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Editorial

*"There is a passion of ours that must grow from faith,
that must be transformed into the fire of charity.
Jesus told us: I have come to bring fire to the earth,
and how I wish it were blazing already".
(Benedict XVI. Meditation on Monday, 8 October 2012)*

Propelled by the imperative of "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith" propounded by the Synod of Bishops in October 2012, the SEDOS Residential Seminar 2013 focused on the theme: **"New Wine in New Wineskins" (Mk 2:22). "The New Evangelization in – Europe, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand"**.

Aware of the call to attentively read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, SEDOS is committed to respond concretely and creatively to the challenge of **"new presentation of the Gospel; a presentation, which is new in its ardour, methods and expression"**.

SEDOS Residential Seminar 2013 engaged our energy for and deepened our understanding of the New Evangelization. It is a summons not limited to the baptized who "no longer practice the Christian faith" but it is directed to all Christians. Concretely, it is a universal call **"to encounter the person of Jesus Christ and in him rediscover the centrality of the Word of God made flesh who leads us to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit"**.

Daunting changes and paradigm shifts in our globalized world today challenges us to seek new methods and new expressions that will effectively proclaim and witness the Gospel message. Networking, collaboration, communication and dialogue are becoming increasingly urgent and indispensable in these times. Synergy – the pooling of spiritual and material resources and energy – remains the clarion call today, which enables us to discover new tools to meet the needs raised by a culture predominately marked by the unavoidable, evasive culture of the Internet.

In this digital age of instant interactions across cyberspace, the Internet is mainly the locus of encounter with the young. But as Pastoral Agents, who are mostly Digital Immigrants, we have to do a lot of catching up with the Digital Natives of the present generation.

To relate with the young in mutual understanding, reverence and respect, we have to enter their world, learn their language, cope with their fast evolving vocabulary, and engage them in meaningful and respectful dialogue. In the context of the New Evangelization, this remains for most of us a real challenge.

In this issue, SEDOS readers are graced with four articles that reflect and echo the challenges presented above. We thank our contributors for their invaluable and enlightening sharing.

Jonathan Y. Tan: "**Ministry Meets Social Networking. Connecting with the Digital Natives**"

Bede Ukwuije, CSSp: "**Faith in Africa in the Context of the New Evangelisation**"ⁱ

Jean Farah: "**Jean Chrysostome et la mission en Phénicie - Etude de l'Epistola CXXIII**"

Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, "**Interpreting Mission Today and into the Future The Impact of Culture**"

In a celebratory and jubilant mode, this issue also features the article of Eric Manhaeghe, CICM, entitled: "**Venganos tu Reino". Un siglo y medio al servicio de la misión ad gentes. Los misioneros de Scheut (1862-2012).**"

It faithfully traces the spiritual and missionary contours of the evangelical journey of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (*Congrégation de Coeur Immaculé de Marie*) at the service of the Kingdom. Indeed, this is an awesome milestone in the history of a congregation with which SEDOS is intimately linked. By God's design, Father Omer Degrijse, CICM, Superior General during the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, was one of the nine SEDOS Founders. We, at SEDOS, take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to Rev. Father Tim ATKIN, CICM, Superior General, for their congregation's foundational gift to the Church and to SEDOS.

The last page includes the logo and the topic for SEDOS Residential Seminar 2014. The remote preparation was made possible by the insightful suggestions and recommendations of the Participants of the SEDOS Residential Seminars 2012 and 2013.

On the behalf of Executive Committee, I wish to express our deep gratitude and appreciation to all the 2013 Participants for facilitating our planning for the SEDOS Public Conference and Workshops. We are energized by the assurance of their continued commitment to the cause and challenge of the New Evangelization!

Sr. Nzenzili MBOMA, FMM
SEDOS Executive Director

ⁱ This paper was presented at the General Assembly of Africans and Malagasies at the Service of the Generalates in Rome, 25 May 2013.



Jonathan Y. Tan*

Ministry Meets Social Networking *Connecting with the Digital Natives*

Social networking has to become part of pastoral ministry, or the church will find itself increasingly marginalized in the lives of digital natives. Pastoral ministers are called to engage today's technology and recognize and foster mutuality, interdependence, empathy, solidarity, and collaboration with digital natives.

This article seeks to identify the challenges and explore the possibilities of doing pastoral ministry with young adults in the United States. First, it introduces the term "digital natives," which many educators and sociologists use to explain the online behavior of these young adults. Second, it surveys social networking sites and other contemporary web resources that are frequented by these digital natives. Third, it discusses the reasons that pastoral ministers have to engage digital natives on their social networking turf. Finally, it reflects on the theological and pastoral implications of such an engagement.

Digital Natives

Today's young adults, also known as "Generation Y" or the "Millennials" are very different from their predecessors. They are well known for being technologically adept, having grown up in a world that is marked by rapid digital and online growth. Many of them are able to multitask with ease, e.g., chatting away on cellphones and instant messaging on their computers while trying to read a book. Not surprisingly, many of their parents, teachers, and employers find such behavior either amusing or annoying at best, or disconcerting at worst.

In a seminal paper entitled "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," Marc Prensky (2001a) thinks that today's young adults "have not just changed incrementally from those of the past, nor simply changed their slang, clothes, body adornments, or styles, as has happened between generations previously." Instead, he argues that a "really big *discontinuity* has taken place," i.e., a "singularity" that "changes things so fundamentally that there is no absolute going back." He identifies this singularity as "the arrival and rapid dissemination of digital technology in the last decades of the 20th century."

Digital natives have a completely different mindset compared to digital immigrants.



Drawing upon the latest research in neurobiology, social psychology, and from studies done with children using games for learning in a subsequent paper, Prensky (2001b) concludes that the brains of young adults have physically changed as a result of growing up in a world of constant exposure to digital media.

In particular, Prensky makes a distinction between "digital immigrants" and "digital natives," arguing that digital immigrants and digital natives often talk past one another because they are using different modes of communicating and relating. Shaped and socialized by a pre-digital world, digital immigrants find themselves adapting to new developments in digital technology. By contrast, having grown up immersed in a digital world, digital natives have a completely different mindset compared to digital immigrants, using

Pastoral ministries would increasingly find themselves having little to no impact and influence on the lives of digital natives if they continue to avoid social networking sites.

cellphones, e-mail, messaging, texting, as well as social networking tools like MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter as natural means of communicating and relating with each other.

Prensky's insights are supported by two important studies conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, i.e., *Teens and Technology* (2005) and *Teens and Social Media* (2007). The first of these two studies, *Teens and Technology* concluded that American teens are enveloped by communication technologies, with the Internet and cellphones playing a central role in defining and shaping their lives. Among other things, *Teens and Technology* noted that 87 percent of teens ages 12 and 17 are online and observed a significant growth in the number of teens who do most of their daily routine (e.g., playing games, reading the news, shopping, getting health information) online. Going one step further, *Teens and Social Media* observed that 64 percent of online teens are engaged in online content creation (e.g., blogging, posting photos and videos online, etc). This study found that girls dominate in the area of content creation (35 percent of all teen girls blog compared to 20 percent of boys), while boys dominate in the area of posting video content online (19 percent of boys vs. 10 percent of girls). In addition, this study also found that teens often go beyond merely creating and sharing online content to participating in conversations fueled by such creating and sharing. For example, 89 percent of teens who post photos say that people post comments on their photos.

Social Networking Technology

What is noteworthy in the findings by Prensky and the Pew Internet and American Life Project is the centrality of social networking communities such as Facebook and MySpace in the lives of digital natives. Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are part of a wider so-called Web 2.0 revolution that also includes other developments such as blogging (e.g., Blogger and WordPress), microblogging (e.g., Twitter), wikis (e.g., Wikipedia and MedPedia), and other forms of creative content creation (e.g, Flickr and YouTube). These Web 2.0 applications are also classified as "new media," to differentiate it from the older Web 1.0 applications such as static webpages.

The term "Web 2.0" was first introduced by Darcy DiNucci (1999): 'The Web we know now, which loads into a browser window in essentially static screenfuls, is only an embryo of the Web to come. The first glimmerings of Web 2.0 are beginning to appear, and we are just starting to see how that embryo might develop.... The Web will be understood not as screenfuls of text and graphics but as a transport mechanism, the *ether through which interactivity happens*" (emphasis added). DiNucci's definition highlights the fundamental defining characteristic of Web 2.0, i.e., the *interactivity* of its dynamic user-generated content, in contrast to the static pages of Web 1.0. If the Web 1.0 of the 1990s was characterized by the centralized, static, unidirectional, and "read-only" personal webpages hosted on Geocities, Tripod, and Angelfire, the Web 2.0 of the 2000s is characterized by the dynamic participation and interactivity in blogs, wikis, and social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, where visitors are able to comment and participate in ongoing mutual conversations. In the case of wikis (e.g., Wikipedia), visitors are also able to collaborate in editing a site's contents, resulting in a site with dynamic user-generated and moderated contents.

The dynamic and interactive aspect of Web 2.0 is exemplified by blogs. Unlike the static websites of Web 1.0, blogs comprise regular web postings that may

include commentaries, reviews, reports, discussions, photos, images, as well as audio and video clips that are posted in reverse chronological order. Typically, blogs allow visitors to leave comments and engage in interactive conversation with other visitors or the bloggers who maintain the blog. Twitter is an example of a microblogging phenomenon that allows their users to send text-based posts called "tweets" that are limited to 140 characters, which in turn are broadcast to their followers. Twitterers could choose to allow their tweets to be read by everyone or restrict their tweets to their followers. In turn, their followers could retweet the messages or reply by posting their thoughts and comments in 140 characters or less. Other examples of Web 2.0's creative and dynamic user-generated content include audio and video podcasts, photos that are posted to sites such as Flickr and Photobucket, as well as user-generated video clips that are posted to sites such as YouTube and Vimeo.

The two principal social networking sites of Web 2.0 are Facebook and MySpace. MySpace is a social networking website that enables users to post personal profiles, music and videos, photos, blogs, and wall posts, inviting comments and feedback from friends and visitors. It is especially popular with teenagers and musicians who often use MySpace to promote their bands and new releases. From 2006-2009, MySpace was the most popular social networking site, until it was surpassed by its principal competitor, Facebook, in May 2009. Facebook is a social networking site that was created by Mark Zuckerberg with his friends Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes while they were undergraduates at Harvard. It has since evolved into a premier global social networking site that enables users to join networks that are organized by school, workplace, or city. Users can add friends, invite others to accept them as friends, interact with their friends through wall posts, status updates, profile updates, quizzes, posting photos, video or music clips, etc.

More importantly, because digital natives spend most of their time online in general, and in social networking communities in particular, pastoral ministers would increasingly find themselves having little to no impact and influence on the lives of digital natives if they continue to avoid social networking sites. One reason that is often given by pastoral ministers for avoiding social networking sites is their uncritical presumption that these sites are "impersonal," i.e., all interactions are virtual rather than physical. On the one hand, it is often said that the impersonal dimension of online interactions is antithetical to the essence of pastoral ministry that emphasizes the personal dimension of relationships. On the other hand, it is also possible to argue that the "impersonal" aspect of online interactions could be its very strength, affording digital natives the opportunity to share their deepest secrets and struggles without the anxiety, shame, or embarrassment of face-to-face contact.

Another reason that pastoral ministers often give to explain their reluctance to engage with digital natives in their social networking communities is their unfamiliarity with this new online landscape and their fear of not being able to take charge and control the messy, complicated, and often antinomian atmosphere of many social networking communities. This is not surprising, in view of the fact that pastoral ministers have been trained to serve in a world that they grew up in, rather than in the Web 2.0 world of the digital natives. As a result, many pastoral ministers are most comfortable in the traditional aspects of doing ministry, e.g., face-to-face meetings, either individually or in groups, once or twice a week, with an hour or two of interaction time in either formal programs or informal sessions.

Although face-to-face sessions are important, they constitute only a small portion of the lives of digital natives. Once digital natives leave those face-to-face

sessions, pastoral ministers are no longer privy to the ups and downs, successes and struggles, achievements and challenges of digital natives in their daily lives. Digital natives often share deeply on social networking sites about their struggles with difficult issues, e.g., alcoholism family problems, depression, etc. Frequently, they are not ready for in-person outreach. Instead, they are usually more comfortable relating online.

Social networking sites can open up new lines of Communications between pastoral ministers and digital natives.

Therefore, social networking sites can open up new lines of communications between pastoral ministers and digital natives, allowing digital natives to seek help or someone to chat to in a neutral environment. By being present in social networking sites, pastoral ministers not only appear to be less aloof but also more readily accessible to respond with empathy and encouragement. In view of the foregoing, pastoral ministers who insist that they can minister effectively through face-to-face contact might want to ask themselves, "Where else are we going to see the messy and chaotic lives of digital natives up close? Where are we going to bump into and interact with those digital natives who have stopped coming to church and would not return our phone calls or e-mails?" If pastoral ministers want to have more influence and impact on the lives of young adults, they have to embrace the social networking world of the digital natives. In doing so, pastoral ministers are able to influence digital natives more effectively than they ever could if they chose to avoid online interactions completely.

By being present and interacting in social networking communities, pastoral ministers are able to see people as they really are, letting their guard down and being themselves, without the masks that they wear in front of their families and church leaders. They could witness firsthand all aspects of their daily lives as revealed through their music, photos, pictures, quotes, and movies that they post or comment online. On the one hand, pastoral ministers could see all the amazing things that digital natives do in their social networking communities and be inspired by their active involvement in issues of social justice, poverty, racism, migration, etc. On the other hand, pastoral ministers can understand the murky reality of the daily life struggles of digital natives up close. Moreover, it is often easier for pastoral ministers to enter into social networking communities and befriend the digital natives, rather than persuade the digital natives to leave their social networking worlds. Pastoral ministers also have a responsibility to minister to digital natives within their world.

Engaging Social Networking Communities

Pastoral ministers should not be afraid to take advantage of new technologies of their time. There is precedent for this, as evidenced by the examples of the apostle Paul and the Protestant reformer, Martin Luther. In the New Testament, we see how Paul kept in touch with the communities he founded through circular letters, which were subsequently reproduced and passed on in viral fashion among other communities as sources of teaching and spiritual inspiration. Martin Luther was able to capitalize on printing, which was the new technology of his day, to spread his views across a broad audience, who in turn circulated his tracts among their friends and neighbors in a manner akin to retweeting tweets on Twitter or sharing posts on Facebook. In a similar vein, pastoral ministers would do well to follow the footsteps of Paul and Luther to make full use of today's communication technology, i.e., social networking tools.

One could also look at the other side of the coin and ask why digital natives are drawn toward social networking sites. Social networking communities are often

egalitarian in orientation without rigidly defined structures of leadership and authority. Such egalitarianism appeals to many digital natives, who find this environment to be empowering and nourishing. Specifically, this egalitarian orientation of social networking often encourages grassroots activities, empowering even the most lowly and ordinary to voice their thoughts, participate, and even take the lead in organizing various activities. Indeed, the grassroots activism of the Obama campaign, as inspired by the campaign's social networking site MyBarackObama.com, is testimony to the power of social networking in challenging and changing the status quo in society. As a result, digital natives find themselves able to be creative and contribute content, voice their thoughts, as well as figure out who they are, what they want to be, and how they relate to others without the critical and judgmental comments of elders.

However, this egalitarianism often frightens clergy and pastoral ministers who fear that they are unable to control the discourse that goes on in social networking sites. Indeed, digital natives can often bypass the centralized ecclesial bureaucracy where everything must be approved by the pastor or pastoral minister by going online, creating a Facebook group on their own, texting invitations to their friends to join and post content, and having an active group up and running within 24 hours. Nonetheless, what is so scary to pastors and pastoral ministers, i.e., the lack of control over direction and activities in online communities, is these communities' greatest strength and asset, giving digital natives a sense of belonging, achievement, and self-worth.

As a result, social networking has to become part of pastoral ministries, or the church will find itself increasingly marginalized in the lives of these digital natives. Pastoral ministers have to go where digital natives are, be willing to walk in solidarity with them in the virtual world, just as Jesus hung out with tax collectors and prostitutes within their social milieu. By entering into the digital natives' online communities and walking in solidarity with them in their social networking communities, pastoral ministers demonstrate their willingness to be open to the ambiguities and accept not only the beautiful and good but also the ugly and bad that are displayed in the chaotic messiness that often define these social networking communities.

A New Missiological Paradigm

From a theological perspective, pastoral ministers are called to reflect on their mission to digital natives and create a new missiological paradigm for their endeavors. Accepting the reality that the social networking landscape is not a challenge to be confronted and overcome, but rather constitutive of the digital natives' world, pastoral ministers can seek non-confrontational ways of relating to the immense complexities that underline the social networking landscape, with an emphasis on mutuality, solidarity, and collaboration with the digital natives. In addition, pastoral ministers have to realize that their ministry to digital natives is not a one-way activity, i.e., they are bringing the Gospel to an environment where God is absent. Instead, they have to discern the presence of God in social networking communities and be sensitive to the workings of the Spirit in these communities that precede their arrival.

