where it has tried to be relevant to society. I shall mention them briefly.

**First**, in 635 the Syrian missionary Alopen arrived in Ch'ang-an (today Sian/Xian), capital of the T'ang Rulers. Christianity spread around the capital for two hundred years. This presence is witnessed to by the stele found in 1625 where earlier, around 781, the Nestorians had engraved in Chinese Characters, among other information, their doctrine, a list of bishops and rulers. Interestingly, with the decline of the T'ang Dynasty and the coming to power of the Sung Dynasty which prohibited all religions, Christianity disappeared. Some of the characteristics of their missionary method can be summarized as follows: Christian leaders were always foreigners, and they tried to obtain as much influence and privileges from the **"non-Chinese rulers" as possible. There are even grammatical errors on the stele they inscribed** showing they lacked a good knowledge of the Chinese language and culture (not a very nice thing to do to the Chinese who are very proud of their writing and grammar) and sought and obtained privileges from a ruler in need of foreign political recognition....

A **second** try was carried out by the Franciscan John of Monte Corvino in 1292 (during the time of the Yüan Dynasty). He was appointed and consecrated first Archbishop of Beijing. He arrived at the Court of the Mongol Emperor of China, Kúblai Khan (reigned 1260-94), who was well disposed towards Christianity. In 1299 John built a church at Khanbaliq (Mongol name for Beijing) and in 1305 a second one, opposite the Imperial Palace (which may coincide with the

one which today is the Northern Church in Beijing). After the break-up of the Mongol Empire, Christianity came to an end. Once again, the characteristic of this missionary method was: political alliance with non-Chinese Dynasts interested in gaining political recognition from a European State and ready to bestow privileges on missionaries in exchange for favours.

A **third** effort was made by Matteo Ricci (1585-1610) during the Ming Dynasty (Chinese Han). Ricci, a missionary imbued with the fervour and mission method of the Council of Trent and the modernist culture of the Renaissance, was followed by his Jesuit confrères and later by other religious congregations, namely, the Franciscans and Dominicans who struggled to make Christianity a relevant religion in the Middle Kingdom. Ricci, in spite of his new missionary vision, still wanted to meet the Emperor, which he never did, hoping to convert him (*cuus region, eius religio*) and he was aware that he had to apply a different method of mission from that of the Franciscans. Ricci praised the personal holiness of Francis of Assisi and his followers, but elsewhere he expressed no admiration for the brash *mission tactics (sic)* of the Franciscans themselves. He seemed to view them as enemies, since their zeal in preaching to the poor and siding with them, so irritated the higher Chinese class of people that the Jesuits felt the backlash of such behaviour.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Rites Controversy had a lot to do with a missionary method (also in Japan) and of course also with the way it sided with different positions alongside those their confrères were taking in Europe in the wake of the Jansenist crisis. As a result of the Rites Controversy Pope Clement XI forbade any marriage between **Confucian and Catholic Rites to which Emperor K'ang-hsi/Kangxi answered with his Decree of K'ang-hsi (1721) in which he ridiculed the Pope's Letter and ordered the expulsion of all foreign missionaries:**

**"Reading this Proclamation, I have concluded that the Westerners are petty indeed. It is impossible to reason with them because they do not understand larger issues as we understand them in China. There is not a single Westerner versed in Chinese works, and their remarks are often incredible and ridiculous. To judge from this Proclamation, their religion is no different from other small, bigoted sects of Buddhism or Taoism. I have never seen a Document which contains so much nonsense. From now on, Westerners should not be allowed to preach in China, to avoid further trouble".**

This Letter and the attitudes it criticized, ring a bell today louder than ever before. Needless to say that the **"rest" Christians in China were under the leadership of a few priests who had to do extensive travelling from community to community upon request. Priests did their service, were paid for it and asked to leave. The community continued taking care of its pastoral business. According to the missiologist Arnulf Camps, OFM, the period between 1745 to 1840, when the Church in China was left in the hands of the laity, was the most productive one and the number of faithful increased more than ever before. This sounds as if priests hinder the growth of Christian communities.**

A **fourth** encounter took place around 1841 in the wake of the Opium War and the Unequal Treaties, where the Qing (Manchurian) Dynasty, to all practical purposes became a puppet country of the West, a sort of **"Banana Republic"**. **Taking advantage of this weakness,** missionaries from all parts of the Western World entered (invaded) China, buying land, building huge structures, with the result that the Chinese became slaves in their own country. Missionaries, who behaved like real Mandarins, ruled over the Chinese people. Yes, hospitals, **schools, universities, and many institutions were created to "help" the ignorant and "backward" Chinese, but resentment among the Chinese against the missionaries** grew exponentially too. During the Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century first,<sup>5</sup> and later in the Communist upheaval, the missionaries were once again confronted by a popular movement (given the visceral anti-socialism and anti-Communism of the Catholic Church that never stops supporting Capitalistic Governments and economies), they later sided with the Japanese, first (when Manchukuo, 1932-1945 was created. The Vatican even appointed Bishop Auguste-Ernest-Désiré-Marie Gaspais, M.E.P. (高德惠) of Jilin (Kírín), to **"act" as de facto Nuncio**) and then with the corrupt and decadent Kuo-min Tang of Chiang Kai-Chek / Shek, ready to sell his own country again to foreign powers. So it is no wonder that the Communist Government,

after 1957, decided to put all religions under the control of the State. The Chinese do not forget.

The **fifth** encounter can be considered to be after Deng Xiaoping changed the Constitution in 1984 and among other things declared that religion was not the enemy of socialism. He suggested that if progress and wellbeing were brought about for all, people would naturally abandon that stupidity. He invited all just to look at what was happening in Europe: wellbeing and social progress was making Europeans abandon religious practice. Of course, Deng Xiaoping's dream of a socialist "paradise" did not come about in China; where on the contrary social inequality, where the rich are extremely rich and few while the vast majority of the people are extremely poor, was the result of the Communist socialist dream. However, as a result of this "freedom" of religion lots of people started looking for some sort of spirituality beyond material wealth. They looked into Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Christians also started to re-emerge from their dark "underground" into the light and came to life. But, the result was that the Church, which only then began to emerge and which is now becoming so relevant, wants to be an independent church; a particular church, local church. Christians wish to be themselves. They do not want to be controlled by a foreign superpower.

Of course, there is tension. A **small pocket of "underground"**, (historically considered the followers of the Bishops who remained loyal to the Pope after the establishment of the patriotic church in 1957, with less than ten bishops who also in private claim their right to appoint their successors without Vatican supervision and who do not fully agree with **Pope Benedict XVI's** provisions in his Letter to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the **Catholic Church in the Peoples' Republic of China, dated 27 May 2007**), supported by foreign and powerful personalities and institutions that speak the language and even use the expressions of the old Kuo-min Tang Party of Chiang Kai Shek, would like to see the defeat of the **majority "official" or "open" Church** (with about a hundred bishops with the approval of both the Chinese and Vatican administrations). It tries to weather governmental restrictions and manipulation (from a group of bishops appointed by the **Government, "patriotic" and** not more than 10 either) and at the same time wants to present a Chinese model of how to follow Jesus. Christianity in China is trying to offer a strong faith and to show the Communist Party that to be a Christian and to love the country (not necessarily the party) are totally compatible, just as to be a Catholic and Polish are. It can be said today that the Catholic Church has more members than the Communist Party.

In the near future, the Chinese Church will have a decidedly important presence in Asia, to say the least. In these circumstances, it is in the interests of the universal Church that tension between the Chinese Government and the Vatican be avoided or minimized, as is happening in reality. But the appointment of Bishops by Bishops is still a thorny question. Most of the bishops elected in China in the last ten years are people of faith and in love with Jesus and with the Church. They all pray for the Pope and for the universal Church. The appointment of bishops should not be an issue **that divides the two "superpowers" in such a manner that it** affects the everyday life of the Christian faithful. The appointment of bishops, in Church Tradition, has been carried out in many different ways as it is today. Even today the Pope assents to the appointment of Bishops by the Chaldean, Coptic or other Catholic Orthodox Churches. The Chinese Government will never give up (what it believes) to be its national duty. The Government intervenes in the appointment of the heads of all major institutions. In China, religion has never been a decisive element of national diversity and ethnicity, as it has been in Europe or India or in the Muslim countries. Thus, for the Chinese Government now, as it was in the past also during the time of Emperor K'ang-hsi, religion and what its structures represent, is one more element in society that falls under the rule of the State, just as culture, ethnicity or language do. I am persuaded, however, that **what is at issue** in the Sino-Vatican relationship is not the appointment of Bishops but an economic one, yes. As a young Chinese Bishop told me, during one of my frequent visits to China, the real issue at stake concerns confiscated land, property and buildings. A Government that wants to show the world that it is willing to play according to, and abide by, the international rule of law, cannot walk away from this very important issue.

A few years ago a high official at the Department of Religious Affairs told me that the Vatican was not a trustworthy partner in dialogue, and as an example cited **the Vatican's appointment of Bishop Auguste-Ernest-Désiré-Marie Gaspais, M.E.P. (高德惠), of Jilin/Kirín, to "act" as *de facto* Nuncio during the Manchukuo period under Japanese Rule (1932-1945)** (which in fact meant that the Vatican agreed to the territorial division of China carried out by Japan) and the presence of the *de facto* Nuncio in Taiwan. Of course, the Vatican may reply by saying that **Taiwan's Papal Representative was not a Nuncio since he did not possess the dignity of Archbishop (Taiwan's Nunciature was downgraded to that of *Chargé d'Affaires*)** but, according to the same Chinese official, the Vatican cannot fool them.

Yet another example was that of Don Celestine Lou-Tseng-Tsiang (陆征祥 12 June 1871 - 15 January 1949), who was a Chinese diplomat and a Roman Catholic monk. He was twice Premier of the Republic of China and led his country's Delegation at the Peace Conference of Paris in 1919. He had sometimes used the French name René Lou in earlier life, and his religious name was Pierre-Célestin. Lou-Tseng-Tsiang made gigantic efforts both as Premier and as a diplomat to get the Vatican to establish diplomatic relationships with the Republic of China which emerged after the Qing Dynasty ended in 1912. The Vatican refused (under pressure most probably from France) and yet it did not mind recognizing Manchukuo, created by the Japanese, thus, accepting the division of the Chinese fatherland. Unbelievable! Lou-Tseng-Tsiang, after his wife passed away, entered the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Andries, Sevenkerken, near Bruges (Belgium) where he now rests in the peace of the Lord. Yet another example was about the provocative and arrogant behaviour of the Papal Nuncio in China Antonio Riberi, later Cardinal, who even dared to ordain bishops for vacant Sees in China (foreigners) just at the most critical moment of Mao Zedong/Mao Tse-tung's **rise** to power, even though he was aware that those bishops would never be able to take possession of their Episcopal Sees. With this attitude he did much more to send the Christians underground than Mao himself. He was expelled from China in 1952.

It is a commonplace that the Second Vatican Council inaugurated a new era in the Catholic **Church's relations** with other religions. Dialogue, was of course the great mantra. As a result we have *Nostra Aetate*, a very open Declaration, which does not offend anybody but which highly esteems all the other religions. *Nostra Aetate* is not definitive in a way that one could not go on developing practical relations with other religions also with further theological elucidation by the other world religions. Later Documents such as *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and others, enabled the trinomial mission-dialogue-social to develop into a very relevant face of the Church. Even the Bishops of India wrote about the fourfold dialogue: **a.** The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. **b.** The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others cooperate to promote the integral development and liberation of people. **c.** The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. **d.** The *dialogue of religious experience*, where people, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

And then came *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000) with affirmations that follow the old pre-Conciliar line, of considering the Christian (Catholic) religion as an absolute, and the other religions — as it states explicitly — as 'deficient' forms of religion. That is an offense to all the other religions, and it is arrogance on the part of the Catholic Church to think that. We are not at all deficient as a matter of fact, there are deficiencies in all religions, but also truth in all religions.

I observe that the majority is born into a religion. Religion is part of the culture in which people are formed for the rest of their lives; few people choose a religion. Changing a religion, besides, carries with it serious consequences such as being uprooted **from one's cultural, historical and social background**. It places these uprooted converted Christians in what Geertz

describes as an **"enclave"**. For example some Thais, who converted to Christianity, were forced to live in a Portuguese enclave where they did not know whether they belonged to the Portuguese or to the Castilian Crown, but what was certain was that they were no longer Thais.

Yet, we seem to dialogue. And we are happy about it. We even say among ourselves that we (of course Catholics) are the only ones engaged in true dialogue. But, I wonder, who wants to dialogue with us when we minimize the seriousness of other religions with our particular and **dogmatic "truth"**, our theological concepts such as Christology, election and revelation? Worse still, we tend to appeal to our confidence in the Lord (in the end God will win; the Church has survived worse crises, so we will survive this one too) that all will become Christian.

Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue, we do a bit of theatricals. Every year during the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity, here and there, a Pastor is brought to a Catholic church or a priest or a Bishop is invited to a liturgical service in a Protestant church. What is it we are praying for? Are we **praying that the "other" come** over to us? If this is the case, then, this is never going to happen. We should stop praying for something we positively know is never going to happen, and that we do not want to happen. If we are praying as communities on the same footing, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, in a mutual effort to challenge others to follow and imitate that inimitable man, Jesus, then, yes, we may pray together.

In my years in Asia, I had many times to celebrate weddings, funerals, and baptisms. These **"rites of passage" (as they are called in anthropology) take place in all cultures**, in all villages and in all languages. They are ritualized everywhere. They are celebrated everywhere and by everybody. I have also attended these rituals as an invited guest. I have seen movies showing Saint Francis or Jesus of Nazareth in Buddhist Temples on the occasion of the celebration of these rituals. However, we, Catholics, in our Rite, seem unable to accommodate the people of other religions who come to our churches to wish their fellow citizens well on these auspicious occasions by reading a message or a prayer from their Sacred Books. Since they do not feel they are a **part of our rituals, they sit in our pews, often smoking, chatting....** They are not part of **"our" passage rituals. Concerning the "spirit of Assisi"**, where the Pope and the Leaders of other religions came together to pray, it always amazed me that these holy people were unable to find in their Holy Books texts which could have easily been shared by all, and which could be used to address God, Creator of all, as well as of all religions. Amazing!

The language of the Church is obsolete and is not understandable to Asians. Even the epistemological method is very different from that of the East. Our Western model of truth and how to arrive at it was born in ancient Greece. Aristotle can be considered the father of the axiomatic First Principle theory, and ever since this has been the basis of the Western way of thinking. And it has been very handy for the West's domination of the rest of the world. Aristotle believed that his First Principles theory, which seemed to be self-evident — if we were to deny it, we would not be able to continue further reflection — is the principle of non-contradiction: it cannot be that something is and is not at the same time and in the same respect. In graphic terms: of two statements, one that affirms something and another that negates it, one is true and the other is false. Both cannot be true (although both could be false). For Aristotle truth is one, it cannot be two (contradictory), it is either one or the other. In this fashion, we arrive at the truth by separating, defining, distinguishing, between what is and what is not, what is one thing and not another. Everything is governed by this principle of non-contradiction: **'one or the other, but not both'**. Thus, truth becomes one, exclusive, **'clear and distinct'** instantly recognizable and beyond any doubt.

In modern times inclusion has been added to exclusion. A truth may be true, not only because it excludes other alternatives, but also because it includes them. But this still remains another form of exclusion. This truth is certain and absolute, because its alternatives are in fact **'included' in it and they are not real alternatives. They are not really 'other truths' but the same truth, only that they do not possess it completely. Thus, exclusion does not allow room for 'otherness'**.

This model of Aristotelian truth, axiomatic, and exclusive has served Western interests only too well: innumerable schools of logic have arisen, as well as implacable metaphysical systems, implacable scientific methodology and powerful technology, which have indeed enriched humanity, but also led to Western imperialism. This model of truth has been applied very successfully in the religious field: religious truth, more than any other, claims to be unique and absolute, everlasting and unchangeable. There is no historicity or evolution in the truth, since it enjoys a metaphysical permanence by virtue of its perfect uniqueness and absoluteness. Christianity is well known for its Western character (in fact in some parts of Asia, it is called a foreign, French religion) despite the fact that its origins are Semitic, thus, Asian. It adapted well to the Greek culture, because Western thought proved to be more powerful, until it became the foundation upon which Europe was built, and North America, becoming the essential component of what is called the 'Western world'.

This model of truth and the mechanism by which we arrive at it, is still so persistent in our midst, that even important theologians, such as Karl Rahner, keep affirming that:

"... **Human** freedom, confronted with multiple options and truths, feels impelled to make decisions on the basis of definitive and absolute values. Human beings want to make an absolute commitment in their lives, and that requires knowing a truth that is also clearly **defined and absolute. Christianity responds to this desire and need, as being 'the only one among the religions that truly has the courage to demand absolute adherence to it'.** Christianity has attributed universal mission to itself from the beginning. It does not see itself as an external, relative, or particular form of religion, but rather as the only justified relationship between human beings and God, because it was established by God for all human beings. It considers every human being, of whatever culture or race, as a subject called to receive its message. It has become a universal religion in the march of European history thanks to which it has managed to bring about a world-wide unity of humankind ... in modern times. Consequently we can say that Christianity is the only religion that really has made itself into a truly universal religion. It has both temporal and spatial universality".

What a self-complacent statement! During the last centuries this classical model of truth has been subjected to strong criticism, especially after the arrival of the Enlightenment and modernity. **Let's briefly highlight** some of the criticism.

The Enlightenment brought the discovery of the world of freedom and history, leaving behind the world of necessity and Nature.

Humanity discovered that it belongs to the world of freedom and creativity, and not only to the order of nature, obeying immutable laws.

The order of the **human world is not a 'natural' order in which all is** a given and to which we must submit ourselves. Rather, it is a historical order belonging to the order of freedom in which order is not a given condition, but a historical one which has to be created and built.

The certainties surrounding knowledge were dismantled by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), establishing the complexity and relativity of human knowledge as opposed to the infallible grasp of knowledge (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*).

Modern historicist thinking has discovered that everything (including knowledge and truth) is historical and evolving, all is in motion, and nothing is enclosed in its own definition, that all is related.

Biology and the history of evolution reinforce the conviction that Nature, understood hitherto as a given by the Creator, is a world in evolution and without frontiers. Often it is more chaos than cosmos.

Modern science, the new physics, with the new theory of the random nature of matter, establish the limitation and relativity of all knowledge. Science now moves more through hypotheses than through its understanding of the causes.

In the religious field too the classical understanding of religious truth has also met great challenges:

Conflict between the Church and modern thought;

Conflict between faith and reason;

Conflict between the Church and democratic movements;

Conflict between the Church and social movements;

Desertion of intellectuals from the Church;

Discontent with the dogmatic and quasi-infallible teaching of the Church and its hierarchy;

The pretention of the **Church's hierarchy to be the sole and authoritative interpreter of 'natural law'**;

The top-down model which modern men and women find difficult to accept;

**The issue of 'Humanae Vitae' and all the Church's Teaching regarding sexuality.**

In **Asia**, on the contrary, we find a different model of truth going around and spreading to the West and to the rest of the world, which is neither exclusivist nor inclusivist, but rather is characterised by its capacity to relate to other truths, and it grows and gets enriched through this multiple relationship: a truth that is based on relationship, not on exclusivism or inclusivism. No truth can stand alone, isolated, complete and perfect in itself. Neither can it be understood as not to be touched or enthroned on a pinnacle of absoluteness. Truth is relational. I am I, not because I am not You; I am I, rather, because I am related to You. As W.C. Smith said succinctly: **"in all ultimate matters truth lies not in either-or but in both-and"**.

Thus, the language used in our ecclesiastical argot is unintelligible in Asia, alien, and does violence to their cultural idiosyncrasy. Maybe this is why so many young in the West are turning to the religions of Asia, and particularly Buddhism. Buddhism does not have commandments or imposing and infallible doctrines and yet it smoothly impels people to The Noble Eightfold Path: The paths are: **Wisdom** (right view and right intention), **Ethical Conduct** (right speech, right action and right livelihood) and **Mental Development** (right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration). Anything that departs from this **"right"** (*sama*) causes *dukkha*, (pain). There are no orders, or commandments, or doctrines, or obligations or dogmas here. One can almost hear Jesus say: **"go and you do the same"**.

Of course, in **Europe** we just need to look at the situation of our churches, seminaries and novitiates. They are empty. If we look at religious practice, it has reached its minimum expression. Many priests abandon the priesthood or live in open life-sharing partnership, both here in Europe and also in Asia. I have heard similar stories from Latin America, but I cannot compare them personally. One, among many other reasons, may be that not only in Europe but in Asia too people have arrived at maturity and no longer wish to be coached or commanded. The Catholic nations of the past abandon the Church. Large families (I come from a very Catholic family of 13 children) have abandoned religious practice with no remorse whatsoever. I have also observed that Christian intellectuals in Asia and the rich classes do not accept the dogmatic and intransigent speech of the hierarchy: moralizing sermons. It is a very interesting fact that in the Philippines Christian intellectuals and the well-to-do people think it is reasonable to defend the RH Bill (Reproductive Health Bill) which the hierarchy wants to derail by urging parishes and parishioners to demonstrate against the Bill, making parishes mobilize. They pass majestically over *Humanae Vitae* and leave its practice to the lower class people who seem to prefer living in dread of hell, practising a more devotional and **"problem solving" religion (Deus ex machina)**.

