Sedos

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Editorial

Summer has come and the rhythm of the City seems to have slowed down so as to keep pace with the season. We too, at SEDOS, slow down a bit but we don't forget our readers who, in all four corners of the World, are committed to bringing the NEWS of the Kingdom to many. To all of you our Greetings and Prayers from Rome.

Intercultural Thology or Missiology? This is the debate being carried on in some areas of the Faculties of Theology and by some theologians in the area of Contextual Theology. Some schools of thought would like to see Intercultural Theology replacing Missiology. **Frans Wijsen**, SMA, in his article *"Intercultual Thology Instead of Missiology. New Wine in Old Wineskins?"*, offers us his analysis of the problem and argues that the attempt to change the name is due to pressure to give Missiology a more academic look, thus rendering it more palatable to the intellectual *élite*. But Frans maintains that these are two different fields and must remain such.

The second article we present to our readers *"Africa: Rethinking the Mission-Charity Paradigm"* is by **Francis Oborji**. Here we observe that one of the major trends in contemporary missiology is the linkage of mission and charity. This runs the risk of devaluing the meaning of both mission and charity, as well as devaluing the dignity of the people to whom the efforts of charity and mission are directed. Oborji invites us to rethink mission as a new paradigm in which the proclamation of the Kingdom is done with the prophetic spirit of Jesus that will renew the face of the earth by empowering the poor and raising their consciousness and human dignity.

The debate over the role of lay people in the Church is discussed in the context of Africa and from the perspectives of Islam and Christianity. Although set in Africa it is valid for all societies of today's, plural and diverse, world. Both the **Imam Mamadou Dosso** and **Jean Sinsin Bayo** invite us to call society to 'coexist and not to exclude'. In these two articles : " *Quelle laïcité?"* and *"Laïcité, dialogue des religions"* both writers invite the readers to 'enrich themselves with their complementarity' and not to close themselves into the particularities of each culture and religion because we are 'partners rather than adversaries'.

We continue with an overview of the crisis of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and the similarities and consequences this has for our mission. *"L' État du Bouddhisme Theravada en Thailandie"* by **Vasana Chinvarakorn** analyses the roots of the big crisis of Thai Buddhism. The 'new religion' of Consumerism is the enemy causing havoc in the spirituality of the monasteries and threatening the traditional religious culture. The big challenge to the "Way of the Elders" is how to offer an alternative and 'satisfying' answer to the needs of the people.

We close the Bulletin with the much discussed topic, *"The Mission Institutes in the New Millennium"* by **Michael Amaladoss**, SJ. Today we accept the fact that 'mission is everywhere' and not only in the so called 'Third World Countries'. 'Mission is no longer seen as a Church-extension, but as an on-going dialogue with the poor, the religions and the cultures of the world, building the Kingdom of God and the Church as its symbol and servant'. How are the Religious Institutes adapting their members to this new reality?

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SEDOS

Intercultural Theology Instead of Missiology. New Wine in Old Wineskins?

- **Frans Wijsen, SMA** -

Introduction

In 1978 the Münster-based pastoral theologian, Adolf Exeler, wrote a 'provocative' article in which he proposed developing a comparative theology instead of missiology.[1] He argued that the end of political colonialism meant there was no room anymore for a paternalistic missiology that was at home only in the North Atlantic region.[2] The Second Vatican Council, moreover, said clearly that mission should be a dimension of all theological disciplines and that local Churches should develop their own theologies. To the extent that both these precepts of the Second Vatican Council are realised, missiology becomes a doubtful enterprise and comparative theology should work on 'the issue that is at stake in missiology'.[3]

Exeler's proposal was not the first nor the last attempt to rename missiology or to replace it with something else. The *Missionwissenschaftliches Institut Missio* at Aachen has had a lengthy discussion on renaming the institute an Institute of Contextual Theologies, following its well-known bibliography *Theology in Context*.[4] At the theological faculty at Tilburg missiology became development studies,[5] and at the theological faculty at Nijmegen it was known as Third World Theology up to 1992, when my predecessor Rogier van Rossum was appointed to the chair of missiology.[6]

Nowadays some scholars prefer to speak of intercultural theology rather than missiology. At the Theological University of Kampen a new chair of "cross-cultural theology" was established "in the framework of missiology/ecumenism", as the advertisement for this chair read. The Faculty of Theology at the University of Nijmegen has recently started new master's and doctoral programmes in intercultural theology "in co-operation with the Nijmegen Institute for Missiology", and the chair of ecumenism at the University of Utrecht will be renamed the chair of intercultural theology.[7] The main question that concerns us here is whether this is just another freak of fashion, observable in other disciplines as well: intercultural philosophy, transcultural psychology, transcultural pedagogy, intercultural communication, and so on – that is to say, old wine in new wineskins? Or is the latest attempt to rename missiology more fundamental than that?[8]

Since other contributors to this volume will deal with the history of intercultural theology, we will not do so extensively. The main question, which was raised above, is subdivided into some sub-questions. In the first section of this article we ask what intercultural theology is all about and whether it can replace missiology. We argue that it cannot. In the second section we ask what a contemporary missiology that takes into account the concerns of intercultural theology could look like.

The term 'intercultural theology' was first propagated by Walter Hollenweger in 1979, who regarded missiology and ecumenism as a coherent whole,[9] studying the common witness of formerly divided Churches amid rapid development of church and theology in the 'third world' and the emerging gospel of the newer Pentecostal, Evangelical and Independent Churches. *'Das eben ist das Thema der interkulturellen Theologie (früher Missionswissenschaft genannt), nämlich dass der kulturelle Kontext ausserhalb unsere Gesichts-, Kultur- und Bildungskreisen für unsere Theologie wichtig ist'.*[10] This is exactly where my problem starts.

I. What's in a name?

To start with, by intercultural theology we mean the theology of intercultural encounter in the context of multicultural societies and a globalising world. The present author was asked to write about the variety of words that are used and the terminological confusion in the debate on intercultural theology. We will adhere strictly to the terms of this request and concentrate on the components of the term 'inter-cultural theo-logy'. Taking these components, we present contemporary trends in the debate, mainly in Roman Catholic theology, and give a critical appraisal of intercultural theology. We then ask whether this theology can replace missiology.

Inter-

As far as we know, the world has always been 'multicultural' in the sense that there were many cultures; we leave aside the theory that it was only the

experiment of the tower of Babel that led to cultural diversity.[11] There were also early contacts between cultures, evidenced, for example, by the 'Indonesian complex' in Africa and the 'Indian Ocean trading complex' with links between the East African coast and India, extending to China and probably dating back to some decades before Christ. What is new is the extent and the intensity of this phenomenon, as indicated already by Richard Friedli in his monumental book *Fremdheit als Heimat*, which introduced 'cultural circulation' as a new context for theology.[12]

Various terms have been used to refer to this reality, and their meaning is not always clear. The prefix 'multi-' simply means 'having many of'. When we speak about a 'multicultural society' we refer to a society in which there are many cultures. 'Inter-' means 'between', 'from one to the other'. Intercultural communication refers to communication between (members of) two or more different cultures. 'Cross-' means more or less the same as 'inter-', but in theoretical studies, the term 'cross-cultural' seems to refer to generalisations that are made about intercultural relations. 'Trans-' means 'across' or 'beyond'. Transcultural hermeneutics moves beyond the existence of particular cultures, or culture as such. Consequently one can state that 'cultures do not exist'.[13]

The term 'intercultural' is also understood differently, not as 'between cultures' but as a 'culture-in-between', an intermediate or 'meta-' culture which provides the mediator with an interface.[14] Interpreted thus it is equivalent to the 'he' or 'outsider' perspective in the theory that stresses the need for a switch and coordination of perspectives. Like intercultural philosophy, intercultural theology then becomes a cultural no man's land, a free space where two or more inculturated theologies can meet and interact but without reducing either of them to the other.[15]

Some people say that 'inter-cultural theo-logy' has no future. Our world is becoming one through the process of globalisation and homogenisation of cultures. Thus intercultural theology is just an in-between stage. Instead of intercultural theology it is better to speak of 'universal', 'world', or 'global' theology.[16] Others expect a revival of cultures and even a 'clash of civilisations', 'jihad' instead of 'McWorld'.[17] Thus there is a need for a theory (theology) of intercultural encounter and understanding, just as there is a theory (theology) of interreligious dialogue. This is what intercultural theology is all about, carefully balancing between the unity and diversity of cultures.[18]

Cultural

By referring to the 'McDonaldization thesis' we are already entering into a second debate, namely:

What is cultural? What is culture? Over the past century innumerable definitions of culture have been formulated. Yet we still do not know what culture is, or even whether it exists. One thing is clear: if cultures exist – and given the dialectical relation between reality and the mental representation of reality we believe they do – people's understanding of culture has changed considerably.

Inspired, among other things, by the 'linguistic turn', many anthropologists saw cultures as monolithic blocks, characterised by coherence (integrated wholes) and continuity (more or less static), a shared knowledge that is learnt by the members of a group and used by them to interpret experience and generate behaviour; a meaning system that is simply there, doing things on its own, independently of the actor. It was fashionable to speak about *the*Nuer worldview, *the*Ndembu inside view, *the*Javanese culture.[19]

Gradually anthropologists came to understand cultures as complex wholes. They no longer described culture in terms of a shared meaning system but in terms of "organisation of diversity".[20] They became aware that cultures are not homogeneous but diverse, that cultural knowledge is not only shared by the members of the group but that there is also a great variety of interpretations within groups. Cultures are not only coherent and integrated but also ambiguous and inconsistent, not timeless (static) but dynamic (flexible), not closed but open to outside influences and capitalised on in various power struggles. Cultures are not 'simply there', but depend on the actors.

The understanding of culture has considerable implications for a theory (theology) of intercultural encounter. If cultures are seen as exclusive, well-defined wholes, understanding another culture and communication between cultures seem almost impossible. Multicultural society becomes a tragedy.[21] When cultures are seen as open and flexible, intercultural communication is possible. Multicultural societies in this case are not to be seen as a mosaic or a patchwork quilt, but as a cultural mix or cocktail for which creole languages serve as metaphors. Multiculturalism is not considered to be a feature of societies but of people who share a multiplicity of cultural orientations. Viewed thus intercultural understanding and communication are possible.[22]

Theo-

Our next question is whether intercultural theology is really theo-logy or whether it has become science of religion. The relation between the two disciplines is complex due to the emancipation of science of religion from faculties of theology. From a theological point of view the difference between the two disciplines has been described in terms of

their material object (ultimate concern *versus* ultimate Reality) and of their objectives (description and analysis *versus* evaluation and innovation of religious beliefs and practices).[23] Here I would like to take up a debate within science of religion. In this discipline a distinction is made between religionist, positivist and empiricist theories. Without going into detail, I would say that theology has stuck to the religionist theory, whereas science of religion has become increasingly positivist or empiricist.[24]

Theology starts from the presupposition of the truth of the religion that it studies (in this regard there is no difference between Christian theologians and those of other religious traditions), that is to say, the conviction that a Reality (in the Christian tradition called *theos*) corresponds with the religious concepts or practices (representations) that are being studied. Most scientists of religion no longer make this assumption. They proceed from methodological atheism (positivists) or methodological agnosticism (empiricists).[25] Does its starting point make theology less scientific? I do not think so. Following Edward Schillebeeckx I would say that a theologian considers the religious conviction to be a hypothesis that has to be tested against human experience. In so doing theologians operate in essentially the same way as other scientists.[26] I could agree to the term 'theological science of religion' if the distinctive starting point of theology and its difference from (other) sciences of religion remain clear. In practice, however, such terminology leads to confusion and ambiguity in the scientific study of religion. This is exactly what happened in several studies on intercultural theology.

Very often scholars who feel embarrassed about the mistakes of mission in the past, and therefore want to replace missiology with something else, not only exchange missiology for comparative or intercultural theology, but exchange theology as a whole for science of religion.[27] Several theologians in Europe are convinced that in the secularised European context there is little room left for theology except maybe at seminaries. At some universities this has already led to a shift from a Faculty of Theology to a department in a Faculty of Religious Studies or a Faculty of Human Sciences.[28]

Sometimes intercultural theology is no more than a branch of comparative science of religion, in the sense of historical and empirical studies of the theologies of the world religions and their interactions with other religions.[29] It is no longer a critical and thus normative reflection on what these theologies say or what is going on in these interactions, as would be the case in a theology of (world) religions or a theology of interreligious dialogue. Exeler already said that his aim was dialogue between theologies, not an assessment of theologies.[30] According to others, it is a rather vague, if not boring, enterprise simply to

describe and analyse missionary practices without asking critically: what do we think about these practices, are they good or bad?[31]

At many universities in the southern hemisphere (except the confessional ones) there are departments of religious studies but their professors, be they Christian or Muslim, start from the presupposition of their faith and consider themselves theologians. So there is a remarkable imbalance here. In the Western world there are faculties of theology, but their professors consider themselves to be scientists of religion; in the southern hemisphere there are departments of religious studies, but their professors consider themselves to be theologians.[32]

Logos

If it is agreed that intercultural theology is indeed theology and not science of religion, the next question that arises is: what kind of theo-logy? It is well known that the Greek word *logos* has various meanings, but two meanings are basic: 'reason' and 'word'. From this we may infer two forms of theo-logy, one based on reasoning, the other on narrating.

More or less in keeping with our previous observation concerning the tendency to reduce intercultural theology to comparative (historical and/ or empirical) studies of religion, some advocates of intercultural theology reduce theology to one specific form of logic, namely propositional logic or searching for truth by reasoning. Many Third World theologians claim that there is also another type of logic, namely existential logic: discovering the truth that shows itself in everyday life, in story-telling and the arts. They claim that reasoning is necessary, but not sufficient. Reality is intelligible and morally right behaviour is the most reasonable behaviour. But reason, all by itself, cannot lead us to it. We need reason integrally considered: reason nourished by imagination.[33]

So we must ask: How intercultural is intercultural theology? Do the advocates of intercultural theology really accept other forms of theology and rationality, or are they 'mono-logical'? Often European theologians eagerly take up contextual theologies from Africa, Asia and Latin America but they do not change their Western outlook and view of theology. They treat Third World theologies as if they are exotic fruit to supplement their traditional European dishes.[34]

Theologies that are based on narrative, not to mention preaching and confession, are not highly esteemed in the West. This was one of the reasons for starting the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians in 1976. Thus speaking about intercultural theology can mask a conflict between Western and non-Western theologies. For this

reason some non-Western theologians are suspicious of 'cross-cultural' theology.[35] We will return to this debate in the second section.

Conclusion

The aim of this first section was to give a critical appraisal of intercultural theology and to investigate whether it can replace missiology. We have shown that the discussion underlying the plea for intercultural theology is an old one. But this discussion has become more radical and concerns not only the place of missiology, but the place of theology as a whole in the academic institutions and secularised societies of Western Europe.

Can intercultural theology replace missiology? Just like Exeler, who did not define 'the issue that is at stake in missiology', various theologians who answer the question in the affirmative do not say what missiology is. Sometimes they say what mission is; most of the time they say what mission used to be, not realising the tremendous changes within the missionary movement world-wide and mission within the world religions.

In this article missiology is understood as the theory (*logos*) of intercultural communication of religious meanings (*missio*). Missiology has much in common with intercultural theology and can contribute to it, as it does to liberation theology or theology of religions, but it cannot be equated with it.[36] Although missiology was the first theological discipline to take the pluralism of theologies seriously, missiologists cannot claim intercultural theology as their specialist field as if they were *the* experts in it. Intercultural theology is a new perspective in theology that is used in several of its disciplines, for example ethics and exegesis.[37]

Besides, there is no need for missiology to be renamed or replaced with intercultural theology. There is more missionary activity in this world than ever before,[38] both in the missionary movements proceeding from Christian Churches in the southern hemisphere and those from the non-Christian world religions – missions that call for thorough study and critical reflection.[39] If we limit ourselves to our own field of study, namely religious dynamics in East Africa, we cannot ignore the 'thirst for souls' among the as yet unconverted indigenous believers on the part of Christian and Islamic revivalist movements, as well as the battle between them.[40]

It is better to study these missions critically in a discipline that specialises in this field than to abandon this discipline in the hope that its task will be taken over by others. It makes no sense to reduce missiology to a historical and empirical study of the boundary-crossing activities of religions, as this is being done already by, for example, historians of religion and anthropologists.[41] It is the perspective of the dialectical relation between what missionary practice is and what it should be that makes missiology a discipline in its own right. This perspective motivates us to practise missiology within the department of empirical theology.[42]

II. What's the game?

What we have said so far shows that the attempt to replace missiology with intercultural theology is closely related to the debate on secularisation.[43] This, however, is primarily a European debate and it is noteworthy that positions in it are shifting. Various scholars are realising that anti-Christian and anti-mission sentiments are closely linked with a generation that feels embarrassed by the excessively expansionist mission during the era of decolonisation. Those who trained after the fall of the Berlin wall see mission more neutrally or regard it as an interesting phenomenon found in almost all religions.

There is a lively discussion about a new missiology in Europe (both east and west) among members of the International Association of Mission Studies and the International Association of Catholic Missiologists.[44] Following from the discussion in section I our question in this second section is: what could a missiology, which takes into account the insights gained from intercultural theology but is not reduced to intercultural theology, look like? As mentioned already, missiology is the theory (*logos*) of intercultural communication of religious meanings (*missio*), but it has to be developed further to overcome its weaknesses and realise its claims.[45] Here again I will explain and elaborate on the words used.

Theory

It goes without saying that missiology as an academic discipline must be theory-oriented. Seen from this perspective one must admit that in the past missiology was too descriptive, either historically or phenomenologically.[46] If one looks at the major missiology handbooks and introductions that have appeared in recent decades one cannot but conclude that there has been little theorising in missiology. This is partly why it has been easy to remove this discipline from universities.

If one takes methodology as an indicator of the maturity of an academic discipline, discussion on methods in missiology is manifestly deficient. David Bosch's *Transforming mission* does not contain one section on methodology; in his *Philosophy, science and theology of mission* (comprising two parts) Jongeneel devotes only eight pages to 'methods of missiology'; in the *Ecumenical introduction* the 'working method' is explained in a mere two pages, resulting in 'a variety of sketches for a theology of mission'.[47] So instead of replacing missiology with another discipline there is a

challenge for missiologists to make missiology more academic in the sense of methodical and theoretical.

In the past missiology has been largely practice-oriented. One reason was that the aim was to train missionaries. Another reason was that many missiologists shared with Third World theologians the 'primacy of praxis' as an epistemological principle. But one must ask, humbly and respectfully, whether this principle does anything to develop missiology as an academic discipline. There are theories (theologies) on various levels: first order, second order and third order theories or, to use the Boff brothers' terms, popular, pastoral and professional theology.[48] Academic missiology naturally strives for scientific theories, but it does so in interaction with first order and second order theories.

Instead of the 'primacy of practice' I would like to stress the *real dialectic* between theory and practice,[49] that of moving from practice-oriented to more theory-oriented research. This leaves open the question whether missiology must opt for a theory-testing or a theory-generating research strategy. Because of its preoccupation with non-Western issues, and consequently its close cooperation with anthropology, missiology has had a preference for a grounded theory approach or exploratory research, but this is not inevitable. At all events, I conclude that academic missiology is theory-oriented (theory in the sense of academic theories), or it is not academic.

Intercultural

One of the things that distinguishes missiology as a theological discipline is its formal object: the intercultural perspective. All theological disciplines deal with the communication of faith to some extent. But what distinguishes missiology is that it deals with communication of faith across the boundaries of one's own cultural meaning system, the communication of the Christian faith to non-Christians, traditionally referred to as 'pagans' or 'gentiles', 'all peoples everywhere' (Mt 28:19), 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).[50] Missiology has been described, not without reason, as the study of the Church's boundary-crossing activity – meaning boundaries in both a temporal and a geographical sense. Nowadays one may add that missiology studies any boundary-crossing activity, not only by Christianity but also by other world religions and ideologies.[51]

In its latest 'Assessment of research quality' the Association of Universities in The Netherlands noted that there is an 'overly introspective Eurocentrism' in Dutch theological practice.[52] Our experience in the master's and doctoral programmes in intercultural theology shows that this is indeed the case. Again and again our students complain about the staff's lack

of interest in extra-European issues and perspectives, albeit with some exceptions. Since most missiologists are experts in religion, church and theology in at least one context other than their own, they have a role to play in theological faculties. It is naïve to think that other theologians will pick up 'the issue that is at stake in missiology', as Exeler expected them to do. The facts show that this has not happened in the past twenty-five years.[53]

Interculturality in the present context is neither a fragmented particularism nor a stifling universalism. Missiologists, who have lived and worked in more than one culture, generally accept that human potential is universal, which is not to say that all people are the same. Intercultural hermeneutics balances between universality and particularity. In this regard missiology safeguards the differentness of people and views every claim to universality with a hermeneutics of suspicion, whether the claim is made by the central doctrinal authority or by modern rationality.

Communication

For a long time mission was understood mainly in terms of communication and the science of communication was embraced as a major ancillary science of missiology.[54] Given the right packaging of the contents and using the correct channels, the 'message' was sure to reach the 'recipient'. Studies of, and reflections on, intercultural and interreligious dialogues, however, have revealed a 'communication crisis'. Consequently several missiologists advocated the return of hermeneutics to missiology.[55]

But the return of hermeneutics should not be exaggerated. After all, mission is not just a matter of understanding the other but also of transmitting the faith.[56] Communication relates to faith from the perspective of the sender, hermeneutics relates to faith from the perspective of the recipient. Communication is not concerned with senders and recipients but with participants in a process. Hence communication and hermeneutics refer to two sides of the same coin. In our department of empirical theology, therefore, we see hermeneutic-communicative practice as our overall object of study, that is to say the interpretation of written and spoken texts and their verbal and nonverbal communication.[57]

Cooperation with cultural anthropologists and communication scientists in the field of intercultural communication can give missiology a solid basis. Missiology has a long tradition in this field, which has produced its finest and most appreciated studies.[58] One may refer to the ongoing work of the Divine Word Missionaries worldwide; *Communicatio Socialis,* the journal of the *Gesellschaft Katholischen Publizisten Deutschlands;* and *Media Development,* the journal of the

World Association of Christian Communication; the Institute for Missiology and Communication in Pune; and the chair of intercultural pastoral theology and missiology in Innsbrück, which focusses on theme-centred interaction.[59]

Religious

It may be questioned whether it is adequate to speak about intercultural communication of religious meanings. Would it not be better to speak about intercultural and interreligious communication? Is religion not being reduced to a cultural system? Is religion not a reality in itself, that exists *sui generis?* Without discussing various theories of religion in detail,[60] I think missiologists, more than other theologians, have discovered that religion is always inculturated or, as anthropologists put it, that religion is a cultural system.[61] It should be noted straightaway that 'religion' is itself a Western concept, based on a division between the secular and sacred domains. To most people in Africa, and in the world for that matter, this division does not exist.[62] To them the material and the spiritual are one, something which modern Europeans manifestly find hard to grasp, considering the ongoing debate on secularisation. The 'culture Catholicism' of the person who says 'I am a Catholic, but I don't do anything about it' is considered nonreligious.[63] By the same token European scholars created a religion called Hinduism from various data that they gathered in India.

