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#### **SEDOS Ariccia Seminar, May 1998**

#### ***PROCLAMATION AND DIALOGUE IN MISSION TODAY***

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## Ariccia '98 - *En route!* - Message d'un groupe

Elle est longue la marche que chacun de nous entreprend, sur cette terre, depuis sa naissance. Elle est longue, périlleuse, mystérieuse, mais aussi merveilleuse.

Sur les pas de Jésus, moi, j'en ai fait du chemin, j'en ai visité des lieux, j'en ai rencontré des gens.

Cette fois-ci, je me suis rendu à Ariccia. J'y ai rencontré des marcheurs, provenant de bien des pays du monde, des hommes et des femmes convaincus, des marcheurs aguerris, éprouvés par le temps, les années, les routes. Je me suis arrêté pendant trois jours et demi. Histoire de reprendre mon souffle, de soigner mes ampoules aux pieds, de partager sous la tente et autour du feu bien des aventures. J'en ai appris. Tant de pèlerins, dans le monde, marchent derrière Jésus ou un «prophète», ou avancent en quête de Dieu ou d'un sens à la vie. C'est surprenant. Interpellant. J'ai pu me raconter et réfléchir ... sur différentes façons de marcher.

Marcher dans la nuit, dans le brouillard,  
ce n'est pas facile.

C'est apeurant.

Comment mettre le pied en avant  
quand on ne voit rien?

Comment oser mettre un pied devant,  
si ce n'est à cause  
de la foi qui me pousse,  
de l'amour qui m'anime,  
de l'espérance qui m'attire?

Comment oser mettre un pied devant,  
si ce n'est à cause  
de la certitude que le Maître, Jésus, est  
devant!

Marcher avec d'autres, ce n'est pas facile. Il n'y a pas de rythme standard ou une seule façon de marcher. Certains, plus grands, font de plus grands pas; d'autres, plus petits, font de petits pas. Certains, plutôt forts, avancent

lentement; d'autres, plus légers, avancent d'un pas résolu. Il faut savoir s'adapter, ajuster son pas, trouver un rythme commun, pour marcher coude à coude, et non un pas devant ou un pas derrière. Si l'un de nous, fatigué par moment, traîne, je ralentis mon pas, avec les autres, pour qu'il reste vraiment des nôtres et qu'il n'ait pas l'impression d'être un poids. C'est ensemble que nous marchons.

Marcher sur de nouvelles terres, ce n'est pas facile. On y trouve des sentiers bien différents; on y rencontre des gens, des marcheurs, bien différents. Que de mal, que de sueurs, pour se défaire des habitudes d'une vie, pour apprendre un nouveau pas, une nouvelle façon d'avancer, une nouvelle langue. Il y a tant à découvrir, à respecter, à apprécier. Il n'y a pas qu'une façon de marcher, qu'une façon de tracer et d'aborder un sentier.

Aujourd'hui, frais, dispos,  
je reprends mon bâton  
pour la route,

en te saluant,  
toi, mon frère, ma sœur.

Après avoir partagé ensemble  
nos aventures,

si variées et surprenantes,

il y a tout de même

une chose qui me console:

si les routes sont bien différentes

d'une terre à l'autre,

si les marcheurs sont de différentes tailles  
d'une race à l'autre,

tous,

que ce soit derrière Jésus ou quelqu'un  
d'autre,

nous nous acheminons

vers une même destination, le Royaume;  
tous,

au terme,

nous rentrons à la même maison,  
celle de Dieu.

À bientôt donc!

# SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 1998

## OUR RESOURCE PERSONS

### *Soeur Lucie NZENZILI Mboma, FMM*

Franciscaine Missionnaire de Marie

J'ai une licence en Enseignement: Option Histoire. J'ai enseigné pendant cinq ans, comme Assistante à l'Institut Pédagogique National: de 1975 à 1980.

De 1980 à 1984, j'ai été missionnaire aux Iles Philippines. De là j'ai été envoyée au Kenya pour notre première fondation dans ce pays. Ensuite j'ai dû regagner mon pays, alors le Zaïre aujourd'hui la République Démocratique du Congo, pour assumer les responsabilités de la Supérieure Provinciale (1987- 1995). Entre temps j'ai également été élue la Présidente de l'Union des Supérieures Majeures (USUMA) de 1990 à 1995. Pour le moment, je fais mon année sabbatique aux USA tout en travaillant dans une équipe de trois, désignée par la Supérieure Générale et son Conseil pour la révision des structures de gouvernement de l'Institut.

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### *Bro. Edmund CHIA, FSC*

Born in Malaysia, Edmund Chia, FSC, completed his secondary school education before he joined the La Salle Brothers, also known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Upon completing his religious formation, he taught in a secondary school for a while before furthering his studies in the United States of America. He has an undergraduate degree in Psychology, and graduate degrees in the fields of Human Development and Religious Studies. Upon returning to Malaysia in 1995, he taught at a community college for a while before being asked to work for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. He serves as its Executive Secretary and his responsibilities include organising dialogue sessions and formation programmes for the Bishops and other members of the Church in Asia.

*Msgr. Michael Louis FITZGERALD, MAfr*

Msgr. Michael Fitzgerald was born in Walsall, England, 1937, ordained priest 1961 (Society of Missionaries of Africa) and ordained Bishop 1992.

STD Pontifical Gregorian University (1965)

BA Honours in Arabic, London School of Oriental and African Studies (1968)

1968-1978 Staff member of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), Rome

1969-1971 Seconded to Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

1972-1978 Director of the PISAI

1978-1980 Pastoral work in Halfa Jadida, Archdiocese of Khartoum, Sudan

1980-1986 Member of the General Council of the Missionaries of Africa (also member of SEDOS Executive Committee)

1987- Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

# THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE IN MISSION

Msgr. Michael Fitzgerald, MAfr

## 1. Interreligious Dialogue as Part of Evangelizing Mission

“Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission” (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 55; Francesco GIOIA (ed.) *Interreligious Dialogue in the Official Teaching of the Catholic Church 1993-1995*, n. 178 — hereafter cited as G). With this everything has been said. But this statement is a conclusion, the result of reflection and practice. What is its background?

The answer is of course the renewed vision of Vatican II, the new consciousness which the Church has of herself. However, rather than go over the teaching of the Council, I prefer to base myself on two post-conciliar documents both produced by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The first is entitled: *The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (1984) (referred to as DM). The second, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), was produced together with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (it will be referred to as DP).

## 2. Love as the Source

God is love (1 Jn 4:8,16). This saving love of God has been revealed and communicated to mankind in Christ and is present and active throughout the world by means of the Holy Spirit. The Church is the living sign of that love in such a way as to render it the norm of life for all. This mission, Christ’s own, is one of love because in him it finds its source, goal, and way of proceeding (cf. *Ad gentes*, nn. 2-5,12; *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 26). Each aspect and activity of the Church’s mission must therefore be imbued with the spirit of love if it is to be faithful to God who commanded the mission and continues to make it possible throughout history (DM9 = G816).

Four affirmations can be drawn from this passage:

- the source of mission is divine love;
- this love is revealed in Christ;
- the love is made present through the action of

the Holy Spirit;

- all activities of the Church are to be imbued with love.

## 3. The Trinitarian Model

“In the Trinitarian mystery, Christian revelation allows us to glimpse in God a life of communion and interchange” (DM22 = G829). This life and love is manifested exteriorly:

- the **Father** is the source; in him “we contemplate a pervasive love unlimited by space and time” (*ibid.*);

- through God the **Son**, the Word made flesh, this love is communicated;

Man — every man without any exception whatever — has been redeemed by Christ. And with man — with each man without any exception, whatever — Christ is in a way united (*Redemptor hominis*, n. 14) (DM23 = G830);

- in the **Spirit** we see the respectful penetration of God’s love; the Spirit “acts in the depth of people’s consciences and accompanies them on the secret path of hearts toward the truth (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22)” (DM24 = G831). The Spirit thus “both anticipates and accompanies” the Church in her mission. The role of the Church is therefore to discern the signs of the Spirit’s presence, to follow the leads given by the Spirit, and to serve humbly and discreetly.

## 4. Mission’s building blocks

The mission of the Church is a “single but complex and articulated reality” (DM13 = G820). It is like a building made up of different storeys. Or perhaps better, it is like a train with linked carriages all pulled by the engine of love. Some of the elements of this mission can be enumerated:

- **presence** and **witness**; this is simply Christian life lived as a response in faith to God’s love;

- **liturgical life, prayer, contemplation**, or the celebration of God’s love as manifested in Jesus Christ, a celebration which necessarily takes on a communitarian dimension, which has its high point in the Eucharist, celebrating the total giving of God in Christ which invites a total return;



- **service**, as an imitation of God's love, especially for the poor, the lowly;

- **interreligious dialogue**, as an imitation of God's love expressed in the patient attraction which is exerted; it can be defined as walking together toward the truth, and working together in projects of common concern;

- **announcement and catechesis**, or a proclamation of God's love as made manifest in Jesus Christ, coupled with the invitation to enter the community of those who believe in Christ.

In the English translation of this paragraph, before the last-mentioned element, announcement and catechesis, is to be found the word "finally". This has led some to consider the other elements as mere preparation, as pre-evangelisation, and only direct proclamation as true evangelization. Yet the word "finally" is not in the original Italian text; it has been added in English for purely stylistic reasons. It cannot therefore be used as a basis for a theory of mission.

At the most one could say that the first four elements can lead up to announcement or proclamation, but they are not finalized by it, they are not motivated by proclamation. The liturgy is not celebrated in order to proclaim Jesus Christ, though indeed Christ is proclaimed, for instance in the eucharistic acclamation. Similarly Christians do not engage in works of mercy as a pretext for preaching Jesus Christ but, like the Good Samaritan, out of compassion for those who are suffering. In the same way interreligious dialogue is not motivated by a desire to "convert" the partner in dialogue.

Therefore "dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 56 = G179). This is expressed in almost chalcedonian language:

In the light of the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue. Instead, she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes* (one could perhaps say: in the context of her mission *tout court*). These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable (*ibid.* n. 55 = G178).

## 5. The Dialogical Dimension of Proclamation

Before ever talking about interreligious dialogue, some attention can be given to dialogue as such. It is "a manner of acting, an attitude, a spirit which guides

one's conduct. It implies concern, respect and hospitality toward the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, modes of expression, values" (DM29 = G836). The conclusion drawn from this is that "dialogue is thus the norm and necessary means of every form of Christian mission.... Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel" (*ibid.*).

The reason for this is that, as Pope Paul VI taught in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Holy Spirit is the chief agent of evangelisation (cf. n. 75). The Spirit is at work both in the one who proclaims and in those who hear the message that is proclaimed. It can be said that the Spirit is at the same time ahead of the work of evangelisation, present during the work of evangelisation, and leading this work.

The Spirit is at work before the evangeliser arrives on the spot:

The evangelising Church must always remember that her task is not exercised in a void. For the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is present and active among the hearers of the Good News even before the Church's missionary action comes into operation (cf. *Redemptor hominis*, n. 12; *Dei Verbum*, n. 53) (DP68 = G992).

The Spirit is present at the very time of proclamation, not only to inspire the right words, but also to open hearts. It will then be seen that "proclamation is a response to the human aspiration for salvation" (DP67 = G991).

The Spirit must also be the one to lead:

Mindful of what God has already accomplished in those addressed, the Church seeks to discover the right way to announce the Good News. She takes her lead from divine pedagogy. This means learning from Jesus himself, and observing the times and seasons as prompted by the Spirit (DP69 = G993).

Proclamation has therefore to be "progressive and patient, keeping pace with those who hear the message, respecting their freedom and even their 'slowness to believe' (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 79)" (*ibid.*). There must be moreover respect for an active reception on the part of the hearer of the word. This may entail "a process of purification and enlightenment". It will lead to an inculturation of the Christian message as it becomes incarnated in the culture and spiritual tradition of those addressed, so that the message is not only intelligible to them, but is conceived as responding to their deepest aspirations, as truly the Good News they have been longing for (cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, nn. 20,62) (DP70 = G994).

## 6. The Goal of Interreligious Dialogue

Proclamation includes an invitation to faith in Je-

sus Christ, to accept Baptism and so to enter into the community of the Church. It can be said therefore that proclamation is really concerned with conversions to Christianity. The word “conversions” is used advisedly in the plural, as something which can be counted and registered in statistics.

Interreligious dialogue is not geared towards such conversions, implying a change of religious adherence. Yet the term “conversion” has a much wider acceptance, as “a general movement toward God” (DP11 = G935), a “humble and penitent return of the heart to God, in the desire to submit one’s life more generously to him” (DM37 = G844). To the extent that interreligious dialogue encourages the partners to open themselves up to God in this way it can be truly considered a dialogue of salvation.

It should be clear then that if dialogue does not aim at making Buddhists or Muslims into Christians, neither can its aim be said to be making Buddhists into better Buddhists and Muslims into better Muslims. It would seem better to categorize the movement of conversion as a more ardent and sincere response to God. In this sense interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations. It reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one’s beliefs and a common exploration of one’s respective religious convictions. In dialogue, Christians and others are invited to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God’s personal call and gracious self-gift which, as our faith tells us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of his Spirit (DP40 = G964).

Mutual understanding and friendly relations have been mentioned. These indeed do form part of the goal of interreligious dialogue, even if they do not exhaust its meaning. Dialogue has been defined as:

“all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom” (DP9 = G933).

In some ways the goal of interreligious dialogue is very general. It is much less specific than ecumenical dialogue in its strict acceptance. The Ecumenical Directory of May 1993 makes this clear:

There are increasing contacts in today’s world between Christians and persons of other religions. These contacts differ radically from the contacts between the Church and ecclesial communities, which have for their object the restoration of the unity Christ willed among all his disciples, and are prop-

erly called ecumenical (n. 210 = G1016).

Yet the same document goes on to underline the ecumenical dimension of interreligious dialogue:

In practice they (these contacts) are deeply influenced by, and in turn influence ecumenical relationships. Through them, Christians can deepen the level of communion existing among themselves, and so they are to be considered an important part of ecumenical cooperation (*ibid.*).

Every human being is on the journey of life towards the one goal.

We share our common human condition as we journey towards the One who alone is truth in its wholeness, God.

There are many ways to make this journey and in each of them we need silence and humble listening to reflect on the experience.

It is part of the way to dialogue, to share the fruits and thus validate the experience.

When we meet another on the journey we are called first and foremost to share our common humanity and common journey in mutuality.

This is prior to any discussion or evaluation of our respective modes of travel.

There are many obstacles on the journey, politics, power, etc., that often hinder our ability to hear and learn from the other.

We desire to live the reign of God and thus attain hearts that are converted and re-orientated towards reconciliation with all in God who makes sense of the journey.

## 7. Interreligious Dialogue — a Duty of All

Interreligious dialogue may be considered by some a marginal activity, something which can be left to a few experts. This is not the thinking of John Paul II. He has presented his position very forthrightly in *Redemptoris Missio*:

Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practise dialogue, although not always to the same degree or in the same way (n. 57 = G180).

The importance of dialogue had been underlined already by Vatican II. The decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, states:

Bishops should dedicate themselves in their apostolic office as witnesses of Christ before all men (n. 11).

In other words, they are not Bishops solely for the Catholics in their Diocese, but for all its inhabitants of whatever religion or none they may belong to. They are therefore encouraged to establish relations on as wide a scale as possible:

Since it is the mission of the Church to converse with the human society in which she lives, Bishops especially are called upon to approach men, seeking and fostering dialogue with them. These conversations on salvation ought to be distinguished for clarity of speech as well as for humility and gentleness so that truth may always be joined with charity, and understanding with love. Likewise they should be characterised by due prudence allied, however, with that trustfulness which fosters friendship and thus is naturally disposed to bringing about a union of minds (*ibid.*, n. 13).

This text mentions “Bishops especially”, since it is specifically dealing with the role of Bishops. Yet the use of the qualifier “especially” shows that Bishops do not have a monopoly of dialogue. In fact here, as in other aspects of their ministry, they need the cooperation of all. Interreligious dialogue provides a field for collaborative ministry.

John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, says that in this area “the contribution of the laity is indispensable” (n. 57 = G180). He speaks first about the example that they can give in their life situations, and also the relations that they can build up through their activities. Specific mention is made of the possibility of contributing through research and study.

Though dialogue takes place between individuals, not systems, a passage from *Dialogue and Proclamation* suggests that even religions as such can be brought into dialogue:

The Church encourages and fosters interreligious dialogue not only between herself and other religious traditions, but even among these religious traditions themselves. This is one way in which she fulfils her role as “sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among all people” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 1). She is invited by the Spirit to encourage all religious institutions and movements to meet, to enter into collaboration and to purify themselves in order to promote truth, and to live in holiness, justice, love and peace — dimensions of that kingdom which, at the end of all time, Christ will hand over to his Father (cf. 1 Cor 15:24) (DP80 = G1004).

Christians should not be jealous if others are engaging in dialogue. There is much room for healthy emulation.

## 8. Dialogue at the Service of the Kingdom

This last quotation can provide a good introduction to the final consideration, namely that dialogue is one way of working for the coming of God’s kingdom. This idea had already been presented by *Dialogue and Mission*.

The reign of God is the final end of all persons. The Church, which is to be “its seed and beginning” (*Lumen gentium*, nn. 5,9), is called from the first, to start out on this path toward the kingdom and, along with the rest of humanity, to advance toward that goal (DM25 = G832).

This text calls to mind a passage from the discourse of John Paul II at the conclusion of the Day of Prayer for World Peace, held in Assisi on 27 October 1986:

The very fact that we have come to Assisi from various quarters of the world is in itself a sign of this common path which humanity is called to tread. Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others. We hope that this pilgrimage to Assisi has taught us anew to be aware of the common origin and common destiny of humanity. Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another toward the transcendent goal which he sets for us (n. 5 = G546).

Interreligious dialogue can thus act as a reminder to Christians that they are not alone. They are called to cooperate with people of other religious traditions. They are called to welcome the help of people of other religious traditions as they respond to God’s will and strive to contribute to the coming of God’s kingdom.

\* \* \* \* \*



# DEVELOPING DIALOGUE

**Msgr. Michael Fitzgerald, MAfr**

## 1. A definition of dialogue

Before presenting some reflections on how interreligious dialogue can be developed, it may not be out of place to recall what is meant by this term. This is how it is defined in the document *Dialogue and Proclamation*:

In the context of religious plurality, dialogue means “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment”, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom (n. 9 = G933).

From this definition it can be seen that interreligious dialogue is a response to religious plurality. As mobility increases and communications become easier and more rapid, so our world becomes more marked by this religious plurality. This makes dialogue a greater imperative. Moreover it can be noticed that in recent years both the awareness of diversity and the desire for dialogue have increased.

It should be noted that the term chosen to define dialogue is “relations”. This indicates something much wider than verbal exchange. Not only formal exchanges are intended, but also gestures of solidarity, action together, and even silent presence. The importance of non-verbal communication should not be underestimated.

Such relations, which to merit being called dialogue must be positive and constructive, can exist between individual believers at an informal level, or between representatives of communities. The range is extremely wide, as will be pointed out shortly. It must be said, however, that whether at the level of individuals or communities, dialogue takes place between people, not between systems.

The goal of dialogue is first mutual understanding, to try to understand the other as that other wants to be understood. If this goal is to be achieved, openness is required, a willingness to listen to the other, a readiness to overcome prejudice if necessary, a desire to learn. Nevertheless, this openness must be two-way, allowing on each side the possibility of self-express-

sion. Thus dialogue includes witness to one's own beliefs and convictions.

A further goal is mutual enrichment. Relations with people of other religions could degenerate into rivalry or be contaminated by a polemical spirit. Where the relationship is positive, it will lead to admiration for what is good in the other religion. This will provide a stimulus to deepen one's knowledge not only of that religion but of one's own as well. Positive relations will encourage spiritual emulation.

## 2. Forms of dialogue

The document *Dialogue and Mission* was perhaps the first to present four forms of dialogue. These were briefly and conveniently summarized in *Dialogue and Proclamation*:

a) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.

c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute (n. 42 = G966).

This typology is not exhaustive, nor are the definitions perfect. In particular it might be better to speak of the *dialogue of discourse*, or *dialogue of formal exchange*, since such dialogue need not be, and in fact is not, confined to theological issues. Nevertheless this division into four forms has proved its worth pedagogically. It will be followed here since it provides useful pegs for the reflections to be presented.

## 3. Dialogue of life

From the description given above it can be seen that the dialogue of life is not something passive. It is

not mere co-existence. Nor can one speak of dialogue if the choice is made, or is imposed upon one, to live in a ghetto. So this form of dialogue requires openness, a desire to enter into relations with others. Its aim is to establish good neighbourly relations, to ensure that people are living in peace and harmony.

How can this be done? Perhaps the first thing is to stimulate an active interest in the other, a healthy curiosity. If new neighbours arrive we observe them, trying to find out what they are like. Can this not be applied to people of a different religion who come and settle in a particular region, or even if they are only going to be present on a temporary basis? Acquiring knowledge about others helps to overcome prejudices. This knowledge can be made available, through booklets, through talks, through meetings, but it can also be acquired through direct contact between followers of different religious traditions.

Paying visits to one another's homes is a normal way of increasing neighbourliness. The description given above talks about sharing joys and sorrows, so it could be presenting congratulations at the marriage of a son or daughter, or on the birth of a child, or offering condolences at a time of bereavement. It might include giving a helping hand when someone is sick or elderly, or when the car has broken down. Life itself provides occasions for meeting and thus for dialogue.

Sometimes these visits may be organized. Westminster Interfaith, an initiative of the Catholic Archdiocese of Westminster, London, holds every year a walk through the streets of London. Each time a different area is chosen. The walkers, or pilgrims, go from one place of worship to another, from the Baptist chapel to the Buddhist temple, from the synagogue to the Sikh gurdwara, from the Anglican or Catholic church to the Hindu temple. In each place the local community is able to receive the group on its own terms, offering an opportunity for rest and refreshment, but also a chance to learn something about the host community. The walkers too, as they go along, are drawn to share their own stories, as pilgrims are wont to do. This annual walk thus helps people of different religious traditions to grow in unity, while at the same time they give a united witness to the wider public.

Another organized form of the dialogue of life that can be referred to is the *Duyog Ramadan* programme in the Southern Philippines. This is a programme to help Christians accompany (the meaning of the word *duyog*) Muslims during the month of Ramadan. By

appropriate sermons and talks, and special programmes on the radio, the Christians are made aware of how Muslims observe Ramadan and why. In this way greater understanding can be built up, and possible tensions overcome.

The mention of Ramadan evokes the idea of greetings for the feast which concludes this month, *Id al-Fitr*. On the occasion of Christmas and the New Year we send greeting cards or letters to relatives and friends. With some people this is the only contact we have in the year, but we would be loth to break it. So acknowledging the feasts of people of other religions is a way of showing recognition and esteem for them. Since 1967 our Council has sent a message of greetings to Muslims for *Id al-Fitr*. There have only been two exceptions: in 1971, when there was no message at all (probably because the official at the Islam desk was away travelling) and in 1991, at the time of the Gulf War, when the Message was sent by Pope John Paul II himself. In recent years our Council has started sending a message to Buddhists for *Vesakh*, and to Hindus for *Diwali*. These messages are well received, and are certainly a way of building up good relations.

You may feel that this point is being laboured, but it seems to me that it takes on a special significance at this time when preparations are being made for the celebration of the Jubilee of the Year 2000. If we are ready to join others in their celebrations, they may be less likely to take offence at ours or feel threatened by them, and they may be ready to join us in some way.

#### 4. Dialogue of action

After having mentioned the four forms of dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* goes on to say:

The importance of dialogue for integral development, social justice and human liberation needs to be stressed. Local Churches are called upon, as witnesses to Christ, to commit themselves in this respect in an unselfish and impartial manner. There is need to stand up for human rights, proclaim the demands of justice, and denounce injustice not only when their own members are victimized, but independently of the religious allegiance of the victims (n. 44 = G968).

Reference is made here to Christians, to Catholics, to Local Churches, but they are not the only ones working for greater respect for human rights. It is encouraging to see for instance in Pakistan, where Christians constitute a very small minority of the population, Christians and Muslims have been protesting together against certain measures, such as the proposal to have one's religious belonging included on one's identity card, or the blasphemy law.

It is not necessarily religious bodies that “stand up for human rights”. There are human rights leagues in many countries, including within the Islamic world, whose members have often shown great courage in condemning abuses. Then one could think of a body such as Amnesty International whose present Secretary General is a Muslim. Such “neutral” bodies can often provide a better opportunity for interreligious cooperation in this field, since they are not dominated by any one religion.

The passage from *Dialogue and Proclamation* continues:

There is need also to join together in trying to solve the great problems facing society and the world, as well as in education for justice and peace (*ibid.*).