More importantly, the mission of pastoral ministers in social networking communities begins not from above or from the center, but from below and from the periphery. Nor is it a one-way, unidirectional street from minister to recipient. Rather, it takes as its starting point the daily experiences of digital natives as they struggle with life's curveballs. Hence, there is a need for pastoral ministers to *immerse* themselves in the contemporary realities of digital natives, sharing with

them the joys and sufferings, blessings and misfortunes of daily living, as well as engaging and interacting dialogically with them.

This means that pastoral ministers must be able to transcend an uncritical paternalism that gives rise to the presumption that they are in charge and have full knowledge of the contemporary world, while digital natives are merely recipients of that knowledge. Instead of hierarchy and dependence, pastoral ministers are called to recognize and foster mutuality, interdependence, empathy, solidarity, and collaboration between ministers and digital natives, eschewing the dichotomy between the ministers and digital natives who are seen as "objects" or recipients of ministry. In today's global, interconnected world that is rooted in interdependence and solidarity, pastoral ministers and digital natives are both ministers and recipients of ministry at the same time, engaging in mutual witness and collaboration to promote the liberative and life-giving Good News of Jesus Christ.

More fundamentally, the call of pastoral ministers to solidarity, empathy, sharing, and mutual collaboration with the digital natives in their social networking communities is grounded in Jesus' own empathy and solidarity with all of humanity, i.e., Jesus came to this world to share in the life of ordinary people, to experience their daily struggle for survival, to empathize with their happiness and pain, thereby engaging fully in all the ambiguities and complexities of daily human living. By immersing themselves in social networking communities, pastoral ministers share in and serve life in empathy and solidarity with digital natives, just as Jesus had done in his earthly life.

If this is the case, then pastoral ministers cannot really fulfill their mission until they are able to experience the lives of digital natives within their social networking communities, just as Jesus experienced the lives of the poor, dispossessed, and marginalized. This sharing in the lives of the people they minister with is not a preliminary or preparatory step, but lies at the very foundation of the mission of pastoral ministers. By engaging in empathy, solidarity, and sharing, pastoral ministers are able to listen to what digital natives are sharing and receive what they have to offer, before responding efficaciously to their needs.

On the one hand, it is true that the virtual world of social networking cannot replace personal pastoral relationships. There will be occasions when pastoral ministers have to be able to look people in the eye, offer them a hug, and listen to them in a genuine one-to-one conversation. On the other hand, social networking tools can extend and enhance a pastoral minister's outreach, especially among those people who prefer the safe distance of virtual communication rather than face-to-face meeting. There are folks who would avoid making appointments with pastoral ministers, but who would open up with their struggles, pains, and hurts online. Sometimes, online meetings could lead to physical meetings. At other times, the online interactions are sufficient for healing and transformation. Whatever the case may be, online interactions enable pastoral ministers to reach out to people who may otherwise avoid them in person, thereby allowing them to expand their outreach.

Imagining New Possibilities

In the final analysis, pastoral ministers have to consider carefully the actual context of their ministries, their own calling, gifts, and talents, as well as discover the extent to which they can synthesize their own gifts and talents with social networking tools. Social networking may not always be the right strategy for all pastoral ministers. However, if pastoral ministers want to work with digital natives, they will find social networking an invaluable outreach tool to communicate with digital natives in new ways. Building online communities and deepening bonds are antidotes to an uncritical ghetto mentality that sees a world of sin and depravity beyond the physical church community. Ultimately, the possibility for ministry in

social networks is limited only by one's imagination and trust that the Spirit will lead to do great wonders for God's people.

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Faith in Africa in the Context of the New Evangelisation¹

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In order to respond to what he called “a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people”² in the contemporary world, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed the “Year of Faith”. He called on the Church to intensify reflection on faith “so as to help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel, especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing” (*Porta Fidei*, n. 8). This concern explains the acceleration of the *New Evangelisation* project which was the theme of the recent General Assembly of the Synod of³ Bishops.⁴

First, I will present the New Evangelisation project as it concerns Africa. Second, I will deal with the concern of the crisis of faith in Africa and its relationship with the cultural crisis as the major challenge of the New Evangelisation. Finally, I will sketch out proposals for the renewal of faith in Africa in the context of the New Evangelisation. I will argue that, to be fruitful, the New Evangelisation will have to re-think the concept of inculturation in a way that takes seriously the reality of the crisis of faith and invites Africans to a true conversion and personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who leads us to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. The New Evangelisation

For a time, it seemed that the New Evangelisation was directed at Europe which was traditionally Christian but now experiencing the phenomenon of de-christianisation. However, a proper reflection has helped the Church to understand that the New Evangelization concerns the entire Church.

The First Synod for Africa used the term *New Evangelization* twice. It stated that “the new evangelization should be centered on a transforming encounter with the living person of Christ” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 57). Secondly, that “The new evangelization will thus aim at *building up the Church as Family*, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 63). However, *Ecclesia in Africa* insisted more on Primary Evangelisation: “the urgency of proclaiming the Good News to the millions of people in Africa who are not yet evangelized” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 48). The Synod also insisted on inculturation, while expressing “a serious concern for a true and balanced inculturation... in order to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast evolving society” (*ibid.*).

At the Second Synod for Africa, the expression *New Evangelization* was more frequently used and emphasized (it appeared 13 times). Benedict XVI speaks of Africa’s “commitment to evangelization, to the *missio ad gentes*, and to the new evangelization” (*Africae Munus*, n. 159). He asked that the three dimensions be

articulated “so that the features of the African continent will increasingly be modelled on the ever timely teaching of Christ, the true “light of the world” and the authentic “salt of the earth” (*Africae Munus*, n. 159). He further explains that “the phrase ‘new evangelization’ designates pastoral outreach to those who no longer practice the Christian faith” (*Africae Munus*, n. 160).

The recent Synod on the New Evangelisation was even more explicit. It took seriously the wide diffusion of secularization and the consequent erosion of Christian faith in different cultures and stated the urgency of the New Evangelisation in Africa: “The new evangelization is an urgent task for Christians in Africa because they too need to reawaken their enthusiasm for being members of the Church”.⁵ This Synod calls for “a new presentation of the Gospel, ‘new in its ardour, methods and expression’”.⁶

This means that the Church officially recognises that in Africa, there are people who “no longer practice the Christian faith”: The New Evangelisation will insist on the fact that evangelisation is an invitation to an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Hence Africans are called to rediscover the centrality of the word of God made flesh who leads us to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. Faith Crisis as Cultural Crisis

The renewal of faith in Africa has to take the cultural crisis Africa is going through seriously. This cultural crisis has to do with the crisis of meaning, which is embodied in different realities, more especially in ethnocentrism, the explosion of the phenomenon of witchcraft and the subtle spread of secularism propagated by the development of functional religion.

Ethnocentrism and Geolatry

A dimension of the cultural crisis in Africa is the increase in ethnic discrimination. There is no doubt that ethnicity helps in structuring the human person and contributes to development in different parts of the world. There is nothing wrong with a person identifying as an Igbo, Hausa, Ewe, Asante, Baoule, Bamilike, etc. The more situated the human person is, the more he/she is empowered to act in the world, locally and globally.



However, ethnocentrism is a form of cultural and anthropological crisis. Many Africans are what Archbishop Anthony Obinna of Owerri calls *Geogamists*, that is, married to their land, attached to their land. People are so very attached to their ethnic groups that they find it difficult to open up to others. A *geogamous* marriage produces *geolatry* and *geofiliance*, sons of the soil. People tend to lose sight of the fact that all human beings are created by God and, by that fact, share

in his image. The world remembers the spectacle of the genocide in Rwanda that exploded at the same time as Africa was being celebrated in the Vatican at the First Synod for Africa in 1994. It became clear to the Synod Fathers that the Church had to reflect on being one family of the whole of humanity: *the Church as Family of God*.

Almost 20 years after *Ecclesia in Africa* was promulgated ethnic discrimination still haunts Africa. Many forms of discrimination trigger conflict, such as that in the Great Lakes Region, the unrest in Dafur, Sudan, and the Boko Haram saga in Nigeria, all of which are consequences of *geogamy* and *geolatry* (worship of the earth).

The most disturbing aspect of *geolatry* is the way it affects life in the Church. It is becoming common for people to refuse to accept a bishop appointed by the Holy Father to their diocese because he is not from their clan or ethnic group.

This cultural crisis is a challenge to the New Evangelisation. It is a test of the maturity of faith in Africa. Christians have to take a radical stand on the God whom Christians worship and how the Christian faith can contribute to better coexistence, living together in society. If Christians want to help build a healthy society, they must start by overcoming ethnic and clan discrimination in the Church.

Witches and Wizards

Witchcraft almost stole the show at the Second Synod for Africa. It was presented as a major concern for Africa today.

“Witchcraft, which is based on the traditional religions, is currently experiencing a certain revival. Old fears are re-surfacing and creating paralyzing bonds of subjection. Anxiety over health, well-being, children, the climate, and protection from evil spirits at times lead people to have recourse to practices of traditional African religions that are incompatible with Christian teaching. The problem of ‘dual affiliation’ — to Christianity and to the traditional African religions — remains a challenge” (*Africae Munus*, n. 93).

The phenomenon of witchcraft cuts across African traditions.⁷ We should not think that witchcraft is solely the affair of illiterate villagers. In Africa, university professors, scientists, medical doctors and politicians, consult diviners, fortunetellers and marabouts.

Why is there this explosion of witchcraft? What message does it reveal? First, it has to do with the African world vision that makes space for the influence of the invisible world on human destiny. Other factors like violence and insecurity, the commercialisation of prophetism and maraboutism and the search for power and relevance also come into play.

The visible and the invisible

The African believes in the influence of the invisible world on human destiny. The human person is understood as a network of relationships.⁸ This principle is embodied in the Igbo proverb, “*Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya*” (something stands and something else stands beside it). This means that to exist is to be related in a multiplicity of ways.⁹ It is said among many African peoples that before a child is born, it is already alive in the land of the spirits and its coming into the world is the visit of an ancestor. This visit is called a re-incarnation or metempsychosis, though the concepts do not represent exactly what the *visit* means. Each person incarnates into the human world through the creative act of a protective (dynamic) spirit assigned to the person by God. The spirit is known by various names in West Africa: *chi* (Igbo), *ori* (Yoruba), *kra* or *okra* (Eve, Asante), *ka* (Ancient Egypt).¹⁰

The human person as such is a network of relationships between the visible world and the invisible world. This relational tension mediates being-in-the-world. It is structural to the social health or wholeness of the community. It structures the relationship between the human being and the divinities. Most often, the human person depends on the gods who give him/her life and who can also decide to take it away.

Consequently, the daily life of the human person is a constant negotiation with the invisible forces. That is why it is important to appease the gods, the spirits and the ancestors. Ceremonies surrounding the birth of a child, initiation and funeral rites, dramatize the negotiation between society and the invisible world for the preservation of life. The vital force of a person can increase or decrease and this is a source of great concern for the African.

This explains the phenomenon of witchcraft (*la sorcellerie*). The witch is the one who will mobilize a spirit in order to influence the life of the other person negatively by provoking failure, sickness or even death. It is then said that that person has been eaten (*mangée*), that means that his/her vital force has been taken away from him/her. It is said that some people are born witches/wizards and that they search for initiation.¹¹ This helps to explain certain deaths and accidents. Africa does not search for the *how* of an accident but the *why*?

This explains why a great number of people have recourse to diviners who tell them the origin of their sickness or failure and what destiny holds for them in the future. People give a lot of money to marabouts and sometimes fall into simple determinism, or fatalism. They also patronize prayer and healing ministries.

Violence and insecurity

It is difficult to deny the existence of diabolic forces. Some people mobilize diabolic and occult forces either for their own personal protection, or to possess power and dominate others, or even to destroy others, their enemies or rivals. Nevertheless, belief in and the practice of witchcraft are also encouraged by situations of insecurity and violence in Africa's cities and villages. These situations produce all sorts of sickness. Most of what is considered supernatural possession, such as epilepsy, schizophrenia, hysteria, etc., are mental disorders caused by hardship and distorted social systems. How many people are able to sleep peacefully at night? What would be the mental health of people who live under the threat of Boko Haram in Nigeria, or in the context of conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or Mali, or South Africa or the Central African Republic? Many cases of mental disorder come from stress, obsession, different sorts of inhibition, and the self-defence mechanisms people create to escape from unbearable situations. Many demons are the product of systems of exploitation that benefit the rich and impoverish the weak. Demons are associated with traditional systems that disinherit widows and marginalize women and orphans. Demons are men and women who pretend to be custodians of traditions who torture barren women and young women who want fresh air and freedom.

Think of the alarming transfer of power into the hands of women and children transformed into terrifying war machines, traffickers and killers in DRC, Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. They are drugged, brain washed and initiated into secret cults with the idea that they will be protected from harm and death. In the context of disaster, "women and children entered the table of perceived threats expressed in the language of witchcraft... They are accused of and sometimes confess to deploying phantasmic power to eat their victims and diminish their life, property or potency".¹² Many of them are simply victims. "They become blameable for illness, natural disasters, economic downturn, death, etc.". ¹³



Marabouts and prophets

Marabouts and witchdoctors, healers and prophets also create demons. They do this by systematic diagnosis of spiritual possession and "*envoûtement*". They tell the barren woman that her womb has been tied up by a neighbour or relative. They tell a trader who has gone bankrupt that his brother has tied up his future. Of course they always have solutions to propose at exorbitant prices. They know that people who are desperate to find a solution to

their problem are always willing to pay.

Power and relevance

The resurgence of witchcraft is also organised by people seeking relevance, especially the new political élite in search of cultural and traditional authenticity in order to safeguard their power or mask their crimes. This has revived the vocations of diviners and modern tradi-practioners who are more like business men and women than the custodians of tradition and ministers of wholeness. A careful observation of different militarized ethnic factions in Nigeria shows that, though they carefully avoid the name of God¹⁴, which is normal in African Traditional Religion, they are all affiliated to one ethnic deity or another. They maintain their power through magical practices and beliefs and witchcraft which are fundamentally anti-cultural and antireligious.

It is no exaggeration to say that almost all the political leaders in Nigeria and Africa belong to secret cults and fly to the patronage of one deity or another. They observe occult practices in hidden shrines. They offer human sacrifices. The saga of the famous Okija Shrine uncovered in Nigeria in 2004 is only the tip of the iceberg. It has to be stated however, that we are no longer dealing here with African Traditional Religion but a perversion, a manipulation of religion for personal, economic and political strategies.

Secularism and Relativism

Another sign of the faith crisis in Africa is the subtle development of secularism. This phenomenon is normally associated with Western industrialized countries and rarely with Africa. Secularism is the expressed desire "to eliminate every trace of faith that is incarnate in history and society and to prevent it from exerting any moral judgment on political and social action".¹⁵ As Patriciu Vlaicu rightly put it, "in secularised societies, religion is often tolerated but does not play a determining role in social, moral, cultural or political life. Religion is tolerated but marginalized and thus faith becomes a private as opposed to a collective matter".¹⁶ A deep dimension of secularism is the eclipse of teleology. The idea of salvation is domiciled to the here and now. The after-life which is ultimately what gives meaning and solace is hardly ever remembered in normal day to day life. In real terms therefore, the world remains a *summum bonum* to be sought by all means".¹⁷

Secularism affects Africa in a very subtle but devastating way. *Ecclesia in Africa* already spoke of the danger of "secularization" but from the point of view of change in intellectual ideas.

"In Africa today 'formation in the faith ... too often stops at the elementary stage, and the sects easily profit from this ignorance'. A serious deepening of the faith is thus urgently needed, because the rapid evolution of society has given rise to new challenges linked to the phenomena notably of family uprooting, urbanization, unemployment, materialistic seductions of all kinds, a certain secularization and an intellectual upheaval caused by the avalanche of insufficiently critical ideas spread by the media" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 76).

However, secularism in Africa is more profound than is observed. It is expressed through functional religion. Whereas the more technologically advanced countries place every trust in the immense promises of the human mind to change the world for the pleasure of human beings, people in Africa seek the same pleasure through the invocation of the Divine. Thus, although the atmosphere of this continent is suffused with religiosity, religious talk, piety and ceremonies, nothing seems to make any impact on the lives of individuals or on our society. The reason appears to be that while less and less emphasis is placed on the personal, transforming relationship with God, more and more emphasis is put on what God can do to improve the material condition of the worshipper.

What is common to the two modes of thinking — of the advanced countries and the African countries — is that this material outlook of enjoyment,

technological pleasures, possessions, occupies a central place in their consciousness. For the former, God is not really needed to pursue the fascinations of his mind; whereas for the latter God is important but only insofar as He serves the many desires of individuals and families. But no relationship or covenant with such a God is necessary.

The Church is considered simply as one of the many possible responses to existential problems. Sacramentals, the Cross, medals and holy water take their place with other protective amulets that contribute to augment the vital force. People who attend Mass at the Catholic Church in the morning have no scruples about attending Pentecostal fellowship in the evening. The same people may equally well go to consult fortune tellers, diviners and prophets.

