sedos
Bulletin
2007

Vol. 39, No. 7/8 - July/August

Sedos - Via dei Verbiti, 1 - 00154 ROMA - TEL.: (+39)065741350 / FAX: (+39)065755787
SEDOS e-mail address: sedos@pcn.net - SEDOS Homepage: http://www.sedos.org
Servizio di Documentazione e Studi - Documentation and Research Centre
Centre de Documentation et de Recherche - Servicio de Documentación e Investigación

Editorial

We have slowly entered the slow pace of summer-time. Rome Universities close down and students and professors try to catch up on extracurricular reading that is not too heavy yet not too light. *SEDOS Bulletin* invites the readers to join us and take a general look at Mission today within the different cultural areas (America, North and South, Asia, Africa), analysing some of the implications and challenges for our work and emphasizing love and respect for the people as the key element of our inculturation endeavour.

Robert Schreiter, C.PP.S., in *"Short Term, Long Term, on Whose Terms?"* reminds us that our mission is not ours but God's mission, and we are called to participate in it; in terms of time, God's terms, the Church's terms....

Edgar G. Javier, S.V.D., in *"Mission in a Cross-Cultural Setting"* shares with us his way of experiencing mission as a 'cross-cultural enterprise in a cross-cultural setting'. Missionaries must first understand themselves and then understand the people they live with and minister to.

Sr Gloria Wirba, *"Mission in Africa Today: A Challenge"* dares us to go 'beyond the fundamental doctrine of faith to listen to and to embrace the world in which Africans find themselves today'.

— *"Understanding Salvation in the African Culture"* is the key we need to understand the way a missionary should interact with the people. Death is not the end but a sign of hope to reach the desirable land of the 'living-dead'.

Nicarnor Sarmiento in *"The Awareness of the Latin American Church to the Reality of the Indigenous Cultures"* invites us to enter into the history and development of the Latin American Church. It offers us an overview to the four Conferences – Rio de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla – Santo Domingo – from 'evangelising the indigenous people' to the 'respect of the cultural values of the indigenous groups' and 'discovering of the Seeds of the Word' in the patrimony of the indigenous cultures, the Church has come to a better understanding of the presence of God in those cultures.

As a final thought to these considerations on interculturality and mission, we present the work of **Jean Tonglet**: *"Répondre à la violence de la misère – L'enseignement de Joseph Wresinski"* as a reminder to help us understand how often our efforts to evangelise contribute to perpetuate the violence of misery instead of liberating the afflicted. Often we fail to identify the signs of violence perpetrated upon communities. Very often the violence of misery grows in a hidden way behind the façade of order, reason and even justice.

Fr Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP
SEDOS Executive Director

SEDOS Staff:

Publications, Subscriptions and Accounting:
Mrs. Ilaria Iadeluca
(redactionsedos@pcn.net - accountingsedos@pcn.net)

Sr. Celine Kokkat, JMJ
(adminsedos@pcn.net)

***Proof-reader*:**
English and French: Ms. Philippa Wooldridge

Short Term, Long Term, on Whose Terms?

- Robert Schreiter, C.PP.S. (Catholic Teological Union)* -

Introduction

I am grateful for the invitation to participate in the USCMA's Annual Conference, especially so because of the theme that has been chosen. The gathering of people at this conference provides a wonderful opportunity to explore the many sides of the question about the term of mission not only in matters of effectiveness achieved by varying amounts of time in mission, but also what are the theological and missiological implications of different lengths of service in mission. In this address I hope to explore some of them, and look forward to what promises to be an engaging discussion in the coming days.

As a way of getting started on this topic, I will make this presentation in four parts. The **first part** will be a brief sketch of some of the data available on differing lengths of mission. This will set the scene for the **second part**, which will look at what cultural factors contribute to even considering different lengths of service in mission. Are there factors, unique to this country, that need to be taken into account as we look at varied terms of mission? This will lead into the **third part** that will explore the theological and missiological ramifications of short- and longer-term mission. A **fourth** and concluding **part** will try to draw the various strands of this discussion together and pose some questions that deserve further examination. The phenomenon of short-term mission raises a host of interesting questions. My hope here is to explore a few of them.

The Profile of Missionary Service Today

The last decades of the twentieth century saw a remarkable change in the patterns of missionary service emanating from the United States. On the Catholic side, mission had heretofore largely (but not exclusively) been the province of religious orders. Missionary Orders had been founded during the nineteenth and through the first half of the twentieth century whose sole purpose was foreign mission. These joined others who were already in the field. After the Second World War, many religious orders in this country that had not been engaged previously in foreign missionary work at all began to take it up, especially in Latin America at the behest of Pope Pius XII. Beginning in the 1970's, the number of missionaries being sent out by all of these religious orders began to plummet dramatically as the number of candidates for those orders declined. By the mid-1970's, another phenomenon began to manifest itself.

Shorter-term missionaries came increasingly on the scene. Most of these were laypeople, although there were also some diocesan priests and men and women religious in their ranks. The numbers of these have continued to increase. The length of service was clearly set in defined terms of time, most of which could be renewed. The scene changed considerably as missionaries were sent out for several months to three years. During this period of time there have emerged missionaries who have consistently renewed their periods of service so that there are now term missionaries who have served more than twenty years.

On the Protestant side, the number of international missioners coming from the mainline churches has continued to drop. The overwhelming majority of international Protestant missioners today coming from the conservative end of the spectrum — evangelicals, Pentecostals, and fundamentalists. Most of these are supported by independent mission agencies with no denominational affiliation or are sent by individual congregations.

Just what does the scene look like today? For this I am relying on the most recent survey done by the Catholic Network of Volunteer Service, and presented at their National Conference in November of 2005.[1] To be

sure this is a survey of those programmes that are members of the CNVS, but that organization provides, to my knowledge, by far the most comprehensive picture that is available to us. Moreover, 86% of the member organizations responded to the survey — a surprisingly large number — so it offers us the best snapshot of the current scene available.

Let me give some highlights from that Report. In 1983 there were 65 volunteer programmes affiliated with the CNVS; in 2005, there were 212. That is nearly quadruple the number involved. In 1992, there were about 5,000 lay missioners/volunteers; by 2004 there were over 10,000. The bulk of these lay missioners (about 90%) are involved in domestic programmes. The CNVS Survey reports that the number of international volunteers has been dropping since 1999 from a high of a little over 1,100 to a little under 900, a drop of nearly 20%.

Regarding term of service, about 75% of these overseas missioners serve for 12 months or less. Of that 75%, about half of these volunteers served three weeks or less, and about 40% served 9-12 months. A little over 60% of all volunteers are female, with slightly under 40% male. They are overwhelmingly (nearly 85%) Caucasian.

Given that the term of service may run from a week to a year for 75% of the missioners, it is not surprising that over half are under the age of 20. The shortest service opportunities are aimed at summer and school break time. A quarter of all volunteers are between the ages of 21-25; this no doubt represents many of the post-college programmes that are conducted by religious orders. Indeed young people between the ages of 21 and 25 make up more than half of all long-term (defined as 9 months or more) service. Interesting too is the fact that more than 90% of all long-term missioners complete their term of service. In 2004, more than 40% of long-term missioners renewed their term of service.

Seventy percent of all long-term missioners have at least four years of college. For shorter periods of service, slightly over half have a high school education — again, showing the fact that the short-term missioners tend to be under 20.

What kind of service do these missioners provide? For the short-term missioners, over half provide social services. For long-term missioners, the largest single block, provide education (i.e., general, not religious, education).

So what emerges from this picture? Let me sketch out what seem to me to be salient points. I begin with the larger context. According to the 2005-2006 figures from the U.S. Catholic Mission Association,[2] there are a little over 6,500 U.S. missioners working internationally. Of these, just over 1,400 — or not quite 20% — are lay missioners. The women-to-men ratio —roughly 6 to 4 — is about the same for both religious and lay missioners.

There has been extraordinary growth in short-term missioners, with half of these under the age of 20. For long-term missioners, the age group 20-25 makes up half of those serving a year or more. Seventy percent of these have had at least four years of college. So in terms of sheer numbers, both short-term and long-term missioners are substantially under the age of 25. In one way, this is not surprising: once these missioners begin families long-term service becomes more complex as decisions have to be made regarding the well-being of children. One hundred and sixty-two missioners working in the short term reported being married, while 154 married missioners were working in the long term. Sixty-four short-term missioners reported have dependent children, while just 18 long-term missioners reported having dependent children. Thus only about 7% of lay missioners serving in both short-term and long-term are married.

Cultural and Social Factors Affecting the Term of Service

As we begin to reflect on what the implications for mission are, it could be useful to begin by providing a cultural and social frame for these reflections. Are there things in the cultural and social environment of the United States that help us understand better what is going on in mission? I would like to reflect on three of these.

The first of these is changes in our understanding of the life cycle. At the height of the industrial age in the United States — running roughly from 1880-1970 — those who entered the job market outside the home were likely to engage in the same kind of work

for most of the rest of their lives. This was partially explained by the level of education; most people had relatively limited education until the end of that period and so could not move around easily in the job market. There was in some trades and professions as well a sense of loyalty to one's employer who in turn would be loyal to the employees. Henry Ford was one of the pioneers in this, raising working class wages in his factory and being repaid by lifelong fidelity of the workforce. This even stretched across generations. In its heyday IBM ("Big Blue") tried to do much the same.

The volatility of the employment scene that has resulted from globalization and technological advances has changed all that. There are now some who say that those entering the workforce must be prepared to change their professions — not just jobs within professions — three or more times over their working life. As the median age of the population has risen, people no longer think in terms only of work and retirement. The work possibilities become more variegated.

What does this mean for mission service? If one starts to look at one's life in segments of time, some period can be allotted to work like mission. For the preponderance of young people who participate both in short-term and longer-term service, it can be seen as part of a larger preparation for one's working life. For those in high school, having such service on one's resumé is helpful in seeking admission to *élite* colleges.

I do not of course want to reduce the motivation of young people to these factors. Their desire to serve is certainly much more complex than that. But these factors cannot be overlooked. That in both of these groups, (the short-term missioners under 20, and the 21-25 age group serving long-term), more than eighty percent of the participants are Caucasian points to the fact that a certain level of privilege gives them the option of thinking in these terms.

A second cultural and social factor that deserves attention is the distinctive feature of the age cohort under 25. These young people have self-designated themselves as "millennials", inasmuch as they began coming of age at the turn of the millennium. The research that has been done on this age group finds them more altruistic, more intellectually curious, and more at home in cross-cultural and interracial settings than the two previous age cohorts (usually known as Generation X and the Baby Boomers).[3] This openness can be partially accounted for by the fact that at least the older members of this age cohort came of age in a time of economic prosperity and relative stability (the years of Bill Clinton's presidency). Annual surveys of college freshmen support this general finding about altruism and ability to live with difference, with the added note that Catholics in this group tend to be especially well represented in these statistics.[4] To be sure altruism, curiosity, and ease with difference do not characterize all young Catholics, but it certainly is a salient factor. A supporting factor from the CNVS Survey shows that among those who go on to graduate school after completing their service, the great majority choose the "helping professions" — education, social work, theology and medical care. Across the country, those involved in graduate theological education have noted in recent years a new group coming to study theology: they typically have spent one or two years in some social service after college, and now want to study theology, at least through the Master's level.