This, it would seem to me, was the inspiration behind an organization such as the World Conference

on Religion and Peace (WCRP). Unitarians, Jews and Buddhists felt that they were faced with the same problems, and that they would benefit by trying to tackle them together rather than separately. The first world conference was held in Kyoto in 1970, and the decision was taken to establish a permanent organization. A Catholic Bishop, Archbishop Angelo Fernandes of New Delhi, gave enthusiastic support. One of the distinctive features of WCRP is that it brings into play the respective religious motivations for commitment to justice and peace. More recently the movement has become more action-oriented. Standing committees are being formed for questions of development, for environmental concerns, for the rights of children, for action on poverty. Whether this will pay lasting dividends has yet to be seen, but already some achievements can be pointed to. WCRP has contributed to the setting up of an interreligious council in Sarajevo.

Once upon a time in a village, deep in the heart of a great subcontinent, there lived a little girl called Maria. She lived happily with her friends Rabia, Laxmi, Harun and Gopel. They were very happy and they played together. They enjoyed the beauty of God's creation, the gifts given to them. Each in their own way celebrated their feasts and joined in each other's celebrations. Each festivity was looked forward to and celebrated with great pleasure.

Maria's grandfather would sit her down and tell her the story of her ancestors.

“It was not always like this”, he would say, “there were missionaries from far off lands who came to us with the stories of their God and many listened to them and followed them. And then, Maria, we were forbidden to go with our friends who were different from us and we were unable to join them for their feasts. Later, others saw the helicopter which came to the village. It appeared on a blue, sunny day like a monster from the sky spitting dirt, dust, pebbles and confusion. More people, who told us their story and offered rewards. Some called them monkeys and laughed at them.

“Then, one beautiful peace-filled day, two people walked into the village. They had come from a long way away. They were tired and they sat on the river bank under the banyan tree and they listened to the stories of the people of the village. The women came to wash, and the man came to chat. As they listened, they heard. As they heard their hearts burned within them and our hearts burned too, Maria”.

The grandfather then turned to Maria and said, “You, now Maria, go and enjoy this peace, harmony and respect and share this with all your friends”. Maria returned to her friends Rabia, Laxmi, Harun and Gopel with a new awareness, new love, appreciation and deep respect.

As we listen now, do our hearts burn within us?.....

It has set up a similar council in Sierra Leone which has become engaged in the rehabilitation of child soldiers.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue does not belong to WCRP but does give it support. It could be said that the Council does not itself engage in the dialogue of action, but it certainly is committed to reflection with other believers on this form of dialogue. For instance, a Catholic-Muslim Liaison Committee was established in 1995 between our Council and representatives of International Islamic Organisations. The contacts made during the period prior to the formal agreement to set up the committee rendered possible a joint reflection on the problems raised by the U.N. Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994. Much older than this is the Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee which, naturally has been much concerned with combatting anti-semitism, but also recently issued a statement on the environment.

It must not be thought that all the action is taking place at the international level. Work for justice and peace is an integral part of the Church's evangelizing mission. It has to be carried out at all levels. It forms part of the Church's *diakonia*. The commitment to education, to medical work, to social action, is not confined to the Church's members. These services are offered to all. They will continue to exist in a multi-religious environment, even when the Christians are in the minority.

There can of course be different situations. There are those in which the Church is in control. She has her own institutions: schools, universities, hospitals, dispensaries, training centres, and so on. There still has to be much reflection when the pupils, students, patients, staff, belong to another religion or to a variety of religions. What is to be the ethos of the establishment? How are the followers of other religious traditions to be made to feel at ease? Such situations offer many opportunities for serious dialogue.

Another type of relationship is created when the Church does not have its own institutions, but members of the Church, either as individuals or as recognized religious bodies, work within already existing structures. These may be under State control or belong to the private sector. A case in point would be Libya, where a request was made to have religious women to work in hospitals. It can happen, in these circumstances, that cooperation is strictly professional and that there is little opportunity for real dialogue. Yet in the long run relations of dialogue can be built

up, helped by the generous witness of those who are engaged in this work.

There are also private initiatives bringing together people of different religions, even though religion may not be the decisive factor for the enterprise. There are areas of health care or social services where governments find it difficult to meet people's needs. Care of the handicapped is a case in point. This has led, in the countries of the Maghreb for instance, to the formation of private associations, in which Christians are involved alongside Muslims. It is obvious that in these circumstances much dialogue is needed, to determine the aims of the association, to ensure the right spirit, to agree on the financial basis. A great deal of confidence is needed to be able to work harmoniously together. So the dialogue of action can truly be considered a form of dialogue.

## 5. Dialogue of discourse

When the word dialogue is mentioned, people immediately think of formal meetings and learned discussions. As has been said above, this is not the only way of engaging in dialogue, yet it does have its importance.

The dialogue that takes place in formal exchanges can take many different forms. As regards the **number of religions**, the dialogue can be bilateral, such as Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim, Christian-Buddhist, or trilateral, Jews, Christians and Muslims together, or multilateral, with people of many different religious traditions taking part. Each of these types has its own special advantages. Bilateral dialogue can allow greater focus not only on common issues but on divergent elements, seeking greater clarity. The trilateral dialogue is particular in nature, referring to the common Abrahamic heritage, however this may be understood. Multilateral dialogue can sometimes take away the edge of confrontation which can arise in bilateral meetings.

Meetings will also differ in the **number** of participants, going from large congresses to groups that can meet in people's homes. If the first type allows the "good news" of dialogue to be carried to a larger public, it also runs the danger of becoming theatrical. It is often more possible for serious discussion to take place in smaller groups.

A similar reflection could be made concerning the **frequency** of meetings. Some are unique experiences. Others may be occasional happenings, yet others may be regular occurrences with a built-in time schedule. Here again, for progress in mutual understanding a certain continuity is useful.

Another difference in these meetings regards the **topics** addressed. These may be theological, or social



issues.

Finally, there can be a difference in the **quality** of participants. The policy may be to work through institutions, thus leaving it to the dialogue partners to choose their own participants. On the other hand, there may be a preference for issuing direct invitations to persons who are already known. In the first case there is a greater possibility of achieving some kind of representativity. The second option may offer a greater guarantee of fruitful dialogue.

If the dialogue of discourse is to succeed, then perhaps certain conditions need to be fulfilled. The preparation for the meeting should be carried out, if possible, in cooperation with the dialogue partners. This preparation should be serious, but there should not be too great a rigidity in the running of the meeting; it is important to leave openings for spontaneous discussion. Care must be taken to maintain a true dialogical spirit; this means not only avoiding polemics, but also not restricting the exchanges to a purely academic approach. It may be necessary to accept that there will be a certain amount of repetition, if not in the same meeting, at least from one meeting to another. New people are often brought into the dialogues, and this is a good thing, but it also means that the fundamentals have to be explained over and over again. Very often meetings wish to end up with a common statement. Here it is elementary wisdom not to want to say everything so that at least something can be said together.

## 6. Dialogue of religious experience

To some extent this can be a specific form of the dialogue of discourse, when the topics for discussion are selected from the realm of spirituality. One example of this is the Christian-Muslim seminar on holiness held at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies in 1985. In this meeting papers were read on the concept of holiness in Christianity and Islam, the teaching on the paths to holiness, and also concrete examples of holy people.

A similar discussion of spiritual teaching has taken place in the encounters of the Ribât al-Salâm, a group that used to meet at the Monastery of Tibhérine, in Algeria, until the assassination of the seven monks. A theme having been chosen in advance, it was explored

in the Christian and Islamic traditions, and time was given to sharing on this theme. Yet these encounters were particular in that a considerable time was given over to prayer.

It is the being with one another in prayer, or at one another's worship, that distinguishes the dialogue of religious experience. It is a type of dialogue that is being developed among monastics. An international secretariat has been set up to stimulate and coordinate this Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID). While the American group has developed a programme of hospitality, welcoming in particular monks and nuns from the Tibetan tradition, in Europe more contact has been made with the Zen tradition of Japan, and various spiritual exchanges have taken place. These include periods of two to three weeks in a monastery of another tradition, trying to live as fully as possible the life of the monks or nuns, developing a dialogue without words. Yet the experience usually ends with a symposium in which observations can be communicated and questions raised.

This type of dialogue has flourished mainly between Buddhists and Christians. It has been more difficult to develop it with other religious traditions.

But it should not be thought that the dialogue of religious experience is confined to monastics. Interreligious prayer can be considered a form of this particular dialogue, and this is a growing phenomenon. The World Day of Prayer for Peace,

held in Assisi in October 1986, has encouraged many people to come together to pray. Such prayer may take place on civic occasions, national days, or anniversaries. People may feel a need to pray together at times of crisis, or when faced with natural or man-made disasters. There can also be more private occasions when people of different religions will want to share prayer. It may not be possible to find formulae of prayers which can be recited together, since different sensibilities have to be respected. Yet, provided the participants are really attentive, listening with respect to the spiritual riches of another tradition as expressed in its prayers, can be considered a true form of dialogue.

With regard to the dialogue of religious experience certain conditions would have to be underlined. First integrity, that there should be no compromise with regard to one's own religious convictions. Sec-

**We encounter each other  
as we draw water  
from the many wells of life.  
Each in a vessel  
typical of its own place.**

**As we talk together  
at the watering place,  
we can enrich each other  
by telling the story of our life.**



only respect, not embarrassing people by inviting them to say words or perform gestures which they are not comfortable with. Finally humility, acknowledging the limitations of human symbols and accepting the signs of God's presence. It may be useful here to quote a passage from *Dialogue and Mission*:

This type of dialogue can be a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals. It leads naturally to each partner communicating to the other the reasons for his own faith. The sometimes profound differences between the faiths do not prevent this dialogue. Those differences, rather, must be referred back in humility and confidence to God who "is greater than our heart" (1 Jn 3:20) (n. 35 = G842).

## 7. Dispositions for dialogue

To conclude these reflections, which have dwelt more on types of dialogue than on its development, it may be good to say something about the dispositions needed for dialogue. A section on this will be found in *Dialogue and Proclamation* (nn. 47-50 = G971-974).

There is a need for a balanced attitude. It is true that the Holy Spirit is at work both in the hearts of individuals and in the religious traditions to which they belong. This does not mean that everything in these traditions is good. To think so would be ingenuous. On the other hand, these traditions cannot be dismissed as being evil or without value. That would be to take an overly critical stance. There is need for openness and receptivity, a readiness to discern what can be attributed to the work of the Spirit.

A further disposition required is a strong religious conviction. Without this there would be a danger of indifference to religious values, a temptation not to take others' religious convictions seriously. Another possibility would be that, when faced with challenges to one's beliefs, if these are not strong enough one might be put on the defensive. This could even lead to a certain aggressivity. When convictions are well rooted, this allows a respectful and receptive approach to the convictions and values of the other.

Connected with this is an openness to the truth. If the Christian is convinced that the fulness of truth is to be found in Jesus Christ, more as something by which we are to be grasped rather than for us to grasp, then the meeting with others can help in the discovery of this truth. Dialogue can thus become a true learning process.

For this to be realised a contemplative spirit is needed. This is something which has been stressed by a number of the participants in the Asian Synod. It is through contemplation that one is able to discover and admire what God is doing through the Holy Spirit, in

the world, in the whole of humanity. Prayer in which a dialogue with God is developed provides a solid foundation for dialogue with others.

Finally mention could be made of patience and perseverance. If one is looking for quick results, then one should not enter into the business of dialogue. There are a number of obstacles to dialogue: ignorance, prejudice, suspicion, self-sufficiency, as well as socio-political factors which may make genuine encounter difficult. Many things have to be explained again and again, and the weariness that this arouses has to be opposed. Nor should failures and disappointments lead to discouragement. The fruits will come in their own good time. Yet it may be true here as elsewhere, that one will reap where another has sown. It is God who gives the increase.

It must be remembered that the Church's commitment to dialogue is not dependent on success in achieving mutual understanding and enrichment; rather it flows from God's initiative in entering into dialogue with humankind and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death and Resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression (DP, n. 53 = G977).

# DIALOGUE DANS UNE CULTURE EN TRANSFORMATION

## *LA MISSION EN AFRIQUE AUJOURD'HUI.*

Soeur Lucie Nzenzili Mboma, FMM

### Introduction.

Le dialogue est au coeur du christianisme, il s'agit d'un dialogue divino-humain exprimé en Jésus qui, à son tour a dialogué avec ses compatriotes afin de les aider à découvrir les signes du Royaume à venir mais déjà présent parmi eux. Jésus a utilisé le dialogue comme l'un des moyens pour révéler sa divinité et les mystères du Royaume de Dieu. Il était prêt et disponible pour dialoguer avec tout le monde, même avec les pharisiens qui n'avaient pas toujours des mots aimables à son égard. Il n'a jamais exclu qui que ce soit de son assistance. Jésus a institué l'Eglise afin qu'elle continue ce dialogue et son oeuvre de transformation. L'Eglise doit témoigner de son amour dans un contexte pluraliste, elle est appelée à comprendre l'oeuvre de l'Esprit-Saint dans l'Eglise et au milieu des peuples de différentes traditions religieuses ( cfr Joy Thomas, SVD, " Mission as Dialogue" in Mission Studies Vol - XIV- 1 & 2, 27 & 28, 1997)

" Le dialogue est compris comme une authentique expression de plein droit de la mission évangélisatrice de l'Eglise. ... Il constitue une dimension importante de l'ouverture au monde voulue par le Concile ... L'Eglise doit entrer en dialogue avec le monde dans lequel elle travaille. Elle a quelque chose à dire, un message à livrer, une communication à offrir (AAS 56 1964, p.639) -

En ce XXème siècle finissant, plusieurs Eglises Particulières d'Afrique subsaharienne sont dans le deuxième centenaire de leur évangélisation. Elles sont jeunes, dynamiques, pleines d'enthousiasme et même de fierté. Le Synode spécial pour l'Afrique, en 1994, a démontré la maturité et le sens de responsabilité, qui en sont les garants de l'avenir. Le Synode spécial pour l'Afrique s'est voulu Synode d'espérance, et de résurrection, au moment où tout semble s'écrouler sur ce continent ( cfr. Savino Palermo, scj.: " Pour l'Amour de mon Peuple" Ed. Dehoniane, Rome 1997, p.13 ). Le même Synode a lancé un appel pressant en faveur du dialogue, la situation des sociétés africai-

nes en pleine mutation fait du dialogue un moyen incontournable.

Dans notre exposé, nous commencerons par une courte description des domaines de dialogue inter-religieux en Afrique Noire, ce sera le premier chapitre. Ensuite nous nous étendrons un peu plus sur le dialogue avec les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines ( RTA), qui constituera l'objet de notre deuxième chapitre, et le troisième chapitre sera consacré au dialogue comme engagement dans les sociétés africaines en transformation.

### Chapitre Premier

#### Bref aperçu des domaines de dialogue inter-religieux en Afrique Noire:

#### Le but du dialogue inter-religieux des chrétiens africains

" L'Afrique a hérité la rivalité qui existait entre les différentes dénominations chrétiennes. Heureusement, après les indépendances des pays d'Afrique, cette animosité a beaucoup diminué. Alors que nous sommes encore bien loin d'atteindre une communion eucharistique avec nos frères et soeurs séparés, nous **coopérons** cependant dans beaucoup de domaines tant civil que social. Ceci ne doit pas nous faire oublier le but qui est de travailler ensemble pour une **complète unité ecclésiale dans une communion eucharistique**. (cfr. Mgr Justin Tetemu Samba, Evêque de Musoma en Tanzanie : " Dialogue " dans Afer, Vol 36 / 1994/ 4). Ces chrétiens font face aux mêmes défis quant au vécu de leur foi.

Ces églises chrétiennes implantées en Afrique par les missionnaires étrangers ont fait jusque récemment, peu d'efforts d'inculturation et de dialogue avec les pratiques et l'esprit des anciennes religions africaines. Un nouveau modèle de comportement socioreligieux, trop peu intériorisé, s'est montré trop

peu résistant devant les grandes interrogations et épreuves de la vie. C'est pourquoi, face au déchirement socio-culturel et religieux d'aujourd'hui, les masses africaines recourent aux prophètes de nouvelles églises en vue de retrouver sens et cohérence de leur vie actuelle dans le nouvel ordre social ( DE HAES, R., " La Pastorale de la Prière en Afrique dans les Actes du Colloque International sur la prière Africaine, Kinshasa, 1994, p.217 ) Les chrétiens africains vivent tiraillés entre la fidélité à leur foi en Jésus Christ et la fidélité aux traditions léguées par les ancêtres. La foi de l'Africain se trouve aujourd'hui prise entre deux traditions et deux cultures, en mal d'identité, comment les amener, par le dialogue à vivre leur foi dans un attachement total au Christ tout en étant fidèles aux valeurs positives de leurs cultures.

### **Le fondamentalisme, un obstacle au dialogue avec des Musulmans**

En Afrique, il y a cette présence envahissante de l'Islam qui, avec l'apparition du courant fondamentaliste en son sein, devient intolérant. Pour le moment, le dialogue avec l'Islam est difficile. " Tout dépend de l'attitude des musulmans avec lesquels vous vivez. S'ils sont des fondamentalistes et fanatiques, il y a grands problèmes. C'est le cas du Soudan, par exemple, la situation a été longtemps malheureuse à cause de la guerre entre le Nord et le Sud du Soudan. ... On a besoin d'une grâce spéciale de la part de Dieu pour dialoguer avec quelqu'un qui est en train de tuer vos frères et soeurs, quelqu'un qui cherche à te réduire à zéro, dialoguer avec quelqu'un qui pense que tu lui es inférieur etc..." ( Mgr Vincent Mojowok Nyiker, Evêque de Malakal au Soudan, Afer Vol 36 / 1994/4)

Ce dialogue devrait, néanmoins, " être intensifié dans le but d'éviter le fondamentalisme et d'autres conflits religieux dangereux. Un tel dialogue qui devrait viser à la création d'une co-existence pacifique, à la reconnaissance de l'égalité de tous les peuples, à l'appréciation du pluralisme religieux et à la promotion d'une coopération mutuelle pour faire avancer les valeurs du Royaume" ( Mgr. Justin Tetemu Samba)

### **Le dialogue avec les gouvernements africains**

Dans des meilleures conditions la relation entre l'Eglise et l'Etat devrait être une relation saine, faite de respect, d'ouverture et d'amour, continue Mgr. Justin Tetemu Samba. Malheureusement, dit-il, l'Eglise en Afrique est exposée aux régimes totalitari-

res et dictatoriaux, et elle a, par ce fait, à lutter pour promouvoir la justice sociale et la liberté de conscience pour le peuple. En même temps, l'Eglise se fait la voix de sans voix et défend les droits civils du peuple: la liberté d'expression.

### **Les nouveaux mouvements religieux**

Les sectes et les nouveaux mouvements religieux ont trouvé un terrain fertile en Afrique noire. " Ils fonctionnent dans les sociétés africaines post-coloniales en pleine mutation. La modernité, la civilisation technique et industrielle, l'urbanisation rapide, le processus de démocratisation en cours, marquent, et troublent en partie, les schèmes de pensée et de comportement de bon nombre d'Africains. Dans les grands centres surtout, les individus, déracinés de leurs anciennes traditions et unités sociales de vie, sont projetés dans un monde nouveau qui ne leur présente aucun cadre de référence pour trouver des solutions aux multiples problèmes posés par leur situation nouvelle. ( DE HAES, R. sj., *ibid*, p.216 ) Le dialogue est difficile à cause de leur intransigeance

### **Les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines.**

Les religions traditionnelles africaines axées essentiellement sur les croyances et les pratiques ancestrales et soutenues par une grande solidarité clanique donnaient aux individus et aux groupes un certain équilibre global et une parfaite intégration dans le milieu. Devenues caduques, surtout dans les centres urbains, sous la pression de la nouvelle réalité sociohistorique, elles finissent en réalité par créer un vide spirituel. Rien d'étonnant que les individus soient ainsi contraints de recourir à d'autres moyens pour trouver une solution à leurs problèmes (*ibid*, p. 216). Le dialogue avec les religions traditionnelles africaines aidera aussi à faire éliminer la dichotomie de la foi chrétienne en Afrique.

C'est pourquoi, nous situant dans la dynamique du Synode Spécial pour les Evêques d'Afrique, nous nous pencherons un peu plus sur le dialogue avec les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines. (RTA). En effet, le Synode a lancé donc un appel pressant en faveur du dialogue.: " **Qu'une attention particulière soit portée à nos coutumes et à nos traditions religieuses en tant qu'elles sont héritages culturels. Ce sont des cultures en régime d'oralité et leur sort se joue essentiellement dans le dialogue des générations en vue de leur transmission**" (Message du Synode n.20).

## Chapitre Deuxième

### Dialogue inter-religieux avec les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines.

#### Fondement théologique du dialogue inter-religieux avec les RTA:

Le Pape Jean Paul II a écrit: “ ... Les Pères de l’église voyaient dans les diverses religions comme autant de reflets d’une unique vérité, comme des ‘se-mences du Verbe’ témoignant que l’aspiration la plus profonde de l’esprit humain est tournée, malgré la diversité des chemins, vers une direction unique, en s’exprimant dans la dimension totale de l’humanité... (RH, 11). L’attitude missionnaire commence toujours par un sentiment de profonde estime à ‘ce qu’il y a en tout homme’ ( cf. Jean 2, 25 ) ... ; Il s’agit du respect pour tout ce que l’Esprit, “ qui souffle où il veut” ( Jn.3,8) a opéré en lui ( RH, 12)

C’est à la lumière de recherches effectuées par les théologiens et philosophes africains et de tant d’autres que nous essayons de saisir de l’intérieur, la signification de certains événements vécus dans le quotidien par les chrétiens africains fidèles à leurs traditions et les croyants des RTA, pour découvrir et essayer de comprendre ce qui constitue la base de leur spiritualité, et qui explique leur profond attachement à la croyance ancestrale malgré la rencontre avec la modernité. Et quelle est la tâche de l’évangéliste aujourd’hui si ce n’est celle qui consiste à travailler avec ces croyants, afin qu’ils arrivent « à discerner dans la foi les éléments traditionnels à conserver et les ruptures nécessaires qu’opère l’irruption de l’évangile sur son sol » (F. Kabasele : Mission et Inculturation, p 142 .cité par les FMM, document inédit, p.15).

#### Les conditions pour un dialogue interreligieux en Afrique noire.

Des spécialistes en la matière présentent toujours un large éventail des conditions pour le dialogue interreligieux, quant à nous, nous voulons souligner quelques-unes qui nous paraissent importantes par rapport au continent, parce qu’il s’agit d’un dialogue de vie, les chrétiens et les croyants des RTA se rencontrent, s’échangent, comment ils s’interpellent mutuellement , tout en respectant l’identité de l’autre.

Le dialogue ne peut se réaliser que dans “un climat de grande **ouverture** et de **respect** en vue d’un enrichissement mutuel”. En effet, “être croyant c’est être capable de s’ouvrir aux autres parce que la ren-

contre avec un croyant d’une autre religion est un chemin royal pour approfondir sa propre foi” (cf. Kovac. E. : Rencontre avec l’autre. Les croyants des autres Religions 52-63. in Spiritus no 238 février 1995).

L’ouverture est une attitude indispensable également parce qu’un autre croyant me fait découvrir la grandeur d’un homme/femme qui espère autrement et dont l’espérance me rassure et me fortifie. Face à autrui, je me découvre moi-même, comme l’affirme Paul Ricoeur: « Le chemin le plus court vers moi-même passe par un autre. » Autrui me découvre plus que moi-même parce qu’il me parle de Dieu. Il me parle de révélation divine d’une autre manière que celle à laquelle je suis habitué et, par le fait même, il me conduit là où je n’étais pas encore. Même si je ne suis pas toujours d’accord avec lui et que je préfère rester fidèle à un autre autrui, celui qui est dans ma communauté, autrui d’une autre religion reste toujours mon maître ” (Kovac,E., o.c.p.62).

Cette ouverture engage tout évangéliste dans un processus de **conversion**. Nous vivons dans une société multiculturelle, il n’est plus permis de considérer sa culture comme le « standard absolu ». Pour l’évangéliste, il est important de se rappeler que « la culture est le lieu où l’Evangile rencontre l’homme » ( E.N.no 20 ) « et que... la culture de chaque peuple est sacrée et digne de respect »( Jean Paul II )

La rencontre directe avec les RTA apparaît plutôt difficile, d’abord à cause de la **langue**. En Afrique,” nous évoluons principalement dans le soubassement de la littérature orale avec son inépuisable richesse de proverbes et dictons, adages et mythes, contes et fables, il n’y a pas de sources écrites” Or la langue apparaît comme le condensé culturel d’un peuple, elle véhicule la culture. Les choses se compliquent encore à cause du caractère exotérique des RTA, soumises aux lois de secret, et demeurent l’apanage des seuls initiés qui en gardent jalousement les clés herméneutiques (J. Efoé Penoukon Spiritus no 138 février 1995, p. 135). Nous avons appris un proverbe aux Iles Philippines qui dit: « Ang wika ay isang daan sa kaluluwa ng mga tao »: ce qui signifie : « La langue est un chemin qui conduit vers l’âme des peuples ».