This secularism is being propagated by a disturbing Cross-less Christianity under the influence of Pentecostalism. This Christianity proposes a gospel of material prosperity "that is loaded with promises of wonderful works of God in favour of the worshipper. Miracles, healing and material prosperity become proofs of the existence of God."¹⁸ Some people stop believing in God when they feel that their prayers are not heard, or that they are suffering too much, or that they are not remembered or loved by God.

The Dilemma

The above reflections provide us with enough ground to diagnose the faith crisis in Africa. That the churches are full is not sufficient proof of the vitality or authenticity of faith. This may appear surprising to ecclesiastical statisticians. Many parishes and dioceses are created on the basis of the increase in the number of baptized Catholics. In some areas, there is even a competition between Catholics and Protestants as to who will have the greatest number of dioceses. The measure of faith is the capacity to interpret and handle existential problems from the point of view of the Gospel with total confidence in God.

Many Christians who would like to hold on to their faith fall into the situation described by the parable of the sower in the Gospel of Luke 8:5-15. People who welcome the word with enthusiasm find it difficult to keep because either the devil takes it away from them or they do not develop enough roots or they are "choked by worries and riches and the pleasures of life". This leads them to search for immediate solutions to their problems.¹⁹ They want to take short cuts and by so doing neglect the normal processes of discernment. The Church asks them to pray and trust in God, but this is a long and tedious process. On the other hand, diviners and fortune-tellers propose immediate results to all their problems as well as offering some objects for their protection.

The youth are perplexed because the traders in occult practices prosper without working. Graduates fill the unemployment market while their illiterate contemporaries suddenly become rich and monopolize socio-political power. They watch their illiterate peers become traditional rulers, members of parliament and senators.

Many Catholic priests are also confused. They see Pentecostal pastors compete with corrupt politicians and businessmen in the display of wealth through the purchase of private jets and flamboyant cars. These pastors are most often chosen by the same politicians as personal chaplains and advisers. Some Catholic priests are tempted to join the race. They think that the Church, to be relevant, has to join the gospel crusaders and perform healing. Some turn into diviners and prayer warriors. They transform Eucharistic adoration into a battle ground for spiritual warfare where people send *Holy Ghost fire* to their enemies and reject all weapons fashioned against them by their neighbours. Of course, they charge exorbitant consultation fees and encourage people to pay tithes, sow seeds and come for thanksgiving for the graces obtained or yet to be obtained. They assure people that their progress has been decided and is written down by God. The delay

in accomplishment of a particular expected miracle is always the result of lack of faith and an invitation to more faith.

The crisis of faith described above poses a greater challenge to evangelisation than what was traditionally called "paganism", though the term is no longer appropriate. While it was easy to identify a "pagan" and invite him/her to believe in God and accept Jesus as his/her personal Lord and Saviour, it is very difficult to convince a contemporary functional religionist or neo-pagan of his/her atheism. Herein lies the mandate and relevance of the project of the New Evangelisation which consists in inviting people, especially Christians, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ. This project obliges Christian communities in Africa to re-think the entire concept of inculturation.

3. The New Evangelisation and Inculturation

The Synod on the New Evangelisation, while calling for the renewal of faith, presented the New Evangelization as "a time of awakening, of new encouragement and new witness that Jesus Christ is the center of our faith and daily life".²⁰ However, the Synod takes on board the idea of inculturation already initiated by *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Africae Munus*: "The New Evangelization calls for particular attention to the *inculturation of the faith* that can transmit the Gospel in its capacity to value what is positive in every culture, at the same time, purifying it from elements that are contrary to the full realization of the person according to the design of God revealed in Christ".²¹ This introduction to inculturation is very important as the concept has often been derailed due to understanding inculturation as the harmonization of faith and culture with the major concern to save African cultures.

The renewal of faith in Africa in the context of the New Evangelisation will have to tackle the cultural problem. The question this time is not whether African cultures have to be respected or how to save African cultures from Western influence, but how to save African cultures from forms of perversion, be they from Africa or from outside, that impose themselves as culture: "It would also help to clarify the vital distinction between culture and cult and to discard those magical elements which cause division and ruin for families and societies" (*Africae Munus*, n. 92). Four points will be treated: critical inculturation, healing and wholeness, theofilience and reconciliation, faith as freedom.

Critical Inculturation

Culture refers to a certain system of values that determine a certain mode of life.²² Vatican II defines culture in the general sense as:

"All those things which go to the refining and developing of man's diverse mental and physical environments. He strives to subdue the earth by his knowledge and his labour; he humanizes social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions; he expresses through his works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of men throughout the ages; he communicates and preserves them to be an aspiration for the progress of many, even all of mankind".²³

Firstly, because culture is dynamic, it undergoes constant transformation. It is like a human being that sheds off certain elements and acquires others in order to survive.

Secondly, culture is related to history, tradition and experience. It is an invisible link that binds together the present generation, their predecessors as well as the generations to come. It is transmitted through story-telling, symbols and rituals at certain moments like birth, death, naming ceremonies, marriage, etc.).

Thirdly, culture is related to ethics, because as *Gaudium et Spes* puts it, it serves the humanization of social life. Culture helps to overcome human instinct and violence. It helps to maintain a certain level of social coexistence.

"It is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture, that is through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. Whenever, therefore, there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately linked together".²⁴

Finally, there is a close historical link between culture and religion. In Africa, it is difficult to distinguish between what is cultural and what is religious. African cultures and African Traditional Religions are interwoven. However, not all practices are cultural and not all cultural practises are religious. One must distinguish between African Traditional Religions and occultist practices that emerge here and there. They are most often manipulated by the new rich, politicians, university lecturers, businessmen and women in order to have more power and dominate society. These practices are pervasive and anti-cultural. The true African Traditional Religion fights against witchcraft and other practices that destroy human relationships in the community.

The New Evangelisation is therefore challenged to embark on a critical inculturation which will involve the re-thinking and transformation of African cultures. Inculturation is a theological word which tries to explain the mystery of the encounter between the Christian message and a particular culture. It follows the paradigm of incarnation, that is, the becoming flesh of the Word of God (*cf.* Jn 1:1-19). The best definition up to now is that given by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Former Superior of the Jesuits:

Inculturation is the incarnation of the Christian life and message in a concrete cultural milieu in such a way that not only is the Christian message expressed through the elements of the culture in question but also this experience becomes a principle of inspiration and at the same time a unifying norm which transforms and recreates this culture, being by consequence at the origin of a new creation.²⁵

The Christianisation of culture obeys the law of continuity and discontinuity. Continuity, in the sense that Christianity develops values and capacities inherent in the culture. Discontinuity, in that Christianity reveals the limits and the violence inherent in the culture. This is evident in the apologetics of the first Christian communities as shown in the Gospels, the *Acts of the Apostles* and the Pauline Letters. The Gospel writers made rigorous efforts to present Jesus as the new Moses as well as a prophet. The Christological titles, *Son of David, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God* are evident examples of inculturation.²⁶ One cannot understand Jesus' baptism in the Jordan without the background of the crossing of the Red Sea by the Hebrews. It is normal that the new Moses should emerge victorious from the waters in solidarity with the whole People of God.

However, one must reflect on the fact that despite the efforts made by the first Christian communities to argue for continuity between Christ's message and the Torah, they were expelled from the synagogues. The confession of Jesus, the Crucified One, as God, was not acceptable to Judaism. The Cross of Jesus Christ, Son of God, is a challenge to and critique of all cultures. Yet the Gospel of the Crucified One shapes cultures as it maintains open the question of the enigma of human life. It is a sign that the Gospel and cultures can never be harmonised. Yet, as *Gaudium et Spes* states, "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22, in W.M. Abbott).

Healing and wholeness

The New Evangelisation has to take the African quest for healing and wholeness seriously. It has to see how the Church will continue Jesus' healing ministry in Africa.

Jesus gave his disciples the power to do exactly what he was doing, namely to set people free from the slavery of evil spirits and from the bonds of sickness. "And preach as you go, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Mt 10:8, RSV). Jesus's disciples performed miracles and exorcism in his name. In the Church's tradition, every Christian has the right to pray for the sick, impose hands on them and comfort them. The Catholic Church has rites and prayers for the sick and for deliverance. They have to be used in accordance with the directives of the Church.²⁷

Healing goes with the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. Priests and ministers should invite people to confess their sins and be reconciled with God and their neighbours. One of the problems of contemporary Africa is the disappearance of shame and the erosion of the sense of sin. Sometimes accusations of sorcery and demoniac possession emerge in the context of a bad neighbourhood and distorted relationships. Healing therefore, involves the transformation of human relations, the search for justice and peace, care for the other and the respect for the rights and dignity of the human person.

There is a need to transform the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation. The African concept and practice of reconciliation integrates the social dimension of sin and reconciliation. This dimension is not well taken care of in the present Christian practice of reconciliation. The Pentecostal churches have rendered it ridiculous by the practice of the public testimony of the sinner who attracts the pity of the assembly by confessing how many people he/she has killed and how God saved him/her by turning his/her life upside down like Saul on the road to Damascus. This confession has no consequence for social life or even for the life of the individual. The Catholic approach is modest, at least it takes sin seriously, the sinner does not mock society but confesses his/her sin in secret. There again, it is difficult to measure the social impact of this process of reconciliation. As *Africae Munus* rightly stated, the practice of individual confession is irreplaceable; however, there is a need to reflect on the connection between the personal and communitarian dimensions of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (cf. n. 156).

Theofilance and reconciliation

Healing and reconciliation in Africa have to be extended to the universal dimension. The violence inherent in humanity, the tendency to *geogamy* and *geolatry* and the consequent forms of discrimination stem from our common woundedness or what the Christian Tradition calls sin. The complicated relationships between Africans and Westerners (Europeans and Americans) are determined by the memory of slavery and colonization. The Slave Trade was a product of sin, the denial of the humanity of the other as an image of God. Despite the primacy of life and relatedness in African cultures and traditions, Africans sold one another. On the other hand, the European who bought the African was coming from a Christian culture, where the biblical revelation was known and practiced. Moreover, the history of modernity has traces of reasoning — Hegel and company — that led to the refusal of the humanity of the African, such that it became easy to reduce him to merchandise in the wake of capitalism. Again, it was this logic that gave the European the excuse to use weapons to overpower the African and reduce him to silence when he resisted. The profound division and wounds caused by this anthropological crisis are yet to be healed²⁸.

This concern was taken up by *Ecclesia in Africa* in the project of *Church as Family of God* and by *Africae Munus* in the project of reconciliation. I propose that the reflection be deepened through the challenge of *theofilance*. I have borrowed the word *theofilance* from Archbishop Anthony Obinna of Owerri.²⁹ He defines *theofilance* as "creation's new and integral sense of kinship with God derived from its relationship with the Son of God who has become the Son of Man". Theofilance is closely related to two other neologisms coined by Archbishop Obinna: *con-filance/con-filiation* and *co-filance/co-filiation*. While *co-filiation* or *co-filality* refers

to the natural relationship of people by birth, *con-filiation* designates our adoption as children of God in Jesus Christ. *Theofilance* includes and transcends both realities; it is humanity's new kinship with God, through His Son Jesus Christ born of the Virgin Daughter Mary, which makes of human beings new sons and daughters of God endowed with the Spirit of Christ".³⁰ Theofilance is also made possible through the action of the Holy Spirit, since it is the Spirit that brings us into the intimate union with the Father and the Son.

How can the idea of divine filiation help to address the issue of reconciliation in Africa and in the world? First, people from different ethnic groups and cultures must recognize themselves as children of the one God. More especially, we must recognize our common wounds, sin and open up to the love of God the Father. Second, we must allow our individual and common memories to be purified by the *memoria passionis et resurrectionis Christi*, that is, the memory of the death and Resurrection of Christ as the event that reconciles us with God and with one another. Third, we must allow the Holy Spirit to guide us by what the Christian spiritual tradition calls docility to the Holy Spirit, which sets us free for dialogue with others and the celebration of our kinship with the environment.

Faith as Freedom

The final aim of pastoral care will be to help Christians to develop an authentic faith that enables them to discover the freedom of the Children of God. The *Letter to the Hebrews* 11:1 defines faith as "the *hypostasis* (substance) of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen". Benedict XVI put this definition at the centre of his Encyclical on hope, *Spe Salvi*.³¹ He identified faith with hope and *vice versa*. The word "substance" here is very important in that it says that there are already in us the things that are hoped for, the whole true life. The thing hoped for is already present in us. It is not yet visible but its presence creates certainty. Faith "gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a 'proof' of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a 'not yet'".³²

Earlier, Hebrews 10:34 reminded the persecuted Christians that it was faith that made them accept the plundering of their property: "For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting". Because the Christians had in them the *substance*, the basis for life, they could accept the destruction of the normal source of security (material possessions). They could give up material basis for life because they had found a substance that endures. Hence they gained a new freedom. Faith is freedom.

Faith, grounded in the event of the death and Resurrection of Christ, establishes us in the freedom of the People of God. Christians have to be encouraged to discern among the different solutions they adopt to address their existential problems, which solution corresponds to the demands of the Christian faith. I remember the story of a catechist. After many years of marriage, he and his wife had no issue. Despite pressure from his family, he refused to go to traditional diviners to find out who was tying up his wife's womb. When eventually the children started arriving, they had four girls. Some family members who were concerned about the perpetuation of the lineage urged the man to take a second wife. Being a Christian and a Catechist for that matter, he refused. Later, by divine providence they got six boys.

Only Christians who have really encountered Christ can confront their cultures in the light of the Gospel. *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 74 makes it clear that the new life in Christ implies a certain rupture with certain cultures and practices. In certain cases, Christians have to accept isolation when they reject certain cultural choices that are against the Gospel. When the life of a person is at stake, Christians must say 'no' to inhumanity, they must uphold the dignity of the human person created in the image of God and saved by Christ. There have been cases where catechumens refused Christian baptism

when they became aware of the demands of the Christian faith. They should learn to appreciate that being a Christian is a grace.

I believe that if Christians really encounter Christ, they will assume the freedom of the children of God. They will be able to take a stand and defend their faith when in difficulty. They will be able to negotiate and dialogue with their families and communities when a particular choice has to be made in life.

¹ This paper was presented at the General Assembly of Africans and Malagasies at the Service of the Generalates in Rome, 25 May 2013.

² Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Motu Proprio, Porta Fidei*, Rome, 11 October 2011, n. 2.

See The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, *Instrumentum Laboris*, Vatican City, 2012; Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin: XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 7-28 October 2012, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith*, Propositions.

⁵ The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, *Instrumentum Laboris*, (4 March 2011), Vatican City, held in 2012, n. 87.

⁶ The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 87.

⁷ See Elochukwu Uzukwu, *God, Spirit and Human Wholeness*, pp. 186-198; Meinrad Hebga, Sorcellerie et prière de délivrance. Réflexion sur une expérience, Paris/Abidjan, Présence Africaine/Inades, 1982.

⁸ See a more complete presentation of the "Relational Notion of the Person", in Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1996, pp. 35-38. Cf. also John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann, 1969, p. 224.

⁹ See a detailed analysis of the principle of duality by Elochukwu Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, Chapter 2, pp. 5-39.

¹⁰ Cf. Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, p. 36.

¹¹ See the account of Filip de Boeck, «Le deuxième monde, et les Enfants-sorciers en République Démocratique du Congo», in *Politique africaine*, n. 80 (2000), pp. 32-57.

¹² Elochukwu Uzukwu, *God, Spirit and Human Wholeness*, p. 190.

¹³ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *God, Spirit and Human Wholeness*, p. 190.

¹⁴ Cf. Elochukwu Uzukwu, « Quand Dieu s'éloigne de nos guerres », in <http://www.catho-theo.net/spip.php?article70>, 2004.

¹⁵ *L'Osservatore Romano*, Wednesday, 11 February 2009.

¹⁶ Vlaicu, Patriciu, "The Consequences of the Enlightenment, from the Perspective of the Orthodox Communities in France", in Matthey, J. (ed.), *International Review of Mission*, (Geneva: The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, 2006, vol. 95), p. 299.

¹⁷ Josephat Oguejiofor, "The Resilient Paradigm: Impact of African World View on African Christianity", in Bede Ukwuije (Ed), *God, Bible and African Traditional Religion*, Enugu, SNAAP Press, 2010, pp. 99-112, p. 110.

¹⁸ See the reflections in my book, *Grace and Contradiction, Letter to an Impatient Friend*, Enugu, SAN Press, 2011, pp. 61-65.

¹⁹ Cf. Anthony Ekwunife, *What Will be, Will be, Why Pray?*, Priceless Press, Lagos, 2007.

²⁰ Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin: XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 7-28 October 2012, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith*, Proposition 5.

²¹ Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin: XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 7-28 October 2012, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith*, Proposition 5.

²² Cf. Claude Geffre, « La rencontre du Christianisme et des cultures », in *Le Supplément*, n. 192, March 1995, pp. 69-91.

²³ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Jean-Yves Calvez, *Pedro Arupe, Ecrits pour évangéliser*, Desclée, Paris, p. 170.

²⁶ See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Doubleday, New York, 2007.

²⁷ Code of Canon Law, Canon 1172, sections 1 and 2 insist that only competent priests can perform exorcism with the permission of the local Ordinary.

²⁸ See Bathélémy Adoukonou, "Poids de l'histoire sur la race noire et Pastorale de l'Eglise d'Afrique", Dakar, SECAM Assembly 2013.