I think that volunteer mission service — both short term and longer term — is providing a wonderful outlet for these aspirations among young people. It provides a forum that not only expands their spiritual horizons, but gives them invaluable experience that will help them shape their adult lives.

The third factor worth considering is the strong tradition of volunteerism in the United States. De Tocqueville noted it already in his travels through the country in the 1830's. The idea that volunteerism may be on the decline was signaled in 2000 by Robert Putnam in his book, *Bowling Alone,*[5] where he detected a significant drop in the amount of participation in shared activities, due to the aggressive individualism of U.S. society. The debate that the book ignited ended up presenting a more nuanced picture. Participation in bowling leagues, card clubs and the like has indeed declined. But the principal reason for that decline is the growing complexity of ordinary life. People still do volunteer, but for shorter periods of time and under carefully specified conditions. A postmodern, globalized society puts a great deal of strain on volunteering, but it has by no means disappeared. A somewhat parallel phenomenon can be found in wider circles in the growth of new social movements

and Non-Governmental Organizations.

In the United States, the Church is very much seen to be a voluntary agency, in contrast with the State Churches still found in Europe. There the Church is often viewed as a department or agency of the State, whereas here one joins a church out of choice. It is precisely that U.S. view that many people see as the reason why secularization is not felt more strongly here as it is now being experienced in Europe. Put another way, the culture and tradition of volunteerism helps create a friendly environment for short-term and long-term mission service, especially when such volunteer opportunities are nested in a voluntary agency itself.

All in all, then, one can identify at least these three factors that contribute to creating a cultural and social environment within which mission service is bound to flourish. Other countries outside the United States send term missioners as well. It is my guess that these are most likely to catch people's imagination when at least the first of the two cultural factors — a longer life-cycle with changing employment patterns and a large cohort of millennials — are in place.

Theological and Missiological Factors in Missionary Service

I turn now to the third part — theological and missiological factors that are evidenced or may be in play among those engaging in short-term and long-term missionary service. By theological factors I mean changes in ideas in our Tradition that might impinge upon mission service in some way. I believe that there are at least three key theological factors that deserve our attention here.

Theological Factors

The first is the universal call to holiness that came out of the Second Vatican Council. In this vision of the Church, there is no longer a clerical centre with a lay periphery. The most important sacrament *vis-à-vis* our membership in the Church is not Holy Orders, but Baptism (*cf. Lumen Gentium*, nn. 30-31). Laity and clergy are all part of the People of God.This insight has had far-reaching implications. To some extent, it has erased the boundary between the laity in general and those who join religious institutes. But it has also served to make the spiritual life of lay people more expansive. The associations that have been set up by religious institutes to share their charism and spirituality with others have led more than 50,000 people to enter these associations. Some lay mission programmes have been inspired by the same desire to share not only charism and spirituality, but also mission. Engaging in these mission programmes becomes part of that quest for holiness, for a deeper participation in the life of Christ and of the Church. Such associations have led to a significant revitalization of religious life, as their membership declines and ages.

A second theological factor that has shaped these developments in mission has been the Church coming to see itself as essentially missionary, and that the whole People of God share in the mission of the Church and in the world. Mission is no longer to be seen as a separate department within the Church. The Church is by its very nature missionary, participating in the mission of the Holy Trinity in the world. Thus, mission can no longer be seen solely as a specialized profession within the Church, but something incumbent upon everyone. Lay missioners are hearing that call. They participate fully in that missionary character of the entire Church.

A third theological factor has been a rediscovery of the centrality of social justice to the Church's mission. The growing body of Catholic Social Teaching, beginning with Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, through the Council and especially the 1970 Synod of Bishops to the pontificate of John Paul II, Catholic Social Teaching has moved social justice to the centre of Catholic consciousness. Nowhere is that clearer than among missioners. If the Great Commission of Matthew's Gospel (28:19-20) formed the principal biblical call to mission through the nineteenth and into the mid-twentieth century, it has been Jesus' discourse in the Synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:18-19) that has captured the imagination of missioners since the Vatican Council. Confronting injustice and the struggle for justice provides a sharp "contrast experience" that can suddenly open up the message of Jesus for people. Especially for those who have come out of a comfortable existence, and now see the suffering and oppression going on in the world, it ushers in a call to promote the Reign of God. Inasmuch as a significant amount of short-term and

long-term mission service focuses on social service, it provides a natural venue for experiencing the meaning and impact of Catholic Social Teaching.

Missiological Concerns

I would like to turn to some missiological concerns, inasmuch as they can be separated from theological ones. By "missiological" concerns I mean concerns that grow out of the practice or experience of mission that in turn help shape the theory of mission. There are two that seem especially relevant to our discussion here.

The first grows out of a question that I have heard voiced among missioners from religious institutes: Are these forms of mission (short-term, fixed long-term) really *mission*? Put some other ways: Are they authentic forms of evangelization? Or are they simply cultural or social exposures of people to a world different from their own? Is calling these short — of fixed-term experiences simply a way of giving these exposures a little more exalted status?

Let me try to separate these out a bit. There has been a continuing debate in missiological circles about just what constitutes mission. There is a feeling that, by saying that the whole Church is missionary, everything gets labelled "mission". There are those who say only primary evangelization — preaching the Gospel to those who have never heard it — is the only activity that deserves to be called "mission". Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, voiced similar concerns. Was proclamation of the Gospel being downplayed to such an extent that it disappeared as the preferred form of evangelization? There is a history to all of this that shapes our current discussion.

There was a great deal of confusion about the meaning of mission after the Second Vatican Council. This was partially caused by the work of the Council, but even more by a crisis that faced missionary institutes. As the European colonial period ended, missioners and mission societies were accused of having colonized not only territory, but even worse, the imagination of people, stripping them of their own culture in order to become Christians. In other words, to become a Christian you had to deny your own culture and accept the culture of the imperial West. Some people in newly independent countries called for an end to mission; the missioners were to go back to where they came from.

Dialogue with other religious traditions came on the scene as well, and led some to question the propriety of direct proclamation. If we were to accept what was true, good and beautiful in these other traditions, as the Vatican Council enjoined us, did not proclamation become offensive and contrary to the very purposes of dialogue? Should not dialogue replace mission as proclamation of the Gospel?

These two developments created a crisis for mission. Discussions about what to do continued through the 1970's. In 1981 SEDOS, the Service and Documentation Centre in Rome established by nearly a hundred religious orders engaged in mission, held a ten-day conference to try to come to an answer to the burning question of the future of mission. The result was an affirmation of the continued importance of mission, and that missionary activity had four dimensions: proclamation, dialogue, inculturation, and commitment to the liberation of the poor.[6] Mission was thus multi-faceted, and had to be understood in this multidimensional manner. Pope Paul VI had affirmed as much in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975 in his reflections on the nature of evangelization.

There is still, however, a tendency to drop back into a default position, as it were, and say that only explicitly religious proclamation or instruction can be truly called evangelization. But any experienced missioner knows that the context of evangelization is always more complex than that. If evangelization is to be a comprehensive reality, as Paul VI so eloquently described it, our actions must reflect that and take that into account.

The second part of answering the question — is it really mission — has to do with the agents of mission and those to whom the Gospel message is addressed. Critiques especially of short-term mission point out that most mission service projects are not of sufficient duration to warrant calling them "real" mission. The young people or others involved in so-called "mission" projects do not learn the language and customs of a people sufficiently so as to be able to communicate with them in any profound manner. If anyone benefits from the project, it is not the people to whom these short-term missioners go, but

the short-term missioners themselves. At best, they would say, it is of some benefit to these short-term missioners in their own spiritual development; at worst, it is an exercise in narcissism and potentially harmful. The presence of large numbers of short-term missioners (especially in very short projects) may actually harm the social ecology of the place, adding to oppression or injustice rather than diminishing it. This criticism has also been levelled at those who work for a year or two years. These longer-term missioners reap the benefit of their experience and then take these benefits home with them. The poor are left with nothing.

It is understandable how such critiques can be made. And there have no doubt been situations where this criticism accurately describes what has happened. So it all bears a little closer analysis.

Anyone who has crossed a cultural boundary as more than a tourist knows that one cannot learn another culture or language instantly. Even staying a year may not be enough to go beyond the "honeymoon" period where the difference experienced in the other culture makes it "exotic". But there can be — and have been — other readings of the short-term mission experience. The object of evangelization may not be "them" — those whom "we" visit. Perhaps one of the most significant features of short-term mission — even mission lasting up to two years — is how it can change the lives of those who experience it. Especially when these experiences come in the late teens and into the twenties, it can mark out a course for an entire life. For those who come as missioners, it may be the first exposure to poverty, or what our governmental policies are doing to others. For the people in those settings themselves, they can find a number of important, if unexpected, benefits. In Latin America, for example, I have seen people there who accept short-term missioners because it is an opportunity to show them the oppressive results of U.S. foreign policy. Their hope is that the missioners will indeed undergo conversion — and go back to convert the United States. For others, who had never had a personal encounter with people from the United States, it led to revising some of the stereotypes they had about *yanquis*. In still other ways, those who have been oppressed (I am thinking especially of indigenous peoples here), they come to realize that their own culture is valuable and valued and that they have something very special to share with people who may have many possessions but lack spiritual depth.

What of course becomes important here is how short-term mission is structured and supervised so as not to inflict more suffering on people who have already suffered far too much. But there is also a theological point to be made here. If we are indeed a missionary Church, and are all called to mission, then the lines between sender and recipient are going to become reciprocal. Long-term missioners often say how mission has changed them, and how returning to the United States becomes increasingly difficult. Evangelization runs in many directions. In a world Church today, it is not simply a matter of sending churches and receiving churches. It needs to run in many different ways.

A second missiological concern related to the first goes something like this: Can there be *real* mission if any term or time limit is put on engagement in mission at all? Is anything but a lifelong commitment what mission truly requires?

This kind of idea arises out of how mission has been perceived over the last two centuries. Until fairly recently, the expense and duration of travel was such that missioners going out from their home country were making a commitment for lifetime service. It meant life commitment in another way as well: many lost their lives, especially in equatorial climes, as they fell victim to diseases against which they had no immunity. The rise of missionary religious institutes, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where profession to the religious institute constituted a commitment to lifelong mission, only strengthened this feeling about the length of term of service.

The feeling that lifelong mission was the only mission was supported also by the missionary spiritualities that served to foster and sustain the mission vocation. As Angelyn Dries has suggested in her study of U.S. Catholic missioners, to be a missioner — at least up to the time of the Second Vatican Council — was to live a spirituality of heroism and/or of martyrdom.[7] If viewed from that perspective, no missioner can be a sometime martyr or short-term heroic figure. But what this still pervasive sentiment regarding the missioner calls us to do is to investigate more carefully what underlies the spirituality of

missioners today, who make Luke 4:18-19 or some other biblical passage the basis of their motivation. Are there distinctive features to a missionary spirituality today? Let me make but one suggestion.

Certainly for the short-term missioner, "bridge builder" might be appropriate. The short-term experience leads to opening up new horizons which the missioner can carry back to his or her home community. The experience may serve as the basis of a call to a deeper kind of vocation. The fact that so many of the young term missioners choose the helping professions as their life's work, rather than simply finding a job which leads to acquiring wealth, is indicative that something like this is going on.

Put another way, perhaps we should look at how term missioners and their experience may be pointing us to thinking through our missiology in another way rather than trying to fit the short- and longer-term experience into pre-existing categories.