It is an illusion to think that if one strips away all the cultural overlays, one will be left with pure religion and that this will enable one to compile a list of key concepts of religion that can then be operationalised and measured by means of questionnaire research. This is not to deny – on the contrary, it is fully accepted – that religions and cultures have certain essential characteristics. But these are always spatiotemporally determined, or they become so generalised as to be practically meaningless.

In some faculties of theology missiology was equated with Liberation Theology or development studies. This was based, among other things, on a reduction of religion to (social and political) ethics, leaving the problem of the plurality of religions unsolved. The first stage of liberation theology in Latin America illustrates the point. The world-wide growth of the Evangelical and Pentecostal movements shows that this was a mistake. Without ignoring the issues of liberation, justice and peace, ecology and feminism, the plea for missiology as the theory of the intercultural communication of religious meanings wants to do justice to the revival of religion as a major force to be reckoned with in the 21st century.[64]

Meanings

To study communication entails much more than studying the relation between stimulus and response. It means studying the creation of a message out of signs and understanding its meaning from the respective signs. As happened in other disciplines, the focus of the missiological study of Christian communication shifted from functions to meanings. In this regard Victor Turner, a devout Catholic, and Clifford Geertz had great influence.[65] Turner's multi-perspective and poly-methodical approach, distinguishing meanings on the exegetical, positional and operational levels, helped to resolve the tensions between functionalism, structuralism and action theory.

It is striking that many adherents of comparative or intercultural theology pay little or no attention to power relations and conflicts of interests. They deal with dialogue, mutual assistance of theologians, open-ended communication, exchange, learning from each other, and so on.[66] Anyone who is really involved in the dialogue between North and South, Western and non-Western, Christian and non-Christian theologians, 'the West and the rest of us', knows that this dialogue is polemical and conflictive. As the theory of intercultural communication of religious meanings, contemporary missiology cannot avoid studying religion's contribution to the breakdown of communication.[67]

Pierre Bourdieu, who did his fieldwork in Algeria during the liberation struggle there, sees society as an arena where actors or groups of actors try to serve their own interests, partly in coalition and partly in competition with others. He gives a theoretical orientation on *die Sache, um die es die Missionswissenschaft geht*: boundary-crossing, inclusion and exclusion, vision and di-vision of the world. Understanding the meaning of (political or religious) utterances requires rigorous reconstruction of the fields in which these utterances are produced and reproduced, and of the links between the positions and agents within them.[68]

The reference to Bourdieu brings us to a feature of the academic discourse in Western Europe that explains, more than anything else, the marginalisation of missiology in faculties of theology. The main problem is not method and perspective, but the view of science. Science in the Western world has become predominantly positivist.[69] Since missiology has on the whole maintained a critical-emancipatory view of science it no longer seems to be at home in Western universities. In our view, however, it is not 'conservative' to stick to an interpretation of theology as a 'science of liberation'.[70]

Epilogue

In this article we asked what intercultural theology is all about and whether intercultural theology can replace missiology? In the first section we concluded

that it cannot. From attempts to rename or replace missiology with intercultural theology we inferred a challenge for missiology to become more academic so as to prevent it from being ousted from universities. But there is another problem. At the beginning of this article we quoted the 'founding father' of intercultural theology, Walter Hollenweger, who said that the main concern of intercultural theology is that it takes into account the 'other' cultural context in doing theology. This is in fact the strongest argument against the attempt to rename or replace missiology with intercultural theology. Maybe this attempt makes sense from a mainline perspective in our Western cultural context. But we would be completely misunderstood by our Pentecostal and Third World colleagues, since for most of them mission is the heart of the matter. It is noteworthy that new institutes and even new faculties of missiology are mushrooming in the southern hemisphere.

Is the attempt to rename or replace missiology in itself not an expression of Eurocentric thinking? Do we not isolate ourselves from the international theological discourse, most of whose participants no longer live in the Western world? Are not our Evangelical and Pentecostal colleagues the most eloquent proponents of missiology and do we not block scientific cooperation with them when we remove missiology from our institutions? From our experience at the Nijmegen Graduate School of Theology, which is training some 55 master's and doctoral students from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, we suspect that an attempt to replace missiology with something else would block intercultural communication and understanding in theology rather than promote it.

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Notes

[1] Cf. A. Exeler, Vergleichende Theologie statt Missionswissenschaft? Provozierende Anfrage eines nichtfachmannes, in: H. Waldenfels (Hg.), "...denn ich bin bei euch", Zürich 1978, 199-211. It is noteworthy that the author first speaks about comparative theology instead of missiology (205). Later on he says that comparative theology will not push aside missiology but broaden it to fulfil its proper task (211).

[2] The presuppositions that missiology is 'paternalistic' and 'only at home in the North-Atlantic region' emerge throughout the article, although the author is aware that at the time he wrote the article missiology had already become missiology on "six continents" (208).

[3] Exeler, *Vergleichende Theologie*, 199. The author does not explain what this issue is, nor whether and to what extent the challenges of the Second Vatican Council were met. See further Th. Kramm, "Was ist von einer

'vergleichende Theologie' zu erwarten?", in: Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft 68 (1984) 69-73; Th. Kramm, Vergleichende Theologie statt Missionswissenschaft, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 70 (1986) 101-111.

[4] Cf. L. Wiedenman, Missionswissenschaft oder kontextuelle Theologie?, in: M. Pankoke-Schenk and G. Evers (Hg.), *Inkulturation und Kontextualität. Theologien im Weltweiten Austausch,* Frankfurt am Main 1994, 231-240; J. Estermann, Missiological Institute Missio, in: S. Karotemprel *et al.*, *Promoting mission studies,* Shilling 2000, 43-73.

[5] See V. Neckebrouck, *De stomme duivelen. Het anti-missionair syndroom in de westerse kerk*, Brugge 1990, p. 63; V. Neckebrouck, *Westerse weerstanden tegen de kerkelijke leer over missie en ontwikkeling in kensociologisch perspectief,* in: J. Bulckens, P. Cooreman (eds.), Kerkelijk leven in Vlaanderen anno 2000, Louvain 1989.

[6] My predecessor always opposed the tendency to reduce missiology to theology of liberation or theology of dialogue and fought for missiology as an independent discipline. See F. Wijsen and P. Nissen (eds), *'Mission is a Must'. Intercultural theology and the mission of the church,* Amsterdam/New York 2002, pp. 3-10.

[7] At the same time the Inter-university Institute for Missiology and Ecumenical Research is to be renamed the Centre for Intercultural Theology, Interreligious Dialogue, Mission and Ecumenism.

[8] The fact that some journals have recently changed their (sub)titles – 'Theology in Context' is now '*Chakana. Intercultural Forum of Theology and Philosophy*' and '*Wereld en Zending. Oecumenisch Tijdschrift voor missiologie en missionaire praktijk*' is '*Wereld en Zending. Tijdschrift voor interculturele theologie*' – makes me apply a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Is this what Germans would call just *Etikettenschwindel*? And if so, what is the interest behind this *Schwindel*?

[9] Without going into detail, this must be seen against the background of the complex relationship between mission, church and world and of the incomplete integration of the missionary and ecumenical movements. See L. Hoedemaker, The people of God and the ends of the earth, in: F. Verstraelen (general editor), *Missiology. An ecumenical introduction,* Grand Rapids 1995, pp. 157-171.

[10] W. Hollenweger, "Kultur und Evangelium, Das Thema der interkulturellen Theologie", in: *Jahrbuch Evangelische Mission.* Band 17, 1985, p. 56.

[11] Cf. Fr Barth, *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organization of difference,* London 1969.

[12] Cf. R. Friedli, *Fremdheit als Heimat. Auf der Suche nach einem Kriterium für den Dialog zwischen den Religionen,* Zürich 1974.

[13] Cf. W. van Binsbergen, *'Culturen bestaan niet'. Het onderzoek van interculturaliteit als een openbreken van vanzelfsprekendheden,* Rotterdam 1999; R. Keesing, Theories of culture revisited, in: R. Borofsky (ed), *Assessing cultural anthropology,* New York 1994, 301-312; R. Brightman, Forget culture. Replacement, transcendence, relexification, in: *Cultural Anthropology* 10 (1995) 4, 509-546.

[14] Cf. W. van Beek, The culture in-between.

Anthropologist and missionary as partners, in: R. Bonsen, H. Mark and J. Miedema (eds), *The ambiguity of rapprochement. Reflections of anthropologists on their controversial relationship with missionaries*, Nijmegen 1990, 109. For 'meta-culture' see Van Binsbergen, *Culturen bestaan niet,* 34.

[15] Cf. Van Binsbergen, *Culturen bestaan niet,* 34. For the 'he' perspective see J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handeln* II, Frankfurt 1982, 53-56. Later on Habermas modifies this position by distinguishing between neutrality and impartiality.

[16] See W. C. Smith, *Towards a world theology,* Philadelphia 1981; D. Krieger, *The new universalism. Foundations for a global theology,* Maryknoll 1991; H. Küng, *Global responsibility. In search of a new world ethic,* New York 1991; P. Knitter, *One earth many religions. Multifaith dialogue and global responsibility,* Maryknoll 1995, to mention just a few.

[17] Cf. B. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld,* New York 1995; G. Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of society,* Thousand Oaks 1993; G. Ritzer, *The McDonaldization thesis. Exploration and extension,* London 1997; S. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order,* New York 1996.

[18] What is needed is a shift from inculturation (or contextualisation) as the main paradigm to interculturation. Intercultural theology is the theory of interculturation. See F. Wijsen, Intercultural theology and the mission of the church, in: *Exchange* 30 (2001) 3, 221; H. Waldenfels, On the hermeneutics of intercultural encounter, in: *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 2 (1992) 1, 31-50; T. Tosolini, H.G. Gadamer and E. Levinas. Two philosophical approaches to the concept of dialogue, in: *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 12 (2002) 1, 37-62.

[19] Cf. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer religion,* Oxford 1956; V. Turner, *The ritual process,* London 1969; C. Geertz, *The religion of Java,* London 1960.

[20] For culture as shared knowledge see: J. Spradley (ed.), *Culture and cognition,* San Francisco 1972; for an understanding of culture that stresses diversity: U. Hannerz, *Cultural complexity. Studies in the social organization of meaning,* New York 1992, 19.

[21] As some of the proponents of the 'multicultural tragedy' or 'multicultural illusion' theory say. See P. Cliteur, *Moderne Papoea's. Dilemma's van een multiculturele samenleving* Amsterdam 2002; C. Huinder, P. Schnabel, R. Gowricharn, R. Mok, *De multiculturele illusie. Een flinke ruzie waard,* Utrecht 2000.

[22] The dilemma between essentialism and constructivism reflects the earlier debate between structuralism and action theory. We expect that this debate will fizzle out, as the debate on action theory and structuralism did. See A. Borsboom and F. Jespers (eds), *Religion and identity,* Saarbrücken 2003.

[23] See, among others, P. Tillich, *Systematic theology.* Vol. 1, Chicago 1951; W. Pannenberg, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie,* Frankfurt 1973. See also Th. Sundermeier, "Was ist Religion? Religionswissenschaft im theologischen Kontext", Gütersloh 1999; K. Hock, Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft, Darmstadt 2002.

[24] See J. Platvoet and A. Molendijk (eds), *The pragmatics of defining religion,* Leiden 1999; W. van Beek, *The culture in-between,* 101-109.

[25] Historically speaking the positivist position came first, more or less as a result of the Enlightenment, and hence marks the beginning of secularisation. The religionist position was a reaction to it.

[26] Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Geloofsverstaan: interpretatie en kritiek,* Bloemendaal 1972, 214; E. Schilleebeeckx, *Jesus. An experiment in christology,* New York 1979, 617-619.

[27] Cf. R. Friedli, "Mission, Religionen, Religionswissenschaft. Erfahrungen mit universitären Neukompositionen", in: D. Becker (ed.), *Mit dem Fremden Leben,* Erlangen 2000, 185-191; W. Ustorf, Rethinking missiology, in: A. Houtepen and A. Ploeger (eds), *World Christianity reconsidered,* Zoetermeer 2001, 67-78.

[28] Cf. J. van der Ven, "Theologie beoefenen binnen een Instituut der Religiewetenschappen", in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 42 (2002) 3, 244-267. Of course, one must take into account that the situation in faculties with a *duplex ordo* system is very different from that in faculties with a *simplex ordo* system.

[29] Cf. F. Clooney, The emergent field of comparative theology, in: *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 521-550. Clooney's comparative theology of world religions is not to be confused with the comparative theology proposed by Adolf Exeler.

[30] Cf. A. Exeler, *Vergleichende Theologie,* 205-208; A. Exeler, Wege einer vergleichenden Pastoral, in: L. Bertsch and F. Schlösser (Hg.), *Evangelisation in der dritten Welt,* Freiburg 1981, 103-107.

[31] Cf. Th. Witvliet, Reponse to Werner Ustorf, in: A. Houtepen and A. Ploeger, *World Christianity reconsidered,* 80.

[32] Examples are Mercy Amba Oduyoye, University of Legon, Ghana; Jesse Mugambi, University of Nairobi, Kenya; Felix Wilfred, University of Madras, India.

[33] Cf. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa. African women and patriarchy,* Maryknoll 1995; Ch. Van Engen, N. Thomas and R. Gallagher, *Footprints of God. A narrative theology of mission,* Monrovia 1999; I. Phiri, D. Govinden and S. Nadar (eds), *Her-stories. Hidden histories of women of faith in Africa,* Pietermaritzburg 2002; A. Shorter, *Christianity and the African imagination,* Nairobi 1999, 15-20.

[34] Cf. F. Weber, *Mission. Gegenstand der Praktische Theologie,* Frankfurt am Main 1999, 22. See also Th. Schreijack (Hg.), *Religionsdialog im Kulturwandel. Interkulturelle und interreligiöse Kommunikations – und Handlungskompetenzen auf dem Weg in die Weltgemeinschaft,* Münster 2002.

[35] This suspicion surfaced repeatedly during the consultations on intercultural theology organised by the Institute of Missiology at Aachen. See M. Amaladoss (ed.), *Globalization and its victims as seen by its victims,* Delhi 1999; P. Kanyandago (ed.), *Marginalized Africa. An international perspective,* Nairobi 2002. See for example Laurenti Magesa's criticism of Robert Schreiter, in: M. Amaladoss, *Globalization,* 188-189.

[36] Cf. F. Wijsen, P. Nissen (eds), *'Mission is a Must',* 1-2.

[37] Cf. B. Adeney, *Strange virtues. Ethics in a multicultural world,* Downers Grove 1995; T. Okure (ed.), *To cast fire upon the earth. Bible and mission in today's multicultural global context,* Pietermaritzburg 2000; J. Ukpong *et al., Reading the Bible in*

the global village, Cape Town 2002.

[38] Frans Verstraelen noted that after the 'moratorium on mission' formulated at the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism at Bangkok in 1973 there was an 'explosion of interest in mission'. Cf. F. Verstraelen, *Christianity in a new key. New voices and vistas through intercontinental communication,* Gweru 1996, 211.

[39] Cf. O. Degrijse, *Going forth. Missionary consciousness in Third World Catholic Churches,* Maryknoll 1984. The mission of non-Christian religions is almost completely neglected in present-day missiology.

[40] Cf. F. Wijsen and B. Mfumbusa, Seeds of conflict. Christian-Muslim relations in Tanzania, in: J. Gort, H. Jansen and H. Vroom (eds), *Religion, conflict and reconciliation,* Amsterdam/New York 2002, 316-326; F. Wijsen, Religionism in Tanzania, in: A. Borsboom and F. Jespers (eds), *Identity and religion,* Saarbrücken 2002.

[41] Cf. A. Borsboom and J. Kommers, *Anthropologists and the missionary endeavour,* Saarbrücken 2002. See also R. Bonsen *et al., The ambiguity of rapprochement.*

[42] One of my predecessors proposed doing missiology in a more empirical way as far back as 1972! See A. Camps, "Vier sleutelbegrippen voor een meer empirische missiologie", in: *Vox Theologica* 42 (1972) 218-231. It has become a hallmark of the missiology in Nijmegen. See J. van Engelen, *Langs een andere weg. Zoektocht naar een empirische missiologie van het Rijk Gods,* Nijmegen 1996; J. van Engelen, *Van kerk naar rijk Gods. Naar een empirische missiologie,* Nijmegen 2003 (forthcoming).

[43] It goes without saying that the debate should also be seen in the context of economic scarcity and that it is part of the ordinary conflict of interests that governs not only our societies but also our universities. It has little to do with theoretical scientific discourse and a lot to do with rationalisation of resources.

[44] During the 1996 IAMS Conference in Buenos Aires Jan Jongeneel proposed to have a European IAMS Meeting. That meeting took place in 1998 in Stavanger. The Second European IAMS Meeting was held in 2002 at Halle. The major concern of these meetings is to strengthen European missiology.

[45] See W. Biernatski, Roots of Acceptance. The Intercultural Communication of Religious Meanings, Rome 1991, and other Working Papers on Living Faiths and Cultures of the Faculty of Missiology, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

[46] Cf. J. Jongeneel, Is Missiology an academic discipline?, in: Exchange 27(1998)3, 1-14. With anthropology missiology shares a neglect of more fundamental research.

[47] Cf. D. Bosch, Transforming mission, Maryknoll 1992; J. Jongeneel, Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission, Frankfurt am Main 1995, 175-183, F. Verstraelen (general editor), Missiology, 5-6.

[48] Cf. H.G. Ziebertz, Normativity and Empirical Research in Practical Theology, in: Journal for Empirical Theology 15(2002)1, 5-18; L. Boff, C. Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, Maryknoll 1987, 12-16. Whereas

Boff and Boff speak about professional theology as third order theory, I would like to reserve the term 'professional' for practice-theories, second order theories. Third order theories are to be labelled 'scientific' or 'academic'.

[49] The founding fathers of academic missiology (Warneck, Schmidlin) at the beginning of the 20th century were theorists in the sense of being remote from missionary practice. Against this background the 'primacy of practice' principle was an enormous step forward. Now the time has come to become more theory-oriented again in the sense of a real dialectic between theory and practice.

[50] Cf. G. Collet, *'Bis an die Grenzen der Erde'. Grundfragen heutiger Missionswissenschaft,* Freiburg 2002. In this sense the conventional distinction between pastoral theology and missiology remains valid. See K. Müller, Missiology, in: S. Karotemprel (ed.), *Following Christ in Mission,* Bombay 1995, 21-36. *Gentes,* however, is no longer to be seen in a geographical sense but in a sociological sense.

[51] Cf. L. Rütti, *Theologie der Mission,* Munich 1972, 132-133; V. Tirimanna, The Church and the crossing of boundaries, in: F. Wilfred and O. Beozzo (eds), Frontier Violations. *Concilium* 1990 No. 2, 80-89; W. Ustorf, *Rethinking missiology,* 75-76.

[52] Cf. Association of the Universities in The Netherlands, *Assessment of research quality,* Utrecht 2000.

[53] Cf. F. Weber, *Mission,* 22.

[54] Whereas Jongeneel says that missiology has been too theological, Hesselgrave noted that (Evangelical) missiologists were more interested in the social sciences. Cf. J. Jongeneel, *Is missiology an academic discipline?,* 217; E. Rommen and G. Corwin, *Missiology and the social sciences,* Pasadena 1996, 1-3.

[55] It is to Theo Sundermeier's credit that he made this point. Cf. Th. Sundermeier, *Konvivenz und Differenz. Studien zu einer verstehende Missionswissenschaft,* Erlangen 1995; Th. Sundermeier, *Den Fremden Verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik,* Göttingen 1996; Th. Sundermeier and W. Ustorf, *Die Begegnung mit dem Anderen. Plädoyer für eine interkulturelle Hermeneutik,* Gütersloh 1991.

[56] For the same reason missiology cannot be equated with intercultural theology. See G. Collet, "... *bis an die Grenzen der Erde",* 56. See also H. Balz, "Krise der Kommunikation – Wiederkehr der Hermeneutik?", in: Th. Sundermeier (Hrg.), *Die Begegnung mit dem Anderen,* 39-65; R. Friedli, "Kultur und kulturelle Vielfalt", in: Th. Sundermeier (Hrg.), *Die Begegnung mit dem Anderen,* 29-38.

[57] Cf. J. van der Ven, *Practical theology. An empirical approach,* Louvain 1998, 41-59; J. van der Ven, *Education for reflective ministry,* Louvain 1998, 116-125.

[58] An example of such a study is E. Nida, *Message and mission,* New York 1960. It was one of my predecessors, Alphons Mulders, who introduced anthropology and linguistics as disciplines at the Institute for Missiology at the University of Nijmegen. Now these disciplines are taught by separate departments in other faculties.

[59] See F. Eilers, *Communicating between cultures,* Manila 1987; M. Scharer and B. Hilberath (Hrg.), *Kommunikative Theologie,*

Mainz 2002. In our country I refer to the work of Anne van der Meiden, with her doctoral dissertation on mission as communication, and Cees Hamelink, professor for Theology and Communication at the Free University of Amsterdam.