I observe a terrible gap between the Church and Modernity. But the changes modernity has brought about are irreversible no matter how strongly the Church may shout from the pulpit to **return to what "she" considers to be "natural law"**. Modernity and the Church seem to be travelling along two parallel roads. Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) in his "The Ballad of East and West" said: **"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat"**. I wonder whether we could paraphrase this statement and apply it to our case: **"Oh, World is World and Church is Church, and never the twain shall meet; Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat"?**

I shall now quote the questions Henri Boulad, SJ, asked the Pope in his letter: **aren't we doing the politics of the ostrich hiding our heads under I don't know what kind of self-security and self-gratifying pride? Why don't we want to look at the signs of the times?** And Boulad continued asking: Because of laziness? Lethargy? Pride? Lack of imagination? Lack of creativity? Culpable passivity in the hope that the Lord will take care of things and because the Church has weathered other crises in the past?

## Judge

I try in my heart to find reasons to explain the terrible frustration I feel when I see that Jesus can no longer be identified by looking at the Institution which claims it was founded expressly and directly by him. This Institution seems to stand between the believer and Jesus and to hinder the **religious experience of the encounter with Jesus**: "‘Rabbi, where are you staying?’. ‘Come and see’" (RSV Jn 1: 38).

I often wonder what would have happened to Jesus, if we had not had Constantine, or the Crusades (by the way, the aim of the Crusades was not to re-capture the Holy Land from the Muslims, but rather to control the Silk Road which had been for long in the hands of the Arab, not Muslim, communities), or the age of the Voyages of Discovery with the subsequent colonization and imperialism and now globalization? Just look at the present reality: the richest countries in the world are Christian. We feel no compunction on invading countries, waging war in order to maintain our strategic, economic and military supremacy in the world. In all these events, **of course, the Vatican sides "document-ally" with the victims but "tactically" with the Christian West**, and this is how it is perceived from the periphery.

Is it still possible to meet Jesus, the One who died, naked, on a wooden cross and experience him alive?

One could give multiple examples, looking at history, of how we have distorted the vision of Jesus, the One sent by the Father to cure, to reconstruct the wounded self of the person, to restore self-confidence, in fact, to give life, and to give it abundantly. We have created a system that today, more than ever before, is perceived as being Western and as benefitting from the military incursions and economic exploitation by the rich and Christian countries.

Some of the testimonies that Giovanni Franzoni quoted **in his conference "The post-Conciliar period — disappointments, contradictions, hopes"** may provide some clues to the secular malaise of an Institution that still functions as the Emperor Constantine established it in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century but, of course, with some cosmetic updating changes.

Why and for what reason does it seem to us, G. Franzoni asked, that the Council has been — and starting precisely with the Popes — more and more neglected, rendered void, and perhaps betrayed? For Franzoni, it was Paul VI himself who set the premise so that the Council could be, at least in part, "tamed" and the post-Conciliar period "cooled down".

The Conciliar Documents were strewn with limitations: the bishops could do this, if the Pope consents ... **"the faithful, for their part, are obliged to submit to their bishops' decisions"** (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 25)... This and that could be done but only if the times permit.... With these premises, what happened when the Fathers, once the Council ended, returned home? Some felt that what was affirmed by Vatican II was the maximum that could be granted, and they therefore set about ending any innovative perspective. Others, however, were of the opinion that the Council had said the minimum that could be said so that all could agree, leaving the local Churches to take further steps forward later. Both sides could find phrases in the Conciliar Documents to support both theses.

Franzoni offered some examples that testify to these limitations by which the Roman Curia under Paul VI did everything possible to normalize the situation and weaken the Council:

In the Third Chapter of *Lumen Gentium* about collegiality, the Note reiterates the papal power in an exasperating way, giving it an interpretation that, in retrospect, renders meaningless the episcopal collegiality that was affirmed (to be precise, Franzoni recalled that the Conciliar text never used the noun "collegiality" but spoke of the College of Bishops). It repeated a hundred times that this College could do nothing "without its head", or without the Pope. With few exceptions, the Roman Curia always maintained that the prior Note was an Act of the Council. But it was not; it was a Papal Act, the full responsibility of Paul VI. The Council simply took note, but formally, without making the text its own.

**Our Lady:** to declare the Virgin Mary to be the Mother of the Church was for the Council Fathers theologically untenable, as they preferred to imagine Her "in" the Church as a disciple of Jesus, not "over" the Church. So what did Paul VI do then? In his Speech on 21 November 1964, the same day that the Council formally approved the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, he proclaimed the Virgin Mary "Mother of the Church ... And we wish that the Mother of God should be still more honoured and invoked by the entire Christian people by this most sweet title". And so, at one stroke, the Pope overrode the Council that, by a large majority, had rejected that title, and he did this just as they were adopting a text that affirmed Episcopal Collegiality (following the wishes of the Polish Bishops).

**The Ministry and Life of Priests: *Presbyterorum Ordinis*.** In the Fourth Session, the issue of mandatory celibacy for priests of the Latin Church had to be addressed. Interventions emerged completely in favour of retaining the current law, but there were also some interventions which foresaw the theory that those who would later be called in Latin *virii probati*, or mature men, with existing professional lives and who were fathers of families, could be ordained priests. The Pope reserved to himself the question of priestly celibacy. That is how Vatican II's discussion of the matter was cut short. Later, on 24 June 1967, Pope Montini promulgated the Encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* in which he rejected any theory of change in the existing law. But everyone knows that since then and throughout these fifty years, the question of celibacy has caused endless debate, much discomfort, much suffering.

**Legitimate methods of birth control:** Many argued that spouses should be granted freedom of conscience, a thesis that was contradicted by fewer but more militant Fathers. The "progressives" upheld — "the pill". Then Paul VI intervened, reserving to himself the determination of morally licit means to regulate fertility. He did it with the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

Franzoni added three observations to what I have said.

**First** observation: *Humanae Vitae* requests Confessors to treat spouses who do not accept the Encyclical mercifully, and it explicitly asks that they may not be excluded from the sacraments. This was not quite obvious. In fact, from the 1930s to the 50s - at least in Italy - priests refused absolution to men who were masturbators. Therefore, in this respect Montini took a major step forward.

**Second** observation: the Pope did not define his thesis as infallible, as some of the Curia and some groups of conservative bishops had requested.

**Third** observation: Paul VI was so disturbed by the wave of criticism from theologians, and various groups, even including some Bishops' Conferences from The Netherlands to Indonesia, that over the next 10 years he did not write any new Encyclicals.

By contrast, Pope Wojtyła, with the valuable help of Cardinal Ratzinger, in fact, expected absolute obedience to the Encyclical "as if" it were an infallible pronouncement. So, for example, they banned American theologian Charles Curran from teaching, when he openly contested that technically "fallible" Encyclical, when it was not the Pope himself who wanted it to be "infallible".

Fourth Session *erit ultima*: it was Paul VI who made the decisions that curtailed the Council's potential, and laid the foundations for a reductive interpretation of the Documents of Vatican II. That was why Wojtyla and Ratzinger could later refer to it pursuing a restrictive and limited implementation of the Council.

Of course, this behaviour is the result of **the Curia's firm persuasion** that the Papal Magisterium is "more" than a Council and thus it is better to prevent free debate and action in a magisterial and authoritarian manner.

Franzoni offered some further examples of this authoritarian behaviour which is supported by deliberate (?) contradictions in the Conciliar Documents:

***Lumen Gentium***: here two ecclesiological views overlap: "Societas Perfecta", and the Church as "communion". Rather than choose between these two views, the Council overlaps and mixes them. Franzoni gave an example. In the first Draft of the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, mainly prepared by the Roman Curia, the Second Chapter was devoted to the Hierarchy and the Third, to The People of God. But in the end, ***Lumen Gentium*** inverted the order: The People of God in Chapter Two; The Church is Hierarchical in Three. But while the Second Chapter opens up vast possibilities and seems to emphasize the ecclesiology of communion, the Third has a different tenor, a different point of view, and it is plagued by a juridical view. So, even as it affirms Episcopal Collegiality, it limits it in every way: **"the college or body of bishops has for all that no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff ... as its head..."** (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 22). Moreover, nothing has been done to make the Conciliar claim of the Church as the "People of God" concrete. Even less with the view of "Church of the poor" in which the Council was not saying anything new, since the Church has always been on the side of the poor, but some of the Fathers wanted to conclude by saying that it was appropriate that the Church be "with" the poor. All of this was left out.

Franzoni stated that both Montini and Wojtyla continued in line with the Council in the commitment to peace and justice in the world. With the Encyclical ***Populorum Progressio***, 26 March 1967, Paul VI even accepted armed insurrection to overthrow dictatorships, and both on the first Gulf War in 1991 and the second in 2003, John Paul II raised his voice against that "adventure with no return".

However when the liberation theologians in Latin America attempted to apply ***Gaudium et Spes*** as well as ***Populorum Progressio*** to the specific problems on their continent, and took the operational implications from the strong statements of the Medellín Conference on "unjust structures of society" that inevitably generate oppression and poverty, Paul VI initially, and Wojtyla and Ratzinger in a systematic way, authoritatively blocked liberation theology. Leonardo Boff and Ivone Gebara are the best known victims of this Vatican policy. In addition, since Wojtyla, the Roman Curia has carried out a systematic policy of replacing "progressive" bishops with "conservative" bishops, and especially "anti-liberation" ones. And when Oscar Romero died a martyr for justice in El Salvador, they named an Opus Dei bishop to replace him! Repression by Post-Conciliar Popes has been rampant against the theologians, who, through their ecclesiological theses (well rooted in the Scriptures and also based on Vatican II), sought to challenge the power structure of the Roman Church. Well-known victims (but not the only ones) of such systematic repression carried out by the Roman Curia, starting with Paul VI and even much later, were the German Swiss theologian Hans Küng, the German Bernard Häring and the Sinhalese theologian Tissa Balasuriya.

In short, Franzoni continued — still proceeding through very quick flashes — the Post-Conciliar Popes have neglected the Council on one point above all (with the repeated recognition of the autonomy of earthly reality and the nation State), or they have interpreted it in a reductive and, ultimately, deviant way. I am referring to the relationship between the ethical norms proclaimed by the Catholic Magisterium and laws of the nation States on "sensitive points" (that is, the issues related to sexuality, the family, the end of life). In Italy, as you know, in May 1974 a Referendum was planned to say 'YES' or 'NO' to the repeal of the law on divorce.

The idea was, therefore, to discuss a civil law, not a sacrament. Well, the Bishops' Conference tried, morally, to coerce not only Catholics but all citizens to vote 'YES' to the repeal. Franzoni then gave a personal reference — "I" (Franzoni **said during his conference**) "publicly opposed this attempt and, in a small book, I supported Catholics' freedom to vote, and their freedom of conscience. So I was suspended *a divinis!*".

In his reflection, Franzoni affirmed that the concept of secularism is completely alien to the hierarchy, or rather, it invokes it, specifying, however, that secularism should be "healthy", that is, it should accept the Vatican's theses.

**And Franzoni's last flash: Over the past fifty years, the issue of women has taken on growing importance in the Roman Church. What is their role? Is women's ministry conceivable? First Paul VI, then John Paul II (and also Benedict XVI) cut short any possible discussion on women priests. But neither do women want to be priests, since they do not want men priests. The priesthood, in fact, does not exist in Jesus' mind. He talks about other things, talks about a community of brothers and sisters, talks about "reciprocal service". The New Testament speaks of "overseers" (bishops), "presbyters" (elders), "deacons" (servers). Well, today the hierarchy, which is determined to keep a sexist and patriarchal structure to safeguard its sacred power, is opposed to that Church. Thus, although they want priests, they say "No" to women priests. We, on the contrary, dream of that Church without priests or priestesses, where women and men, single and married, minister in the service of the ecclesial community. Is this Utopia? Is it heresy?**

## **Act**

As Fr Boulad writes in his letter to the Pope, there is need of profound renewal of theology and catechesis; theological and catechetical reform based on the conviction that the Church is a community. In this community the source of inspiration is the person of Jesus and he does not have vicars. Jesus only has followers. This concept of Church as a community committed to follow in the footsteps of Jesus needs a pastoral reformulation of structures and spiritual renewal, where the liturgy is celebrated by the People of God. Not a liturgy with so many protagonists, such as **the Pope in "his" basilica, the Bishop in "his" cathedral, the Priest in "his" parish.**

We also need to re-think the moral and ethical areas. Accept the independence of States to pass laws that they deem necessary for the wellbeing of their citizens, even though those decisions may not be to the liking of the Vatican. Neither relying on the past nor holding on to its vestiges.

To this Hans Küng adds the importance of the Bible. Because mission can no longer be understood as a propagandistic activity to make converts, both the praxis and theology of mission should abandon any apologetic orientation and retrace its origins to the missionary character of **Jesus' ministry as** recounted in the biblical narrative. The biblical narratives and **metaphors "become the language of Christian hope", which fill Christians with a new vision.** Both the history and the theology of the early Christians as reflected in the biblical narratives were primarily a history of mission and mission theology rather than a compilation of records of intra-ecclesial doctrinal struggles. Mission was first of all a genuine *expression* of the very life of the community rather than a mere *function* of the early Christian communities. Christians saw themselves as the forerunners of a saved community and they genuinely believed themselves to be the yeast of the world whose mandate was to share the salvific message with the whole human family. They believed they were called to implement **Jesus'** utopian dream of a world governed by God, that is to say, to establish the *basileia* of God. In the biblical narratives the believing community today can still find the presence of God who comes, the power of the Word and the creativity of the Spirit and the march of the nations, liberation from every slavery and the call for universal gathering in the unity of divine love. In **the concrete realization of this call to "universal gathering" mission will have to be** all-inclusive. Thus the discourse of the missionary Church will have to make feminist issues, for example,

part of its missionary activity. It follows that the Church, as a community of Christians engaged in mission, needs to reconcile itself to the diversity it finds in the historical reality of everyday.

**Prophetic Service.** The community of believers is one of service. That community demands no privileges of any kind – on the contrary, it concentrates all its energy on service to the kingdom, building a new heaven and a new earth where God will be Lord over all; this is prophetic service. As Amaladoss writes, “**Prophets arise whenever the poor are** oppressed, injustice is widespread, and pleasure, money, and power become idols”. When mission is spoken of as prophecy, there tends to be general alarm about the risk of identification with liberation, with the further misconception that liberation itself may be reduced to its economic and political aspects. True, looking at the reality in today’s world one could say that this is happening right now. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen, and the so-called preventive wars against terrorism — which hide other, unspoken interests — take a heavy toll of the weak: women, children and civilians generally. Of late, ethnic and racial problems have become tragically manifest in ethnic cleansing. Often religion seems to have become a tool, one that offers a rationale for unspeakable social, political, economic and military atrocities.

**Liberation and transformation.** Christian missionary activity is aimed at salvation. However, in Catholic missionary thinking, particularly after Pope John XXIII declared Vatican II open, (50 years ago now) salvation could not be defined only in ‘religious’ (or ‘ecclesial’) terms, but also in terms of what happened to others elsewhere. Thanks to liberation theology the term ‘salvation’ has acquired a broader meaning. Thus Gutiérrez enquires into the relationship between salvation and human liberation. More concretely, “**what is the meaning of the struggle against an unjust society and the creation of a new humanity in the light of the Word?**”. Acknowledging a lack of courage in tackling these social issues (the meaning of salvation and the way it works in practical actions are considered obvious in traditional Catholic theology), Gutiérrez criticises the classical axiom of the salvation of pagans, which he sees as a quantitative question. In this context, who was saved, how, and how many of them, were the standard questions, together with the **Church’s role in the salvific operation. Besides, the emphasis was on the life to come, which prompted a moralistic, individual spirituality and a selfish (“I need to save my own soul”) type of Christian life.**

**Church:** a community of believers that practices justice inside and outside. In both the Old and the New Testament faith in one, all-powerful God has the corollary of a divine domain, namely the Reign of God. Mission needs to be exercised for the benefit of a people, not of an Institution. It creates this people and in turn develops through that body. Believers in Jesus know that mission belongs to him, and that they are gathered round his word which calls people, gathers people, judges people and ultimately guides them. It is important to see this word becoming flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who calls and gathers his messianic people. It means that mission needs to be carried out not only by the efficacious word, but also by signs and power, actions and attitudes, by the very life and death of Jesus and his followers, that are capable of transforming people and societies. Mission is as concrete as the **life of people, not only its ‘religious’ aspects** but the entire social, cultural, economic, political and ecological conglomerate of human **existence. It is not merely individual ‘souls’,** but people as groups or cultures who are judged and called to conversion, loved and saved, set apart and gathered in unity.

Here I wish to present the kenotic missionary model of the Korean Christians during the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1784 the first Korean was baptized in the Northern Church of Beijing by a French Lazarist missionary. Peter Lee Seung-hun returned to Korea and began gathering around him a large number of scholars to whom he preached the Gospel he had learned in Beijing and baptized them. These scholars in turn, created their own groups of disciples. In a very short period of time, the Korean Christians reached the number of several thousand believers. Peter Lee Seung-hun even choose from among the scholars, some friends, with a high intellectual capacity and irreprehensible lifestyle, on whom he bestowed the responsibility of presiding

over the Sunday celebrations and of explaining the Christian Way. The growth of this Christian community, which in a short time spread throughout the Korean Peninsula, was so quick and so pervasive, especially among the intellectual élite and the poor, that the new movement was immediately persecuted and suppressed by Government forces. In the year 1801, an estimated number of five thousand people were executed (martyred), and especially, the whole intellectual group was put to death.

What caused the rapid growth of the Christian communities all around Korea? What were the reasons behind the political suppression? I venture to offer some clues:

**Laity** in dialogue with local culture. The Korean Christians were lay people. The group of intellectuals, Confucian scholars, had read many of the books written by foreign missionaries in China and in Chinese. These books made their way into Korea. In Korea, the books were read, discussed and taught to others. These intellectuals tried to find the best they could in their own Confucian culture, and add to it what was missing, namely, the capacity to die on a cross; compassion for the poorest of the poor; to inspire a personal as well as social transformation.

**Gospel:** Good News for the poor. One of the books which made its way to Korea was the "Life of Jesus" written by Julio Aleni. The life of Jesus of Nazareth, his love for the poor, the sick, and the outcaste, and his death on the cross, made a huge impression on the hearts and lives of Korean scholars. The Korean Christians discovered that the poor were also children of God. Money, fame, and power add nothing to the dignity of a person before God.

The Gospel demands human and social transformation. They decided to criticize some of their own cultural shortcomings, such as the subordination of woman to man; the punishment of children; the division of society into a class system. They also criticized the corruption of the Government and the abuse of power.

Preeminence of **conscience** over authority. Following Confucius' **teaching**, these Korean Christians established that personal conscience came before any other worldly authority or **law**. **Being faithful to one's conscience was the best assurance that one was also loyal to God**. What infuriated the Government the most was the appeal to **a person's** personal conscience. If personal conscience was to be so central, what, then, was the role of the ruler? The Government could not accept this way of thinking; it saw it as an invitation to a general upheaval against their '**divinely**' instituted power.

If the Church is to have any future it will need to keep the following aspects in mind:

**Laity.** The '**sacred orders**' on which the Church has been based needs to come to an end. The **only 'order'** is the order of the faithful followers of Jesus. Leadership is to serve, help, and wash the feet of the people. In this service women need to recover their role (more than 50% of the members of the Catholic Church are women), and the **de facto** service they already provide in the communities, needs to be institutionally acknowledged.

Simplicity and with the poor. More than half of the Catholic Church members live on less than € 1 per day, thus, there is not much room for ostentation: gold rings, golden pectorals, extravagant clothes (which originated in the time of the Roman-Byzantine Empire), and other symbols. Our brothers and sisters are being exploited, made poor for the economic advantage **of a few, and the 'official'** Church cannot condone this.

**Consistent life style.** To follow Jesus is to share in his utopian dream of the Kingdom of God. Each one accomplishes this in his/her own way. What is demanded is a life consistent with the Gospel values.

Far from politics and yet being political and striving for social transformation. What makes the Church a non-credible Institution is its involvement in politics and its siding with power. In spite of all the explanations to the contrary, the official Church is perceived as being on the side of the powerful and the economically rich. The official Church has never been on the side

of the people fighting against empires and colonial forces. And yet, the whole Church needs to be political, siding with the poor in order to make a better society. The poor are the builders of history. If the Church wishes to be a protagonist in history, then, it will have to be poor, strive with the poor, and live with and among the poor.