Where Do We Go from Here?

What is the future of short-term and longer-term mission? In this concluding section, let me try to situate our examination of this question within the wider context and in light of what has been presented here. It falls into three sections. **The first** has to do with sustaining forms of term mission into the future. **The second** revisits the theological and missiological issues just discussed. And **the third** and final part addresses the question: on whose terms?

Sustaining Term Mission into the Future

What issues surround sustaining term mission — of the shorter or the longer variety — into the future? Here we have some things to learn from our Protestant counterparts, who have been working with term systems for many years. They have experience with how the issue of terms can change within the lives of the missioners themselves. When children reach a certain age — especially in secondary school — family issues may come to predominate over the ministry issues.

If we look at the current state of Catholic mission, it is largely (although by no means completely any more) sustained through religious institutes. As numbers decline and members age in those institutes, they themselves are being faced with the question of sustainability. We have seen this happening already with healthcare institutions, with schools, and with parishes. While mission service organizations are already being entrusted to lay people to manage them, the question will be what happens as the religious institute may be no longer able to provide the needed financial support. We can already look at what some institutes have decided to do. The Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers have set up their lay missioners as a separate, canonically recognized body that could be able, in principle, to continue should the Maryknoll Society reach a point where it can send no more priests and brother missioners. The Bethlehem Fathers (the national missionary institute of Switzerland) are working with a structure whereby their lay missioners constitute the overarching institution within which the priests have a separate place. As we look at women's congregations, even more creative models are likely to emerge.

The likely trajectory of the huge spiritual associate movement among religious institutes might serve as a cautionary tale here. Most of these associates are middle-aged or older — the same age as the members of the institutes. When those institutes are gone, will this movement continue? We do not know, but it would seem unlikely. This may be the same fate for those term mission programmes that depend on religious institutes, some of which (the institutes) may not survive.

Although the number of U.S. and European missioners who are religious will continue to decline, the number of life-term missioners from the Global South continues to grow, both within already existing international religious institutes and in new missionary institutes emerging in Africa and Asia. It is with these people that short — and longer-term missioners from the United States will have to interact.

Will young people especially, and people of all ages continue to show an interest in mission? That is certainly to be hoped for, even though we have no way of predicting the future in that regard. Certainly in countries where the birthrate is below the level of replacement of the population, more and more young people will find themselves having to enter the workforce sooner. That will have a negative effect on all but the shortest-term

mission experience. The United States is not yet at that point, thanks to immigration. But all of Europe already is.

Another feature that may figure in the immediate future is the intense animosity against the United States and the impact this may have on U.S. missioners operating outside the United States. Skills for dealing with trauma and conflict are increasingly important in the missioner's repertory. The Pew Institute keeps reporting a steadily dropping rate of favour for U.S. citizens, even among our allies. Given that the percentage of long-term international missioners is already fairly small, this may come to shrink even further.

The Ongoing Impact of Term Mission on Theology and Missiology

As was already seen above, there have been changes in mission throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, especially into these first years of the twenty-first. The context in which mission is done, and the theology of mission that came out of the Second Vatican Council has changed how we imagine mission and how we engage in it. A stronger sense of the Church as essentially missionary, and the universal call to holiness and participation in the mission of the Church has changed the face of mission today. Consequently, we should be careful not to try to squeeze contemporary experiences of mission too quickly into our pre-arranged boxes. That the numbers of short-term missioners have continued to grow so rapidly may be one of those "signs of the times" to which we should be attending. Our missiological strategies should be informed by a praxis that feeds back into our theology the experiences we are encountering.

Whose Terms?

I wish to conclude with the final part of the title of this conference and this presentation; namely, on whose terms do we engage in mission?

To a great extent, the terms have been set by the Holy See and by the religious institutes. The latter have carried the major part of what had been considered mission work. As their numbers decline here and in other wealthy countries, they may have no choice but to cede whatever terms they had been able to set forth.

To say simply that the terms will be ceded to others engaged in short- or longer-term mission has to take into account that term mission depends upon an infrastructure that sustains it. To the extent that infrastructure is in place, to that extent that handing on of the direction of mission will be able to happen. We will need to do two things at once. If, on the one hand, we say all Christians are to be engaged in mission, then we should try to bring that about. But on the other hand, this will not happen if a wider body is not given the resources and the capacity to make decisions about mission.

In trying to think through these future dimensions, it is important to remember that mission is ultimately on God's terms. This is not our mission; it is God's mission, in which we are called to participate. If indeed God is calling people into shorter and long-term mission, then it is up to us to find ways to make that happen.

Footnotes

* USCMA Annual Mission Conference, University of Notre Dame, 1 October 2006.

[1] "2004-2005 Membership Survey Results". I am grateful to Michael Montoya, MJ, for making this available to me.

[2] Statistics may be found in the executive summary at: uscatholicmission.org/go/missionersurveystatistics.

[3] Representative of this literature is Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

[4] These are published annually in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

[5] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of Human Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

[6] The proceedings of this conference may be found in Joseph Lang and Mary Motte (eds.), *Mission and Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982).

[7] Angelyn Dries, *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

Ref.: Periodic Paper, n. 3, Fall 2006. Periodic Papers are published by USCMA. They feature short reflections on issues pertaining to mission. Additional copies may be purchased from: *USCMA,* Fourth Street, NE Washington, DC 20017-1102. Phone: 202 884-9764 Fax: 202-884-9776 [E-mail: uscma@uscatholicmission.org — Web site: www.uscatholicmission.org]

Mission in a Cross-Cultural Setting

- Edgar G. Javier, SVD* -

Introduction

Many times I have been asked what made me enjoy my work in Oceania. My spontaneous response is something like this: "Mission is a journey; mission is encountering people who are different from us. What made me enjoy my years of mission work in Oceania was, and in fact still is, my passion for peoples and their living cultures. Thanks to missiology and anthropology, I came to experience that mission is a cross-cultural enterprise in a cross-cultural setting".

Doing mission in a cross-cultural setting is the topic of this paper. It is written with the belief and conviction that missionaries should not only understand themselves but also the people they live with and minister to. In a cross-cultural setting, missionaries are to be more sensitive to the people and their culture, history, and the social changes taking place in their society. For this reason, missionaries are to be more aware of, not ignore, the complexities of social and cultural changes that are happening in the mission place.

This essay is a kind of retrospective look at the past. In writing this essay, I am again in touch with the wisdom of those Pacific Islanders with whom I have forged a close relationship. They have taught me to be a good, if not better, missionary in a cross-cultural setting.

Contexts in Mission

Mission contexts play an important factor in the movements of missionaries and the conduct of mission itself.[1] These contexts are where missionaries encounter God's purposes for human beings in the concrete. They are a *locus missiologicus* where missionaries participate in those purposes. These contexts provide the missionaries with the opportunity to experience the message the Church has incarnated in the life and the world of those who have embraced it.[2]

While in American Samoa I was invited to give formation seminars in many places in Oceania. While the countries or local Churches/dioceses have many similarities, they also abound in differences. A case in point here would be the Church in Vanuatu. The ni-Vanuatu who are Catholic speak French, while the ni-Vanuatu who are Anglican, Episcopalian, Lutheran, etc., speak English. Traces of colonial times are still felt in these churches. However added to this, there is the distinctively Melanesian genius in their life as a Christian community. But there is more to this personal observation if we look more closely at Vanuatu.[3]

Vanuatu boasts of having 113 distinct languages and innumerable dialects. This makes it one of the most culturally diverse countries in Oceania. This amazing diversity is a result of 3,000 years of sporadic immigration from many Pacific countries.

Today, there are four main cultural areas. In the northern areas, there are two variations of a social and political society where men and women can 'purchase' positions of status. Wealth, in the form of mats and pigs with rounded tusks, is not defined by how much an individual owns, but by demonstrating how much he/she can give away.

In the central areas, Polynesian-type systems have predominated. Here, a hereditary Chief is a powerful authoritive figure reigning over an entire class system, complete with nobles and commoners. In the southern islands, particularly Tanna, titles or names are bestowed on certain men, which designate them as chiefs. This status can give them rights over land and even the possession of entire

social groups. Women have a very low status whereas in places like Ambae and the Shepherds, women can achieve the rank of chief. The situation is complicated even further by the introduction of more recent 'religions' such as the John Frumm's (cargo cult)[4] and the Halfs Halfs and various men's secret societies, both on Tanna and to a lesser extent, on Santo and other islands.

However, throughout all the islands one thing remains constant. Life is characterized by a constant cycle of ritual events. Every aspect of a person's life is celebrated by extended families that number in the hundreds, filial relationships being remembered back in time through countless generations. Birth, circumcision and initiation, the achievement of status, marriage and death are a paramount feature of a community's social life. With so many relatives, there seems to be a significant ritual of some sort happening or about to happen, somewhere.

With no written language, story-telling, song and dance are of paramount importance. Art, in its many forms, from body decorations and tattoos, to elaborate masks, hats and carvings, is also a vital part of ritual celebrations and the social life of the village.[5]

Ni-Vanuatu culture is also abundant in myths. Legends of significant cultural importance are still based on natural formations, the presence and causes of volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters. Even today, natural events are considered not to be the result of, say, plate tectonics or the chance passing of a cyclone, but brought about by the actions of individuals who may have offended certain spirits.[6]

Despite the introduction of European ideas, the disastrous effects of missionaries and black-birders and the development of Bislama[7] as a universal language (loss of language being a prime destroyer of primitive cultures worldwide), Vanuatu's richness and diversity of culture is one of its primary attractions to foreigners. Rituals, the obligations of kinship and traditional ceremonies are an integral part of modern life that can be appreciated more fully if one works or visits one of Vanuatu's many islands.

Vanuatu is a pluralist society. Different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups form a mosaic of people who are determined to move forward to their common destiny. Like many island nations in Oceania, Vanuatu is a challenging context for mission.

Anthropology for Mission

To enter, know, appreciate, live, and work in a given context, a missionary needs some understanding of, and training in, anthropology. The question then is: Why anthropology for mission?

Schreiter argues that "this is a critical question and that we must face it squarely and answer it carefully". According to him, "cultural anthropology has become important – indeed essential – to the missiological enterprise. No one would be considered adequately trained for cross-cultural missions now without some understanding of cultural anthropology".[8] Shenk expresses the same conviction. According to him, "the study of culture is of unquestioned importance to the conduct of mission especially where we are concerned with cross-cultural communication of the Gospel".[9]

Realizing the autonomy and force of culture in human affairs, Menamparampil asserts, "It has become imperative for evangelizers, especially those working across cultures, to have some acquaintance with social anthropology and cultural psychology".[10]

Hiebert also explains why anthropology is essential for mission. He says: "There has been a growing awareness in the social sciences, particularly in anthropology, of the need to understand people in their cultural settings".[11]

Indeed anthropology is important for the evangelizing work of the Church. The underlying reason is this — missionaries will have a better understanding, deeper appreciation, and more active participation in the way of life of the people they live and work with. Knowledge of anthropology helps the missionary avoid proclaiming a message that is meaningless and irrelevant, or a message that is considered foreign and, therefore, unacceptable.