Pour souligner l’importance de la connaissance de la langue, nous reprenons ici le témoignage d’un missionnaire qui a vécu au Tchad et a appris l’arabe: “...Rencontre avec une culture, d’abord, par l’étude de l’arabe littéraire: J’ai été séduit par la beauté formelle de cette langue et fasciné par le monde auquel elle me donnait accès. Quand je constate, aujourd’hui



Le dialogue est une aventure à l'issue imprévisible! Même plus, le dialogue est plein de risques!  
 Où sont nos certitudes d'autan?  
 Où sont nos définitions sûres, nos affirmations claires?  
 Nous croyions tout avoir,  
 nous croyions tout savoir sur Dieu  
     pour simplement en faire part aux autres.  
 Et nous voici renvoyés à Celui qui, de sa divinité certaine n'a rien retenu,  
     rien gardé, pour se livrer un aux mains de l'humanité.  
 Quelle position instable que de se savoir ainsi vulnérables de toute part!  
 Quelle école d'humilité, au plus haut point inconfortable  
     pour les savants que nous sommes,  
     de devoir constamment écouter sans savoir quand nous aurons droit  
     à la parole.  
 C'est Celui qui est suspendu en l'air, relié à la terre ferme que par le seul  
     bois du supplice et de la honte qui nous fait signe aujourd'hui de  
     réapprendre à aimer en allant à la découverte de Son Esprit  
     auprès de ceux et celles qui apparemment n'ont  
         rien à nous dire,  
         rien à nous apprendre  
         rien à nous offrir.

encore, le puissant effet catalyseur qu'exerce sur moi l'attrait de l'arabe dans mes rapports avec les musulmans, je crois qu'on ne saurait trop souligner l'importance du rôle que joue, dans la rencontre, l'attachement à la langue et à la culture de l'autre" ( Cou-dray, H., « Cherchez ce qui unit »: rencontrer l'homme musulman p.57 in Telema 2/94 ). La connaissance de la langue offre la possibilité d'établir des relations d'amitié, de connaître les gens de l'intérieur.

Puisque les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines relèvent de l'oralité, **l'écoute** attentive est l'attitude fondamentale si on veut pénétrer cet univers, afin d'y découvrir comment les Africains sont imprégnés de religiosité, tout a un caractère sacré. Nous relevons ici quelques valeurs qui se dégagent de la palabre africaine, qui en soi constitue un processus exigeant d'écoute: d'abord elle demande la participation de tous, et une écoute respectueuse de la personne peu importe sa condition, chacun et chacune fournit l'information qu'il/elle détient, sa parcelle de vérité, et on **l'écoute jusqu'au bout. sans l'interrompre, on prend son temps pour écouter, et ce, dans le respect.** Cet aspect nous fait comprendre l'importance accordée à la

personne dans les RTA et dans la culture: elles sont anthropocentriques.

Les conditions ci-dessus mentionnés ne sont pas exhaustives, toutefois, il est bon de souligner qu'elles constituent des défis pour tout évangéliste, qu'il soit africain ou étranger. Nous avons glané d'ici et là quelques rites, cultes qui nous permettent de saisir les manifestations de la religiosité des croyants des RTA.

### **A l'Ecoute des croyants des RTA vivant en harmonie avec leur univers.**

La religion est, dans son essence, cette référence de l'être humain à Dieu, comme à son Créateur. La religion constitue le noyau intime de la culture africaine et la spiritualité africaine se dévoilera dans les rituels.

Quand il s'agit de la Religion Traditionnelle Africaine, " il est difficile de définir de manière appropriée le contenu et la forme du sentiment religieux. En Afrique la religion est une **intuition** qui considère Dieu comme une Réalité cosmique primordiale, l'Afri-

cain a la foi en ce Dieu, l'Être suprême, il est transcendant. L'Être Suprême est inaccessible; il est d'une Transcendance telle que, pour beaucoup de problèmes, ce sont les esprits intermédiaires, notamment des Ancêtres qui s'occupent des problèmes pratiques et concrets “; mais « la Transcendance absolue de Dieu n'entre pas en conflit avec son Immanence » ( Atal sa Angang, Prof. D. Les Valeurs contenues dans les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines à la rencontre de l'Évangile de Jésus Christ” Pro Dialogo n94 ( 1997/ 1).

L'Être Suprême est à l'origine de la terre et de la voûte céleste et l'univers imperceptible. Dieu est l'explication ultime de l'être humain. L'Africain a foi en des esprits, la foi en la communauté des hommes. On observe en Afrique une attention permanente envers le monde invisible au point que l'Africain a été qualifié **d'incurablement religieux**” (cfr. Tsangu Makumba, M.V.: “Pour une Introduction à l'Africanologie.” Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse 1994, pp. 5-34). Dans la RTA, l'élément central c'est le sens du sacré, cette dimension est perçue avant toutes choses comme un univers bien organisé et hiérarchisé, régi par les Vivants invisibles sur cette terre. Cet univers structurellement concilié et hospitalier ne comporte ni antagonisme dualiste, ni exclusivité irréductible : il s'agit là de **l'harmonie universelle**. ( cfr Tsangu Makumba, M.V., o.c, p. 28)

Cette présentation assez brève du contenu de la foi du croyant des RTA nous fait pressentir que, ces religions sont monothéistes. “ Mais le Dieu unique que l'on y célèbre est celui à qui l'on peut parler, sans qu'il n'ait lui-même jamais parlé ni ne soit descendu du ciel pour communiquer aux hommes sa volonté (cfr. B. Muzungu : « Religions Africaines traditionnelles et théologie africaine» dans Bilan, 86-87) Même la prière qu'on lui adresse ne devrait pas oublier le mystère qui entoure son être divin et ses volontés, c'est en réalité la prière silencieuse seule qui constitue l'attitude à adopter devant lui (Ntima Nkanza, sj., “Non, je ne mourrai pas, Je Vivrai” .Edition Loyola, p.83) D'ailleurs les Bobo de Burkina Faso disent: « Personne n'a conversé avec Dieu face à face. Dieu est bien voilé, personne n'est son témoin immédiat ». Pour expliquer l'éloignement de Dieu, les Bobo racontent:

« Dieu (Wuro) maintient le contact.

A en croire les fables et les mythes traditionnels, il y a, il demeure un lien entre le ciel et la terre, et cela parce que le monde “spirituel” est un et que Dieu établit le contact.

Aux origines le ciel était contigu à la terre et les femmes présidaient aux destinées de la communauté

villageoise. Mais par la faute et la mégarde de la Vieille Femme, le firmament (l'en-haut) s'est retiré et Dieu aussi s'est éloigné. (Sanon, A.T., “Religion et Spiritualité Africaine. La Quête Spirituelle in L'Afrique et ses Formes de Vie Spirituelle, FCK, 1990, p.40)... Plusieurs mythes africains attribuent cet éloignement de Dieu à l'orgueil de la femme. Dans ce cas, c'est une vieille femme, ailleurs ce sera la fille roi. Le Père E. Mveng, un Jésuite camerounais insistait beaucoup sur une étude africaine de la Bible, la culture africaine, disait-il, est plus proche de la culture qui a écrit la Bible.

Cet éloignement de Dieu nous fait comprendre pourquoi, “ce n'est pas avant tout la question de Dieu ou sur Dieu qui est au centre des Religions traditionnelles. C'est plutôt l'homme seul et son salut qui prédomine dans cette tradition où les rites et les cultes (notamment le culte des ancêtres comme intermédiaires entre Dieu le Très -Haut et les mortels que nous sommes) occupe une place de choix” (Ntima Nkanza, ibd).

## 1. L'Ancêtre:

Dans les sociétés de l'Afrique noire, la relation des vivants avec les morts et, en particulier, avec les Ancêtres, est celle à laquelle l'Africain est le plus attaché. C'est sans doute le point crucial de la culture africaine et, à cause de cela, l'héritage le plus important.

Le passage par la mort n'abolit pas l'humanité de l'ancêtre (il reste et demeure homme) “C'est par l'Ancêtre que Dieu a insufflé le souffle de vie au descendant. Il possède des qualités physiques et spirituelles; doué de force surnaturelle et parce qu'il vit proche de Dieu, il est le médiateur entre Dieu et les parents encore vivants et peut entrer en relation avec ces derniers par les visites oniriques ou dans des lieux bien précis. (Nyamiti, Ch., The Incarnation..., vol VI, n1 [1990], 4-10. résumé par Nkanza Ntima, o.c., p 108-109).

### a ) Qui devient Ancêtre?

Ce n'est pas n'importe quel mort qui devient ancêtre. “L'ancêtre c'est le mort qui a vécu une vie morale et humaine intègre, qu'il peut être présenté aux vivants aussi bien comme modèle de vie et des mœurs que comme l'un de ceux qui ont contribué à la stabilité communautaire grâce à leur apport positif à l'héritage de la tradition ancestrale que l'on commémore régulièrement de manière toujours créatrice. L'ancêtre est une personne qui a atteint la maturité morale et dont le souvenir et la geste demeurent toujours vi-

vants dans la communauté qu'il vivifie" ( Ntima Kanza, o.c., p 110 ).

On a donc pas besoin d'avoir les cheveux blancs pour accéder au rang des ancêtres.

### **b ) Les célibataires consacrés sont honorés du titre d'ancêtre.**

Dans notre réflexion pour vous présenter ce papier, nous avons été frappée par les propos du Père Boka di Mpasi Londi sur l'accès accordé aux célibataires consacrés au titre d'ancêtres. En effet, les consœurs du Sénégal et du Burkina Faso ont confirmé ce fait aussi. Le nom de la religieuse est souvent donné à une fille de sa famille ou bien d'une famille qui n'a aucune relation parentale avec la religieuse. Alors que les ancêtres sont les esprits, des morts-vivants, nous accédons à cet échelon de notre vivant, c'est une sérieuse interpellation, un défi à la sainteté. Un appel à une présence de qualité au milieu de notre peuple. Le peuple a bien compris que tout en étant du monde, nous ne sommes pas du monde. La vie religieuse est un don, et un don doit être partagé.

Si nous, Religieux/Religieuses africains avons choisi de ne pas donner la vie biologiquement, nous avons à la donner par notre totale donation au Christ qui fait de nous des Frères/Soeurs universels. Il n'y a pas de place à l'égoïsme. Il arrive même qu'un missionnaire ou bien une religieuse dont la vie a été une source d'inspiration pour les gens, une personne totalement donnée, qu'on l'admet dans le clan et en reçoit le nom; ou bien son nom est donné à un enfant du clan, comme expression de sa fécondité spirituelle. Mais souvent, les missionnaires croient toujours que, parce que matériellement pauvres, les parents utilisent leur nom pour avoir des cadeaux. Or que ce sont eux, les parents qui leur font un cadeau précieux, leur nom sera perpétué dans l'enfant; on continuera à parler d'eux. En tant que missionnaires ils ont fait naître Dieu dans la vie de leurs frères et soeurs

### **2. Les sacrifices sont offerts aux ancêtres, mais les rites sont des signes d'une présence qui est là sans être nommée.**

... "En Afrique comme dans toute humanité religieuse, le sacrifice vient comme un rite qui consacre la vie en sa dimension communautaire, familiale et individuelle ou personnelle.

A qui s'adresse les sacrifices africains? Le cas des Bobo de Burkina Faso:

L'observation la plus pertinente nous conduit à répondre sans hésitation: jamais ou rarement à Dieu directement, mais plutôt à d'autres qu'à Dieu:

On avance à l'appui:

- Dieu ne mange pas, ne boit, n'a ni faim ni soif;
- A Dieu

pas de rituels sacrificiels, pas d'endroit fixes ou d'autels;

pas de ministres spécialisés

bref, ni rituel, ni autel, ni image, ni culte, ni ministre.

En deçà, les religions de la terre africaine multiplient leurs célébrations utilisant comme matériel le sang et tout bien matériel perçu comme un don venu des ancêtres.

Elles connaissent le rituel des abstentions et des purifications selon les idées du pur et de l'impur. Elles aspirent à traduire le désir d'action de grâce, de réparation et de joie dans la danse et l'exaltation devant Dieu pour les ancêtres et leurs forces vitales. Les sacrifices sont alors pour ceux qui peuvent servir d'intermédiaires ou des médiateurs entre lui et nous, les Ancêtres et les Esprits. Ainsi Dieu n'est pas le débiteur de l'homme pour recevoir de lui afin de donner à son tour; à la limite, l'homme n'est pas le client de Dieu: **on ne doit rien à celui auquel on doit tout, dont soi-même.** Les rites deviennent en ce cas des signes d'une présence qui est là sans être nommé « C'est Dieu que nous prions quand nous prions les ancêtres » disent les Bariba" ( Sanon, A.T., o.c., p.48 - 49 ).

### **3. La terre appartient aux Ancêtres et elle est indivisible:**

"Elle revient de droit aux Ancêtres, en tant que legs ancestral, aucun être humain ne peut se l'approprier. C'est ainsi qu'avant de procéder à des activités de production ou de construction, on doit d'abord apaiser les génies protecteurs du sol qui habitent dans la forêt, les collines, les montagnes ou bien avant la pêche, il faut évoquer les génies des eaux. Ces rites de propitiation s'explique par le fait que tout est sacré dans la nature" (Sambu, E. : Religions Traditionnelles Africaines: se rencontrer et dialoguer autrement. in Spiritus no 138 février 1995, 45).

"Toute mission catholique érigée sur un secteur, est une « propriété » ancestrale. Toute décision concernant la vie doit être soumise à ceux qui détiennent les pouvoirs traditionnelles en ce lieu. Au Sénégal, il a fallu leur accord pour la construction d'une maternité par la mission catholique, et après l'inauguration et la bénédiction, ces desservants ont exigé de procéder, à leur tour, à leur libation et sacrifices traditionnels pour demander aux ancêtres de protéger cette nouvelle réalisation sur la terre ancestrale léguée aux survivants" (ibd).

#### 4. Le pays d'origine, c'est là où sont enterrés les Ancêtres.

Le pays d'origine ce n'est pas là où l'on est né, parce que tu peux bien naître en ville ou dans un pays autre que le tien, mais le pays, dans la conception africaine, c'est là où sont enterrés les Ancêtres. La plus grande pauvreté pour un Africain à l'étranger, ce n'est pas l'absence de la carte de ce séjour, c'est le fait de ne pas pouvoir être enterré aux côtés de ses ancêtres. En effet, "le désir de mourir « à la maison » est très fort, les Zulu parlent de « ukubuyisa » qui signifie ramener à la maison" (cf. Gwembe, P. : La Piété envers les Ancêtres dans la Religion Africaine in *Telema* no 82 avril- juin 2/95, p54). Malgré les conditions dans lesquelles ils peuvent se trouver, les Africains feront une cotisation pour rapatrier les dépouilles mortelles de leur compatriote, même si pour cela il faille s'endetter. Les funérailles, en Afrique, sont très somptueuses et coûteuses.

#### 5. La Conception de la mort chez les Yoruba du Nigeria

La Mort n'est pas une destruction d'une personne, mais "un passage". Le cas des Yoruba du Nigéria.

Ceux ou celles parmi vous qui ont été en Afrique se rappelleront peut-être de certaines réactions des Africaines face à la mort: dès qu'on apprend la mort d'un membre de la famille, les femmes arracheront leurs pagnes, d'autres vont défaire leurs cheveux, et d'autres encore se jetteront à terre, elles poussent des cris déchirants pour exprimer leur douleur. Puis, quand ce premier moment est passé, et rassérénées, elles se mettent à chanter des complaintes funèbres et à danser. Toutes ses manifestations traduisent l'impuissance devant cette réalité tragique mais en même temps, aussi étrange que cela puisse sembler, c'est-à-dire le passage d'une période bouleversante et déchirante à celle d'une fête lève le voile pour permettre de saisir le sens profond de la mort telle que conçue en Afrique: c'est un départ inexorable, un passage d'un état de vie à l'autre.

La mort est une affaire personnelle, et tellement personnelle que même les parents sont impuissants devant la mort de leur enfant. La mort est naturelle, un proverbe yoruba dit : " La maladie se soigne, la mort est incurable", il n'y a pas d'échappatoire, comme le décrit cette complainte funèbre des Yoruba:

« La mort tue à droite et détruit à gauche.  
Elle tue à gauche et détruit à droite.  
Elle tue à l'improviste à la maison comme au

champ.

Elle tue l'enfant par le fer avec lequel il joue.

Elle tue en silence.

Elle tue le voleur et le propriétaire des biens volés.

Elle tue le maître de l'esclave - et l'esclave s'enfuit.

Elle tue le propriétaire de la maison - et couvre l'âtre de son sang.

Elle est une aiguille qui pique aux deux bouts.

Elle a de l'eau mais lave avec du sang »

(Poète anonyme décrivant un aspect de l'image yoruba de la mort, in *Voices of Africa* Fontana/Collins London 1974, 56 cité par Anita Stasulane: "Les Yoruba devant la Mort: Approche de l'Africanité profonde" *Telema* no 82 avril- juin 2/95, p.45).

Chez les Yoruba comme dans les autres pays de l'Afrique noire, la mort n'est pas une destruction de l'individu mais c'est un départ, nous sommes des pèlerins sur cette terre, la vraie maison est dans l'au-delà, puisqu'on ne la quitte plus. Une personne âgée qui se sent proche de la mort dira aux siens:

« Je vais à la maison - Je suis prêt à partir à la maison » !

Et quand une personne meurt de la mort naturelle, c'est-à-dire âgée, les siens diront:

« Le père ou (la mère) est allé à la maison », ou bien il est allé dans le grand village où jamais le soleil ne se couche.

« Un roi yoruba ne meurt jamais, mais "il change de position" » ( cfr Stasulane, A., o.c. p. 45)

La mort est un passage progressif du maintenant à toujours. Après la mort physique la personne continue de vivre.

John Mbiti explique pour nous le sens de cette immortalité personnelle: "Tant que les gens se rappellent le nom du défunt, celui-ci n'est pas vraiment mort: il est vivant, il est ce qu'on appelle un « mort-vivant ». Le mort-vivant est une personne qui est physiquement morte, mais qui existe dans le souvenir de ceux qui l'ont connu durant sa vie, et qui existe en même temps dans le monde des esprits. Tant que demeure le souvenir du « mort-vivant », il est dans un état d'immortalité personnelle" (Mbiti, John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, Ibadan 1990, p.25).

Les actes rituels sont des moyens de contact, de communion et de solidarité; ils manifestent que les défunts ne sont pas oubliés; ils symbolisent l'accueil



et l'hospitalité qui leur sont dus. Ils servent à apaiser les défunts s'ils ont été offensés et irrités; ils sont la « marchandise » qui sert à obtenir une faveur, étant donné que les défunts peuvent agir comme intermédiaires entre Dieu et l'homme (Mbiti John S., : "Concept of God in Africa, SPCK London 1970, 267). C'est avec justesse que Birago Diop a écrit : "Non, nos morts ne sont jamais morts".

## 6. Le rôle religieux réservé aux Femmes dans les RTA.

En parlant des actes rituels nous voulons attirer votre attention sur le fait suivant: que la fonction sacerdotale est exclusivement réservée aux hommes, cependant dans certains pays d'Afrique, les femmes remplissent un rôle non négligeable. En 1989, en vue de la préparation de la rencontre continentale des provinces d'Afrique noire et des Iles, au niveau de la Congrégation, nous avons mené des enquêtes sur le thème: "La Vision de la femme en Afrique, et ceci en vue d'une Formation Inculturée". voici quelques extraits sur le rôle de la femme dans les RTA:

Au Ghana la femme âgée qui a des enfants, joue un rôle de première importance: elle reçoit le message des dieux pour le bien et la prospérité du village. La femme ZOE (prêtresse et prophétesse) a le contrôle sur les hommes quand il s'agit de l'initiation, elle est respectée et a autorité sur le clan. Elle a la permission de prier les ancêtres pour la protection de la famille et la bonne santé de ses membres

Au Mozambique, dans certaines circonstances déterminées, c'est à la femme que revient le rôle d'offrir des sacrifices accompagnés de certaines attitudes de mortification: telles que s'abstenir de manger certains aliments, s'abstenir des relations sexuelles avec son mari, d'éviter de parler à haute voix... pour obtenir la bénédiction de Dieu.

Chez les Serrer du Sénégal: la femme y joue deux rôles très importants:

1. garder les coutumes des ancêtres
2. donner, protéger, et perpétuer la vie.

Ces deux rôles ne font qu'un puisqu'il s'agit de perpétuer ce que l'ancêtre a commencé: offrir à la société des hommes d'aujourd'hui, un groupe humain avec toute son identité.

**Garder les coutumes des ancêtres:** C'est la femme qui doit consulter l'esprit des ancêtres, en connaître les désirs et faire en sorte qu'ils soient accomplis. Mais la tradition des ancêtres, c'est d'abord la

crainte de Dieu, c'est pourquoi la femme est gardienne des autels. Le culte consiste en offrandes, sacrifices, prières et c'est elle qui en fait tous les préparatifs, entonne les chants... etc. Pendant qu'ils se déroulent, elle protège les assistants, et même tout le village des mauvais esprits. Si elle s'aperçoit d'un danger qui menace, avec les autres femmes, elle décide comment appeler la bénédiction de Dieu, et en éloigne le malheur. Comme prêtresse, elle peut soigner certaines maladies. Elle veille à la santé du clan et à son unité dans la paix sans quoi sa survie serait menacée. Gardienne de la littérature orale, créatrice elle-même, la femme contribue encore par là, à la transmission du patrimoine ancestral.

**Dans les cérémonies et rites du cycle de la Vie.** de la naissance à la mort, elle est l'intermédiaire entre le clan et Dieu, là encore c'est le rôle « sacerdotal », car les gestes qui seront posés, les paroles qui seront prononcées seront **signes** d'un message spirituel.

Par exemple, **accueillir une naissance**, c'est témoigner de Dieu, car c'est son rôle dans la préhistoire de cette vie qui vient au monde.

- Propreté des lieux, purification du bébé dans l'eau reviennent à la tante maternelle. Ils préludent à **l'annonce du nom** au huitième jour et sont accompagnés de souhaits comme: "Tu es homme parmi tes frères qui t'ont précédé dans la vie, sois ce qu'on attend de toi, par la bénédiction de ceux qui t'ont donné cette vie, par la toute puissance de Dieu".

- L'enfant commence alors la première étape de sa vie et est introduit dans la société, il reçoit un vêtement neuf et est accompagné d'un pagne blanc, car il doit encore être protégé de tout risque par ses parents. (Document Inédit FMM).

Ces quelques exemples sont une invitation pressante adressée à l'Eglise en Afrique noire. Dans le dialogue avec les croyants des RTA, elle veillera à réserver une place spéciale aux femmes en tant que gardiennes des traditions des ancêtres, elles constituent une mine inestimable. Le rôle d'intercession, de conjuration leur réservé peut infléchir le courant de l'histoire. Ce sont les femmes qui sauveront l'Afrique. L'oeuvre évangélisatrice de l'Eglise en Afrique serait incomplète sans la participation de la femme, car elle y apporte tout son dévouement, la richesse de son intuition, sa présence discrète, mais active et efficace. "Or il n'y avait plus de vin, car le vin des noces était épuisé. La mère de Jésus lui dit : « ils n'ont plus de vin »... Sa mère dit aux servants: « Tout ce qu'il

vous dira, faites-le ». Jésus dit aux servants: « Remplissez d'eau ces jarres ... Puisez maintenant et portez en au maître du repas »... tel fut le premier des signes de Jésus" ( Jn 2, 3, 5; 7-8, 11 )

### **Conclusion sur le dialogue avec les RTA: Approches théologiques**

Une appréciation des valeurs des RTA et le rôle de l'Evangile:

- L'expérience de la Transcendance de Dieu: il est l'Etre Suprême, Créateur de l'être humain, du monde visible et invisible, il est l'explication ultime de l'être humain. C'est le Dieu de la bible, comment, après une longue période de cheminement ensemble, les aider à découvrir l'amour du Père révélé dans son Fils Jésus, qui a établi sa demeure parmi nous (Jn 1, 14). Comment dans les vicissitudes de l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui faire "résonner cette parole du Christ: " Dieu a tant aimé le monde qu'il a donné son Fils unique pour que tout homme/femme qui croit en lui, ne périsse pas, mais ait la vie éternelle? "(Jn 3,16)

- L'être humain apparaît comme quelque chose de sacré, il est capable de communiquer avec les esprits et plus tard, s'il a mené une vie digne, devient lui aussi un esprit, c'est-à-dire ancêtre. Le sens du sacré est vraiment inné en lui. Tout est manifestation de Dieu. La vie est au centre de tout. Rien n'est plus précieux que la vie, c'est pourquoi l'africain la célèbre. L'Africain reste attaché à ces valeurs.