²⁹ Anthony Obinna, "African Cultures and Development: The Rectifying Challenge", in *Cultures and Faith*, Vol. XVIII, n. 4, Rome, 2010, p. 321-333.

³⁰ Anthony Obinna, "African Cultures and Development", p. 328.

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 7, Encyclical Letter, Rome, 30 November 2007.

³² Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 7.

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Fr. Jean Farah

Jean Chrysostome et la mission en Phénicie

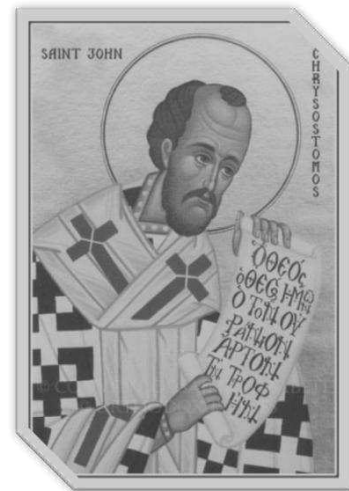
Etude de l'*Epistola* CXXIII

Abstract

Etudiant la *lettre 123* l'auteur puise un ensemble d'éléments qui peuvent introduire à la compréhension de l'esprit missionnaire de Jean Chrysostome et de son œuvre en Phénicie : sa préoccupation et zèle pour le salut des païens. Ce Père de l'Eglise demeure un exemple oriental vivant pour tout évêque engagé dans ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui la « coopération missionnaire entre les Eglises ».

Introduction

Parmi les personnages qui ont contribué au début du Ve s. à l'évangélisation de la Phénicie, on trouve l'évêque Jean Chrysostome. Comment comprendre sa contribution et quelle peut être la figure du missionnaire selon lui ? Jean Chrysostome a-t-il un message à donner à l'Eglise d'aujourd'hui ? Cette approche sera approfondie à partir de l'*Epistola* (Ep.) 123 adressée « Aux prêtres et aux moines de la Phénicie chargés de catéchiser les païens ».¹ Après l'exposé du contexte historique et prosopographique du texte, l'article étudiera la valeur missiologique de la lettre à partir de son contenu pour y découvrir le visage missionnaire de Jean Chrysostome jusqu'à présent méconnu et combien ce Père grec-antiochien et évêque de Constantinople est inspirateur en matière de coopération missionnaire pour ce temps.



Le contexte et les circonstances de la lettre

L'évangélisation de la Phénicie apparaît clairement dans son activité épistolaire : dix « lettres missionnaires » en parlent². Il y a ceux qui soutiennent que l'œuvre missionnaire du Chrysostome n'aurait eu que peu de succès surtout parce qu'il n'en reste aucune trace archéologique.³ Toutefois, l'importance de ces lettres ne réside pas dans le *combien*, mais plutôt dans le *comment* et le *pourquoi* !

Malgré les lois émises contre le paganisme la politique permissive des successeurs de Théodose a fait qu'en Phénicie, surtout dans les campagnes, le paganisme demeura vivant et parfois agressif contre les missionnaires chrétiens.⁴ L'Ep. 123 est écrite juste quand Jean arrive à Cucuse, le lieu de son second exil. Les missionnaires en Phénicie, prêtres et moines, sont en grande difficulté et souffrent des persécutions et de tant de pressions qu'ils en arriveraient à désespérer et à la tentation de délaisser leur mission.⁵ Dans ce contexte Jean écrit sa lettre. En bon rhéteur, il utilise l'art de la langue et des images de la vie quotidienne et des écritures faisant un parallélisme entre la croissance du mal, des tribulations et des difficultés d'un côté, et de l'autre la croissance du zèle et de l'engagement qu'il faut déployer pour en faire front afin de mener à terme la mission.

Personnages cités dans la lettre

Autres que Jean et les destinataires de la lettre mentionnés dans le titre, la lettre mentionne directement ou indirectement d'autres personnes qui ont aussi leur importance pour sa compréhension. D'abord il y a les Phéniciens, le peuple à évangéliser, qui est présent indirectement à travers les expressions de persécutions

et de troubles. Il y a aussi les catéchumènes qui sont mentionnés indirectement dans le titre de la lettre ; tout ce peuple fait partie des gens à ne pas délaissier, les uns à cause de leur maladie et les autres à cause du soutien qu'ils méritent dans les difficultés. Les « imposteurs (...) aux paroles ailées et séductrices »⁶, auxquels les missionnaires étaient tentés de prêter l'oreille et être perdus désignent les adversaires de Jean qui ont été la cause de son exil et qui semaient la zizanie.

Le pieux prêtre Constantius⁷ est le destinataire de la première lettre qui concerne les « affaires de la Phénicie »⁸ envoyée depuis Nicée vers le début de juillet 404. Or Flavien d'Antioche est décédé vers le 20 juin 404, les nouvelles parviennent au début de juillet chez Jean qui est déjà sur le chemin de l'exil, à Nicée où il fait étape. Jean pense que Constantius va succéder à Flavien et il lui écrit des consignes pour résister et poursuivre sa tâche en Phénicie, en Arabie, auprès des Eglises d'Orient et à Chypre⁹. Il s'agit des régions qui dépendent jusqu'au Ve siècle du patriarcat d'Antioche. Cependant, c'est Porphyre qui l'emporte sur Constantius. Quand Jean arrive à Cucuse, ce dernier demeure encore à Antioche et lui rend plusieurs visites, car Cucuse n'est pas très loin d'Antioche. Plus tard, refusant d'entrer en communion avec Porphyre, Constantius doit quitter Antioche vers Chypre.¹⁰

Un autre personnage mentionné dans la lettre est le prêtre Jean (ou Ioannis) auquel Jean Chrysostome demande de rejoindre la mission en Phénicie en compagnie de Gérontius. Il fait partie du monastère de Zeugma ou d'une région proche. C'est au prêtre Nicolas de Zeugma que Jean écrit demandant que ces deux personnes soient envoyées avant l'hiver (*Ep.* 53). En effet, il annonce aux destinataires de la lettre 123 qu'il leur a envoyé en aide le prêtre Jean. C'est le laïc Alphius qui l'a persuadé de partir en lui fournissant de l'argent et il mérite les remerciements de Jean (*Ep.* 21). Vers la fin de l'année 405, le prêtre Jean doit quitter la Phénicie, fuyant les troubles provoqués par les païens contre les missionnaires (*Ep.* 126 à Rufinus, déjà mentionnée). Il vient à Cucuse et, vu qu'il est fidèle à Jean et menacé d'être arrêté, il doit quitter l'Orient pour Rome chargé de diverses lettres destinées aux évêques exilés et au Pape Innocent.¹¹

La figure du missionnaire

La richesse des images et des exemples utilisés dans cette lettre fournit beaucoup d'éléments qui dévoilent la figure du missionnaire tel que Jean la conçoit. Le missionnaire est l'envoyé de l'Eglise à travers l'évêque ou son délégué. Mais il est surtout l'envoyé de Dieu. Ce dernier l'accompagne et, avec Sa grâce, le missionnaire détruit l'impiété. Dieu intervient dans la mission pour mettre fin aux iniquités qui le menacent et Il donne à celle-ci de progresser. Il récompense fortement le missionnaire ; cette récompense croît selon la patience montrée devant la croissance des difficultés supportées. Dans les autres « lettres missionnaires », Dieu récompense aussi ceux qui convainquent les missionnaires, ceux qui les envoient et ceux qui les aident et les financent aussi¹². Enfin, c'est sur l'espérance qui vient de Dieu qu'il faut compter parce que rien n'égale ses bienfaits et la confiance en Lui fonde toute son activité. Cependant, l'accent mis plutôt sur les efforts humains et sur les « actions héroïques » du missionnaire est bien mis en relief. Pour Jean la grâce vient fonder, voire compléter l'effort que l'homme déploie pour contribuer à l'œuvre de Dieu ; c'est pourquoi Jean donne en exemple l'effort des pilotes et des médecins, ainsi que celui des apôtres et de Paul.



Devant les difficultés et les persécutions le missionnaire doit être soit un pilote (κυβερνήτης), soit un médecin (ιατήρ). Un pilote guide et gouverne son bateau déployant tous ses efforts, donnant toute sa vie, afin de le mener à l'autre rive sain et sauf. Le pilote n'a pas le choix

de délaissier son bateau durant les tempêtes ; au contraire, plus la tempête est forte plus il déploie des efforts. Les mêmes efforts doivent être déployés par le médecin devant la fièvre qui augmente et devient violente. Il n'abandonne pas le malade, au contraire il fait tout ce qu'il peut pour vaincre le mal et le sauver.¹³

Ces efforts sont accentués par les mots σπουδή (2x) et σπουδάζω (1x) qui viennent joints au mot προθυμία (3x) ; ces mots portent un champ sémantique assez riche. Le mot σπουδή signifie : zèle, effort, hâte, ardeur, empressement, sérieux ; σπουδάζω : être empressé, s'appliquer, avoir à cœur de, travailler à, s'efforcer de ; de même προθυμία signifie : ardeur, mais aussi, désir ardent, bonne volonté, empressement. Tous ces sens montrent combien le missionnaire doit être non pas seulement éveillé, mais encore animé de l'intérieur par le zèle, l'ardeur et la bonne volonté. Dans les deux exemples Jean invite à compter aussi sur le zèle et l'ardeur « d'autres personnes ». La mission n'est pas une œuvre individuelle. C'est une œuvre d'Eglise où les uns évangélisent par la parole, d'autres par la prière, d'autres par leur soutien moral et économique. C'est pourquoi Jean assure ses missionnaires que rien ne leur manquera : habillement, chaussure, nourriture, tout le nécessaire dont « les frères » ont besoin, pourvu qu'ils s'occupent de leur tâche.

La charité réveille l'ardeur du missionnaire et se fonde sur la confiance en Dieu et en sa providence. Le missionnaire est invité à être aussi vigilant, actif, persistant, ferme, courageux, inébranlable, incorruptible, sans craindre les troubles ni les « complots suscités contre les Eglises », supportant les persécutions avec grande patience ; il l'imagine tel un « rocher » qui brise les flots du mal et les fait évanouir.

Le missionnaire trouve aussi son critère de vie dans les Saintes Ecritures. Jean l'invite à suivre l'exemple des Apôtres et de Paul et à prêcher l'Evangile en toutes circonstances : durant la persécution, sous les fouets, dans la faim et en prison, il est invité à « initier aux mystères » et à administrer les sacrements (baptiser), sans négliger aucun devoir de son apostolat. Le missionnaire est invité aussi à établir une correspondance avec l'autorité. De ce que l'Eglise lui envoie, il use du juste « nécessaire » menant une vie de simplicité : ce nécessaire est son « abondance » ! Il n'y a pas de place pour le luxe dans sa vie.

En face de la récompense Jean parle de « la condamnation et de la peine ». Vers la fin de sa lettre il met en garde brièvement ses missionnaires de ne pas sous-estimer ses conseils, veillant à ne pas s'attacher à ceux qui les séduisent et les trompent et mériter ainsi la condamnation et la peine.¹⁴ Cette mise en garde rapide vient rappeler la grandeur de la responsabilité du missionnaire qui sera aussi la mesure de son jugement. Toutefois, c'est la liberté qui entre en jeu. Cette liberté est accompagnée par la charité et l'affection de celui qui les aime et qui leur écrit.

L'œuvre du missionnaire

Il est intéressant de voir comment Jean esquisse l'œuvre missionnaire : c'est un *navire* que les missionnaires, comme les pilotes, ne doivent pas abandonner ; c'est une cure par laquelle les missionnaires, comme les médecins, cherchent à déraciner le mal ; c'est un *édifice splendide* construit par les missionnaires avec tant de soins et de fatigues, qu'ils doivent maintenir debout ; c'est un *champ* qu'on ne doit pas cesser de cultiver. Cette œuvre est construite par l'entreprise de travaux, le support des fatigues, l'accomplissement d'actions héroïques, et elle a des résultats : l'impiété est détruite. Jean rappelle tout cela aux missionnaires pour qu'ils reprennent courage et continuent cette œuvre. Cette dernière requiert le zèle, l'ardeur, tout l'engagement, voire toute la vie du missionnaire. Elle doit être maintenue et menée jusqu'au fond, rien ne doit lui manquer pour qu'elle puisse continuer et prospérer jusqu'au salut des païens. Pour Jean cette œuvre missionnaire est une priorité. C'est pourquoi il refuse de vivre lui-même dans

l'abondance de biens matériels, refusant l'argent et les cadeaux qu'il envoie aux missionnaires et à leurs œuvres.¹⁵

La figure de « l'évêque missionnaire »

On peut se demander si Jean agit en évêque de Constantinople,¹⁶ et comment il s'ingère alors dans les affaires d'une région qui dépend du patriarcat d'Antioche ? Réitère-t-il son intervention à Ephèse, agissant avec autorité, comme ayant la juridiction pour le faire ? On sait que cette intervention à Ephèse a servi de prétexte et de grief à ses adversaires, ce qui provoqua son exil. Pourquoi s'intéressait-il encore à cette mission ?

E. Martin, soutient que Jean voulait aider Porphyre, l'évêque de Gaza, à détruire le temple de Marnas dans sa ville, et que la Phénicie attira son attention.¹⁷ C'est fort possible, mais il ne faut pas oublier que l'évêque Jean est d'origine antiochienne, un prêtre antiochien de sang et de culture, et qu'il a passé au moins quarante huit ans de sa vie à Antioche et ses alentours. Il n'a vécu hors de sa ville natale que six ans environ, à la capitale, et trois ans, en exil. Cela permet de supposer que Jean aurait été déjà au courant de premières initiatives de mission développées par des moines antiochiens dans les lieux encore païens. Par ailleurs sa correspondance montre une relation de connaissance, et même d'amitié parfois, avec les évêques de la Phénicie et de la Palestine.¹⁸ Les lettres de la mission chez lui parlent de moines et de prêtres antiochiens, surtout de Zeugma ou d'Apamée. Par conséquent, Jean écrivait et finançait la mission de moines et prêtres missionnaires qui dépendaient d'une autre Eglise particulière et sur lesquels il n'avait aucune juridiction mais de laquelle, en quelque sorte, il faisait encore partie.

C'est ainsi que son langage le manifeste dans la lettre 123 : l'évêque de Constantinople agit surtout en antiochien avec une autorité fraternelle et morale, donnant des conseils (βουλή et ses dérivés : 3x) et conjurant (παρακαλῶ : 5x ; δέησιν : 1x). Le seul ordre qu'il donne (ἐκέλευσα) est à ceux sur lesquels il a encore juridiction pour envoyer des aides en mission, afin que rien de nécessaire ne manque aux « frères ». Il connaît bien ses limites et s'adresse à la liberté de ses destinataires, il n'impose rien (même s'il le fait avec insistance). « L'exhortation par la parole, l'encouragement par les conseils » et la subvention aux besoins des missionnaires sont pour lui un *devoir*.

Ainsi Jean peut être proposé comme évêque modèle pour la coopération missionnaire inter-ecclésiale. Brûlant de zèle pour la mission *ad gentes*, veillant à ses besoins et à ceux de ses ouvriers, il est enthousiasmé pour connaître leurs nouvelles et celles du progrès de l'évangélisation ; maintes fois, il les invite à lui écrire¹⁹. Il préfère orienter vers les missionnaires les dons qui lui sont envoyés pour ses propres besoins, pourvu qu'ils s'acquittent de leurs tâches et que l'Evangile guérisse tous les païens et diminue l'impiété : l'évangélisation passe avant ses besoins personnels. Il va même au-delà et sensibilise des laïcs aisés à coopérer, à financer les missions et à accueillir des missionnaires de retour.²⁰ Les subventions envoyées en Phénicie contribuaient par ailleurs à ce qu'on a nommé la « conquête de l'espace »²¹ par la construction des églises, mentionnée implicitement dans le texte. Ce n'est pas par hasard que l'adresse de cette lettre est justement à ceux qui *catéchisent les païens*. Dans d'autres lettres, nous voyons Jean travailler pour le recrutement de missionnaires,²² encourager les responsables de monastères à en envoyer, ou les exhorter à continuer à le faire,²³ ou bien à s'occuper du retour des missionnaires,²⁴ etc. Presque dans toutes ses lettres concernant la mission il presse ses destinataires à œuvrer et à agir sans retard. La mission ne peut pas attendre, le temps presse.