As expressed elsewhere, "relevance absolutely holds the key to evangelizing

success. There is no use answering questions that no one is asking, providing information that no one is seeking, and offering services that are not needed in today's society. When there is no relevance, there is no possibility of a worthwhile encounter, there is no meeting point".[12]

Relevance opens the door to successful and meaningful work in the missions. Let me cite one experience I had in American Samoa. I remember explaining the mystery of the incarnation to my students for the permanent diaconate at Fatuoaiga Pastoral and Cultural Centre in American Samoa. The word I used was "Atali'i" – which means "son" in the Samoan language. "Atali'i" is derived from two words – "Ata" [picture, image] and "Ali'i" [lord, chief, master]. "Atali'i, derived from " le ata a le Ali'i" – literally it means, "[the son is] the image of the lord". This word "Ali'i", but especially its etymology and meaning, served as the starting point for the discussion and explanation of the mystery of the Incarnation. I was so happy when I saw nods and smiles of approval on the students' faces. Never before, they said, was the term explained this way.

In the past, and even today, many missionaries emphasize that they are well equipped for the mission. They claim they have solid theology at their beck and call. For them, that is good enough luggage to take along. On account of this, they rarely stop to examine the people they serve and the cultures they have to enter and participate in. What happens then is that they are like hunters shooting in the air, missing the target. The message they bring is often misunderstood and considered "foreign".

On the other hand, there are also missionaries who over-emphasize or stress the value of knowledge of contemporary human settings. They downplay the importance of a solid theology of mission. This group is in danger of losing the "why" or theology of mission.

Mission work is a cross-cultural enterprise. It implies that missionaries cannot divorce their theologies from their anthropological models. To do so is to imply a separation between the spiritual and temporal nature of human beings.

New missionaries must realize that they have to learn some painful lessons from history. They have to accept the fact that indeed the peoples of the world are different from each other and that they live in diverse, historical and cultural contexts. If mission is "the greatest religious adventure, it calls us to a triple conversion — to God, to culture, and to other people. This must be our abiding concern".[13]

Missiological Anthropology

Missiological anthropology rests on three solid theological foundations. They are, according to Luzbetak, the following: the role of the Holy Spirit; genuine spirituality for mission and deep faith; as well as human knowledge and skills.[14] Let us see what these mean for missionaries in cross-cultural settings.

The Holy Spirit — Missiological anthropology insists on the primacy of the Holy Spirit in mission action. This means that the mission of the Church is essentially a spiritual activity — i.e., the work of the Holy Spirit (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 75). *Lumen Gentium*, for example, after presenting the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation (nn.1, 9, 45), explains the root of this ecclesial "mystery" in the mission and presence of the Holy Spirit (*ibid.* n. 48b). The Spirit, however, was not given to the Church only as a principle of sanctification or unity. The Spirit was also given as the impelling principle of the missionary action (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 2). And so, starting with Pentecost, we can claim that all ecclesial communities became missionary communities.

Today, the Spirit still keeps the missionary character of the Church. It is the Spirit who opens the ecclesial community to the missionary dynamism. The Spirit is present and works actively in the missionaries, impelling them always to proclaim the mystery of Christ. This is the characteristic fruit of the work of the Spirit in the missions: the proclamation of the mystery of Christ.[15]

While missionaries in cross-cultural settings must keep this ever alive, the chances are that they work in a local Church that is strongly "Marian". In the Pacific, for example, Mary is more popular than the

Spirit. Care should be taken that the Spirit does not continue to remain the "unknown" Person of the Trinity.

Mission Spirituality — Missiological anthropology is founded on genuine spirituality and deep faith in those engaged in mission. The most important and most desirable ingredient in a person engaged in mission is genuine and deep spirituality.[16] Those engaged in mission must be, above all, individuals of deep, living faith, sincerely believing in what they preach, with God as the very heart and centre of their lives, the mainspring of their innermost selves.[17] Those engaged in mission must have selfless dedication to the needs of others (Mt 22:3; *Evangeli Nuntiandi*, n. 9).

Spirituality for mission presupposes a deep but humble and obedient sense of personal mission, a conviction tied to an unshakeable trust in God. Two ideas may be brought to the fore, as emerging forms of spirituality today, namely: spirituality of presence and kenotic spirituality. "The spirituality of presence is understood as being 'present to' and 'present for'. This is an attitude that is nurtured especially by contemplative prayer and meditation. Closely connected to presence is *kenosis* (Phil 2:5-11), which speaks of the opposite of human power, and seeks rather the power of God, manifested in the suffering Christ on the cross".[18]

The spirituality of reconciliation (II Cor 5:17-20; Eph 2:12-22) is also finding its way into missionary spirituality. "This spirituality shares characteristics of the kenotic spirituality; it sees reconciliation first and foremost as the work of God; we are but the agents through whom God works. It sees God beginning the work of reconciliation with the healing of the victim, rather than focusing on the wrongdoer".[19]

Human Knowledge and Skills — Missiological anthropology is convinced of the important role that human knowledge and skill can and should play in "proclaiming the Kingdom of the Father, sharing the life of the Son, and bearing the witness of the Spirit".[20]

(a) Among other things, a missionary must know how to approach the Christian ministry more maturely and adequately. In a given situation where the missionary is working, it is helpful to know what is the contemporary current in "missiology" that is operative in a local Church. Is it "soul-saving?". Is it "church-planting?". Is it "Christ-centred?". Is it "Kingdom-centred?". Is it "vision-mission centred?". It is important for the missionary to know or to find out the changes and lines of continuity that have existed in the mission history of the place of assignment. This will keep the missionary from disregarding, if not judging negatively, the failures and achievements of past generations of missionaries.

The focus is on mission as movement. This is important for the missionary to avoid perpetuating or prolonging irrelevant teachings, practices, and mentalities. A question that might be helpful is this, "What points of view and perspectives have been held in that history?". This could help the missionary understand and chart the history of mission or the theory of mission in a local Church. Until now relatively little attention has been given to the history of the motivating forces of mission. If there is such a thing that we call conscious religiosity, there should also be conscious missiology. Today, a missionary is expected to do his/her work a bit more professionally, or more reflectively and more intelligently.

(b) Another important matter that a missionary should consider is the art of understanding other people, and entering a new culture. In Oceania, we find three distinct racial groups — the Polynesians,[21] Melanesians,[22] and the Micronesians.[23] Take note, however, that any talk of Oceania or the Pacific can often encourage an underlying assumption that all island societies in the vast and mighty Pacific Ocean are the same. There is in fact a vast diversity of social, political, and economic circumstances across the 28 countries and territories, with populations ranging from over five million people to just 50.[24]

Although they are all Pacific islanders, they are different in many ways. Just to have an idea of what I mean, let me give you an example: Micronesian seafarers navigate the mighty

Pacific by stars and tides, Polynesians recite vastly long genealogies, and Melanesians are very conscious of taboos.

Entering another culture is an art that entails a long process before one can understand, appreciate, and participate in any given culture, defined "as a way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organize themselves, celebrate and share life".[25] In the words of anthropologists, these are "the 'root paradigms' – the set of assumptions about the fundamental nature of the universe, humankind, or the way in which people behave, which are so deeply held by the members of a society as to be essentially unquestioned by them".[26]

While in the Pacific, I spent a good deal of time "reading, understanding, and appreciating" the Pacific Islanders' cultural eloquence best expressed in their rites and ceremonies, symbols and languages, and the social changes and turmoil that were taking place in their island nations. As a missionary in the Pacific, I also spent a lot of time reaching out to the people and establishing personal contact. I discovered and experienced that sympathetic understanding, human warmth and caring love, and lasting relationships work great missionary miracles.

(c) Talking of political and social turmoil, let me share two of my experiences in Fiji and Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). I was in Fiji during the *coups* of 1987 and 2000. Since then, the Fiji Islands have witnessed a cycle of *coups*, armed insurrection, political unrest, and ethnic conflict since the first military *coup* of 1987. While the country has not erupted into full-blown civil or ethnic war, the political instability has caused considerable social and economic setbacks.[27]

From 1988 to 1998, the 180,000 inhabitants of Bougainville suffered from fierce jungle warfare, said to be the longest and most bloody conflict in the South Pacific since the end of World War II.[28] Armed violence was the order of the day. In 1998, the rebels burned the Airport in Kieta on Bougainville and violence escalated. I was on the island at that time.

My personal experience of the political and social turmoil in the Philippines, especially before, during, and after the Martial Law Regime, was not without value. I realized that those events were bound to happen in places where urgent social and political concerns are grossly neglected.

(d) Equally important is language study, or better still, language learning. Study is done in a classroom setting, while learning is done in the field. Language is the key to understand the people. Language is the key to understand their way of life – that is, their way of thinking, behaving and acting, and valuing. Gittins explains it this way: "People reflect their cultural heritage and human context; their knowledge and experience are mediated to them through their language and culture. Anyone wishing to communicate in an adequate fashion absolutely must take these things seriously".[29] For this reason language is a *conditio sine qua non* to mission. It is intrinsic and essential to mission. By this is meant that mission is impossible without knowing the local language. How can the missionary communicate the Good News if he/she does not have the tool or key to proclaim the Good News? It is my firm belief that the seeds of the Word are not only found in the culture and history of the people; they are also found in the language of the people.

It is a fact that some missionaries are more gifted with languages than others. They are to be admired and emulated. These gifted missionaries have "produced some of the finest scholarship in language studies, from philology to semantics, from grammatolgy to comparative linguistics, from the creation of new scripts to the phonetic notation of unwritten languages. Their legacy is incalculable".[30]

The foundations of cross-cultural mission should transform the missionary in his/her mentality, attitude, and vision. This core foundation must make the missionary more trusting in the Holy Spirit, more creative in the ministry, and ever stronger in the faith.

Theological Assumptions

What are our "theological assumptions"[31] or the "theological foundations of mission"[32] that must also be kept ever alive?

The Source – A theology of mission must begin with God, who has revealed himself to humanity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – i.e., the Blessed Trinity (*Ad Gentes*, n. 2). It is from the Blessed Trinity that mission begins and ends (*Lumen Gentium* nn. 4, 48; *Ad Gentes* n. 2; Eph 1:3-14; 2:18). The Blessed Trinity constitutes the first and ultimate foundation of mission. Hence, mission, is viewed not as a responsibility of the missionary, the mission society, or the sending Church, but as a cause of the triune God. Mission is God's own work.[33]

It is stated elsewhere that "in view of the many difficult, seemingly intractable, issues mission is facing today – conflict, interreligious violence, growing poverty and hunger, loss of local control, erosion of the physical environment – there seems to be a growing awareness that it is not we that carry out our mission, but rather that we participate in what is first and foremost God's work".[34]

From the perspective of missiological anthropology, the history of humankind must be seen as first and foremost the story of God's mission. It is in this context of God's saving activity within this world and throughout history that must understand our task. Mission is ultimately God's, we are but tools of God for that mission.

From experience, this perspective gives "room" for the Alone when the missionary feels alone and lonely, for "courage" when the missionary gets discouraged, "rest" when the missionary is tired, and so on and so forth. The real author and sustainer of mission is God.

The Message – The Bible is a record of God's self-revelation to his people. God's word must be the message to all people living in a broken and secularized world.

The missionary's central task is to communicate this message to people so that they understand and respond to God's invitation. Just as God's self-revelation was given in a specific historical and cultural context (Jewish culture), the missionary should also proclaim the message in such a way that he/she relates it to the time and setting in which the message should be given.