Les croyants des RTA seront invités à accueillir le message divin avec leur héritage particulier, avec leur vision du monde telle que nous venons de résumer ici et avec leurs symboles " Le rôle de l'Evangile est d'accomplir et non de détruire". " La médiation du Christ est centrale mais elle ne doit pas exclure les autres médiations. Mais qu'est-ce que cet héritage culturo-religieux africain en général donne à l'homme comme perspective et ouvre comme horizon? Si dans l'analyse intrinsèque des RTA se dégage une perspective auto-destructive, ou qui avilit l'être humain d'une façon ou d'une autre, ou bien une perspective qui éloigne trop Dieu de la personne humaine ou qui dissocierait le vécu de l'horizon de la croyance, en ce moment-là, s'impose une interpellation de l'Evangile qui s'adresse alors à l'héritage culturel africain" ( Atal sa Angang, o.c., p.25)

Les RTA adressent comme interpellation à l'Evangile notamment le fait qu'elles existent, qu'elles ont

façonné les hommes et les femmes, qu'elles les ont fait vivre et mourir, qu'elles leur ont permis de se faire véritablement une fierté, d'humaniser leur milieu etc...(ibid., p.26) L'Evangile ne peut donc pas tout évacuer des RTA au risque de jeter l'enfant avec l'eau du bassin. Mais l'Evangile lui-même a sa spécificité parce que, pratiquement, il vient briser et faire éclater certaines restrictions et étroitesse pour ouvrir la Culture à un horizon positif et universel. L'éclairage nouveau qu'apporte l'Evangile à la Culture consiste en l'expression de la radicalité de l'Evangile, en ce sens qu'il peut aller jusqu'à mettre en question non seulement certaines idées-force ou certains comportements mais même le noyau-fondateur d'une religion donnée dans la mesure où ce noyau entre en contradiction directe avec le message selon lequel Dieu est amour et amour de tous.(ibid.,p.26-26). L'amour de Dieu est un amour gratuit, inclusif.

Le dialogue inter-religieux devrait ouvrir une porte vers l'espérance, c'est-à-dire amener les **chrétiens africains** à donner une réponse personnelle à la question: « Au dire des gens qu'est le Fils de l'homme?... Mais pour vous, leur dit-il, qui suis-je? »... Chacun

**Nuestro grupo se ha sentido inspirado con la imagen de la carreta de bueyes, caminando humildemente en el suelo polvoriento de los pobres.**

**Por esto, queremos expresar nuestra nueva comprensión de la proclamación/diálogo interreligioso como una rueda de esa carreta.**

**En esa rueda nos sentimos representados.**

**El eje de la rueda es la encarnación, los radios que la mueven: amor, servicio, escucha, encultuación, presencia, respeto.**

**"Vamos a proclamar la salvación, es este grito vivo en nuestro corazón:**

**que todos tengan vida".**

devrait répondre spontanément et selon son expérience personnelle. Puisque l'Ancêtre joue un rôle important dans sa vie, et que les approches théologiques de ces vingt dernières années ont mis au point une Christologie articulée sur le titre de Jésus le "Frère-Ancêtre"; pourquoi chacun ne répondrait-il pas: "Tu es Jésus, le « Grand-Frère- Ancêtre! »" Ce titre rend Jésus-Christ accessible, proche et familier, sans menace ni compromettre aucune de ses prérogatives transcendantes... (Boka di Mpasi Londi: Les Ancêtres, médiateurs." Telema no 82 avril- juin 1995, p.64 ).

En Afrique, la croyance dans l'interdépendance de la vie et de la mort, des vivants et des morts et même avec ceux qui sont encore à naître, est encore assez répandue ... C'est un système de croyances qui constitue la base réelle de la vision africaine du monde... Le fait que les ancêtres jouent un rôle-clé dans la Religion Traditionnelle Africaine rend ceci très important. Il est souhaitable que dans différentes parties de l'Afrique des recherches soient menées dans ce domaine pour arriver éventuellement à la nouvelle compréhension de la communion des saints. Il est donc nécessaire que le mystère de la vie et de la mort, vécu à la manière africaine, soit pris en considération et, en outre, que les rites concernant la mort et les funérailles soient christianisés de manière à situer les ancêtres par rapport à la vision chrétienne de la communion des saints" (Instrumentum Laboris no 72) et pour éviter les représailles exercées sur les femmes veuves.

A la fin du Synode Spécial pour l'Afrique les Pères synodaux ont envoyé ce message pascal: "Jésus-Christ, Fils Unique et bien-aimé est venu sauver chaque peuple et en son sein chaque homme/femme. Il est venu rejoindre chacun sur le chemin culturel où l'ont laissé ses ancêtres. Il fait route avec lui pour lui commenter ses traditions et coutumes et lui révéler qu'elles sont des préfigurations lointaines mais certaines de lui, le Nouvel Adam, l'Aîné de la multitude des frères que nous sommes..." (Message du Synode 24-25)

### Chapitre Troisième:

#### Le dialogue comme engagement dans les sociétés africaines d'aujourd'hui

" Pourquoi l'Eglise ne serait-elle pas une de ces voix organisées et libres qui, au nom de l'Evangile, s'élèvent pour défendre les droits de l'homme/femme en Afrique Noire? « L'Esprit Saint est à l'oeuvre dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, dans les aspirations des hommes et des femmes à une meilleure qualité de vie ( GS,38) à un ordre social plus digne de

l'homme(GS,4)» " ( J.M. Ela: " Le Cri de l'homme africain, p.73, cité par Yiky Bazié: Théologie Africaine de Libération. Pertinence et perspectives Théologiques. Rome 1997, p.40). « Maintenant plus que jamais l'Eglise est appelée à guérir les blessés, à prendre soin de l'environnement, à parler pour les sans voix et à préparer les peuples pour l'attaque du SIDA» (Albert Nolan, o.p. cité par les FMM, document inédit, p.20). Or, l'Afrique est en crise. La crise a toujours été une opportunité pour devenir créatif, inventif, il y a des raisons d'espérer dans la crise africaine..

L'Eglise doit écouter le cri de l'Afrique qui souffre d'une pauvreté anthropologique, comment rendre à l'Afrique sa liberté, son identité, sa présence au monde, pour lui redonner fierté et dignité? . Les Africains font montre d'une prise de conscience aiguë de la trajectoire historique parcourue et ils cherchent des racines profondes de la crise. " Il ne s'agit pas d'une crise conjoncturelle, c'est une crise profonde qui provient d'un faisceau complexe de causes, parmi lesquelles celles qui sont liées au facteur humain sont déterminantes" (Ngoupandé, J.P., Racines Historiques et Culturelles de la Crise Africaine. p.9-10. Ad Editions & Editions du Pharaon, 1994). Les Africains sont responsables de leurs malheurs.

"Après plus de trente ans d'indépendance, il y a eu des réussites, bien sûr, mais l'arbre ne doit pas cacher la forêt. Globalement nous avons échoué. Nous n'avons pas pu répondre à nos propres espoirs tels qu'ils ont été exprimés en 1960. Au coeur de la question du développement africain se trouve aujourd'hui posée, de manière incontournable la question de l'homme africain. C'est lui le facteur décisif du décollage; et tant qu'il demeure prisonnier de ses divers blocages psychologiques, aucun programme, aussi savamment concocté soit-il, n'a de chance d'aboutir. Ce sont les africains, et eux-mêmes qui feront le développement africain. Personne d'autre, et quelle que soit la générosité des intentions, ne le fera à leur place"

**Pour sortir de notre situation:** "combattons nos tares: ... par une valorisation du travail et de l'effort. La course au développement est une compétition de très haut niveau, une compétition impitoyable, où les canards boiteux n'ont pas leur place. Le train de développement n'attendra pas l'Afrique... Il faut combattre la persistance de la mentalité de groupe ... l'émergence d'une conscience aiguë de la responsabilité individuelle a été un facteur de progrès...

...Combattons la persistance du sentiment de peur

à initier une véritable pédagogie de la liberté; la peur est un sentiment qui paralyse, qui réduit la capacité d'initiative et donc de responsabilité. Il est indispensable que s'instaure un climat de liberté où chacun puisse s'épanouir et exprimer pleinement sa créativité. Combattre la persistance du complexe de race inférieure ...un complexe de race mal aimée...nous avons fini par interioriser cette image de nous-mêmes fabriquée par autrui...d'où nos relations avec les autres races se traduisent sous la double forme de l'imitation servile ou des réactions épidermiques" (Ngoupandé, J.P. , o.c., pp. 44-55).

#### **Collaboration avec d'autres confessions religieuses pour la défense des droits des citoyens**

Lorsque le vent de la démocratie a soufflé à travers l'Afrique, nous avons cru que ce sera la fin de nos malheurs. Dans certains pays, les regards se sont tournés vers l'Eglise catholique.

Membre de la Société Civile, elle y a joué un rôle prépondérant et ce, en collaboration avec les chefs religieux des autres confessions religieuses. C'est ainsi que l'Eglise a contribué à éveiller, à forger et à affermir la conscience politique de nos peuples. Là où les Evêques ont été élus Présidents de la Conférence Nationale Souveraine (CNS), les élections ont été honnêtes et transparentes, et les membres de la CNS se sont rendu compte que des élections de ces genres sont possibles en Afrique. Les après Conférence ont bien montré que les Chefs d'Etats africains ne sont pas du tout concernés par le bien-être des populations. C'est pourquoi l'Eglise doit continuer le dialogue avec les dirigeants africains.

Récemment, au Kenya: "Le 11 février 1998, l'archevêque de Nairobi, Mgr. Raphaël Ndingi Mwana Nzeki, a organisé une procession de protestation avec le soutien et la participation des autres confessions religieuses. Tous, laïcs, prêtres en aube et étole rouge, ont marché coude à coude avec l'archevêque à travers les principales avenues du centre-ville de Nairobi en chantant des cantiques religieux avant de s'arrêter à Uhuru Park pour un meeting au cours duquel les intervenants ont demandé au gouvernement, dans un message très clair, de démissionner purement et simplement. Au début comme à la fin de cette manifestation qui a duré près de 4 heures, le Cardinal Maurice Otunga, retraité depuis l'an dernier, a tenu à être présent malgré son âge et surtout son état de santé visiblement précaire.

Aujourd'hui, les valeurs familiales s'effritent. La vie est menacée de toute part et pourtant « la vie est le

concept de base qui gouverne l'être et l'agir de l'Africain et lui donne toute sa dynamique » Il n'y a rien de plus sacré que la vie. Or la vie se voit constamment menacée par les ruptures de la haine et de violence, par des conflits et des guerres à l'armement lourd. L'Afrique n'a aucune industrie pour fabriquer ces armes lourdes et meurtrières qu'elle utilise avec tant d'aisance pour tuer ses propres enfants, et dépense son argent en faveur des pays riches qui ne cessent de la traiter de pauvre. L'Eglise doit dialoguer avec les Chefs d'Etats d'Afrique.

Ces derniers ont perdu leur identité de chef que leur conférait jadis la tradition, ils ne s'adaptent pas non plus aux structures modernes où la vie n'est plus respectée. Un proverbe Kikuyu dit: " La femme ne doit pas être tuée," à cause de son caractère sacré: elle porte la vie, elle la donne, elle protège, elle la nourrit et la promeut etc... Dans des guerres ethniques on tue tout le monde indistinctement: les femmes, les enfants, les vieillards. L'Eglise doit lever la voix, pour dénoncer ce manque de respect de la vie humaine:

Au Burundi, la Conférence Episcopale s'est adressé aux catholiques et hommes de bonne volonté: « Le Dialogue est la seule voie contre la logique du suicide»: "Après avoir passé en revue les souffrances endurées par le Peuple... une situation sans nom, causée par la guerre et par des violences devenues endémiques au Burundi, ceux qui font la guerre ne veulent que le pouvoir politique les uns pour le garder, les autres pour le conquérir...ce qui est recherché c'est l'extermination de l'autre. Tous rivalisent pour tuer".

Les Evêques encouragent leurs frères et soeurs Burundais à cesser de rivaliser dans le crime, à cesser de prouver leur supériorité dans la violence, au lieu de chercher à exterminer les autres, revenir plutôt au patrimoine hérité des ancêtres. "Accepter de nous asseoir ensemble pour régler nos différends. Ne prenons pas des attitudes irréconciliables, ni un comportement de méfiance ou de ruse. Changeons de mentalité, là se trouve la vraie sagesse. A notre point de vue, ce n'est pas dans la guerre qu'est notre salut mais dans le dialogue profond entre les Burundais" (Message des Evêques du Burundi, dans la Documentation Catholique no 2153, 79e Année T XCIV 2 février 1997, p. 145).

#### **Il y a des raisons d'espérer parce que:**

Dans cette crise, c'est toute l'Afrique qui se mobilise. En tête, c'est la femme africaine: "Mère, porteuse de la vie, plus peut-être qu'ailleurs dans le monde, est, en même temps, providence de la société



par son travail et par ses qualités. Les femmes agricultrices africaines produisent environs 80 % de la nourriture du continent. Les femmes passent plus de 15 heures par jours à des tâches manuelles. On a reconnu, ces dernières années, la place centrale de la femme dans le processus du développement, (La Femme par elle-même: "Femmes d'Afrique: La Femme Africaine, Providence de la Société par son Travail" in TELEMA, no 81 janvier - mars 1/95, p 68 ).

M. Camara, guinéen souligne la nécessité de prendre en compte les questions féminines et promouvoir leur participation dans tous les domaines du développement: "Une des meilleures solutions pour les pays en développement consiste à impliquer les femmes à tous les niveaux du processus du développement, dit-il. Cela signifie qu'il faut leur accorder le même statut qu'aux hommes" (La Femme par Elle-Même: in Telema p.68).

Les Evêques africains se sont engagés à s'occuper du sort de la femme. Le Synode demande de donner à la femme une formation soignée ... , de lui ouvrir toutes les carrières sociales dont la société traditionnelle et moderne tend à l'exclure sans raison... que soit redonné à la femme la place qui correspond à l'importance réelle que lui confèrent les responsabilités qu'elle assume déjà (Message du Synode, no 66). Ce que nous expérimentons est bien loin des souhaits de nos Pasteurs en Afrique et même dans l'Eglise en général: la femme est absente dans les instances de prise des décisions. On se demande parfois s'il n'y a pas une certaine peur inavouée... face aux capacités de la femme.

Les jeunes sont très éveillés, parfois plus éveillés que les adultes sur le plan politique, mais ils manquent d'expériences. Il se sont formé un esprit critique très aigu et font parfois des remarques pertinentes. Les jeunes savent que souvent c'est le peuple qui est responsable des régimes dictateurs en Afrique. Dans une école secondaire, la soeur Directrice avait organisé un examen de maturité dans une classe de 5ème. Une élève avait écrit par exemple: Au début, le Chef de l'Etat était très préoccupé du bien être de la population, notre pays était devenu prospère et faisait la fierté de l'Afrique. Et voilà que d'un coup le Chef s'est laissé flatter. Il lui a fallu de l'argent pour satisfaire ses flatteurs. Il ne pensait plus au peuple qui, lui, ne faisait que chanter et danser pour lui. Le peuple a oublié qu'il fallait travailler pour vivre. Alors ce fut la période de la corruption. A l'école, certaines élèves ne se donnaient même plus la peine d'étudier, puisqu'elles donnaient de l'argent aux professeurs. Le

niveau de l'enseignement a vite fait de baisser etc... etc... Ces jeunes là attendent leur tour pour servir autrement le pays. Qui leur donnera cette place ?

"...En ces années charnières et cruciales traversées d'incertitudes et de chaos, de convulsions et de subresauts. Il (Le Synode) voudrait redire à tous ses fils et filles d'Afrique qu'au coeur de toutes ces tourments, l'espérance pour nous en sortir réside dans le Rédempteur qui nous donne son Esprit pour que nous nous prenions résolument en main" (Message du Synode no 31). L'Eglise est le sacrement de Jésus, et dans la situation actuelle de l'Afrique, la présence du Rédempteur doit se faire sentir aux côtés de ceux qui peinent pour vivre, il faut que l'Afrique fasse l'expérience de Dieu engagé dans sa lutte pour une vie meilleure.

Et le camerounais J.M. Ela: " Face aux famines provoquées par la société capitaliste, Ela opte pour une "Pastorale du grenier" En discutant avec les paysans, il crée une conscience, sensibilise, fait découvrir des repères pour l'action, et cela à la lumière de la Parole de Dieu. Il fait ainsi de Dieu " quelqu'un qui parle à l'homme pour lui permettre de changer les situations. Il aide les paysans à passer d'une conscience naïve et résignée à une conscience politique qui fait qu'ils redeviennent des acteurs de changements au sein desquels Dieu, qui est présent et à l'oeuvre dans ce qu'ils font, redevient celui qui fait aboutir leur espérance comme leur appui (J.M. Ela, Identité propre d'une théologie africaine, p. 58 cité p. 115 par Yiky Bazié; Théologie Africaine de Libération. Pertinence et Perspectives Théologiques. Roma 1997).

C'est de ceci dont l'Afrique a besoin aujourd'hui, lui réapprendre à compter sur ses propres forces tout en étant consciente de la présence du Rédempteur en son milieu. Ce dernier point est important car la transformation qui s'opère maintenant sur le continent est un changement radical de mentalité, et l'Eglise doit veiller à l'éclosion de cette nouvelle conscience ; tout en continuant son engagement en faveur de la personne, de la justice sociale, de la liberté et des droits de l'homme et de la femme, ainsi que de la réforme des structures sociales injustes.



## LE COURAGE D'UNE FORMATION CONTEXTUALISEE

Soeur Lucie Nzenzili Mboma, FMM

**“Saisi par l’appel de Dieu dans l’aujourd’hui de nos cultures,  
le périple africain avec le Christ suivra un tracé particulier”.**

Les Pères Synodaux ont rendu hommages aux missionnaires en ces termes: «La splendide croissance de l’Eglise en Afrique et ses réalisations sont dues essentiellement au dévouement héroïque de générations de missionnaires désintéressés: cela est unanimement reconnu (...). C’est une histoire que nous ne devons pas oublier; elle confère à l’Eglise locale la note de son authenticité et de sa noblesse, la note apostolique. Cette histoire est un drame de charité, d’héroïsme, de sacrifice, qui fait de l’Eglise africaine, depuis les origines, une Eglise grande et sainte» (Ecclesia in Africa, n.35)

Aujourd’hui, en ce début du deuxième centenaire de l’évangélisation, à travers le continent, presque tous les Pasteurs sont issus de notre peuple, et assurent la relève des missionnaires étrangers. Cette relève constitue un changement fondamental et décisif dans l’histoire de l’évangélisation de l’Afrique.

C’est un changement d’hommes, par conséquent un changement de culture et des mentalités. L’Africain apparaît au premier plan de l’évangélisation pour continuer la mission du Christ. Le Pape Paul VI avait proclamé à Kampala, en 1969 : « Africains, désormais vous êtes vos propres missionnaires. Et vous pouvez et vous devez avoir un christianisme africain » (cfr. Cardinal Malula, J.A.; Esquisse de l’Itinéraire spirituel du Peuple de Dieu qui est au Zaïre [1880-1980], Colloque International, Kinshasa 1983. p.13-14).

Puisqu’il y a un changement fondamental et décisif, “le périple africain avec le Christ suivra un tracé particulièrement négro-africain. En tant que nouveaux peuples dans l’Eglise, nous avons à être attentifs à la tradition de l’Eglise qui est en Occident, cette tradition ne peut constituer ni une norme pour nous, ni un modèle à reproduire. L’appel de Dieu qui nous saisit dans l’aujourd’hui de nos cultures, la fidélité à l’Es-

prit du Christ au milieu de nos situations feront surgir d’autres modalités de célébrer et d’exprimer ses mystères, de nous consacrer à lui, et de le servir dans l’Eglise. Nous avons à construire l’unité de l’Eglise dans la diversité, et la diversité acceptée et vécue, nous permet de cheminer ensemble vers une plus grande communion, parce que chaque peuple prendra sa place au sein de ce grand vitrail qui doit refléter les multiples tonalités de la lumière unique du Christ, (cfr. Kabasele, FR., “ Homélie télévisée de l’Epiphanie”, Lille 1981. cité par J.M Ela dans “Voici le Temps des Héritiers”. Ed. Khartala, Paris 1981, p.212).

### Les valeurs positives de l’Initiation africaine:

Dans le domaine précis de la formation, les Africains s’inspireront, autant que se peut, des valeurs positives de l’initiation africaine qu’ils chargeront de la sève évangélique. Pour ce faire, il est nécessaire de continuer à explorer ce domaine en menant des recherches sur les systèmes d’initiation, en dégager des pistes de réflexion ainsi que des intuitions théologiques. Elaborer un manuel qui pourrait servir comme un guide pour une formation inculquée.

A ce propos, nous avons trouvé des “approches qui ont décrit l’initiation comme système éducatif global, visant à intégrer progressivement l’individu dans son propre être, dans son milieu, son histoire, sa culture, etc., pour en faire une personne équilibrée et adulte, membre responsable de sa communauté socio-historique. Autrement dit : lui faire acquérir une identité propre qui soit la base de fidélité et d’engagement persévérants à toute épreuve. (...) Le temps est venu de se débarrasser des ethnologues qui naguère tenaient à confiner l’initiation dans les rites de circoncision. Or au Tchad, par exemple, il y a des peuples - ceux du Sud notamment - chez qui la circoncision n’est ni centrale ni obligatoire: L’initiation comme temps fort de l’expérience éducative, peut se dérouler avec ou sans la circoncision” ( Diddy Brossala, F.sj., “ L’Initiation ou « Mort- Renaissance » chez les SARA-KABA du Tchad ” dans TELEMA n.82 avril - juin 2/95, 29).

### Le bien-fondé de l'initiation:

Les ancêtres n'avaient pas fait des études psychologiques, mais ils étaient maîtres en la matière. En effet, les cérémonies d'initiation ont lieu pendant l'adolescence. Une période difficile, ils avaient observé qu'à cette période de la croissance, l'être humain connaît des changements accompagnés des tensions psychosomatiques: l'équilibre était en quelque sorte rompu, donc il fallait lui rendre l'harmonie nécessaire et le préparer à ses responsabilités d'adulte et faire de lui /d'elle un membre à part entière de la société, d'où le besoins de certaines connaissances et aptitudes requises pour son intégration:

-“ l'art de vivre avec constance, maîtrise de soi, patience et discipline;

-la conscience d'être membre d'une communauté à gérer pour le bien-être de chacun et de tous;

-le courage, l'endurance, la serviabilité pour la prospérité et la sécurité du clan;

-l'esprit d'entraide qui ne va pas sans sacrifice, la loyauté, l'amour des enfants et de la vie, la sensibilité aux valeurs du sacré, le respect envers l'autorité, la déférence à l'égard des aînés et des anciens;

-le souci d'assister les vieillards, spécialement les parents, la fidélité aux engagements” (Sr. Muthoni Nyaga F., “L'Initiation traditionnelle Kikuyu au Kenya” *Telema* n. 65 janvier - mars 1/91, p. 39). Ce sont là quelques-unes des vertus que les initiés sont appelés à développer.

L'initiation était un temps de scolarité, de formation, d'épreuve et de maturation. Garçons et filles apprenaient par des exercices pratiques les façons d'agir et les secrets de la société kikuyu. C'est un temps fort qui durait deux ans, et se déroulait dans un endroit retiré. Les jeunes étaient séparés selon leur sexe, les filles à part sous la direction des femmes et les garçons aussi à part. “Chez les Day du Tchad, la brousse où se déroulait l'initiation avait une signification particulière: c'est le domaine des Ancêtres, de l'Inconnu où l'homme affronte le Chaos. A ce titre la brousse s'oppose au village qui est le domaine des femmes et des enfants: un monde organisé par les Hommes. Les jeunes... s'affrontent à l'Inconnu et s'instruisent de la sagesse des Ancêtres “leur initiation dure trois mois” (Ratoingar Nahounoum, sj. *Le Yondo, Initiation Traditionnelle du Peuple Day au Tchad*”, dans *Telema*, n.65 janvier - mars 1/91, p.52).

L'enseignement était dispensé aux moyens des chants, des danses, des contes, et proverbes, des poèmes, symboles et devinettes etc. Une langue ésotérique scellait le caractère sacré de l'événement. Un

esprit de corps se créait dans le groupe; chaque groupe se donnait un nom caractéristique, significatif, parfois emblématique et généralement aide-mémoire. La discipline était de rigueur ( Sr. Muthoni, F. , o.c. p 40-42).

Chez les Day, par exemple, le Yondo (ou Mort-Naissance) ne donne pas seulement une connaissance de la tradition mais elle introduit le jeune dans une manière de comprendre le monde et de s'y comporter. C'est une recherche du Transcendant, une recherche de solutions aux problèmes de la vie qui hantent le cœur de l'homme, tels que la naissance, la croissance, le bonheur, la maladie, la souffrance. L'initié apprend rituellement à dominer la mort. (...) La mort du Yondo est différente de la mort naturelle... la mort du Yondo est symbolique et résulte de la participation aux rites. Le jeune meurt à ses jeux d'enfant, à ses mauvaises habitudes, à son cercle féminin... Bref, le jeune initié meurt, si l'on peut dire, à son « vieil homme» pour renaître aux Hommes (Ratoingar Nahounoum,sj.,o. c. , p. 53)

Chaque candidat avait un parrain ou une marraine, les candidats étaient soigneusement interrogés pour être sûr qu'ils n'avaient pas eu de relations sexuelles, ils devaient tous être purs. L'entrée au camp d'initiation était précédée par un rite de purification dans chaque famille, et ensuite venait celui de bénédiction: « Nous supplions la paix de Dieu » - ...« Paix aux initiés »... Pendant les deux années, le maître restait avec les candidat pour leur apprendre les coutumes, les traditions et les croyances kikuyu, par exemple:

-l'origine, l'histoire, les coutumes du peuple kikuyu, la genèse des groupes d'âge, la raison d'être et la signification de leur nom;

-la droiture dans la vie avec ses semblables, avec l'étranger, avec les membres du clan etc..