[60] See Platvoet and Molendijk, *The pragmatics of defining religion,* D. Pals, *Seven theories of religion,* Oxford 1996; Th. Idinopulos and Br. Wilson, *What is religion?* Leiden 1998; Th. Sundermeier, *Was ist Religion?* Gütersloh 1999.

[61] Cf. E. Hillmann, *Many paths,* Maryknoll 1989, 1-23; C.

Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures,* New York 1993, 167-186; C. Geerzt, *Available light. Anthropological reflections on philosophical topics,* Princeton 2000, 167-186.

[62] Cf. F. Wijsen, "I have all kinds of medicines", in:

W. Valkenberg and F. Wijsen (eds), *The polemical dialogue,* Saarbrücken 1997; D. Westerlund, The study of African religions in retrospect from Westernization to Africanization, in: J. Olupona (ed.), *Religious plurality in Africa,* Berlin/New York 1993, 43-66.

[63] See the ongoing debate on 'popular' versus 'official' religion. Very often, 'popular' religion is seen as 'just folklore', nonreligious or pseudo-religious. See my book *Geloven bij het leven. Missionaire presentie in een volkswijk,* Baarn 1997, 198-199.

[64] See among others P. Berger, *The desecularization of the world. Resurgent religion and world politics,* Grand Rapids 1999; H. Cox, *Fire from heaven. The rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty-first century,* London 1996; F. Wijsen, "... op zondag willen wij vooral onszelf zijn". Allochtone Christenen in Nederland, in: C. Hermans (ed.), *Is er nog godsdienst in 2050?,* Budel 2003 (forthcoming).

[65] The present author was trained in this way of looking at cultural meaning systems by Aylward Shorter at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. See A. Shorter, Symbol, ritual and history. An examination of the work of Victor Turner, in: T. Tanger and I. Kimambo (eds), *The historical study of African religion,* London 1979, 139-150.

[66] Cf. Kl. Piepel, *Lerngemeinschaft Weltkirche. Lernprozesse in Partnerschaften zwischen Christen der Ersten und der Dritten Welt,* Aachen 1993; V. Küster, *The many faces of Jesus Christ. Intercultural Christology,* London 2001; R. Schreiter, *The new Catholicity. Theology between the Global and the Local,* Maryknoll 1997.

[67] Cf. J. Gort, H. Janssen and H. Vroom, *Religion, conflict and reconciliation,* Amsterdam/New York 2002; Valkenberg and Wijsen, *The polemical dialogue,* Chinweizu, *The West and the rest of us. White predators, Black slaves and the African élite,* Lagos 1987.

[68] Cf. P. Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire,* Paris 1992, 135-148; P. Bourdieu, *Ein soziologischer Selbstversuch,* Franfurt am Main 2002. Bourdieu assumes a fundamental link between actions and interests. This applies also to science. He criticises the 'myth of an interest-free science'.

[69] For the debate on methodology see: P. Verschuren, *Dogma's en ontwikkeling in wetenschap en methodologie,* Nijmegen 2002; H.-G. Ziebertz, Komplementarität von Forschungsmethoden, in: J. van der Ven, H.-G. Ziebertz (Hrsg.), *Paradigmenentwicklung in der Praktischen Theologie,* Kampen 1993, 225-260.

[70] Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, Theologie als bevrijdingskunde, in: *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 24 (1984) 4, 388-402; E. Borgman, Theology as the art of liberation. Edward Schillebeeckx's response to the theologies of the EATWOT, in: *Exchange* 32 (2003) 2. See also the debate on liberation theology: G. De Schrijver (ed.), *Liberation theologies on shifting grounds,* Louvain 1998; S. Schipani & A. Wessels (eds.), *The promise of hope,* Elkhart/Amsterdam 2002.

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Africa:
Rethinking the Mission-Charity Paradigm

- **Francis Anekwe Oborji*** -

One of the major trends in contemporary missiology is the linkage of mission with charity. The result of this prevalent trend is that mission and charitable work are often perceived as synonymous. Thus, the two terms are often in danger of losing their traditional force and meaning. It also reduces the respect and dignity that ought to be given to the recipients of both mission and charity. The last phenomenon is compounded all the more by the influence of the modern mass communications media. In a bid to attract financial donors, some missionaries and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) present a miserable picture of the people and place where they are working. By so doing, the central theme of the Christian proclamation of salvation and the restoration of human dignity in Jesus Christ are relegated to the background. The recipients of mission and charity are made to lose their self-respect and human dignity. Mission itself is made ambiguous.

Moreover, instead of realistically reflecting on the root causes of the African situation, the foreign media and their sponsors continue to feed the world with a false image of Africa, thus promoting the colonial image of, and foreign interest in, the continent. Rightly or wrongly, some African authors have viewed this development as a psychic war being waged against Africa and its people through the media and the charitable organizations. The Lord Jesus' warning, "fear not those who kill the body, but those who kill the spirit", was right on the mark.

At the beginning of this twenty-first century, it behoves us to rethink mission with the prophetic warning of Jesus. In this paper, I wish to examine the mission-charity paradigm from the perspective of the Gospel according to Matthew, taking Africa as a study case. The topic will be discussed as follows:

1) Matthew and Almsgiving
2) Matthew and Poverty
3) The Mission-charity trend
4) Towards a new approach

1. Matthew and Almsgiving

In the New Testament (NT), the duty of giving to the needy or the poor is praised and raised to almost the same level as the duty of human beings to God. In Matthew (as in other synoptic gospels), this phenomenon is emphasized all the more. It assumes a *new meaning* which radically enlightens the practice in the Old Testament (OT). In fact, in the earlier books of the OT, the duty of giving to the poor is not mentioned. The prophets often speak of the duty of compassion to the poor, but their emphasis falls upon justice rather than upon charity. Charity to the poor, though praised in Proverbs (3:27; 22:9; 28:27), also has a similar scope. It is particularly from the Greek period that almsgiving becomes one of the principal works of charity (Tb 4:6-11; Sir 3:30-4:10; 17:22; Dn 4:24). The Talmud praises almsgiving. But in its case, almsgiving is praised to the extent it helps to raise the status symbol of the giver or the rich class. Almsgiving becomes one of the ways of showing how wealthy one is. If it is done by the entire community, it assumes a nationalistic outlook and pride. Thus, by the time of Jesus' coming, there was a total loss of the prophetic meaning of almsgiving: compassion and justice to the poor.[1]

Therefore, the novelty of the NT in this regard, as Matthew shows, lies on one major significant fact. Jesus mentions almsgiving to correct the ostentation prevalent in the practice of charity to the poor: "So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win human admiration. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward" (Mt 6:2). In this singular teaching, Jesus condemns any form of publicity in almsgiving: "But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you (Mt 6:3-4). This is, in fact, an intolerable and a new language to the people. Jesus is addressing an audience that is used to publicising their almsgiving to the poor. For this audience or community, uprightness before God is measured by this type of charity to the poor. Thus, for this people, to perform a publicised kind of almsgiving is to fulfil a religious obligation. Indeed, for the Jews, the good works which make someone righteous in the sight of God were principally: almsgiving, prayer and fasting (Mt 6:1-18). Therefore,

Jesus is here teaching his disciples a duty and manner of almsgiving different from the practice of the time. Almsgiving should be done in humility and in silence before God and the people. It should come from the right motive rather than the ostentatious display of wealth and pride. Almsgiving is rewarded if it is made without publicity.

Furthermore, almsgiving has substance only when it is made in the name of God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and with full respect for the human dignity, justice and compassion due to the recipient of the alms. This last point is very important because in Jesus' time there were communities of the poor who existed as a result of the unjust social structures of the time. And there is no doubt that Jesus is referring to this class of the poor in his inaugural speech that launched his public ministry: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord (Lk 4:18). In the OT, the group that immediately comes to mind here are the *'ani.* There are several Hebrew words to express poverty, but none of them explains it more forcefully than the word *'ani.* Literally, it means "afflicted"; and the affliction consists in membership of a lower class which is indigent and subject to oppression with no power to defend itself. The related word *'anaw* is synonymous, but is more frequently used of the poor in a religious sense.

Among the Israelites of the time of the Exodus and before the rise of kingship and monarchical rule, there was a close family and clan interdependence as well as a degree of community ownership. This tradition helped to protect the individual and the smaller group against extreme need as long as the group had something to share. However, Israel's settlement on the land brought it with the growth of individual ownership, and life in villages and cities led to greater individual responsibility for subsistence. Israel's expanding economy also brought the rise of a wealthy class and the emergence of depressed and oppressed peasants and artisans. This development enhanced the culture of slavery and regulations for the liberation or redemption of the slaves were put in place. It also created the atmosphere that favoured the display of wealth and ostentation in almsgiving.

From the prophetic literature, it is clear that the increase in wealth and the spread of dire poverty became even more of a social problem under the monarchy, due largely to the conquests of David and the trading of Solomon and his successors. Prophets rebuked the oppression of the poor and the denial of their basic human dignity. For instance, harsh exactions of debts are crimes rebuked by Amos (2:7; 4:1; 5:11). Isaiah utters woe to those who expand their holdings of land (5:8), and speaks of the denial of rights and justice to the poor (10:2), and of those who crush and grind the poor by exacting the full measure of their debts (3:15). The Book of Deuteronomy prescribes liberty to the poor both by loan and gift, and clearly alludes to the crime of defrauding the poor day labourer of his wages (15:1-18). The oppression of the poor and needy is a crime for which Yahweh will destroy the kingdom (Ez 22:29). The Book of Psalms speaks of the duty of judges to render justice to the poor and needy and to protect them from oppression. The Psalms frequently refer to the oppression of the poor by the wicked rich (Ps 82[81]:3-4; 10[9]:2,9,17f). Yahweh does not forget the cry of the poor (Ps 9:13,19).

Thus, in the Psalms and Prophets, we meet a concept of the poor which is both religious and socio-economic. Moreover, the Psalms and Prophets (particularly of the postexilic period), present the dehumanising treatment of the poor as a motive why Yahweh will come as their deliverer. The purification of Israel demands the destruction of the rich and the powerful, who are such wicked oppressors that they are beyond redemption. There is no place for them in the restored Israel. The remnant which survives the fall of Israel will be poor and needy (Zp 3:12). Yahweh hears the prayer of the poor and delivers them from the hands of the wicked rich and the powerful (Pss 22[21]:27; 35[34]:10; 76[75]:10). The poor rejoice when they hear the voice of Yahweh (Ps 37[36]:11). This verse is the basis of Mt 5:5 translated in most English versions as "meek"; but the word designates the lowly and oppressed class as described above.[2] This is clear in Ps 69[68]:33, where the parallelism of the line makes poor synonymous with those who seek God and look to Him for their liberation from poverty. Yahweh is the saviour of the poor and needy (Jer 20:13).

2. Matthew and Poverty

In the NT, particularly in Matthew, the dominant idea of poverty indicates that Jesus came not to glorify poverty but to deliver us from it. The kinds of poverty and the mechanisms of impoverishment which were operative in Jesus' time and which he condemned have neither human nor religious value. On the contrary this poverty and the mechanisms are agents that debase people and destroy their dignity as persons. Therefore, they are anti-evangelical agents. Engelbert Mveng who made the foregoing statement, rebukes those who reproach the Gospel for its beatification of poverty. The poor of the Beatitudes are not blessed because they are poor, but because the Reign of God is theirs (Mt 5:1-12). In other words, Jesus has not come to institutionalise and beatify misery, but to deliver us from it. This is the message of Zechariah's

Benedictus (Lk 1:68-79), and that is what the *Magnificat* proclaims (Lk 1:47-55). It is what the charter of the Beatitudes promulgates (Mt 5:1-12), and what the Lord himself reveals in the synagogues at Nazareth, as he inaugurates his public ministry (Lk 4:18-20).[3]

The critical situations that we live and experience in the Third World today, have induced some to use the Gospel to justify poverty. But this approach makes it difficult for one to appreciate the essence of Jesus' teaching on poverty and the new meaning he gives to it. Whatever be the semantic approaches in the Hebrew or Aramaic vocabularies *dalim* and *anawim*, or their Greek translations into *penes, ptochos*, and *tapeinos*, we need only observe the praxis of the Lord Jesus in order to appreciate a certain number of evident facts. In Matthew the poor are called blessed (5:3), more precisely the "poor in spirit". This does not mean detachment, but reflects the OT usage discussed above, precisely the lowly classes, whose spirit is crushed by their need and by oppression. "Poor in spirit" is not only synonymous with Luke 6:20 but also with "meek" of Matthew 5:5; which also reflects the OT vocabulary mentioned above. The revolutionary character of this statement should not be missed; the curse of poverty is removed by it, and the blessing consists in the Kingdom of Heaven, which surpasses all wealth. The saying does not mean that only the poor enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but *even* the poor; it is an implicit response to the haughtiness of the Pharisees. A similar response to the Pharisees lies in Jesus' employment of Isaiah 61:1 (Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18) to announce the messianic character of his mission; the Good News is brought to the poor, who are not excluded from the kingdom.

Consequently, Jesus who belonged to the lower classes made no attempt to escape or to disguise it. The crowds that follow Jesus and listen to him are plainly and simply crowds of the poor, the lame, the blind, the halting, the deaf, the mute, and those humble folk who, after listening to the Lord for hours and hours, reach into their pockets and find not so much as a piece of bread or fish to eat. Secondly, at no moment does Jesus preach resignation to sin, poverty, wretchedness, sickness, or the like. On the contrary, he has come to set people free, and that is why he works his wonders. His solidarity with the poor, the weak, and the oppressed does not consist in sitting down beside them to bemoan and bewail the cruelty of fate, under the demagogic pretext of identifying with them. Jesus' solidarity with them consists in proclaiming to them the Good News of their liberation, as he delivers them from their physical, moral, and spiritual misery. Moreover, nowhere is Jesus seen publicising the wonders he was doing among the poor and needy. In fact, he warns that those wonders should be kept secret. The NT shows that the publicity given to his ministry among the people is not done by Jesus himself nor by his immediate disciples, but often by the beneficiaries of those wonders and miracles. Jesus does not trumpet his wonders. People come to know and identify with him through his teaching and deeds. His deeds speak for him. Whenever he is with the public, his preoccupation is always centred on the proclamation of the kingdom, liberation and the offer of salvation in him. He does not advertise the misery of the poor nor does he make them the object of public pity and sympathy.

Through his teaching and deeds Jesus begins to attract the attention and anger of the religious and political leaders who see him as a threat. Jesus' identification with the poor and the preaching of their liberation does not appear to be Good News to the patricians, particularly the religious and political leaders who benefit from the poverty of the poor. The structures that breed poverty are man-made. The people are poor because of the social structures operating in society. The rich and the powerful create this situation. Hence, they will continue to have the poor with them as long as these structures are operative. Poverty therefore is a source of wealth for the rich and the powerful. This is the basis of Jesus' words to his disciples in Mt 26:6-13 during the anointing at Bethany (see also Mk 14:3-9). Matthew and Mark record that some disciples were indignant at what they considered to be a waste of an expensive ointment which could have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor. John specifically mentions Judas Iscariot as the person who made that statement. John adds that Judas made the statement not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common funds and used to help himself to the contents (Jn 12:1-9). In other words, Judas Iscariot belongs to that class of people that build their wealth by seeking donations in the name of the poor. Thus, for people like Judas, poverty is an indispensable industry that should not be done away with, but is something to be developed.[4] One such mechanism is the perversion of meaning contained in political rhetoric such as the one employed by Judas. This rhetoric claims to speak for the welfare of the poor but produces misery, oppression and dependence.

The foregoing underscores the response Jesus gave to Judas: "Leave her alone; she was keeping it for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me" (Jn 12:7-8). In other words, as long as there are people like Judas, who build their wealth on the misery of other people, they will continue to have the poor with them. This is because poverty is the source of their wealth. But with Jesus one will be delivered from poverty. As Mveng argues, the Bible shows us clearly that the term

"poverty" refers primarily to those who are oppressed by the unequal structures in this world put in place by people like Judas Iscariot. This is fundamentally the meaning of *'ani*, which implies not deserved poverty but rather impoverishment through injust oppression.[5] In the words of J. Jeremias, the biblical message is not one of the glorification of poverty for its own sake; rather, it is a message about God's concern for those who are oppressed, and the demand to eradicate poverty from every level of life.[6]

The above discussion shows that one should avoid the danger of confusing the poverty of Jesus, which he preached and lived, with the modern mechanisms of impoverishment. The attitude of Jesus towards wealth was simple; it is an obstacle to the Kingdom of Heaven. His refusal to accept any income, even by earning, is a striking feature of his public ministry. Moreover, it must not be thought that the poverty of Jesus was excessive in comparison with the common poverty of his time; the economic conditions of the place and time were such as to emphasize the excess both of wealth and of poverty. The social and economic condition of Jesus was not preached as an ideal; it was simply taken for granted. Jesus did not exhibit the "piety of poverty" of the OT; he does indeed recommend the attitude, but the attitude arises from a real social and economic depression. He preached against the structures that breed dehumanising socio-economic conditions and worked for the liberation of the poor from such oppressive situations. The background must be understood in order that the words of Jesus as reported in the Gospels may not seem less emphatic than they are. Furthermore, the doctrine and spirituality of the evangelical counsels of poverty, consecrated celibacy, and obedience should not be confused with the forms of poverty and impoverishment which we experience in the Third World today.

We can conclude that in Matthew (as in the entire NT), the poverty of the evangelical counsel does not belong to the structures of sin and modern means of impoverishment that dominate the world. Evangelical poverty lies in the imitation of Jesus Christ who has freely come to deliver us from sin, from hatred, from death, and from our physical, moral and spiritual misery. Evangelical poverty belongs to the reign of the Beatitudes: "One must leave everything to follow Jesus Christ – leave the reign of this world with its structures of sin and its industries of power, wealth, domination, and misery, in order to gain access to the Reign of the evangelical Beatitudes".[7] The story of the rich man who would not renounce his possessions to follow Jesus is an excellent illustration of the basis of "the evangelical counsel" of poverty. It is found in all three synoptics with slight variations (Mk 10:17ff; Mt 19:16ff; Lk 18:18ff). And where Mark and Luke have "one thing is lacking to

you," Matthew has "if you wish to be perfect." Jesus makes the total renunciation of wealth a condition of "following him", that is, of joining the group of disciples who lived as he did and had given up home and income (Mt 19:27-29; Mk 10:28-30; Lk 18:28-30).

3. The Mission-Charity Trend

Our starting point is the present linkage of mission with charity. This practice is best illustrated in Africa. Here, I shall give a brief analysis of this phenomenon, taking Africa as a study case. The overall aim is to underline how the perspective in the NT, particularly, the Gospel of Matthew could inspire a new approach to mission and charity without harming the dignity of the human person in the mission territories. Thus, it is not to underrate the assistance the rich can render to the poor (or the old Churches to the young Churches). Rather, it is to demonstrate that if the prevailing mission-charity trend is not checked, it could harm the goal of the Christian mission and thereby jeopardize the Gospel teaching on charity.

a) *Historical background*

Christian missionaries came to Africa (especially, beginning from the 15th century), when there was no developed theology of mission. Moreover, during the two centuries (15th and 19th) of missionary expansion in Africa, there was no Council convoked nor was there a major theological shift similar to the one that took place when Christianity encountered the Hellenistic world.[8] Africa was considered "the land of the deepest, darkest, heathen night, inhabited by dark-skinned backward people, the poorest of the poor, unintelligent, without culture, language, religion, civilization, etc.".[9] According to this belief (sustained by the so-called theology of the *curse*), Africa was the target *par excellence* of mission. This was the belief that informed William Carey's book on Christian mission in Africa. Many missionaries, historians and anthropologists have often based their studies and mission in Africa on this belief. Great thinkers, such as G.W.F. Hegel, I. Kant, starting from this belief, have developed theories which postulated that the Africans were unruly and "*savage*", and that there was nothing in Africa which really deserved the name "human".[10] The British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery was influenced by this belief when he drew up a plan to make Africa a continent ruled by the Whites after a secret visit there in 1947. And so he hailed the Cecil Rhodes spirit, based on the apartheid emerging in South Africa.[11] In other words, this belief, which is still very much with us and is not about to go away, paved the way not only for the

Christian penetration of Africa but also for the growth of European power and commerce on the continent. The latter process was officially sanctioned by the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, at which the European powers partitioned and divided up the continent of Africa (in a system of *divide and rule*). The colonial boundaries have continued to be a source of tension and fighting in post-independent African States, and in the actualisation of real ecclesial communion in African local Churches.[12]

On the basis of this belief foreign mission agencies and charitable organizations have recruited workers for Africa as it is the poorest continent. Some have risen to hero status in the West because of their African experiences. Yet all their efforts seem to have availed the continent little. Africans are still poor and languishing. Indeed, Africans themselves have been aware of their own vulnerability for sometime. Tiénou puts it as follows: Is Africa good only for promoting outsiders to hero status? The impasse here rests on the fact that many people easily associate material deprivation, technological simplicity, skin colour, with spiritual needs. Africans are the poorest of the poor, the third world of the Third World as the American Journalist, Lance Morrow, said.[13] Since Africa is inhabited by dark-skinned backward people, it must follow that Africans are most in need not only of "*missionizing*", but also of the philanthropists' invasion and of foreign occupation. Moreover, since Africa has the highest number of the world's poorest countries, it must follow logically that it is the place where the un-reached are found. When missiologists are convinced of this, an inevitable link between mission and charity develops. Mission and charitable work become synonymous.[14]

However, thanks to the palaeo-anthropology, which uses highly developed scientific methods for dating fossils, artefacts and relics, some as old as two and half million years, we know now that Africa was not a cultural wilderness before its contact with the foreign powers. From the Maghreb in North Africa to the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania and the Swartkrans in Transvaal in South Africa, archaeological excavations have revealed that man has had a very long history in Africa. Although, scientific statements are generally tentative in character, one thing is certain; before 5,000 B.C. there were already human beings in Africa. Therefore, they must have had some way of living and of relating to each other, developing social organizations and values, some form of religion, and all that constitute what is referred to today as culture or civilization.[15]

In the same vein, the foreign myth behind the theology of the curse which viewed Africans as children of the *Ham* has no substance. The truncated and conjectural theory derives from the pompous spirit of the mid-Victorian period of complacency

and ignorance. Those who hold such a view have been proved wrong by modern scholarship in theology and Scripture. In fact, Engelbert Mveng has argued that no such curse was put on Africans; rather the Bible shows Yahweh taking the side of Moses and his African wife (Nm 11-12).[16] According to Elochukwu Uzukwu, mediaeval Christian belief sustained such a curse, and the prayer for the conversion of Africa (composed after Vatican I), which was recited in many churches of Africa, until the Second Vatican Council suppressed it, proves the continued presence of such a belief.[17] Such propaganda was designed to keep the outside world ignorant of the African reality and to justify keeping the continent as a place of adventure for the powerful nations of the Northern hemisphere.

b) Biblical and ecclesial perspectives: a key role for Africa

It requires a denial of the biblical account to view Africa as a cursed continent. Both Scripture and archaeological accounts show that it was in Africa that God revealed himself and the plan of salvation to Abraham and much later to Moses. The Israelites knew and still remember that some ethnic groups in Africa (the Blacks included), have direct links with them; some belonging to the so-called lost tribes of Israel after the event of the Exodus, and others as a result of long matrimonial and trade relationships (as is the case with the Ethiopians).