As pointed out very eloquently elsewhere, missionaries should remember that "when an evangelizer presents the Gospel according to the genius of the people, he/she readily wins a hearing. He/she stimulates the inner genius of a community (tribe, ethnic group) with the Gospel from within, and does not impose an outsider's norms from without. He/she presents the message taking into consideration the worldview and inner dispositions of a community".[35]

The Embodiment – The Scriptures must be understood in the light of Jesus Christ. His incarnation within history has achieved our salvation through his passion, death and Resurrection. His death was a result of his commitment to his mission; his Resurrection stands as God's seal of approval on Jesus' life and work".[36]

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's self-revelation. Our message is centred on the message he came to proclaim – i.e., that there is a God who loves us all.

The hidden reign of God is already present in Jesus and his actions. Christ, therefore, is our hope (I Tm 1:1; Col 1:27). This is the key statement of all hopes and at the same time the essence of a reflective interpretation of the message of the Reign of God.

According to Blaser, "eschatology without Christology is blind, and *vice versa*. The story of Jesus, his death, and his Resurrection have revealed what will come to be. Christians' hope and struggle are hope and struggle for the foundation of a new humanity and the new world".[37]

Keeping our attention focused on Jesus does not diminish the role and importance of the Church. After all, "the grand purpose of mission is that the world might encounter the living God revealed in Jesus the Messiah".[38]

The Power – It has been correctly observed that "in the Roman Catholic Church, the Spirit was subordinated to the Church, the continuation of the incarnation. The Spirit became the possession of the Church, working in and through the ruling, teaching, sanctifying ministry of the hierarchy".[39]

Today, however, mission is more and more seen as related to pneumatology. This is a result of the rediscovery of the Holy Spirit in church and theology. This theological assumption has brought in a renewed way of thinking about mission from a pneumatological perspective. This has contributed to a more balanced view of mission as the work of the triune God.

The Holy Spirit is the transcendent and principal agent of mission. The mission of Jesus Christ is always and inseparably associated with the Spirit (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 36). The Spirit is the protagonist of the mission. It is the primary purpose of the Spirit that the messianic reign be realized, anticipated, and actualized.

The Instrument – The Church is the People of God. Mission is the task of the Church as a whole. According to Gittins, "Vatican II was asserting not so much that by Baptism everyone actually is missionary: that would be magic or manipulation.

"Rather, by virtue of Baptism everyone is called to be, supposed to be, capable of being missionary: that is, the mystery and the marvel. If Roman Catholic Christians after the 1960s, or Protestant and Reform Christians after Willingen (1952), have understood this more clearly, there might now be a mature generation marked by a true missionary spirit. Currently, and despite an encouraging growth of laity in mission, the missionary spirit generally remains quite limited. Many good people still do not understand: mission means me".[40]

The mission of the Church is both an invitation and a command. According to Gittins, "God calls and sends (co[m]missions) the baptized. God offers each one a share of the common responsibility: to proclaim the integrity of the Good News of salvation, the Reign of God, and the Church. The Church is the visible sign of the Body of Christ historically present in cultures and communities; the sacrament, signpost, symbol, or visible message of salvation".[41]

Thus, the Church is the People of God sent by God to carry out his work to the ends of the earth, to all peoples, and to the end of time.

The Final Destiny – The centre of Christ's message is the proclamation of the Kingdom. Although it has to do with the eternal destiny of humans and all creation (a new heaven and a new earth), it is already present, yet to be fulfilled at the end of time ("already" and "not yet").

Today's theology of mission strongly emphasizes the close connection between the Reign of God and the poor (Lv 25; Mt 5; Lk 4:18). A missionary theology founded on the Kingdom of God is a central theme in the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

This view values all aspects of human life and history. It emphasizes that salvation is integral. As such, it covers all that is created and all that is human. And since the Kingdom of God extends to, or embraces, all human beings and all peoples, and to every aspect of human, historical, and secular life, so too the Church's mission must embrace all this.[42]

The ultimate goal of mission founded on the Kingdom of God is the transformation of the whole of creation, and the Church must understand its mission in the service of the imminent Kingdom.[43]

The Contexts – All cultures are means through which a people hear the proclamation of the Good News in their own tongue, from their own perspective, according to their own mentality, and worldview. For this reason, missionaries must be prepared to "become all things to all people".

The contexts – social, historical, cultural, and economic – in which the missionaries find themselves influence their mission theology, mission work, mission spirituality, and day-to-day conduct. This calls for more attention to be given to contextual influences, and a greater appreciation of the Christian faith's integration with the people's everyday life.

This also calls for an attitude of listening as the missionary's first stance upon entering a new place and a new culture. This listening is a listening that tries to learn what God is doing to his people. This is done by listening to the lives and actions of the people. This is done by feeling the pulse of the people –

sentire cum ecclesia – or, by reading "the signs of the times", as Vatican II has encouraged.

Anthropological Assumptions

If mission is a cross-cultural enterprise, how should we look at the people and their way of life? What should be our anthropological assumptions?[44]

Different People, Different Ways – My years of mission work as director of Fatuoaiga Pastoral and Cultural Centre (FPCC) in American Samoa and as a faculty member of the Pacific Regional Seminary (PRS) in Suva, Fiji Islands, took me to many island nations in Oceania. My missionary travels to [Western] Samoa, the Kingdom of Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Federated States of Micronesia [State of Pohnpei and State of Chuuk], and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands [Saipan] taught me many lessons.

If first impressions are lasting impressions, my first impressions can be capsulized by the word "change". Outside influences have come to the shores of these island nations. Change is part and parcel of modern-day life, but the pace and amount of change is varied. What may have been considered primitive, simple and illogical societies before are as complex and rational as those of modern mankind, though in different ways.

Organized and Integrated – The diversity of Pacific societies is very obvious. Each of them is well organized and integrated. They have built-in systems that help them cope with the onslaught of outside influences.

These island societies are no longer self-contained. There is a lot of travelling in the region, and outside of the Pacific. Like their ancestors who loved navigating, many Pacific islanders are also travelling today. What is interesting is that they travel with much luggage. In the two Samoas, for example, one can observe a lot of "ie tonga" (fine mats) being transported to other places, such as Hawaii, mainland USA, New Zealand, and Australia. One who is familiar with their way of life can only say that there must be a Samoan wedding or funeral somewhere else that fine mats have to be brought along.

In Micronesia, for example, the people travel to Guam, Hawaii, or mainland USA with ice-chests containing fresh sea food. When they come back, these ice-chests are full of spam, sausages, and other canned products. These are interesting practices today. The Pacific islanders themselves are agents of social change.

Integrated Whole – In Oceania, one observes how people work together not only to survive, but to build a larger Pacific society, without which life in Oceania would be impossible.

It is interesting to note here the beliefs behind their ideas, symbols, and actions that can be capsulized by the term "Pacific Way", which was coined by the late President of Fiji, Sir Ratu Kamisese Mara.

The "Pacific Way" has helped the islanders appreciate other cultures in the region. It has helped them understand how other islanders communicate with one another, how to understand their cultural differences, and how their societies are changing. The "Pacific Way" encompasses all aspects of life in the Pacific.

Missionaries should be aware of the fundamental assumptions that underlie explicit cultural beliefs. Each culture has its own worldview, or fundamental way of looking at things. Thus, cross-cultural communication at the deepest level is very important. Missionaries must understand not only the explicit symbols but also the implicit beliefs in a culture if they are to communicate the Gospel to its people more effectively and efficiently.

Concluding Remarks

Today the Church is found in all parts of the world and is growing most rapidly in many of the younger churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania.

Mission is a cross-cultural enterprise. By

definition, a cross-cultural missionary is a cultural outsider who speaks the language with an accent, not fully familiar with the idioms and nuances of the host culture, and perhaps having a different skin colour. What is important, however, is that he/she loves the people, identifies with them, and respects, appreciates and adapts to their way of life. The incarnation of Jesus is the standard for all missionary adaptation and identification!

Endnotes

[1] Robert Schreiter, "Epilogue – Mission in the Third Millennium", in Mission in the Third Millennium, ed., Robert Schreiter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books), 149.

[2] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 421; *cf. Missiology. An International Review*, Vol. XIX, n. 2, April 1991, pp. 153-160.

[3] See: vanuatutourism.com/vanuatu/export/sites/VTO/culture/culture.html.

[4] It began around 1940 with the expectation of a new order with plenty of cargo wealth as well as a revival of traditional customs discouraged by Western schools and mission. SEDOS: *The Birth of a Religious Movement: Part I*, Vol. 38, n. 9/10; *Part II*, Vol. 38, nn. 7/8, by Theo Aerts, SVD.

[5] *Cf.* Albert C. Moore, *Arts in the Religion of the Pacific: Symbols of Life* (London/New York: Pinter Publishers, 1995), pp. 113-116.

[6] See, for example, Joel Bonnemaison, "The Tree and the Canoe: Roots and Mobility in Vanuatu Societies", in *Mobility and Identity in the Island Pacific*, ed. Philip S. Morrison (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1985).

[7] Since the arrival of Europeans, a *lingua franca* evolved. Its name, Bislama, derived from the Bech-der-mer (sea cucumber) traders. It is essentially a phonetic form of English, with much simplified grammar. If it is listened to closely and spoken slowly, it can be understood by most English-speaking people.

[8] Robert Schreiter, "Anthropology and Faith: Challenges to Missiology", *Missiology: An International Review* 19/3 (July 1991): 283-94.

[9] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Messianic Mission in the World", in *The Transfiguration of Mission: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Foundation*, ed., Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1993), 155.

[10] Thomas Menamparampil, "Take the Gospel to Life Contexts", *Omnis Terra* 350 (September-October 2004): 333.

[11] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2000), 9-10.

[12] Thomas Menamparampil, "Take the Gospel to Life contexts", p. 329.

[13] Anthony J. Gittins, *Ministry at the Margins: Strategy and Spirituality for Mission* (Maryknoll, New York; Orbis Books, 2002), p. 8.

[14] Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Boos, 1988), pp. 1-11.

[15] D. Simon Lourdusamy, "The Holy Spirit and the Missionary Action in the Church", *Documenta Missionalia* 16 (Roma: PUG, 1982), p. 50.

[16] Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, pp. 2-3.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-8.

[18] Robert Schreiter, "Epilogue – Mission in the Third Millennium", p. 160.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, pp. 9-10.

[21] Polynesia, means "many islands", comprises ten island groups: Hawaii, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Wallis et Futuna, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Niue, Cook Islands, and French Polynesia (Tahiti). The Maori of New Zealand are also culturally and linguistically Polynesian.

[22] Melanesia, meaning "black islands", is the term coined to describe those parts of the South Pacific inhabited by people with dark skin. Melanesia encompasses four independent island nations (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji), a colony of France (New Caledonia), and a province of Indonesia (Irian Jaya).

[23] Micronesia, meaning "small islands" (an estimated 2,500 islands with just over a thousand square miles), is comprised of four archipelagos (Mariana Islands, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Kiribati), and two isolated islands (Nauru and Banaba).

[24] The largest Pacific State, Papua New Guinea, has 5.1 million people; the British territory of Pitcairn, listed with the UN Decolonization Committee as a non-self governing territory, has less than 50 people, the descendants of the Bounty mutineers. For country information, se Brij Lal and Kate Fortune, eds., The Pacific Islands: An Encyclopedia (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

[25] Thomas Menamparampil, "How do Cultures Interact With Our Mission of

Evangelization?", in *Evangelization and Inculturation*, ed., Mario Saturnino Dias (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2001), p. 65.