Chez les Day du Tchad, l'initiation comportait aussi les épreuves pour les garçons: “pendant le séjour en brousse, les néophytes doivent prendre possession de la nature, maîtriser la sagesse des ancêtres dont ils éprouvent la rigueur. Ainsi , ils doivent passer par plusieurs séries d'épreuves d'endurance: dormir loin du feu pour résister au froid de la nuit; supporter, sans se plaindre, les efforts physiques imposés par les Bra-Ndo (le père initiatique, parrain); il y a divers exercices comme: la danse, l'apprentissage de la langue secrète, les techniques de la chasse, de la pêche, de la guerre, des champs, des arts, etc. A la fin du Yondo, les jeunes rentrent transformés par la brousse; c'est la « résurrection » le retour à la vie...” (Ratoingar Nahounoum,sj. , o.c., p 55).

A la fin des deux ans, quand le maître d'initiation estimait que les candidats avaient suffisamment assimilé le savoir et le savoir vivre kikuyu, on organisait une grande fête. Puis, avant la circoncision ou l'excision pour les filles, se rendaient en procession jusqu'à l'arbre sacré ou figuier, les garçons couraient vers l'arbre sacré ... la procession et la course symbolisaient le passage de l'enfance à l'âge adulte et le scellait à jamais. Les initiés prêtaient serment de ne jamais révéler à personne les secrets de leur peuple. Donc près de l'arbre sacré ils ont abandonné le comportement de l'enfance et ils ont embrassé l'âge adulte, tout cela ils le rythmaient dans les chants ( Sr.Muthoni, F., O.C. 43-44)

### **Les objectifs essentiels dans la formation de futurs évangélistes africains: au noviciat et au séminaire.**

Il y a tout d'abord une conviction de base: dans toute vocation à la vie religieuse ou sacerdotale, c'est toujours Dieu qui choisit, qui appelle, envoie, et dans son "action créatrice, jour après jour attire, façonne et forme, selon son projet et la réponse de chaque personne, d'où la formation est une réalité qui s'enracine dans le passé de la personne, se vit dans l'aujourd'hui et prépare l'avenir" ( F.M.M., Esprit et Vie FMM, document inédit, p. 9 ). Tout appel est donc un dialogue entre l'amour de Dieu qui appelle et qui donne la grâce de répondre et la réponse libre et pleine d'amour de la personne qui a entendu l'appel: *Dieu est le premier formateur*.

La formation doit engager toute la personne, il s'agit d'une *formation intégrale*, elle sera humaine, intellectuelle, spirituelle et spécifiquement missionnaire.

**Formation humaine:** qui aide la personne à atteindre un certain équilibre psychologique, affectif; à développer son sens de l'initiative, de créativité et de responsabilité si nécessaire pour le monde d'aujourd'hui si plein de défis.

**Formation intellectuelle:** elle sera bien soignée, afin de disposer les jeunes à faire face aux interpellations des pays africains qui aspirent aujourd'hui à la paix, à plus de justice, au bien-être matériel, qui aspirent au respect de leurs droits, de leur dignité humaine, bref à leur développement intégral etc. On accordera une place spéciale à l'études de l'Islam et des Institutions islamiques, des Religions Traditionnelles Africaines, les préparer au dialogue interreligieux.

Ici, nous voulons partager ce que Son Eminence,

Cardinal Laurean Rugambwa, Archevêque Emérite de Dar-es-Salam (Tanzanie) avait dit au Synode concernant la formation des prêtres et des religieux/ses:

"En Afrique aujourd'hui, nous sommes confrontés aux changements politiques, économiques et sociaux. Pour cette raison l'Eglise a besoin de leaders bien entraînés pour faire face aux changements et rendre l'Afrique capable de contribuer plus à l'ordre mondial. Je propose, dit-il, que:

"Les prêtres, aussi nombreux que possibles, poursuivent les études supérieures après le séminaire. Ils devraient se spécialiser aussi bien dans les branches de la théologie que civiles. Ceci n'est pas seulement en vue de subvenir aux besoins des séminaires en professeurs, mais aussi pour entourer les Evêques d'un personnel efficace et compétent.

Nous, avons, en Afrique, une armée de religieux, spécialement, les femmes. Si nous leur donnons une formation comme leaders, avec un haut niveau d'éducation, beaucoup de nos problèmes seront résolus.

En tant que jeune Evêque dans les années 50, j'ai formé des Associations Sociales pour préparer l'indépendance. Aujourd'hui dans le processus de démocratisation nous devrions aider à la formation des leaders. Nous devrions avoir des forum des Professeurs Catholiques. Engageons les laïcs/laïques dans l'Eglise et dans les structures de gouvernement".

**La formation spirituelle:** bonne formation théologique et inculturée, formation doctrinale solide. On soignera l'éducation à une intense vie de prière, disposer le /la jeune à rencontrer personnellement le Christ; ce sera une éducation à la liberté, c'est-à-dire une docilité à l'Esprit afin d'être capable de discerner les appels de ce même Esprit. Lui apprendre à trouver sa demeure dans la Parole de Dieu, à se familiariser avec elle, former des contemplatifs afin d'arriver à l'unité de vie, être contemplatif n'est pas le monopole des ordres contemplatifs seulement. Appelé à devenir prophète par sa vie, l'entraîner surtout aux valeurs de l'écouter: "Tous les matins il éveille mon oreille pour que j'écoute comme les disciples. Le Seigneur Yahvé m'a ouvert l'oreille" (Is. 50, 4-5a)

**Une formation spécifiquement missionnaire:** cultiver chez les jeunes une « conscience missionnaire », qu'ils soient prêts à être envoyés dans n'importe quel pays d'Afrique et en dehors du continent, les ouvrir donc à l'universel et avec toutes les conséquences qu'un tel envoi suppose: respect de la culture des autres, l'apprentissage de la langue, avoir le sens cri-



tique afin de pouvoir se situer dans une nouvelle culture. Le Pape Jean Paul II a bien souligné dans l'encyclique *Redemptoris Missio*, les exigences de l'envoi pour les prêtres "Cela exige d'eux non seulement maturité dans la vocation, mais aussi une capacité peu commune de se détacher de leur ethnie, de leur famille, et une aptitude remarquable à s'intégrer dans d'autres cultures, avec intelligence et respect" (RM 67). C'est ici qu'on pourrait étudier la possibilité d'intégrer les valeurs de l'initiation traditionnelle pour former des missionnaires courageux, aguerris qui aiment et respectent les pauvres et s'engagent pour les rendre artisans de leur propres libération.

### **Que pouvons nous déduire de notre réflexion sur les valeurs de l'initiation traditionnelle?**

Quand les jeunes sortaient de l'initiation, ils étaient transformés, prêts à assumer leurs responsabilités dans la société. Ils devenaient des êtres nouveaux. "Par l'initiation on acquiert une autonomie et l'on est capable de prendre soi-même des décisions concernant sa vie: décision de se marier, de s'établir dans sa propre parcelle, chez soi, d'avoir son champ etc. Après l'initiation on est capable d'autodétermination personnelle. (...). L'initiation offre au jeune une technique de connaissance de monde. Il ne doit pas bâtir sa vie sur «les on-dit». Il est tout le temps appelé à connaître de dedans pour porter un jugement de valeur qui tienne. Grâce à l'exercice de maîtrise de soi pour garder le secret initiatique, l'initié peut accueillir et conserver les confidences d'autres personnes" (Diddy Brossala, F., o.c., p. 35)

A la fin du noviciat ou du séminaires, les jeunes devraient être prêts pour s'engager en connaissance de cause dans ce processus de conversion qui dure toute la vie. Leur offrons-nous l'espace voulu afin qu'ils puissent réellement s'épanouir? Nous avons parfois l'impression que dans les séminaires on forme plus de gens de la plume. Comment aider les populations dans le milieu rural d'une façon efficace si on ne forme pas des agronomes, des vétérinaires, des maçons. Comment rendre la justice aux pauvres et de façon équitable si nous n'avons pas des prêtres, des religieux et religieuses avocats? Qu'allons-nous faire pour que la formation donnée colle à la vie?

Aujourd'hui la formation est un domaine très exigeant, c'est pourquoi le choix et la formation des formateurs/trices devient une priorité. Prendre suffisamment du temps pour les préparer. Les équiper avec certaines techniques modernes afin de les disposer à

faire face avec sérénité et objectivité aux défis de la formation. Par exemple dans l'accompagnement spirituel, les nouvelles approches sur l'intégration de la psychologie et la spiritualité sont indispensables. Ils apprendront la dynamique de groupes pour développer leur capacité de travailler en équipe.

Dans les Séminaires, nous avons parfois l'impression que quand on a un diplôme des études supérieures en théologie, en psychologie ou autre, on pense que la personne remplit les conditions pour devenir le Directeur spirituel. La personne désignée peut être un saint homme, cela ne suffit plus aujourd'hui, la direction spirituelle est un art qui s'apprend, qui demande un entraînement spécial. Faciliter le dialogue pour une prise en charge par chaque jeune de sa formation, promouvoir la maturité. Y a-t-il un profil du prêtre africain de l'an 2000? Si non quel serait ce profil?

Il serait souhaitable d'assurer un minimum de confort matériel permettant aux responsables des Séminaires de s'adonner à leur tâche. Libérés de certains soucis matériels, ils consacreront du temps à la recherche et encourageront les jeunes à apporter leur contribution dans l'oeuvre de l'inculturation.

### **Libérer la jeune femme africaine de la peur, et elle sera prête pour la mission.**

Nous avons organisé, en 1989, une rencontre continentale de douze provinces de l'Afrique noire et des Iles. Chaque provinciale était accompagnée de la maîtresse des novices et un membre de l'équipe de formation. Le thème: « Une formation inculturée », pour ce faire nous avons mené des enquêtes sur la Vision de la Femme en Afrique. Notre but était de comprendre cette femme africaine dans toute sa richesse afin de nous comprendre nous-mêmes, et enfin, respecter les valeurs fondamentales de cette femme dans la formation, pour que la jeune femme qui s'engage, puisse se donner totalement au Christ, dans son être de femme africaine enrichie par la grâce, et contribuer pleinement à la mission évangélisatrice de l'Eglise. Après des journées de prières, conférences, carrefours etc... Nous avons élaboré les grandes lignes d'un programme de formation. Un point avait retenu notre attention dans la formulation de l'objectif général: libérer de la peur la jeune femme qui nous arrive.

**L'origine de cette peur:** "La vie de l'individu, en Afrique, est saisie en tant que participée. Les membres de la tribu, du clan, de la famille sait qu'il ne vit

pas de sa propre vie, mais de celle de la communauté. Il sait que détaché de la communauté, il n'aurait plus les moyens d'exister, il sait surtout que sa vie est une participation à celle de ses ascendants, et que sa conservation, son renforcement en dépend continuellement. L'homme africain se voit inséré dans le grand courant de la vie qui dépasse son propre moi". Bref, pour l'Africain, vivre, c'est exister au sein d'une communauté". (Mgr. Monsengwo Pasinya: L'esprit communautaire africain. Ed. St Paul, Kinshasa 1982, p.5 ; cité par Scarin, A., Jalon pour une Spiritualité Africaine. dans : Colloque International, Kinshasa 1983, p. 364-365).

Il est de coutume en Afrique que quand une jeune fille se marie, toute la famille lui prodigue des conseils, l'exhortant à une fidélité sans faille: "Nous voici tous rassemblés, tes grands parents, oncles, tantes, frères (cousins) et soeurs (cousines) amis et connaissances. Va dans le foyer de ton époux, et surtout, ne nous fais pas honte de te voir revenir, ce sera une honte pour ta mère et pour nous tous; ne fais pas de nous un objet de moquerie pour nos voisins, etc...". La jeune femme qui nous arrive est hantée par cette idée, puisqu'elle reçoit exactement les mêmes conseils. Faut-il généraliser cet état de choses? Peut-être pas, mais ce qui se passe actuellement ne peut s'expliquer autrement.

Il y a quelques années, quand le silence était de rigueur, nos formatrices ne se rendaient pas compte de nos drames, parce qu'on souffrait en silence. Aujourd'hui, chacune peut s'exprimer, il y a parfois des drames dans les maisons de formation. Malheur à celle qui va oser accuser les autres chez la maîtresse des novices, elle fera l'objet d'un ostracisme de la part de ses compagnes. Tu fais une remarque, même bien fondée, cela devient un drame, parce que la jeune a peur d'être renvoyée. Nous faisons tout pour créer un climat de confiance, d'écoute et de dialogue. Nous prenons du temps pour cheminer ensemble, leur faire comprendre que la Supérieure, les formatrices sont des grandes soeurs chargées de les accompagner dans leur aventure avec le Seigneur, dans le discernement. C'est une affaire personnelle, la vocation! Quand elles comprennent la raison d'être de notre présence en tant qu'aînées et initiatrices, on les voit alors s'épanouir. Il serait intéressant d'entendre celles qui forment les Africaines en Europe, quelle est leur expérience à ce propos, nous pouvons nous tromper!

Mais la constatation est qu'une jeune femme en formation qui est renvoyée d'un couvent, ira se présenter ailleurs. Il peut y avoir des erreurs de la part des formatrices, ce qui peut arriver. Là où la

### A parable

**The Word of God flowed like a river down the mountain. And as it flowed, it passed various villages until it entered a lake. People saw the lake and were attracted to it. They gathered around the lake and built their villages there. Then they dammed the lake so that the waters would belong to the forever. They wanted to ensure they would always have and hold the water. They realised they held a treasure.**

**But unknown to them, the river also flowed down to other side of the mountain. Here it formed many tributaries. The people here allowed the river to flow freely, believing that since it had passed for centuries, it would continue to do so.**

**Only a few people of each side of the mountain were aware of the life giving water on the other.**

Conférence des Supérieures Majeures s'est organisée pour aider ses jeunes à faire un cheminement et pouvoir se réintégrer dans la société, celles qui sont renvoyées trouvent les accès faciles dans certaines congrégations en Europe. Nous ne sommes pas contre, elles sont libres de le faire, puisqu'elles avancent comme arguments; "Je sens encore que Dieu m'appelle à la vie religieuse". Mais ce qui étonne parfois, c'est le fait que la jeune femme a été renvoyée pour une raison grave. Et, lendemain, elle reviendra se présenter toute fière chez vous, en robe blanche ou noire, pour vous dire, voilà, vous m'avez chassée... maintenant me voici religieuse comme toi. Et parfois la famille garde une dent contre vous, en disant: "Tu as voulu nous faire la honte, nous avons bien élevé notre fille; la voilà religieuse, tu n'aimes pas notre tribu c'est pour cela que tu nous as fait ça".

Nous avons vécu l'expérience suivante: nous avons organisé une session pour toutes les professes à vœux temporaires de toutes les Congrégations; le thème: Entrer en liberté. A la fin de la session, les jeunes n'ont pas caché leurs sentiments et les tensions qu'elles vivent durant cette période: « Elles sont con-

frontées aux mêmes problèmes, elles ont peur d'être renvoyées ». Nous avons admiré leur franchise et nous-mêmes nous étions interpellées. Un climat de confiance est indispensables. Nous avons à être des mères et des grandes soeurs pour nos jeunes en formation. Dans la formation les initier à une vraie rencontre personnelle avec le Christ: " Si vous demeurez dans ma parole, vous serez vraiment mes disciples, vous connaîtrez alors la vérité et la vérité vous fera libres" (Jn 8, 31 -32) Que la jeune femme soit libérée en Christ.

### **C'est pourquoi la formation doit être enracinée dans le passé de la jeune femme, d'où la connaissance de son milieu familial**

Avoir des contacts assez longs afin de pouvoir situer la personne dans son milieu naturel, si possible connaître le rôle qu'elle joue au sein de son clan, ses relations avec ses parents, tout ceci en vue d'une formation personnalisée et pour aider la jeune à se façonner une identité personnelle, gardant toujours dans l'esprit le fait qu'elle vit de la vie de son clan. Nous avons aussi à cheminer avec les parents, tous ne comprennent pas ce qu'est la vie consacrée. Nos cérémonies constituent un moyen pour offrir aux parents une catéchèse sur la vie religieuse. Ils sont associés à toute cérémonie marquant une étape nouvelle dans la formation. Les parents sont invités à saisir la raison d'être de chaque étape. Nous essayons de leur faire comprendre que nous sommes toutes dans un processus de discernement. La vie religieuse est un choix libre et personnel. Leur fille peut découvrir que ce n'est pas sa vocation, ou bien les responsables de la congrégation peuvent trouver que leur fille ne remplit pas les conditions pour mener cette vie.

Et si leur fille confirme sa vocation en accord avec ses formatrices, leur rôle sera de rendre leur fille à Dieu, elle est le don qu'ils ont reçu de lui; leur tâche est de la soutenir dans sa démarche d'amour, désormais, elle sera la soeur de tout le monde, parce qu'elle s'engage au service du Royaume au moyen des conseils évangéliques.

Nos efforts d'inculturation consistent à éveiller et à épanouir chez la jeune les valeurs d'une femme africaine. La femme africaine est gardienne des valeurs morales, c'est pourquoi la femme est tenue en haute estime dans la société, même s'il semble qu'il y a une contradiction dans ce que nous avançons. On tolère l'immoralité de l'homme, mais si c'est une femme, c'est le rejet, parce qu'elle est comme un symbole des valeurs qu'elle porte en elle. Former la jeune femme

africaine à ne pas considérer sa vocation comme un statut social qui l'élève au-dessus des autres, elle devra plutôt témoigner de sa consécration totale au Seigneur, et vivre dans la simplicité, dans la dignité. Elle est mise à part pour le Seigneur.

La femme africaine est symbole d'intériorité: porteuse de vie et gardienne des valeurs du clan, la femme africaine réalise cette double vocation dans le silence. On lui apprend la discrétion et la pudeur exigée par le caractère mystérieux de ce dont elle est la gardienne. En compagnie des autres femmes, elle partage. Mais ne partage jamais le secret de son intimité de femme avec les hommes. On développe chez elle les qualités d'intuition.

A propos de la discrétion, on croit parfois que nos aînées africaines qui ont été élevées selon cette tradition et qui refusent d'avoir un directeur spirituel, on dit parfois qu'elles ne comprennent rien du rôle d'un directeur spirituel. Elles comprennent bien mais c'est par pudeur. Elles disent: « qu'est-ce que je vais raconter à un prêtre sur ma vie ? Je vais bien me confesser chez lui ». La discrétion est un facteur important dans les relations. Les autres femmes fuient facilement celle dont la bouche est « comme une marmite sans couvercle ». C'est point est souvent source de conflit dans nos couvents. C'est vrai qu'il y a des Africaines qui ne gardent pas le secret. Mais nous n'acceptons pas cette mentalité qui pense qu'il faut divulguer tout ce qu'on apprend sur les autres. La discrétion est indispensable dans la mission, dans nos relations avec le peuple de Dieu avec lequel nous travaillons et que nous servons.

La femme africaine est la cheville ouvrière de la famille, du clan, et même dans la société africaine d'aujourd'hui. Nous essayons de former nos jeunes à l'amour de l'effort et du travail qui refuse la médiocrité; les aider à développer en elle le sens de la discipline. Les aider à découvrir leurs propres talents, leurs dons, à les reconnaître et ceux de leurs compagnes; à les mettre au service du Royaume de Dieu. Dans toutes nos provinces d'Afrique noire, les maisons de formation laissent l'espace et le temps pour le travail manuel, sans pour cela porter préjudice à la formation; des jardins potagers, un champ, un poulailler, un atelier de couture ou autre, afin que les jeunes puissent contribuer aux dépenses de la maison. Elles doivent apprendre à manger à la sueur de leur front comme toute femme africaine.

La formation au charisme vise surtout à aider la jeune à rencontrer la Fondatrice afin de former une identité FMM claire, des convictions solides, la com-

munauté formatrice sera le lieu où la jeune pourrait percevoir les différents aspects du charisme vécus dans le concret.

Nous continuons nos recherches dans le domaine de l'inculturation du charisme par l'étude des valeurs positives de la culture africaine. Et nos soeurs aînées, dont la plupart ont maintenant célébré le jubilé d'or ou même s'approchent du jubilé de diamant, sont pour nous la concrétisation du charisme vécu dans la fidélité; telle la Soeur Claire Weghezo, l'une de toutes premières FMM africaines; qui ne nous pas surpri-

ses, lorsque mourante, elle se redressa la première fois pour nous dire, : «Maintenant, c'est l'heure de l'adoration», puis se rendormit. Elle se redressa une dernière fois, regarda ses consœurs autour d'elle, et répéta: «Maintenant, c'est l'heure de l'adoration», elle s'endormit pour ne plus se relever. Modèle d'une vraie missionnaire, elle ne quittait jamais la maison pour aller visiter les familles sans passer d'abord saluer le Seigneur, et lorsqu'elle revenait, elle s'arrêtait d'abord devant le Saint Sacrement. Elle a vécu jusqu'au bout sa vocation d'adoratrice du Très Saint Sacrement. Un exemple d'une formation inculturée.

**INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE  
CALLS EACH ONE OF US AND OUR INSTITUTES  
TO OPEN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS  
TO THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN THE PEOPLES OF OTHER FAITHS  
AND TO SEEK OUT THE SEEDS OF UNITY AND COMMUNION.**

**WE BELIEVE  
THAT THERE ARE MANY VALUABLE PERSPECTIVES  
ON TRUTH.**

**WE ARE CHALLENGED PERSONALLY AND AS INSTITUTES  
TO BE PRESENT HUMBLY WITH ALL OTHERS OF DIFFERENT FAITHS AND CULTURES,  
AND IN ACKNOWLEDGING THE RICHNESS IN DIVERSITY,  
TO WALK WITH PEOPLES OF OTHER FAITHS TOWARDS TRUTH.**

**WE ARE CHALLENGED  
BY THE PERCEIVED ARROGANCE OF OUR INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH  
AND THE INCONSISTENCY  
BETWEEN ITS OFFICIAL PROCLAMATIONS AND THE REALITY IN PRACTICE.**

**WE ARE HEARTENED  
BY THE GROWING AWARENESS  
OF THE ENRICHING VALUES OF DIVERSE CULTURES  
AND THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD AMONG THE PEOPLE WITHIN THEM.**

**WE ARE CHALLENGED AS INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTES  
TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE FEAR AND VULNERABILITY  
WITHIN OURSELVES AND IN OTHERS,  
DUE TO THE VESTIGES OF HISTORY,  
SUCH AS SLAVERY, COLONISATION  
AND SOME FORMS OF EVANGELISATION  
WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE PAST AND STILL CONTINUE.**

**WE ARE CHALLENGED  
BY THE CHANGING SITUATIONS  
IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES  
CAUSED BY THE RAPID TRANSFORMATIONS OF CULTURES  
DUE TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF  
URBANISATION, GLOBALISATION AND MARGINALISATION.**



# DIALOGUE WITH RELIGIONS OF ASIA: CHALLENGES FROM WITHOUT<sup>1</sup> (Part I)

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**Malaysia**

## Introduction

As with most papers, this paper begins by setting the parameters of the present discussion. Firstly, the paper is prepared primarily for an international audience of Catholic Religious having leadership roles in their respective Religious Congregations. It therefore presumes certain things, especially with regard to the audience's knowledge of Christian catechesis. On the other hand, it also presumes that a significant number are non-Asians and so would not be too familiar with Asia or the religions of Asia. Secondly, while the paper is meant to be merely an overview, at a certain point, especially towards the end, it will look at specifics and details more closely so as to afford more substance for the purposes of discussion. Thirdly, while the author will touch on a great variety of issues and topics, no claim is made by the author to be expert in any of these areas. These are primarily reflections and thoughts arrived at from the praxis of dialogue and through reading a variety of authors, especially Asian theologians. They are therefore by no means conclusive but are put forth primarily to facilitate reflection and discussion.

## The Face of Asia

For the purposes of the present paper, a useful description of the face of Asia comes in part from the Asian Bishops' Meeting of 1970<sup>2</sup> and the *Instrumentum Laboris*<sup>3</sup> of the recently concluded Synod of Bishops for Asia. Much of what the Bishops of Asia had to say, in both these events, is pertinent to our discussion here.

Firstly, Asia is a continent of the teeming masses. Its lands are home to about three-fourths of the world's population. Nearly 60 per cent of this population are below 25 years in age. It is, therefore, the world of the youth, the future of the world. Secondly, Asia is largely characterized by degrading and inhuman poverty along with its injustices and inequalities, scarred by riots, wars and suffering, and recently troubled by an economic crisis which in turn has precipitated severe unemployment and social

unrest. On the other hand, many countries in Asia are, at the same time, in the process of nation-building, development, industrialisation and modernisation. With this comes the wave of urbanisation, transnational migration, worker exploitation, financial mismanagement, family disintegration, environmental pollution and a host of other problems. Globalisation has also created negative impacts upon the peoples of Asia, many of whom have been seduced by materialism, consumerism and have tended towards individualism and secularism.