Thus, in the New Testament, Africa is recorded as having played some key roles in the Christ-event and in the growth of the Christian mission. There is the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt (Mt 2:13-23). On the way to the Calvary, an African named Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus to carry the cross (Lk 23:26; Acts 2:10). The implication of this is that the African continent is brought in at two very crucial moments in the life of Christ: at his infancy, safeguarding him from those who wanted to kill him, and at his passion, helping him to carry the cross of salvation. Again, at Pentecost, North Africans are said to have been among the witnesses. In other words, Africans were present at the public inauguration of the Church on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-13). In addition, the Apostle Philip is recorded as having baptised an Ethiopian eunuch, who returned to Africa with his new faith. Apollos, whom Paul spoke of with great admiration is an African, working among his countrymen and women in Alexandria, (Acts 18:24; I Cor 3:4-7). The Church in Egypt traces its apostolic origins to St Mark, who is still venerated as the founder and first Bishop of Alexandria. Christendom got its first faculty of theology in Alexandria, Egypt. The great theologians of Africa like Athanasius, Cyril, Augustine, Cyprian, Origin, Clement, Tertullian, etc.,

through their faith and writings gave shape to the Christian doctrine and life as we know it today. Anthony the Abbot from Egypt was the first to introduce monastic life (and therefore, the evangelical vows of consecrated celibacy, obedience and poverty), to Christianity. There were numerous African martyrs and saints before the modern era. Therefore, when in the 14th century the great King of Congo, Nzinga a Nkuwu, invited missionaries to Africa, he was hoping to see the revival of the type of Christianity which had previously flourished there, especially during the episcopate of Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria.

One could go on and on to prove that God has been dealing with Africa in a very positive way just as he has been dealing with other peoples and continents. There is no continent that is cursed by God. God does not curse his creation. On the contrary, God loves and walks with his creatures; even when they strayed away from the right path, God sent his Son to redeem them.

c) Ideological Shift

So, the division of the world into rich and poor is sustained by a truncated ideological rationalisation, the aim of which is to serve the economic and political ambitions of the wealthy and the powerful. In other words, the rationalization behind the theology of the curse and its view that the sons and daughters of Africa are a cursed race, has its origin in this principle. This form of thought and stereotype are used to rationalize one ethnic group in its negative relationship with another. It is another ethnocentric attitude of one racial or ethnic group against another. Sometimes foreigners regard the continent of Africa as one vast homogeneous stock, divided into different people and nations by the European powers. The same kind of assumption of similarity of grouping, behaviour pattern and social development lies behind the use of the term "tribes". It is often not realised that what are often called tribes are in fact nations. In many cases, each group may number as many as 20 million, comparable to that of many recognised European countries.

The same attitude is seen in the use of the term "vernacular" in reference to African languages. Reference to them as vernaculars and dialects makes the erroneous assumption that all Africans speak the same language. But the fact is that some centuries ago, when the language of the Roman Empire, Latin, was regarded as the language of scholarship and civilization, the languages of other provinces of the empire (including English), were regarded as vernaculars. Hence, it is assumed that only the conquering or imperial people use a language, while their subjects use a vernacular. Actually no African language is more primitive or less developed than any of the modern European languages. What is more, any African language is capable of being used as a medium for scientific or technological discussion, learning or teaching, commerce, industry or the humanities.[18] These days, for instance, at big celebrations in the West, to show that Africa is not forgotten, at the end of speeches given in the languages of various European nations, a word is often said in Swahili which is referred to in Europe as an African language, without saying it is particular to East Africa.

Therefore, the belief that defines Africa as a "dark continent" inhabited by the poorest of the poor, was borne from prejudice and ignorance. To say this is to affirm the fact that the presence of poverty in Africa is a systems problem. Poverty, as we experience it today in Africa, has no evangelical value nor any value at all. It is an evil that must be eradicated because its presence in Africa has continued to produce other evils that oppress and reduce human beings created in the image and likeness of God to a status almost equal to that of an animal. Poverty in Africa is a *dependency programme, a system of control:* to keep Africa for as long as possible under foreign tutelage.[19] In this case, therefore, the theology of the Good Samaritan proposed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*[20] needs to be quantified and complemented by the prophetic theology proposed by the African Bishops in their message at the end of the 1994 Synod for Africa.[21] The problem that remains is how to free the theology of the Good Samaritan from the prevalent tendency of paternalism, dependency and control.

d) Consequences for the mission

The mission-charity trend has a number of worrisome consequences for mission. For instance, it has brought about an unholy alliance between the press, the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and the missionary agencies. These organisations engage in propaganda that is damaging to the African image in the name of seeking donations to help the poor people of the *dark* continent. Look at the journal of any foreign missionary institute, NGO or agency operating in Africa and you need not be told what their image of Africa is all about. This practice has induced some of these foreign agencies to tell lies as they define the people and culture of Africa at will. Christopher Clapham has recently drawn our attention to the fact that the arrival of the NGOs engendered a change in the content of the external world's relationship with Africa, in ways, which reduced the role of normal State-State relations, and increased that of charitable and civil-right organizations. In addition, Clapham affirms that the NGOs broadly represent the privatisation of North-South relations. In Africa they come with strongly held Western values which encompass the full range of often contradictory attitudes and sentiments that the continent evokes.[22]

In the same vein, Peter Sarpong contends that the way the foreign media portray the poor condition of Africa leaves no one in doubt that the term "poverty" is an ideological and political strategy, designed to demoralise and discourage Africans from believing that they are equal partners with the rest of the world. For the media and most of the charitable organisations, Africa is synonymous with "poverty, AIDS, sexual promiscuity, tribal wars, refugees, hunger, disorderliness, disease, ignorance, etc". In fact, in many cases, the media is used to poison the minds of Africans and to propagate crime, violence, falsehood, and immorality. What is more, only rarely do news items that are not derogatory to Africa appear in the media in Europe or North America. Sarpong insists that if we are to promote the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, the media must balance their presentation of Africa so that people of good will can have an accurate image of the continent.[23]

This trend has also resulted in missionaries being regarded with suspicion. If the local populace has criticized the missionary past for involvement in the Slave Trade, colonialism, and the degradation of the African and his culture; today, missionaries are viewed as collaborating with the Multinational companies, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), NGOs, etc. Missionaries have been suspected of being among the agents through whom their home nations export arms to aid war lords, one-party systems and military regimes in Africa. In some cases, they are even seen as being involved with groups that aid the foreign organisations that distribute drugs to young African women in the name of so-called family planning, but which in reality are meant to spread disease and reduce the fertility capacity of the recipients.

Another worrisome aspect of the mission-charity trend is the tendency to treat the people of the mission land, in this case, Africa, with a step-mother mentality. This tendency is another expression of the phenomenon already described. Its theology is based on the conception that Africans are still on the way, that they are still learners or rather like helpless children or junior members of the human race they are in constant need of benevolent care. The "on-the-way" theology does not view Africa as a continent like the others on the planet. It does not perceive Africa as a continent of people, just people, but as strange beings that demand a special kind of treatment. This theology does not feel that Africans have the capacity for beatific vision and ontological reality. It does not recognize the fact that becoming a good Christian does not depend on colour or place of birth but on one's response to the faith in Jesus Christ. One may be born in Africa but respond to faith in Jesus Christ in a more authentic way than a person born in any of the so-called Christian nations.[24]

Furthermore, the "on-the-way" theology explains why some people are angry when they see an African living in a decent building, driving a good car, or doing higher studies. In the psyche of these people, Africans are not born for such advanced luxury and studies. This is also why many religious orders in the North would prefer to close their communities and convents rather than invite their counterparts in Africa to help in the work of the new evangelisation of Europe. Missionaries from Africa are not received in Europe and America on the basis of equality and in the spirit of Pius XII's Encyclical *Fidei donum*[25] for the same reaon. Indeed, one has the impression that there is concern among people in Europe at the rising tide of Christianity in Africa. There is an unfounded fear that Africans are going to take over the leadership of the Church very soon if not checked.[26]

All this is due to cultural bias. The historical unhealthy relationship that has existed between Africans and people of the North has its origins in the myth that informed the theology of the curse which accounts for the peculiar and strange way in which the continent is still perceived, despised and marginalized. The tragic events of the past and of the present are justified on these grounds. Indeed, the present economic divide and financial system, which have continued to impoverish the people of Africa and other Third World countries, are the continuation of the same old belief and prejudice.

4. Towards a New Approach

Poverty, as Julius Nyerere says, is not the real problem of the modern world, because we have the knowledge and resources which could enable us to overcome poverty. The real problem, the thing which creates misery, wars and hatred, is the division of mankind into rich and poor. The significance of this division into rich and poor is not simply that the one has more food than he can eat, more clothes than he can wear. It is not simply that one nation has the resources to provide comfort for all its citizens, while the other cannot provide basic services. The reality and depth of the problem arises because the one who is rich has power over the lives of those who are poor, and the rich nation has power over the policies of those who are not rich. Even more important, our social and economic system, nationally and internationally, supports these divisions and constantly increases them, so that the rich get ever richer and more powerful, while the poor get relatively poorer and less able to control their own future.[27]

So, this is the form of poverty prevalent in the world today. It is a man-made poverty. Pope John Paul II notes that we need interdependence among nations

and States on an equal basis in order to correct the current imbalance in global existence, and to give a human face to the economic system. The interdependence extends to all facets of life: politics, economics, ecology, culture, religion, etc. Interdependence can work only if all parties which relate are equal, with an equal voice, equal rights, equal power, and so forth.[28] Willy Brandt's commission on "North-South: A Programme for Survival" shared a similar view. The commission insisted that nations should urgently start taking concrete steps towards improving constructive North-South cooperation, without which the world economic situation could only deteriorate further, and possibly result in conflict and catastrophe. Furthermore, the commission asked that the world's economic and monetary system be reconsidered and restructured under circumstances nearly as serious as those of 1944, when the lingering horrors of the 1930s economic disaster inspired the Bretton Woods institutions: General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT), IMF, and the World Bank. The vision and need for a new economic order were clear then. Today, these international finance institutions cannot deny being major contributors to the present socio-economic and political problems of many developing countries. This is why all hands must be on deck to give these financial institutions a human face so that poverty as we know it today can be eradicated and those who are rich use more of their wealth in the interest of peace.[29]

Equally necessary is the need for a new language for missiology in relationship with the people of the developing nations, particularly in an African context. The prevailing language of missiology has prevented us from recognizing the potential of the local Churches and the people of Africa in the mission of the Church. There is a need to break with the type of missiological language which still sees Africans as junior members of the human race; which only sees the negative side of the people; which promotes paternalism; and which marginalizes and lies about the overall picture of the people's mentality and cultural heritage. There is a need to develop a language for missiology centred around the attractive identity of the people in the mission land, based on their cultural values, tradition and the Gospel message. A new language that will present the positive aspects of the people, with respect for their culture, tradition and self-esteem, treating them as normal and full members of the human family. In the light of the Second Vatican Council mission theology, the new language should be based on the fact that the poor will respond better to appreciation than to sympathy. They will do well when they are offered hope and not demoralization. The greatest enemy, the Bible tells us, is the one who kills the human spirit (cf. II Cor 3:6). To a large extent, today, the language of missiology in many mission territories could be described as one which kills the spirit of the poor. Indeed, what the poor nations need is not necessarily foreign aid (which often come with strings attached), but a change of attitude and mentality on the part of those who speak, study and deal with them. What a continent like Africa, for example, is asking for is the purification of memory and the evangelisation of the superstitious beliefs which have hitherto informed the external world's attitude and relationship with it.

5. Conclusion

It has always been the tactics of the rich and the powerful to exploit the poverty of the poor; to keep them in the dark and in ignorance. However, in the NT (particularly as reported in Matthew), we learn that Christianity has its origins and growth in the poor and lower classes who left everything to follow Jesus Christ. Christianity conquered society not from above but from below. In Jesus Christ, the poor and lowly whom society has excluded and oppressed, were able to find life and the force to dismantle the structures and mechanisms of impoverishment and discrimination. The example and teaching of Jesus which empowered the "wretched of society" were such that the Church of the early centuries easily thought of itself as the Church of the poor. These included not only the poor who are deprived of the necessities of life, but also of all those who renounced everything to follow the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus, evangelisation in our time should also consist in a proclamation of Jesus Christ that will empower the poor, raise their consciousness and human dignity so that they can actively participate in bringing about the Reign of God in their environment. It is in so doing that the poor, like the early Christians, could bring dynamism to Christianity and renew its face in our contemporary world so deeply in need of Jesus Christ and the salvation he has won for it.

Notes

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[1] Cf. Mckenzie, John, L*., Dictionary of the Bible*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1985, p. 21.

[2] Cf. Mckenzie, John, L., *op. cit.*, p. 683.

[3] Cf. Mveng, Engelbert, "Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World", in Gibellini, R. (ed.), *Paths of African Theology*, London, SCM, 1994, p. 163.

[4] Cf. Oborji, Francis, A., *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*,

Rome, Leberit, 1998, p. 170.

5 Cf. Mveng, Engelbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-164.

6 Cf. Jeremias, J., *New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, London, Heinemann, 1971, pp. 133ff.

7 Mveng, Engelbert, "Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World", *op. cit.*, p. 164.

8 Cf. Bosch, David, J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York, Orbis Books, 1993, pp. 190ff.

9 Carey, William, *An Inquiry into the obligations of Christians to use means for the conversion of the Heathens*, London, Hodder & Soughton, 1891, p. 63.

10 Cf. Ayisi, Eric, O., *An Introduction to the study of African culture*, London, Heinemann, 1992, p. 39.

11 Cf. Dowden, Richard, "What is wrong with Africa?", in *The Tablet*, 16 January 1999, p. 72.

12 Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa, Post-Synodal Exhortation*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, n. 49.

13 Cf. Morrow, Lance, "Africa: The Scramble for Existence", in *The Times*, 7 December 1992, p. 30.

14 Cf. Tiénou, Tite, "The Training of Missiologists for an African context", in Dudley Woodbery, J., *et al.* (eds), *Missiological Education for the 21st century*, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 95.

15 Cf. Clark, J.D., "The Legacy of Prehistory: An Essay on the Background to the Individuality of African cultures", in Fage, J.D. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 2, Cambridge, University Press, 1978, p. 13.

16 Cf. Mveng, Engelbert, "Négritude et civilisation Greco-romaine", in *Colloque sur la négritude*, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1971, pp. 46ff.

17 Cf. Uzukwu, Elochukwu, E., *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 22.

18 Cf. Afolayan, Adebisi, "African languages and literature in Today's World", in Olaniyan, Richard (ed.), *African History and Culture*, Lagos, Longman, 1996, pp. 179-180.

19 Cf. Parratt, John, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995, p. 8.

20 Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 41.

21 Cf. Synod of Bishops. Special Assembly for Africa, *Message (Nuntius),* Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 1994, n. 15.

22 Cf. Clapham, Christopher, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival*, Cambridge, University Press, 1996, pp. 258ff.

23 Cf. Sarpong, Peter, K., "Conclusion", in *African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 225.

24 Cf. Oborji, Francis, A., *La teologia africana e l'evangelizzazione*, Rome, Leberit, 1999, p. xii.

25 Cf. Nzuzi, Bibaki, "The Missiology Institute of Kinshasa", in Karotemprel, S., *et al.* (eds), *Promoting Mission Studies: The Role of Missiological Institutes*, Shillong, VIP, 2000, p. 241.

26 Cf. Ratzinger, Joseph, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the end of the Millennium*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1997, p. 262.

27 Cf. Nyerere, Julius, "The Role of the Church in Society", in Parratt, John (ed.), *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, London, SPCK, 1987, p. 117.

28 John Paul II, The Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Social Concern), London, Catholic Truth Society, 1988, nn. 14, 17.

29 Cf. Brandt, Willy, *Common Crisis North-South: Cooperation or World Recovery*, London, Pan Books, 1983, p. 1.

NB. This article was first published with the title, "Poverty and the Mission-Charity Trend: A Perspective From Matthew", in: *International Review of Mission* (IRM), Vol. XCI No. 360, January 2002, pp. 87-101.

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[www.netcrim.org]

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DÉBATS :

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*La société, en Afrique de l'Ouest comme ailleurs, est fondamentalement plurielle : pluralité d'ethnies, pluralité de cultures, pluralité de langues, pluralité de religions, pluralité de choix idéologiques. Dès lors se trouve posée la question des règles de conduite permettant à tous de vivre ensemble dans le respect de chacun. Longtemps, comme partout ailleurs, **c'est dans la personne des "Chefs" (de village, de tribu, d'ethnie, d'État) et des "Rois" que l'Homme a cherché à réaliser l'harmonie et l'unité de sa pluralité** en leur en confiant le « pouvoir». Sans doute croyait-on la chose possible dans le cadre de micro-sociétés où les différents acteurs se connaissaient entre eux de manière personnelle; mais il fallait déchanter la plupart du temps : il n'est pas vrai que l'harmonie régnait aussi facilement au village ! Les conflits ne s'y résolvaient qu'au prix d'interminables palabres et, souvent, de l'arbitraire royal du chef !*

*Cela est devenu beaucoup plus difficile dans le cadre élargi des sociétés contemporaines où les réseaux anonymes d'affinités remplacent peu à peu les systèmes de clientèles personnalisées par lesquelles le chef pensait pouvoir assurer son emprise sur l'ensemble de la société plurielle. **C'est aujourd'hui au peuple entier que revient le soin de rendre possible le "vivre ensemble", dans le respect de sa "laïcité"** dont les chefs successifs se doivent d'être, par leur fonction, les principaux garants. La laïcité est ce qui permet à une communauté plurielle de se constituer en communauté authentiquement 'politique' ; c'est-à-dire composée de citoyens sans doute en conflits, naturels et légitimes, entre eux, mais sachant les régler démocratiquement.*

Débats *- **Courrier d'Afrique de l'Ouest** entend contribuer à une réflexion sur la laïcité et ouvrir un débat entre les différents acteurs de cette société. Aujourd'hui Débats donne la parole à un musulman : que peuvent signifier le mot et la chose pour les musulmans en Afrique de l'Ouest ?*

Quelle laïcité

<div style="text-align:right">

- Imam Mamadou Dosso -
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</div>

Pour une laïcité mieux adaptée

La différence de perception du principe de laïcité suscite débats : sur la conception juridique, politique et socioculturelle de ce phénomène en Europe, particulièrement en France, mais de plus en plus en Afrique, dans nos États indépendants depuis bientôt un demi-siècle.

Les courants de "sécularisation" puis de "laïcisation" des sociétés, de leurs institutions et des esprits ont amené et continuent de pousser à la "profanation" de l'héritage moral et confessionnel, pluriel, de l'humanité.

Or, si la laïcité, quelle qu'en soit la conception, milite en faveur de la liberté de pensée, de conscience et de croyance religieuse, bref, pour l'avènement d'une société démocratique idéale, elle ne devrait faire l'objet d'autres restrictions que celles confondant liberté et libertinage qui sont, de facto, autant de menaces pour la protection de la morale, de la santé publiques et des droits et des libertés d' autrui.

1. La laïcité à l'intersection du "tout religieux" et de l' "antireligieux"

Le fondement ou la justification religieuse de

l'organisation de nos cités a marqué le pas quand l'évolution des sociétés les a conduites à substituer des pouvoirs "civils" (républicains ou monarchiques) aux institutions et expressions idéologiques propres aux phénomènes religieux. A partir de ce moment, l'État a pour devoir républicain de gouverner la communauté des citoyens sans s'assujettir à un quelconque ordre voulu par Dieu.

Toutefois, pour être efficiente, cette gestion doit respecter la liberté religieuse — droit que chacun a de choisir sa croyance religieuse —, et les libertés de pensée et de conscience, le citoyen contribuant à l'édification saine de la société dans le strict respect de la morale publique ainsi que des droits et libertés d'autrui. Le problème à résoudre devient ainsi : bâtir l'espace de la liberté pour tous, en respectant l'engagement de la liberté de chacun.

Pour réussir dans ce contexte de pluralisme religieux émergeant, il revient à la plupart des États, de permettre à la religion de s'affranchir du domaine public pour exister et agir librement dans la société civile, en se soumettant aux exigences de l'ordre public. Un élément essentiel de la laïcité qui ne se réduit pas à cela.

Ce mouvement général de laïcité a dû, dans les colonies françaises et anglaises d'Afrique, se concilier avec, d'une part, la liberté des populations de cultiver les convictions de leur choix et de s'associer en communautés de croyants, tant chrétiennes que musulmanes depuis les premiers contacts entre l'Afrique et l'Asie, d'autres, chrétiennes, après l'arrivée des missionnaires européens. Mais aussi, d'autre part, avec les acteurs des futures «républiques sans Dieu» dont les dirigeants, les colons et leurs successeurs, n'ont pas établi de rapports institutionnels suffisamment fiables et impartiaux avec les religions, les États ou d'autres institutions. Cette sorte de laïcité, héritée des besoins et réalités de la colonisation, était en fait inadaptée aux populations africaines dont les identités et les cultures diffèrent de celles des Européens. Conformément à cette forme hybride de laïcité, des dirigeants ont entendu montrer par leur attitude que la religion du président de la République était la religion de l'État. Hélas, cette situation se constate dans la presque totalité des pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest, que les populations y soient majoritairement d'une certaine croyance religieuse ou qu'elles se répartissent équitablement entre diverses confessions.