[26] Hugh Montefiore, ed., *The Gospel and Contemporary Culture* (London: Mobray, 1992), p. 2.

[27] For more information see: Satendra Prasad and Darryn Snell, "Fiji: Enabling Civic Capacities for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding", in *Searching for Peace in Asia Pacific*, eds., Annelies Heijmans, Nicola Simmonds, and Hans van de Veen (Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), pp. 543-561.

[28] For more information see: Volker Boge and Lorraine Garasu, "Papua New Guinea: A Success Story of Postconflict Peacebuilding in Bougainville", in *Searching for Peace in Asia Pacific*, eds., Annelies Heijmans, Nicola Simmonds, and Hans van de Veen (Boulder/London; Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), pp. 564-579.

[29] Gittins, *Bread for the Journey*, p. xiv.

[30] Gittins, *Ministry at the Margins*, p. 81

[31] *Cf.* Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, pp. 17-19.

[32] *Cf.* Sebastian Karotemprel, ed., *Christ in Mission: Foundational Course in Missiology* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1996), pp. 47-117.

[33] G.F. Vicedom, *Missio Dei: Einfuehrung in eine Theologie der Mission I* (Munich, 1960; English tr. St. Louis, 1965) quoted in J.A.B. Jongeneel and J. M. van Engelen, "Contemporary Currents in Missiology", in *Missiology: An Ecumenical Introduction: Texts and Contexts of Global Christianity*, ed., F.J. Verstraelen *et al.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdman, 1995), p. 447.

[34] Robert Schreiter, "Epilogue – Mission in the Third Millennium", p. 155.

[35] Thomas Menamparampil, "Take the Gospel to Life Contexts", p. 333.

[36] Stephen Bevans, "Wisdom from the Margins: Systematic Theology and the Missiological Imagination", *Omnis Terra* 343 (January 2004): p. 24.

[37] Klauspeter Blaser, "Reign of God", in *Dictionary of Mission – Theology, History, Perspectives*, ed., Karl Mueller *et al.* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 385.

[38] Shenk, *The Transfiguration of Mission*, p. 10.

[39] Roelf S. Kuitse, "Holy Spirit: Source of Messianic Mission", in *The Transfiguration of Mission – Biblical, Theological, and Historical Foundations*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1993), p. 106.

[40] Gittins, *Ministry at the Margins*, p. 11.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

[42] John Gorski, "Participation in the Paschal Mystery in the Local Church: Foundation of Ad gentes Missionary Spirituality", *Omnis Terra* 350 (September-October 2004): p. 346.

[43] John Fuellenbach, "The Kingdom f God", in *Dictionary of Mission*, ed. Karl Mueller *et al.* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 594.

[44] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, pp. 1921. For a brief outline of the history of thedevelopment of anthropological theories and the main research strategies employed by contemporary anthropologists, see Marvin Harris, Culture, P*eople, Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 474-479.

---

* Fr Edgar Javier is a member of the Society of the Divine Word. He did his licentiate and doctoral studies in missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. As a missionary he was assigned to the different mission areas of his congregation in the Philippines and outside the country. He became the director of the Pastoral and Cultural Centre in American Samoa while in mission on the Pacific Islands. At present he is professor of Missiology at the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (the Philippines).

Ref.: *Religious Life Asia*, October–December 2005.

Mission in Africa Today: A Challenge

- Sr Gloria Wirba* -

The story of missions in Africa during the colonial era has been described by some missiologists as an amazing tale of adventure, endurance, privation, sickness, weakness and death. With such crippling casualities these missions were able to do little more than maintaining a holding operation. Today the Church on this continent has made more converts than in Asia and Latin America, with a remarkable increase in the number of clergy, men and women religious. Its rate of expansion also contrasts with the stagnation and decline that characterise the Church in Europe today. Christianity in Africa has made greater advances to the level of being described as the "hope of the universal Church". Yet, a critical observation at the concrete situation of this Church has moved some thinkers to conclude that this Church is closely related to the parable of the quick-sprouting seed that fell on shallow ground, which sprouted immediately, but had no roots and finally withered away (Mt 13:5-6). This is evident when one moves from the statistics to the concrete reality of Christian life on this continent.

This paradoxical situation raises pertinent questions about the future of this Church; "The Church in Africa, will its success continue?".[1] The future or continuity of this Church depends on the capacity to answer the ever-growing need to root the Gospel in the local realities of the people of this continent. This calls for a new model of evangelisation where the assimilation of the Gospel message by the people is assessed and re-evaluated in the light of their concrete lives. A space in which biblical revelation becomes the basic principle for conscientising the people and involving them in the transformation of their reality.

In an era when Africa is living a drama of technological and cultural modernity, liberation of the oppressed, option for the poor and marginalised, the cry for peace and reconciliation must be the fundamental key for understanding authentic mission in the African Church. A critical look at the millions of Africans oppressed, deprived of their human rights and dignity, marginalised, robbed of everything even of their names and identity,[2] screaming under the yoke of injustice with poverty staring them in the face, calls everything about Christianity into question. Hence, a critical reflection on the relevance of an African Christianity demands a keen look at the structures, causes, strategies of exploitation and misery under which Africans today are struggling more than ever.

The question which faces anyone who has the duty of evangelisation in Africa today is how to confess Jesus Christ in a continent which tends to become a veritable empire of hunger. This demands that we rethink the whole question of understanding and experiencing faith.

The encounter with Christianity led many Africans to embrace it for various reasons ranging from economic gain, to prestige and fear. In some areas it met with furious resistance and its success was considered a failure of the traditional religion. For this reason, Christians were considered those who had abandoned their customs and traditions. Missionaries on their part demonstrated that all that had to do with culture and tradition was not only contrary to the Christian faith, but devilish. There was a distinct rift between African culture and Christianity. The Church in Africa, notwithstanding the centuries between the first evangelisation and the present, is still under the yoke of this mentality. Today the result of this rift is glaringly evident in the dichotomy between concrete life and faith. Christianity has remained outside the intimate life of the African. In fact, Christians exist in the Church, which despite all the catechesis and

sacraments, really amounts to no more than an empty shell with no influence on the social and real problems of the people. Because of this, Christians continue to follow their traditions, when faced with life crises they have recourse to their traditional religion. This ambivalent way of living is the hall mark of the life of most African Christians.

This situation should compel the Church in Africa to re-examine its mission and presence in African society, or else Christianity will be seen as a religion for women and children.[3] The Church on this continent can no longer evade the question of its capacity to "dirty" its hands by soaking them deeply in the suffering of the people. It is fundamentally on this that the future and credibility of the African Church depends. In order to restore authenticity to Africans and construct African Christianity there is need for an in-depth understanding of the African culture, worldview, life and reality, i.e. plunging into the world where Africans search for concrete happiness here and here-after.

Christianity in Africa must go beyond the fundamental doctrine of faith to listening and embracing the world in which Africans find themselves today. It must step outside of the Church walls. Christian sacramentalism must be redefined in terms of the African culture and reality. The meaning and significance of the Christian mysteries must be re-evaluated taking into account the African culture and reality.

The Church in Africa has been described by the Synod Fathers as the Good Samaritan. Soon this Church will no longer be able to pass the wounded man by. Our African society is infested with corruption, exploitation, injustice, oppression, sickness, consumed by bitterness, and threatened by famine whose very appearance strangles people. Fear has become a recurring pandemic which paralyzes energy and any initiative. People back away from their own history because they lack the power of speech.

Today the work of mission on this continent must be understood in reference to the overall situation of Africa. We must deal with down-to-earth questions, in search of a new world that is built on the framework of justice, peace and freedom which is the heart of the Christian message. Only in this way will Christianity demonstrate its credibility to the Africans. We must rethink our faith as Africans in the light of the enormous challenges overwhelming the continent. In the words of Jean-Marc Ela, "the Christians of Africa are searching for a Church that will rediscover its evangelical identity by determining to stand beside the multitudes who seek to escape from all forms of marginalisation. The tasks of the Kingdom of God require us to abandon all Church models and practices that do not include incarnation of the faith in our condition of the poor and exploited".[4] During the first phase of evangelisation in Africa, the model of the Church presented was deposit of faith or sacrament of salvation of souls. Today this type of ecclesiology must be modified taking into consideration the African situation. The model of the Church must be that described in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* – a Church concerned, above, with the salvation and total liberation of the person, of society, and of the material universe. In this type of Church evangelism and human promotion are not opposed. Living the Gospel becomes rooted in the concrete life situations, Jesus' victory over life and death is translated into the concrete lives of the people.

The Church in Africa will only have meaning today if it answers the cry of the poor. In a situation where the rich not only oppress the poor, but enrich themselves by robbing them, where corruption and embezzlement are a canker-worm eating away the fabric of political life, the Church must rethink and fortify her prophetic witness, must vigilantly and courageously denounce the political, social and cultural ills.

Questioning the relevance of our faith gives new orientation to the evangelising mission in Africa. The crucial question which is difficult to answer is: How can the Church be Church and remain a credible Church within the structures of domination in which Africans are seeking their identity? If this question is not answered the Christians in Africa will continue living in a dichotomised situation whereby they go to mass in the morning, to the diviner at night, amulet in pocket and a scapular or rosary around the neck.

In its evangelising mission in Africa

today the Church must respond to the unanswered questions of the first phase of evangelisation. The Church must re-evaluate its practices, attitudes, beliefs and teachings. The first phase of evangelisation in Africa only cultivated the surface, leaving Africans with numerous questions, doubts and dissatisfaction and indeed disappointments. The present Church must give not only plausible, but relevant answers to the problems weighing heavily on the African heart.

In contemporary Africa subject to conditions more than to traditional values; by upsetting phenomena such as urbanization, economic constraints, political unrest, drought, HIV pandemics, famine, etc., faith does not consist in asking questions about the gender of God or about the infallibility of the Pope, but about the lack of authentic implementation of the critical functions of the Christian doctrine. The Church cannot keep on deploring the degrading situation of Africans; it must re-evaluate its contact not only with African religiosity, cultures and traditions, but with the humiliations, violence, struggles of the people. It must take notice of the injustices and the social ills which are fast shaping the functions of faith and theology. Only this type of involvement can demonstrate that the Gospel Message is liberating and heralds a new future of hope for the people.[5]

A flash back to the Christianity of the early centuries, and the missionaries, shows that they tended to limit the Good News to the law and moral obligations. In fact, the Word of God was greatly reduced to the Commandments; the celebration of the mystery of salvation was condensed to religious practice or rituals. Today the Church in Africa faces new challenges, and so the Word of God must be proclaimed and celebrated. The Church in Africa is ardently called upon to take up the challenge to proclaim the Gospel as the Good News of salvation in a new way. We must free ourselves from a Christianity that remains ideological, abstract and barren.

The Bible which speaks of God and human beings in the same breath always includes the political, economic and social deliverance of God's People. Any profession of faith is a profession of God who intervenes in human history as Creator and Saviour. For this reason, our faith must lead us to every place of distress, suffering, misery to be vehicles of a promise and hope of life to every human being. In this perspective we could say that a faith lived in Africa today must discover a new language, carry out a serious task in a society torn apart, a society in a serious crises over identity and reality. The African today in the words of Jean-Marc Ela:

"resembles a person running in the dark, not knowing which way to go. Run, run, but where to? To the fore, to the rear, toward the tom-tom and dance in the moonlight? Back to village life? Impossible. Ahead, to the future, the unknown future, mystery? Unthinkable".[6]

Footnotes

Kenyuyfoon Sr Gloria Wirba is a student doing a Ph.D. in Missiology at the Pontifical University of Urbaniana in Rome.