Whose is the future? What will the future be like? The future will be a “critical-liberating religion” which demands a radical paradigm change (like that of the Axial Age) adopting a holistic (non-dualistic), ecologic (non-anthropocentric) and pluralistic heart (non-exclusivist). We must assume the responsibility of living the response to the Gospel in a communal manner. Then, sitting at the table with all men and women of good will, try to understand together what we can do for peace, justice and the safeguard of Creation. As Franzoni affirmed, every time we Christians celebrate the Eucharist, we are almost celebrating a trial: that is, at that moment, at that table with Jesus, we are being judged on whether we are fulfilling a false and comforting ritual, or a real and consistent task. If, like Jesus, despite our limitations and contradictions, we strive to be a Church-for-others, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer taught us, then the Eucharist we celebrate will be blessing and salvation for us, a true viaticum on our way to the Kingdom. If, on the other hand, there is nothing behind the ritual, and we are working for a Church-for-us, our Eucharist will be our death and our curse (*cf.* I Cor 11:29). But, as the rabbis commenting on the early Chapters of Genesis put it well, when the Lord curses the serpent that tempted Eve, He actually blesses it and, in fact — they noted astutely — by forcing it to crawl, the Lord in fact allows it to escape from danger and hide in holes in the ground. If our Eucharist is not sincere, the Lord invites us to repentance, to conversion, to set out again on the path with humility and courage.

Do we still have confidence in the future of the Church? What might the answer be? If the world is so bad, could the Church be in a good condition? Let's not think, then, about the future; let's think of the present. Behold, in this tragic and tormented present, so disturbed by terrible evils and wrapped in darkness, we learned, just as an example, that at the Japanese nuclear plant in Fukushima some technicians, knowing they were going to meet death, entered the plant to try to cool it. Those people weren't Christians; they may not have known anything about Jesus. And yet, they accepted death simply to save other lives. This is indeed a moving deed, and we can say that one can still have hope in human beings.

Let us try daily in our communities to build this Church-for-others that has a thousand reasons to be based on the Second Vatican Council.

"Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest" (RSV, Jn 4:35). It's true. In a world overflowing with tares and weeds, here and there, thank God, the golden grain ripens. It ripens wherever men and women strive for peace, justice, and the safeguard of Creation, wherever they become Samaritans to help that unknown brother who falls a victim to bandits.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> A former Superior of the Jesuits in Egypt.

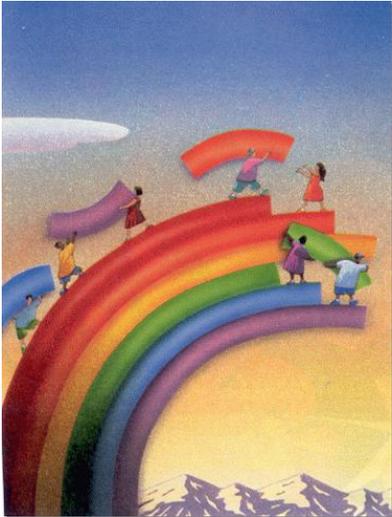
<sup>2</sup> Hans Küng is a Christian theologian whose influential writings have been criticized by the Vatican, which in 1979 stripped him of the right to teach as a representative of the Church. Ordained a priest in 1954, Küng was the youngest theologian to participate in Vatican II.

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Franzoni, a former Benedictine Abbot, Catholic theologian, and eyewitness at the Second Vatican Council, offered these reflections at the 31st Congress of the Asociación de Teólogos y Teólogas Juan XXIII in Madrid.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Fonte Ricciane* 1/179, 232, 2/269. D'Elia cites an even stronger warning from Alessandro Valignano to Ricci about Other Orders' “*herror y zelo desordenado*” in *Fonte Ricciane*, 1/187.

<sup>5</sup> The Boxers fought not against a religion, but against foreign intrusion that defended a decadent, corrupt and violent imperial regime.

**Alexander Jebadu, SVD**  
**Far From Being Idolatrous**  
***Ancestral Veneration in the Rainbow of Religious Pluralism***



Graphics: Centro misionario diocesano (webpage)

*This article aims to show that ancestral veneration has a special place in the rainbow of world religions. It is one aspect of Traditional Religions. Yet it has suffered from two major prejudices which view this religious piety as a sort of idolatry and superstition. We argue that these prejudices are absolutely unfounded. Religious piety that centres on honouring ancestors, on the contrary, is non-idolatrous and non-superstitious by its very nature. In ancestral veneration, the souls of the dead, believed to be with God in heaven, are loved and honoured by the living community. Like in the devotion to the Saints in the Christian Tradition, ancestors are never worshipped. If carefully studied this religious piety could be inculturated into the Christian religion and so become an integral part of the rainbow of religious pluralism.*

## **Prologue**

Religious practice that centres on venerating ancestors, or the living dead, still plays a significant role in the life of many Christians around the world today, especially in Asia, Africa as well as in other parts of the world such as Latin America, Melanesia and Australia (Aborigines). Before the Second Vatican Council it was not uncommon for Christians to regard all cultures and the other religions, including the so-called Traditional Religions, as evil. They were considered satanic creations. They were by their nature the opposite of the Gospel of Christ. Interestingly, after hundreds and hundreds of years, these Traditional Religions are still able to show their vitality and survive their suppression and expulsion by the Church or by any other social entity. Many forms of Traditional Religions such as ancestral veneration have come along and lived side by side with the Christian faith. This reality gives us a hint that those Traditional Religions must have many good intrinsic values that have the capacity to nourish and nurture the life of their practitioners. They do not contradict the Christian faith and suffice it to say, they are neither idolatrous nor superstitious. In our effort to make this point, we shall need to examine idolatry and superstition to see whether ancestral veneration falls under those categories.

## **The Maltreatment of Ancestral Veneration in Records**

### ***Christian Faith Imposed On Local Cultures and Religions***

It is no secret that there are abundant historical records that reveal stories about the lack of understanding for the ancestral veneration in the past, and even to the present day, leading to the suppression of the practice of this religious piety. Probably, among the many historical records recording the maltreatment of ancestral veneration, the first noteworthy example is the well-known ***Chinese Rites Controversy*** in China. Because of the space limit we cannot treat this controversy here at length. But suffice it to say, it was about the different interpretations of ancestral veneration in China by the Catholic Church missionaries.

The controversy began with the arrival of the Jesuits on mainland China in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century led by Matteo Ricci (1582-1610) from Italy. The missionaries had to decide how to interpret the traditional Chinese rituals of ancestral veneration. They had to discern whether the ceremonies performed in honour of the dead were merely political, secular rituals or

whether they were religious rituals having some sort of belief that contradicted the Catholic faith tradition. In the Directive of 1603, Ricci described the Jesuit position on Chinese ancestral rites: saying that they were not superstitious by nature since they were not conceived as such. But later on he recognized that there were a variety of beliefs associated with the ancestral rites that might not be compatible with the Christian faith. He qualified his statement by saying in later writings **that “perhaps” the ancestral rites were not superstitious. After the death of Matteo Ricci (1610), the Pope gave other missionary groups permission to establish Missions in China such as the Dominicans (1631), the Franciscans (1633), the Augustinians (by the 1680s) and the Paris Mission Society (1683).** The arrival of these new missionary groups not only increased the likelihood of more Chinese converting to the Catholic faith, but also increased the possibility of disagreement in interpreting the Chinese traditional ancestral rites — a disagreement that later on came to be known as the *Chinese Rites Controversy*. This controversy which began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the mission field of China spanned more than 300 years. It involved not only the Bishop of Manila in the Philippines but also numerous Popes, numerous Cardinals serving at the Congregation for the Catholic Doctrine of the Faith, two Apostolic Delegates, 160 scholars at the Sorbonne, the Kings of Spain, Portugal and France, Jansenists, Preachers Fenelon and Bossuet, the writers Leibnitz and Voltaire, the Jesuit confessor of King Louis XIV, two Chinese Emperors of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese, and Japanese Government Officials. The controversy which formally began in 1633 did not end until 1939 (Butcher 1996:17-18). The controversy is also described at length in the work of George Minamiki, SJ, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times* (1985). The book describes the problem in detail with its intricacies and the pain felt by the Catholic missionaries and by the Indigenous Chinese Catholics as well as by non-Christians.

The three major points of the controversy were: 1) Whether the ancestral veneration ritual was civil in nature or whether it had religious significance; 2) Whether the ceremonies performed in honour of Confucius by Chinese scholars at that time were secular or religious in character; 3) The Missionaries encountered difficulty in coming to an agreement on the best Chinese word to express the Christian concept of God. All three of the issues involved in the Chinese Rites Controversy are important.

However, the first issue is the one we are chiefly concerned with here. Before the rites controversy was put to rest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Church had issued numerous Decrees regarding the matter.

The Decree of 1645, proposed by the Spanish Dominicans, passed judgement against the Jesuits who had claimed that Chinese ancestral veneration rituals were secular in nature — in other words they were **not** religious and that therefore Chinese Catholics could be allowed to participate in such rituals.

Conversely, the Dominicans, supported by the Holy See, claimed that the Chinese ancestral veneration rituals were religious in nature — that they were not compatible with the Christian faith and that therefore Chinese Catholics should be banned from performing, as well attending, such ancestral ritual ceremonies.

On 4 December 1939 the Church ended the Controversy by issuing an ambiguous statement, declaring that the ancestral veneration rituals including the one to Confucius were performed to demonstrate honour and respect. The **“Liberating Decree” for China** also states that in former times the rites may have had pagan connotations, but with the passing of the centuries they now merely expressed a civic sense of piety (Butcher 1996:18-21).

There are two quick evaluations we need to make in regard to the Controversy. 1) In our **opinion, the Jesuits’ position claiming that** the Chinese ancestral veneration was merely secular or civil — backed up again by the Holy See 300 years later — was wrong. Because in reality no rite is secular simply because it is performed by civil society or the Government. In the olden days, as it is still in many traditional societies today, there was no separation between religious and secular matters. 2) The Dominicans were right in claiming that the Chinese ancestral ritual was religious in nature. Today, contrary to her position of stating that it was incompatible with the Christian faith, the Church needs to declare that ancestral veneration is indeed religious in nature and can be incorporated into the Christian faith and can help foster the growth of the Church, if it is properly studied.

In addition to the Chinese Rites Controversy, there were also many other forms of maltreatment, not uncommon in the old days, to impose the Christian faith on the local cultures and religions. Instead of elevating the primal beliefs and cultures of the people in Asia and Africa as well as in other parts of the world, people were told to abandon their religious beliefs and cultures. In the Philippines, for instance, all the tribal religious symbols were considered pagan and therefore they were burnt. People were forbidden to attend their native rituals. To become a Christian **meant to forget one's culture** and beliefs. People were taught about the same God and other spiritual beings (Angels and Saints) but in a totally different language and in a different frame of philosophical thinking. People were introduced to the same God and other spiritual beings in a language they could not understand (Alunday 1989: 37-41). Instead of simply believing in God, people were taught to believe in the Christian God, who had been rationalized: He is One in Three persons. One person became man but still divine. Instead of believing in the traditional healing spirits and venerating and appealing to their good ancestors, people were taught to call upon Angels and Saints with whom they were not familiar. Because of this, Benigno P. Beltran has dared to say that the Trinitarian aspect of Christianity has not penetrated, and probably will never penetrate, the consciousness of the tribal people of the Philippines, of Asia and of Africa because by and large the Christian faith has not been explained in a way they can understand (1989: 6-15).

There are many lamentations on the African Continent about the fact that the Christian faith has been imposed excessively at the expense of African cultural values. Many Africans, interviewed by Luarenti Magesa, argued that Christian missionaries had looked down on African Religions, dismissing them as evil and pagan (2004: 34). When talking about dialogue with primal religions, Ennio Mantovani mentioned ancestral veneration as one of the classical examples of possible misunderstandings on the part of Christianity or of any other of the great religions. He said that in Christianity, people obey God by, among other things, honouring their father and mother as the Bible commands. If the dead in a given culture are an integral part of the community, then rituals — ancestral rites — performed to express and consolidate the good relationship with deceased parents must also bring honour to God as much as the observance of the Fourth Commandment in the Christian faith. As a consequence the omission of, and the condemnation of, those mortuary rituals in such a culture might be disobedience to God (1989: 48-59).

### ***The Dilemma Faced by the Protestant Churches***

The Protestant Churches by and large still today suspect ancestral veneration as being a religious practice that is contrary to the Christian faith. In Taiwan, for instance — according to the survey by Joel Nordtvedt, a Lutheran Brethren missionary, — ancestral veneration is considered to be one of the main hindrances to the spread of the Gospel. Therefore, traditionally, new Chinese Christians are told not to continue their ancestor practices after they are baptized. Often a ceremony is held for the burning of ancestral tablets to make a complete break with these practices. Consequently, traditional Hakka Chinese usually see Christians as being unfilial to their ancestors and unfaithful to their religious cultures. For non-Christian Chinese becoming Christian amounts to cutting oneself off from all family ties. Joel Nordtvedt however, while on the one hand positively claiming that ancestor worship is not idolatry, judges ancestral veneration as a sort of religious practice rooted in a lack of understanding of the spirit worlds. Furthermore he says, new Chinese Christians should be taught that Ancestral veneration is not necessary and misleading (Nordtvedt, accessed in January 2006, [http://members.aol.com/taimission/hak\\_ance.htm](http://members.aol.com/taimission/hak_ance.htm)).

On 16 November 2002, a Seminar, held at Aletheia University in Tam-sui, Taiwan, brought together a number of scholars and clergy. It was conducted by the Presbyterian Church in order to seek Christian ways to face the common Taiwanese practice of ancestral veneration. In this Seminar, some Presbyterian pastors and scholars said that if a broad view of the place of ancestors in a family system is taken, then their veneration can become a strong force for family unity. However, they further stated, much care must be taken in the degree to which Christians can accept the veneration rites. One of the concerns brought up in the Seminar was: whether the ancestors venerated were to be regarded as gods or spirits whom humans worship? In response to this concern, Li Chiao, the Presidential Office Consultant of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, warned that if that were to be the case an

important line had been crossed, since from the perspective of Christian theology, human beings are created and limited, but God is unlimited and singular. All Christians confess that there is no god but God. While Tzeng Chong-ming, a professor at Taiwan Theological College in Taipei, said that the problem of [Ancestor](#) worship is difficult to solve because the whole thing has become tied up with the idea of idolatry and it is difficult to separate the two. He pointed out that the Church should avoid lumping the ancestors with idols. Ancestors are not the same as "gods". Since even Taiwan's traditional folk religion makes a distinction between ancestral spirits and the spirit worlds, gods or God, and so Christians, too, should have differing attitudes towards them. Chong-ming said that many peoples of Asia and Africa believe that there is a need to provide for people after they have died. Ancestral rites have grown from this belief. The process of moving from the state of "family member" to "ancestor" does not separate the person from the living. The [Ancestor](#) continues to dwell with the family. This can have a deep religious significance, but, he said, since the Protestant Reformation, for the most part, talk of the dead among the living in Christian theology (Protestant Church) has been suppressed. Chong-ming was backed up by Tzeng Chiong-fa from Tainan Theological College in Tainan City. Chiong-fa placed some of the blame for the conflict between Christianity and Taiwan's folk culture at the feet of the foreign missionaries who spread the Gospel and founded the churches in modern Taiwan. They were acting on assumptions based on the Protestant Reformation of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe. When they condemned the religious practices they did not take the time to understand them. They should have taken the time to differentiate between those things that pertain to the ancestors and those which pertain to the One True God. The Foundations they laid here, Chiong-fa continued, has resulted in the harmful alienation of Taiwan's Christians from their native cultures. But despite the positive tone of these scholars, a cursory survey of church practices in Taiwan found that 60% of the Presbyterian clergy adamantly opposed ancestral veneration by their members. More than 70% of the Presbyterian ministers surveyed indicated that they work on the principles of gradual progress in dealing with the continued presence of ancestral veneration materials in the homes of Christian believers (Hao-ran: <http://www.pct.org.tw/english/news26474.htm>, accessed in January 2006).<sup>0</sup>

Jack Partain also gave a report regarding the dilemma the Protestant churches in Africa face in accommodating African Ancestral Veneration into Christian rituals and theology, as it is clear from **the title of his article "Christians and Their Ancestors: A Dilemma of African Theology"**. Partain noted that the cult of ancestors is the most common and essential activity in African Traditional Religion. Deceased ancestors are believed to remain close by. They are still part of the family, sharing meals and maintaining an interest in family affairs, just as before death. Rites in honour of the dead are simple and omnipresent. The presence of the dead is often acknowledged particularly at meals or when drinking. Small portions are set aside or spilled on their behalf. In times of extreme adversity, expensive gifts may be offered to them to gain relief or to enlist their help. Even African believers, who have assented to orthodox Christian belief and joined in the denunciation of the ancestor rites, still privately retain their loyalty to the tradition, especially in times of serious misfortune or death (Partain <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1078>, accessed in January 2006).

Partain, then, went on to describe the dilemma or controversy among African theologians regarding the significance of Ancestral Veneration. Many theologians agree to incorporate ancestral veneration into Christian theology, while many others do not or at least are hesitant. Bishop Desmond Tutu, for instance, said **that "a Christianity (in Africa) that has no place for them (ancestors) speaks in alien tones"**. John Mbiti added **that "until Christianity can penetrate the spirit world, it will remain on the surface for a long time"**. According to African theologians, the main tenets of traditional thinking about the spirit worlds do not really conflict with Christianity at all, but in fact parallel the New Testament understanding of a spirit-inhabited world. There is no reason for Christian thought to be bound to a rationalistic, materialistic and scientific world view. Partain quoted a statement made by one of the African theologians in 1962: **"It is not part of the Christian Gospel to impart a particular metaphysic, but to speak to each man where he is.... It is necessary to present the Gospel in a form which meets that large area of human experience which is essentially irrational"**. Partain went on to report that African theologians agree with the traditional belief that death is not the end of the **story regarding man's life. Relations with a dead person, indeed, are different from relations**

with someone who is living. But there is a continuity. Death is but another passage. Family ties are not severed by death. The tribe or clan lives on. A more promising approach would be to define the relationship with the ancestors in terms of the Communion of Saints. Then, with this in mind, African protestant theologians called for the Communion of Saints to be revived and given new prominence within the African context. Toward this tempting endeavour, however, many African theologians still want to go easy. Despite the fact that ancestral veneration is very central to African Traditional Religions, they are well aware that this agenda is extremely delicate. They say that biblical evidence concerning relations with the dead is scant. Some traditional notions about ancestors cannot be accepted by Christians. For instance, Christians cannot accept the view that ancestors have power over living family members or that deaths are caused by ancestors. Divination, a primary preoccupation of the ancestral cult, is entirely unacceptable. Keeping all of these points in mind, Partain ended his paper by saying that by incorporating ancestors into Christian theology, African theologians clearly flirt with danger. But the relationship to ancestors is so basic to the African sense of selfhood and society, while the pastoral problems created by negative and foreign approaches to the issue are so widespread and destructive, that theologians feel compelled to attempt such a synthesis (Partain <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1078>, accessed in January 2006).

### **Ancestral Veneration Is Non-Idolatrous**

The main reason why ancestral veneration is maltreated as described above is because many view it as being idolatrous. To mention another example, the widespread use of the phrase: '**Ancestor Worship**' in the works of many scholars especially anthropologists, theologians of the Reformed Churches, who deny the special role of superhuman beings and semi-gods and hold a belief in God without a mediator and in salvation without mediation, indicates that ancestral veneration in their understanding is idolatrous. Even in the Catholic Church, commonly believed to have a more positive attitude toward ancestral veneration, not **all Catholic scholars are free from the use of the inappropriate phrase, 'Ancestor Worship'**.<sup>1</sup> They too, by calling this religious piety a *worship*, still treat ancestral veneration as an idolatry. The title of their works is in contrast with the title of the works by some African theologians<sup>2</sup> who directly experience the religious piety of ancestral veneration.

In addition to what has been described above, stories regarding the persecution of Churches in East Asia — in Korea (at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), in Vietnam (1802-1945) — in which thousands of Catholics and Protestants alike suffered and shed their blood for their opposition to ancestral veneration (Huoi Xung <http://hmongstudies.com/Lee2003.pdf>, accessed in January 2006) — strongly indicate that Christians in East Asia at this era viewed the religious piety of ancestral veneration as idolatrous. Some missionaries of the past have even mistakenly used Leviticus 19:27-28 and Deuteronomy 14:1 to view ancestral veneration as a religious piety that is irreconcilable with **faith in Israel's God** and therefore have condemned the practice as magic, idolatrous and polytheistic (Malek 1999: 17). In order to refute such prejudice and misunderstanding, we need to examine the nature of idolatry to make sure that the religious piety of ancestral veneration does not fall under the umbrella of idolatry.

### **Etymology of Idolatry**

The word *idolatry* is formed from two Greek words, *eidōlon* which means 'image' and *latreia* which means 'adoration' or 'worship'. Therefore, etymologically *idolatry* means 'adoration of images'. Scholars have tried to make different definitions of *idolatry* and *idol* and accordingly have revealed the complexity of the problem. Eugène G. d'Aviella (1911), for instance, used the word *idol* to mean image or statue that is considered to be conscious or animate and *idolatry* to mean the act of regarding an image as having a superhuman personality. While for J. Goetz (1962) *idolatry* meant adoration of images by emphasizing the specific nature of the cult surrounding the objects of adoration, which strictly speaking expresses a feeling of absolute dependence, especially through sacrifice. While an *idol* is any material object that receives a form of worship. Christopher P. North added that the concept of idolatry historically stemmed from the strict monotheism of Israel. In his research on the reactions of the Hebrew prophets to pagan religions, North (1958) presented two ideas taken from the prophets of Israel. **First**, idolatry is the worship of creatures instead of the Creator

and the creatures are made by man who is himself a creature. **Secondly**, idolatry is a worship of an idol or *eidōlon* or image or portrait that is regarded as a substitute for the divinity (cited by Ries 1987: 72-73).