Malheureusement, plus d'un siècle après l'établissement de la colonie, nous sommes aux antipodes d'une certaine laïcité-neutralité convenable à nos États et loin de l'intersection du "tout religieux" et de l' 'antireligieux'. En Côte d'Ivoire, en tout cas :
- même si l'emprise du christianisme sur les institutions de l'État a reculé et continue de se déliter,
- même si les responsables des pouvoirs publics, fidèles de l'une ou l'autre religion, ont cessé d'ignorer les autres et se savent adeptes d'une option particulière dans un champ pluraliste d'options diversifiées,
- même si d'autres religions oeuvrent pour l'identité et la culture démocratique de l'État sans avoir eu besoin d'édit pour acquérir leur place dans la société,
- même si, plutôt propagé dans la partie septentrionale, l'islam, religion des principaux opposants d'envergure aux colonisateurs se trouve confronté, autant que le christianisme au défi de son ajustement intérieur à l'idéal de l'univers démocratique, la construction ivoirienne reste marquée par certaines normes sociales globalement inculquées par l'autorité du magistère de l'Église : les jours fériés, le régime matrimonial officiel, l'implication heureuse de l'État dans l'organisation communautaire de secteurs tels que l'éducation, les médias, la santé, les édifices religieux, etc. Il serait vain de dissimuler ce tableau qu'une conception plus pertinente de la laïcité en Côte d'Ivoire doit préserver d'un antagonisme même latent : il serait assez malheureusement exploitable par bien des opportunistes politiques, passés maîtres dans l'art de la manipulation des citoyens au nom de "Dieu"....

2. Les raisons du choix d'une laïcité-neutralité

L'option pour la laïcité-neutralité devient un choix s'imposant de fait, au regard de la diversité confessionnelle de la société civile ivoirienne depuis la période pré-coloniale jusqu'à nos jours. L'identité laïque de la Côte d'Ivoire ne peut se construire qu'en impliquant impartialement les pouvoirs religieux, en les traitant à égalité. Or les pouvoirs républicains ont constamment cherché à les tenir jusqu'ici à suffisante distance dans leur ensemble, ne les consultant qu'occasionnellement, par opportunisme, pour échapper au tourbillon des débats, discussions et polémiques. Le rejet de toute référence à Dieu pendant la rédaction de la constitution ivoirienne en 2000 en est une preuve.

Or, les derniers événements socio-politiques survenus le 19/09/2002 en Côte d'Ivoire nous ont convaincu que l'identification à la chose publique devrait tenir lieu de justification individuelle quand seulement chacun doit recourir à ce qui peut, en ultime ressort, donner un sens à sa conduite et à son existence en commun. Dans ce chahut, seules les expressions personnelles de liberté de croyance religieuse sont restées crédibles — encore qu'il faille en excepter les impostures de ceux qui, toutes religions confondues, ont trop évidemment troqué leur dignité morale

factice et leur aura spirituelle fictive pour des reconnaissances sociales et d'autres prébendes.

A ce stade de la nécessaire reconversion de nos mentalités, un nouvel enjeu se présente pour toute la société civile ivoirienne : au-delà de leur coexistence pacifique, dans leur apprentissage du pluralisme, quel sens les différentes religions peuvent-elles avoir en commun les unes et les autres ? En traduisant les préoccupations en lois pour préserver notre coexistence et gérer notre diversité, chaque communauté religieuse contribuera de ce fait à l'assaisonnement d'une démocratie exigeante.

Appliquée au premier chef à l'école, en principe creuset de l'apprentissage décisif du dépassement des particularités et point d'appui stratégique de la République émancipatrice, cette loi doit sommer de faire avec les individualités confiées à l'institution scolaire et contribuer à adapter toutes ces particularités. Car *«quand le choix collectif cesse d'être en lui-même la plus haute des fins»*, dit Marcel Gauchet, *«la définition des fins ultimes se trouve renvoyée aux individus et aux groupes»*.

La promotion par les croyants déclarés (qui sont plus de 80% de la population ivoirienne) d'une sainte alliance en faveur de cette lutte pour la primauté de l'esprit sur la matière, accouchera de ce nouvel ordre social en Côte d'Ivoire, face à un athéisme envahissant qui sape les fondements de la morale traditionnelle par les violences, l'homosexualité et d'autres licences.

3. Etablir des lois de laïcité pour une morale intégrale

Si la laïcité paraît un fait socialement acquis en Côte d'Ivoire, elle demeure juridiquement diluée dans de nombreux articles de la constitution ivoirienne, ce qui en fait un foyer d'incertitudes pour les populations et surtout d'inquiétudes électoralistes pour la classe politique.

Or, si la loi doit certes viser l'établissement de la justice, elle doit aussi mettre en valeur notre personne humaine par son élévation au-dessus des choses terrestres et de la vie animale bassement matérielle. De ce fait, une loi réglementant la laïcité doit être non seulement claire et nette, mais doit constituer un code de conduite consensuel sur les questions de morale, de citoyenneté, de civisme et de civilité.

En Afrique, il faut éviter à cet effet, d'opposer l'immoralité pseudo-légitime de l'homosexualité et d'autres pseudo-libertés de conscience aux légitimités de la société africaine initiale fondées sur le respect de la dignité humaine dans l'ordre d'un monde naturel.[1]

Si la loi est le produit de l'expérience et l'objet de la foi, son autorité morale sera celle de ces communautés de croyants pratiquants dont la vocation et le rôle seront de contribuer à faire de l'expérience ivoirienne un observatoire fiable de la laïcité-neutralité dans tous les secteurs, notamment celui de l'éducation. Le Coran (chapitre III, La famille d'Imam, verset 104) ne dit-il pas : *«Que soit issue de vous une communauté qui appelle au bien, ordonne le convenable, et interdit le blâmable. Car ce seront eux qui réussiront»* ?

4. L'école : centre privilégié du dispositif de construction de la laïcité

Le nouveau fondement de l'école ivoirienne est à réaliser par des projets moraux et de société, où l'égalité des chances restera sous-tendue par une scolarisation de masse, aux antipodes du projet de la mythique école élitiste de Jules Ferry.[2] A cet effet, exclure du système global l'enseignant ou l'élève en raison de son appartenance religieuse le renverrait nécessairement à un communautarisme étroit, une attitude à proscrire car incompatible avec l'édification de la nation. Dès lors, la laïcité-neutralité se mettra à la fois au service de la définition de l'identité laïque de la République, et permettra à l'École de résoudre au mieux de sa mission la question des conditions de l'Éducation morale et civique. Tant il est sûr que cette école ne peut exclusivement se fermer sur le sanctuaire d'une vocation d'instruction laïque de la morale sans inclure l'enseignement de la morale laïque inspiré des fondements de la société africaine.

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La conception juridique de la laïcité-neutralité sera bâtie sur le socle de la sainte alliance multiconfessionnelle dans la culture des vertus morales de la société africaine, à l'abri du prosélytisme, de la recherche d'hégémonie et de business religieux, à la barre de la foi. A ce titre les pouvoirs publics intégreront sans partialité les pouvoirs religieux à la conception et la gestion de leurs projets de société, dans la laborieuse tâche de construction de la Côte d'Ivoire.

Ainsi, *«Allah ne laisse jamais un peuple s'égarer après l'avoir éclairé, sans qu'il ne lui montre ce qu'il doit éviter. Allah se connaît à tout, vraiment»* (Coran, chapitre IX, Le repentir, verset 115).

L'auteur invite à réfléchir notamment à deux aspects de la laïcité-neutralité :

1. L'implication impartiale des pouvoirs religieux, à égalité, dans l'identification laïque de la société (p. 30).

2. La définition d'un code de conduite consensuel sur les questions de morale, de citoyenneté, de civisme et de civilité (p. 31).

Quelles réflexions vous suggèrent personnellement ces invitations ?

Notes

1. Toutes choses qui auraient pu éviter aux Européens, en août 2003, «l'incendie de leurs bibliothèques», la mort de plusieurs milliers de personnes âgées par solitude et chaleurs caniculaires, faute de chaleur humaine. On connaît le mot de Hampaté Bâ : " *Un vieillard qui meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle*".

2. Si Jules Ferry a promu l'enseignement primaire laïc et gratuit pour tous, il a aussi promu un système scolaire particulièrement sélectif, à base de concours pour passer d'un niveau à l'autre.

Laïcité, dialogue des religions[1]

- **Jean Sinsin Bayo** -
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de l'Afrique de l'Ouest)

Débats a ouvert, dans son numéro 9, November 2003, un débat sur la laïcité comme valeur centrale d'une société plurielle. L'Iman Mamadou Dosso a été le premier à y apporter sa contribution : "Pour une laïcité mieux adaptée". C'est aujourd'hui au théologien catholique Jean Sinsin Bayo d'apporter la sienne dans le contexte d'une société ivoirienne publiquement mise à l'épreuve de tensions bien réelles.

La crise révèle que la Côte d'Ivoire est confrontée à de réels problèmes de fond à traiter avec humilité, franchise et sérénité. C'est dans cet esprit que nous voulons aborder le thème «Laïcité, dialogue des religions». Les préoccupations qui sous-tendent cette réflexion sont les suivantes : la Côte d'Ivoire est une république laïque; comment cette république laïque peut-elle organiser la liberté des religions sans que cela conduise à une guerre des religions ? Du moins, comment organiser la séparation et la coexistence pacifique entre l'État et les religions dune part et les relations pacifiques entre les différentes religions d'autre part ?

La laïcité de l'État constitue un principe régulateur, libérateur et responsabilisant dans le rapport entre l'État et les religions d'une part et les religions entre elles d'autre part. Elle met en exergue la différence et l'autonomie des ordres, temporel et spirituel, la spécificité de leur vocations, les conditions de leur cohabitation et collaboration pacifiques.

1. Laïcité de l'État et rapport aux religions

Le rapport entre l'État et les religions est délicat, parce que complexe. Les deux agissent sur les mêmes personnes de manière idéologique et structurelle et concernent d'importants enjeux. A partir du moment où elle s'organise, toute communauté de croyants se structure, se dote d'une hiérarchie, propose à ses membres, au-delà du culte, un humanisme, exerce sur eux une influence, cherche à accroître leur nombre. De ce fait, elle entre déjà plus ou moins en concurrence avec l'État. Comment l'État va-t-il se comporter ? Accepter d'être subordonné à la

communauté croyante ? Essayer de dominer les religions ? Les mettre au service de sa politique ? Les combattre ? Leur laisser la liberté en conservant sa propre indépendance ? Quel rapport doit-il établir avec les religions de manière équilibrée, eu égard aux enjeux que sont : la souveraineté de l'État responsable du destin national, par sa législation et sa politique; la liberté des citoyens croyants ou incroyants, face à l'État et face aux religions; la concorde et l'unité des citoyens malgré la diversité de leurs croyances et de leurs confessions religieuses; la nécessité de valeurs morales pour un vivre-ensemble durable et harmonieux de la société.

La laïcité est le principe d'organisation et de fonctionnement des services de l'État et de toutes les personnes publiques selon lequel l'État est non-confessionnel. L'État, au nom de la communauté nationale, ne professe aucune foi, n'adhère à aucune religion, ne donne investiture et privilège particulier à aucune communauté de croyants, ne professe pas non plus l'irréligion. Mais la non-confessionnalité ne signifie pas que l'État ignore le fait religieux, exclut les relations avec les communautés de croyants et les autorités religieuses. La non-confessionnalité de l'État exprime la séparation totale de l'État et de la religion du point de vue doctrinal et fonctionnel, laissant chacun s'organiser et fonctionner selon ses lois, ses objectifs propres, dans le respect strict et le souci responsable du bien de l'ensemble de la communauté nationale.

Dans l'esprit de la laïcité bien comprise, le rapport de l'État aux religions doit être marqué par la neutralité, la transparence des intentions et la vigilance pratique. L'État, sans intervenir dans l'organisation doctrinale et pratique des religions, devient un organe régulateur des incidences sociales et politiques du fait religieux, des options et des actions religieuses, positives ou perverses, des communautés de croyants ou de leurs membres, et crée à cet effet un cadre juridique.

En Côte d'Ivoire, il n'existe pas de conflits particuliers entre l'Etat et les communautés de croyants. Cependant, le souci et la quête de la vérité nous imposent de reconnaître l'existence de tensions, de tiraillements souterrains et de malaises retenus entre les communautés de croyants, malaises perceptibles, relatifs à la recherche de traitements de faveur, au maintien de privilèges acquis ou à la quête de privilèges nouveaux qui forcent parfois l'État à s'improviser équilibriste pour sauvegarder la cohésion et la paix sociales.

Un malaise subtil, inodore, silencieux est celui que crée constamment la confession religieuse du chef de l'État, au sein de la communauté des croyants. Ce malaise reflète soit la crainte d'une défaveur politique, soit la quête d'un traitement de faveur des communautés de la part de l'État. Et, en tout cas, il exprime bien le soupçon et la crainte d'une certaine partialité dans le traitement politique des communautés de croyants. Cela nous conduit à faire les suggestions suivantes.

a. Concernant l'État. Pour sauvegarder la paix, consolider la société, l'unité nationale et l'autorité de l'État par rapport aux religions, celui-ci devra, dans la vérité et la transparence éthique, renforcer le respect de sa propre laïcité et son autonomie.

- L'État veillera à ne pas accorder à des communautés de croyants des traitements de faveur, des privilèges, en termes de calculs politiques. Il devra traiter les diverses communautés de croyants de manière égale, équitable, avec harmonie et équilibre, réalisme, justice et vérité, en tenant compte non seulement de l'importance numérique des communautés, mais aussi de leur importance objective, de leur impact social positif dans le pays.
- Au nom de sa laïcité, l'État devra veiller particulièrement, par des dispositions juridiques adéquates, à ce qu'aucun homme ou parti n'utilise et manipule la religion ou le sentiment religieux à des fins politiques, partisanes ou pas.
- L'État veillera aussi à ce que tous les citoyens jouissent des mêmes droits et devoirs, soient traités de la même manière, et que ni les individus, ni les institutions ne soient l'objet de discriminations selon leur appartenance religieuse et confessionnelle.
- L'État, devra laisser les religions exercer librement leur mission d'être des voix critiques, objectives, d'éveilleurs et éducateurs des consciences pourvu qu'elles ne quittent pas leur champ spirituel, ne perturbent pas l'ordre social et ne deviennent pas des forces politiques directes.
- Par contre, l'État devra prendre ses responsabilités face à des effets sociaux, politiques pervers, conséquences ou applications de convictions et de doctrines religieuses.
- De manière positive, l'État assurera par des dispositions pratiques, par le truchement du ministère de tutelle, l'encouragement, l'encadrement des religions afin qu'elles travaillent effectivement, individuellement et ensemble à la promotion de la concorde et de la paix entre tous les concitoyens au sein de la nation.

b. Concernant les religions. La laïcité honore

les religions, les établit dans leur véritable champ d'action et les libère d'éventuelles pressions de l'État ou des forces de manipulation ou d'instrumentalisation politique. En conséquence, il est à recommander que les religions ou les autorités religieuses se gardent de toutes actions ou attitudes tendant à établir entre elles et l'État des rapports stratégiques d'intérêt, leur conférant une quelconque forme ou force d'influence, risquant de provoquer au sein des autres communautés malaises, soupçons et frustrations.

Les religions, au nom de la laïcité, devront elles aussi demeurer vigilantes, refusant de quémander des faveurs — attitudes qui fragilisent leur liberté d'expression — refusant d'être les caisses de résonance d'hommes ou de partis politiques dont elles deviendraient les griots pour des raisons matérielles, religieuses, ethniques ou par volonté d'avoir ou d'être une influence ou une force auprès ou en face de l'État. Elles devront apprendre à se contenter de ce qui leur revient de droit de par leur reconnaissance objective et par le rôle qu'elles jouent dans la construction de la communauté nationale.

Les religions devront plus que jamais s'en tenir à leur mission spirituelle. L'infidélité à cette mission, par l'interférence d'ambitions politiques inavouées, conduit tôt ou tard à la fanatisation des communautés religieuses et à l'installation de l'intolérance. Elle compromet l'équilibre des rôles, détruit la cohésion et la confiance sociale, et prépare la guerre des religions. Cette fidélité à leur mission spirituelle, que l'État doit encourager et soutenir de manière objective et impartiale, appelle les communautés de croyants et leurs leaders à repenser de fond en comble leur raison d'être, dans le contexte critique présent de la Côte d'Ivoire, à entrer en dialogue réflexif, créateur avec et entre elles-mêmes pour redécouvrir les principes et les conditions de leurs actions afin de contribuer à la reconstruction de l'unité et de la paix nationales.

2. Principes et conditions de la cohabitation et de la collaboration pacifiques des religions en Côte d'Ivoire

a. Du point de vue des principes. Si la laïcité de notre République a été affirmée dans la lettre, son esprit n'a peut-être pas encore été accueilli ni intériorisé positivement comme principe de mise en circulation implosive et harmonieuse des diverses forces nationales en présence, forces profanes, politiques, culturelles et religieuses.

La confession de la laïcité de l'État, si elle souligne la séparation de la religion et de l'État, et la non-confessionnalité de celui-ci, implique aussi la responsabilité des religions quant à leur contribution à la construction de la communauté nationale, dans l'espace de leur action spécifique. De manière concrète et pratique, la situation récurrente de trouble en Côte d'Ivoire interpelle les communautés des croyants et les autorités religieuses quant à la raison d'être de leur présence et à la vérité, à la profondeur et à l'efficacité de leur action. Qu'ont-elles fait ? Que n'ont-elles pas fait pour que nous en arrivions là ? Elles sont, dans leur diversité, appelées à la vérification de leur identité, à l'évaluation de leur action, au retour à leur véritable mission au sein de la société ivoirienne.

Sans nul doute, la mission des croyants, dans notre société ivoirienne plus matérialiste que spirituelle, est de donner à la vie sociale, politique, culturelle, économique, sa dimension transcendante, morale, éthique sans laquelle la société est sans âme et s'abîme dans l'inhumanité et le meurtre de la vie.

Les religions en Côte d'Ivoire se constitueront en socle de paix si elles tournent le dos à la querelle, à la guerre stérile de la primauté, celle de se savoir la religion la plus en vue, la plus influente au sein de la société ivoirienne et surtout dans le jeu politique, au regard du pouvoir en place.

Qu'au lieu de cela les différentes communautés croyantes cultivent entre elles des relations de réciprocité critique, se donnent le pouvoir de se dire la vérité, se rappellent mutuellement à l'ordre en cas de déviation déontologique et de déviance dans leurs options et comportements. Ce pourrait être la mission du Forum des Religions, disposant d'un organe de vérité et de vigilance ayant le pouvoir de rappeler à l'ordre et de sanctionner au besoin les communautés, et leurs chefs religieux indélicats ou perturbateurs.

Les communautés de croyants peuvent promouvoir une culture de justice, de vérité, d'ouverture, de respect des différences — accueillies comme richesses — en devenant elles-mêmes, entre elles et devant la communauté nationale, des modèles et des acteurs d'unité et de paix dans la conjugaison des diversités humaines, idéologiques, culturelles, ethniques, politiques.

Dans le cadre de la laïcité, ce qui devrait fonder la valeur objective et sociale d'une religion est la qualité repérable de ses efforts sociaux pour contribuer à la paix, à l'unité et à la communication

entre citoyens. Il y a des conditions à la cohabitation et à la collaboration pacifique des religions.

b. Conditions d'une cohabitation et d'une collaboration pacifique des religions. Pour être porteur de fruits d'unité et de paix au sein de la communauté nationale, le dialogue des religions devra se faire dans la vérité, la sincérité, l'humilité, le respect mutuel, la bonne foi et la transparence. Les communautés de croyants dans leur ensemble devront sortir de leurs relations d'unité de façade, de politesse, pour percer les abcès et les poches de méfiance, de résistance, de mépris, de rejet sournois entre musulmans et chrétiens, entre les diverses branches chrétiennes, entre les chrétiens des Églises établies et tous les autres groupes qui fourmillent au nom de Jésus Christ ou au nom d'autres entités, et qu'à la vérité personne ne prend au sérieux.

- Les communautés de croyants devront sortir de leur relations à l'occasion des crises épisodiques pour travailler ensemble durablement, selon un programme concerté, à la prise en charge spirituelle de la société. Des séminaires et des ateliers les conduiront à se mieux connaître et à devenir témoins et levains, inaugurant et favorisant la cohésion, la paix nationale. Pour agir en profondeur, nous suggérons la tenue d'un séminaire du Forum des Religions permettant de réfléchir sur la contribution des communautés de croyants à la construction de la Côte d'Ivoire nouvelle.

Conclusion

Positivement assumée, la crise que traverse la Côte d'Ivoire peut devenir source de sagesse, de stabilité, de paix plus grandes. Les religions, dans ce processus de restauration nationale, doivent jouer un rôle de choix marqué par la vigilance, l'humilité et la vérité prophétique. Les religions devront faire montre de vigilance par rapport aux réflexes de repli, de fermeture sur soi, de nationalisme exacerbé, de fanatisme aveugle, de confusion entre religion et politique. Vigilance aussi par rapport à la menace d'instrumentalisation, de manipulation politique de la religion, par rapport au danger réel de quête de stratégie sécuritaire qui les guette. Levain dans la pâte nationale, puissance critique d'interpellation réciproque entre elles et vis-à-vis du politique, l'essentiel de leur mission est d'être ferment d'unité, de compénétration des hommes, des cultures, des peuples dans la vérité, l'accueil des différences et dans la paix.

Notes

1. Nous remercions l'association des intellectuels ivoiriens de nous autoriser à reproduire cette conférence prononcée au colloque *Paix et stabilité en Côte d'Ivoire* (30.08.03)

Réf.: Les deux articles sont publiés dans *Débats - Courrier d'Afrique de l'Ouest*, nn. 9 and 11 (novembre 2003/ janvier 2004), pp. 27-32 and 25-30.