Conclusion

Aujourd'hui encore la mission presse et le magistère de l'Eglise ne cesse de le rappeler. La figure missionnaire de Jean Chrysostome, tel que nous le révèle l'*Ep.* 123, est de toute actualité. Le christianisme se trouve dans des situations assez semblables à celle de la Phénicie d'alors; il est la religion la plus persécutée en ce monde avec le nombre annuel de martyrs le plus élevé parmi toutes les religions ! Troubles, infamies, calomnies, impiétés et persécutions sont le pain quotidien des chrétiens qui vivent dans certaines régions de la planète. Nous avons besoin encore aujourd'hui d'un clergé qui, à l'exemple de Jean, puisse agir avec zèle et coopère à la mission de l'Eglise universelle. Jean n'a pas manqué à sa mission *ad intra*, et il a même œuvré à Constantinople à évangéliser les Goths, mais il s'agit aussi d'envoyer *ad extra* des personnes ou, au moins, de contribuer à leur envoi ou à leurs missions. Jean Chrysostome nous a ouvert la liste d'actions à entreprendre : sensibilisation et recrutement de vocations missionnaires ; soutien moral et spirituel aux missionnaires par la correspondance et par la prière ; soutien financier aux missionnaires et aux missions ; il appelle et incite aussi d'autres personnes à le faire motivées par la mission ; soutien à travers des personnes envoyées en vue d'aider et d'encourager les missionnaires. Il veille à tous les détails et au progrès de ces missions et de leurs besoins sans ménager ses efforts ; il veut tout cela afin que le nom du Seigneur Jésus et son amour soient connus sur toute la terre. L'activité missionnaire de Jean demeura longtemps orpheline parmi le clergé gréco-byzantin²⁵ ; en Orient, c'est le clergé antiochien qui maintiendra plus longtemps de telles activités.²⁶ C'est avec un cœur d'antiochien que notre saint affronte ces aventures. C'est avec le même cœur que sa lettre doit être lue aujourd'hui par le clergé et surtout les évêques qui se réclament de l'hérédité d'Antioche ; elle leur est une invitation à le prendre comme modèle, à ne pas oublier leur patrimoine missionnaire. Ce Père de l'Eglise Orientale est aussi à consulter en matière de mission.

Le texte de la lettre :

Aux prêtres et aux moines de la Phénicie chargés de catéchiser les païens²⁷

Les pilotes, lorsqu'ils voient la mer agitée et furieuse, lorsque la tempête et l'ouragan sont déchaînés, non-seulement n'abandonnent pas le navire, mais déploient un plus grand zèle, une plus grande ardeur, veillant eux-mêmes et excitant les autres. Les médecins, lorsqu'ils sont en présence d'une fièvre qui augmente et devient violente n'abandonnent pas le malade, mais ont recours à tous les moyens, déployant leur zèle et mettant en œuvre celui des autres personnes pour vaincre le mal. Pourquoi ai-je rapporté ces exemples ? Afin que personne d'entre vous ne se laisse entraîner par les troubles présents à quitter la Phénicie, et à s'en éloigner, afin que plus les difficultés sont grandes, plus les flots sont irrités et plus vive est l'agitation, plus aussi vous demeuriez vigilants, actifs, animés par le zèle, déployant une ardeur toute nouvelle, en sorte que votre édifice splendide ne soit pas renversé, que tant de fatigues ne restent point vaines, que les soins donnés à votre champ ne soient pas perdus. Dieu est assez puissant pour mettre fin à ces agitations et assez riche pour vous accorder la récompense. Cette récompense ne pouvait être aussi brillante lorsque tout s'accomplissait avec facilité, qu'elle le sera maintenant, alors que le tumulte et la confusion sont partout et que le nombre de ceux qui donnent le scandale est grand. Considérez donc les travaux que vous avez entrepris, les fatigues que vous avez supportées, les actions héroïques que vous avez accomplies, et l'impiété que, par la grâce de Dieu, vous avez en

partie détruite, et les affaires de la Phénicie entrant dans une voie meilleure, et la récompense plus grande, et le salaire plus riche qui vous attendent, et Dieu qui mettra fin bientôt à tant d'iniquités, et qui vous réserve le prix de la patience, et, pour toutes ces raisons, demeurez et persistez dans votre œuvre.

Car, rien ne doit vous manquer présentement; j'ai donné l'ordre de vous fournir avec la même abondance, avec la même libéralité, soit les vêtements, soit les chaussures, soit ce qui est nécessaire à la nourriture des frères. Or, si nous qui sommes dans une telle affliction et de si graves embarras, habitant ce désert de Cucuse, nous avons un si grand souci de votre œuvre, à plus forte raison faut-il que vous-mêmes, jouissant d'une grande abondance, je parle de celle des choses nécessaires, vous fassiez tout ce qui est en votre pouvoir. Je vous en conjure, que personne ne puisse vous inspirer de crainte. D'ailleurs, les espérances sont présentement meilleures, comme vous le verrez par les lettres que nous envoie le seigneur Constantin, prêtre très-pieux. Demeurez, et fussent les obstacles être comptés par milliers, vous les surmonterez tous. Car, il n'est rien de plus fort que la patience. Elle ressemble à un rocher, de même que les troubles et les complots suscités contre les Eglises, ressemblent aux flots qui se précipitent contre le rocher et qui s'évanouissent dans leur propre écume. Remettez-vous devant les yeux tout ce que les bienheureux apôtres ont souffert de la part de leurs proches et de celle des étrangers, et comment ils ont passé le temps de leurs prédications au milieu des épreuves, des dangers, des embûches, dans les prisons, dans les liens, dans l'exil, en butte à la faim, à la nudité, aux fouets. Et cependant, même dans la prison, ils ne négligeaient pas la charge qui leur était confiée; mais le bienheureux Paul, habitant la prison, accablé par le fouet et versant son sang, retenu dans les entraves, endurant tant de maux, initiait aux mystères du fond de son cachot, baptisait son gardien et ne négligeait aucun devoir de son apostolat. Repassant ces choses dans votre esprit, selon que j'exhorte votre charité, tenez-vous fermes, inébranlables, incorruptibles, mettant votre espérance en Dieu et en son secours que rien ne peut égaler; enfin, ayez soin de nous écrire sur toutes ces choses. Nous vous avons envoyé le très-pieux prêtre Jean, afin qu'il raffermisse vos esprits et que vous ne vous laissiez abattre par quoi que ce soit. J'ai fait moi-même ce que je devais, vous exhortant par mes paroles, vous relevant par mes conseils, fournissant abondamment à vos besoins pour que rien ne vous fasse défaut. Que si vous refusez mes conseils, si vous vous attachez à ceux qui vous séduisent et qui vous excitent contre nous, la faute n'en est pas à moi. Vous savez sur qui retombera la condamnation et la peine. Qu'il n'en soit pas ainsi, je vous en prie, accueillez les conseils d'un homme qui vous aime beaucoup. Dès que vous aurez besoin de quelque chose, écrivez-moi, ou si vous voulez, députez-moi quelqu'un et vous ne manquerez de rien ».

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Notes

¹ « ΠΚΓ'. Πρὸς τοὺς ἐν Φοινικῇ πρεσβυτέρους καὶ μοράζοντας, τοὺς κατηχούντας τοὺς Ἕλληνας. », (in JOANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS, Του εν Αγίοις Πατρός Ημών Ιωάννου Του Χρυσοστόμου, Τα Ευρισκομενα Παντα - S.P.N. Joannis Chrysostomi, Opera Omnia Quæ exstant, vel quæ ejus nomine circumferuntur, Tomus Tertii, Series Græcæ Prior T LII, Migne 1862, 676-678.). Une comparaison synoptique faite avec les dernières traductions des textes en français et en italien ont permis de mener à terme cette étude : Pour les textes français cf. JEAN CHRYSOSTOME, «Lettres de Saint Jean Chrysostome», in M. JEANNIN (ed.), Saint Jean Chrysostome. Œuvres Complètes. Traduites pour la première fois en Français sous la direction de M. Jeannin, IV, Sœur-Charruey, Arras 1887, 488-489; JEAN CHRYSOSTOME, Œuvres complètes de S. Jean Chrysostome, ed. J. F. BAREILLE,, III, Vivès, Paris 1867, 548-549. Pour le texte en italien cf. GIOVANNI CRISOSTOMO, Dall'esilio : lettere, ed. R. CALLEGARI,, Già e non ancora 5, Jaca Book, Milano 1976, 235-237. Quant à l'étude scientifique qui a étudié plus profondément les personnages et les dates des lettres cf. R. DELMAIRE, «Les "lettres d'exil" de Jean Chrysostome. Étude de chronologie et de prosopographie», Recherche augustinienne et patristique 25 (1991), 71-180.

² Il s'agit des lettres qui concernent la mission, surtout en Phénicie, et surnommées dans cet article « lettres missionnaires ». Placées selon leur ordre chronologique ce sont : Epistola (Ep.) 221 à Constantius (destination : Antioche, 4 juillet 404) ; Ep. 123 aux prêtres et aux moines de la Phénicie, chargés de catéchiser les païens (destination : Phénicie, fin août/début sept. 404) ; Ep. 53 au prêtre Nicolas (destination : Zeugma, mi-sept. 404) ; Ep. 54 au Prêtre Gerontius (destination : Zeugma, mi-sept. 404) ; Ep. 28 au prêtre Basilus (destination : Syrie ou Phénicie, Automne 404) ; Ep. 21 à Alphius (destination : Antioche, hiver 404/405) ; Ep. 55 aux prêtres Symeon et Mares, et aux moines d'Apamée (destination : Apamée, hiver 404/405) ; Ep. 51 à Diogène (destination : Syrie[?], été 405) ; Ep. 126 à Rufinus (destination : lieu indéterminé, été/automne 405) ; Ep. 69 au prêtre Nicolas (destination : Zeugma, printemps 406). cf. R. DELMAIRE, «Les "lettres d'exil" de Jean Chrysostome», 176-180. Désormais, la sigle « Ep. » désigne la parole latine « Epistola » ou « Epistolae » et les lettres se réfèrent au texte grec in PG 52, 543-742.

³ Cf. Y. SADER, Crosses and Symbols in ancient Christian art of Lebanon, Dar Sader Publishers, Beirut 2007, 243-244.

⁴ Cf. E. MARTIN, Saint Jean Chrysostome. Ses œuvres et son siècle, Tome II, Félix Seguin, Montpellier 1860, 289.

⁵ Cf. Ep. 53 et 126

⁶ C'est selon la traduction de J.F. Bareille. M. Jeannin traduit « si vous vous attachez à ceux qui vous séduisent et qui vous excitent contre nous ». R. Callegari traduit par « ... se badate invece a chi vi vuole ingannare e aizzare ».

⁷ « τον εὐλαβεστάτον πρεσβυτερον » : εὐλαβεστάτος (son équivalent latin *reverentissimus*) est un titre employé par Jean seulement au membre du clergé. Cf. R. DELMAIRE, «Les "lettres d'exil" de Jean Chrysostome», 95.

⁸ « τα πράγματα της Φινίκης » *pragmatas* désigne l'occupation ou l'affaire. C'est ainsi que Jean désigne la mission en Phénicie.

⁹ Cf. Ep. 221.

¹⁰ R. DELMAIRE, «Les "lettres d'exil" de Jean Chrysostome», 120-121.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 136.

¹² Voir surtout *Ep.* 221, 54, 21, 55 et 51.

¹³ Les deux figures du pilote et du médecin viennent souvent ensemble chez Jean. Il les a utilisées aussi au singulier pour deux autres personnes qui s'occupent de la mission : Constantius (*Ep.* 221) lettre écrite peu de temps auparavant ou en même temps que celle-ci. Il les utilise aussi pour le Prêtre Nicolas de Zeugma (*Ep.* 53) « Ainsi » – lui dit-il – « vous avez rempli le devoir d'un bon pilote et d'un bon médecin » parce qu'il n'a pas permis aux missionnaires qu'il avait envoyés en Phénicie de quitter leur mission à cause des tribulations.

¹⁴ ἡ καταγνωσις ... καὶ ἡ ζημία.

¹⁵ Voir les lettres à Diogène. les *Ep.* 50 et 51. Voir aussi J.-B. BERGIER, *Histoire de S. Jean Chrysostome. Archevêque de Constantinople, Docteur de l'Eglise. Sa vie, ses œuvres, son siècle, influence de son génie*, Ambroise Bray, Paris 1856, 438.

¹⁶ Au début de son exil, Jean croyait encore qu'il retournerait à son siège surtout qu'il espérait que le Pape Honorius allait pouvoir réunir un concile en sa faveur, ce qui n'a pas eu lieu de son vivant. Sa réhabilitation n'aura lieu qu'après sa mort et graduellement.

¹⁷ E. MARTIN, *Saint Jean Chrysostome. Ses œuvres et son siècle*, 290–292.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ep.* 204, 55–56, 85–90, 229–232 et 28.

¹⁹ Dans toutes ses lettres missionnaires il demande de lui écrire. Il demande à Rufinus de lui écrire de chaque étape de son voyage : « accordez-moi cette inestimable faveur [dit-il] : écrivez-moi lettre sur lettre, et avant de partir, et durant votre voyage : instruisez-moi exactement de tout ».

²⁰ Cf. *Ep.* 21 et 175.

²¹ Cf. *Ep.* 126 à Rufinus. Jean y parle de la construction des églises dont le toit doit être terminé avant l'hiver. Sur la conquête de l'espace cf. M.-Y. PERRIN, «Le nouveau style missionnaire: la conquête de l'espace et du temps», in J.-M. MAYEUR et al. (edd.), *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours. Tome 2, Naissance d'une chrétienté (250-430)*, Desclée, Paris 1995, 585–621, surtout les pp. 605–606.

²² Cf. *Ep.* 221.

²³ Cf. *Ep.* 53 et 55.

²⁴ Il s'occupe du retour du prêtre Jean qu'il a envoyé à Rome, le recommandant aux évêques Cyriaque, Démétrius, Palladius et Eulysius, cf. *Ep.* 148 ; ainsi de même pour le prêtre Helpidius qui avait évangélisé l'Amanus et qu'il recommande à Agapetus cf. *Ep.* 175).

²⁵ Cf. L. MEYER, *Saint Jean Chrysostome. Maître de perfection chrétienne*, Etude de Théologie Historique, Beauchesne, Paris 1934, 264–265.

²⁶ P. MARAVAL, «Le monachisme oriental», in J.-M. MAYEUR et al. (edd.), *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours. Tome 2, Naissance d'une chrétienté (250-430)*, Desclée, Paris 1995, 719–745, surtout les pp. 734 et 745. Sur le mouvement monastique missionnaire syrien voir H. BOULOS, *الموارنة والروحانية السريانية. دراسات تاريخية* (Les Maronites et la spiritualité syriaque. Etudes historiques), La Librairie Pauliste, Jounieh 2011.

²⁷ Pour le texte de la lettre nous utilisons la version française de M. Jeannin cf. JEAN CHRYSOSTOME, «Lettres de Saint Jean Chrysostome», 488–489. Quant au titre, nous avons préféré utiliser la version française de J.F. Bareille comme plus haut parce qu'elle connote un sens plus large. Le titre en grec est : Πρὸς τοὺς ἐν Φοινίκη πρεσβυτέρους καὶ μονάζοντας, τοὺς κατηχουντας τοὺς Ἕλληνας. M. Jeannin traduit ainsi « Aux prêtres et aux moines de la Phénicie, chargés de l'instruction des catéchumènes » ce qui est aussi juste. Mais il s'agit de Ἕλληνας qui veut dire « Païens, gentils ». Le contexte de la lettre et des autres lettres qui parlent de la mission en Phénicie supposent que le sens de τοὺς κατηχουντας τοὺς Ἕλληνας soit plus large qu'une instruction des seuls catéchumènes.

Réf. : Père Jean Farah est étudiant à l'Université Pontificale Urbaine, et il a bien voulu nous faire parvenir, par courrier électronique, son texte qui entre dans le cadre de ses recherches.

Jacob Kavunkal, SVD
Interpreting Mission Today and into the Future
- The Impact of Culture -

I bow my head in acknowledgement and gratitude to all the Irish missionaries, both men and women, for the immense good they have done in different parts of the world, more so, in Asia. Though they have not contributed much to the gene pool of Asia as they did elsewhere, their role in the spread of the faith and for the betterment of the quality of life in Asia through their initiatives in education, health care, as well as through the many welfare services for mitigating suffering and exclusion, is remarkable.

Since this paper is presented in the context of the conference on Mission and Development, jointly organized by Misesan Cara, Irish Missionary Union and Kimmage Development Studies Centre, I will speak about Mission Today and Tomorrow, and integrate the biblical basis of holistic mission development in it so that the paper may serve as background material for the Conference.

Prophetic Contemplation

Tom Lynch, SVD, an Irish missionary to India, was the Founder and inmate of an Indian Ashram for over 40 years. By nature he had a contemplative bent of mind that he inherited from the Celtic spirit, but what made him unique was his contemplativeness and mysticism, characteristic of the Indian way of mission and witnessing.

Mission in Asia must take into account the rich and varied forms of prayer and mysticism enshrined in the Asian philosophical and theological systems. Contemplation and mysticism naturally appeal to the masses in India. The recent *Mahakumbhamela* (Religious gathering), at the auspicious confluence of three rivers at Prayag, Allahabad, India, that attracted over 300 million people from all over India, led by Sannyasis and spiritual people, was an example of the impact that genuine spirituality can have on the Indian mind even if mixed with popular devotion and cultic elements. What should be noted is that Fr. Tom encountered God not in a beautifully decorated Western chapel but in the vast expanse of the Dhar Desert in Madhya Pradesh, India, where his Ashram was situated. Fr. Tom reminds me of Jesus himself who spent forty days in the wilderness under a serene sky and in solitude. There, in the desert's enormously wide, flat, dry terrain covered with low scrub, Jesus experienced the immediacy of God as his intimate parent – *Abba* — who anointed him at the moment of his baptism for his messianic mission.