[1] W.J. Wilson, (ed), *The Church in Africa in a Context of Change*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll (NY), 1967.

[2] This is what E. Mveng refers to as *Anthropological Poverty.*

[3] *Cf.* J.-M. Ela, *My Faith as an African*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll/Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1995, 34.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 123.

[5] *Cf. Ibidem*, pp. 154-155.

[6] J.-M. Ela, *African Cry*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll (NY) 1986, p. 100.

Ref.: Text sent for the SEDOS Publication (April 2007).

Understanding Salvation in the African Culture: A Key to Authentic Inculturation

- Sr Gloria Wirba -

Always, everywhere, in diverse ways and through various means, people seek to be freed from all that entails pain, suffering and distress that threatens human subsistence. Salvation understood as a quest for a meaningful life or a holistic state of being is therefore a vital question that plunges man into a crisis to which he restlessly and tirelessly seeks clarity and certitude. It is a process whereby man seeks to give an answer to his destiny, and find physical and spiritual security. Therefore, salvation is the fundamental question that characterises human life. It is not only an anthropological and religious problem, but also an ontological question that touches man in the depths of his very being, thus, indicating his most intense need. The search for salvation is a search for a sense and meaning to life and the ultimate destiny of human existence. In the African culture and religion salvation is understood as a quest for meaningful life; the pivot around which other values and human activities revolve and its preservation.

The African concept of human life

African peoples conceive life to be a continuous cycle and rhythm, which nothing can destroy. This life stems from birth through various phases of initiation to the entry into the community of the departed to the company of the spirits. It is a dynamic rhythm punctuated by various rites of passage, which mark the entrance into its different stages.[1] Thus life is the pivot on which the African worldview hinges. *Muntu*, man, is at the very centre of existence and African peoples see everything else in its relation to this central position of man. All internal human forces are directed towards the service of life, for its reinforcement, maintenance and protection. Thus, according to the African traditions the quest for a meaningful life and its preservation is the principal scope of every human being. Whatever promotes life, transmits life, manifests life, enriches life, saves life, ensures life, heals life is good and must be longed for by all. Whatever does the opposite is evil and must be avoided by all.[2] Life is the unifying factor of every reality, the first principle considered a permanent vital force. It is the vivifying principle that seals the link between the living and the dead. Life comprises the past, present and future generations. It is a regular cycle, which knows neither end nor a radical alteration as it connects both the visible and the invisible worlds. It does not only connote a state of being alive, but also an ongoing process which follows the pattern of birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death and entry into the community of the living-dead.[3] This life defines the basic duty of each person and the basic human relationships. Indeed, what is ontologically, morally and juridically just is that which maintains and increases life as received from God, the Giver, the Creator, Source and Controller of life. Salvation in the African culture can only be understood from this perspective.

Salvation in the African culture

The African ontology is basically anthropocentric; man is at the very centre of existence and everything is seen as rotating around this central position. The attention and preoccupation of African peoples are dominated by a quest for the existential reality and what happens around them. They are not interested in formulating theories or ideologies about life and eschatological concepts, but are curious in understanding the reality of life as it is and to orientate their choices in the direction of gaining a meaningful life and preserving it even in the next world. Africans

continuously question themselves about all misfortunes like sickness, pain, death, natural calamities, failure, etc., and believe there is a cause for these, which can be avoided. This attitude stems from their underlining view of the world, which ought to be harmonious, balanced, good and peaceful. Misfortune, any imbalance or disharmony in the universe does not happen by chance, but must have a cause, which is either human or superhuman.

From this view of life and of the world a certain amount of attention has been given to the theme of salvation in the African culture and religion. Among other things, African words, which designate salvation, received an analysis, which helps to open up the meaning of this theme within the African religio-cultural setting. Linguistically considered, the terms of salvation seem to indicate that the concept is intimately related to the physical welfare of life. This has to do principally with physical and immediate dangers that threaten the life of the individual, of the community and harmony in the order of things in the visible and the invisible worlds. Salvation is not simply abstraction, nor something to be realised only at the end of time. It is believed to have been experienced in the past, is being experienced now and will be fully realised through union with the ancestors in the hereafter.[4] For this reason, prayers in the African traditional religion concentrate on various aspects of salvation. The majority are petitions, requests, intercessions and invocations for: health, healing from disease or bareness, success hence salvation from failure, protection from harm, danger, death or misfortune, peace and blessings. From these prayers, salvation in this culture can be understood as:

Salvation as prosperity or wellbeing

Prosperity in the African understanding does not primarily regard material wealth. It means people; a great progeny. For this reason, children are considered the greatest blessing from God and from the ancestors. They are valued as a crown of continuity for the entire family and clan. Through them the name of the family is perpetuated. The more children one has, the greater his glory and honour among the people. Children add to the social status of the family. They are seen as the 'buds of society, and every birth is the arrival of Spring when life shoots out and the community thrives. The birth of a child is therefore the concern not only of the parents, but also of many relatives including the living and the departed. Conception and birth are the assurance that the universe is in harmony and that the ancestors are happy; an indication of a possibility of life after death i.e. becoming an ancestor.

Secondly, prosperity also means material wealth. For the Masai of East Africa it is an abundance of cattle, for the farming population abundant crops, for others like the pigmies a good catch. When individuals and communities get a satisfactory amount of food, children, rain, health, etc., they have experienced a state of original bliss and harmony with the universe and with mankind.[5]

Salvation as a state of good health

According to the African worldview, the universe-visible and invisible ought to be in a harmonious, balanced and happy state. Misfortune, sickness, pain, suffering, etc., signify disharmony in this order of things and are considered punishment either from God, from ancestors or from the personified evil spirits. The breach of social norms is an offence against the ancestors who are the guardians of the morality of the community. This transgression cannot escape punishment: "If descendants suffer from maladies caused by ancestors, it is because the descendants have neglected them. For instance, the living may have disregarded the possessions of the ancestors, failed to observe lineage rules, or neglected to conduct rituals in the name of the ancestors. A descendant may also suffer because of past grievances."[6] The majority of African peoples believe that God punishes in this life. Sickness might also come from God as punishment for one's misdeeds. For this reason, good health is considered a merit of good deeds, fidelity to God, ancestors, harmony with the community and with the entire universe. When one lives in concord, in agreement, in peace and unity with himself, with his neighbours, ancestors and with God, he is considered saved.

Salvation as protection from evil and misfortune

African peoples are very much aware of the presence of evil in the world. Most of them believe categorically that God did not create and does not do any evil whatsoever. In this way, the causes of evil are to be sought in individuals or in the community. When evil befalls, it is quickly interpreted as punishment for the people's misdoings. On the other hand, some African societies like the Kikuyu of Kenya sustain that God is the final guardian of law and order, and of the moral ethical codes of the people. Therefore any breach of these norms is ultimately an offence against God and cannot escape punishment.[7] Ancestors too are considered the watchdogs of tribal morality. Any breach of the laws is against them and must also be punished. For this reason, misfortune is considered an indication of the wrath of God, ancestors or the work of human hands. The belief in witchcraft, sorcery and magic are widely spread in African society. Certain misfortunes like accidents, certain types of illness are quickly attributed to magic, sorcery and witchcraft. For this reason when people live without misfortune or when they are rescued from it, they consider themselves saved or redeemed.

Salvation as long life

Longevity according to the African peoples is a prized aspect of life. It is considered a proof of a dignified moral life. The death of an elderly person is a dignified event, which is greatly celebrated, graced with various rituals. A life ended without attaining this moral and physical maturity is inconceivable. The death of a young person is considered an inexplicable tragedy. This becomes more painful if he/she has not left behind any child to carry on the name of the family.

An elder is a symbol of knowledge, hope and an epitome of wisdom for the living. He/she is considered one who has known how to manage this life in conformity with the moral/ethical norms of the community. Ripe old age is considered a blessing from God and from the ancestors. It is the ardent wish of African peoples to attain this ripe age, which signifies a meaningful life, lived fully, justly and satisfactorily with great remuneration.

Salvation as integration into the community of the ancestors

The ultimate desire and hope of African peoples is to join the community of their ancestors considered as the final destiny of man. Ancestors are the dead who remain alive in the memory of their descendants. They are believed to occupy a privileged place nearer God, thus special intermediaries between man and God. They are regarded as the 'glorified living-dead' members of the family and clan. The hope of becoming an ancestor is considered victory over death. Thus, to become an ancestor is to live forever. Not to be extinguished by physical death from one's family and community, but to continue the dynamic cycle of life as life-in-community, as being-in-relation, is the ardent wish of Africans. The greatest fear for Africans is for one to be quickly forgotten after physical death. To be cast away, to be separated from one's own family, to have one's personal immortality destroyed, to be turned into a state of non-existence by lack of remembrance by the loved ones of the family or clan. This is considered the most dreadful misfortune.[8]

Nevertheless, death alone does not make one an ancestor. Life lived according to the social norms of the community, longevity, descendants, appropriate funeral rites are some of the prerequisites for enrolment in the community of the living-dead. This indicates that joining the community of the ancestors is a blessing or merit for what one has done and been. Becoming an ancestor is considered being saved as it means attaining meaningful life and preserving it forever. One is not considered saved by God, but by one's own deeds through the intercession of the ancestors. There are no myths or stories on becoming an ancestor by divine predilection.

Salvation in relation to God

Though salvation in the African religion is understood principally from the anthropological dimension, God occupies a basic position not only as Creator of the universe and all that it contains, but also as

One who continues to re-create particularly through new births and to protect His creatures. This explains why people quickly turn to God in moments of difficulty, misfortune, danger and need. In fact, there are many names or titles attributed to God as well as sayings, which portray His saving activity. For example, the Barundi refer to God as the giver of life, the protector of the poor, while according to the Ila of Zambia He is fundamentally the deliverer of those in trouble. The Barundi and the Rwandans express it well in a proverb: "A tree protected by Imana (God) cannot be hurt by the wind".[9] In other tribes names indicating God's saving deeds are often given to children for example: among the Nso of Cameroon, *Nyuydini* meaning it is God who shows the way, *Nyuylunghir* meaning it is God who saves, *Nyuysene* meaning God has helped. In addition to this, in many oral accounts it is also narrated how God saved His people from tragic situations such as war, calamities, captivity, famine, floods or any other destructive forces of nature. But one pertinent thing to underline is that the saving activities of African religion concern the more cosmic saving activities of God.

In fact, one could say that, salvation in the African culture has a wide semantic range, which could be understood from man's vision of himself, the world and the community of the living and the dead. It also refers to what God does for man either directly or indirectly through the ancestors. Whatever is an obstacle to this quest is considered sin or evil.

Sin or wrong-doing in the African culture

According to the majority of the African myths, the separation of God from man and the consequent loss of the original state of happiness, the coming of suffering, pain, old age, death, the loss of the gift of rejuvenation and resurrection was due to man's disobedience. This marked the beginning of sin and evil, which is not attributed to God but to man. Many African societies categorically hold that God did not create what is evil, nor does He do them any evil whatsoever. In fact, there is no original sin in African religion, nor is a person born a sinner. A person is a sinner by deed".[10] Human beings are the architects of their own misfortune and of the withdrawal of God from humanity's immediate surroundings.