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L'État du Bouddhisme
Theravada en Thaïlande

- **Vasana Chinvarakorn*** -

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[NDLR – *A plusieurs reprises ces dernières années,* Églises d'Asie *a publié des documents au sujet de ce qui est perçu comme une certaine crise du bouddhisme en Thaïlande (voir, entre autres, les documents parus dans* EDA 223 : «Bouddhisme en crise» ; EDA 289 : «Le malaise du bouddhisme thaïlandais» ; EDA 331 : «La crise du bouddhisme en Thaïlande» et «Le bouddhisme en Thaïlande : la robe safran disparaît du tissu moral»). Le Dossier publié en supplément de EDA 347, «Approche du bouddhisme thaï», rédigé par le chercheur Louis Gabaude, permettra à nos lecteurs d'aller plus loin dans l'analyse de cette crise du bouddhisme thaïlandais. Avec l'article ci-dessous, parus à quinze jours d'intervalle dans le magazine Outlook du Bangkok Post, en date des 24 novembre et 8 décembre 2003, nous publions une analyse complémentaire. Rédigée par Vasana Chinvarakorn, elle offre une analyse d'une étude du moine Phra Phaisan Visalo explorant les racines de la crise actuelle du bouddhisme Theravada en Thaïlande. La traduction est de la rédaction du P. Marcel Laouénan, MEP*].

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I. Du sacré au profane

« Joueurs… Drogués… Visiteurs des lieux d'amusement nocturnes… Bandits turbulents… Voleurs en robe safran…». Ces qualificatifs paraissent s'appliquer à bien des cercles de la Sangha thaïe ces temps-ci. Mais selon Phra Phaisan Visalo qui vient de terminer une recherche de huit années sur l'état du bouddhisme Theravada en Thaïlande, ces phénomènes de moines qui s'écartent de la *Dhamma-Vinaya* (doctrine et discipline bouddhiste) ne sont pas nouveaux. Il développe son analyse dans un nouveau livre intitulé : *«Le bouddhisme thaï à l'avenir : tendances et alternatives à la crise actuelle».*

Cette conduite inconvenante si répandue dans la Sangha signale le déclin du bouddhisme en Thaïlande. Mais il y a eu aussi des essais de réforme çà et là. Le développement du bouddhisme thaï n'est pas sans présenter des similitudes avec le flux et le reflux des vagues, avec des hauts et des bas continuels.

Ce qui différencie le passé de la crise présente et qui peut rendre compte de la survie ou de la disparition de la religion dans l'avenir, ce sont les différences dans la vision du monde. Selon Phra Phaisan, les vieux bouddhistes souscrivaient encore à des croyances en l'illumination spirituelle (nirvana) comme but ultime de la pratique religieuse ; en l'existence d'autres mondes qui transcendent la vie présente ; en une foi toute simple, en un ciel qui attend les bons et un royaume infernal pour les mauvais. Mais, continue le moine, les gens d'aujourd'hui attachent peu d'intérêt à de telles croyances. L'éveil suprême est devenu une tâche trop difficile – voire impossible – pour la majorité des pratiquants. Des succès tangibles, souvent matériels, dans le monde présent, ont émergé comme la seule mesure de sa propre valeur et de ses actes ; quant aux notions de quelque autre plan d'existence au-delà de la mort, on ne peut qu'en rire.

En effet, le sacré des temps passés a été piétiné et le profane a pris sa place. Une transition aussi importante ne s'est pas faite en une nuit. Selon Phra Phaisan, ces changements sont le résultats d'efforts délibérés de la part de l'élite au pouvoir et remontent aux tout débuts de l'ère Rattanakosin (ère de Bangkok, 1782 - ...). Au moins les réformes étaient-elles considérées nécessaires à la lumière de l'expansion des forces coloniales et leurs outils puissants de science et de modernisation. D'autres royaumes dans la même région avaient déjà été témoins d'un déclin du corps officiel des dogmes, spécialement depuis

que les membres des classes supérieures, par exposition à la culture occidentale, avaient choisi de se convertir à la nouvelle religion (le christianisme) et aux nouvelles façons de vivre.

Tout arrive avec un prix cependant. Les succès du renouveau du bouddhisme thaï venant d'en haut ont laissé tout un écheveau de malaises que les générations actuelles doivent démêler si elles veulent conserver la religion.

Comment cela s'est-il passé ? Pour Phra Phaisan, *«la transformation fondamentale, radicale, a commencé quand les croyances en l'ancienne cosmologie qui tournait autour du Trai Phum Phra Ruang (un vieux corps de doctrine sur les lois du karma) furent invalidées par ceux-là même qui prétendaient être de fervents et dévots bouddhistes»*.

Une découverte surprenante faite par Phra Phaisan dans sa vaste recherche est que les pionniers de cette version séculière et plus scientifique du bouddhisme furent le roi Mongkut (Rama IV) qui passa près de trente ans sous la robe safran, et l'un de ses fils, le prince Vajiranana, qui devint le patriarche suprême sous le règne de Rama VI. Le roi Rama IV fut le fondateur de la secte Thammayut, une secte nouvelle qui critiquait et défiait la secte Maha Nikaya, alors prépondérante dans la Sangha. Le prince Vajiranana soutenait l'unification du bouddhisme Theravada thaï et son incorporation dans le discours plus large de la nation.

A en juger par les divers commentaires faits par la Cour, le statut des moines ainsi que les modes traditionnels de pratique étaient tombés bien bas. Rama IV commentait à qui voulait bien l'entendre le sort des hommes en jaune : ils étaient 'démodés' et jouissaient d'un style de vie indûment confortable. Le prince Vajiranana lui-même exprima son embarras quand il prit la décision de se faire moine : une vie que les autres considéraient pleine de futilités et d'oisiveté. Son demi-frère, le roi Chukalongkorn (Rama V), alla plus loin : il considérait les moines qui passaient leur temps à méditer comme *«les plus paresseux»*, comparés à ceux qui étudiaient les textes bouddhiques ou priaient. (Le monarque fit plus tard amende honorable pour sa *«mauvaise compréhension»*).

De telles attitudes négatives furent traduites dans une série d'actions. Phra Phaisan considère Rama IV comme le premier souverain thaï à adopter la science et sa façon rationnelle de penser envers les enseignements du bouddhisme Theravada thaï. Il approchait le Bouddha non plus comme une figure mythique et spirituelle mais comme une personne historique dont on pouvait calculer les jours, mois et années de la naissance et de la mort. De même ne croyait-il pas à l'accumulation des mérites des vies antérieures qui avait été traditionnellement enseignée à qui était ou non destiné à être roi. Ce qui était plus décisif, c'étaient les facteurs sanguins. Eliminées aussi les croyances au pouvoir surnaturel d'un autre monde, bien que, curieusement, ce fut le roi Rama IV qui fit bâtir le Phra Siam Thewathiraj, vénéré depuis comme le protecteur de la dynastie Chakri et du royaume thaï.

Il est important de se rappeler que le but ultime de la pratique de la Dhamma : atteindre l'illumination spirituelle, a été depuis commodément abandonné. Différent en cela des monarques précédents, le roi Rama IV ne pensait plus que c'était une chose que l'on pouvait atteindre ni même qu'elle fût pratique pour un chef d'État. Il abandonna donc la tradition de l'aumône quotidienne aux moines : il préférait passer cette partie de son temps à écouter les doléances de ses sujets ou à les visiter. C'était la première fois qu'on leur permettait de lever les yeux et d'entrevoir le visage royal.

La dilution de la Dhamma s'étendit aussi au domaine ecclésiastique. Le prince Vajiranana fut encore à l'origine d'un changement important dans la cérémonie d'ordination de la secte Thammayut : les moines n'avaient plus à prononcer le vœu de pratique pour atteindre l'illumination. Le royal abbé pensait qu'une déclaration montrerait plutôt le manque de sincérité de la part de l'ordinand.

Ces transformations ne furent pas réalisées comme des fins en soi. Phra Phaisan remarque un trait particulier du bouddhisme Theravada : un lien étroit entre la Sangha et l'institution nationale, que ce soit la monarchie ou le gouvernement central. La Sangha bouddhiste était et avait été exploitée pour servir les intérêts de la classe dirigeante, un fait qui allait affaiblir l'institution religieuse et, à la longue, le laïcat lui-même. Comment ?

Comme l'élite dirigeante s'embarquait dans un projet pour consolider son pouvoir, le bouddhisme Theravada thaï devenait un moyen indispensable pour atteindre ce but. L'immixtion tant dans la direction que dans l'éducation des bonzes était de la première importance. Ici, le prince Vajiranana jouera un rôle important dans le processus de centralisation dans le domaine religieux, un parallèle très étroit avec la transformation séculière. Il y eut une réforme dans le curriculum religieux qui soulignait le savoir textuel avec un test général annuel. (L'enseignement de la méditation fut donc mis à l'écart car il serait difficile de tester ce savoir). Le prince Vajiranana écrivit des

centaines de manuels et de commentaires qui continuent d'être employés dans les écoles de pagodes et les universités bouddhistes.

La direction de la Sangha fut divisée et catégorisée par strates, depuis la pagode de village jusqu'aux états-majors régionaux. La seule autorité fut confiée au roi et, plus tard, au patriarche suprême qui, à la longue cependant, ne garda qu'un rôle nominal. On créa aussi toute une série de décorations et de récompenses financières comme incitations ; le prince Vajiranana fut à l'origine de vingt et un grades différents (*sammanasakdi*) pour récompenser les moines qui adoptaient les nouvelles règles et avaient de bonnes relations avec les pouvoirs en place.

Ce changement historique ne se fit toutefois pas sans heurts. Dans sa recherche, Phra Phaisan cite plusieurs histoires qui dénotent les conflits entre les moines envoyés par le régime central et leurs confrères locaux. Le roi Rama IV lui-même dédaignait les prêches du genre populaire alors très en vogue au sujet des incarnations passées du Bouddha, qui incorporaient des réflexions amusantes que le roi considérait comme extravagantes, irrationnelles et mensongères. Des donations pour de telles cérémonies religieuses, disait le monarque, auraient été mieux employées à bâtir un bûcher pour les chiens errants crevés. Il va de soi qu'il s'ensuivit un sentiment d'aliénation et de discorde entre l'ancienne et la nouvelle Sangha. «*Car il y avait en présence deux cultures différentes et incompatibles*», écrit Phra Phaisan, «*L'une professait le nationalisme, avec un contenu très clair et des résultats tangibles dès cette vie et préconisait l'étude des textes comme un vecteur vers la réalisation de la Dhamma et de la vérité. L'autre culture, elle, épousait des entités au-delà des frontières de la raison, un autre monde au-dessus de celui-ci, un savoir fondé sur l'expérience, une forme orale d'enseignement par allégories et paraboles et – c'est important – la perception que la Dhamma et la jouissance n'ont pas à s'exclure l'une de l'autre*».

Le résultat fut que ces moines nommés dans des temples provinciaux eurent tendance à considérer des versions locales du bouddhisme sous un angle négatif. De tels conflits pouvaient être présentés comme des divergences dans la vision du monde. Mais sous-tendant tout cela, il y avait un autre genre de différences importantes entre les cultures urbaine et rurale, ou, plus spécifiquement, entre la culture du palais et celle du peuple, qui haussaient les disputes entre les deux groupes. Et puis il y avait encore un préjugé ethnique subconscient envers les milieux lao.[2]

Avant longtemps, le bouddhisme moderne et rationnel l'emporta, avec les conséquences suivantes :

la religion devait être citée en tête dans les discours nationalistes pour justifier l'existence de l'État. Peu à peu, cependant, les croyances et le personnel bouddhistes devaient être considérés comme subordonnés aux intérêts de la nation. Une nouvelle religion prenait naissance : celle du nationalisme. «*Il vaut d'être noté que là où le bouddhisme a été une religion prédominante, quand le nationalisme étend son emprise, le tout premier précepte :* «Tu ne seras pas» *sera toujours manipulé dans un sens qui servira la nation-État*», écrit Phra Phaisan. En vérité, les cinq préceptes[3] seront amendés de façon à entrer dans le nouveau schéma de modernisation et de sécurité nationale. La déclaration infâme d'un moine de haut rang, nommé Kittivuddho Bhikku, au plus fort de la guerre froide, que «*tuer des communistes n'était pas un acte déméritoire*», fut l'épitomé d'un tel pragmatisme dévoyé. Mais il y eut bien d'autres exemples, compilés par Phra Phaisan. Quand une dictature militaire se lança dans des programmes d'industrialisation rapide, on ordonna aux moines de ne pas enseigner la valeur de «*San-thosa*» («*se contenter de ce que l'on a comme opposé au désir effréné ou la convoitise*»). On leur conseilla plutôt de prêcher au peuple le sens du sacrifice pour le bien du pays et de la monarchie comme une autre forme de pratique de la Dhamma. Curieusement, le roi Rama IV introduisit une version « grossière » des cinq préceptes pour les laïcs qui tolérait le fait de tuer des animaux, le mensonge, l'alcool, etc. «*Tant que cela permettait à chacun de survivre et ne causait pas grand tort aux autres*».

Après tout, la notion même que ce que les bouddhistes ont à faire, c'est de pratiquer les cinq préceptes, signifie la prévalence de cette forme pragmatique du bouddhisme. Pire encore, les croyances religieuses ont été réduites à ne plus s'occuper que des bénéfices des individus ou de leurs connaissances les plus proches. «*En parallèle très étroit avec la dilution de l'enseignement bouddhiste, il y a la distance de plus en plus grande entre la pagode et le laïcat. Maintenant, on attend des bonzes qu'ils conduisent leurs routines traditionnelles à l'intérieur des enceintes ecclésiastiques, à l'écart de tout, complètement indifférents aux affaires du monde*». «*Dans le passé, le bouddhisme Theravada a prospéré grâce aux relations étroites entre moines et villageois*», indique Phra Phaisan. «*Mais quand les deux parties grandissent à l'écart l'une de l'autre, toutes deux ne peuvent que s'affaiblir*».

La communauté laïque s'est affaiblie parce que la pagode n'a pas été à même de la conseiller sur l'interaction possible avec le monde extérieur dans les courants de la modernisation, d'une manière constructive et éclairée. Dans le même temps, la Sangha aussi s'est affaiblie car il n'y a pas eu de soutien, pas d'infusion de «sang neuf» de la part des laïcs dont

la majorité a depuis longtemps délaissé la pagode (tout comme ils ont délaissé leurs propres communautés). Des conditions relâchées comme celle-là ne peuvent que contribuer à l'émergence d'une nouvelle religion et de la plus terrible : la consommation.

La soumission aux intérêts de l'Etat-nation n'est qu'à un pas de la servilité aux diktats du marché et à la séduction des récompenses financières. Phra Phaisan note comment la montée de la prospérité matérielle des pagodes a été parallèle à l'expansion de l'économie capitaliste fondée sur l'argent, spécialement depuis le règne de Rama V. Maintenant, le royaume de la foi est devenu un marché dynamique où tout est transformé en produits.... Les niveaux de sophistication sont simplement décourageants. Il y a des mérites différents, et personnalisés, qu'il faut payer. La superstition elle même s'est glissée entre les murs des pagodes, cette fois pour offrir des solutions instantanées et toutes faites à ceux qui cherchent et de l'argent pour les acteurs.

Des armées de «*guides spirituels*» battent les rues avec des techniques très avancées de prospection du marché. L'ordination a été réduite à «*une expérience*» à faire au moins une fois dans sa vie. On peut même goûter aux sensations de l'illumination ultime comme quelque chose «*de tendre, de frais et de translucide*».

De nouveau, Phra Phaisan montre comment l'élite gouvernante a contribué à fusionner bouddhisme et capitalisme. Les sermons et les écrits du prince Vajiranana contenaient plusieurs passages faisant de la publicité pour des institutions et des entreprises à but lucratif. Pendant que le culte du nationalisme promeut l'uniformité et l'homogénéité – tous les bouddhistes sont des citoyens thaïs – la prolifération de la consommation épouse la diversité. Et il doit en être ainsi. Il y a des files et des files, longues et éclectiques, de bouddhistes des temps modernes : des paysans qui désirent une récolte abondante, des officiers en mal de promotion, des vendeurs, des politiciens, des acteurs, des étudiants.... Ils ont tous et chacun différentes sortes de désirs et des niveaux différents dans la compréhension de ce que le bouddhisme demande. Phra Phaisan voit une similitude entre cette religiosité bigarrée et l'art du collage. «*Nous voyons donc un nombre de gens qui approchent plusieurs croyances religieuses en même temps – sur une base d'«essai», exactement comme pour la consommation de biens matériels. Il est aussi facile pour tous ces gens de mettre de côté l'un ou l'autre groupe de pratiques qui ne leur plaît plus, un peu comme on se débarrasse de vêtements démodés*».

La sécularisation du bouddhisme, d'une religion fondée sur la communauté entretenant respectivement le nationalisme et l'individualisme, a été subtile, mais avec d'innombrables ramifications. Avec l'entrée d'une pléthore de croyances étrangères, la Thaïlande est devenue un supermarché de «*nouvelles religions*» où le consommateur peut choisir et se servir. Nombre de fidèles, cependant, n'ont aucune indication sur la qualité du produit. Au contraire, notre époque est témoin d'un désarroi complet de la religion nationale : il y a les scandales de certains moines, l'incapacité de la Sangha à se réformer et les disputes jamais résolues sur ce qui constitue les vrais enseignements du Bouddha, pour ne mentionner que ces quelques problèmes. En aucune autre époque, le bouddhisme Theravada thaï n'a eu autant besoin d'un nouveau souffle. Le temps est compté mais il y a quand même l'espoir au bout du tunnel.

II. Un recommencement[4]

A l'apogée du bouddhisme en Inde, il y a mille ans de cela, l'université de Nalanda, l'institut ecclésiastique le plus grand, abritait des dizaines de milliers de bonzes, venus de tout le sous-continent. Il y avait une abondance de stupas, de temples et de statues dans les styles les plus grandioses, les plus coûteux, les plus élaborés. Des milliers d'ascètes qui se faisaient passer pour des «*éveillés*» s'adonnaient à des rites mystiques, murmurant des mantras sacrés incompréhensibles, attirant la loyauté sans faille des dévots. Et puis des hordes de militants musulmans du Nord-Est déferlèrent sur le pays et le bouddhisme fut pratiquement écrasé et extirpé du pays une bonne fois pour toutes.

Pour Phra Phaisan, le facteur décisif dans la disparition du bouddhisme fut moins une invasion de l'extérieur que les failles inhérentes à la Sangha indienne elle-même. L'Institut Nalanda, malgré sa grandeur, s'était peu à peu séparé des communautés avoisinantes car il dépendait du patronage de la Cour royale. Le laïcat de son côté considérait toutes les affaires religieuses comme le domaine exclusif des moines et ne jouait aucun rôle dans l'édification de l'ordre monastique. Malgré toutes les années où il avait été florissant, le bouddhisme ne devait plus retrouver la prééminence qui avait été la sienne en Inde, son lieu de naissance.

Dans son nouveau livre : «*Le bouddhisme thaï à l'avenir : tendances et alternatives à la crise actuelle*», Phra Phaisan indique quatre points qui ont vraiment besoin de réformes si l'on veut éviter pareil sort au bouddhisme de ce pays. Notre moine indique les failles dans les structures actuelles de la direction de la Sangha, dans l'éducation des bonzes, dans leur relation avec le laïcat et les déformations actuelles de

l'enseignement du Bouddha. «*Le bouddhisme ne sera détruit par personne d'autre que les bouddhistes eux-mêmes*». Le Bouddha lui-même avertissait il y a plus de 2,500 ans «*qu'un bateau sombrerait à cause de son équipage (pas à cause de la tempête)*».

Les facteurs extérieurs peuvent être puissants mais ils ne sont pas aussi importants que les éléments internes. Il est dit dans la Dhammapada que «*quand une main est saine, sans blessure, aucun poison ne peut lui faire de mal*». Tant que le bouddhisme est fort, il peut résister à toutes les menaces extérieures. «*Pour le dire tout simplement la corrosion actuelle du bouddhisme thaï n'est pas imputable aux défis d'autres religions, au flux de la modernisation ou de la globalisation. Son déclin est dû à la faiblesse, à la négligence des bouddhistes eux-mêmes*».

Contrairement à la perception générale, Phra Phaisan affirme qu'une étroite affinité entre la Sangha et l'État – un trait commun du bouddhisme Theravada depuis le temps d'Asoaka le Grand – n'est pas nécessairement un bien à la longue pour la religion. Mais, jusqu'à il y a un siècle, le pouvoir de l'État était restreint à la capitale et à quelques grandes villes. La centralisation du pouvoir politique s'est finalement réalisée au détriment de l'autonomie des communauté locales et de leur participation aux affaires des pagodes.

La nouvelle mouture de la loi sur la Sangha cherche à redresser la structure centralisée et inefficace de la direction. Le conseil suprême (*Mahathera Samakhom*) ne gardera plus qu'un rôle de conseiller du patriarche suprême et l'administration sera confiée à un groupe de moines plus jeunes appelé *Mahakhanissorn*. Cependant, dit Phra Phaisan, la hiérarchie pyramidale demeure intacte dans le nouveau plan proposé. Le nouveau corps administratif sera encore nommé, et non pas élu, au sein d'un groupe de moines plus âgés, mais cette fois les nominations seront faites pour un temps donné et non plus à vie. (A présent, la majorité des membres du conseil de la Sangha approche des 80 ans ou les a déjà dépassés).

D'un autre côté, Phra Phaisan avance l'alternative d'un programme de décentralisation dans les dimensions verticale et horizontale. Les moines dans tout le pays devraient avoir leur mot à dire dans le processus de la prise de décisions par le biais d'assemblées générales élues (*Sangha sapha*) du niveau du district jusqu'au niveau national. Le choix des bonzes pour les différentes fonctions devrait être fait au mérite et non au nombre de titres ou de décorations (*sammanasakdi*) que tel ou tel bonze a acquis. Les branches des pouvoirs exécutif et judiciaire devraient aussi être séparées et contrebalancées par l'établissement de deux comités indépendants appelés respectivement *Sanghamontri* et *Winayathorn*.