### **Historical Semantic of Idolatry**

In Ancient Greek literature since the time of Homer the word *eidōlon* is rarely found. Formed from the word *eidos* which means 'aspect' or 'shape'. The term *eidōlon* has various meanings such as 'phantom, undetermined form, image reflected in a mirror or in water'. It can also mean an abstract image formed in the human mind such as a concept or an idea. Therefore in ancient Greece, the word *eidōlon* had no religious meaning. It seems that the word *eidōlon* gained its religious connotation in the Septuagint. The word is used 70 times to translate 16 different Hebrew words such as *aven* (vanity), *elil* (nothing), *gillulim* (excitement), *pesel* (carved statue) and *tselim* (image). While in the Vulgata, the word *idolum* is used 112 times and the word *simulacrum* is used 32 times to translate the Hebrew words translated as *eidōlon* in the Septuagint. The Hebrew Bible itself uses 30 different nouns in order to talk about idols and mentions 44 pagan deities. Thus in the Hebrew Bible the Hebrew words — translated as *eidōlon* in the Septuagint and as *idolum* in the Vulgata — designate primarily false gods or pagan gods and do so with a scornful tone because pagan gods are: vanity, lies, nothingness, vain images, moulded metal and carved wood. Therefore, in translating the Hebrew Bible, the Greek word *eidōlon* acquired a religious meaning of representing a pagan divinity considered to be a false god. Then, from this time on the use of the Greek term *eidōlon* — with the same connotation of representing false gods — passed into the Greek NT Bible and into the patristic era of early Christianity (Ries 1987: 73-74).

### **Idolatry in the Hebrew Scriptures**

The formal condemnation of idolatry in Hebrew Scripture is in Exodus 20:3-5 in which the Hebrew God forbids both the worship of foreign gods and the making of images that represent Him since it is believed that the God of Israel cannot be represented by any image. The confirmation and amplification of this commandment are in Deuteronomy 4:12-19. The prohibition in this biblical passage pertains to both theriomorphic and anthropomorphic images. It is about the condemnation of the idolatrous worship of Yahweh and the worship of false gods. The Second Commandment in the Decalogue forbids the making of representations of the divinity (cf. Ex 20:4-6; Dt 4:15-19, 5:6-9, Lev 26:1). A strict tendency took this Mosaic prohibition literally by banning any ornamentation of religious buildings. This tendency was widespread among the Pharisees who insisted on the pure worship of only one God and radically opposed the danger of idolatry. Yet, despite this strictness, archaeologists have discovered some ancient synagogues with animal and human decorations which indicate a liberal interpretation of those biblical passages.

What this means is the prohibition of worshipping Yahweh through any image or symbol made to represent Him. There are many biblical texts that refer to this idolatrous form of worship of Yahweh. In I Kings 12:28, for instance, Jeroboam represents God symbolized by "two calves of gold...he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan" (RSV) as the liberator of Israel during the time of the exodus out of Egypt. The prophets fought against the use of images of Yahweh. Hosea 3:4 speaks against the use of *sacred pillars* (the stone massebah — originally perhaps a phallic symbol — representing Baal (cf. Gen 28:18; Ex 34:13), *ephod* (an instrument used in consulting the deity (cf. 1 Sam 23:6-12, 30:7) and *household idols* (images regarded as the guardian spirits of the household (cf. Gen 31:19; Judg 17:5, 18:14)). It seems that the Israelites took the images of the gods of their neighbours and used them in their worship to represent Yahweh. So, it was a kind of inculturation which was condemned by the Prophet Hosea. Prophet Jeremiah went even further, telling the Israelites to forget the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and not to make another copy of it (Jer 3:16). The argument offered by the prophets was that all tangible representations of God is dangerous, limited as well as misleading, since the visible image is distinct from the great, powerful and mysterious God.

It must be admitted that the forefathers of Israel held a monotheist practice but still practiced a polytheist reality. In their religion, they chose to worship only one true God called *Yahweh* and vowed not to worship the other gods, even though they acknowledged that these other gods also existed. Joshua, for instance, recalled that the father of Abraham and Nahor

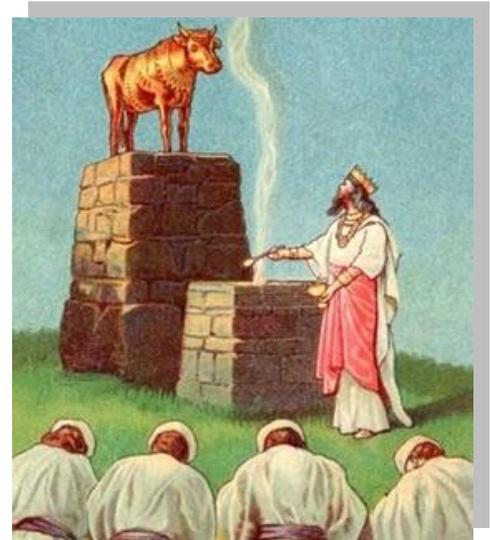
served other gods (Jos 24:2 and 14). Upon their return from Egypt, the Hebrews who settled in Canaan came under the influence of the surrounding pagan culture and were tempted to adopt their gods (Judg 10:6; I Sam 7:4, 12:10). Kings of Israel often allowed polytheism because they had taken foreign wives who kept their gods (I Kgs 11:7, 11:33). Amos accuses his contemporaries of worshipping two astral divinities called Sakkuth and Kaiwan (Am 5:26). Shaken by the triumphs of the Assyrians and Chaldeans during the reign of Manasseh (688-642 B.C.), the Israelites embraced the gods of their conquerors (II Kgs 21:1-9; 23:4-14). Israelites worshipped the sun, moon, Baal and the Astartes (Jer 2:8, 7:9), Nergal and other divinities gained space in the sanctuaries (II Kgs 17:30-31).

After 587 B.C., the Israelites were exiled: this was followed by a spiritual reform. They were encouraged to regain their monotheistic faith and be vigilant about keeping a distance from idolatry. The prophets took the lead in an effort to attain religious purification. At the solemn unveiling of the golden calf at Bethel, a prophet rebuked King Jeroboam and announced Yahweh's threat (I Kgs 13:1-31). Elijah and Elisha fought against the worship of Baal on Mount Carmel (I Kgs 18:22-40). Amos reproached his Judean compatriots for letting themselves be seduced by idols (Am 2:4). Hosea claimed that in his eyes the worship of Israel had become idolatrous (Hos 4:12-13). Isaiah attacked the idols and foretold their fall (Is 2:20; 17:7-8; 30:22). One of the important points the prophets brought up in their polemic was the nothingness of the false gods. Idols are nothing but wood (Jer 16:20). In Hosea 8:4-6, the prophet likens idolatry to fetishism for in his eyes the image is set up in place of God (Ries 1987:74-75).

### ***Idolatry in Christianity***

The study of idolatry from the point of early Christianity is linked to the problem of the birth of Christian art and to the question of images, their worship and refusal to worship them. Christians with a Jewish background had a strong monotheistic faith. Christians who converted from paganism radically separated themselves from idols and their worship. Yet, they continued to live in the midst of a pagan population which had proliferated temples, altars, statues, sacrifices, processions and festivals in Egypt, Greece, Rome and in the Middle East. The rapid growth of Christianity in the Roman Empire spurred the Church to take a very clear position in regard to pagan cults.

The opposition of the Old Testament Bible to idols passed into the New Testament Bible especially in the Epistles of Paul where the word *eidōlon* appears many times. Galatians 4:8, for instance, speaks of pagan gods who have no substance. In 1 Corinthians 10:19, Paul says that when one venerates idols, one is appealing to demons (cf. Dt 32:17). **Apparently, Paul's polemic in this matter revives the Old Testament's tendency to equate the pagan sacrifices to demons.** Revelations 9:20 denounces demonolatry. Thus influenced by the Old Testament, the New Testament holds a double view on idols: they are empty and their worship (idolatry) has a demonic character (Ries 1987:76).



Among the Greek Apologists and Fathers, idolatry continued to be condemned. Justin Martyr, for instance, says about idols in his first *Apology*: **"The human form is not suitable to divinity; idols have no soul and are made from a base substance; they are works of depraved artisans and bait for thieves; they bear the names of the maleficent demons in whose apparel they are clothed"**. In his *Apology*, Aristides of Athens condemned the Greeks for the sin of worshipping created things and the barbarians who revered the earth, water, the sun and the moon and created idols as divinities. In his *Libellus*, Athanagoras attempts to show that making statues of the **divinities is not of old. With this in mind, he says: "All such statues are the works of men whose names we know. The artists have therefore made gods who are younger than their makers"**. In short, all these idols are no more than fragments of creation that the faithful adore in place of God the true Creator. Clement of Alexandria in his

*Protrepticus* convinces those who worship the gods of the stupidity of pagan myths. He first tries to determine the origin and nature of idols. In his opinion the idols were only blocks of wood and pillars of rock in ancient times, but then they became human representations. In answer to the question as to where the gods represented by idols came from, Clement says that they came from the deification of human beings and of kings by their successors. He, **then, gives a theological response: "Pagan gods are demons, shadows, infamous and impure spirits. The error and moral corruption of idolatry is that it leads the faithful to worship matter and demons as divine. Idols excite lust and sensuality which were invented by demons..."** (cited by Ries 1987: 76).

Of the Latin Apologists who also strongly condemned idolatry, Tertullian and Augustine can be mentioned as outstanding examples. Tertullian addressed idolatry in: *To the Nations, Apology* and in *On Idolatry*. In the *Apology*, he called people to stop worshipping gods once they had realized that they do not exist. Tertullian reproached the pagans for claiming that their gods became gods after death because of their meritorious service to man. Statues, he said, are only inert matter, just like vases, dishes and furniture, insensitive to outrage or homage, and that they are given over to commerce if not to destruction. Tertullian treated these matters at greater length in *On Idolatry*, which undertook to show that idolatry is the gravest of sins, encompassing all other sins. He condemned paintings, modelling, sculpture and participation in public festivals, since idolatry hides beneath seemingly innocent actions.

Both the Greek and Latin Apologists viewed the idea of the false gods in the Hebrew Bible as demons. They claimed that the demons are hiding in the shadows of idols. In his work entitled *Octavius*, Minucius Felix said that the demons hide behind statues and sacred images; and by exhaling their breath, they exercise their mysterious effects — spells, dreams and prodigies. The demons are the beneficiaries of the sacrifices. In *To the Nations* Tertullian claimed that the demons use masks to deceive men, while in *On Idolatry* he cursed artists and workers who fashion bodies for the demons. Firmicus Maternus, in his work entitled *De Errore Profanorum Religionum*, further developed the teachings of Tertullian and Minucius Felix regarding idolatry, affirming that devils exist everywhere in paganism — in idolatry, zoolatry, the deification of sovereigns and astrology (cited by Ries 1987: 77).

In 410 A.D. barbarians led by Alaric entered Rome and pillaged the city. Several Romans who had remained pagan blamed the Christians for what had occurred. They accused the Christians of having destroyed the worship of the Roman gods and thus chased away the city's protectors. Augustine responded to the accusation in 22 volumes entitled the *City of God*, written between 413 and 426 A.D. His are the last great apologetic works against ancient paganism.

In the 22 Volumes of the *City of God*, especially in the first ten, Augustine launched a critique of the Roman gods, polytheism and mythology. To strike a fatal blow at the idols, he criticized the pagan thinkers such as Varro, Cicero, Seneca, Euhemerus, Apuleius and Plato. **Augustine said that Varro's theology is full of "false gnosis" of etymologies of divine names and the tripartition of gods introduced by poets, philosophers and Heads of State.** In his study of demonology, Augustine concluded that demons evoked by men take possession of idols. The *simulacra* or *eidōlon* become animate, and the work of demons can be achieved because the idol is no longer inert. An invisible *numen* or evil spirit is present. The idol serves as a body for the demon. It receives life from the demon, to whom it lends itself. By this means, the demon **accomplishes his revelation. For this reason, Augustine repeatedly said: "The gods are demons and worshippers of idols are worshippers of demons"**. Yet in book 8 of the *City of God* he weakened the power of demons since they are not gods but lying angels who continue their struggle against the true God. Through Augustine's works, Christianity finally put an end to pagan theology in the fifth century, yet the Church remained vigilant in order to uproot the last stronghold of paganism and quash its influence in the life of Christians. To achieve this goal, three pastoral strategies were adopted: (1) penitential discipline enacted against the sin of idolatry, (2) the teaching of morality and (3) the constant purification of Christian worship and vigilance regarding the veneration of Saints (cited by Ries 1987: 77-78).

## Conclusion

After analysing the concept of idolatry and its practices, it becomes clear that ancestral veneration is not a sort of idolatry, as many often accuse it of being, for the following reasons: **First**, ancestral veneration does not consist in the worship of lifeless images or *eidolon*, or idols of emptiness. Instead, it primarily consists in venerating and loving human life, the souls of the dead, that still survive after corporal death and continue to engage in an enduring communion with their living relatives, a belief which is also fundamental to the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

**Second**, ancestral veneration is not the worship of demons hiding in images — statues, paintings or sculptures — as often claimed by the early Fathers of the Church when talking about the danger of idolatry. Instead, it concerns the veneration of the living spirits of the dead. They are not demons or evil spirits. They are distinctly different from evil spirits. The carved images of ancestors (Ray 1987:68) found in some traditional societies in Africa and Asia are not intended to be representational or abstract but conceptual and evocative. By means of its stylized form and symbolic details, the image conveys the characteristics of the ancestor and helps to make the spiritual reality of the ancestor present among the living. Thus, a carved ancestral icon enables the world of the living community and the world of the dead to come together for the benefit of human life. It is like the picture or statue of a saint. These reproductions are not meant to represent or to substitute the Saints themselves. A photo of my mother is not the substitute of my mother. Yet it helps me remember my mother and arouse my love and longing for my mother.

**Third**, ancestral veneration is not the worship of creatures in place of God, since the living souls of the dead are never viewed, approached or treated as God. Instead they are viewed as special human beings having achieved a higher status, a status of being closer to God, and from this status of advantage, accordingly, they are believed to be able to play an intermediary role between God and the living, a belief which is also central to the Christian faith, especially in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.<sup>4</sup> In addition ancestral veneration, both in the world of antiquity such as in ancient Egypt, ancient Rome, ancient Babylon or ancient Greece and in the world of modern Asia and Africa, is never a religion in itself. It is only one aspect of a complex religion that usually venerates God as an Absolute Being. Even if in the religious practises of traditional societies, ancestors are addressed more often than God, normally the living will turn to the Supreme Being as the last resort when recourse to their ancestors fails to obtain the desired effect (Nyamiti 1993:16). In other societies contact between men and God or gods is established only in extraordinary situations (Sellato 2002:5). Turning to God as the last resort is a crystal clear indication that the living dead are not believed to be **'absolute beings'** and, suffice it to say, the living do not have an absolute dependence on them. For the practitioners of ancestral veneration who have embraced one of **the world's** major religions,<sup>5</sup> it is clear that the living do not view the ancestors as having an absolute role in their lives as God does in the major religions.

**Fourth**, is ancestral veneration irreconcilable with the Christian faith? Is it condemned as magic, idolatry and polytheism because such practice is forbidden by Leviticus 19:28 (***Do not clip your hair at the temples nor trim the edges of your beard. Do not lacerate your bodies for the dead and do not tattoo yourselves***) and Deuteronomy 14:1 (***You are children of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead***)? According to Raymond Brown, Leviticus 19:28 is part of the older laws which were prompted by the danger arising from the cultic practice of Israel's neighbours. The background to Leviticus 19:28 is the mourning customs of the Canaanites: cutting of hair, body lacerations and tattooing, probably viewed as a means to ward off the spirits of the departed (Faley 1968:80). As in Leviticus 19:27, Deuteronomy 14:1 is about the prohibition of incisions or tonsure as a sign of mourning for the dead. It seems they had been practiced by the prophetic communities of Canaan (*cf.* I Kgs 20:41, II Kgs 2:23). Yet in Jeremiah 16:6, 7:29, 41:5, it seems to have been regarded as normal practice (Blenkison 1968:111). Both Leviticus 19:28 and Deuteronomy 14:1 are examples of the ancient Hebrew Laws set up to measure the purity of their monotheistic faith in Yahweh by eliminating the pagan customs of their neighbours, in particular the customs regarding the mourning of the dead. Yet in our opinion, ancestral veneration in general is more complex and cannot be regarded as irreconcilable with the Christian faith simply because of the prohibitions in these two biblical texts.

### **Ancestral Veneration Is Non-Superstitious**

Another common prejudice is a tendency to view ancestral veneration as superstition. In the eyes of many Christians in China both Protestants and Catholics who do not have a sufficient understanding of the ancestral veneration, there is a tendency to view it all as superstitious.<sup>6</sup> The Vietnamese Communist Government viewed the veneration of ancestors in Vietnamese traditional religions as the remnants of superstitious practices (Quoc Viet <http://geocities.com/suthatcsvn/hmrights/religions/chapter2.html>, accessed in January 2006). In order to find out whether or not these claims are valid, the concept regarding superstition needs to be examined.

In common parlance, superstition is generally understood as something irrational and illogical to the human mind. In accordance with this the Oxford Dictionary defines superstition as the belief in certain events that cannot be explained by reason or science. It is a belief that can bring good or bad luck (Crowther 1995:1199). Some common examples of superstition are: "It's bad luck to walk under a ladder: or seeing a black cat cross your path brings bad luck". In the religious context, superstition is seemingly a judgmental term traditionally used by the dominant religions to categorize and downgrade the less sophisticated piety or show disapproval of religious attitudes and behaviour. In religious parlance the use of the term "superstition" is pejorative and not analytical since it is defined in opposition to a given culture's concept of the true religion. Its specific meaning varies widely in different periods and contexts. Thus, the best approach to understand the concept of superstition is to review its historical religious application rather than an abstract definition.

#### ***Its Etymology and Classical Usage***

In the classical world the term superstition was used to describe any irrational religious behaviour or incorrect understanding of nature and the divinity. Greek writers from Theophrastus to Plutarch used this terminology to describe a cringing and obsessive fear of the gods called *deisidaimonia* as an inappropriate religious attitude. Roman philosophers sometimes echoed this criticism, but the study of the etymology of the word indicates that it once had a neutral meaning. The word 'superstition' stems from the Latin *superstitio* or *superstes* which means 'surviving or witnessing'. The term *superstitio* includes the idea of surviving an event as a witness and referred originally to divination concerning the past. The word can also be traced from the verb *super-stare* which means 'to stand above'. That is why those who survived a battle used to be called *superstitians*, since they had outlived their fellow warriors they therefore stood above them. From this neutral meaning, it shifted to a pejorative one. Thus in the earliest Latin literature, the word *superstitio* was already used in a negative sense to describe divination, magic and 'bad religion' in general. In regard to this, Cicero in his work entitled *On the Nature of God* gives a concrete example. He called all those who prayed and offered sacrifices for the well-being of their children "superstitious". For the classical Roman thinkers, Seneca, Lucretius and Cicero, *superstition* meant erroneous, false or excessive religious behaviour stemming from ignorance of the philosophical and scientific truths of the laws of nature. Such ignorance was associated with the common people (*vulgus*) and with the countryside (*pagus*) so, superstitious behaviour had its social locus in the uneducated strata of Roman society. As the Empire expanded, the term *superstitio* came to be applied to exotic foreign religions such as the Egyptian cult of Isis and the Jewish sect of Christianity. Its pejorative meaning became more collective: from an inappropriate individual Roman religious attitude to the 'religion of others' (O'Reil 1987:163).

#### ***Superstition in Early Christianity***

The early Christians in Rome adopted the collective meaning of superstition and applied it back to the pagan Romans. Beginning with the third century, pagans and Christians reciprocally condemned each other's religious beliefs and practices as superstitious cults of false deities. But later on the militant monotheism of Christianity took a lead and intensified the negative meaning of these charges. The Church Fathers interpreted Roman statues as idols, their sacrifices as offerings to the devil and their oracles as the voices of the demons. Such false beliefs did not deserve the name of religion, because religion is the worship of the true and the superstition is that of the false (O'Reil 1987:163-164).

### ***Superstition in Mediaeval Christianity***

During this period, all the religions of the Germanic tribes were viewed by the Christian missionaries in the same way. They were all idolatrous and superstitious. Bishop Martin of Braga (Portugal, 572) wrote an Epistle entitled *On the Correction of Rustics*, condemning popular magical practices, divination and the worship of rocks, trees and springs as a sort of apostasy to the devil. He also refused to use the vocabulary of the Latin Calendar since the days of the week were named after the pagan gods, who were demons in his view, like Mars (*Martedì* in Italian or *Martes* in Spanish or Tuesday in English), Mercury (*Mercoledì* or *Miercoles* or Wednesday), Jove (*Giovedì* or *Jueves* or Thursday), Venus (*Venerdì* or *Viernes* or Friday) and Saturn (*Sabato* or *Sabado* or Saturday). Soon afterward, scholastic theologians brought the case of superstitious error to a sophisticated level. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) defined superstition as “the vice opposed to the virtue of religion by means of excess ... because it offers divine worship either to whom it ought not or in a manner it ought not” (*Sum. Theologiae* 2.2.92.7). Aquinas categorized idolatry and divination as superstitious by virtue of their inappropriate object of worship: not God but demons.