The desert has attracted hermits, monks and saints. Why? Because in the desert you experience the immediacy of God in silence, in timelessness. It is a place of spiritual power where the Australian Aboriginal people and many others have experienced the divine presence for over 50,000 years.

In our modern culture in suburban Dublin God is to be experienced and listened to, not as the patriarchal figure Michael Angelo

depicted, but as the awesome, omnipresent, encompassing God who is so near with his constant presence. We have to be open to this God, whose immense Mystery we can never grasp fully, nor his ways. The best we can say is 'netti-netti', not this not that, with the Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic approach, except for what we have experienced in Jesus Christ. That experience, as we shall see later, calls for mission, not for denying the God-experience of others.

Probably fractal geometry can teach us more about God than St. Patrick's shamrock, the trefoil leaf symbolising the Holy Trinity, and a national emblem of Ireland. God is beyond the range of human concepts and categories, "beyond all being and knowledge" (St. Augustine). Fractals, the mathematical shapes discovered by Benoit Mandelbrot, enable us to understand the infinite complexity of nature. Each natural object has a shape, yet different from that of others. This is only a remote comparison to the divine Being. This in turn must make us infinitely humble, and open – *mutational people* – i.e., people capable of making the transition to a new world of the future, rather than arrogantly maintaining that only our understanding of God is the right one and that it is the exhaustive understanding of God!

At this point I may point out that the North African Church of the early centuries, all too busy with theological obsessions, got decimated, whereas the St. Thomas Christians of India, who were the least involved in doctrinal issues, focusing only on worship and life, survived and continue to flourish down to our own day. We must collaborate in the shared re-appropriation of the divine in the weakness of wonder and the sense of Mystery that made Moses cry out before the burning bush: "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt!" (Ex 3:3). We must seek to recognize the divine as it is manifested in our secular society where more and more people tend to describe themselves as "nones".

Realizing that "all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:3), mission today has to be open to all religious traditions and cultures. Forms of exclusivism and even the so-called preparation and fulfillment theory, need to be fine-tuned. I may also add that some mission theologians refer to the "ray of truth" present in other religions or that they contain a certain influence of the "Spirit of God", or the "Word of God", and that some sort of paternalism is hidden in these approaches. We must admit openly that all genuine religious traditions are part of the divine plan, even if they are also subject to human selfishness. Even Christianity is not free from it, but that does not minimize the significance of Christian service, but always in the spirit of partnership.

The Language of Salvation

As all other missionaries, the Irish missionaries went out to save, if not the "heathens", at least the non-Christians. Fr. Pete Melony, SVD, had a great love for the people of India and he loved them so much that he had no difficulty in sharing their food and drink, to the extent of damaging his health, which compelled him to return to Ireland. However, there is no doubt that he came to India, a mission country, to save the souls of as many people as possible. The Second Vatican Council expressed this motive by saying: "Everyone, therefore, ought to be converted to Christ, who is known through the preaching of the Church, and they ought, by baptism, to become incorporated into Him, and into the Church which is his body" (AG, n. 7). The Church was necessary for salvation and through baptism, as though through a door, all must enter this community of the saved.

Indeed the Irish missionaries as successors of the Hiberno-Scottish mission led by the great Columcille, Founder of the Iona monastery in 563, which Columbanus

continued with his twelve companions giving rise to Celtic Christianity, never had any doubt about their motive.

However, we have to be aware that the *ad gentes* theology of mission was not free from its colonial precedents and that the Second Vatican Council's mission theology is contained in other documents as well. Today we have to use simpler language that is more familiar and less objectionable to the people, and in conformity with the Bible.

Jesus explained his mission as Good News to the poor, and spelt it out in terms of sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and as **the** acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19). It was a celebration of life, to have it to the full, already now and transform the world so that it sustain life in its fullness, for individuals, for societies and for creation. In fact Jesus made that the defining characteristic of his mission. When the disciples of John the Baptist approached him enquiring if he were indeed the Messiah, Jesus replied to them using the same language (Lk 7:20-23, Mt 11:4-6). That theme is reflected again in the Last Judgment scene as seen in Matthew 25:31-46.

The first point to notice is that Jesus uses the Jubilee language of the Old Testament. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2 directly, a text that was part of the Synagogue Reading for the Feast of Jubilee in Old Testament times. By quoting this very passage Jesus claims that the Jubilee, the acceptable year of the Lord, has come in him. The Jubilee was good news to the poor insofar as the main elements of Jubilee were the return of land as well as the freeing of slaves and giving them a sufficient means of livelihood. The poor benefitted from the arrival of the Jubilee. It was a divine revolution to retrieve the original equality and fraternity, which the Israelites enjoyed when all had their own fig trees and vineyard (I Kgs 4:25), a symbolic expression of social and economic well-being. Due to human weakness, this ideal situation could be destroyed. However, God did not want such an unnatural situation to continue endlessly and hence, we have the Jubilee prescription.

In Jesus' time, the poor, the blind, the lame and the bonded eked out a dehumanized existence insofar as they had to beg for their livelihood — they were not considered to be fully human. By healing them and restoring to them their ability to fend for themselves, Jesus not only enhanced their life but also their human dignity. Jesus' respect for human dignity is manifested also in the oft-repeated table fellowship with the excluded of society. In fact even the Last Supper has to be seen in the light of these table fellowships. In his Letter St. Paul hinted that these gatherings had degenerated (I Cor 11:20 ff). It is sad that even today this aspect of the Eucharist is not perceived by many. In the light of the ministry of Jesus we have to re-write our missionary purpose: as promoting full human life for all on earth with all its glory and dignity. By doing this we would include not only ecology but also the transcendental dimension of human life that is integral to the dignity and rights of each human person.



Even the all-too familiar Sabbath disputes in the Gospels, a major contributive reason for Jesus' arrest and killing (Mk 3:6), were, in fact, a relativizing of the Divine in terms of the human person. For the Jews, the Sabbath rules could not be broken

since they were given by God, the Absolute. But Jesus' standard attitude is that the Sabbath is made for human beings, for their well-being. The same respect for people is manifested in Jesus' approach to the many purity/pollution laws as well. Restoring the dignity of the human person was his mission manifesto (Lk 4:18-19); it was his very Messianic identity (Lk 7:22-23). Elsewhere he summarized the Law and the Prophets in terms of the respectful treatment of neighbour: "So, whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 7:12).

In the context of the Old Testament expectations Jesus spoke of the divine Reign, the Kingdom of God as the core of his message (Mk 1:14; Mt 4:17; Lk 4:43). Though Israel was restored to its own land after the Exile in Babylonia, it continued to experience suffering under foreign overlords, which was interpreted as punishment for Israel's sins. Hence the promise of forgiveness the exilic Prophets spoke of, like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, continued to fuel the hopes of Israel, making the post-Exile Prophets speak of the liberation still to be completed.ⁱ In describing this liberation they employed the language of the return from exile: the new exodus, when God would rule as the absolute ruler over Israel. Jesus begins his ministry claiming that that rule has dawned with his ministry. Resurrection, in Mark's Gospel, as in the other Gospels and the Acts, is the sign that God has vindicated Jesus and his deeds and words, and thereby, the coming of the divine Reign through him. Jesus' Resurrection affirms that God's Kingdom has been inaugurated on earth as it is in heaven.ⁱⁱ What happened in Jesus should be repeated through the disciples, for the world.

What should be noted is that the coming of the divine Reign in and through Jesus is not a set of truths or a new religion, but the practice of radical love towards others. It is the summit and climax of Israel's history, its decisive moment.ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus' entire ministry is a systematic unfolding of the divine Reign, though radically different from the prevailing expectations. He showed through his ministry how the Kingdom would look and how his followers could associate themselves with him in this work, and reverse the situation of those who are poor, who mourn, who hunger, who are voiceless by their compassionate and selfless service (Mt 5:3-11).^{iv} Through the mission of his disciples the poor of all times can experience the coming of the Kingdom.

Frequently scriptural commentators present the Johannine Gospel as a spiritual one in contrast to the Synoptic Gospels. However, even the fourth Gospel is to be understood from the perspective of radical love and righteousness towards the poor. The key text is John 3:16: "God so loved the world ... whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life". This verse is to be read along with the following verses, more so vs. 20:

"For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his/her deeds should be exposed. But he/she who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his/her deeds have been wrought in God".

Eternal life results from an engagement with the world choosing the deeds of light over those of evil. It is a question of how one responds to people and structures that are dark, evil and bring death to the world.

Mission Today

To begin with, to be a Christian is to answer a call to follow Jesus in his mission. The Second Vatican placed mission at the core of the Church by saying that it is missionary by its very nature (*Ad Gentes*, n. 2; *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 2-5). The theme of mission shines through every conciliar document. Though there is always the need

for intercultural and “professional” missionaries to have communities of disciples everywhere culturally and geographically, every Christian is called to share in the mission of reaching out to neighbour with radical love and service and thus sacramentalising the love of God made present in Jesus Christ. Insofar as the very Incarnation and ministry of Jesus was the affirmation of the human person, Christianity is a human centred religion. While all religions believe in God, Christianity tells us that the way to God is through one’s neighbour.

Contrary to the common assumption of a God who sends out, what we have in the Bible is a God who is constantly reaching out to mankind. Though we have instances of God calling and sending, these all manifest God’s concern: “I have seen the affliction of my people, ... and have heard their cry” (Ex 3:7). The biblical narratives of the Creation, the Covenants, the sending of Prophets and of God’s Word Incarnate, spell out this divine-self reaching out, “God with us” (Mt 1:23). Jesus, by his constant reaching out to the poor, to the afflicted, to the marginalized, manifests God and he can say ultimately: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 12:45; 14:9). Thus, God **is** mission, himself reaching out. Mission is the ecstasy of God! Vatican II expressed this in terms of God being “fountain-like love” (AG, n. 2).

Mission is a **life-centred ministry** in our changing cultural context, teeming with death and such death-dealing forces, as violence, war, or utter selfishness, especially in Asia. Despite all the talk of development and progress, impressive as it is, more than 40% of Asians are excluded from a life-style that is consonant with human dignity: whether it is a question of the denial of genuine freedom, of equal opportunities in decision-making, of resources for all (not only the resources of the earth, but also other resources like health-care, education, housing, and others), or of human rights as defined by the United Nations. God’s concern for the wholeness of life for all that was manifested in Jesus Christ, has to be continued through the work of the community of his disciples. How it is expressed, the ways in which we seek to obtain and nourish it will, naturally, depend on the context.

Such a life-centred service will lead to the **transformation of civil society** with the emphasis on justice and the practice of human rights. As the WCC’s Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism put it: “The Church is the gift of God to the world for its transformation towards the Kingdom of God”.^v The Church carefully maintains the openness to the world that *Gaudium et Spes* ushered in. The Church is for the sake of the world, to be at its service, so that the world may become a campus of God’s Reign. Authors like Bryant L. Myers speak of Transformational development,^{vi} through material, social, psychological and spiritual change in the whole of human life.

The significance of mission to civil society can be understood only when we realize that the purpose of mission is the transformation of the world and not the growth of the Church or the safeguard of its interests. The Church is called to be salt, light and leaven to the world. The Kingdom movement is at the service of society at large. Nothing is outside the radius of the Kingdom transformation. Even as Jesus’ mission was not a self-proclamation or the expansion of his own interests, mission today is not primarily a question of the growth of the Church or its well-being, but that of God’s interest and God’s Reign for the world. This idea at the root of Vatican II’s description of the Church: “is the Church’s task of bringing all people to full union with Christ. The Church is the sacrament of intimate union with God and the unity of all humankind” (LG, n. 1). The Church is important, not for its own sake, but for the sake of God’s reaching out to the world.

For this we will have to foster what David J. Kettle termed a “garden spirituality”,^{vii} as opposed to a spirit that spontaneously multiplies in the world.

Formerly we used to speak about “the frontier” missionaries. In today’s context, the frontier is not so much the Christian faith as opposed to other religions, as the ideas and values that are dissonant with the Kingdom values. This implies a prophetic denunciation of all that truncates life, marginalizes and exploits others. Our theological discussions and reflections cannot be confined to theological schools and universities but must influence the decision-making bodies in public life, such as City Councils and board rooms.

The fundamental malaise of our culture, also in Asia, is the lack of hope, while the basic call of the Gospel is **a call to hope**. This has to be at the root of any reflection on mission today and tomorrow. Pope Benedict XVI in his Encyclical *Spe Salvi* highlighted hope as the critical virtue of Christian life and suggested that “a distinguishing mark of Christians is the fact that they have a future ... life will not end in emptiness” (n. 2). Hope distinguishes Christian existence from that of others. The Church must become a road map for the people of our time on their journey through life.^{viii} In the face of the unbridled drive of consumerism, fostering narcissism and exploitation of the



needy, the Gospel can become an inspiration for altruism that Jesus Christ offered on the Cross as “the ultimate encounter between God and the power of human evasion”.^{ix} He went to the extent of losing himself that others might have life, which in turn made God glorify him by raising him from the dead. Thus, God’s affirmation became the basis of all hope.

In sharp contrast to the existing feeling of hopelessness and alienation Christians can reach out to others with genuine **hospitality**, reminding all of God’s own hospitality for all. Refugees and internationally displaced people have become a challenge to Christian mission. Christian hospitality can prove to be a harbinger of hope especially when it is extended to situations of homelessness, rejection, those seeking refuge and so on. Christian hospitality has even been extended to the unborn through pro-life movements.

An important expression of hospitality in our time is reaching out to migrants and asylum seekers in genuine friendship. This becomes all the more significant in the context of the process of globalization and the search for better economic prospects, if not to escape sheer hunger, poverty or violence. We can become catalysts in their search not only to find a lodging but to make a home there.

Frequently we come across the need for peace in the world. However, there cannot be genuine peace without **justice**. In the Bible justice precedes peace: peace to the people of *good will*! Christian mission has to be at the forefront of creating a just society in which each can live with God-given dignity, with his/her rights accepted and respected. The Christian approach to justice is animated by a radical love in-so-far as the social transformation Jesus initiated is based on radical love. This made Jesus reach out to the periphery. Jesus’ reaching out to the periphery reminds us of God’s own exodus to the poor, the victims of oppression in Egypt. In the context of mission, talk of the periphery is significant inasmuch as mission was formerly directed to the

periphery, but today we realize the need to receive mission from the periphery. We cannot ignore the fact that in apostolic times mission was a movement from the periphery. We could speak of the need for an exodus from the centres of power and importance to the people who do not count for much. Associated with such a shift is also the exodus from self-centredness to other-centredness.

As Fiorenza Schussler has underlined, the focal point of the early Christian self-understanding was a **relationship**, and not any rite or book.^x It was a relationship based on the experience of God's presence in and among them and through one another. With regard to the early Church we notice that the proclamation of the Gospel first brought about a communitarian or relational change forming a Church, along with a transformation in the life pattern of individuals and society, through the divine Reign breaking-in. This relationship Jesus described in the Gospels as a wedding feast. For Semites, as for Asians, especially in those days, a wedding was a time when close and distant relations gathered for a celebration of several days. It was not an occasion confined to a reception/dinner with caterers, as it is today. This in turn, challenges us to a series of relationships in concentric circles, with deeper understanding and cooperation for the realization of the divine Reign.

Women in Asia, as elsewhere, are victims of the patriarchal paradigms, imposed marginality and invisibility. They are the poorest of the poor in Asia as they suffer from double discrimination, the woes of discrimination against the poor and as women, doing most of the household chores, like drawing water, fetching firewood, cleaning and washing as well as other chores. We witness heinous crimes against women in various countries. Obviously the world continues on a path of patriarchal domination.



Christian mission concerns not only liberating women from patriarchal structures in general but also within Christian society and its structures. Our advocacy can create the necessary changes to usher in a social order that will accord respect and dignity to women.

Schussler, in speaking about the role of women in apostolic times, draws our attention to the fact that although Luke's primary interest in writing the Acts of the Apostles was to highlight the words and deeds of Paul and Peter, women come across not just as auxiliaries, "but as prominent leaders and missionaries who — in their own right — toiled for the Gospel".^{xi} Aloysius Pieris describes the gender and racial equality in the early Church imaginatively by qualifying the basic sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist as "sacraments of social transformation".^{xii} The experience of God's gracious goodness in the life and ministry of Jesus must enable the Church to radical openness that does not allow room for any member to feel marginalized or excluded.

Youth everywhere experience a feeling of uncertainty and distress in their search for meaning in the face of anxiety and uncertainty, broken homes, rejection from the economic system, marginalization from the religious system and the need to be affirmed and acknowledged. They become skeptical about the content of the faith that they have inherited, looking more like an information-package than a living experience. They fail to recognize its existential relevance to their own life. Are we



prepared to walk with them as the Lord accompanied the dejected disciples at Emmaus? Unless we learn to understand young people, their language and culture, we stand in danger of losing the future generations. We have to guard against providing answers which are irrelevant to young people. We must be capable of deciphering their “emotional alphabet”.