Ce projet de démocratisation ne devrait pas être prisonnier des murs de la pagode. Phra Phaisan souligne l'implication du laïcat dans le soutien et la surveillance des affaires ecclésiastiques. Mais, contrairement à une proposition du gouvernement, les représentants du laïcat doivent venir de tous les secteurs et pas seulement de bureaucrates âgés. La participation du public peut commencer au niveau de la communauté locale sous la forme de comités de pagodes qui actuellement n'ont de fonction que purement nominale. Une telle libéralisation, dit-il, conduira à une plus grande transparence dans l'administration quotidienne des affaires, dans la surveillance de la conduite de chaque moine et – c'est important – dans l'allocation des budgets des pagodes, ce qui, pour la plupart des gens, reste une zone d'ombre. «*Rendre une pagode à la communauté locale est la mesure la plus importante et la plus concrète pour refaire de la Sangha une part active de la société*», dit Phra Phaisan. «*La loi actuelle de la Sangha a transformé les pagodes en propriétés de la Sangha sous la direction de l'État. Les abbés ont donc joui d'un monopole du pouvoir dans l'administration des temples, agissant comme s'ils étaient les propriétaires au lieu d'en être les simples gardiens au nom des villageois, comme cela aurait dû être traditionnellement*».

Distancier ainsi le temple du pouvoir séculier n'implique pas que les affaires financières et administratives. Il est important, dit encore Phra Phaisan, de savoir que pendant longtemps la Sangha a été dépendante du Département des Affaires religieuses comme d'un cerveau qui décidait comment il devait régir tout le système. Cette fonction a maintenant été prise par un nouvel organisme appelé le Bureau national du bouddhisme. Le conseil suprême doit passer par ce bureau pour pratiquement toute information au sujet des moines : le statut de leur éducation, leur bien-être et leurs activités, étant ainsi sujet à l'influence, subtile mais profonde, de son propre secrétariat. «*La Sangha devrait avoir un organisme ou un institut indépendant du contrôle de l'État pour rassembler et analyser l'information sur les affaires des temples et proposer un agenda de décisions à partir des perspectives des moines eux-mêmes. Les deux universités bouddhistes* (Mahamakut *et* Mahachulalongkorn) *peuvent aider à l'établissement d'un tel organisme et plus tard collaborer avec lui*».

L'autonomie intellectuelle demande des esprits progressistes. Mais à en juger d'après l'état actuel de l'éducation religieuse en Thaïlande, la perspective tracée par Phra Phaisan semble plutôt sombre. A tant souligner le savoir textuel comme opposé à la pratique

de la Dhamma, la majorité des moines se débrouille plutôt mal. «*Il a souvent été avancé que les moines et les novices, ces dernières années, ont été absents à leurs examens ou les ont ratés. Et la proportion de ceux qui ont réussi n'a fait que diminuer régulièrement. En 1975, par exemple, 31 % des candidats passaient leur examen. Mais en 2002, 19 % seulement l'ont passé. En 1988, une enquête montrait que 95 % des abbés – supérieurs de pagodes – dans tout le pays n'avaient achevé que l'instruction primaire et les cours de «naktham» (les études de la Dhamma et de la discipline en langue vernaculaire thaïe). On estimait que très peu d'entre eux pouvaient atteindre le plus haut niveau de* naktham».[5]

Malheureusement, la nouvelle version de la loi de la Sangha continue de n'attribuer qu'un rôle marginal à l'éducation des bonzes. Ceci est contraire à l'essence même du bouddhisme comme système «*de développement de soi*» vers l'ultime libération spirituelle. Phra Phaisan suggère une approche globale pour la réforme de la pédagogie ecclésiastique qui a été trop longtemps encombrée par un savoir dépassé et bigot et du genre de leçons apprises par cœur.

Il est surprenant de constater que les toutes premières marches vers la réforme de l'éducation envisagée par notre érudit sont de reconnaître que la plupart des moines ordonnés n'ont l'intention de rester sous la robe safran qu'un laps de temps plutôt court. C'est pourquoi le niveau primaire des études est si important. Phra Phaisan montre que le cœur des réformes est de savoir établir un équilibre entre les connaissances ordinaires et les connaissances religieuses, entre la formation de novices et de moines de valeur et l'éducation des masses, pauvres pour la plupart. On continuera d'enseigner des sujets ésotériques ainsi que le Pali mais à un niveau élevé ou pour ceux qui ont l'intention d'être ordonnés pour une longue période.

Des changements si vastes ne signifient pas que l'enseignement et la propagation de la Dhamma ne sont assignés qu'aux bonzes. Au contraire, Phra Phaisan dit qu'en dehors du fait que les moines ont à obéir à tout un code de conduite très élaboré – ou *sila* – [6] il n'y a littéralement pas de division entre une Dhamma pour les clercs et une autre pour le laïcat. « *Le laïcat devrait et doit pratiquer la Dhamma comme le font les bonzes pour pouvoir atteindre la libération. Le Bouddha a clairement dit que la* «Lok-uttara dhamma» *(la compréhension de la nature transcendantale de tout phénomène terrestre) est une richesse que tout un chacun peut atteindre*».

Mais pour ceux qui sont immergés dans la lutte quotidienne pour la survie, une revitalisation de la Dhamma adaptée aux besoins de toute la société est indispensable. Phra Phaisan souligne que les enseignements bouddhistes peuvent s'attaquer aux innombrables malaises de la société moderne : la consommation, l'obsession de l'argent, l'escalade de la violence, la crise d'identité, l'aliénation grandissante et la peur de la mort.

Mais les valeurs des croyances ne devraient pas être enseignées que par les moines, ni même seulement dans les pagodes. En fait, la vraie Dhamma doit être cultivée à partir des expériences de la vie réelle. Par diverses activités charitables et sociales, tant les moines que les laïcs peuvent travailler ensemble à la réalisation du bien commun. Après tout, Phra Phaisan prévoit une ligne indistincte entre les domaines séculier et religieux, et ses bienfaits. La société thaïe, propose-t-il, a besoin d'un laïcat dont la conduite s'approche de celle des moines autant que de moines dont les œuvres dépassent les affaires spirituelles. «*Si des moines et des laïcs s'adonnent à des services communautaires et sont soutenus par le public comme le sont les bonzes, cela permettra au bouddhisme d'être plus adapté à la société au lieu d'être confiné à des rites, aux affaires des pagodes ou à des bénéfices individuels*». « *A quoi sert la Dhamma si ce n'est à être au contact d'autres êtres, à favoriser les services communautaires – en particulier pour les pauvres – à faire d'elle une réalité tangible, concrète pour tout un chacun*».

Dans la même veine, Phra Phaisan épouse l'ouverture du terrain religieux aux femmes. Mais permettre aux femmes d'entrer dans la vie religieuse – sous quelque label que ce soit – n'est pas une réponse aux appels féministes pour l'égalité des sexes, car le Bouddha lui-même avait déjà affirmé qu'hommes et femmes avaient le même potentiel pour atteindre l'illumination spirituelle. En fait, le rôle plus actif de moniales (ou de nonnes), dit Phra Phaisan, rehausserait la valeur féminine de l'amour-bienveillance et contrebalancerait ainsi les enseignements traditionnels qui soulignent plutôt les valeurs masculines.

Le cœur du débat sur l'ordination de moniales, continue-t-il, tourne autour des valeurs et de la façon de vivre monastique. En fait, c'est de savoir si une existence ascétique est encore une chose désirable et profitable ou non. A notre époque, les textes de la Dhamma sont disponibles et accessibles sous une multitude de formes ; les laïcs peuvent étudier et interpréter eux-mêmes les enseignements bouddhistes. Et certains d'entre eux deviennent même capables d'enseigner la Dhamma aux bonzes eux-mêmes. Phra Phaisan tient encore au rôle essentiel et indispensable de la vie monastique pour la survie de la religion. Le statut et la façon de vivre des « moines » leur donne une meilleure occasion d'étudier et de

propager la Dhamma directement. Les laïcs peuvent établir leur propre institut, mais il serait bien plus difficile à soutenir qu'une pagode qui ne dépend que de l'aumône des villageois.

«Plus important est la valeur d'une vie monastique qui va au-delà du célibat. L'essence d'une telle existence fait référence à un sentier vers la liberté spirituelle : être libre de toute luxure et d'attachements terrestres. Toute société a besoin de personnes qui donnent l'exemple qu'un tel genre de vie est bénéfique et peut être atteint par tout un chacun. Ceci ne veut pas dire que les moines et les laïcs doivent toujours se trouver sur un spectre opposé, que la santé des uns est dommageable pour les autres. Tous sont les propriétaires égaux de la religion et, pour que le bouddhisme survive et prospère, les moines et les laïcs doivent travailler ensemble».

III. Conclusion : la grande question[7]

Pour le moine réformateur Phra Phaisan Visalo, la survie du bouddhisme Theravada thaï dépend de ce que l'on puisse ou non répondre de façon satisfaisante à cette question : *«Le bouddhisme peut-il lutter contre cette frénésie de consommation ?»*.

La rivale la plus terrible du bouddhisme est cette culture de consommation ambiante. Il n'y a pas d'autre force qui puisse s'opposer à son flot, que ce soit le communisme, le nationalisme ou même la démocratie. Un dictateur peut s'accrocher au pouvoir aussi longtemps que ses sujets sont satisfaits de leur pouvoir d'achat. Cette nouvelle religion appelée *«consumérisme»* s'est étendue à tous les coins du monde, même dans

certains endroits où de fervents missionnaires n'osent pas s'aventurer.

Comment une foi sans prétention comme le bouddhisme peut-elle défier – et peut-être vaincre – une force si puissante ? Phra Phaisan pense que c'est possible. Comment ? Un accomplissement matériel peut apporter un confort physique, rehausser sa propre estime et créer un sens d'appartenance (pour ceux qui emploient la même marque d'objets, adorent le même genre de musique, etc.) et finalement faire que ce qui semble être une promesse d'immortalité devienne une réalité. D'un autre côté, un vœu réalisé va appeler un autre désir et encore un autre. En d'autres termes, c'est le cycle sans fin du Samsara.[8]

Sous une abondance apparente se cache un sens fondamental de manque, un sentiment inexplicable et fort de vide, de doute, de peur et de misère, tapi dans les ombres de notre cœur. Le bouddhisme cependant combat ce vieux malaise à la racine. Tout

d'abord, la pratique constante de l'attention nous fait réaliser l'impermanence de toute chose. Il n'y a pratiquement rien à quoi nous puissions nous rattacher. Une telle compréhension spirituelle – réelle et plus profonde que l'intellect mondain – nous poussera à accepter le fait qu'il n'y a pas de «soi», que tous les phénomènes terrestres ne sont que des combinaisons de causes et de conditions sans arrêt fugaces, jouant avec l'esprit humain. En d'autres termes, la force intrinsèque et la valeur des enseignements du Bouddha sont dans la découverte que l'on peut vivre «dans» le monde sans être «du» monde. La possibilité de rompre avec les entraves de la vie se trouve là.

Malheureusement, le développement passé du bouddhisme Theravada thaï a négligé cet aspect transcendantal de la religion lui préférant la dimension rationnelle, scientifique, plus tangible. Phra Phaisan cite l'essai exemplaire de ranimer l'enseignement de la *Lok uttara dhamma* sur la nature transcendantale de tous les phénomènes, par le regretté Buddhadasa Bhikku, fondateur du monastère de forêt Suan Mokkh dans le sud de la Thaïlande. Toute sa vie, Buddhadasa a souligné que l'éveil spirituel (*nibbhana* = nirvana) est non seulement possible mais qu'il est même un devoir pour tout être humain. Autrement dit, vivre et pratiquer la Dhamma ne sont qu'une seule et même chose. Et une telle poursuite n'est pas que pour un bienfait individuel. En fait, il y a une multitude de croyances bouddhistes qui correspondent au concept de *«société civile»*, soutient Phra Phaisan. Après tout, un autre nom du bouddhisme n'est-il pas *«Dhamma-Vinaya»*, ce dernier élément faisant référence à un système de coexistence pacifique dans la société. L'enseignement sur l'interdépendance ou *«inter-être»* signifie le besoin de respecter les autres vies, de développer l'humilité et l'amour-bienveillance envers chaque autre personne.

Dans son carnet personnel, Buddhadasa Bhikku entrevoyait neuf possibilités pour l'avenir du bouddhisme. La religion peut disparaître un jour *«n'étant plus considérée comme adéquate en un monde préoccupé de bonheur matériel»*. Ou bien les mots du Bouddha peuvent bientôt recouvrer leur valeur et, même si l'effort initial pour ramener le bouddhisme doit être l'œuvre d'une poignée de gens de la périphérie, bientôt la race humaine toute entière adoptera les enseignements comme une part de sa façon de vivre. Quel scénario est le plus plausible ? Seuls les bouddhistes peuvent formuler la réponse.

Notes du traducteur

* Vasana Chinvarakorn, Outlook, Bangkok Post, 24 novembre 2003.

[2] Tout le Nord-est, le tiers du pays, et une partie du Nord sont de souche lao et pas toujours regardés d'un bon œil par les Thaïs.

[3] Les cinq règles de conduite morale, également appelées observances (sila) auxquelles sont astreints tous les laïcs bouddhistes sont les suivantes : s'abstenir **1** de tuer tout être vivant ; **2** de voler ; **3** d'avoir des relations charnelles illégales ; **4** de mentir ; **5** de faire usage de spiritueux. Vocabulaire Pali-français des termes bouddhiques ; Adyar, Paris 1961, p. 229.

[4] Vasana Chinvarakorn, Outlook, Bangkok Post, 8 décembre 2003.

[5] Naktham : celui qui a passé un examen des connaissances de la Dhamma selon un programme déterminé ; il y a trois niveaux d'examens : chantri, le plus bas, chanto, et chan ek, le plus élevé ; c'est de celui-ci qu'il est question ici.

[6] Les moines sont tenus d'observer 227 préceptes concernant la retenue, la conduite des sens, la purification en ce *qui concerne les quatre choses nécessaires aux moines : robes monastiques, aumône en nourriture, habitation et médicaments.* Vocabulaire*, op. cit., p. 230-231.*

[7] *Outlook,* Bangkok Post*,* 8 décembre 2003.

[8] Samsara : cycle de renaissances, littéralement : transmigration perpétuelle, est un terme pour désigner l'océan de la vie toujours agité ; montant et descendant, le symbole de ce processus continu de toujours et encore naître, vieillir, souffrir et mourir. Vocabulaire, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

Réf. : Supplément *Églises d'Asie (EDA)*, Dossiers et Documents n. 5, 2004, n. 397, Mai 2004.

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The Mission Institutes
in the New Millennium

- **Michael Amaladoss, SJ** -

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Are the mission institutes in crisis?[1] I think they are. There are many reasons for this. The world mission situation has changed. We are now living in a post-colonial period of history. It is true that the period of contemporary mission Institutes coincides with the colonial period. While we cannot say that colonialism is the cause of mission there is no doubt that the missionary project was helped by the colonial situation. People in the so-called 'mission' countries do link colonialism and mission. That is why missionaries are no longer as welcome as they were before in many Asian countries. In India any missionary, identified as such, will be denied an entry visa. Some other countries have a quota system or allow missionaries to come for a limited period for specific, often non-religious, tasks. The struggle for independence from the colonial powers has led to a reaffirmation of local cultural and religious identities. Not only the missionaries, but the Church itself is seen as 'foreign'. Religions are becoming increasingly politicised and fundamentalistic. In this context traditional forms of mission are seen as culturally and religiously aggressive. The mission Institutes themselves may be seen in this context as colonial relics.[2]

It is not surprising then that, in the ecclesial situation after the Second Vatican Council, the local Churches are, even though very feebly, asserting their responsibility for mission in their area. An International Congress on Mission that met in Manila in December 1979 said:

'Mission' is no longer, and can no longer be, a one-way movement from the 'older Churches' to the 'younger Churches'.... Every local church *is* and cannot but be missionary.... [It] is responsible for its mission, and co-responsible for the mission of all its sister-churches. Every local church, according to its possibilities, must share whatever its gifts are, for the needs of other churches, for mission throughout mankind, for the life of the world.... The Spirit of the Lord calls each people and each culture to its own fresh and creative response to the Gospel.[3]

The goals and methods of mission have been undergoing radical changes. The goal of mission is now seen as two-fold: the building up of the Kingdom of God and of the Church as its symbol and servant.[4] The Asian Bishops have spoken of mission as a three-fold *dialogue* with the poor, the cultures and the religions.[5] The vocations for mission institutes in the First World Christian countries, as vocations in general, have been rapidly declining. The ideology of foreign mission has been changing from mission *ad gentes,* to mission *ad extra,* to international mission. With regard to personnel, the Third World Churches seems to be the sources today. But with regard to material resources the First World Churches are still dominant.

How are the Mission Institutes facing up to this situation? How are they evolving? What lessons can we learn from today's experiences?

Kinds of Institutes

Whatever be the current theology of mission, it is clear that when we talk about Mission Institutes we are talking of Institutes whose aim was and is mission *ad gentes.* There are two kinds of Mission Institutes. The focus of some Institutes is broad. Mission is only one element in their multi-faceted apostolates. An example would be the Society of Jesus. It is ready to engage in any kind of work anywhere in the world. But there have always been some Jesuits, starting with St Francis Xavier, who have been missionaries in the traditional sense. Every Province sent out some of its members, often the best, to the 'mission' countries. The Franciscans too have been ardent missionaries. The second kind of Institute has mission as the only goal. They gather and form missionaries to send out to other countries. Most of these were founded in the 19th and 20th centuries. The experience of these two types of Institute is not the same. The second type of Institute has been more affected by the changes in missiology and the reduction in vocations.

Among the Mission Institutes some are international. They draw their membership from different countries. The Divine Word Missionaries are an example. Others are, or at least used to be, limited to a particular country in terms of recruitment. This is still the policy of Maryknoll Missionaries. In the international Institutes the reduction of vocations in the First World is offset by an increase in vocations in the Third World. Some European Institutes have been driven to the Third World to recruit new vocations.

A New Theology of Mission

I have indicated above that there is a new theology of mission which sees it as a threefold dialogue of the Good News with the poor, the cultures and the religions. People are still invited to a change of heart. But conversion to Christianity is not the only, nor even the main, focus of mission, though it is not excluded. For instance, in India the Church has been present from the time of St Thomas, the Apostle. Yet, only 2.5% of Indians are Christians today. But the Good News of Jesus has influenced Indian leaders and, through them, Indian culture in many ways.[7] The Church today is taking this 'hidden mission' into account. But many Mission Institutes have had difficulty in adjusting to this situation. They seek therefore to focus their attention on what are called 'responsive groups'. Their attention has shifted from Asia to Africa. It is easier to enter and work in African countries. They also tend to be poorer and less developed. Within Asia itself, they concentrate on Tribal peoples, who are still practising some form of cosmic religion and are more open to adhere to the metacosmic religiosity of Christianity,[8] often as a protest against local metacosmic religiosities seen as belonging to locally oppressive groups. They do not worry about the sociological and cultural dynamics that are operative in such conversions. Numbers seem more important for them. They develop a theory of responsive groups as a special sign of the Spirit. One sometimes wonders whether there is a proper discernment in this matter. Sociological or even political conversions may have their place in history. God does manifest God-self in various ways under various circumstances. But a misplaced zeal may blind us to the real movements in history.

As a consequence of the process of secularisation and de-Christianization in the formerly Christian countries today we speak of mission on the six continents. There are non-believers everywhere. Mission is no longer in the South and the East of the world, but also in the North and the West. As a matter of fact, mission is more urgent in parts of the world where people do not seem to believe in anything at all than in areas where people are still very religious. The Missionary Institutes have had some difficulty adjusting to this reality. If their focus is the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus to non-believers, these are now right on their doorstep. But the Missionary Institutes have always seen mission as going to a distant country with a different culture and religion. So they are trying to adjust their sights in various ways. Therefore, mission *ad gentes* (i.e. non-believers) becomes mission *ad extra* (i.e. in foreign countries). There may be a lot of unbelievers at home. But they have to go outside their own countries in order to feel that they are missionaries. The stress is on people who have not yet heard the Good News as opposed to people who have been Christian and have now become de-Christianised. They talk about 'first evangelization'. Since conversion to Christianity remains their main focus, they search for areas where such a movement of peoples is still possible. This is the reason for their increasing interest in Africa as compared to Asia.

I have said above that today the local Churches feel responsible for mission in their own territories and co-responsible for universal mission. Given the fact that the Church is present everywhere in one way or another, the local Church must take responsibility for its mission. This means that Mission Institutes are invited to collaborate with the local Church wherever they are. One could even say that they should not work in a territory without being invited in some way by the local Church. The Mission Institutes, however, are not accustomed to play such a subordinate role. Even when the local Church is in place, the Mission Institutes may be tempted to patronize it and get away with it, especially when they still have financial power. The local Bishops invite Mission Institutes as some sort of foreign investors in their local apostolic projects, bringing in funds, if not personnel.

Missionary circles also evoke the idea of reverse mission. This supposes people from Asia, Africa and Latin America coming to Europe and North America to be witnesses to the Good News. This is possible and even welcome in principle. But there are a lot of difficulties in practice. I shall come back to some of these later.

Problems of Personnel

The problem of personnel may be solved in various ways. In International Mission Institutes the reduction of vocations from some areas in the world like Europe and America may be made up by vocations from other areas like Asia, Africa and Latin

America. Problems may arise as how to manage this. I shall come to them later. Mission Institutes that were originally based in one country (e.g. the Low Countries) or one region (e.g. Europe) now recruit members from other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Some of these Institutes may keep up their original geographical focus. For example, there are a number of Mission Institutes who limit their work to Africa like the White Fathers and Sisters and the Society of African missionaries. There are also examples of European Institutes handing over their works in Africa to Asian Institutes due to lack of personnel. There is no problem about this as long as intercultural issues in mission are kept in mind. The Church and the Mission Institutes are not like Multinational Corporations that transcend national and cultural borders in pursuit of markets and profits. These Corporations may relocate their industries wherever cheap labour is available. Mission Institutes cannot follow such policies. They must be more sensitive to the cultural dimensions of mission.