In mediaeval times, superstition was theorized as bizarre, erroneous and excessive religious behaviour by pagan Roman thinkers such as Cicero who was seen as occurring within Christianity itself rather than in religions outside of it. The Inquisition, originally founded to combat organized heretical groups, later included cases of superstition. Still in the same period of history, the humanist and Protestant Reform Movements early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century applied the term *superstition* to the Catholic Church. Many traditional Catholic religious observances were then judged as superstitious because of the inappropriate manner in which they were practised. The Catholic humanist reformer Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) criticized externalized ceremonialism as a superstitious defamation of the true religion. He satirized clerical attachment to repetitious prayers, fasting, popular devotion to relics, Saints and shrines. People might travel to see a Saint’s bones, Erasmus said, but did not attempt to imitate the Saint’s holy life (O’Reil 1987:164-165).

### ***Superstition in Catholicism and the Reformed Churches***

The Protestant Reformation intensified the humanist criticism of Roman Catholicism. Starting with Martin Luther’s attack on Indulgences (1517), the new theology of justification by faith rather than by works provided the theoretical basis for rejecting Roman Catholic reliance on external devotions as ‘work righteousness’. Having rejected most of the ceremonial aspects of Catholicism — from the use of holy water, to the devotion to Saint’s, to Transubstantiation and the Mass, Protestants of all groups were in accord in their denunciation of the papist religion as magical and superstitious. But at the same time, the term superstition was also applied to describe backsliding within the Protestant Church, namely, to early Protestants who were still attached to the High Church with a fondness for vestments and incense or the lingering attachment to rosaries and shrines. As a response to the Protestant criticism, after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Catholic Church made an effort to identify and eliminate some popular superstitions within the Church of Rome. The Catholic Church, for instance, began to discourage exaggerated Orthodox observances, such as the ‘desire for a fixed number of candles or Masses as superstition in the Tridentine Mass (O’Reil 1987:164-165).

### ***Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment Attitudes***

If the Protestant Reformation viewed the entire Catholic Church as superstitious, the radical anti-clerics of the French Enlightenment used the term in a wider sense. They regarded all traditional religions as superstitious. Voltaire’s *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) asserts: “Superstition was born in paganism, adopted by Judaism and infested the Christian Church from the beginning”. In place of the fanaticism and intolerance associated with organized religion, *philosophies* proposed a *natural religion* that would acknowledge a Supreme Being but regard this creation as sufficient revelation. The scientific study of Nature was proposed as a new cultural orthodoxy and the concept of superstition was redefined to fit this frame of reference. From ‘bad religion’ it came to mean ‘bad science’, assuming its modern sense of a misplaced assumption about causality stemming from a faulty understanding of nature (O’Reil 1987:165).

## Conclusion

After reviewing the slippery historical use of the term “superstition” with its different meanings in different times and in different religious contexts, we can justly judge whether or not ancestral veneration is superstitious. Some elements of ancestral veneration, such as excessive fear of the living dead, the belief that the dead cannot get rest when not continually offered a large amount of food and drink can be regarded as superstitious and it should be part of the pastoral work of the Church to trim and refine it after it is incorporated into the frame of the Christian religious tradition.<sup>7</sup> But to brand the whole veneration of the dead as superstitious, illogical and meaningless would be inappropriate and suffice it to say, such an attitude is mistaken.

The religious piety of ancestral practices is based on **man’s universal belief**: in the continuation of life after corporal death; in the existence of an Absolute Being as the only source of life both for the living and for the dead; and in the continuous communion between the living community in the world and the living dead in the great beyond — beliefs which are also fundamental to Christianity. In our opinion the traditional societies will never love and request intermediary favours of the dead, if the dead do not continue to live in the great beyond with the Almighty. As in Christianity, the Saints will not be honoured and invoked for their intercession if there is no faith in the continuation of life after corporal death.

## New Theological Efforts to Understand Ancestral Veneration Properly

As we have seen, ancestral veneration was widely misunderstood and misinterpreted in the past, and as the consequence of such a misunderstanding, it was condemned as magic, idolatry, superstition and polytheism. The belief in ancestors was mistakenly identified with beliefs in the spirit worlds, especially the evil ones popularly known as black magic. On the dogmatic level ancestral veneration was judged to be a religious practice opposed to the First Commandment,<sup>8</sup> and on the moral level it was held to be in contrast with the Fourth Commandment and as an obstacle to conversion to Christianity.<sup>9</sup> But neither those attempts to abolish ancestral veneration nor the increasing urbanization have managed to shake it. Both in traditional societies and many modern societies, ancestral veneration continues to play a significant role in the life of its practitioners.<sup>10</sup> It will not be shaken, for ancestral veneration is one of the most important elements in the religious traditions of many cultures (Malek 1999: 20-21). Probably due to this very truth, Carol R. and M. Ember say, that although human culture is subject to change, people cannot normally be expected to change an aspect of their culture such as religion that is central to their lives (Ember 1999: 28).

It becomes obvious, then, that there is a fundamental truth in a religious piety known as ancestral veneration, namely: a belief in the existence of the human soul, in its immortality and in the Absolute Being as its guarantor, and any effort in the past to suppress it was a blunder. Being aware of this truth, many of the Protestant Churches in Africa and Asia today have been trying to include ancestral veneration in the Christian faith and are considering reviving the article of faith in the Creed of the Apostles **on the “Communion of Saints”** as a path to let it in. While the Catholic Church has implicitly opened her bosom to embrace this piety through the Second Vatican Council in which the Church officially admits the truths and all the good values in other cultures and religious traditions. Roman Malek briefly indicates three approaches on how ancestral veneration should be treated (Malek 1999: 18-19), as follows:

### **Biblical Approach and Critic toward this Approach**

A theological-biblical approach to ancestral veneration can be constructed on the basis of: **1)** Wisdom 3:1-9 (a sort of religious counselling for the Jews in Alexandria who were influenced by Hellenic culture. They are told about the state of the life or soul of the just immediately after death in Sheol with the souls of the wicked until the Last Judgment, when they will be brought to be with God)<sup>11</sup>, **2)** II Mac 12: 44 f (regarding the Israelites praying for their dead which presupposes that they believed that certain people might be unworthy to go directly to heaven and accordingly in need of some sort of purification and so are in dire need of the prayers of their living relatives), **3)** Lk 16: 19-31 (regarding the parable of the Rich Man and the Poor Lazarus. The rich man is suffering in hell, while Lazarus is happy in the bosom of Abraham in heaven), **4)** Jn 11:26 (regarding eternal life after death promised by Jesus to those who believe in Him during their worldly life) and 14: 1-14 (The Last Supper Discourse in

which Jesus proclaims Himself as the Way, and the Life and the Truth for all those who believe in Him), **5**) I Cor 15:15-52 (regarding the Resurrection of Christ as the guarantor of the resurrection of the dead at the end of time or at the Last Judgment), **6**) I Thes 4:13 f, 18 (regarding the hope of the Christian Dead. The author counsels his Christian community that death is not the end of life for the Christian but a new passage), **7**) Heb11:39-12:29 (regarding examples of Christian life, of discipline and of disobedience that effect eternal life after death) and **8**) I Jn 3:2f (regarding the picture of life after death with Jesus' life as its model).

All of the biblical texts quoted above generally talk about the beliefs of the Hebrews in eternal life after death and in God as its guarantor. Yet they do not indicate that the Hebrews had customs in which they invoked the help of the dead who were believed to have been with God in heaven, the point which is very central to African and Asian ancestral veneration. Due to the fact that ancestral veneration does not have similarities with the Hebrew Scriptures, Eugène Lapointe (1995:215) said:

Coming to the Bosotho traditional *worship* (my suggestion: the word 'worship' here should be read  *veneration*) of their ancestors, my first response would be to say that it is impossible to reject altogether. My reason being that I do not see how it — ancestral veneration — can be condemned as totally wrong, although I cannot find anything similar in the Bible. We may find sacrifices and prayers offered for the dead in the Books of Maccabees, but a *worship* or prayer to ancestors cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. Although the expression 'the God of our fathers' is often used, it is to God that the Jews pray, not to their ancestors. Just the same, because there is no *worship* of ancestors in the Bible does not mean that such worship is condemnable....

Therefore, we argue that the biblical references listed by Roman Malek cannot be employed as a point of departure in treating and understanding ancestral veneration. That these same biblical texts happen to deal with the relationship between the living and the dead is the fact that cannot be denied and they are coherent with the beliefs of traditional religions. But the problem is: what if the traditional religions have religious customs that are not consistent with the Hebrew and Christian Traditions, if, at the same time, these beliefs and customs of the Traditional Religions are not contrary to the literal expressions of the Hebrew and Christian Bible? The wise answer to this question would be, as indicated by the Second Vatican Council, that the truths and the good values found in other cultures and other religious traditions such as ancestral veneration cannot be turned down simply because we cannot find their parallel in the Hebrew and Christian Bible. Conversely, they should be embraced in order to enrich the Christian faith. The various biblical references quoted by Roman Malek as a model approach to ancestral veneration would be a sort of ancestral veneration in Judaism and early Christianity rather than a point of departure in treating or approaching ancestral veneration in Traditional Religions.

### ***Christological Approach and Critic toward this Approach***

A Christological interpretation treats ancestral veneration within the context of redemption. Ancestor veneration can be described as a "memorative-narrative soteriology". Jesus, after all, showed solidarity with the ancestors of goodwill (*descensus ad inferos*) so that they might find their fullness of life only in Him. That means that although the righteous ancestors had never heard of Him, they have died in Christ and share community with Him. All the righteous ancestors are secure in Christ, and the vitality passed on to their descendants flows from Him alone. According to this view, the practitioners of ancestral veneration can pray only to their ancestors and ask for their intercession through Christ. Hence ancestral veneration is an expression of solidarity within the *corpus mysticum* of Christ who alone constitutes the future.

Another Christological approach would be based on the principle that Christ, through the Incarnation and the work of redemption, is the only true brother and ancestor. Here the Community of Saints, who are also ancestors, pneumatologically speaking, and the human community with the Redeemer are regarded to be the foundation of Christian ancestral veneration. In this context, the Eucharist — the Lord's Supper — is celebrated as an "ancestral ritual".

While it is not impossible to view Jesus Christ as a Proto-Ancestor since He is the source and origin of all life, as has been proposed by many African theologians, the image of Jesus as an ancestor is not without difficulties. And one of the difficulties is that ancestors in the common understanding of Traditional Religions are only creatures, while Jesus Christ is God or Creator of the ancestors. Because ancestors are human beings, in the Traditional Religions they are only venerated, remembered and asked for their mediation by their living relatives. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, since He is God, is not venerated but worshipped. In Traditional Religions, ancestral veneration has a devotional character like the devotion to the Saints in the Christian faith.

In addition, Christological reflection which tries to view Jesus Christ as Proto-Ancestor and theological reflection which tries to understand the religious nature of ancestral veneration are two distinct subjects — one cannot be replaced by the other. In Christology, Jesus Christ is viewed as Ancestor because Jesus plays a role similar to the role of the ancestors. One of the aims of this Christology is that Jesus Christ would be more familiar to indigenous Christians in Asia and Africa because Jesus has a role that is also that pretty much played by the ancestors such as protector and mediator. Ancestral veneration on the other hand deals with a living faith that multitudes of ancestors are still alive in the underworld/heaven with God and still continue to influence the life of the living on earth. Ancestors are believed to play a role as **God's emissaries** for the living.

### ***Ecclesiological Approach***

Ancestor veneration is rooted in the relationship between the living and the dead, a relationship that is also manifested in the Christian veneration of Saints. In this way ancestor veneration is reconciled with the Church, especially the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in their teaching regarding the Community of Saints.<sup>12</sup>

**The living and the dead form a close "communion"**, and the community of Saints includes the community of ancestors of the Traditional Religions.

In our view, this is an ideal approach for treating the ancestral veneration of the Traditional Religions. Ancestral veneration is rooted in the relationship between the living and the dead, precisely like the relationship between the living and the dead in the concept of the Christian faith — the Communion of Saints. Both ancestral veneration in the Traditional Religions and Saint veneration in the Christian faith have a devotional character. The good living dead of all nations including those who were not Christian during their earthly life are in heaven with Christ. Like other Christian Saints, they are also worthy of love and veneration but not of worship, and needless to say, such religious piety is far from being idolatrous or superstitious.

### **Epilogue**

If ancestral veneration is well studied, it gives us an assurance that it is far from being idolatrous or superstitious. It does not contradict the Christian faith. It can be incorporated into the Christian faith and be made an integral part of Catholic Christian piety. It is part of the rainbow of the **world's religions. It stands side by side with** the other great religions especially Catholic Christianity and gives a unique colour to the **rainbow of world's religions.**

### **End Notes**

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<sup>o</sup> It seems that compared to the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Reformed Churches by and large have difficulty in accommodating ancestral veneration for two main reasons. First, Protestant Spirituality leaves no room for praying for the living dead since it does not accept the idea of Purgatory

as a place of purification for the living dead where they are in need of the prayers of their living relatives. Second, Protestant Spirituality leaves no room for prayer through and with the living dead who are now with the Lord in Heaven since it does not accept the special role of the Saints as intermediaries between God and the militant Church.

<sup>1</sup> There are numerous documented resources which use the phrase inappropriately such as, Helen Hardacre "Ancestor Worship", in Mircea Eliade, Ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987:263-268), Jane Dawnhee and Roger L. Janelli, *Ancestor Worship in Korean Society* (1982), Roman Malek "Ancestor Worship I (General)" in Karl Müller, SVD, Theo Sundermeier, etc, ed., *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives* (1999:17-19), Horst Balts "Ancestor Worship II (in Africa)" in Karl Müller, SVD, Theo Sundermeier, Steve B. Beavens, SVD, etc, eds., *Dictionary of Mission* (1999:20-22).

<sup>2</sup>We can mention a number of examples: Simon Bokie, *Death and the Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief* (1993), Antony E. Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (1997), C. Nyamiti "African Ancestral Veneration and Its Relevance to the African Churches" (1993:15-35).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the article of Christian Faith on The Communion of Saints.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the intermediary roots in Christian religious faith tradition.

<sup>5</sup> The Hindus in Nusa Pendina, Christians in Batak, Muslims in Gumai, Indonesia, for instance, do not find their ancestral veneration and the God of their official major religion irreconcilable. For further information cf. A. Giambelli, "Reciprocity, death and the regeneration of life and plants in Nusa Pendina", pp. 48-68; Anthony Reid, "Island of the Dead: Why do Bataks erect Tugu?", pp. 88-101; Monako Sakai: "Modernising Sacred Sites in South Sumatera...", pp. 103-16. The three articles are in Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony, eds. *The Potent Dead: Ancestors, Saints and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia*, Honolulu: Asian Studies Association of Australia / Southeast Asian Publication Series, 2002

<sup>6</sup>Among many examples see D.M. Hung "Mission Blockage: Ancestor Worship", in Bon Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985), pp. 199-208

<sup>7</sup> As for how this religious piety that centres on honouring the dead should be incorporated into the Christian faith, see Alexander Jebadu, "Ancestral Veneration and the Possibility of Its Incorporation into the Christian Faith", in *EXCHAGE: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2007), pp. 246-280. This article strongly argues that if ancestral veneration is carefully studied one will come to the conclusion that such religious piety is not wrong. It does not contradict the Christian faith. It has a place in Christian faith and should be incorporated into Christian religious devotion and worship.

<sup>8</sup> Ancestral veneration was judged as a violation of the First Commandment because ancestral veneration was misunderstood by Christians to be a kind of worship. Ancestors, or the living dead, according to Christianity are merely human and are not divine and do not become divine figures after death and consequently they cannot be worshipped as God is. But the fact is that ancestors are never treated as divine figures in Traditional Religions and therefore they are not worshipped but only venerated.

<sup>9</sup> Ancestral veneration was judged as such here because it was misunderstood as a worship, while according to the Fourth Commandment, the living are only to honour their living parents and are not to worship them, and the Commandment to respect and honour one's parents does not prolong or go beyond death. In other words God, in the Fourth Commandment, does not require the living to continue honouring and respecting their parents after death.

<sup>10</sup> The Chinese who immigrated to the United States of American, for instance, still continue to hold and practice ancestral veneration. We can refer to the story of a Chinese American Yang Ni entitled, "Chinese Ancestor Worship in the USA", published by Tripod, Vol. XVI, No. 92, March — April, Holy Spirit Study Centre: Hong Kong, 1996, pp. 5-14. Another example is, "Chinese American Teens on Ancestor Worship Today" sponsored by the National Museum of Asian Art For the United States. These young Chinese Americans volunteered to set up a kind of Ancestor Worship Centre in the USA. These Chinese teenage students, who are mainly from the Experimental School in Reston, Virginia, and the Gaithersburg Chinese School, attended a series of workshops sponsored by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery - from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, to learn about archival research, documentary photography, storytelling, and interviewing techniques — and the investigations began. The teenagers contacted relatives in Taiwan to track down family photos and ask about funeral practices there. They also interviewed parents and other members of the local Washington-area Chinese community. They visited nearby temples and took photographs of current ritual practices. For further information, one can log on: <http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/teen/research.htm> (accessed January 2006).

<sup>11</sup> The numeration system — 1 to 8 — and the brief biblical commentaries in parenthesis are mine.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 49-51.

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## ***De la "misión" a la "nueva evangelización". El origen latinoamericano de un nuevo desafío pontificio***

El 30 de junio de 2010 el Papa Benedicto XVI sorprendió a muchos. Anunció que había decidido crear un nuevo dicasterio en la Curia Vaticana, el "Pontificio Consejo para Promover la Nueva Evangelización". Fue una sorpresa porque el Pontífice actual antes había observado que el número de oficinas en la Curia debía ser reducido y no incrementado. El 21 de septiembre emitió el Motu Proprio, *Ubicumque et Semper*, para formalizar la existencia del nuevo dicasterio y nombró a un insigne teólogo, Mons. Salvatore Fisichella, como su primer Presidente. Además el 24 de octubre, en la clausura de Sínodo especial para los Obispos del Medio Oriente, el Papa anunció que el tema de la próxima Asamblea General del Sínodo de los Obispos en 2012 sería "La Nueva Evangelización para la Transmisión de la Fe Cristiana". Precisamente, ¿qué quiere decir la "Nueva Evangelización" que este nuevo dicasterio debe promover? ¿Cuáles son los orígenes de este concepto? ¿Cómo afecta esto la actividad misionera a escala mundial?

### **La evangelización de todos los pueblos: una tarea permanente con diferentes nombres**

Desde que el Señor resucitado envió a sus apóstoles a hacer discípulos a todas las ilaciones, la Iglesia Católica ha emprendido lo que actualmente llamamos la "actividad misionera", la evangelización de los grupos humanos que todavía no conocen a Cristo, para que iglesias locales nazcan en medio de ellos. Pero el modo de hablar de esta actividad ha cambiado durante los siglos. De hecho, la palabra "misión" no se usaba para referirse a esta actividad durante unos quince siglos. El Nuevo Testamento habla del anuncio del Evangelio. Usa el verbo "evangelizar" y varios otros, pero el sustantivo "evangelización" no aparece en la literatura teológica católica hasta 1955. Para comprender el sentido del término "nueva evangelización", primero debemos saber algo de la evolución del concepto de la "misión". Pues había sido en el contexto de la aclaración progresiva del sentido específico de la "misión" y de la "evangelización" que se pudo introducir el concepto de la "nueva evangelización" en el vocabulario teológico-pastoral de la Iglesia católica.



Podemos rastrear las raíces del concepto en el Concilio Vaticano II. Primero el Concilio en su Decreto misional *Ad Gentes* optó por enfocar la misión en la evangelización de los pueblos más que en la expansión geográfica de la Iglesia. Esto implicó la transición de una demarcación puramente territorial de "las misiones" a una idea "situacional". El modo en que los diversos grupos humanos se relacionaban con Cristo asumió una mayor importancia que vivir en las "tierras de misión". El Papa Pablo VI en sus enseñanzas abrió la perspectiva, pasando de una idea de "misión", la que tenía un sentido limitado en la mentalidad popular, a una visión más amplia de la "evangelización", la que él enalteció como la tarea fundamental de la Iglesia. Posteriormente la Tercera Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano en Puebla (1979) insistió en una "nueva evangelización" de grupos humanos que se encontraban en nuevas condiciones socio-culturales. El Papa Juan Pablo II participó en esa Conferencia en los primeros meses de su pontificado, y él hizo de la "nueva evangelización" una preocupación central en su magisterio.