Jonathan Sacks^{xiii} narrates a story told by John von Neuman to prove that maximum wealth is not produced when people act out of selfishness, as Adam Smith is said to have advocated, but when people act with mutual trust and communication. In my opinion this is very true of our mission of ringing in the divine Reign. The Police arrested two men on suspicion of a serious crime. But failing to get any evidence from either, the police separated them with no communication and offered them the following choice. If one of them informs about the other and the other keeps silent, the informant would go free and the silent one would get ten years of imprisonment. If both inform, both would get five years each. If both were silent both would get one year each. The result was that each got five years as neither could trust the other since there was no communication between them. However the best choice would have been to keep silent and be sentenced to one year! Thus Neumann challenged Smith’s theory of wealth production based on selfish interest.

I would suggest this is true of the Church’s service to contemporary culture as well. The maximum cultural transformation, making the cultures more Kingdom-like, can only be achieved by **communicating and cooperating** with all in trust.

A practical consequence of this need for collaboration is the wider ecumenism in relation to other religions. We have to reassure the followers of other religions that Christian service is not directed against their religions or to displace them. In the past somehow mission was seen as a threat to other religions, as it was feared, with justification, that the Church with its claim of being the only revealed religion was trying to dislodge other religions. We need to be sensitive to our times and the feelings of the followers of these religions. In the light of the Johannine Gospel, as we saw earlier, we have to realize that the followers of these religions are also enlightened by the same mystery, the Logos, that became Jesus of Nazareth (Jn 1:4). Our call is to follow the ministry of the Historical Jesus who, though he is the same reality as the Logos, has a different function. Pope John Paul II took pains to point out the Church’s concern for humanity, saying that the Church’s mission has only one purpose, “to serve man by revealing to him the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ” (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2). Together with people we are on pilgrimage to the fullness of the Kingdom. Interreligious dialogue for us is an important expression and an integral part of mission as it leads to the realization of the Kingdom, in co-operation with the followers of other religious traditions.

Most Irish missionaries are not ignorant of St. Patrick's "temper that could flare dangerously when he perceived an injustice – not against himself but against another, particularly against someone defenseless".^{xiv} Today **advocacy** addresses the outrage of injustice. Local, national and international advocacy is now recognized as a major part of mission that is exercised on behalf of people on the margins, victims of the denial of their rights, the subaltern people, as it leads to an experience of the divine Reign.

All we have been saying above has to do with **dialogue with cultures**. Inculturation has become a leading theme in missiological deliberations. The Irish Church is known for its spirit of inculturation right from its inception. St. Patrick allowed the Irish to continue many of their former practices like May Day and the 1st February celebrations. Even private confession, though to some extent it has earned disrepute today, was introduced by the Irish Church to spare the penitents the public disgrace to which they were subjected on the continent. Similarly, until about the eleventh century marriage separation on 1st February, the feast of the god of fertility, said to be Brigid, was common in Ireland.^{xv} Likewise, fostering personal holiness is even more important than going on a pilgrimage to Rome:

To go to Rome
Is little profit, endless pain;
The Master that you seek in Rome,
You find at home, or seek in vain.^{xvi}

Today we need to develop what the Australians call, a "postal-code theology"^{xvii} that responds to specific localities and pastoral situations which in turn can blend into a missional conversation, positioning the local within the range of local and global dynamics. We cannot have a "one size that fits all" model. One thing that we can say for sure, based on the ministry of Jesus, is that the Gospel cannot exist independently of the embodied contexts.

We come across a noticeable fading of the impact of Christian culture. The Gospel has less and less impact on daily life with regard to meaning and message. In this context mission becomes a way of life rather than a to-do list item. It is a life of promoting, reminding people of a sense of the divine presence in our secularizing world. Christians lead a life of constant wonder and feel a sense of mystery on encountering the divine finger-prints in the world. This can produce a fresh experience of the divine in our secular culture, widening people's outlook and worldview to include the Transcendent, and make an impact upon their life and relationships.

Concluding Remarks

We need more than ever what Pope John XXIII outlined in his Inaugural Address to the Second Vatican Council, to become ourselves ever better fitted to proclaim the Gospel to the culture of our time: "... seconding the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order that the work of all may correspond to the modern expectations and needs of the various peoples of the world ... requires of you serenity of mind, brotherly concord, moderation in proposals, dignity in discussion, and wisdom of deliberation" (11 October 1962, St Peter's Basilica). This requires that we be open to the signs of the times. We cannot hide behind the façade of grandiose theological claims. A study conducted among the churches of Ireland and the U.K., presented to the Edinburgh Conference in 2010, revealed that what these churches and agencies said in public about the theology of mission, did not necessarily match their mission practice.^{xviii}

What Cardinal Moran said of the Irish Catholics of Australia in 1890 is still relevant for mission today: "I find that the faithful entrusted to my spiritual charge have the same piety, the same love for religion, the generosity and spirit of sacrifice which distinctly mark the old Church at home".^{xix}

God's concern for the wholeness of life for all as manifested in Jesus' ministry, death and Resurrection, is our concern. The promise of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1) is the abundance of life which Jesus presented through the image of the wedding feast, an exuberance of love, life in abundance. Mission is a celebration of life for all.

Notes

ⁱ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, xvii.

ⁱⁱ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, London: SPCK, 2007, 246.

ⁱⁱⁱ N.T. Wright, "The mission and message of Jesus", in M.J. Borg and N.R. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus*, San Francisco: Harper, 1999, 35.

^{iv} W. Carter, *Mathew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, New York: Orbis Books, 2000.

^v "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes", *International Review of Mission*, 101.2, (November 2012): 253.

^{vi} Bryant L. Myers, *Walking With The Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, New York: Orbis, 2011.

^{vii} David J. Kettle, *Western Culture in Gospel Context*, Eugene – Oregon: Cascade books, 2011, 154.

^{viii} Feradine Doogue, "Foreword", to *Believers: Does Australian Catholicism Have a Future?* Paul Collins, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008, xi.

^{ix} Kettle, *Western Culture*, 30.

^x Schussler, 345

^{xi} Schussler, 161.

^{xii} Aloysius Pieris, "Gender and Class in the Nascent Church and in Early Christianity", *Vidyajyoti* 72/7 (2008):486.

^{xiii} Jonathan Sacks, *Dignity of Difference*, London: Continuum, 2003, 145-147.

^{xiv} Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe*, New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1995, 147.

^{xv} Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*: 149.

^{xvi} *Ibid*, 181.

^{xvii} A. Dutney, "Postal-mark Australia", in *From Here to Where? Australian Christians Owning the Past, Embracing the Future*, A. Dutney (ed), Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1988, 1-9. Even the postal-code theology is inadequate insofar as there are millions who lack a postal-code as well!

^{xviii} Christine Kim and Andrew Anderson, (eds), *Edinburg 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow*, Edinburg: Regnum, 2011, 125.

^{xix} In Reid Richard, *Not Just Ned: A True History of the Irish in Australia*, Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2001, 20.

Ref.: Jacob Kavunkal, SVD, is Associate Professor Yarra Theological Union/MCD - University of Divinity, Australia). He graciously sent his text through the Internet.

Eric Manhaeghe
"Venganos tu Reino"
Un siglo y medio al servicio de la misión ad gentes
Los misioneros de Scheut (1862-2012)

Con ocasión del aniversario número 150 de la CICM¹ el 28 de noviembre de 2012, quisiera evocar brevemente² de qué manera este instituto misionero de origen belga se comprometió para que la oración de todo cristiano: "vénganos tu Reino" pueda convertirse en aquella de todos los seres humanos, y para que todos se pongan a trabajar con el fin de crear condiciones favorecedoras a la acogida de ese Reino de Dios. Me esforzaré por situar el caminar de la CICM en el contexto sociohistórico y eclesial de cada época evocada.

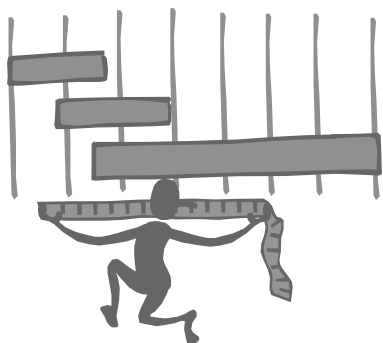
La propagación del progreso

La conquista de las naciones para Cristo

Tres años después de la fundación del nuevo instituto misionero en 1862, el Padre Verbist partió con cuatro compañeros a Siwantse (la parte de Mongolia que pertenece a China). En 1868, el fundador y uno de sus compañeros ya habían muerto.... El principio fue duro.... Pero, a pesar de los múltiples contratiempos, disputas y desacuerdos, la CICM contaba con alrededor de 400 miembros a principios del siglo XX. Había casas en Bélgica y en Holanda. Los miembros trabajan en dos países de misión: China y la República Independiente del Congo.³ A fines de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la congregación ya contaba con 1.400 miembros. ¡Una expansión fenomenal! Congo se transformó en colonia belga y la CICM empezó a trabajar también en Filipinas (Mountain Province) y en Indonesia (Makassar). Había una nueva casa para estudiantes en Roma y una procura en Singapur. El mundo estaba dominado por Europa que representaba el progreso, sin embargo, sin estar en condiciones de ponerse al abrigo de las pasiones nacionalistas que desataron dos guerras asesinas. Para la Iglesia católica, la misión consistía esencialmente en convertir a los paganos. Una evidencia que ningún miembro de la CICM ponía en duda, ya que según las *Constituciones*, la conversión de los infieles era el primer objetivo de la congregación, su razón de ser.



El progreso



En la Europa de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX y la primera del siglo XX, la palabra "progreso" (científico, económico, militar, etc.) estaba en boca de todos. Dos guerras mundiales y la crisis económica desastrosa de los años treinta dieron, ciertamente, lugar a una reflexión, pero no lograban sacudir la fe frente al progreso del cual Europa se consideraba la única protagonista. Ebrios de su éxito y de su poder que no deja de crecer, los habitantes de este continente encontraban muy normal que los otros pueblos del mundo adoptasen su religión, su sistema económico, sus lenguas, su filosofía, etc.

Tenían el derecho y el deber de introducir el progreso en todas partes, de civilizar a los pueblos que habían quedado más o menos "salvajes".

El espacio no es suficiente para detallar más sobre el medio en el que los miembros de la CICM de esta época fueron socializados.⁴ Ciertamente, fueron impregnados de la idea de progreso, pero también estaban conscientes de la ambivalencia de tal discurso. La mayoría venía de familias de agricultores acomodados, artesanos, pequeños empresarios, profesores, etc. El progreso y la industrialización que se imponían cada vez más, también se sentían como fuerzas destructivas. Deterioraban los valores tradicionales, hasta las tradiciones religiosas, y simbolizaban el fin de la hegemonía del mundo rural, a veces querido como un "paraíso". A pesar de estas reservas, querían poner sus manos a la obra. La Iglesia y la congregación eran, por una parte, un refugio en el que podían vivir los valores tradicionales, y por otra parte, organizaciones eficaces que promovían el progreso en varios campos (salud, educación, etc.). De esta manera, su formación haría de ellos los protagonistas de un proceso del que al mismo tiempo querían escapar. En el país de misión, introducirían el progreso esforzándose en recrear el *paraíso agrario* que estaba desapareciendo en sus países.

Conquistar las naciones para Cristo

De manera más concreta, los miembros de la CICM soñaban con conquistar Mongolia, China y el Congo — más tarde también el norte de la isla de Luzón en Filipinas y Macasar en Indonesia — para Cristo. La animación misionera en Bélgica los presentaba como héroes, listos a sacrificar sus vidas para salvar las almas de los paganos. La única vía de salvación para estos últimos, era la de convertirse (renunciar a los ídolos y a las supersticiones), hacerse bautizar y vivir como buenos cristianos. En este sentido, los misioneros estaban incentivados a bautizar a la mayor número posible y la misión era considerada como una verdadera conquista. Los criterios del éxito de la actividad misionera eran: el número de bautismos, de confesiones, de comuniones, de matrimonios, etc. Cierta inquietud caracterizaba al trabajo concreto: "Con tal que nadie se pierda por mi culpa". Comúnmente se creía que las otras religiones eran falsas y debían ser consideradas como la obra del demonio. De aquí nació cierta agresividad que iba a la par con el sentimiento de expectación.



Muchas veces se reprochó a los *hermanos* de esta época (1862-1945), el tener una visión estrecha, debido en parte al hecho de que siempre estaban viajando, ocupados en resolver los problemas más urgentes, sin ocuparse en lo más mínimo del futuro a largo plazo. Hay que admitir que no se interesaban en la misionología de su tiempo (por ejemplo, la *plantatio ecclesiae*, enseñada por Pierre Charles en la Universidad Católica de Lovaina). Eran sobre todo hombres prácticos, los medios de los que disponían eran muy limitados y eran muchos los que compartían las condiciones miserables de vida de sus feligreses. Sus jefes no apreciaban las iniciativas innovadoras, salvo aquellas que hacían progresar la obra misionera (finanzas, número de bautizos, etc.). El contexto colonial no les era favorable, pero no eran ellos los creadores de este contexto. Así fue como lograron acceder al corazón de miles de gentes simples, ocupadas — como ellos — en resolver problemas cotidianos de supervivencia. A su manera, demostraron una gran apertura, la de un corazón generoso y deseoso de acoger a los más simples e insignificantes. A pesar de sus *imperfecciones*, fueron un reflejo de Jesús de Nazaret, y, como Él, lograron hacer escuchar la Buena Nueva: "¡Regocíjense! ¡El Reino de Dios está cerca! ¡Está entre nosotros!".

El desarrollo y la *plantatio ecclesiae*

La expansión de la CICM en la época precedente (+ 22 miembros por año) continuaba de la mejor manera durante los primeros decenios de la posguerra (+ 24 miembros por año). El número de hermanos sobrepasaba ligeramente los 2.000 hacia mediados de los años sesenta para luego empezar a descender, lo cual no inquietaba mayormente. Aparte de algunos miembros chinos, la congregación contaba con un número limitado de hermanos congolese, filipinos y americanos. La expansión geográfica continuaba de igual manera. Nuevas inserciones de la CICM se veían en Estados Unidos, Japón, Haití, Chile, Hong Kong, Taiwán, Guatemala, República Dominicana, *Brasil* y Camerún. ¿Se podía hablar de un triunfo? En realidad, no. La congregación debía enfrentar tres enormes desafíos: *la expulsión* de todos los hermanos de China Popular, la descolonización del Congo y la "revolución cultural" que condujo a un cambio de la sociedad.

El desarrollo

En esta época (1946-1970), la cooperación entre autoridades civiles e Iglesias en vías de desarrollo, en primer lugar de las colonias y, luego del tercer mundo, se situaba en el contexto de la propagación del pragmatismo. Se creaban instituciones cuyo objetivo específico era el desarrollo. No eran totalmente independientes de las Iglesias, pero no tenían ningún vínculo organizacional con sus entidades misioneras. Se relacionaban *con* las Iglesias como las organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG) con los gobiernos de los Estados. Es más, muchas de ellas recibirían más tarde el estatus de ONG. Estos organismos se ocupaban del desarrollo mientras que las entidades misioneras lo hacían por el anuncio del Evangelio. Esto creaba cierto malestar en los institutos misioneros que continuaban defendiendo el vínculo íntimo entre anuncio y servicio al prójimo. Sin embargo, no estaban en capacidad de oponerse a las corrientes del pragmatismo y del profesionalismo que ganaban terreno, hasta entre sus propios miembros.

Después de la ola de independencia de los años sesenta, las necesidades eran enormes. El número de refugiados y desplazados aumentaba a un ritmo inquietante; la insurrección, la guerra civil y la hambruna se transformaban en realidades cotidianas en el tercer mundo. La acción caritativa ya no era suficiente. Había que atacar el problema en su conjunto y analizar los vínculos entre los fenómenos complejos como el hambre, el desempleo, el apego a los métodos tradicionales de agricultura, la sequía, la enseñanza, la economía, las estructuras políticas, etc. De aquí nació la necesidad de contar con instituciones dirigidas por profesionales que estuviesen en capacidad de resolver estos problemas. Así era como entrábamos en la perspectiva del pragmatismo. Hablamos del problema del hambre y no de los hambrientos, de la pobreza y no de los pobres, de la agricultura y no de los agricultores. El "problema" se tomaba en cuenta, pero no se tomaban en cuenta las personas afectadas. El factor humano estaba ausente en las soluciones planteadas por los expertos. En cuanto al dinero, ya no era un problema. El fuerte crecimiento económico en los Estados Unidos y en Europa, permitía a las Iglesias, a menudo en asociación con los gobiernos europeos, constituir fondos considerables y emplear personal altamente calificado.