Thirdly, the era of political colonialism is a moment of the past. The last two or three decades have seen a new consciousness and new self-understanding emerging in Asia. It seeks to discover and affirm an identity in continuity with the heritage of its past, but also resolutely turned toward the future. The urge towards self-determination has spilled over to the realm of economics. Until about a year ago, talk about the new "Tiger" economies and the Asian "miracles" flooded the news.

Fourthly, Asia is home to the great religions of the world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Shintoism. There is also present in significant numbers communities of what is today called Primal or Traditional Religion. These religions of Asia have moulded the lives and cultures of Asian people for several millennia and continue to give meaning and direction to their lives even today. On the other hand, they have also served as stumbling blocks to change, at times even legitimizing oppressive regimes for the preservation of the *status quo*. The resurgence of religious fundamentalism and new religious movements is also a very real phenomenon in Asia.

Fifthly, except for the Philippines, the Christian community is but a minority in all Asian countries which are predominantly Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Shintoist, Confucianist or Taoist. The Catholic community of Asia constitutes a mere 2 to 3 per cent of the total Asian population. If we do not include the Philippines, Catholics do not even make up 1 per cent of the total population.<sup>4</sup> In other words, in most parts

of Asia the Church is present in communities where 99 per cent of the surrounding population are adherents of other religious traditions. Put another way, for every one Catholic walking a particular street of Asia, 99 others who walk that same street are believers of other religions.

### Pilgrims on Journey

In view of the context of Asia, any discussion of Christianity's presence and contribution in Asia has to be done in acknowledgement of the presence and contributions of the other religions of Asia. Put another way, one cannot look at Christianity in Asia without at the same time looking at the other great Asian religions. All are communities on pilgrimage together on this earth in the search for wholeness, holiness and truth. All have their own particular systems, codes, creeds, and worship patterns meaningful to their followers but which may not make much sense to members outside the community. But it is interesting to note that most speak of religion in terms of "way" or journey. In fact, the very term "way" is at the heart of the self-understanding of most Asian religions.<sup>5</sup>

For instance, the early followers of Jesus were called the people of "The Way". In Islam, the *Shariah*, or "the Way", is the external path to be followed. Hinduism has the three *margas* or "paths" to salvation or liberation. Buddhism speaks of the Noble Eightfold "Path" as the way to attain *Nirvana*. The very name of Taoism comes from *Tao* which literally means "the Way". Confucius taught that "The Way of Humanity" (*Ren-Tao*) is to follow "The Way of Heaven" (*Tien Tao*). In Japan, the Shinto religion is referred to as "The Way of the Gods".

It is therefore appropriate to use "way" or journey as a metaphor to illustrate the relationships of the various religions in Asia. Thus, if religious communities are on the "way" each religious tradition could be looked upon as representing the vehicle by which the community travels. The Rig Veda illustrates this well: "*Carry us across, as by a boat across the sea, for our good*". Christianity or the Church, therefore, is the vehicle by which Christians journey along this way to salvation. They do so as co-pilgrims with the other peoples of Asia, who are also journeying but using their respective religious traditions as vehicles. As co-pilgrims of this journey in life, all have some form of Transcendence or the Absolute Truth, God or the Ultimate Reality as their final destination. Jalal al-Din Rumi puts it thus: "*Though the ways are various, the goal is one. Do you not see that there are many roads to the Kaaba?*"<sup>6</sup>

Each religious tradition or vehicle, however, has its own means or routes for reaching this destination. Each has its own description for the journey. Each gives a different name to this final destiny. It is variously called God, Allah, the Tao, Great Spirit, Brahman, Nirvana, Sunyata, Tien, Holy One, etc. Various scriptures point out that "*Truth is only One, but the sages call it by different names*". Moreover, the models and make up of each vehicle differ as do their functions and efficiencies. In other words, the individual differences across the various religious traditions are as different as the types and makes of motor-vehicles on the highways. Some vehicles may be better able to perform certain functions but not so good in other areas. For instance, one vehicle may be better at negotiating winding roads, but not so good at climbing hills or on slippery ground. Another vehicle may have more comfortable seats but may not have the best pricing or physical appearance.

It would be difficult, therefore, to see how any one can claim to be the "best" vehicle, since the criteria for evaluating that is yet unclear. Is it the speed, the comfort, the aesthetics, or the size of the vehicle which make for what is "best"? If the criterion is the amount one has contributed to society, can any community say with certainty that their vehicle has outshone the others? Would it not seem a little strange then when one hears of claims to being the "one and only" true vehicle for this journey, as if all the others were false, untrue or demonic. Likewise, claims to being the final or absolute vehicle by which passengers of all other vehicles would eventually find their fulfilment are also difficult to understand.

Would it not be better to look at all as still being on the "way", and therefore none ought to be assuming a sense of superiority over the others? While some may fight and argue over this, ultimately it would probably be realized that reaching the final destination is more important than what happens along the way. Vehicles which can facilitate that ought to have as much right to existence and respect as one's own. Rumi has this to say: "*Once they have arrived there, that disputation and war and diversity touching the roads — this man saying to that man, 'You are false, you are an infidel', and the other replying in kind — once they have arrived at the Kaaba, it is realized that the warfare was concerning the roads only, that their goal was one*".<sup>7</sup>

### The What? of Dialogue

Continuing with the metaphor of "way", the dialogue between the adherents of religions is therefore of paramount importance since all are co-pilgrims along the journey. Dialogue, therefore, is an

opportunity for passengers of each vehicle to interact with passengers of other vehicles. It is a way of bridging the gap which exists on account of each vehicle having gone its separate way and of developing independently of one another. It is, thus, an alternative to the usual ghettoism and parochialism that is so pronounced when it comes to matters of religion. While in their own respective vehicles, passengers are only socialized and educated on their own systems and interact only with their own co-passengers, in dialogue they get the chance to look at what other vehicles are like as well as to befriend the passengers of other vehicles. In the process, many new discoveries are made and walls of indifference, prejudice, and even hatred are broken down.

Dialogue, therefore, is about learning. It is an opportunity for both parties to learn something new about the other. It is an opportunity to clear up misconceptions and correct untruth and misinformation. It is also an opportunity to discover that others have an equally valid system, coherent vision and efficient organisational structures. Besides, as one learns about the other, one also begins to re-view one's own previous learning about oneself. For instance, as one looks at the inside of another vehicle, one may realize that one's own gear-box or head-lamps are in need of some repairs. Or, as one gains more knowledge about the other's conception of the journey and the final destiny, one may see that what one has been taught to believe is in need of some revision. Dialogue, therefore, is a process where both parties mutually learn about the other as well as about themselves. Pope John Paul II states in *Redemptoris Missio* that dialogue is "a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment" (n. 55).

But in order for learning to take place, the partners-in-dialogue have to be willing to teach, to share, to witness, to proclaim and to be prophetic. Passengers of each vehicle have therefore to tell their stories, speak about their joys and sorrows, relate their religious experiences, and even denounce actions which oppress and structures which dehumanize. Not only does this demand that one is adequately knowledgeable, it also suggests that a certain amount of courage and authenticity is necessary in order for persons to witness and proclaim to one another. While being respectful of one's dialogue partner, one must also be honest in witnessing to even those elements which may sound disconcerting to the other. For instance, if a particular vehicle has been contributing to the pot-holes of the highways or endangering others through reckless driving, then it has to be made known as such. Likewise, just as one is ready to witness to the truth, one must also be ready to listen to the truth as perceived and witnessed to by

the other. Therefore, if passengers of other vehicles warn that one might be taking the wrong route or teaching the wrong concepts, then one has the duty to pay attention to such warnings. Dialogue, therefore, is an occasion where one comes ready to witness as well as to be witnessed to<sup>8</sup>. The 1991 Vatican document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, speaks of dialogue as "a mutual witness to one's beliefs and a common exploration of one's respective religious convictions" (n. 40).

The ultimate goal of dialogue is the conversion of the dialogue partner. Anything short of conversion implies a lack of change of heart and thus failure of the dialogue efforts. However, by "conversion", one is not so much referring to a "winning over" as to a "sharing with". In other words, each party hopes the other may come to see and appreciate whatever is fundamental to one's system. Put another way, one hopes to convert the other to one's stories, one's creeds and one's ultimate concern. Likewise, just as one hopes to convert the other, one is also open to being converted by the other. Dialogue therefore is a platform where one comes to convert the other as well as be converted by the other. It is mutual conversion, characterized more by authentic transformation of hearts rather than by change in religious affiliation. In dialogue, therefore, one gets a chance to go aboard another's vehicle, look at it, like it and appreciate it, and then return to one's own vehicle with a broadened understanding of the other and the other's vehicle.

The most fundamental aspect of dialogue with other religions is that whatever is learned has to be brought back and shared with persons of one's own tradition. In other words inter-religious dialogue has to lead to intra-religious dialogue. Thus, as one discovers something new and beautiful about another vehicle, one returns to one's vehicle to share that new insight with one's own co-passengers. Thus, interreligious dialogue is a corporate activity and ought to lead to growth of whole communities and not just the individual interlocutors. It is the task of those who engage in interreligious dialogue to share with their own co-religionists whatever good they have learnt about the other.

Because the aim is to build better relationships and eliminate prejudices, prudence must be exercised so as not to highlight negativities as one speaks about *the other* to one's own. Besides the question of fuelling greater prejudice, there is also the question of justice since *the other* is not there to correct misrepresentations. It is in this spirit that the rest of the present paper will try to offer glimpses into some religions in order to see how we, as a community, might be able to learn something from them. In looking at these religions from the inside, one is also at

the same time being confronted by them as they could possibly pose a challenge to one's own understanding of one's religion.

### Glimpses into Hinduism<sup>9</sup>

Often regarded as the religion of 330 million gods, Hinduism defies any definition. Its difficulty in being defined in theoretical terms is in part due to its all-embracing inclusiveness. Its acceptance of multiple paths to reality makes it difficult to pin down exactly what constitutes Hinduism. Philosophically grounded in religious plurality, Hinduism's tolerance of internal diversity is so high to the extent it is even willing to overlook glaring contradictions. This radical pluralism within its doctrines and practices affords Hinduism the feature of universality.

A perfect glimpse into this universality would be to look at the concept of *yogas* which is structurally central to Hinduism. Also referred to as *margas*, which means path, the *yogas* are basically techniques which facilitate union between the human and the divine. They are means by which human beings attain self-realisation, *moksha* or liberation, the goal of Hinduism. Thus, *yogas* are essentially paths for establishing linkages between the human world and the transcendental world. They are the pivots on which the whole Hindu universe revolves. Contemporary Hinduism has more or less crystallised around the three *yogas* of *jnana yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, and *karma yoga*.

*Jnana yoga* is the absolutistic form of Hinduism. It is the path of knowledge, emphasising the faculty of knowing through the intellect. Its concern, therefore, is with philosophy. In the realm of realisation, one encounters the Ultimate Reality called Brahman in its non-duality (*advaita*). This takes the form of knowledge which is pure and simple and without any qualifications. It is an unmediated presence of the Ultimate Reality through the act of knowing. However, it is a knowing which is more experiential and intuitive rather than intellectual. A representative figure of *jnana yoga* is Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), who through internal and external renunciation and intense meditation, arrived at an identity with the Absolute or Ultimate Reality or Godhead. It is at this point where one realizes that one's own individual or psychic ground of being is identical with the universal or Cosmic Ground of Being.

*Bhakti yoga* is the theistic form of Hinduism. It is the path of devotion, emphasizing the faculty of feeling and emotions through the heart. Its concern, therefore, is with worship and is understandably the most popular form of Hinduism. It is worship of a variety of deities: *Brahma*, the creator god who

designed the universe; *Vishnu*, the preserver god who rules over the world; and *Siva*, the god of destruction, responsible for the ending of the world at the end of each *kalpa* (cosmic age). Besides these primary gods, there are numerous others, such as *Sakti*, the feminine principle or *Rama* and *Krishna* the incarnations of *Vishnu*. Devotion at its peak takes the form of profound love and intimate relationship with the deity and is often likened to a relationship between lovers except that it is not tainted by carnality. The representative figure for *bhakti yoga* is Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) whose greatest disciple Vivekananda helped popularized his mission.

*Karma yoga* is the activistic form of Hinduism. It is the path of action, emphasizing the faculty of willing through the will. Its concern is with being in active relation with society and the world. Where action on behalf of the marginalised is wanting there one is able to express concern through concrete actions. The experience of *Brahman*, the Ultimate Reality, is therefore through one's active participation in social and cosmic change. These actions, however, are not so much motivated by worldly desires of popularity, power, or prestige but by a genuine concern for the good of the cosmos and humanity. It is action rooted in truth and love and performed with zeal and compassion. Mahatma Gandhi is the representative figure of *karma yoga*.

What is interesting about Hinduism is that individuals may embrace any one of the *margas* or paths, or a combination of several paths. In other words, the paths are not mutually exclusive but instead are mutually complementary. Individuals formulate the paths of their preference in the context of their histories, cultures, personalities, temperament, and vision of life. This is in recognition of the fact that individuals are unique and therefore have unique ways of responding to the divine or Ultimate Reality. In the state of self-realization, it is the very same reality that is being experienced even though the paths which effect the experience may differ. A particular path may be adopted as the preferred path but then it is with the understanding that this preferred path is one among other equally good paths. One is free to formulate one's own sacrality as long as it does not transgress upon another person. Likewise, one is also free to opt for the deities of one's preference or free to believe in one god, several gods, or none at all. It is in this context that Hindu pluralism is sometimes regarded as all things for all persons.

### Glimpses into Buddhism<sup>10</sup>

A glimpse into Buddhism will necessarily begin with a glimpse at the historical founder, Siddharta



Gautama. A prince by birth, Gautama led a luxurious life until he decided to leave his palace for a life of austerity in search of the truth to the existence of suffering in the world. After six years of asceticism he gave up the search, after which he suddenly attained enlightenment under a tree in Bodh Gaya. He was subsequently called the *Buddha*, meaning the Enlightened One. In his very first sermon at Deer Park, the Buddha spoke about the Four Noble Truths. The Truths are about the existence of *dukkha* or suffering (first truth), caused by desire (second), which when removed will cease suffering (third), and this is possible through the Eightfold Path (fourth). An eight-point programme, the Eightfold Path consists of right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation. Thus, the Buddha takes the middle way avoiding the two extremes of overindulgence and self-mortification.

The Buddha further taught that it is *avidya* (ignorance) which causes one to have desires or attachments. Illustrating this through the chain of causation he points out that ignorance causes one to cling to existence and so remain in bondage to *samsara*, the process of birth-death-rebirth-redeath. Also known as the realm of transmigration, emancipation comes about by overcoming ignorance

to awaken wisdom which leads to the attainment of *Nirvana*, a blissful freedom. It is here where one no longer abides in *samsara* and having broken the chains of rebirth forever one attains enlightenment and realizes *annata* (that there is No Self/Soul) and the ultimate reality which is *sunyata* (voidness). Such is the *dharma* or the teachings of the Buddha.

A point of interest about Buddhism is that it does not so much stress right belief as right deeds and good conduct. Thus orthodoxy is of lesser significance than orthopraxy. For instance, the Eightfold Path is offered not so much as a dogma to be believed but a path of action to be followed. Even the Four Noble Truths were regarded as provisional teachings, and not to be treated as sacrosanct. In fact, they are to be discarded as one would discard the raft once one has reached the shore. Moreover, certain schools of Buddhism even regard details about the Buddha's life and story as distractions. It suffices that the teachings be passed on and there is even a saying in the Zen tradition which urges that "if you meet the Buddha, kill him!" It is in this context that the Buddha himself discouraged his followers from engaging in any form of devotion to him. For him, the salvific practice is the only one which matters and by this he was talking about a salvation of the here and now. It is in this regard also that the Buddha is believed to have avoided discussions on metaphysical issues since they do not help bring one closer to *Nirvana*. Gods were of no use in one's quest for enlightenment. As far as the Buddha was concerned every person had to "be lamps unto yourselves" as well as "be islands upon yourselves". His dying words are believed to be "strive for your own salvation with diligence".

A second point of interest about Buddhism is the doctrine of *upaya* (skillful means). It advocates that all teachings should be adapted to the spiritual, moral, and intellectual level of the audience. They must speak to the experience and reality of the people. The content of the message remains but the form may change. That is why Sanskrit was used when Buddhism was taught to the Hindu *élites* while the Chinese language was the medium when being transmitted to the Chinese people. Moreover, when addressing Tibetans, where the pre-Buddhist magical practices were very much a part of life, Buddhism was presented under the magical guise. It also accommodated itself to the popular religions of South East Asia, with its worship of spirits. That is why the various forms of Buddhism of today differ so much one from another. The original Theravada tradition would be unrecognisable amidst the Mahayana traditions of East Asian Zen Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, and a variety of others. The bottom line is that the teachings of the Buddha, the gift of *dharma*,

***We applaud those who are contributing to dialogue between the Catholic Church and other religions.***

***We deplore the lack of dialogue within our own institutional Church itself.***

***We maintain that to be truly Church is to be in dialogue at all levels of membership and between all levels of membership. Only then will our institutional Church's dialogue with other religions be credible.***

***We believe that a humble Church, respecting the beliefs and ways of other religions and journeying with them on a common and holy ground, will be most authentically in mission to the world today.***

is shared with as many people as possible. This sometimes is done even at the expense of some basic Buddhist principles. Abe cites an incident in which Edward Conze asks a group of Mongol monks why they were eating meat, thus violating the monastic disciplinary code. The monks replied: "Yes, we know that by habitually eating meat we act against the ordinances of the Lord Buddha. As a result of our sin we may well be reborn in hell. But it is our duty to bring the *dharma* to the Mongol people, and so we just have to take the consequences as they come".<sup>11</sup>

### Glimpses into Islam<sup>12</sup>

Because Islam is probably the religion which poses the greatest challenge to the West in general and Christianity in particular, the present paper will look at it with a little more depth. The challenge is augmented not only on account of the historical relationships Islam has had with Christianity (both good and bad), but also because Islam has its own version of what might seem to be particularly Christian, namely the Jesus factor. It is in this context that this glimpse will necessarily begin with the Muslim's own self-understanding of the religion itself.

According to Islam, and in keeping with the Judeo-Christian tradition, Adam is the first human at the beginning of humanity's terrestrial history. He is therefore the first prophet of humanity. He was a monotheist who preached the doctrine of Unity and Oneness of *Allah*. The primordial religion, therefore, is based on Divine Unity and began with Adam himself. While humanity was originally monotheistic, at times it fell into polytheism. Hence, prophets had to be sent to remind humankind of the original doctrine of Unity. That accounts for why history consists of a series of cycles of decay and rejuvenation.

Abraham represents one of these prophets who was sent to reassert this message for the Semitic people. As "father of the Jews" he represents in Islam the "father of monotheism" as well. He came to reassert the primordial religion of Oneness of *Allah*. This universal message of Abraham was later particularized for a "chosen people" by Moses. Moses, therefore, was leader to the first separate religion to issue from the Abrahamic tradition. The revelation given to Moses stresses the Law (*shariah*) and fear of *Allah* as the basis of religion. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, came to reassert the spiritual way or the path of love, rather than the Law. This represents the internal dimension of the primordial religion. Therefore, Christ did not bring a new law but a way (*tariqah*) based on *Allah's* love and hence

Christianity, the second separate religion to issue from the Abrahamic tradition, is essentially based on the love of *Allah*.

Just as Judaism represents the external or exoteric dimension of the primordial religion and Christianity represents its internal or esoteric dimension, Islam sees itself as integrating the two by containing both the law and the way, the *shariah* and the *tariqah*, or the external and the internal. Therefore, Islam sees itself as the third great manifestation of the Abrahamic tradition whereby if Judaism is based on the fear of *Allah* and Christianity on the love of *Allah*, Islam is based on the knowledge of *Allah*. This, of course, is but a matter of emphasis, since all three religions contain fundamental aspects of the three relationships of *Allah* with humanity.

Islam, therefore is but a reassertion of the primordial religion. To be sure, it is not a new religion founded by the Prophet Muhammad, but the same religion founded by *Allah* through Adam, the first human person. However, it is also the "last religion" as with the Prophet Muhammad the prophetic cycle ends. The Prophet was the "Seal of the Prophets" as *Allah* had announced that there would be no more prophets after him. This specific characteristic gives Islam the power of synthesis. Being the final message and the last religion in the prophetic cycle, Islam was given the power to synthesize, to integrate and absorb whatever was in conformity with its perspective from previous civilizations. Therefore, if Moses was given the Torah, David the Psalms, and Jesus the Gospel (*Injil*),<sup>13</sup> Muhammad was given the Qur'an and, because it is the latest and final revelation, the Qur'an abrogates all former revelations.

Anyone who has been in close company with Muslims will know that the Qur'an is of paramount significance to them. If Christianity is founded on the Incarnation, which is God becoming a human being or the Word made flesh, then Islam is founded on the Inlibration,<sup>14</sup> which is God becoming Book or the Word made Book. Therefore, the Qur'an is the revelation of God and God's Word is contained therein. It is Divine both in spirit and in letter, the content as well as the form. Nothing, therefore, is more sacred to the Muslim and violation of the Qur'an is considered violation upon the Word of God, the utmost sacrilege and condemnatory blasphemous act.

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet when he was on Mount Hira, a cave near Mecca. Through the Archangel Gabriel, the divine message was transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad. It is believed that when the Archangel first instructed the Prophet to "Recite!" the Prophet responded that he was unable to do so, since he was unlettered. But, he was then able to recite, due to the power given him by the Divine

Message. Eventually, the Qur'an became a complex compilation of messages, whose work is regarded as the most beautiful of all works in the Arabic language. It could not have been the work of the Prophet.

"How can this be so, if the Prophet is unlettered?" will have as its response, "How can this be so, if the Virgin Mary knew no man?" Traditional Muslim theology posits that just as the vehicle of the Incarnation is the Virgin Mary, the vehicle of the Inlibration is the unlettered Prophet. Note that the messenger in both cases is the Archangel Gabriel. They see the significance of Mary's virginity as synonymous with that of the Prophet's unletteredness. The Divine Message must be transmitted through a pure and untainted instrument. Since they see Mary's virginity as indicating her being untouched by another human being, so the "Word made flesh" is pristine and purely from God. Likewise, the Prophet's unletteredness is an indication of his passiveness before the Divine. Therefore, it had no possibility of being corrupted or tainted by the Prophet's own human knowledge. He was purely passive as a vehicle and so the "Word made Book" is pristine and purely from God. It is in this context that the Qur'an is viewed as the verbatim Word of God, revealed for the benefit of all humankind.

### Challenges to Mission

In using the word "challenge" the present paper takes it to mean more as an opportunity than a threat. Therefore, challenges, viewed as something good, are welcome phenomena and could also be looked upon as grace-filled moments of growth. It is probably in this context that the Holy Father, in *Redemptoris Missio* speaks of dialogue as "based on hope and love" and that it will "bear fruit in the Spirit". Having said that, he then asserts in the next line that "other religions constitute a positive challenge to the Church" (n. 56).

In the spirit of this challenge, how are we, as Christians, to respond in light of whatever new discoveries we make about other religions? After having taken a quick look at the inside of some of the other vehicles of Asia, have we discovered anything new about them? But more important, how would some of this new knowledge help us to look at our own vehicles with new eyes? For example, could the various notions of salvation afforded by Hinduism teach us something about our own religion? Is there anything we can learn from the radical pluralism which Hinduism espouses? Can the spirit of complementarity rather than exclusivism of Hinduism show us the way to harmony as we co-exist with other religions in Asia? Likewise, could Buddhist pragmatism teach us anything about the notion of

religion? Is there a lesson to be learned from the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means or adaptability to culture? What can we say about the process of inculturation in our own churches? Do insights about the essence of mission, namely that the sharing of the message is more important than the form in which it is contained, have a bearing on the Church's missiological reflections? Does the Buddhist stress on a here-and-now salvation speak to us in any way about our own notions and understanding of salvation? What have we learned from Islam that we might not have known before? Could issues of epistemological concerns teach us something about the way we have understood Christianity ourselves? Would we be in a better position to understand why Muslims assert their own perspectives of Christ? What can perspectivalism teach us about the way religions have been asserting truths peculiar to their own culture and history?

These are but some questions which need to be explored if conversion is the goal of dialogue. Numerous other questions ought to surface as we examine the issues more deeply. However, unless we take the trouble to reflect upon issues raised in the process of dialogue, dialogue would then be merely an activity which comes and goes. Reflection, of course, should ideally lead to conversion or a change of heart. Hence, the dialogue with the religions of Asia ought to effect change within the life of the Church. Only then would it become integral to the mission of the Church. Conversely, if the mission of the Church does not take into consideration issues raised in interreligious dialogue, it becomes mission in isolation. In the context of Asia, where the religions are co-pilgrims, such an attitude will not only be looked upon as arrogant, but also as irrelevant to the peoples of Asia. If the Church, as suggested by the theme of the Synod for Asia, wishes to proclaim "Jesus Christ the saviour and his mission of love and service in Asia" it would be ideal that she be first converted by the other religions as she learns from them. Only then will she, along with the other religions of Asia, be able to proclaim to the peoples of Asia, "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (cf. Jn 10:10).