En los últimos 40 años, he tenido el privilegio de acompañar a varios obispos latinoamericanos en sus esfuerzos de transformar a la Iglesia católica en este continente en una Iglesia verdaderamente "misionera". En este ensayo describiré lo que he podido atestiguar acerca de esto y ofreceré mi interpretación de los hechos observados. Es posible que otros ofrezcan otras perspectivas. Lo importante es comprender lo que significa el concepto de la

"nueva evangelización" y cómo éste nos llama a un apostolado más efectivo /eficaz. Creo que una comprensión de los orígenes del concepto podría ser de alguna utilidad.

### **El sentido moderno de la palabra "misión"**

La palabra "misión" en su sentido moderno aparentemente remonta a san Ignacio de Loyola en el siglo XVI. Por medio del cuarto voto, "el voto de la misión", algunos jesuitas elegidos fueron enviados a tierras no cristianas (o a regiones perdidas al catolicismo durante la Reforma protestante) como agentes revestidos con la autoridad del Papa para propagar la fe católica. Después de poco tiempo, se comenzó a llamarlos "misioneros" y los lugares a donde fueron enviados, "tierras de misión" o "misiones".

### **"Las misiones" como un término geográfico y jurídico**

Históricamente, desde el siglo XVIII, el concepto de "las misiones" fue estrechamente ligado a la práctica del colonialismo europeo (y desde inicios del siglo XX, el colonialismo de los Estados Unidos). La idea suponía que las "Iglesias establecidas" tenían el deber de trasplantar su forma de Cristiandad a las naciones previamente no cristianizadas colonizadas por sus países. Implicó la superioridad de la vieja Cristiandad del Occidente y la inferioridad de los pueblos colonizados! La misión religiosa normalmente iba unida a la empresa seglar de "civilizar" a estos pueblos, es decir trasplantar modelos culturales occidentales. Así la palabra "misión" llegó a significar el complejo de actividades por las cuales el sistema eclesiástico occidental se extendió a todo el mundo.

Según la jurisprudencia vigente en Europa cuando el cristianismo católico llegó a América, el África y el sud y este de Asia, el Papa ejercía una autoridad directa sobre todas las naciones todavía no sometidas a autoridades cristianas eclesiásticas y civiles. Se presumía que él podía delegar sus poderes a autoridades seculares, como en el caso del *Patronato* a los reyes de España y Portugal. Cuando en los siglos XVIII y XIX estos imperios decayeron y nuevas fuerzas políticas y potencias coloniales asumieron el control del llamado "Tercer Mundo" (Latinoamérica, África, grandes partes de Asia y las islas del Pacífico y del Caribe), el Papa delegó su autoridad principalmente a una entidad religiosa, la Congregación de la Propaganda Fide (ahora llamada de la Evangelización de los Pueblos), que a su turno entregó los territorios todavía no cristianizados a congregaciones religiosas o institutos misioneros para convertir a sus habitantes a la fe cristiana y para "plantar la Iglesia" en esas tierras (primero como Prefecturas o Vicariatos Apostólicos, antes de ser diócesis). Así en los últimos dos siglos "las misiones" católicas generalmente se identificaron con territorios sometidos a la autoridad de la Propaganda Fide.

### **Las limitaciones de la demarcación geográfica y jurídica de la misión**

Dentro de esta visión jurídica, se suponía que ciertos grupos humanos fueran destinatarios de la actividad misionera simplemente porque vivían en ciertas áreas geográficas, aquellas sometidas a la Propaganda Fide. De un modo parecido, se suponía que los fieles que vivían en Europa y América sólo necesitaban de una atención pastoral ordinaria, que consistía en la enseñanza de la doctrina católica y la administración de los sacramentos.

Teológicamente también la demarcación jurídica y territorial de la misión tenía limitaciones muy serias. Se veía la conversión más como un cambio de religión que un encuentro con el Cristo viviente que lleva al discipulado. Se puede decir que el objetivo patente era la "cristianización" (la incorporación de más y más gente en una entidad socio-política y religiosa llamada la "Cristiandad") y no tanto la evangelización (el anuncio del Evangelio que suscita la fe). Los responsables de las "misiones" eran los "misioneros" revestidos de la autoridad de "plantar la Iglesia". Dentro de esa visión no se pudo imaginar que la Iglesia entera fuera misionera por su naturaleza o que todos los fieles -obispos, sacerdotes, religiosos y laicos- participaran en esta responsabilidad misionera.

Cuando la Iglesia en América Latina comenzó a ser consciente y activamente misionera después del Concilio Vaticano II, las deficiencias serias de la demarcación jurídica y territorial de la misión eran muy evidentes. Pues más del 90% de los grupos humanos necesitados de una primera evangelización (mayormente los pueblos originarios o indígenas y las poblaciones afroamericanas) no habitaban en los territorios misionales sujetos a la Propaganda Fide, sino más bien en las diócesis establecidas.

Se reconoció que ciertos grupos humanos necesitan de la actividad misionera, no porque viven en cierto tipo de jurisdicción eclesiástica sino más bien porque todavía no han sido evangelizados en su identidad cultural. Las deficiencias de una demarcación básicamente geográfica de la misión condujo a una perspectiva "situacional". Pero primeramente veremos cómo el concepto de la "evangelización" llegó a complementar el de la "misión" en el pensamiento católico actual.

### **La teología católica redescubre la evangelización**

El Nuevo Testamento con frecuencia usa el sustantivo "evangelio" y el verbo "evangelizar", pero el sustantivo "evangelización" es de más reciente aparición. En el siglo XVIII, cuando algunos protestantes comenzaron a descubrir la importancia de la actividad misionera en la vida cristiana (es un hecho histórico que durante los dos siglos posteriores a Lutero y Calvino las iglesias protestantes no enviaron misioneros), se acuñó el nombre "evangelización". Hasta 1955, como ya decía, la palabra difícilmente se encuentra en la literatura teológica católica. Ya que era una "palabra protestante", se evitaba su uso. Fue redescubierta por católicos en la renovación catequética de la década 1950-1960. En aquel tiempo la evangelización se distinguía de la catequesis. Eran dos modalidades en el ministerio de la Palabra. Se consideró la evangelización como el primer anuncio del Evangelio y la catequesis como la formación progresiva en la fe para aquellos ya evangelizados. En Asia, algunos misioneros y misionólogos hablaron de un proceso de "pre-evangelización", una preparación de los no cristianos para el anuncio explícito del Evangelio. Así un ambiente católico fue preparado para el uso de la palabra "evangelización" en el Concilio Vaticano II hace 40 años. En los documentos conciliares las palabras "evangelización" y "evangelizar" se encuentran principalmente en el Decreto sobre la actividad misionera, *Ad Gentes*, y normalmente en el sentido de un primer anuncio del Evangelio a los que todavía no conocen a Cristo. Describiremos más abajo cómo el término adquirió una mayor amplitud y extensión en el pontificado de Pablo VI.

### **De "las misiones" a la "actividad misionera"**

El Concilio transformó dramáticamente la comprensión teológica de la misión, aunque muchos católicos, obispos y sacerdotes inclusive, no actualizados en la misionología, todavía piensan y hablan de un modo preconiliar. En el Concilio el documento "sobre las misiones" se transformó en el "Decreto sobre la actividad misionera". Este cambio en el vocabulario misional no fue simplemente una cuestión de palabras sino de conceptos y de mentalidades. Este cambio, protagonizado por teólogos eminentes como Yves Congar y Josef Ratzinger, fue un proceso penoso y costoso en los trabajos del Concilio. El decreto misional fue sometido a un mayor número de redacciones que cualquier otro texto del Concilio, pero al final fue aprobado con un mayor grado de unanimidad que cualquier otro documento.

El *Ad Gentes* en primer lugar afirma que la Iglesia entera es misionera por su propia naturaleza. En otras palabras, la misión es un asunto no sólo de ciertas congregaciones religiosas e institutos misioneros, de los "misioneros profesionales". El Decreto también fundamenta la misión de la Iglesia no en un ejercicio de autoridad para someter a las naciones a la verdadera religión, sino más bien en Padre quien envía a su Hijo y Espíritu al mundo el amor frontal del para que la humanidad participe en la vida divina.

### **La actividad misionera diferenciada de la actividad pastoral**

Uno de los aportes más significativos del *Ad Gentes* fue el siguiente. Aunque el Decreto a veces sigue usando la frase "las misiones" en el sentido tradicional, introduce un concepto nuevo y dinámico: "la actividad misionera". Ésta se basa en la convicción de que la misión evangelizadora de la Iglesia es una, pero diferenciada en su ejercicio debido a la condición particular de sus destinatarios, los diferentes tipos de grupos humanos evangelizados. Así el número 6 del *Ad Gentes* distingue la *actividad misionera*, cuyo objetivo es la evangelización de pueblos o grupos que todavía no conocen a Cristo y entre los cuales todavía no existe una Iglesia local madura, de la actividad pastoral, cuyo objetivo es la evangelización continua de los que ya son católicos. Esta distinción fue uno de los secretos mejor guardados del Concilio (pocos la conocían o dejaron que afectara su mentalidad) hasta que el Papa Juan Pablo II la reiteró clara y enfáticamente en el número 33 de su encíclica misional, *Redemptoris Missio*. Por

supuesto, para quienes ignoran esa encíclica, sigue siendo un secreto. Volveremos a esta distinción más adelante. Pero primero examinaremos su desarrollo en el pensamiento misionológico durante el pontificado de Pablo VI, en el cual el concepto de la "evangelización" adquirió una nueva amplitud y profundidad de significado y una mayor importancia en la vida de la Iglesia.

### **La Evangelización en la enseñanza de Pablo VI**

Diez años después del Concilio, a fines de 1974, el Papa Pablo VI convocó una Asamblea del Sínodo de los Obispos para considerar las diferentes dimensiones de "La evangelización en el mundo actual". El Papa recogió los aportes de los obispos y los comunicó a toda la Iglesia de un modo ordenado en su Exhortación Apostólica *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). En ella él afirmó claramente que la evangelización es la tarea específica y fundamental de la Iglesia. La Iglesia existe para evangelizar, para anunciar el Evangelio. La evangelización es sobre todo -y esto nunca se puede omitir- el anuncio explícito del Evangelio, el dar a conocer la persona y mensaje de Jesucristo. Pero la evangelización es más. Es una realidad compleja, rica y dinámica que puede entenderse sólo si se toman en cuenta todos sus elementos. Pablo VI no reduce la evangelización a la actividad misionera, el primer anuncio de Cristo a aquellos que no lo conocen. Mientras que el llevar el Evangelio a todos los pueblos y áreas geográficas es de gran importancia, Pablo también insiste en la penetración del Evangelio en cada aspecto y nivel de la vida humana, particularmente en la evangelización de la cultura y de las culturas. Esto implica la transformación de las escalas de valores, patrones de comportamiento, estructuras de relaciones sociales y de modos de pensar. La evangelización es un proceso que comienza con el testimonio de vida y de palabra que invita a la persona evangelizada a la conversión, la profesión de fe y la incorporación en la vida comunitaria y sacramental. El resultado final es la transformación del evangelizado en un evangelizador de los demás. El Papa enfatiza la responsabilidad evangelizadora y misionera de las Iglesias locales -de obispos, sacerdotes, religiosos y laicos- en la evangelización (algo que antes no se dio por supuesto), pero extrañamente no habla específicamente de institutos misioneros de compromiso vitalicio.

Infelizmente *Evangelii Nuntiandi* no ofrece una definición clara de la "evangelización". La Exhortación describe los múltiples elementos ricos comprendidos en la evangelización, el proceso por el cual ella se realiza, sus efectos y los responsables por su transmisión, pero no define el término. Personalmente me gusta la definición propuesta en el *Instrumentum Laboris* preparado antes del Sínodo en 1973: "la evangelización significa la totalidad de aquellas actividades por las cuales la gente es llevada a participar en el misterio de Cristo". Parece apropiada; esta definición porque nos recuerda que el objetivo de la evangelización es un encuentro con la persona de Cristo, y una participación en su misterio pascual. El encuentro personal con Cristo implica el discipulado, y el discipulado implica pertenecer a aquella comunidad de discípulos que es la Iglesia. Veo esta participación en el misterio de Cristo (más que la salvación de las almas de forma individual) como; el objetivo de toda evangelización y de la actividad misionera en particular. La Iglesia es necesaria en el designio de salvación porque la participación histórica en ese designio es de máxima importancia. Dios desea que esta participación sea plenamente humana: realizada con conciencia, libertad, responsabilidad y con todo el afecto del corazón, no solo sino con otros en la sociedad y la cultura.

Desde la publicación de la *Evangelii Nuntiandi* la palabra "evangelización" se hizo muy popular. Los católicos comenzaron a hablar mucho de la evangelización y llamaban "evangelización" a casi todo lo que hacían, aun si esto no fuera orientado al conocimiento personal de Cristo o a una participación en su misterio. Algunos misioneros y misionólogos dieron mayor importancia a los "elementos" de la "evangelización" y a sus "métodos" que a sus fundamentos teológicos. Mientras que la "evangelización" llegó a estar muy de moda, surgió una crisis sobre la necesidad y la urgencia de la actividad misionera en su sentido específico. Algunos la consideraron útil para promover el bienestar y la liberación de los pobres y oprimidos de ultramar y la tolerancia mutua de las religiones y culturas, pero no necesaria para la salvación de los pueblos y tampoco urgente. El Papa Juan Pablo II reconoció la extensión global de esta crisis y escribió una Encíclica desafiante sobre la validez permanente del mandato misionero de Cristo, la *Redemptoris Missio*. En los siguientes párrafos llamaré la atención sobre algunos de sus pensamientos, de los cuales tomaré sólo aquellos que nos ayudan a comprender lo específico y distintivo de la actividad misionera.

## **Juan Pablo II abre las perspectivas sobre la "actividad misionera" y urge una "nueva evangelización" de los descristianizados**

Juan Pablo II infundió una nueva energía en el concepto conciliar de la "actividad misionera" y lo hizo de diversos modos. Siguiendo el pensamiento del *Ad Gentes* 6, el Papa afirma que la Iglesia tiene una misión evangelizadora, cuyo ejercicio se diferencia conforme a las diferentes situaciones en que los diversos pueblos y grupos humanos se hallan. Fue en este contexto que él instó a una nueva evangelización, dándole un sentido bastante claro.

### **El Papa reitera la distinción entre la misión y la actividad pastoral**

Para Juan Pablo II ha sido fundamental la distinción entre la actividad misionera, orientada hacia los que están más allá de los límites visibles de la Iglesia, y la atención pastoral ordinaria hacia los que ya se hallan en la Iglesia. A esta actividad misionera en su sentido propio él confirió el nombre de "misión *ad gentes*", un término nuevo popularizado en círculos misioneros de Latinoamérica desde la Conferencia de Puebla, pero todavía no de uso corriente en otras partes. He aquí sus palabras tal como se encuentran en la *Redemptoris Missio* 33:

En primer lugar, aquella a la cual se dirige la actividad misionera de la Iglesia: pueblos, grupos humanos, contextos socioculturales donde Cristo y su Evangelio no son conocidos, o donde faltan comunidades cristianas suficientemente maduras como para poder encarnar la fe en el propio ambiente y anunciarla a otros grupos. Esta es propiamente la misión *ad gentes*.

Hay también comunidades cristianas con estructuras eclesiales adecuadas y sólidas; tienen un gran fervor de fe y de vida; irradian el testimonio del Evangelio en su ambiente y sienten el compromiso de la misión universal. En ellas se desarrolla la actividad o atención pastoral de la Iglesia.

Como ya sé había observado arriba, antes de la *Redemptoris Missio* sólo ciertos misioneros y misionólogos subrayaron la distinción en las dos actividades, la misionera y la pastoral. Esta distinción todavía es desconocida o ignorada por muchos pastores, teólogos y aun muchos misioneros quienes todavía dirigen sus esfuerzos principalmente a la pastoral general, la atención a los fieles que frecuentan sus parroquias. Dan tanta importancia a los problemas pastorales inmediatos que ignoran los desafíos de la actividad misionera en su sentido específico.

### **Entre la misión y la pastoral: una situación intermedia que urge una "nueva evangelización"**

Cuando Juan Pablo II emitió la *Redemptoris Missio* (RMis) en 1990, ya habían pasado 25 años desde el Decreto conciliar *Ad Gentes*. En aquel cuarto de siglo las condiciones socio-culturales y religiosas que afectaban a los pueblos de mundo iban, desde luego, cambiando, como también se transformaba el modo en que la Iglesia evangelizadora percibía las implicaciones de esos cambios. Permaneció válida la distinción entre los grupos humanos que necesitaban la actividad misionera y aquellos que necesitaban la atención pastoral ordinaria. Pero no era suficiente. Era verdad que todavía había pueblos enteros que todavía no conocían a Cristo, cuyas culturas ancestrales no fueron afectados por el Evangelio. También era verdad que había otros grupos ya evangelizados y constituidos como comunidades eclesiales. Pero también había un número considerable de grupos que ya no se consideraban cristianos, para quienes Jesucristo, su Evangelio y su Iglesia eran de poca o ninguna importancia. La condición de estos motivó al Papa a promover una "nueva evangelización" de ellos. En el párrafo siguiente del número 33 de la *Redemptoris Missio*, leemos, en este sentido:

*Se da, por último, una situación intermedia, especialmente en los países de antigua cristiandad, pero a veces también en las Iglesias más jóvenes, donde grupos enteros de bautizados han perdido el sentido vivo de la fe o incluso no se reconocen ya como miembros de la Iglesia, llevando una existencia alejada de Cristo y de su Evangelio. En este caso es necesaria una 'nueva evangelización' o 'reevangelización'.*

En la decena o más de años antes de escribir estas líneas, Juan Pablo II ya estaba hablando de una "nueva evangelización". Eran los años después de Puebla. El Papa pedía una "nueva evangelización" particularmente en el contexto de la preparación de dos eventos: en América, la celebración de los 500 años de la llegada de la fe cristiana al continente (1492-1992); en la Iglesia universal, el advenimiento del Tercer Milenio (2000-2001), En el primer

caso el mensaje se dirigió particularmente a América Latina, y se acentuó una evangelización que sería "nueva en su ardor, en sus métodos y en su expresión". No se enfocó específicamente la descristianización. Pero en el segundo caso, particularmente cuando el mensaje se dirigió a contextos en Europa secularizada, se acentuó una "re-evangelización" de los que habían sido bautizados pero que abandonaron su adhesión a la fe cristiana. Esta última situación mereció ser puntualizada en RMis 33. Veremos más adelante otro aspecto de la problemática, las necesidades de una "nueva evangelización" específicamente orientada a nuevas situaciones socio-culturales, pero sin acentuar la descristianización, merecería ser descritas como "ámbitos no territoriales de la misión ad gentes" en la RMis 37. Tal como Benedicto XVI observó en su Motu Proprio del 21 de septiembre, Juan Pablo II asumió la ardua tarea de la "nueva evangelización [como] uno de los ejes de su vasto magisterio".

### **¿Cuál había sido el origen de esta idea de una "nueva evangelización"?**

Tal como yo lo puedo entender, fue la participación activa del Papa Juan Pablo II en la Conferencia de Puebla (1979), un poco después de su elección, la que le ayudó a precisar su enfoque evangelizador y que le ofreció el lenguaje concreto para expresar su inquietud.

El término "nueva evangelización" ya aparece en documentos eclesiales de América Latina por lo menos desde 1968. En el *Mensaje* final de la Segunda Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano en Medellín, los obispos se comprometen a "alentar una nueva evangelización [...] para lograr una fe lúcida y comprometida" (N° 6). Es una sola línea; la idea está presente, pero sin mucha precisión en su sustancia. He podido encontrar otros usos del término "nueva evangelización" en 1969 y 1970 en el contexto de la pastoral indígena. No sé si el término se empleaba en otros continentes. No aparece en la *Evangelii Nuntiandi* del Papa Pablo VI (1975). Me parece que ha sido el modo en que el término se usaba en América Latina, y particularmente en Puebla, el que influyó directamente a Juan Pablo II.

El Documento de Puebla (DP, números 365-367) insta a la Iglesia a enfocar tres tipos de "situaciones más necesitadas de la evangelización" (el penúltimo texto las llamó "situaciones misioneras"). Primero son las "situaciones permanentes", la condición de poblaciones indígenas y afroamericanas todavía no evangelizadas adecuadamente desde su identidad cultural. En segundo lugar son las "nuevas situaciones que requieren una nueva evangelización". Cito el texto del n. 366:

*Situaciones nuevas (AG 6) que nacen de cambios socio-culturales y requieren una Nueva Evangelización: migrantes a otros países; grandes aglomeraciones urbanas en el mismo país; masas de todo estrato social en precaria situación de fe; grupos expuestos al influjo de las sectas y de las ideologías que no respetan su identidad, confunden y provocan divisiones.*

Finalmente son las "situaciones particularmente difíciles, cuya evangelización es urgente pero que queda muchas veces postergada: universitarios, militares, obreros, jóvenes, mundo de la comunicación social, etc." (Esta inquietud fue un aporte pre-Puebla del Obispo Juan Gerardi de Guatemala, martirizado en 1998). Una conjetura personal es que el párrafo que concretamente influyó el pensamiento y el lenguaje de Juan Pablo II fue el N° 366, que identificó "nuevas situaciones que requieren una nueva evangelización". El Papa seguramente conoció esta página del Documento muy bien, porque en la *Redemptoris Missio* N° 64 alabó como "ejemplar" el compromiso de los obispos latinoamericanos con una proyección misionera "ad gentes, más allá de sus propias fronteras" formulado en el DP 368.