La *plantatio ecclesiae* y el Vaticano II

La Iglesia católica de la posguerra continuaba evolucionando lentamente. Teólogos [Pierre Charles] y misioneros valientes (Vincent Lebbe, Placide Tempels, Jules Monchanin, etc.) ya habían cuestionado a la misión como conversión de paganos en el transcurso de los años treinta, pero muy poco se los escuchó. Los artículos del jesuita Pierre Charles, profesor de teología de la Universidad Católica de Lovaina, publicados en revistas científicas, fueron reeditados en una obra única en 1955,⁵ un año después de su muerte. El autor analizaba el enfoque de sus

hermanos en China, en la época de la controversia de los ritos. Apoyándose en el progreso de las ciencias humanas (la etnología y la ciencia de las religiones), cuestionaba el estatus que la teología tradicional acordaba a los paganos, llamados también a menudo idólatras. Sus creencias tal vez no los preparaban directamente para recibir el Evangelio, pero no estaban tan lejos del Reino de Dios como pretendía la teología. Además, los "primitivos" eran considerados bastante cercanos del Evangelio. Las grandes religiones (budismo, hinduismo e islam) no debían ser combatidas, sino acompañadas hasta la perfección. En lugar de hacer borrón y cuenta nueva, y cortar el neófito de su medio cultural, se debía promover una "mística de la adaptación". El objetivo de la misión era el de (im) *plantar la Iglesia en un país, que era* distinto a convertir a los paganos. Varios discursos de Pío XII, en los que insistía en el enriquecimiento del género humano por medio del respeto a la diversidad de los pueblos, parecían motivar estas aperturas. La reflexión misionológica comenzaba a expandirse lentamente entre los misioneros. Conviene mencionar en este contexto la fundación en 1959 de dos revistas para la formación permanente de misioneros: *Verbum svd* (antropología y teología) en Sankt Augustin (Alemania) y *Spiritus* (espiritualidad) en París.⁶

El Vaticano II no enfatizaba más en las misiones consideradas como un medio de expandir las fronteras de la Iglesia, sino en el deber de todos los miembros del Pueblo de Dios de ponerse al servicio de la misión de Dios en el mundo. La misión se enraíza en el misterio trinitario y es la razón de ser de la Iglesia. De aquí la afirmación de que la Iglesia es misión y la insistencia en la responsabilidad misionera de cada bautizado. El Concilio abandonó la idea de la misión considerada como una conquista espiritual y desarrolló una visión nueva basada en las Escrituras. La misión de la Iglesia es presentada como la continuación de la misión del propio Dios en el mundo. La actividad misionera contribuye a la edificación del Reino de Dios, ya que éste no es más que la realización del proyecto de Dios en el mundo. Esta identificación de la misión con el proyecto de Dios, recalca una vez más su aspecto cósmico al mismo tiempo que histórico. En efecto, este proyecto es global e incluye a *los seres humanos, así como* también al conjunto de la creación. Igualmente, se trata de un proceso dinámico cuyo cumplimiento se encuentra en el futuro.

Un cambio de sociedad, difícil de manejar



Para la CICM, incluso los primeros años de la posguerra fueron difíciles. Ciertamente, las *casas* de formación estaban llenas y las finanzas se comportaban relativamente bien. La congregación logró abrir dos nuevas "misiones". Una en Estados Unidos, donde los hermanos trabajaban entre los afroamericanos menos favorecidos y donde habían establecido una procura para recolectar donaciones, destinadas en primer término a las Filipinas.

La otra, en Japón, en donde creían haber discernido una situación favorable para la misión. ¡Pero en China la misión estaba mal, muy mal! Por supuesto, se felicitaron por la erección de la jerarquía eclesiástica por la Santa Sede, pero la guerra civil volvía el apostolado cada vez más difícil, *hasta llegar* a ser imposible. En 1949, China se transformaba oficialmente en una república popular (comunista), cuyo nuevo dirigente Mao Ze Dong, no regalaba nada a nadie. Para los miembros de la CICM esto quería decir: residencia vigilada, prisión, tortura, expulsión. En 1957, el último scheutista belga fue expulsado de China, luego de varios años de prisión y de torturas refinadas. En sí, el golpe ya era lo suficientemente rudo, pero había que acoger y cuidar a centenares de misioneros traumatizados. Algunos se quedaron en Bélgica, otros eran enviados al Congo o a Filipinas. Era la oportunidad también para enviar algunos misioneros a Hong-Kong y a Taiwán, que constituían

junto a Singapur la nueva provincia de *Sínica*. Algunos obispos de América Latina hicieron un llamado a la CICM. Así, algunos miembros partieron a Haití, Chile, Guatemala y República Dominicana. A excepción de Haití, estos territorios se situaban fuera de la jurisdicción de la *Propaganda Fide* pero esta última no veía ningún problema. Hacia 1960, mientras que la CICM se estaba recuperando del golpe vivido en China, otro golpe se estaba preparando....

La revolución cultural de los años sesenta, acompañada de la descolonización en el Congo, golpeó fuertemente a la congregación. La *Propaganda Fide*, desde siempre favorable a la autodeterminación de los pueblos, tomó precauciones instituyendo la jerarquía eclesiástica y nombrando a los primeros obispos autóctonos. Por su parte, los miembros de la CICM no estuvieron preparados, y mal equipados para enfrentar la situación. Para la mayoría, fue una sorpresa desagradable. El conjunto de valores de la CICM se cuestionó fuertemente. La noble causa de la congregación era presentada como una aberración, un barbarismo cultural, una de las principales causas de la miseria en el Congo, *ahora* independiente. Hasta la prensa católica belga cuestionaba la obra de los misioneros a los que una vez llamó héroes: tal vez ayudaron a *cierta* gente, pero la conquista espiritual no era nada más que una agresión. Los sacerdotes congoleños reprochaban a los scheutistas el haber estado muy *cercanos* al poder colonial y afirmaban con fuerza que la Iglesia sería en adelante dirigida por ellos.

La "revolución cultural" en Europa y más allá era cada vez más difícil de manejar. En realidad, ninguna institución estaba preparada. Todo pasaba demasiado rápido y los cambios afectaban profundamente la capacidad de movilización de la CICM. Ésta dependía enteramente del clérigo diocesano para la animación vocacional, que también *entraba en crisis* y sus *visiones* divergían cada vez más de la de los superiores de la CICM. Las revistas misioneras de la congregación perdieron muchos lectores.... De esta manera, el dispositivo de enmarcación puesto en marcha para mantener el espíritu misionero en la Iglesia de Bélgica, se pulverizó en pocos años y los jóvenes se sentían atraídos por *otras* organizaciones que les *daban la ocasión* de concretar su gran generosidad. Estábamos entonces confrontados a una mutación mayor de la sociedad. Enfrentarla tomaba tiempo. ¡No estábamos seguros de nada, salvo de que no saldríamos indemnes!

La globalización y la multiculturalidad

La misión se revistará de múltiples formas

La mutación de sociedad conducía a un cambio de tendencia en la evolución demográfica de la CICM durante los últimos decenios del siglo XX (27 miembros por año): pasamos de 1.900 a 1.200.... Déficit debido a la mortandad creciente (envejecimiento) y a la rareza de las entradas. A partir de los años ochenta, las casas de formación se volvían a llenar, pero esta vez en el Congo, en Camerún, en Filipinas, en Indonesia, y en Haití, lo que conducía a tener una CICM realmente intercontinental. Este desarrollo coincidió con la globalización que se revestía de varias formas. La CICM atravesaba por *varias* dificultades para dar sentido a la enorme complejidad del mundo y de la Iglesia. Con rostro multicultural y actuando en un mundo plural, luchaba por reformular su identidad. Actualmente, el proceso aún no ha terminado y la congregación continúa su camino con una identidad misionera que sigue en construcción....

Cambio de época

Hacia mediados de los años setenta, era claro que los bloques dominados por las dos superpotencias tradicionales, los Estados Unidos y la Unión Soviética, cesaron de ser bloques. China tomó distancia de la Unión Soviética y siguió su propia política interna imponiéndose de manera autónoma en el plano internacional.

Los satélites soviéticos afirmaban cada vez más su identidad propia y el "gran hermano" estaba obligado a conferirles cierto grado de autonomía. La Comunidad Europea se organizaba cada vez más, adoptando una actitud crítica hacia los Estados Unidos que ya no podían contar con la lealtad incondicional de los países de su "patio trasero". Dispensados de toda obligación militar, Japón y la República Federal de Alemania experimentaban un desarrollo tecnológico fenomenal que les permitía inundar el mercado norteamericano de nuevos productos. Los países del tercer mundo, siempre dependientes del exterior, se esforzaban por diversificar sus relaciones políticas y sobre todo comerciales. De esta manera, asistimos a la emergencia de una economía globalizada caracterizada por la desregularización, y daba la impresión de que varios centros de poderse estaban desarrollando.

A partir de la segunda mitad de los años ochenta, la amplitud y la naturaleza de los cambios hacían pensar a los observadores que ya no se vivía en una época de cambios, sino en un cambio de época. Época caracterizada por la *globalización*. La vida sociopolítica era cada vez más sumisa a la influencia de factores económicos mundiales. Motivados por las instituciones monetarias internacionales, los mercados financieros daban el tono e intentaban imponer una homogenización del mundo asegurando al mismo tiempo la libertad de comercio, la competencia ilimitada y la privatización generalizada. Este modelo, sin embargo, era rechazado no solamente por los sindicatos y la sociedad civil, sino también por reconocidos académicos, políticos y expertos financieros. Estos proponían una globalización desde abajo, que respete la identidad cultural de los pueblos concernidos.

La misión como diálogo

En el marco de esta globalización desde abajo, observamos una pluralidad de formas de anuncio y de teologías contextuales. La misión es vista como un diálogo en varios planos: con los pobres, las religiones, las culturas. El misionero no es un compañero en este diálogo, sino alguien que lo facilita, un catalizador. Los compañeros del diálogo son Cristo y el grupo humano en el que se incultura. El misionero favorece y acompaña este proceso. Posibilita el encuentro inicial y asiste al nacimiento de nuevas comunidades cristianas. Los acompaña en su expansión local y en su camino hacia la comunión con la iglesia universal. En el transcurso de este proceso, la joven comunidad se alimenta de la riqueza de su propia tradición religiosa y se transforma en su interior gracias a su apertura al Evangelio. Habiendo logrado cierto grado de madurez, esta nueva entidad deviene misionera y ayuda a la Iglesia universal a enriquecer sus expresiones simbólicas y a redescubrir bajo un nuevo ángulo el mensaje recibido del Señor.

Congregación multicultural

En ésta época, la CICM se vuelve realmente multicultural, *gracias a la* iniciativa de sus miembros asiáticos y africanos. A principios de los años setenta, fes pocas decenas de miembros congolese y filipinos fueron invitados a dejar la congregación para integrar una diócesis o un instituto nacional. Estos rechazaron la oferta, y el noviciado en Congo, que había dejado de funcionar después de la independencia, se reabrió en Mbudi en 1972. Uno de los primeros congolese, fue el primer maestro de los novicios. El noviciado en Manila continuaba sus actividades, y otros empezaron a funcionar en Makassar y en Puerto Príncipe. Su "pertinacia" brindó frutos, ya que en 2012 los miembros originarios de África, Asia y América son más numerosos que los miembros europeos, en gran parte jubilados.... Afirmando su voluntad de vivir el ideal de la congregación en un nuevo contexto, este grupo lanzó un enorme desafío a sus hermanos europeos. La acogida de estos nuevos miembros obligó a la congregación a revisar su posición y, sobre todo, a adoptar una actitud positiva frente a la nueva imagen del misionero que se *estaba* desplegando.

El nuevo misionero de la CICM trabaja no solamente fuera de su país, sino también con sus hermanos de otras nacionalidades, de otros continentes, en un equipo multicultural. De esta manera, se convertirá en un símbolo de la fraternidad universal en Jesucristo. Primero, porque trabaja en un pueblo extranjero, y luego porque vive en una comunidad internacional. El joven candidato se preparará para cumplir con una tarea pastoral (a menudo erróneamente llamada misionera) fuera de su país y a vivir en comunidad con hermanos que no son sus compatriotas. Las otras prioridades de la congregación no cambian: opción preferencial por los pobres,⁷ actividad entre los no cristianos, etc., pero a menudo se trata de declaraciones puramente teóricas.

Una observación ... un deseo ...

Al final de una breve evocación del camino de un instituto misionero, no podemos pretender llegar a verdaderas conclusiones. Me limito a una observación y a un deseo. Es claro que el objetivo de la CICM no ha cambiado fundamentalmente, pero se sitúa en lo sucesivo en una nueva perspectiva. En el siglo XIX y hasta el fin de la Segunda Guerra Mundial se hablaba de la conversión de los paganos. Después de Vaticano II, las relaciones con los no cristianos se modificaron. El Concilio mismo reformuló el objetivo de los institutos misioneros: *invitar* a los no cristianos a acoger el Reino de Dios.⁸ La razón de ser de la CICM es, desde entonces, mostrar que una parte *esencial* de la misión de la Iglesia consiste en ir hacia los no cristianos. La CICM lo ha hecho de *manera coherente, hasta la* época en que se vio obligada a *secundar* a las jóvenes Iglesias que había fundado.⁹ Pero esta actividad, cuya necesidad no se puede cuestionar, jamás podrá volverse permanente ni absorber todas las energías. En una Iglesia esencialmente misionera, la actividad misionera debe ser considerada como fundamental, así como la oración. El rol de los institutos misioneros es tan indispensable e importante como el de las Órdenes contemplativas. Estas últimas están naturalmente caracterizadas por la adoración, la oración y el servicio de Dios, constituyendo así, un símbolo para la Iglesia y el mundo. Debe ser igual para la CICM: debe actuar de tal *manera* que se vea que la *Iglesia* existe, sobre todo, para llevar a la humanidad entera, a más del 60% que son no cristianos, al Reino de Dios, ¡Y eso no se ve cuando se ocupa casi exclusivamente de los cristianos!

Notas

¹ La Congregación del Inmaculado Corazón de María (CICM) fue fundada en 1862 en Scheut (de aquí nace el popular nombre "scheutistas") por Théophile Verbist, un sacerdote belga de la diócesis de Mechelen-Bruselas. A inicios del año 2012, contaba con 881 miembros de 18 nacionalidades, trabajando en alrededor de 20 países de África, América, Asia y Europa.

² En un *artículo corto* "de actualidad", necesariamente hay que limitarse a la evocación de algunos temas significativos. Para un estudio más global, ver Daniel Verhelst y Hyacinthe Daniels (dir.) *Scheut hier et aujourd'hui 1862-1987. Histoire de la Congrégation du Cœur Immaculé de Marie C.I.C.M.*, Leuven, Presses universitaires, 1993, 551 pp. Hace más de veinte años, abordé la cuestión más en detalle en un artículo centrado en África: Eric Manhaeghe, "L'évolution d'une présence missionnaire CICM (missionnaires de Scheut en Afrique)", en *Spiritus*, n. 117, 1989, pp. 380-394. Podemos encontrar una aproximación más teórica de la misma época, enfocada en la experiencia de los misioneros franceses, en Claude Prudhomme, "La mission au XX^e siècle: triomphe, crise et mutations du côté catholique, en particulier à travers l'exemple des spiritains", en *Histoire & Missions Chrétiennes*, n. 10, 2009, pp. 9-31.

³ Los cuatro primeros hermanos fueron enviados en 1888, apenas 26 años después de la fundación de la congregación.

⁴ Leer Eric Manhaeghe, «À l'écoute de la culture belge», en *Euntes-Dossiers*, n. 14, 1993, pp. 21-34.

⁵ Cf. Pierre Charles, *Études missiologiques*, Bruselas, Museum Lessianum y Desclée de Brouwer, 1955, 435 p.

⁶ Cf. Eric Manhaeghe, e.a. «Dossier: les 50 ans de Spiritus», en *Spiritus*, n. 194, 2009, pp. 27-87. Para una versión más corta, leer Id., «Les 50 ans de Spiritus. Breve histoire d'un

parcours missiologique, 1959-2009», en *Histoire & Missions Chrétiennes*, n. 10, 2009, pp. 203-218.

⁷ En este campo, el aporte de los miembros no europeos puede ser importante. Contrariamente a sus hermanos de la época colonial que realizaban grandes obras porque tenían los medios, estos misioneros llegan donde la gente con las manos vacías.... Para una reflexión sobre este tema, leer Gerard Moorman, "Learning What it Means to Be Part of the Multicultural Body of Christ: Experiences Within Catholic Religious Orders in the Netherlands", en *Exchange*, 41 (2012)1, pp. 68-86.

⁸ Notemos que el Concilio reconoce la vocación especial de los misioneros sin asociarla a un lugar geográfico: está ahí para autóctonos y extranjeros. "Están marcados por una vocación especial, dotados de un carácter natural adaptado, y siendo capaces por sus cualidades e inteligencia, están listos para asumir la obra misionera, *sean autóctonos o extranjeros*, sacerdotes, religiosos, laicos. Enviados por la autoridad legítima, *parten* desde la fe y la obediencia *hacia aquellos que están lejos de Cristo*" (AG, 23; el énfasis es mío). Vaticano II dice que los misioneros parten, no de sus países, sino *hacia* aquellos que están lejos de Cristo. ¡Poco importa de dónde se parte, sobre todo hay que saber hacia dónde se va!

⁹ El éxito de la *plantatio ecclesiae* condujo paradójicamente a la crisis de la vocación misionera.

Ref.: *Spiritus* — Edición hispanoamericana, n. 208, Septiembre de 2012, pp. 104-115.

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