Another way of solving the problem of personnel is the promotion of lay and temporary associates. Young people today seem hesitant to commit themselves to a missionary Institute for life. But they are ready to offer their services in other countries for a few years. Similarly, lay people are ready to offer their services, sometimes with special expertise, for a limited period. They also experience this as a participation in the charism and spirituality of the Institute. Many Institutes have been encouraging and organizing such lay and temporary participation in recent years.

Some International Institutes may also bring people from Asia, Africa and Latin America to take over some of their work in Europe/North America. Later I shall mention some of the problems connected to such projects. Here, let me make an excursus on the practical problems of Gospel-culture encounter in the context of the work of the missionary Institutes.

Mission and Cultures

In the past, the missionaries built up local Churches in the image of a presumed universal Graeco-Roman Church. The pioneering efforts of Matteo Ricci and Robert de Nobili enabled them to make some external adaptations. But the core of doctrine, liturgical practice and church organization was not touched. Today we speak about the need for inculturation.[9]

The missionaries who go to a particular people to proclaim the Gospel try to acculturate themselves to the culture of the local people so that, through translation, they can communicate the Good News

to them. The people who respond to the Good News must be allowed to do so through the medium of their own culture. In this way they 'inculturate' the Gospel in their culture. The local culture has therefore a primary role in the process of evangelization. The acculturating effort of the missionaries and the inculturating attempt of the local people are both inter-cultural processes. The Gospel does not come in some abstract pure form, but is already inculturated many times over in the various cultures through which the tradition has passed: Jewish, Greek, Latin, and the other cultures to which the missionaries belong. Thus the Gospel-culture encounter becomes also an inter-cultural encounter. Even if the missionaries maintain that there is a universal Roman Catholic Culture with its Graeco-Latin roots, in practice even this is mediated through the culture of the countries from which the missionaries come. This culture is transmitted through the attitudes of the missionaries, their way of life, the saints and popular devotions they promote, etc. Such encounters can be mutually challenging and enriching, provided the people are able to grow through such encounters without losing their roots in their own cultures. In the perspective of the catholicity of the Church, the missionaries themselves can be seen as mediators between two cultures: the one from which they come and the one in which they work. Each culture brings out and highlights various dimensions of the Gospel and that is why an encounter of cultures can be enriching both culturally and evangelically. How conscious are the Mission Institutes of, and responsive to, this complex process? Various situations are possible. Let us examine some of them.

Various Scenarios

Missionaries from a particular culture, let us say, Dutch, come into a country in Africa. Though ideally and in the abstract the local people need encounter only the Gospel, they are also interacting with the culture of the missionaries. Even though, at the moment, real inculturation is made very difficult by the central authority of the Church's insistence on the normativity of the Jewish-Graeco-Roman cultural mediation of the Gospel, the people do succeed in inculturating the faith in their own way in popular religiosity. But they are also influenced by the culture of the missionaries. So we have Churches with hybrid cultures.

In the second scenario, Dutch vocations are decreasing and the Missionary Institute, being international, brings in missionaries from many other countries. They see this as international mission. The local people may learn to adjust to the various cultures of the missionaries in their relationships to them. The tension will be in the community of the missionaries.

Besides the Gospel which has universal relevance, they could claim a certain universality to the Jewish-Graeco-Roman culture and to the "culture" of the Institute as expressed by the charism of the founders and the Constitutions of the Institute. *These claims to universality are obviously false.* There simply are no universal cultures. While we accept that the Gospel was first expressed in Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultures and that we always have to go back to these first expressions to discover the Gospel, the Gospel itself has to be freed from these cultures through interpretation and has to be re-culturated in the local culture. The Jewish-Graeco-Roman Culture has no normative value. Real international institutes should not and would not claim to have a universal or international culture of their own. Their charism and identity would be differently inculturated in the various cultures of the world. If there is no such internationality, then there will be a domination of the majority cultural group in the Institute. This majority may be in terms of a particular culture or region. In our example, the Dutch missionaries have been there for many years and the others coming from different countries will have to adapt themselves to their culture. The Dutch may even claim that their culture is more developed or better compared to the cultures of the others coming from Asia or Africa. Eventually, the financial support which keeps the community going and the power structure in the Institute may decide which culture is supposed to be dominant and 'universal'.

A third scenario is when a European Mission Institute recruits vocations in Asia and sends them to Africa. Sometimes the recruits may even be trained in Europe. One may even project the illusion that by training them in Rome they are trained in a catholic, 'universal' culture. These recruits are rootless people. They are rooted neither in their culture from which they are taken away while still young, nor really in any European culture in which they are temporary foreign residents. They have nothing culturally worthwhile to communicate. They are a-cultural. They claim to witness to a supposedly 'universal' Gospel, free of all cultures. In practice, they will be second-class mediators of an European Church and a European Institute.

A Global View

Some Institutes try to get round the cultural problem by promoting multi-cultural mission communities with people coming from different countries. Multiculturalism is always a problem.[10] A pluralism of cultures is welcome. A variety of cultures can be enriching. The problem is that in most situations the cultures do not encounter each other

as equals. One culture always tends to dominate over the others. The reasons can be cultural, financial or political. The inter-cultural encounter in the process of Gospel-culture encounter is already a difficult problem. This need not be complicated by a group of missionaries who are multi-cultural. Ideally the culture around which they should come together is the local culture where they are working. But often this does not happen. Either the local culture is looked down upon by people who claim to come from a more developed culture. This may be true of Asians or Latin Americans working in Africa or among tribal groups in their own countries. Or the local culture is a well developed one and it is not easy to make it one's own. In this situation the multi-cultural groups of missionaries tend to gravitate around a dominant group. Often the dominant group takes their dominance for granted and expects the others to adapt themselves. Cultures with a colonial tradition or with material resources or with a dominant media often have such an attitude of domination. This complication could be avoided if the missionaries in a particular place come from one particular culture. A lot of tension can be avoided in this way. I do not think that multi-cultural communities of missionaries are necessary to mark mission as international. This might be good when all cultures are experienced as equal. When this is not so there will be tension, which is worse for not being acknowledged as cultural, but attributed lightly to personal attitudes and dispositions.

Sometimes, in the name of international or reverse mission, people from poor countries in Africa and Asia are 'imported' into Europe. Some of these seem to provide cheap labour in churches and religious institutions in some countries. They work in Old Peoples' Homes, Hospitals and Nurseries. Priests are welcome to celebrate the sacraments. These people are put in difficult cultural situations. They are rarely respected for their own culture and identity, coming as they do from the Third World. They end up doing institutional ministries or looking after migrants. They do not have a chance of doing real pastoral ministry, given the cultural conditions. European missionaries in Asia and Africa, for example, could work with local interpreters and catechists. In a colonial situation, celebrating the liturgy in Latin, they could get by with a few phrases in the local languages. Asian missionaries in Europe can hardly survive under these conditions. They are not really prepared for an authentic inter-cultural dialogue. They do not feel particularly welcome either. They get easily frustrated. The only people who can be considered authentic intercultural missionaries in Europe are Asians who witness to Asian Christian spiritualities that are born out of a dialogue of the Gospel with Hindu and Buddhist

religious traditions. There are Asian missionaries who initiate people in Europe in Asian methods of prayer and concentration leading to inner peace and harmony. These are the authentic 'reverse missionaries'. But these are very few. There are also a few theologians, rooted in Asian contextual theology, who may dialogue with their counterparts in Europe.

On the other hand, many Asian and African Institutes may see their presence and involvement in Europe as fund-raising ventures. I know many Indian Institutes, especially of women religious, who function in this manner. They may have the consolation of serving the old, the sick and children. But the conditions in which they work often make us (and others) look at them as cheap labour. The local laws in many European countries may not allow non-Europeans to engage in the kind of activities that many missionaries felt free to take up in the 'mission' countries, at least in the past. The Asians and Africans working at various administrative levels of the Institute are in a different kind of situation and do give a multicultural flavour and meaning to the Institutes. They are not really missionaries in the countries where they are living.

An Asian View

In recent years, both international and local Mission Institutes have come to Asia to recruit missionary vocations. Some are formed in Asia and sent to other 'mission' countries. Others are formed in Europe and sent to other Third World countries. Some are formed, at least partly, in the countries where they are going to work as missionaries. It is a welcome development that Asians are going out on mission. Ideally they should be witnesses to the Gospel as it has been inculturated in Asia. In that way they will be able to share, besides the Gospel, the riches that their culture has discovered in it and developed as well as the religious and cultural riches that are God's gift to them. I would not like them to be people who have no roots either in their country or in Europe, claiming a false internationality and universality.

Even when the missionaries are formed in Asia, the financial support often comes from Europe or America. Unfortunately those who control the funds also control the policy. It also leads to an unhealthy dependence on the European model of mission. The missionaries do not really represent the Asian Church in mission. They are like paid employees of a multi-national company.

Asia is sending missionaries.[11] But we do not see a sense of mission taking hold of most of the Asian

Christian communities. The Asian Christians are not making sacrifices to support their sons and daughters in mission. There is no wide awareness of mission as a dimension of their Christian life. The missionary spirit touches only those who are going on mission and not the others. When members of local religious Congregations go on mission they seem to go more out of a sense of obedience than with zeal for mission. The Asian Church is not becoming mission minded. The Asian missionaries are not supported by the Asian Christian community.

I think that the ideal is the foundation of Asian Mission Institutes, supported by Asian Churches. Asian missionaries may discover new ways in mission arising out of an Asian mission theology and spirituality and Asian pastoral practice. A poor Asian Church witnessing out of its poverty, without trying to imitate its colonial predecessors and without easy access to their funds, may have a different kind of impact on missionary outreach. Is it not a counterwitness to the Gospel when the Mission Institutes in Asia seem to have inexhaustible sources of funds when most of the local Christians are poor? Mission Institutes in Europe could gracefully accept the fact that they are dying and let new Mission Institutes be born elsewhere and let them grow and develop independently. Some sharing of experience is certainly welcome. But their freedom must be respected.

Challenges for the Future

What lessons can the Mission Institutes learn from this recent experience? First of all, let us accept that today mission is everywhere. The Good News of Jesus needs to be proclaimed everywhere. We could say that it is more urgent in the First World which is considered Christian by the rest of the world. It is seen as exploitative and oppressive continuing an economic colonialism supported by the power of arms and control of global political institutions.

Mission is no longer seen as Church-extension, but as an on-going dialogue with the poor, the religions and the cultures of the world, building the Kingdom of God and the Church as its symbol and servant.[12]

The Church is also present everywhere in one way or another. Mission is the responsibility of the local Churches. This may be the end of Missionary Institutes focused exclusively on foreign mission. The mission of the Church will find expression in various Mission Institutes. But they will focus as much on mission at home as on collaboration with the other local Churches in their mission. What we need then will be a global networking between Mission Institutes

for mutual support. We must also encourage local Churches to become authentically local culturally, organizationally and financially. If inculturation is an essential dimension of mission, is it still meaningful to equate, at least implicitly, 'mission' with 'foreign mission?'.[13] From my own experience in India I can say that 'foreign mission' does not seem very appealing to most young Indians, when there are many urgent challenges within the country. As I said earlier the Church in Asia as a whole does not have a mission consciousness. Was the desire for 'foreign mission' in the past linked in some way to the colonial spirit of adventure and domination, appropriately spiritualised, not excluding concern for the poor and the ignorant?[14]

Given the atmosphere of religious conflicts everywhere, mission can no longer take the form of aggressive proselytism. Mission will have to be witness and dialogue.[15] Religious pluralism has become the characteristic of most countries. For example, there are proportionately more Muslims in the Low Countries than Christians in the various countries of Asia, except the Philippines. Therefore witness and dialogue have to start at home and need not be sought in far away countries in Asia and Africa.

Most religious Congregations and Mission Institutes were founded during the Industrial Revolution in Europe. They focused on the needs of the time like social work among the poor, the education of the poor children, and health care for the sick and the dying. The Mission Institutes too took up these works where 'direct proclamation' was not possible. They were seen progressively as preparatory to indirect and integral evangelization. Now most of this work is the responsibility of the State. There are also many Non-Governmental Organizations in the field. Education and health have become commercial enterprises. I think that it is time that we rethink our mission strategies in this context. Our option for the poor leads us to struggle with them, not only to meet their needs, but to change the structures that cause them. But this struggle may take various forms according to situations. It may have to be in the media, through advocacy groups and international networking. Decisions in Bruxelles and Washington may influence economic and political life in Africa and Asia. It may be better to influence decision-making in these centres than rush to heal the consequences in the Third World, though the poor victims need to be cared for too. Prevention is always better than cure. Mission of this type requires different types of missionaries with different kinds of talent, study and training. The lay people may be more at home in it than clerics and religious.

In the secularised and de-Christianised world of today the need for mission will be in the area of ethics and spirituality that make life meaningful and peaceful. Asian methods of personal integration like yoga, zen and meditation/concentration are becoming popular everywhere, in the West as well as in the East. Today's missionaries should be primarily spiritual leaders and practitioners. We need people who can animate ethical reflection and action in a world in which the secular sphere is claiming absolute autonomy. The world is also divided in the name of cultures and religions. We need therefore people who can promote reconciliation and peace. These are new challenges in mission that need new Institutes. Once again this need not be the preserve of clerics and religious though a certain short- or long-term dedication can be helpful.

In the contemporary world, Mission Institutes will have to work with both permanent and temporary volunteers. The gender border also can be crossed. Appropriate structures will have to be worked out through practice and experimentation. If the force of mission is primarily directed against Satan and Mammon in which we find other religions as allies rather than as enemies, is it thinkable that Institutes that devote themselves to pursue particular goals like ethics in social and public life can be ecumenical and even inter-religious?[16]

Do not let us think of 'reverse mission' as bringing people from Eastern Europe or Asia or Africa to fill the increasing number of empty places in existing institutions. In a globalizing world international collaboration is necessary and welcome. But the aim is not to fill the gaps in a system that needs radical change. Stop-gap measures will only delay the change. For example, one does not solve the problem of a shortage of priestly vocations by importing priests from abroad. I have the impression that in areas like Africa and Latin America the 'missionaries' are actually filling the gaps that the local Churches are not able to fill because of a lack of vocations and because the Church is not ready to change its ministerial structures.

If the priority for contemporary mission is in the de-Christianised First World, the European Mission Institutes may have to rethink their own priorities. They could primarily engage in the prophetic proclamation of the Good News to people at home rather than rush elsewhere. Their continuing contact with the Third World will make their prophetic witness more meaningful and credible. Besides the members of other religions need not be sought elsewhere far away. They are next-door neighbours. They are coming to Europe as economic and political migrants.

In so far as the local Church is responsible not

only for mission at home but also co-responsible for the mission of the Church everywhere, the Mission Institutes too are expected to network and collaborate with other local Churches and Institutes elsewhere on the globe. The phenomenon of globalization both facilitates such inter-Church collaboration and brings new challenges. Mutual help may be financial and technical. It must reach the poor and the works for them and not merely enrich local Church and Mission Institutions and their personnel. Temporary and specialized volunteers may cross borders in all directions. International agencies may be needed to coordinate such action. They will take forms different from the traditional Mission Institutes.

Conclusion

Every Missionary Institute claims to have a special charism. Even when we accept this claim, we may consider that every charism need not be universal and eternal. Charisms do change or disappear when the context changes. If the Missionary Institutes do not change, reading the signs of the times, they will disappear. We need not feel sorry for them, while we are appreciative and thankful for the service they have done in the past. As long as the Church exists, there will be mission and this will be embodied in appropriate Mission Institutes. But this does not guarantee the continuance of the existing ones. The first type of Institute in which mission is one among many tasks may fare better in facing this crisis than the second type, especially if they are focused on one particular task or geographical area.

More thought should be given to the cultural, political and financial conditions of mission. The identity and individuality of the local Churches in the newly emerging mission-sending countries must be acknowledged and respected. These new Churches must be helped to become more aware of their being in mission emerging from their own theological, spiritual and cultural situation. The Church is by nature missionary. Every local Church must be missionary. It must give rise to its own Missionary Institutes. The older Mission Institutes could assist or facilitate this development without dominating or imposing themselves.

The personnel profile of many Mission Institutes is changing. The European members are aging and the Third World members are increasing in number. But if this demographic change is not accompanied by a change in vision and theology, goals and strategies, they are bound to encounter crises. It can be a painful process. But only death can bring new life — even to Mission Institutes.

Notes

[1] This is a thoroughly revised and expanded version of an article: "Les institutes missionaires en Asie", *Spiritus* 167 (2002) 161-170. This issue of *Spiritus* is on the theme "Les Instituts Missionnaires, quel avenir?" and can be usefully consulted.

[2] See Padmini Mongia, *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996); Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997).

[3] Gaudencio Rosales and C.G. Arévalo (eds), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Vol. I (Manila: Claretian, 1997), p. 130.

[4] See M. Amaladoss, "Le royaume, but de la mission", *Spiritus* 36 (1995) 291-304.

[5] *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Vol. 1, pp. 14-16.

[6] Cf. M. Amaladoss, "Foreign Missions Today", *East Asian Pastoral Review,* 25 (1988) pp. 104-118.

[7] Cf. M.M.Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM Press, 1969).

[8] For the distinction between the 'cosmic' and 'metacosmic' in religion, please see Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), pp. 71-74.

[9] Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Beyond Inculturation. Can the Many Be One?* Delhi: ISPCK/VIEWS, 1998.

[10] Cf. Gutmann, Amy (ed), *Multiculturalism.* (Princeton University Press, 1994); Cynthia Willet (ed), *Theorizing Multiculturalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

[11] Cf. James H. Kroeger, "Las Iglesias locales de Asia despierta a la misión", *Misiones Extranjeras,* 193-194 (2003) pp. 206-214.

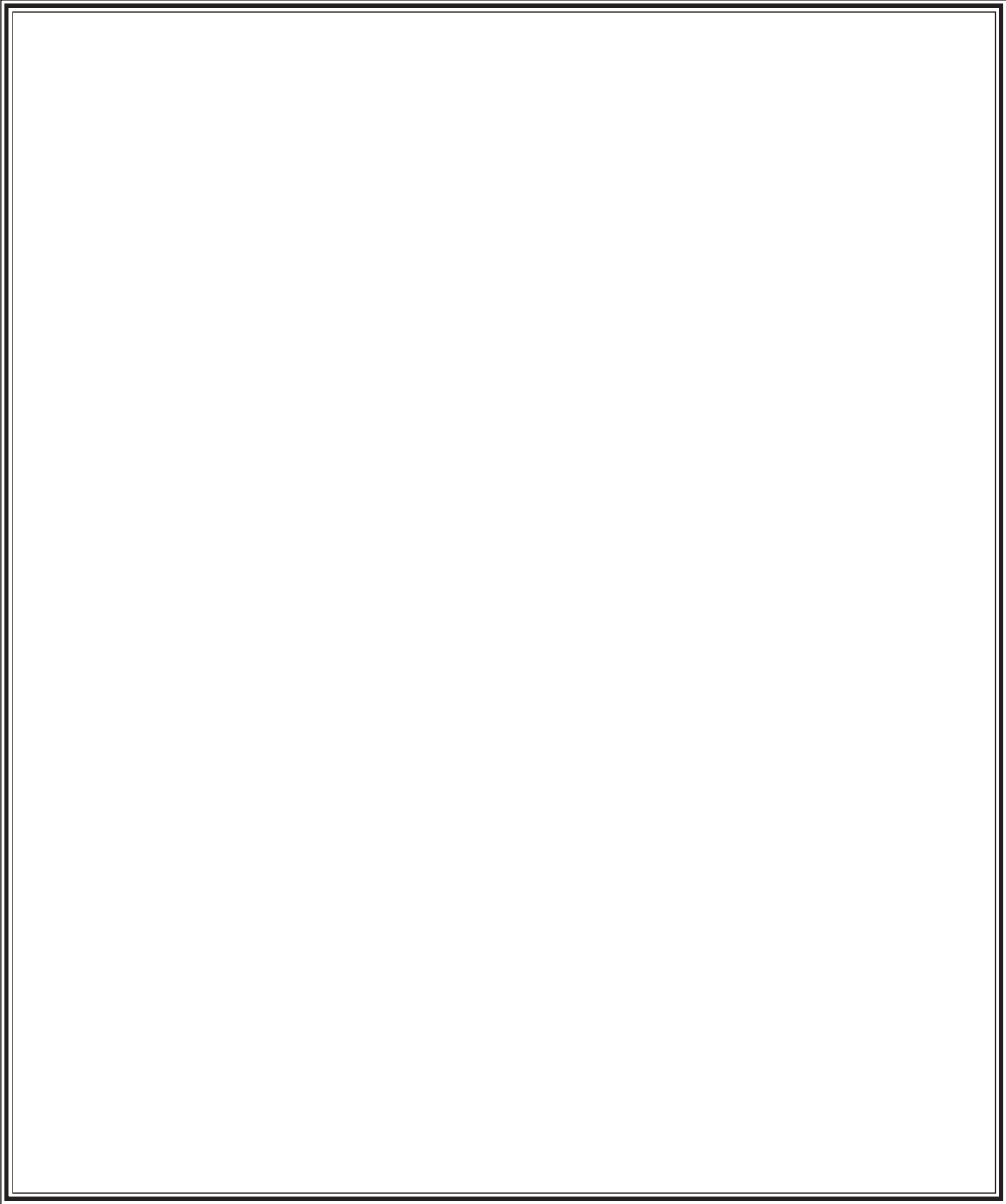[12] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission.* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

[13] For an example of possible tension between 'foreign' missionaries and the locals see Eric Manhaeghe, "Crise de croissance CICM aux Philippines", *Spiritus* n. 167 (2002) 155-160. The tension led eventually to a painful division.

[14] See R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism. Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998) Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1985); *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).

[15] Cf. Thomas Malipurathu and L. Stanislaus (eds), A *Vision of Mission in the New Millennium* (Mumbai: St. Paul's 2001).

[16] Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Making Harmony. Living in a Pluralist World* (Delhi: ISPCK/IDCR, 2003).

Ref.: Text from the Author.

Working Groups

Wednesday, 6 October, **Bible and Mission Group** 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**