El número 366 de Puebla no fue el producto de una "generación espontánea" en el transcurso de la Conferencia. La idea de "nuevas situaciones misioneras que requieren una nueva evangelización" había tenido su propia pre-historia en el pensamiento creativo de Monseñor Roger Aubry CSsR (1923-2010), el "relator" escogido para redactar el texto del sub-capítulo sobre "Evangelización, Dimensión Universal y Criterios". Aubry, el entonces Vicario Apostólico de Reyes en la Amazonia boliviana, fue el Presidente del Departamento de Misiones del CELAM desde fines de 1974 hasta los inicios de 1979. Desde su inceptión en 1966 este departamento estaba comprometido con la evangelización específica de los pueblos indígenas del continente. Por eso había insistido en la necesidad de superar el inadecuado criterio territorial para demarcar lo que es "misión". Un aspecto central en la visión del Departamento desde 1968 era el concepto de las "situaciones misioneras" existentes entre grupos humanos todavía no evangelizados en y desde su identidad cultural. Aubry afinó y completó este concepto, proponiendo la idea de "nuevas situaciones misioneras".

Probablemente más que cualquier otro, Aubry contribuyó a forjar una teología latinoamericana de la misión con sus propios acentos y a motivar el compromiso misionero del Episcopado del continente. Su enfoque teológico, profundamente bíblico, formado por su mentor, François Xavier Durrwell, se centró en el misterio pascual y luego fue afinado por las orientaciones del *Ad Gentes* del Vaticano II. Su lectura de ese Decreto confirmó su convicción, nacida de su comprensión del misterio pascual, de que la Iglesia es misionera por su propia naturaleza. Reiteró la importancia dada en *Ad Gentes* 6 a la distinción entre la actividad misionera y la acción pastoral ordinaria. En el sexto párrafo del mismo número, las siguientes palabras le llamaron la atención:

*Además los grupos en que vive la Iglesia cambian completamente con frecuencia por varias causas, de forma que pueden originarse condiciones enteramente nuevas. Entonces la Iglesia tiene que ponderar si estas condiciones exigen de nuevo su actividad misional.*

Aquí el Concilio afirmó que la transformación de las condiciones históricas, aun entre grupos humanos previamente evangelizados, puede requerir una nueva actividad misionera en su sentido específico. Aubry fue invitado a dirigir la palabra a los directores nacionales de las Obras Misionales Pontificias en Sao Paulo en enero de 1976. En ese discurso, al describir "que es la misión", él llamó la atención a este texto, pasado por alto por otros comentaristas del *Ad Gentes*. Así nació el concepto de las "nuevas situaciones misioneras" que se integraría en el enfoque del Departamento de Misiones en los años antes de Puebla y llegaría a ser el contenido fundamental de Puebla N° 366, que afirmó que las nuevas situaciones misioneras requieren una "nueva evangelización". Creo que este texto pudo haber ofrecido a Juan Pablo II el "lenguaje" concreto para expresar la necesidad de un tipo distintivo de evangelización para los grupos humanos afectados por nuevas situaciones socio-culturales.

### **Otra respuesta de Juan Pablo a nuevas situaciones misioneras: ámbitos no territoriales de la "misión ad gentes"**

La importancia de la identidad cultural de los destinatarios de la actividad misionera está implícita en el Concilio. Juan Pablo II la hace explícita en su Encíclica misional (RMis 34). El Pontífice llama la atención no sólo sobre las culturas tradicionales, sino también sobre nuevas situaciones culturales. Esta característica de su pensamiento es clara en su insistencia en una "nueva evangelización" de grupos secularizados. Pero no es el único modo en que el Papa expresa esta atención a las nuevas situaciones culturales. Un aspecto original de su mensaje es su referencia en la RMis 37 a diferentes "ámbitos de la misión ad gentes": territoriales, sociales y culturales. Lo significativo es que él considera éstos no sólo como desafíos a la evangelización en general sino a la "misión ad gentes", es decir la actividad misionera en su sentido específico (ver RMis 33). (El uso del término "misión ad gentes" es otro ejemplo de la influencia de Puebla -y de Aubry- en el pensamiento y lenguaje misionero del Papa; antes no se encuentra en el modo en que los Papas anteriores hablaban de la misión).

Para Juan Pablo, la actividad misionera ya no puede restringirse al primer anuncio del Evangelio a pueblos *jamás o todavía no evangelizados* en y desde su identidad cultural. Esto sería el "ámbito territorial" de la misión. Es todavía muy, muy amplio. De hecho abarca más de los dos tercios de la humanidad, más de cuatro mil millones de personas, principal pero no exclusivamente en el África y Asia. El Papa admite que esta situación también existe en regiones tradicionalmente cristianizadas (pensemos la urgencia de una evangelización realmente; inculturada en muchas comunidades indígenas, afroamericanas y asio-americanas en América Latina, tal vez la tercera parte de la población del continente).

La situación de los todavía no evangelizados en el ámbito territorial es relativamente "permanente"; se trata de pueblos con religiones y culturas con muchos siglos de antigüedad. Pero los otros dos ámbitos presentan nuevas situaciones humanas y nuevas culturas. El Papa llama a un ámbito "social" y al otro "cultural". La distinción que yo veo es ésta. El "ámbito social" se refiere a nuevos modos de convivencia humana y a una nueva estructuración de relaciones entre grupos humanos; el "cultural" se refiere a nuevos sistemas de valores, nuevas visiones de la realidad y nuevos modos de pensar.

El primer ámbito no-geográfico que demanda una nueva actividad misionera, el ámbito *social*, es aquello que corresponde a nuevos mundos y realidades sociales. Es la situación de aquellos grupos humanos envueltos en los fenómenos de la globalización, la urbanización y la migración, con el surgimiento de las nuevas culturas de los pobres, de los marginados y de la

juventud. Juan Pablo aun se atreve a afirmar que las grandes ciudades constituyen "los lugares privilegiados" de la misión *ad gentes* hoy.

El tercer ámbito de la misión *ad gentes* y el segundo ámbito no territorial dirigen la atención a las nuevas áreas culturales o "nuevos areópagos". Un importante *areópago* (lugar de encuentro público) moderno es el mundo de las comunicaciones sociales masivas, que ejerce tanta influencia en la formación y difusión de modelos culturales modernos y pos-modernos. Otro *areópago* del mundo moderno es constituido por las tomas de conciencia generalizadas (Juan XXIII y la *Gaudium et Spes* las llamó "los signos de los tiempos") sobre los derechos humanos, la promoción de la mujer, la defensa de los niños, la integridad de la creación y las nuevas culturas que emergen en el mundo de la política, la economía y las investigaciones científicas.

En la enseñanza de Juan Pablo II, todos estos "ámbitos de la misión", sean las antiguas situaciones histórico-geográficas o las nuevas socio-culturales, exigen la actividad misionera *ad gentes*. El muy conocido ámbito territorial se refiere en general a las *culturas tradicionales*, los pueblos aun no evangelizados del África y de Asia y las poblaciones culturalmente no occidentales de América, cristianizadas hasta cierto punto en su historia pero apenas evangelizadas en su identidad cultural (ver el Documento de Puebla, número 365). Los nuevos ámbitos no geográficos, sociales y culturales, se refieren a nuevas situaciones culturales. Tanto el uno como el otro exigen la atención de la Iglesia misionera.

### La "nueva evangelización": una dimensión de la actividad específicamente misionera

Creo que Juan Pablo II, intentando orientar la Iglesia hacia nuevas formas de actividad misionera al servicio de aquellos distanciados de la Iglesia debido a nuevas situaciones socio-culturales y religiosas, emplea dos modos originales para expresarse. Habla de la "nueva evangelización" en RMis 33 y de los "nuevos ámbitos no territoriales de la misión" en RMis 37.



La misión *ad gentes* se dirige hacia los "todavía no evangelizados" en su situación cultural particular, antigua (el ámbito territorial) o nueva (los ámbitos no territoriales, sociales y culturales). Hay otra situación, la de los "ya no cristianos", para quienes una "nueva evangelización" es necesaria. Estos son grupos enteros de gente bautizada en los países de la antigua Cristiandad para quienes la persona de Jesucristo ha perdido importancia, quienes mantienen una distancia de la Iglesia y que han perdido un sentido vivo de la fe cristiana. Se puede preguntar: esta "nueva evangelización" de los descristianizados, ¿sería una forma de la actividad misionera, **en su sentido específico** Ciertamente no entra en la atención pastoral ordinaria a los fieles que ya

pertenecen a comunidades eclesiales maduras con su propio dinamismo misionero. Muchos de nosotros, misionólogos latinoamericanos, estamos convencidos de que la "nueva evangelización" de la RMis 33 es una forma de la actividad misionera! Pues la actividad misionera en su sentido específico consiste en la evangelización de los que no Conocen a Cristo y su Evangelio, y que no se adhieren a la Iglesia visible. A nuestro parecer tanto los grupos humanos "todavía no cristianos" como los "ya no cristianos" son destinatarios de la actividad misionera -o la misión *ad gentes*- en su sentido específico.

### ¿Por qué un nuevo dicasterio vaticano para la "nueva evangelización"?

Si la "nueva evangelización" es una dimensión de la actividad misionera *ad gentes*, ¿por qué es necesario u oportuno crear un nuevo departamento en la curia vaticana dedicado a ella? Sabemos que ya existe, y ha existido durante casi 500 años, la Congregación para la Evangelización de los Pueblos, tradicionalmente conocida como la "Propaganda Fide". Aquí ofrezco mis propias opiniones. No sé si corresponden al pensamiento del Santo Padre. Como un antiguo Director Nacional de las Obras Misionales Pontificias en Bolivia (1985-89) y Presidente emérito de la Asociación Internacional de Misionólogos Católicos (2000-04), he

tenido una experiencia limitada con aquel dicasterio misional. Obviamente estas observaciones más son generalizadas y sujetas a correcciones o matizaciones.

Lo que yo he observado es que la Propaganda Fide ha sido orientada principalmente a la organización eclesiástica y a las operaciones de las llamadas "tierras de misión". Su campo es vasto. Abarca docenas de Prefecturas y Vicariatos Apostólicos en ciertas regiones (come Latinoamérica y el Medio Oriente) y más de mil establecidas jurisdicciones misionales elevadas a la categoría de diócesis y arquidiócesis en Asia, el África y Oceanía. Su obra parece ser mayormente de carácter jurídico (p.ej. el nombramiento de obispos) y económico (el financiamiento de las obras de la Iglesia en estos territorios). La Propaganda de hecho hereda el peso de una carga histórica y estructural. Esperar que ella se reoriente para contemplar la multitud de "nuevas situaciones misioneras", no territoriales, sino sociales y culturales, y responder eficazmente a estos desafíos, a mi parecer es pedir demasiado.

En cambio, he podido observar que los nuevos dicasterios creados principalmente después del Vaticano II, los llamados "Pontificios Consejos", son más ágiles y competentes en su campo del apostolado. He tenido relaciones operativas directas con los Consejos para promover la Unidad de los Cristianos y para el Diálogo Interreligioso, e indirectas ocasionales con aquellos para los Laicos, la Cultura y la Justicia y Paz. Lo que he podido observar es que las personas que componen el "staff" de estos Consejos son seleccionadas principalmente por su competencia académica y apostólica en la especialización del dicasterio. Es mi opinión que el Santo Padre, preocupado seriamente por las múltiples y desafiantes "nuevas situaciones misioneras" que piden una "nueva evangelización" ha visto la oportunidad de fundar un nuevo dicasterio o departamento orientado a esta problemática. Mons. Fisichella es seguramente muy competente como teólogo y educador. Los cardenales y obispos ya nombrados como miembros del dicasterio son personas de gran valor. Ciertamente las personas escogidas para ser componentes del "staff serán especializadas en la problemática.

Sabemos que Benedicto XVI, como su predecesor, demuestra en su magisterio una preocupación *particular* por la re-evangelización de descristianizados de Europa. ¿Pero debería ser el llamado a la "nueva evangelización" limitado a ese continente? ¿Se crea un nuevo dicasterio para un solo continente? Sería extraño, porque en la actualidad más del 60% de los católicos del mundo viven en Latinoamérica, África y Asia. En estos continentes el pentecostalismo, la atención a las culturas antiguas y nuevas y el encuentro con otras religiones son mayores desafíos que la no creencia. Juan Pablo II obviamente no había pensado limitar su preocupación por la "nueva evangelización" a Europa. Pues después de emitir su Encíclica misional (1990), había insistido que la "nueva evangelización" fuera uno de los tres ejes temáticos de la IV Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano en Santo Domingo (1992). Es obvio que él no tenía la intención de restringirla a Europa, o al fenómeno de la descristianización.

## Conclusión

En estas páginas he intentado demostrar cómo la idea de la "nueva evangelización" hubiera tenido su origen en América Latina, y concretamente, en la influencia del documento de Puebla. He sido un testigo del proceso en que esto tuvo lugar. Espero que estas observaciones y reflexiones sean de alguna utilidad para algunos hermanos y hermanas en la Iglesia en los inicios de un nuevo departamento del Vaticano creado para Promover la Nueva Evangelización. Seguramente este hecho tendrá alguna repercusión en la vida de las diferentes diócesis y Conferencias Episcopales.

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**Hugues Louis, Haïti**  
**L'Évangélisation en Amérique**  
**latine**  
**a la lumière des cinq**  
**Conférences Générales du CELAM**

### **Introduction**

L'histoire de l'évangélisation en Amérique peut être divisée en trois grandes périodes ou phases : Phase de la Chrétienté coloniale (1492-1768) ; Phase de la crise de la chrétienté ou recherche d'un nouveau modèle de chrétienté (1768 - 1899) ; Phase de la nouvelle chrétienté ou du lancement de la nouvelle évangélisation coextensive à la promotion humaine intégrale (1899-à nos jours)<sup>1</sup>. Nous nous intéressons dans ce présent article à la troisième phase tout en nous limitant aux cinq conférences Générales de l'Épiscopat latino-américain et des Caraïbes. Ces conférences ont, en effet, marqué un tournant décisif dans l'histoire de l'évangélisation en Amérique Latine, clairement exprimé par le courage des responsables de l'Église de ce sous-continent à prendre au sérieux le cri des pauvres, des exploités et des sans-voix. Bref, ils se montrent attentifs aux signes des temps. Comment les conférences générales du CELAM ont-elles contribué à un renouveau dans l'activité évangélisatrice du continent ? Les lignes qui suivent s'attelleront à répondre à cette question.

### **Qu'est-ce que l'évangélisation dans le contexte de l'Amérique Latine ?**

L'évangélisation, bien qu'encore à ces débuts dans le continent de l'espérance missionnaire<sup>2</sup>, elle s'est plus ou moins frayée son propre chemin. Biffet résume les grandes lignes de l'évangélisation en Amérique Latine en ces termes : « sous le signe de l'espérance, à partir de sa propre pauvreté, de son expérience de libération ou du salut intégral, l'évangélisation en Amérique Latine embrasse tout le champ de la justice sociale, avec l'expérience de l'inculturation tout en respectant la dignité humaine, avec le témoignage d'unité et de communion (avec le Pape et l'Église universelle), sous le signe marial ( dans le contexte de la catéchèse, des sacrements et des engagements personnels, familiaux e sociaux).. La ligne de fond de ces caractéristiques est celle de *l'incarnation, c'est-à-dire l'insertion* à la lumière du Verbe incarné et de la Parole de Dieu, qui donne la lumière pour interpréter les événements et pour les transformer de l'intérieur »<sup>3</sup>. Elle est liée non seulement à la proclamation de la Bonne Nouvelle du Royaume de Dieu mais aussi à la promotion humaine.

L'évangélisation est le fil conducteur qui oriente tous les documents des Conférences générales du CELAM. Il faudra cependant attendre Puebla (1979) pour avoir une définition plus claire de l'évangélisation en Amérique Latine, à la lumière de *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Elle (évangélisation) est constituée de quatre éléments fondamentaux (voir Puebla 165-169) : a) Le Christ : espérance et envoyé du Père. Il anime l'Église de son Esprit pour la proclamation de la Bonne Nouvelle de la libération de l'homme ; b) L'Église : mystère de communion et peuple de Dieu au service de l'homme ; c) Marie : motif de joie et source d'inspiration en tant qu'elle est étoile de la nouvelle évangélisation ; d) L'homme : créé à l'image de Dieu, mérite notre engagement en faveur de sa libération et sa totale réalisation dans le Christ.

La finalité de l'évangélisation est explicitée en ces termes : rejoindre et transformer, avec la force de l'évangile, les critères de jugements, les valeurs déterminantes, les modes de vie de l'humanité qui sont en contradiction avec la Parole de Dieu et le plan du Salut (Puebla 394). Autrement dit, l'Épiscopat latino-américain et des Caraïbes a décidé, à travers l'évangélisation, d'assumer les multiples défis auxquels les peuples du sous-continent font face. Il s'agit d'une évangélisation qui affronte courageusement et sans détour les nombreux maux qui tenaillent cette portion de peuple de Dieu.

### **Situation de l'Amérique Latine<sup>4</sup>**

En 1968, l'Amérique Latine contenait 270 millions d'habitants ; 60% de sa carte géographique était sous la dictature des militaires ; la croissance économique était de 6 dollars par an par habitant. 150 millions de latino-américains vivaient dans la sous-alimentation, 50 millions d'adultes analphabètes, 15 millions de famille sans un toit, plus de 17% de la population sans assurance sociale. Un contexte marqué par un ordre social dominé économiquement, politiquement et idéologiquement par un petit nombre qui en tire profit au détriment des classes populaires exploités, des cultures opprimées et des races mises à l'écart. Cette situation dramatique de pauvreté et d'exploitation des personnes et des classes, des races et des cultures, de violence institutionnalisée n'est autre que les conséquences de la mauvaise gouvernance et mauvaise gestion du bien commun. Depuis lors, de nombreux progrès ont été réalisés puisque dans l'Amérique latine de ces dernières années foisonnent des expériences politiques innovantes. Dans le document final de la V<sup>ème</sup> Conférence générale, les évêques n'ont pas manqué de souligné les effets de la mondialisation en Amérique latine : « Les peuples d'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes vivent aujourd'hui une réalité marquée par de grands changements qui affectent profondément leurs vies... La nouveauté de ces changements, à la différence de ceux d'autres époques, vient de ce qu'ils englobent et affectent le monde entier, avec certaines différences et certaines nuances cependant ; c'est le phénomène de la mondialisation... Cette nouvelle dimension mondiale de ce phénomène humain a des conséquences dans tous les domaines de la vie sociale, avec un impact sur la culture, l'économie, le sport, les arts, et aussi, naturellement, la religion »<sup>5</sup>.

### **Les Cinq Conférences générales du CELAM<sup>6</sup>**

Les cinq Conférences générales du CELAM s'inscrivent dans la troisième phase de l'histoire de l'évangélisation qui a certainement commencé avec le Concile plénier de l'Amérique Latine en 1889 à Rome. Elles ne sont autre chose qu'une nouvelle étape dans le cheminement de la vie de l'Eglise en Amérique Latine, née de la découverte du monde du pauvre qui a conduit l'Eglise de ce continent à se solidariser activement avec les intérêts et les luttes des pauvres. Chacune a ses caractéristiques spécifiques mais on y retrouve aussi des éléments communs et une certaine continuité entre elles. Relevons-les.

#### **Río de Janeiro (25 juillet-4 août 1955)**

L'objet central de cette assemblée générale a été le problème fondamental qui attristait le continent : *le manque de prêtre<sup>7</sup> et la formation des laïcs*. Les évêques ont cherché à donner une forte impulsion à la vocation sacerdotale en déclarant que l'œuvre des vocations sacerdotales doit être considérée, dans tous les diocèses, comme œuvre fondamentale qui préoccupe tous. Conjointement à la campagne vocationnelle, il faut entreprendre une autre, non moins fondamentale ni moins générale : celle de l'instruction religieuse. Ils ont opté également pour une présence transformatrice de l'Eglise dans la société qui doit se réaliser sous trois formes : *illumination, éducation et action*. Autrement dit, ils étaient animés tous du désir de former de nouveaux opérateurs pour la mission de l'Eglise en Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes. L'apport le plus important fut la création de CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latino americano) qui sera reconnu par le Pape Pie XII et qui devient depuis lors, l'organe principal de l'Eglise en l'Amérique Latine, si on peut l'appeler ainsi, pour penser, réfléchir et évaluer, dans une dynamique participative, les dons du Seigneur présents dans la vie des peuples latino-américains, afin qu'ils puissent, évêques, prêtres et fidèles laïcs, sous la mouvance de l'Esprit Saint et en communion avec toute l'Eglise, trouver toujours de meilleurs voies de libération pour leurs peuples à travers l'évangélisation.