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<sup>1</sup>Paper presented at *SEDOS Annual Research Seminar*, Ariccia, Rome, 19-23 May 1998.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Rosales & Arevalo, *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, the Philippines: Claretian, 1992.

<sup>3</sup>*Synod of Bishops: Special Assembly for Asia*, Vatican City, 1998.

<sup>4</sup>Bishop T. Bacani, The need for a new

evangelization, in *Evangelization in Asia: Proceedings of the Asian Congress on Evangelization*, the Philippines: Claretian, 1993, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup>L. Swidler, *The Meaning of Life at the Edge of the Third Millennium*, USA: Paulist Press, 1992, p. 7-9.

<sup>6</sup>A.J. Arberry (trans), *Discourses of Rumi*, London, 1961, p. 108ff.

<sup>7</sup>*Op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup>The contents of this witnessing range from theological to sociological to political, etc. The issues and problems confronting the peoples of Asia as a whole (from globalisation to exploitation to poverty) constitute a great part of this witnessing. Religionists have to be willing to talk about what they are doing or what they need to do more to alleviate the sufferings of the world. In a way, witnessing would then lead to cooperation and collaboration in addressing the causes of the problems confronting the world. Where religions have legitimized a particular oppressive or unjust political or economic structure, the power of witnessing becomes ever more urgent.

<sup>9</sup>The reflections of this section are taken primarily from the writings of Arvind Sharma, born in India and

Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University, Canada. He is editor of one of the finest books on world religions (*Our Religions*, USA: Harper, 1993) which is the primary source text for the next few sections of the present paper.

<sup>10</sup>This section is primarily from the writings of Masao Abe, born in Japan, leading interpreter of Buddhism and prominent participant of Christian-Buddhist dialogue, esp. with John Cobb, Jr.

<sup>11</sup>Conze, *Buddhism: The Mahayana*, p. 307. cited in Abe, *Buddhism*, in Sharma (ed.) *Our Religions*, USA: Harper, 1993.

<sup>12</sup>Taken primarily from the writings of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, born in Iran and currently University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, U.S.A.

<sup>13</sup>This Gospel (*Injil*) is not in reference to the Four Gospels of the Christian Bible but to that which was given to Jesus but which got lost.

<sup>14</sup>A comparison made by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a Canadian pastor, renown as an religion and Islamic scholar, having served in parts of Asia for many years.

# SEDOS Symposium



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# DIALOGUE WITH RELIGIONS OF ASIA: CHALLENGES FROM WITHIN<sup>1</sup> (Part II)

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## **Introduction**

Unlike the first paper, the present paper will take an approach which is more subjective and personal. The author will attempt to speak as an Asian and from an Asian perspective, at times using Asian methods of speaking. Thus, there will be personal sharings, story-telling, use of symbols and metaphors as well as contextualized theories. This paper will explore the internal struggles confronting the Church as she engages in dialogue with the religions of Asia. It does this by means of a case-study and then extrapolating the trends to that of the wider society. It then looks at issues raised in the context of the analysis, making reference to how Asian theologians have tried to respond to some of these issues.

## **The story of a boy named Bok**

Kim Bok, popularly known as Bok, grew up in a typical Catholic family in an Asian country where Christianity is but a mere five per cent of the total population. His mother was a third generation Catholic while his father was a Buddhist who converted to Catholicism in order to get married. Because Bok's paternal grandfather had four wives (a common practice), Bok therefore had four times as many relatives who were Buddhist as were Christian. Bok was thus socialized into many of the Buddhist practices and worship rituals, even as his own immediate family were church-going Catholics.

As a teenager, Bok was very involved in numerous school activities during which he had intense interactions with his schoolmates, the majority of whom were adherents of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. Religious differences was never a barrier to their friendships and working relationships. Occasionally, he would accompany a Hindu friend to a temple for a Hindu feast, as his friend would join him for Mass on a Sunday. As far as his own religious life was concerned, Bok was a "Sunday-Catholic". He never participated in any Church activities nor did he have any special pietistic devotion. He was a nominal Christian, but led a pretty

decent life.

When Bok completed high school, he decided to become a religious. He, therefore, spent some years in formation houses and studied in the seminary. The initial period was difficult since he was not familiar with the common prayers and religious observances and he also lacked the appropriate knowledge in basic catechism. He, however, worked at it and with time became quite a fervent Catholic. His knowledge of the faith grew as did his commitment to his vocation. But for every ounce of increase in his Catholic faith, he felt an ounce of burden upon his shoulders. He experienced a sense of fear and regret as he thought fondly about his numerous relatives and friends who were not Catholic. He constantly prayed for their conversion as he also frequently wrote to his best friend, Thangavelu, and shared with him all he was learning about the Catholic faith. When he returned home to celebrate Chinese feast days with his relatives, he would hesitate about lighting joss-sticks or bowing before the family ancestral shrine, something he had always done ever since he was a little child. Bok went through a crisis of sorts but was thankful for his religious vocation.

When Bok completed his religious formation, he enrolled at a teachers' college. For the first time after many years he had the opportunity once again to interact actively with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs. There was a small Catholic community of about a dozen students in the college of more than 4,000 students. While Bok organized the Catholic community for Bible-study sessions, he spent most of his time in association with persons from a variety of religious traditions. Many of them were fervent practicing Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists and some were also "Religious" who were training to be teachers of Islam. While still committed to his Christian fervour, Bok also began to appreciate the deep faith and commitments of his colleagues to their respective faiths. Bok then served as a teacher in a school in a small village. There was a total of three Catholics in the school of about 1,000 pupils. Bok lived in the village itself which was predominantly Muslim and Buddhist. The villagers could never

understand why he was not married. All they knew was that it had something to do with his being an adherent of the “White man’s” religion. As for Bok, he saw his being in this new ministerial environment more as an opportunity to befriend these Buddhists and Muslims rather than to proselytize or convert them. He neither prayed for their conversion, nor did he compromise on his religious commitments.

Bok then had the opportunity to further his studies in the United States. It was there that he actively engaged in the study of religions. Besides reading Karl Rahner, Raymond Brown and Schillebeckx, he also had the privilege of reading Diana Eck, W. Cantwell Smith and Bede Griffiths, the latter three being scholars of Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism respectively. Not only did the studies provide him with more insights into the various religions, it also helped him to reconcile himself with the fact that his relatives and friends were not Catholic. He was now able to put into language and thoughts what his heart always wanted to believe, namely, that his relatives and friends need not be Catholic to be saved. It was, for him, a liberation from the dogmatic bondage which held him ever since he took to Catholicism seriously.

### **Theories to explain Bok’s story**

If the above story is to be made more meaningful, an analysis of Bok’s life would be in order. Firstly, it would be important to look at how Bok struggled with his own attitudes towards his neighbours (relatives and friends) of other faiths. Secondly, it would be useful to look at this in the context of his own faith development and in light of his history and experiences.

### **Attitudes towards the “other”**

An appropriate paradigm to categorize Bok’s attitudes is that used by most contemporary scholars when mapping out a theology of religions. It speaks of three attitudes or positions taken by Christians in apprehending persons of other religions or generally known as the “other”:

(i) *Exclusivists*: They have a theological perspective which regards only themselves as the saved ones. All other religions do not have the power to bring peoples to salvation, despite the good which may be contained in them. Salvation is only possible for those who explicitly belong to the Catholic faith. This model is ecclesiocentric as it believes that the Church is necessary for one’s salvation.

(ii) *Inclusivists*: They believe that other religions can mediate salvation for their respective

adherents. However, they still believe that it is Jesus Christ who is the means of salvation. As such, salvation through other religions is ultimately mediated indirectly through Christ, and the people, unknown to them, are actually “anonymous Christians”. This model is Christocentric since it is Christ who brings about the ultimate fulfilment of the other religions.

(iii) *Pluralists*: They regard the inclusivist model as patronizing. They prefer to think of all religions, including Christianity, as relative. Only God is Absolute. All religions are therefore means and ways to the Absolute. They are different, even as there may be similar features amongst them. But, ultimately they are as different as languages are different. None, they believe, can claim superiority over the others. Persons of other religions are saved through their own religious faith just as Christians are saved through their own Christian faith. This model is Theocentric since all peoples are ultimately saved by God.

Exploring Bok’s story, one can suggest that Bok started off as a pluralist during his childhood and school days. His day-to-day interactions with persons of other religions enabled him to appreciate the goodness in the religions. He thought nothing about the salvific powers of the religions, just as he thought nothing about his own salvation. What mattered to him was that his relationships with friends and relatives across religion were authentic and harmonious. As far as he was concerned, religion was a private and personal matter, and certainly had no business making judgments about other people’s redemption.

But as he entered the novitiate and was initiated into the Catholic faith, his attitude changed. Not only because he was now isolated from persons of other religions but more so because the Catholic theology which he was exposed to was exclusivist in orientation. He therefore became very exclusivistic himself, especially since he was on his way to being a fisher of men and women.

His entrance into the teachers’ college, however, marked another turning point in his attitudes towards the “other”. While still believing in the importance of the Christian faith, he was now forced to recognize that others too have an equally deep faith. He was not prepared to hold on to his exclusivist commitment, but neither was he ready to embrace a pluralist faith where others are looked upon as co-pilgrims in faith. In his mind, therefore, he probably reconciled this as the inclusivist would, by regarding the religions as means of salvation, but that ultimately this salvation is brought about through the power of Christ, even though those saved might not know it.

Bok’s exposure to the objective study of religion

in a university setting in the West was yet another turning point for him. For it was here that he had the opportunity to explore in greater depth the various religions. This comparative study afforded him the possibility of looking at the religions in relation to one another, with God as the absolute centre. He thus was able to accept the differentness amongst the religions without having to posit that his own is superior to others. He became a pluralist in orientation and was comfortable accepting the various religions as legitimate ways of salvation without feeling that it compromised his commitment to his own Catholic faith.

### Stages of Faith Development

In order to appreciate Bok's development of his attitudes towards the "other", the use of James Fowler's theory of faith development might help<sup>2</sup>. A Methodist pastor who was at once theologian and psychologist, Fowler developed his theory through an empirical research integrating the theories of psychologists such as Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg together with that of philosophers and theologians such as Niebuhr, Riccoer, Tillich and Buber. He speaks of six stages of faith and that each person's faith development will be contingent upon the internal biological maturation as well as on environmental and social factors. For the purposes of the present paper, only three of these stages will be mentioned.

*Stage 3 Faith (Synthetic-Conventional):* Stage where interpersonal harmony and concordance is of paramount importance. Person's need for acceptance will dictate belief and value systems. Profound need to feel a sense of belongingness to the community or group. Thoughts and actions are largely based on others' judgments and expectations. Conformity marks this stage.

*Stage 4 Faith (Individuative-Reflective):* Stage where the locus of authority shifts to an internal control. Person takes responsibility for own life and strives towards a self-chosen faith. A sense of reflectiveness characterizes person's life which then leads to the need to have clear-cut answers to questions. There is an over-zealous need to be absolute, determinative, decisive, and dichotomous in one's choices and beliefs. This is the either/or stage of rigidity and no room is left for ambiguity or tentativeness. Boundaries are set to demarcate "we" from "they". In later Stage 4, the person goes through a period of deconstruction and demythologizes previously held beliefs to embrace a form of skepticism. The critical and dichotomous spirit characterizes this stage.

*Stage 5 Faith (Paradoxical-Consolidating):*

Stage where the person now restructures what Stage 4 made explicit and then deconstructed. It also integrates whatever the determinative Stage 4 previously suppressed. Person is relatively comfortable with opposing views and bipolar tensions and consolidates them into a both/and harmonious balance. Person has no need to be definite and acknowledges the importance of finiteness and human limitations. There is an active embracement of multi-dimensionality, pluralism and a sense of subjectivity. Person is comfortable with uncertainty and tentativeness and is open to the Mystery of Life. The dialogical spirit characterizes this stage.

Looking at Bok's life, during his school-days, when he was in close contact with persons of other religions, and in view of his age, personal and social development, he was probably at Stage 3 Faith. Thus, the need for acceptance by the community prompted him to conform to the larger society's religious pluralism. A pluralist orientation helped, since that enabled him to cognitively accept all peoples and hence enjoy a sense of belongingness to the larger community in school and at home with his relatives. But it was a sort of casual pluralism, marked by a pre-critical acceptance of differences and a naïve sense of religious commitment. It, however, worked well for him in his context and in his state of life.

Things began to change when he completed high school. He was now at the crossroads where he needed to map out his own personal identity. He could not remain as a mere element in a salad mixture of numerous varieties. Bok was thus prompted to address the challenges posed by Stage 4 Faith. He was challenged to individuate from the larger community so as to seek his own personal faith and religious identity. He was challenged to find out who he really was and the characteristics which constitute his true identity. He thus spent some time in reflection and then applied to join a religious congregation, believing that this was the identity which fit him. Even as this was his self-chosen identity, from a psycho-social point of view, the decision was a convenient way to foreclose the rigours of an identity crisis. Instead of having to struggle and work out his own personal identity, Bok very easily jumped onto the bandwagon of an existing group and embraced its identity in toto. While he now had a self-identity, it was one which belonged to a group and not one which was tailor-made for his personal and individual self. It, however, suited his purposes well. It sufficed that he was now different from the larger society which he had come from. But Bok's choice did not seem to suggest that he had moved on to a Stage 4 Faith, even if he was initially motivated by the Stage 4 characteristics to be reflective and to individuate from his previous larger

community. It looks more as if he had moved away from one large group only to jump into another group, albeit a smaller one and with a more defined identity. Instead of conformity to the pluralism of the larger community with a variety of religious beliefs, he was now conforming to the exclusivity of a smaller community with more rigid and clear-cut beliefs. While the Stage 3 spirit of conformity still characterized Bok's orientations, he was also much influenced by the Stage 4 characteristics of absoluteness and rigidity. He took on an either/or mind-set and became an exclusivist, with neatly drawn theological boundaries of the in-group as opposed to the out-group. It can be said he was at a Stage 3-plus Faith, since he was neither just Stage 3 nor had he arrived at Stage 4 yet. Moreover, his new homogeneous environment and the culture of isolation typical of novitiates and seminaries helped reaffirm his exclusivist orientation. His access to books which confirmed his attitude, coupled with the fervour of religious formation, helped nurture his dichotomizing faith.

The transition into the teachers' college and his apostolic experience as a teacher was yet another milestone in Bok's faith development. No longer surrounded by the confines of an exclusively Catholic institution, Bok had now to struggle with the pluralism which confronted him each day. The challenges posed by Stage 4 Faith again confronted him. In trying to individuate from his Stage 3-plus Faith he had to deal with his exclusivist mind-set. Aided this time by a heterogeneous culture and the multi-religiosity of his colleagues and students, he was able to deconstruct some of his previously held exclusivist beliefs. He was also able to demythologise some extremist myths he harboured about other religions. The authenticity and goodness of his Buddhist and Muslim friends forced him to embrace a more inclusivist orientation. Because he had struggled out of the rigidity of an exclusivist and dichotomous faith, it indicates his having worked through a Stage 4 Faith. However, it is not possible to say that he had arrived at the Stage 5 Faith yet, since that calls for a genuine openness to pluralism. Thus, Bok would be best categorized as being at Stage 4-plus Faith during this phase. He no longer had an either/or mind-set but he was not ready to accept a both/and mind-set either. He, however, had the beginnings of the dialogical spirit.

This dialogical spirit was facilitated when he went abroad to study. Because he was now able to look at religion with his judgments suspended and prejudices and assumptions bracketed off, Bok embarked on an inner search to reclaim whatever the Stage 4 Faith might have suppressed. Specifically, he sought to

integrate the bipolar tensions posed by his faith's proclamation that Jesus Christ is the one and only saviour with the fact that two-thirds of humanity had never, and will probably never know Christ. This fact defied the other trend of theology which was dear to him, namely that God is a God of justice and love and wills the salvation of all. The inclusivist fulfilment theory model was no longer sufficient explanation. The decision of Bok to accept in faith that each religious tradition is true and constitutes a path of salvation in its own right, helped in his transition to Stage 5 Faith. He was now open to tentativeness and was comfortable not having the need to assert the dogmatism of his own Christian truths. Aware that religious truths cannot be simplistically reduced, he became more appreciative of pluralism, diversity and subjectivity. Not only were they no longer threats to his own religious commitments, he began to value them as parts of the glorious mysteries of life. In a way he seems to have reverted back to the relativism which characterized his younger days. This, however, is more like a post-critical relativism, which Riccouer suggests is why some call this phase the second naïveté.

### **Bok's Story Writ Large**

It would be useful now to draw parallels between Bok's personal faith development and the faith development of whole Churches in Asia. Specifically, looking at the various stages of faith he passed through, one can more or less identify each of those stages amongst clusters of the Catholic population in Asia.

His school-days phase where he was generally a pluralist is very much what the majority of Catholics in Asia are staged at. Most of these are the Sunday-Catholics of our churches, where there is a certain dichotomy between religion and one's private and social life. For them, to be engaged in the ordinary dialogue-of-life with their neighbours of other faiths is more important than engaging in explicit discussions about religion or explicit demonstrations of their personal religiosity. They co-exist peacefully and harmoniously with persons of other religions, and in fact, more often than not, their religious differences are not a factor in their day-to-day activities. They are friends or colleagues not on account of their religious preferences or differences but on account of some other criteria. They are generally tolerant and accepting of religious pluralism since that is a fact of life, and having any other attitude would not serve in the interest of their need for social harmony.

Bok's religious formation and seminary years where he became very much exclusivistic in his



attitude towards other religions parallels a small segment of Catholics in Asia. Many of these are people who have taken to their Christian faith seriously, perhaps after a time of crisis or some significant event in life. They are especially fervent and zealous in their commitments, at times tending towards fundamentalism and fanaticism. They are uncritically narrow in their understanding of religion and are usually unyielding when it comes to doctrines of biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, depravity of the human being, substitutionary atonement, and certainly the uniqueness of Christ. They are inclined to place absolute authority in the Bible and stress the necessity of a personal faith experience in the Lord Jesus and are resolutely committed to converting the world to Christ. They are

suspicious of modern theology and especially the historical-critical approach to Biblical studies and are generally averse to suggestions of interreligious dialogue. They are generally seen to form Catholic ghettos where most of their social relationships, aside from business and work, are with fellow Catholics. These are the soldiers for Christ and they are usually at the forefront of most aggressive evangelisation efforts.

Bok's college and teaching days where he harboured an inclusivist orientation has also clear parallels with another segment of the Church, probably a larger group than the previous one. These are those who have a reasonable grasp of their own faith and are reasonably committed to many of its injunctions. They, however, are at the same time very

Our group, after being together these past days, feels enriched by the open sharing of our multicultural members, and by the atmosphere created by this symposium. As we come to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we find many signs of hope in the personal experiences of the missionaries: hope in the Church, hope for our mission and hope for the future of the religious life.

In studying and fostering inter-religious dialogue, we would be naïve to believe there are no obstacles ahead. We therefore make the following resolutions:

- ◆ We must improve the dialogue in our communities, especially with members of other cultures and ask for more dialogue in the Church, e.g. between Rome and local Churches.
- ◆ We must prepare ourselves and our members by formally studying the richness of other religious traditions.
- ◆ In countries where the Church is a minority, we must work toward an ever deeper inculturation of the Church into the local situation. We need inter-religious dialogue to do so.
- ◆ In meeting people of other religions we intend not so much to proclaim Jesus as to find Jesus and God's Spirit already present.
- ◆ We encourage SEDOS to help international missionary congregations to discern and deepen what it means to be multicultural.

In our deliberations we found it our responsibility to name some of the weaknesses in the missionary endeavours of the Church. We feel the present Church administration hinders, in many instances, opportunities for dialogue.

In spite of all our shortcomings, the members of the group trust in God, the Holy Spirit who is at work in us and in all peoples of good will to foster and realise the coming of God's kingdom.

exposed to persons of other faiths and to the religions they adhere to. Because of the profound interactions with the “outside world” they strike a balance between their could-have-been exclusivist views and a total acceptance of “the other” as co-pilgrims in the journey of faith. In other words, while they would not assert that salvation is not possible without the Church, they are at the same time hesitant about asserting that salvation is absolutely possible independent of the Church. A kind of middle ground is that of the inclusivists’ notion that while the other religions are means of salvation, eventually it is Christ who saves, since it is by no other name that one is saved. Many church leaders and members of the hierarchy (aside from those with minimal interactions with the “outside” world) would probably fall under this category. They are convinced about their faith, but at the same time they are appreciative of Asian realities and especially of the fact that the religions of Asia have much wealth and wisdom.

Bok’s final phase where he was more or less a pluralist also finds parallels within the church community, albeit a significantly smaller group. These are Catholics who have gone through the phase of vigorous commitment to their Christian ideals and then later mellow on account of intense exposure to a variety of religious commitments other than Christianity. Exposure can take the form of formal study of the various religions of their neighbours or active engagements with persons other than Christians who live and preach the ideals of their religions. The witnessing power of the lives of these neighbours of other faiths usually has the potential of enabling one to take a more relative or relational stance as regards religion in general. Since one is at the same time also committed to one’s own religious beliefs, in the light of this powerful witness, one can only acknowledge the truth and goodness in the other religion, just as one acknowledges the same in one’s own. Persons on this level do not look at other religions as competitors but as allies and co-pilgrims. Partnerships and collaborative efforts to address human and social concerns are common with people who are pluralist in orientation. They are also the ones who are often at the forefront of formal interreligious dialogues.

### **Wrong Paradigm!**

Having said all of the above, which to a certain extent has been useful and valid, it is important now to point out certain issues arising from the methodology used as well as the contents of the analysis. Firstly, an examination of the paradigm used is in order. As far as the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist model is

concerned, numerous Asian theologians have pointed to its insufficiency. Not only does it take as its criterion for categorising people an element foreign to Asians, but it also operates from an assumption that people need to be categorised according to their commitment to a certain ideal. An illustration might help here. If in Vietnam evaluating a person’s wealth according to her/his mode of transportation (bicycle, motorcycle or car) might be legitimate, in the Vatican City it might not (since everyone probably drives a car). The categories are invalid on two counts. One, the mode of transportation is not a very good index for measuring wealth in the Vatican (perhaps bank account balance or the number of credit cards might be better). Two, wealth is not a good index to categorize people in the Vatican (perhaps age or nationality might be better).

Likewise, Indian theologian Felix Wilfred suggests that the use of the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist paradigm begins with an epistemology which gives primacy to the principle of non-contradiction, a principle alien to the Asian mind. Moreover, it is also derived from a culture which gives importance to history, where particular events or persons and their uniqueness matter. Whereas, the Asian mind is one which accepts mutuality between the various religious traditions and appreciates the inexhaustibility of the Divine Mystery. It therefore has no problem in embracing pluralism and in fact accepts plurality as the structure of reality. Next, it does not operate from an Aristotelian logic of exclusion (either/or) but from the yin-yang logic of complementarity (both/and). As such, ambiguity and paradoxes are aspects common to the Asian psyche.

Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris, on the other hand, points to the fact that uniqueness of Christ or Christianity is never the starting point for Asians when relating with other religions. Such a paradigm seems to follow from a hierarchical structural model which quantifies everything into higher or lower, better or worse. Whereas in Asia, such comparisons are alien, since people are generally able to hold more than one thing, event or person, with equal worth. Asians, therefore, have no problem in acknowledging more than one lord or saviour and more than one path of salvation.

Hence, in using the above paradigm, one keeps in mind that it is not the best and has severe limitations. Moreover, having had to transpose what might have worked for a particular culture to an Asian context raises other issues which need to be addressed here.

### **Wrong Training!**

The use of the paradigm above was inevitable as

appropriate models have yet to be articulated and systematized for use in Asia. Moreover, the author, having had a Western training himself, knows no better. Thus, while it is generally recognized that Western methodologies and analyses have their shortcomings, it is also acknowledged that at present Asia has yet to develop its own methodology and theology independent of the West. This is where the problem lies since resources within Asia are severely limited. Most of the books Asian theologians read come from Orbis, Crossroad or Harper San Francisco. Asian theologies have more quotations from Aquinas, Descartes or Hans Kung than from ibn-Arabi, Mencius, or Tagore. Suffice to say, Asia is still lagging behind many countries in the West when it comes to theological resources, be they books, journals or scholars. Conceding to this shortcoming, many church leaders have no choice but to rely on the West for the formation and training of their brighter young men and women. Thus, it is not uncommon to hear of leading scholars, theologians and church leaders of Asia who have had their training either in Rome, Belgium or America. This, in itself, exacerbates the problem even more, since if the best of Asian minds continue to go West for their training, how can Asia develop its own resources? On the other hand, if Asia's best brains limit themselves to studying in Asia, how would they be able to develop to their fullest potential with sub-standard formation and inadequate resources? Such, is the dilemma faced by most Churches in Asia.