#### **Medellín (26 août-7 septembre 1968)**

Medellín est la deuxième Conférence générale du CELAM qui se proposait d'appliquer le renouveau du Concile Vatican II en Amérique Latine, en réfléchissant sur le Thème : *La présence de l'Eglise dans la transformation de l'Amérique Latine, à la lumière du Concile Vatican II*. Medellín est en quelque sorte une analyse de la réalité concrète de l'Amérique latine à la lumière de l'Évangile tout en insistant sur la responsabilité conjointe de tout le continent. L'authentique promotion humaine a été, à la lumière du Concile Vatican II (surtout *Lumen Gentium* et *Gaudium et Spes*), des trois grandes encycliques papales<sup>8</sup> : *Mater et Magistra* (1961), *Pacem in Terris* (1963), *Populorum Progressio* (1967) et du *Message des évêques du Tiers Monde* (1967), à l'ordre des exigences de la justice et de la paix, de la famille, de la démographie et de l'éducation de la jeunesse, comme devoir essentiel de l'évangélisation et de la croissance de la foi. Cette conférence s'est articulée

autour de trois thèmes<sup>9</sup> : a) la promotion humaine et des peuples qui impliquent la justice, la paix, l'éducation et la famille ; b) l'évangélisation adaptée et une foi mature des peuples à travers la catéchèse et la liturgie ; c) les problèmes liés à l'unité et à l'action pastorale à travers les structures visibles de l'Eglise. Elle est connue surtout pour son audace à prendre en charge la situation des peuples latino-américains en offrant des perspectives sur « le Salut, la libération, la richesse de la religion populaire, l'expérience des communautés ecclésiales de base, la floraison des ministères ordonnés et des ministères confiés aux laïcs, l'option préférentielle pour les pauvres, le compromis des chrétiens avec la justice et la promotion humaine »<sup>10</sup>.

### **Puebla (27 janvier-13 février 1979)**

Elle avait pour thème : *L'évangélisation dans le présent et le futur de l'Amérique Latine*. Si Medellín a traduit les grandes impulsions du Concile Vatican II dans un langage accessible et selon la situation des peuples du sous-continent, Puebla, sans s'écarter de la ligne, avait pour base de réflexion l'Exhortation Apostolique *Evangelii Nuntiandi* du Pape Paul VI sur l'évangélisation dans le monde contemporain, et sa conscience de la situation d'oppression et de misères des peuples latino-américains. Pour atteindre son objectif de nouvelle évangélisation dans le contexte de l'Amérique Latine, Puebla s'est construite autour d'une ligne théologico-pastorale formée de deux pôles complémentaires : *la communion et la participation*. Il s'agit, à travers la pleine évangélisation de rétablir et approfondir la communion avec Dieu et la communion avec les hommes et, la participation et l'engagement à la vie de l'Eglise à tous les niveaux. La Conférence de Puebla est d'un apport particulier pour les Eglises en Amérique Latine et dans les Caraïbes, car elle a offert une meilleure conscience à leur identité et a approfondi et amplifié la synthèse offerte par les conférences précédentes. C'est à Puebla que l'Eglise en Amérique Latine a ouvert un nouvel horizon à la mission universelle pour se projeter vers la mission ad gentes.

### **Santo Domingo (12-28 octobre 1992)**

A l'occasion du cinquième centenaire de l'Évangélisation dans le Nouveau monde, le CELAM a réfléchi sur le thème : *Nouvelle évangélisation, promotion humaine et culture chrétienne. Jésus-Christ est le même hier aujourd'hui et toujours (Hb 13,8)*. A Saint Domingue, on se préoccupait de la nécessité d'une nouvelle évangélisation en mettant l'emphase sur le fondement christologique de l'évangélisation et de la nécessité de l'inculturation de l'évangile dans les diverses cultures et les différentes structures des peuples de l'Amérique Latine. A la lumière de *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio* et *Puebla*, et les indications de Jean-Paul II, le thème de la nouvelle évangélisation est abordé en mettant l'accent sur le sujet, les destinataires, le contenu, la méthode (nouvelle ardeur, nouvelles méthodes et nouvelles expressions)<sup>11</sup>. Le document final est divisé en trois parties : a) Jésus-Christ, Évangile du Père (1-21) ; b) Jésus-Christ, évangéliste vivant dans l'Église (22-286) ; c) Jésus-Christ, vie et espérance de l'Amérique Latine. Dans son discours inaugural, Jean-Paul II a souligné que « la nouvelle évangélisation est née de la responsabilité envers le don que Dieu nous a fait dans le Christ, par lequel nous avons accès à la vérité sur Dieu et sur l'homme, et la possibilité de la vie authentique »<sup>12</sup>. Reprenant *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, il a précisé que « la nouvelle évangélisation vise à donner à l'action pastorale un élan nouveau, capable de créer, dans une Église encore plus enracinée dans la force et la puissance immortelles de la Pentecôte, des temps nouveaux d'évangélisation »<sup>13</sup>.

Reconnaissant envers les premiers missionnaires qui sont arrivés sur le Continent pour les efforts auxquels ils avaient consentis, malgré les ombres de la première évangélisation, les évêques ont cherché à formuler et synthétiser des propositions pour une nouvelle évangélisation dans, par et depuis le continent. Bref, ils ont proposé à l'Eglise de l'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes les lignes fondamentales pour une nouvelle pulsion évangéliste que le Christ met dans les cœurs, sur les lèvres et dans l'action et dans la vie de tous les latino-américains.



### **Aparecida (13-31 mai 2007)**

Dans la mouvance de la préparation de la célébration du cinquantième de la création du CELAM en 2005, très vite les évêques ont aussi pensé aux nombreux problèmes et défis auxquels est confrontée l'Eglise en Amérique Latine, comme par exemple : la perte de la foi, et la croissance continue des sectes dans le continent, la faiblesse de la foi des croyants eux-mêmes et des problèmes liés à la situation socio-économiques et

politiques. C'est pourquoi en 2003, ils ont décidé de célébrer la V<sup>e</sup> Conférence, du 13 au 31 mai 2007, au Sanctuaire national de Notre Dame d'Aparecida, au cœur du Brésil<sup>14</sup>. Ce fut un événement déterminant pour l'Eglise de l'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes qui a su élaborer de nouvelles lignes de leur action pastorale pour donner une impulsion et une vigueur nouvelles à la mission à l'intérieur de l'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes par et depuis cette région. Le thème qui a été retenue pour cette V<sup>e</sup> Conférence est le suivant: « *Disciples et Missionnaires de Jésus-Christ pour que nos Peuples aient la vie en Lui* » (Jn 14,6). En fait, les évêques ont cherché, soulignent-ils dans le message final, à avancer sur le chemin du renouvellement parcouru par l'Eglise catholique depuis le Concile Vatican II et lors des quatre précédentes Conférences générales de l'Episcopat latino-américain et des Caraïbes<sup>15</sup>.

Aparecida offre des perspectives pour un nouvel élan dans l'activité missionnaire. Il est construit autour de trois thèmes principaux qui lui donnent son unité et sa cohésion de telle sorte qu'il est possible de découvrir entre eux : interrelation, interdépendance et interaction : a) la vie en plénitude, renvoie à la première partie du document ; b) le disciple, en référence à la seconde partie ; c) la mission, c'est ce qui est traité dans la troisième partie. À notre sens, la conversion pastorale<sup>16</sup> est l'élément catalyseur qui fournit au document toute sa fécondité. Car les lignes maîtresses du document de conclusion, à savoir : la foi en Dieu, la rencontre avec Jésus-Christ – Chemin, Vérité et Vie –, la Parole de Dieu, l'eucharistie, le disciple et la mission, peuvent rester sans grand impact, sans une réponse à l'appel à la conversion pastorale que lance le document.

### Spécificité et continuité des Conférences du CELAM

Les Conférences générales du CELAM ont constitué un tournant décisif et ne sont autre qu'une nouvelle étape dans le cheminement de la vie ecclésiale en Amérique Latine et dans les Caraïbes, avec la libération des opprimés comme horizon particulier. Chacune, selon son style propre, a contribué à donner une nouvelle impulsion à l'évangélisation dans le Continent. Si l'évangélisation a toujours été la motivation première de ces cinq Conférences générales, elles se caractérisent toutefois par leur particularité. Nous pouvons les synthétiser schématiquement en disant que la principale préoccupation de *Río de Janeiro* fut les évangélisateurs ; de *Medellín* la personne humaine et la société latino-américaine ; de *Puebla* la communion et la participation dans l'Eglise ; de *Santo Domingo* Jésus-Christ, évangile du Père et évangélisateur ; de *Aparecida* la pleine vie dans le Christ des disciples-missionnaires de Jésus-Christ.

La force de ces Conférences est à rechercher dans la continuité<sup>17</sup> qu'il existe entre elles. Elles forment un riche filon prophétique de l'Eglise en Amérique Latine avec une fidélité claire à la méthode *voir, juger, agir*<sup>18</sup>, à partir de laquelle avaient émergé les grandes intuitions pastorales qui ont marqué la vie des Eglises latino-américaines: les communautés de base, l'option préférentielle ou évangélique pour les pauvres, la lecture priante de la Parole de Dieu, la théologie de la Libération<sup>19</sup>.

### Courage de l'Eglise de l'Amérique Latine

Les Conférences générales du CELAM, sans oublier l'apport considérable et remarquable de la théologie de la libération<sup>20</sup> qui a fortement influencé les orientations pastorales – Le Cardinal Lopez<sup>21</sup> l'a clairement expliqué dans son livre sur la théologie de libération –, ont inauguré une nouvelle étape dans l'œuvre évangélisatrice en Amérique latine qui, sans nul doute, a renouvelé avec efficacité la vie chrétienne des peuples de l'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes. Les pasteurs et les chrétiens latino-américains, malgré les nombreuses résistances rencontrées, ont fait preuve de courage à répondre aux défis imposés par leur foi à transformer la réalité inhumaine des pauvres, des non-personnes et des damnés de la terre, en réalité humaine et chrétienne digne des fils et filles du Père face à une fraternité profonde et exigeante. Ils ont lutté et luttent encore contre toute injustice, spoliation et exploitation en s'engageant dans la création d'une société plus juste et plus fraternelle. Puisque Dieu se fait proche de nous de manière humaine, en la personne de Jésus-Christ, l'Eglise de l'Amérique Latine a compris que l'Évangile doit être annoncé aux hommes et aux femmes afin qu'ils se réalisent comme êtres humains dans la mesure même où ils forgent leur propre destin. C'est pourquoi le CELAM a situé l'évangélisation sur un socle



historique concret qui consiste à voir, d'abord la réalité dans une perspective croyante et selon la vérité de l'Évangile ; ensuite l'assumer ou juger à partir des critères de la foi et de la raison pour un bon discernement et sa valorisation ; enfin projeter une action salvifique comme disciple de Jésus-Christ. Cette nouvelle manière d'être Eglise dans la société n'est pas une proposition de rechange d'évangélisation par rapport à la riche et longue tradition de l'Église, mais sa reprise et son développement, en même temps que son dépassement et sa refondation<sup>22</sup> pour la libération des opprimés, créés à l'image de Dieu. Par-delà le prisme européen plus ou moins déformant des efforts courageux de son engagement auprès des pauvres, et à condition de ne pas répéter les sempiternels énoncés programmatiques, l'Église de l'Amérique Latine a laissé l'hiver glacial de sa sacristie pour un printemps courageux et existentiel des favelas de la masse des pauvres.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Plusieurs auteurs ont limité la troisième phase de l'évangélisation en Amérique latine entre 1899-1992. C'est le cas de Enrique Dussel dans son ouvrage : *La Chiesa in America Latina 1492-1992, il rovescio della storia*, Ed. Italiana a cura di Antonio DAL BIANCO e Giuseppina POMPEI, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi 1992. Nous préférons dans le cadre de ce bref article l'étendre jusqu'au moment présent, puisqu'il est difficile de trouver une ligne de démarcation nette entre la réalité d'avant 1992 et celle d'après.

<sup>2</sup> Message de Pape Jean-Paul II pour le COMLA 3, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> J. ESQUERDA BIFET, *Dizionario dell'Evangelizzazione*, Editrice Dominicana Italiana, Napoli 1998, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Voir note 21 in ENCHIRIDION, *Documenti della Chiesa Latino Americana*, Editrice Missionaria Italiana, Bologna 1995. EPISCOPADO LATINOAMERICANO, *Conferencias generales: Río de Janerio, Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo, Documentos pastorales*, San Pablo, Chile 1993, pp. 9-10. On trouve dans chacun des documents des cinq Conférences générales du CELAM plus ou moins une description de la réalité en Amérique Latine.

<sup>5</sup> Document final de Aparecida 33-35.

<sup>6</sup> Conseil Épiscopal de l'Amérique Latine.

<sup>7</sup> Voir message final de Puebla in ENCHIRIDION, p.116, nn. 130-135.

<sup>8</sup> P. RICHARD, *Desarrollo de la teología en la Iglesia latinoamericana*, in CEHILA, "La Iglesia latinoamericano. De Medellín a Puebla", Codecal, Bogota 1971<sup>1</sup>, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Medellín n. 8.

<sup>10</sup> CONSEJO EPISCOPAL LATINOAMERICANO, CONSEJO EPISCOPAL LATINOAMERICANO, *Síntesis de los aportes recibidos para la V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano*, Bogotá, D.C. Colombia 2007, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> J. ESQUERDA BIFFET, *Dizionario dell'Evangelizzazione*, Editrice Dominicana Italiana, Napoli 1998, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> ENCHIRIDION, *op. cit.*, p.1970.

<sup>13</sup> Discours inaugural de Jean-Paul II à la Conférence de Saint-Domingue, 6 ; Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* n. 2.

<sup>14</sup> La participation et la présence de toutes les composantes du peuple de Dieu – évêques, prêtres et les fidèles laïcs - nous font comprendre que contrairement aux précédentes Conférences générales, Aparecida n'a pas été une conférence entre responsables et spécialistes des problèmes ecclésiaux, mais un événement ecclésial d'intense communion fraternelle entre tous les baptisés, comme Peuple de Dieu.

<sup>15</sup> V<sup>e</sup> CONFERENCE GENERALE DE L'ÉPISCOPAT LATINO-AMÉRICAIN ET DES CARAÏBES, *Disciples et Missionnaires de Jésus-Christ pour que nos peuples aient la vie en Lui*, Coll. documents d'Eglise, Bayard Editions – Fleurus-Mame – Cerf, Paris 2008, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> On ne trouve pas de définition explicite de la conversion pastorale dans le document. La lecture du document toutefois nous suggère quelques indications sur ce thème. Elle est motivée, d'une part par le modèle paradigmatique des *cultures et des circonstances* et, d'autre part par l'*ecclésiologie de communion* du concile Vatican II. La conversion pastorale est avant tout un changement de mentalité qui suppose esprit d'ouverture d'une Eglise capable de s'autocritiquer et s'auto-évaluer pour être plus efficace dans son action pastorale, en cherchant à rénover ses structures internes, des structures qui soient non seulement adaptées aux temps nouveaux, mais répondent à l'Esprit Saint qui exige un témoignage plus authentique. « La conversion pastorale de nos communautés exige de passer d'une pastorale de simple conservation à une pastorale vraiment missionnaire » (Aparecida n. 370).

<sup>17</sup> Chacun des documents de conclusion a souligné la continuité qui existe avec le précédent. Voir Puebla n.1 ; Saint-Domingue n.1 ; *Message des évêques aux peuples de l'Amérique Latine* n.4 ; Aparecida n.9. Cf. Discours inaugural de Benoît XVI à Aparecida, le 13 mai 2007, n.2 ; RE, G.B, *Introducción : Líneas maestras de Aparecida*, in PONTIFICIA COMMISSIO PRO AMERICA LATINA, *Aparecida 2007. Luces para América Latina*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2008, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Il faut dire que la méthode voir, juger, agir est un héritage de la JOC (jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne) fondée par le belge Joseph Cardijn. Elle est devenue, depuis la Conférence générale de l'Épiscopat latino-américain à Medellín (Colombie), dont elle est le fil conducteur, la méthode qu'adoptent les documents du CELAM.

<sup>19</sup> V<sup>e</sup> CONFERENCE GENERALE DE L'ÉPISCOPAT LATINO-AMÉRICAIN ET DES CARAÏBES, *Disciples et Missionnaires de Jésus-Christ pour que nos peuples aient la vie en Lui*, Coll. documents d'Eglise, Bayard Editions – Fleurus-Mame – Cerf, Paris 2008, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Nous aurions dû dire quelques mots sur la théologie de la libération vue son importance et son influence en Amérique Latine. Nous nous contentons cependant de renvoyer le lecteur intéressé à des ouvrages très indiqués : GUTIERREZ, G., *Essai pour une théologie de la libération*, Profac, Paris 1972 ; *Théologie de la libération*, Lumen Vitae, Novalis 1974 ; en collaboration : *La lutte de libération bouscule la théologie*, Cerf, Paris 1985 ; SOBRINO, J., *Jésus en Amérique latine. Sa signification pour la foi et la christologie*, traduit de l'espagnol par Francis GUIBAL, Cerf, Paris 1986., BOFF, C., *Théorie et pratique. La méthode des théologies de la libération*, Coll. Cogitatio Fidei, Editions du Cerf, Paris 1990 ; voir également DUPUIS, J., « Théologie de la libération », in *Dictionnaire de théologie fondamentale*, LATOURELLE, R., - FISICHELLA, R., (dirs.), Editions Bellarmin, Montréal et du Cerf, Paris 1992, pp. 1386-1393.

<sup>21</sup> A. LOPEZ TRUJILLO, *La théologie libératrice en Amérique Latine*, Coll. Croire et Savoir, traduit de l'espagnol par Fernando Moreno, Téqui, Paris 1983.

<sup>22</sup> C. BOFF, *Théorie et pratique. La méthode des théologies de la libération*, Coll. Cogitatio Fidei, Editions du Cerf, Paris 1990, p. 2.

## SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 2013

**Theme: "New Wines in New Wineskins": "The New Evangelization" – Europe, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.**

**Date: 23- 27 APRIL 2013**

**Venue: At Centro "Ad Gentes" NEMI , (ROME)**

### SEDOS UPCOMING WORKSHOP

**When:** November 10, 2012

**From** 9:00 am to 6:00 pm

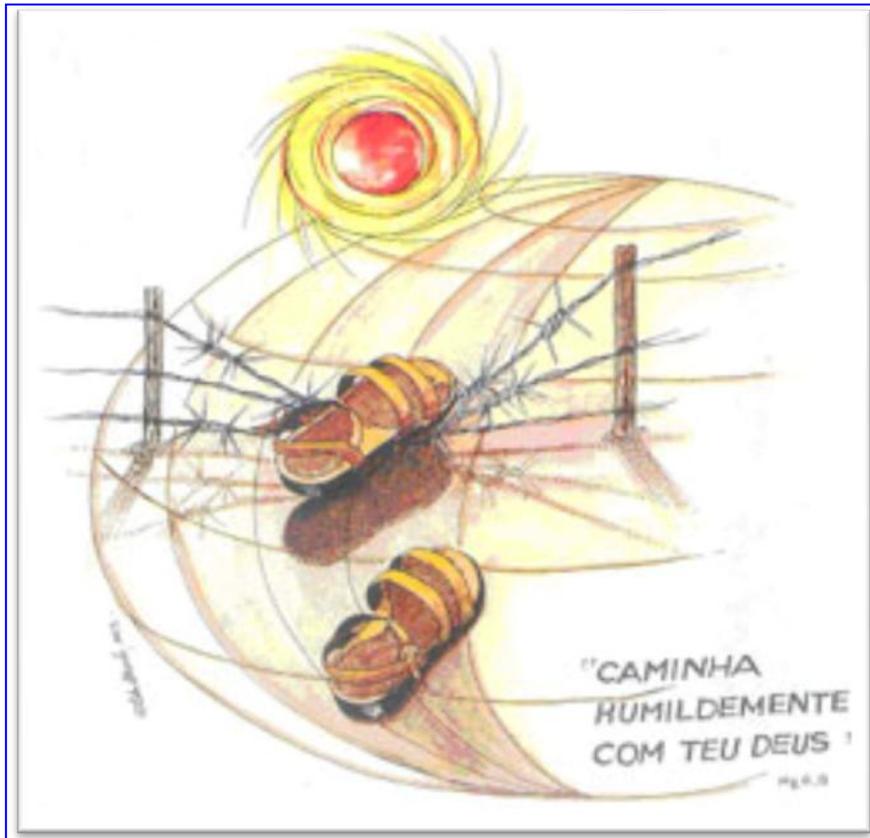
**Where:** at the Curia of the Brothers of Christian Schools  
Via Aurelia, 476

**Speaker:** **Fr. Paolo SUESS** from Brasil.

**Theme:** The Journey of the Missionary Church  
50 years after the Opening of  
The Second Vatican Council.

More details will be given in the next issue.  
Do not miss this wonderful opportunity and  
kindly pass the word on.  
Thanks

Lucie Nzenzili MBOMA, FMM  
Executive Director



***TO WALK HUMBLIE WITH YOU, GOD,  
FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION***

***CAMMINARE UMILMENTE CON TE, SIGNORE,  
PER LA NUOVA EVANGELIZZAZIONE***