Leaving aside the question of how a person's psyche can be shaped by the socio-cultural influences of foreign lands, the type and nature of theology picked up from the West is of even more significance in this discussion. Specifically, theologies oriented towards explaining and expounding concepts inherited from Judeo-Christian Scriptures and Church Tradition may be rendered irrelevant when brought back to Asia. Theologies developed even by the most intelligent scholar would also be rendered irrelevant, no matter how profound or insightful, if account were not taken of the insights and theologies of scholars who are other than Christians. Besides, theologies developed with no concern for the Asian realities of poverty and religious pluralism will also not find a home in Asian soil. It is sad but true that many of the seminaries and formation houses in Asia are doing just that, dishing out theologies which have little bearing to Asian realities.

It is important, therefore, that theologies even if done in the West raise questions about scriptural authority and take cognisance of the fact of the Asian realities of the suffering masses and the diverse traditions of Asian religiousness. Hence, scholars,

such as the Hong Kong theologian Kwok Pui Lan, advocate a multi-scriptural approach, accepting non-Biblical revelation as sources for theology and thus placing the canons of other faiths alongside the Judeo-Christian canon. Taiwanese C.S. Song develops a theology which concerns itself not so much with "truth-talk" but with "love-talk", taking as his sources the struggles of Asia's poor as well as the popular religiosity of Asian peoples. The French Benedictine Monk, who took the name of Swami Abhishiktananda, after spending decades in India as a Hindu-Christian *sannyasi* (holy man), attempted a reconciliation of the Hindu *advaitic* (non-duality) experience and the Christian Trinitarian experience.

Unless more Asians begin to treat the realities of Asia when doing theology, the Western mind-set will continue to dominate much of the Church's thinking in Asia. And unless the Churches in Asia make room for Asian thought in their own seminaries and formation houses, the theologies of the Church will continue to be irrelevant to more than 95 per cent of Asia's population.

### **Wrong Cultural Roots!**

An even more serious concern is the fact of the Western-ness of the Church in Asia. Bishop Oshikawa of Japan, in his intervention at the recent Synod of Bishops for Asia, raised the issue as he pointed out that the norms for Christian living, Church discipline, liturgical life and theological orthodoxy seem to be mainly Western. In fact, when the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Asian Synod came out, a scholar pointed out that the entire document had numerous Western names, from Francis Xavier to De Nobili to Pope John Paul II, but it did not contain a single Asian name, save for those of Jesus and Mary!

The late theologian George Soares-Prabhu describes the Church in Asia as thoroughly Western in her doctrine, administrative structures, attitudes and forms of worship. In itself it is not so bad, but to exist alongside religions which have equally efficient structures and rich doctrines and worship experiences but which are totally in tune with Asianness, the Church might appear to some as a fish out of water.

It therefore is not too surprising that after so many centuries Christianity is basically still not accepted by the masses of Asia. As far as the peoples of Asia are concerned, the Churches in Asia might appear as no more than ghettos of European Churches. Some of these Churches in Asia seem to give the impression of being subsidiary or local branches of European transnational corporations. It is as if Christianity was potted and transported into Asia without the opportunity of it ever transplanting itself into Asian

soils, not to even speak about gaining rootedness. In that way, Christianity can be said to be counter-cultural, but it is counter-cultural in the literal sense and not so much in its prophetic stance or witnessing effect.

Bishop Bastes of the Philippines, also at the Asian Synod, calls for a shift from an Euro-centred Church to an authentically Asian Church. The Archbishop of Nagasaki, Shimamoto, puts it even more pointedly. He posited that if evangelisation were to proceed in Asia, the European cultural characteristics have to be shed first. Another Bishop called for greater freedom of action so as to allow for broader initiatives. That instead of translating official liturgical texts written in Rome, the Churches in Asia ought to be encouraged to write their own.

Having said that, it must also be pointed out that while the Church is basically rejected by the peoples of Asia, Jesus and the Gospel are not. In fact, if Jesus and the message he preached were offered to the peoples of Asia independent of Christianity, there might be a better chance that they will be accepted and become more widespread than at present. A more important mission, therefore, seems to be mission *to* the Churches *in* Asia, so as to bring about their conversion to become truly Churches *of* Asia. It is a mission to help the Church individuate from Western dominance and control so as to be free to map out an identity of her own, one which is fully Asian as well as fully Christian.

### Remnants of a Helicopter Church in Asia

Indian theologian Stanley Samartha<sup>3</sup> has an amusing way of describing the predicament of the Asian Church. He uses the helicopter to illustrate this. He speaks of the Church as having a Christology which looks more like a helicopter. When descending upon Asia, from above of course, she made so much missiological noise and kicked up so much dust that the peoples of Asia found it difficult to listen to the message she had to share. But despite the message not being heard, the helicopter still remained in Asia, and continues to affect the developing local Churches of Asia. Specifically, the helicopter Church had the following features.

Firstly, she came as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. She was awe-inspiring on the one hand, but evoked fear and mistrust, on the other. Even though she was not something the peoples could identify with, yet with her power and might, she was able to wield a certain amount of control and influence on Asian soil. For instance, with her economic power and international connections, she was able to appeal to those seeking material benefits and social uplift.

While there is certainly nothing wrong with that, the beneficiaries, mainly amongst the poor and especially the tribal and indigenous peoples, eventually seem to convert to Christianity. They, therefore are referred to as “rice-Christians” by the more educated Hindus and Buddhists who often bring this up as a sore point of Christian mission. It is as if the Church operates from the maxim: “your soul for our service”. Moreover, the continued use amongst some quarters of triumphalistic language and the patronizing attitude of having come to save the peoples of Asia or to give them abundant life muster up a lot of anti-colonial sentiment. Besides being presumptuous that they alone can save Asia or give it abundant life, Christians have also presented the crucified Christ as the conquering Christ, a further symbol and remnant of Western imperialism. This good-news of domination, therefore, has certainly not been perceived as good news by the peoples of Asia.

Secondly, in order to operate a helicopter, people need to have the right knowledge. Therefore, precise theories and accurate information are emphasised. It is not surprising then that the Church took on a very dogmatic stance, where one’s beliefs and thinking were the measure of one’s entitlement to remain a rightful member of the Church. Thus the stress on creeds and doctrines and catechism, obviously learned through books. This, again, is an element foreign to the peoples of Asia. Religion, to them, is more a way of life than a set of beliefs. The emphasis on orthodoxy instead of orthopraxis makes Christianity a “heady” religion instead of a “heart-felt” one. The Christian theologian from Korea, Chung Hyun Kyung, describes herself as possessing bowels that are Shamanistic, a heart which is Buddhist and a head which is Christian. Moreover, even the dichotomistic tendencies of Western thought have been adopted by much of Christian thought in Asia. At issue are the dualist separation of Church from society, soul from body, salvation history from human history, all of which do not resonate well with the Asian psyche. Is it any wonder then why Christianity does not seem to appeal to the peoples of Asia?

The third factor is one which continues to awaken the most resentment amongst the peoples of Asia. This has to do with the phenomena of proselytism and conversion. In the minds of Asians, the Church’s primary objective seems to be to convert as many people as she can so as to increase her little flock. As alluded to above, Church expansion is also seen as Western extension. The increase in the number of Church movements engaged in aggressive and militant evangelisation is certainly cause for concern for our brothers and sisters of other faiths. Some of



the less than discreet and less than ethical means used in these proselytism efforts make one wonder if these were really followers of Christ. To make matters worse, many of these groups have blessings from the hierarchical leadership of the Church. In fact, they draw their inspiration from statements such as “People everywhere, open the doors to Christ” (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 3) and challenges to participate in the New Evangelisation and to engage in mission *ad gentes*. But most of all, they take the “Great Commission” of Mt 28:19 as their missionary mandate: “Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”. However, from the way some of these Christians go about evangelising, one wonders if they have ever known of the existence of the “First Commission”, love for one’s neighbours. Otherwise, how can one claim to be loving one’s neighbour if one does not even have respect for the religion and God of one’s neighbour? Perhaps it might be good to be reminded of the Golden Rule which nearly all the religions speak of, but whose quote here is from Confucius: “Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself” (Analects).

### **Towards a Bullock-Cart Church of Asia**

Samartha then goes on to speak about an alternative form of Christology, one which would probably be more welcome in Asia. He uses the bullock-cart to illustrate this. With its wheels touching the unpaved roads of Asia, the bullock-cart is more in touch with Asian realities and for it to move ahead, it has to be in continual friction with the ground. Moreover, the bullock-cart continues to move even if the driver falls asleep, and there’s no provision for remote control by anyone, least of all by some control stations in far-away Rome! A bullock-cart Christianity would include the following features:

Firstly, like the bullock-cart which trudges along the dusty roads of Asia, the Church also needs to humbly walk the dusty earth in order to discover God in the soils of Asia. Felix Wilfred speaks of the dusty soil as the meeting ground of all religions. For, it is there that the realities of Asia, the landless peasants, the oppressed labourers, the starving street-children and the other “non-people”, become the starting point for theology. Hence, theology does not begin in the skys of Europe or America but *from the dusty soil* (title of Wilfred’s book) of Asia. The Church therefore has to be grounded on the dusty soil in order to be credible. It is in this regard that many see the colonial Church, for all her grandiosity, power and might, as not having had the authority she needed to be in Asia. She had failed to identify herself with the non-

peoples of Asia. Her institutional power and wealth, even if it had contributed to welfare services, makes it difficult to come down to the dusty soil. But that is exactly what the Church has to do if she seeks the authority to function in Asia. As Aloysius Pieris puts it, the ultimate source of authority is from he who entrusted the mission to us. And he has chosen to identify with the poor as victim-judge (Mt 25), and so the Church receives her authority from none other than the poor, the non-peoples of Asia. With the blessings of this grassroots magisterium, the Church, even if she lacked the power and wealth, would have been conferred the authority to be amongst the peoples of Asia. At the Asian Synod, Cardinal Paul Shan of Taiwan was emphatic that the Church had to become “not only a Church for the poor, but also a Church with the poor”.

Secondly, again, Pieris points out that the Church also needs to get her authority from the other religions of Asia. Even though the Church has been in Asia for so many centuries, she has never been initiated into the pre-Christian traditions which have long been in existence in Asia. She, therefore has to come under the tutelage of the ancient gurus and the wisdom-sages of the various religious traditions of Asia. Even if individual Catholics, Bishops and theologians have done so, the institutional Church is by and large still very isolated from these religions of Asia. But, if Jesus, who before beginning his ministry, chose to submit to baptism by John, then the Church ought also to be baptized by the great sages in the Jordan of Asian religions. Of course, sometimes the temptation is to baptize rather than be baptized. But, unless the Church sits at the feet of Asian religiousness, she will continue to lack the authority and the peoples of Asia will never be told: “Hear ye him”. Bishop Julio Labayan of the Philippines reminds us that “we are not the saviours of Asia”, we are but “guests” in the house of the religions of Asia.

It is in this context that the Church has to be in constant dialogue with the religions of Asia and to embark on this with great seriousness. Indian theologian, Raimundo Panikkar, speaks of the need to truly experience God and Christ from within other religions. Taking seriously the affirmation that Christ is the way, the truth and the life, he therefore feels he cannot reduce Christ’s significance to historical Christianity or to Jesus of Nazareth. There may be more truth about God and life than those made known to us through the Jesus of history and the Church. As such, Christians who take Christ’s injunctions seriously must search for this Truth in the various religions of the world. Michael Amaladoss, also from India, adds that we already know what God has done for us through our religions, but how much do we

know about what God has done for others in and through their religions? How, then, do we dare to dominate and posit that Christianity has monopoly over truth and salvation. Amalados suggests that we approach the other religions not so much to proclaim Christ but to discover Christ who is already present there. As such, the mission of the Church needs to shift from proclaiming Christ to peoples of other religions to encountering Christ in peoples of other religions.

Thirdly, like the bullock-cart, the Church exists primarily to serve, and not to be served. Cardinal Stephen Kim of Korea, in his welcome address at the Asian Synod, pointed to this in no uncertain terms. Trying to respond to how the Church is to witness to Jesus, the Cardinal said that there was no other way but to follow the Lord who came “not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45). Thus, if the helicopter Church operated from a “Jesus Saves” mentality the bullock-cart Church ought to operate from a “Jesus Serves” mind-set. Mission, therefore, is understood not so much in terms of numerical growth or Church expansion but more in terms of participation in the creative mission of God, healing of brokenness, and bridging of the rifts between humanity and the cosmos. Moreover, the Church also needs to trudge along that same road which Christ trudged along, namely service and self-sacrifice even unto death. Like her Master, the Church’s uniqueness ought to lie in the washing of feet, walking another mile and of turning the other cheek. Also, following in her Master’s footsteps, the Church ought to “empty herself” and “assume the condition of a slave” (Phil 2:7). This *kenosis* or “self-emptying” of Jesus, a point also brought up at the Synod by Cardinal Shan, will be the authentic sign of true discipleship. If the Church is ready to empty herself of her power and strength so as to be in the total service of the peoples of Asia, it will be the beginnings of her walking the way of the Cross. In walking the way of the Cross, she would, in the words of Cardinal Shan, be “a suffering servant of the Lord, who shares the pain, poverty, rejection and exploitation of the Asian peoples”. Such a Church, because she no longer has glory and power, risks losing membership, but would certainly gain in credibility and relevance for the peoples of Asia.

### **Towards the Third Millennium**

As can be imagined, the sort of “self-emptying” and openness to baptism as discussed above requires a great deal of maturity on the part of the Church. It would certainly require that at least a Stage 5 Faith is reached. Without the ability to renounce absoluteness and the sense of self-righteousness, the Church would

find it difficult to embrace the way of the Cross, the way of submission and the path of humility. However, considering that the Church has only just opened her doors to the outside world (with Vatican II) and that the Church of Asia is just beginning to understand her true self-identity in the midst of Asian religiousness, it might be unrealistic to expect growth and change to take place so quickly. It suffices that encouraging signs of growth are seen amongst different sectors of the Church at different moments in time. For now, as the new millennium approaches, one’s hope and prayer is that the Church will be ever more faithful to her “mission of love and service in Asia” so that, indeed, with the other religions of Asia, she will be able to say, “that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at *SEDOS Annual Research Seminar*, Ariccia, Rome, 19-23 May 1998.

<sup>2</sup> J.W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*, USA: Harper & Row, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> S.J. Samartha, *One Christ — Many Religions: Towards a revised Christology*, USA: Orbis Books, 1991.

## RESPONSE TO THE PAPERS OF BRO. EDMUND CHIA, FSC

Bro. Philip Pinto, CFC

The story is told of a Sufi mystic on his way to Mecca. The day being hot and the journey long, he halted in the shade of a tree and went to sleep.

Another pilgrim, travelling that same road and seeing the sleeping mystic, woke him and began to berate him:

“O you wicked man, you wicked, wicked man! have you no respect for God? Here you are on a pilgrimage and have fallen asleep with your feet pointing to Mecca! You should be ashamed of yourself”.

The Sufi raised his head and apologized profusely, then he added, “My brother, since you are standing up will you do me another favour? Please point my feet in the direction that God is not to be found”.

The story is revealing for many reasons. It is apt in the context we are discussing: inter-religious dialogue. In the first place we too need to be told and to realise again and again that God is present everywhere, and equally present everywhere: not more present in some places and less present in others. Secondly, we remember that God is not the commodity or the monopoly of any particular individual or particular group. Thirdly, our God is the God of the unexpected and delights in surprising us — as Jesus discovered when the Syro-Phoenician woman asked for her daughter’s cure.

There is much that I affirm both at the level of the head and of the heart in the two papers that have been presented. I strongly ratify that thinking which sees all people as still being on the Way. Though it might appear that some are further down the road than others, it is obvious that none has reached the end. And so, like some of you, I too feel uncomfortable with certain attitudes and claims made by the Church: the Church IS one, the Church IS holy, the Church IS Catholic, the Church IS apostolic, the Church IS a sign.... Our lived experience tells us that our Church is struggling to be all these things, struggling to be one, struggling to be holy, to be catholic, apostolic and a sign — just as religious life is struggling to become what it professes to be. There is always a tension between the ‘Already’, and the ‘Not Yet’, between what Jesus has achieved for us, and what we

yet need to accomplish. We need to honestly hold this tension all the time.

Later on in the first paper there is a sentence that says, “A certain amount of courage and authenticity is needed” if our dialogue is to be genuine. I could not agree more. This is one of those moments in the history of our Church when we are being called on in various instances to face the truth, particularly the truth about ourselves, no matter how unpleasant it may be. It is only this truth that will set us free. If we remain faithful to the dynamics of inter-religious dialogue, we will have to review our own previous learning about ourselves, as Edmund mentions in his paper. What do I mean by this? See for example how the Hindus have a wonderful sense of the sacred, no matter where they discover it. When we ask our Hindu children to pray we notice how they bow their heads and close their eyes in deep reverence. We Christians seem to have lost this and need once more to re-discover it.

While speaking to the Conference on Religion, India, I asked that we use the occasion of the Synod for Asia to apologise to the people of Asia for the way in which Christian Churches had ridden rough-shod over Asian religious sentiment, denigrated Asian culture and condemned Asian practices. But our Church is slow to apologize! I wonder if many of us here really realise the damage done by the imposition of Western culture (ideas, practices, structures) on Asian life. And until we listen to the stories of people and hear their anger and feel their pain, we will never say sorry. And hearing it will mean entering a new way of being. This will take a while for us and for our Church because we have to learn to love anew, in spite of all the documents that come from Rome about dialogue springing from the life and love of the Trinity.

In his second talk Edmund has very cleverly shown the struggle that takes place when Christianity interacts with other religions and cultures. He very rightly says that the categories he has used to describe the different stages are Western. I agree too with the way in which he describes how difficult it is for Asian theologians to evolve an Asian theology, especially when

You ask me why I am here.  
 May I enter your space and time and  
 humbly speak to you?  
 I come to listen in the silence of the soft,  
 gentle breeze — the silence of your  
 words.  
 To hear from your rituals, to see in your  
 music, to dance to your smiles, to walk  
 to your dreams.  
 If you are willing, may we journey to-  
 gether — exploring, explaining, de-  
 scribing, desiring.  
 Let us sit together in silence and hear  
 the rhythm of life.  
 For your silence, your gestures, your  
 peace call to me  
 and reveal my own innermost self.

Rome views with suspicion any attempts to formulate alternatives as seen in the treatment of Tissa Balasuriya. We notice also the attempt to control teaching of theology in the recent review being carried out in seminaries in India, the country which is “the epicentre of the new heresies” according to Cardinal Tomko.

I also enjoyed the two images Edmund Chia used of the helicopter Church and the bullock-cart Church. However, they also contain implications which we need to tease out in the days ahead. For example, how do we allow ourselves to be educated by the “Magisterium of the Poor”? How do we discover what God has done through other religions? How do we create a culture of service in Asian society?

Underneath all this, the big challenge facing us is to see inter-religious dialogue as an attitude of the mind. We have spoken so much about this during these last few days. And yet we continue to use terms that unwittingly revert to the past. The term “Non-Christian” for instance is so revealing. It gives us the notion of insider and outsider. To define people by what they are not is to say that they do not belong, that they are not good enough.

Inter-religious dialogue calls us to be open and yet even within our Church we are told that there are certain issues we are forbidden to discuss.

Inter-religious dialogue invites us to be respectful of other people and their cultural differences, but

within our Church we are often made to blush at the way women are treated. And then we have the temerity to point a finger at Islam’s treatment of women!

I cannot help ask the question, “Do we have one set of values for inter-religious dialogue and another for the rest of life?” Are we really serious about what we preach? Are we ready for this dialogue? If charity begins at home, so too do the attitudes behind dialogue!

I do not believe we ever used the language of dialogue as long as we enjoyed the advantages of power in colonial times. But when we felt our weakness as a minority and were regarded as irrelevant or even as an optional extra, the equation changed. I believe too that being in such a position of weakness and vulnerability is a great grace for our Church. We are being forced because of this to radically re-think our mission strategies and move from a crusading Church to a crucified Church. And when our Church is being persecuted, as is happening in some parts of Asia, we need to recognize this too as grace. Archbishop Romero put it beautifully when he said, “I am glad, brothers and sisters, that they have murdered priests in this country, because it would be very sad if in a country where they are murdering people so horrifically there were no priests among the victims. It is a sign that the Church has become truly incarnate in the problems of the people”. This is the sort of mind-set we need for inter-religious dialogue, one that leaves us open and vulnerable and eager to learn.

Finally, I believe that such dialogue which brings us right into the lives of people will give Christianity an Asian face. We will then be distinguishably Christian and indistinguishably Asian.



## SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 1998 - PARTICIPANTS

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| CICM | Pycke, Nestor         | MMB    | Martínez, Ana Maria       |
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| CSSp | Castriani, Sergio     |        |                           |
| CSSp | Jolibois, Jean-Michel | MMM    | Quinn, Margaret           |
| CSSR | Darlix, Georges       | MMS    | Syron, Rita               |
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| DMJ  | Slade, Deirdre        |        |                           |
| DMJ  | Eason, Margaret       | NDS    | Wolff, Katherine          |
|      |                       | NDS    | Brittain, Teresa          |
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| FMM  | Gamba, Palmide        |        |                           |
|      |                       | OFMCon | Da Silva, Ivair           |
| FMS  | Fernandez, Santiago   | OFMCon | Montero, Enrique          |
| IBMV | Pak, Annuntiate       | OSM    | Carroll, Patrick          |
| IBMV | Harriss, Patricia     | OSM    | Jacques, Camille          |
| IBVM | Mitchell, Noni        | OSU    | Sasmita, Ma. Dolorosa     |
| IBVM | Keegan, Josephine     | OSU    | Ryan, Elisa               |
| IBVM | O'Dwyer, Cecilia      | OSU    | Bunoz, Cécile             |
| IBVM | Rogerson, Libby       | OSU    | Gómez Del Valle, Carolina |
| IBVM | Paturau, Jacqueline   | OSU    | Lingnon, Colette          |
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| IMC  | Trabucco Piero        | RGS    | Rodriguez, Delia          |
|      |                       | RGS    | Fergus, Evelyn            |
| ISMC | Pasini, Patrizia      | RGS    | Botelho, Gabriella        |
|      |                       | RGS    | Bautista, Guadalupe       |
| JMJ  | Wowilina, Aldegonda   |        |                           |
| JMJ  | Alkemade, Scholastica | RNDM   | Mullaveetil, Bernardine   |
|      |                       | RNDM   | Reba, Veronica D'Costa    |
| MAfr | Prevost, Alex         |        |                           |
| MAfr | Garnier, Antoine      | RSCM   | Pereira, Rosa De Lima     |

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| RSM  | Hannon, Agnes           | SVD                        | Pape, Carlos        |
| SA   | Conde, Silvia           | SVD                        | Seigel, Mick        |
|      |                         | SVD                        | von Holzen, Vincent |
| SCMM | Hondrö, Theresia        | SX                         | Casey, Archie       |
| SHCJ | MacCarthy, Geraldine    |                            |                     |
| SHCJ | Gosser, Karen           |                            |                     |
|      |                         | <b>GUEST</b>               |                     |
| SMA  | Thoolen, Frans          |                            |                     |
|      |                         | Delaney, Lorraine Marie    |                     |
| SMC  | Ayele, Libanos          | O'Sullivan, Helene, MM     |                     |
|      |                         | <b>SPEAKERS</b>            |                     |
| SMSM | Stowers, Patricia       |                            |                     |
| SMSM | Fornasa, Virginia       |                            |                     |
| SMSM | Leamy, Pat              | Fitzgerald, Micheal, MAfr  |                     |
| SMSM | De Préville, Marie José | Nzenzili Mboma, Lucie, FMM |                     |
| SMSM | Casari, Flaviana        | Chia, Edmund, FSC          |                     |
| SMSM | Quinn, Anne             |                            |                     |
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| SND  | Davis, Terry            | Fabrizi, Paula             |                     |
|      |                         | Persia, Daniela            |                     |
| SSCC | Brion, Edward           | Barra, Thérèse             |                     |
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| SSpS | Daun, Christel          |                            |                     |
| SSpS | Muñoz, Maria Adela      | von Holzen, Walter, SVD    |                     |

## COMING EVENTS

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### SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY '98

TUESDAY, 1 DECEMBER 1998 - Morning Conferences

## MISSION AND POLITICS - LOBBYING THE MIGHTY

Fr Ignacio Harding, OFM  
*Franciscan International, New York*

### *Lobbying at the UN in New York*

Sr Brigid Reynolds SM - Fr Seán J. Healy, SMA  
*Dublin, Ireland*

### *The Service of Lobbying in front of the Irish Government*

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SATURDAY, 5 DECEMBER

## SEDOS DAY FOR THE SYNOD FOR OCEANIA

Morning Conferences:

**Ms Irene Hancey**, *New Zealand*  
**Fr Ennio Mantovani**, *Melanesian Pastoral Institute*

Afternoon Conferences:

**Msgr. Michael Putney**, *Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane*  
**Msgr. Michel Visi**, *Bishop of Vanuatu*