Sin is better expressed in the African religious culture as wrong-doing, badness or destruction of life. It is never considered in isolation but always attached to a person, a wrongdoer. The ideology behind it is that, sin does not exist in human experience except as perceived in people. It is a person who is sinful or evil whether aided or not by invisible forces. African morality and ethics are centred on safeguarding the vital force and the preservation of human life. Whatever is contrary to this is considered evil. "To threaten in any way, to break any of the community codes of behaviour, which are in fact moral codes, endangers life".[11] This is considered evil, wrongdoing; sin for it injures or destroys the accepted social order and peace. The wrongdoer must be punished by the corporate community of both the living and the dead and God may also inflict punishment and bring about justice.

The African moral code demands not only the avoidance of wrongdoing or the observance of rules and taboos, but above all the formation of a good character, the pursuit of a good conduct. One is not condemned or judged as a sinner for having refused to share bread or water with the stranger, but for not being a hospitable person.

Death in African culture

Death in African mythology has various origins, but the most well-known is that it is one of the tragic consequences of man's disobedience to God and of God's separation from man. Since then man has lived with death and struggles to accept it as part of the natural rhythm of life. Death is considered a departure and not a complete annihilation of a person. He/she moves on to join the company of the departed in the hereafter and is venerated by the family or clan as an ancestor. The only major change is the decomposition of the physical body. The spirit moves to another state of existence in another world, hereafter. Some

people use euphemisms such as 'going home' and 'answering a call', to talk about death and life here-after meaning that life is a pilgrimage; the real 'home' is 'the hereafter'[12] where the deceased becomes a 'living-dead' or ancestor.

Death is often compared to birth and initiation. It stands between the visible and the invisible worlds. The diverse funeral rites performed by various peoples are an indication of the paramount importance of death in the continuous cycle of life. In some tribes the dead are buried with food, drink, clothes, and utensils in the belief that the person will need these things in the next world. In other tribes, they are buried inside the house. The grave becomes a new family shrine for ancestral worship where sacrifices and libations are offered to thank or to implore the intercession of the 'living-dead'. They believe that though the dead person is cut off from human beings, he/she remains an active member of the family. The ties between the living and the dead continue and are often believed to be stronger. Death causes pain, loss, disrupts normal life, but does not destroy the rhythm of life. The grave is paradoxically the symbol of separation between the living and the dead but simultaneously a meeting point or junction for the visible and the invisible worlds.

Death is also considered the beginning of the individual's deeper mystical relationship with the whole universe. It is a bridge between the two polarities: divinity and humanity, invisible and visible as the dead person becomes mystically connected to all of earth's creatures. Almost all funeral rites in the African traditions indicate the belief that out of death comes life.

Life here-after

After physical death a person is believed to make a journey to the land of the departed or the village of the ancestors. Different African peoples have various versions of how this journey take place and where this land is situated. According to some it is close to the land of the living, to others it is a long, dangerous and terrifying journey, which depends on the moral life one lived here. The Lodagaa of Ghana believe that this land lies in the West across a river called 'the river of death.' Good people cross easily while bad ones fall and keep swimming with much suffering and without food. Debtors, thieves, witches, etc., must wait on the bank till the one they offended also dies and arrives there and they pay their debts. For this reason, in many African traditions the dead are buried with food, drink and equipment, to prepare them for the journey and to enable them to start a new life in the hereafter. Some of the African peoples associate this land with natural phenomena such as waterfalls, lakes, rivers, pools, etc. According to some it is underground, for some it is above the moon, sun and stars, while to others the dead go where God is (to regain the lost paradise of the primordial period). According to many others wherever it may be situated is not the greatest concern what matters is that it is similar to this world. It has mountains, forests, rivers, valleys etc. The dead continue their former activities there. They retain their personalities, social and political status, sex distinction, wealth or poverty of the individual remains; the hereafter is the carbon copy of the present life.[13] The Lodagaa make coffins for the dead in the form of the work tool, which he/she used while alive to enable him/her to continue the same profession in the life 'here-after'.

One could say that, generally most African people do not believe in the here-after as being better than the present. It is more or less a projection of this life. No form of judgment or retribution is expected except in very few cases like the Lodagaa who maintain that good is rewarded as the just people only need to think what they wish to eat and get it while the bad ones toil and labour. For most African peoples the 'here-after' is geographically here but separated from this one only by virtue of being invisible to human beings.

Conclusion

In the African culture and religion, the concept of salvation has been given considerable attention. It has to do principally with the physical and immediate dangers that threaten life, which is the pivot

around which other human activities revolve. Thus, salvation has to do with liberation from all that is an enemy to life. Though fundamentally anthropocentric, the belief in God as the Creator, Protector is well developed among the majority of African peoples. God saves either in moments of difficulty, calamities and misfortune. He does this either directly or indirectly through the ancestors who are the special intermediaries between God and man. Sin or wrongdoing is an offence against the life of the entire community of both the living and the dead, which deserves punishment in this life.

The concept of salvation in Africa also reserves an important place to the eschatological dimension understood as the final realisation of life in the communion of the ancestors. The 'here-after' is the final goal for man, where one not only joins the company of the beloved ones, but becomes a 'living-dead'. Death neither destroys categorically from the ontological, the inter-relational perspective, nor from the point of view of space and time. It is a sign of hope to reach the desirable land of the 'living-dead'.

Footnotes

[1] *Cf.* J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi 2002, 24.
[2] *Cf.* L. Magesa, *African Religion: The moral traditions of abundant life,* Paulines Publications, Nairobi 1998, 77.
[3] *Cf.* D. R. Nkurunziza, *Bantu Philosophy of Life in the Light of the Christian Message: A Basis for an African Vitalistic Theology*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1989, 129-131.
[4] *Cf. Ibidem,* 67.
[5] *Cf. Ibidem,* 99.
[6] D. Westerlund, *Pluralism and Change: A Comparative and Historical Approach to African Disease Aetiologies,* University Press, Stockholm 1989, 188.
[7] *Cf.* J.S Mbiti, *African Philosophy and Religion*, 204-208.
[8] *Cf.* J.S. Mbiti, *African Philosophy and Religion*, 27.
[9] *Idem*, «God, Sin and Salvation in African Religion», 67.
[10] *Idem*, p. 59.
[11] L. Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life,* 154.
[12] *Cf.* J.S. Mbiti, *Death and the hereafter in the Light of Christianity and African Religion,* Makere University, Kampala (Uganda) 1973, 10.
[13] *Cf. Idem, African Philosophy and Religion*, 161.

Ref.: Text from the Author. Sent by e-mail (April 2007).

www.qumran2.net

The Awareness of the Latin American Church to the Reality of the Indigenous Cultures

- Nicanor Sarmiento -

The contemporary history of the Latin American Church begins with the creation of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), during the Conference at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1955. This institution created opportunities for dialogue between Bishops and grassroots Catholic's. Local Bishops became aware of the pastoral reality of the other local Churches in their own country and region. The collegial initiatives of the Bishops were gradually implemented with the creation of the National Bishops' Conference in each country. In these ecclesial instances, the Bishops discovered a dialogical way of ministering to the Church; they organized four general conferences in the second half of the twentieth century. At this point, the Latin American Church was preparing the fifth Conference, held in Aparecida, Brazil, 13 May 2007. The practice of holding conferences with the Bishops of an entire continent is a unique experience in the whole Catholic world.

The documents that come out of these conferences address different areas of Church evangelization, from family catechesis to indigenous cultures. These documents reflect the understanding and the issues of a particular time of the Church, as ideas and pastoral approaches evolve from one conference to the next, certain ministries are implemented, and others omitted.

The General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) – Rio de Janeiro, Medellin, Puebla and Santo Domingo – constitute fundamental landmarks in the pilgrimage of Latin American Catholics.[1] These conferences are ecclesial encounters of bishops, missionaries, theologians, laity and social scientists, as expressions of collaborative work. The Final Documents are the fruit of positive discussions, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and true concerns of the Bishops faced by the concrete realities of their flocks. These documents reflect the life of the Latin American Christian communities, with their fears and hopes, their joy and sadness, their weakness and strength.[2]

The Conferences held in Medellin, Puebla and Santo Domingo are the fruit of an arduous participation of the grassroots in the different stages of preparation. The Bishops tried to hear the voice of the people, not only each Bishop in his own jurisdiction but as an Episcopal College. At each conference the Bishops have become more and more aware of the missionary identity of the Church in Latin America. For that reason, the results of the conferences do not end up in conclusive documents. They are transferred into new ways of being Church, into new forms of pastoral work, as well as into the missionary and theological orientations that are being born on this "Continent of Hope".

In this paper, I will explain the movement in the Latin American Church from paternalism towards the native people, to stances of acceptance and empowerment. This development will be through a chronological, analytical, and interpretative reading of selected texts of the Latin American Church. I will adopt, in order to see, to judge and to appreciate the Latin American method. I will reflect on the historical context in which these conferences have arisen and on the

contribution of each conference to the evangelization of the indigenous people. I will discuss the steps the conferences have followed concerning the spread, acceptance and implementation of projects of evangelization that have taken place among the indigenous populations of the Latin America Continent. I will, also, briefly describe the missionary congresses organized by the Department of Missions of CELAM (DMC/DEMIS-CELAM), since they were held as part of the preparation and implementation of the Bishops' General Conferences.

1. The First Conference in Rio de Janeiro, 1955

In 1934 Cardinal Pacelli visited Buenos Aires, Argentina, as the Papal Envoy to preside over the *International Eucharistic Congress*. When he became Pope Pius XII, he campaigned to send missionaries, both men and women, to Latin America. He promoted the creation of new dioceses and the organization of national Synods in Latin America. In this context, Pope Pius XII summoned the Conference to meet at Rio de Janeiro from 25 July to 4 August 1955.[3] The Pope had several reasons to call this conference, such as "the serious shortage of candidates to the priesthood, deficiencies in the doctrinal instruction of the faithful, the defence of the Catholic faith as a way to prevent the action of Protestant sects, the social questions and the influence of materialistic ideologies. The Pope wanted to call the attention of the Latin American Bishops to these challenges and urged a coordinated and more effective pastoral action".[4] Pius XII named Cardinal Adeodato Piazza as his Envoy and President of the Conference in Rio. Cardinal Piazza in his inaugural speech entitled "*The Problem of Evangelization*", focused on the existing local missionary situations on the Latin American Continent.

Continuing with Church Organization, at the end of the Second World War, the Holy See promoted the creation of the National Episcopal Conferences. It has been a slow process. The National Conference of Brazilian Bishops was created in 1952, followed by other national conferences on the continent in the following years. At the continental level the creation of the "Conference of the Latin American and Carribean Bishops' Conferences" took place during the Conference in Rio in 1995.

This institution, an instance of coordination and joint efforts for evangelization, was able to "coordinate and guide the life of the Church on the continent". It became a privileged space for Bishops to teach collegially, to address social issues that were affecting the vast majority of the population, and to offer the main pastoral guidelines to the Latin American Church.

The Document of Rio has two sections: first, the declarations and conclusions, and second, the documents. In the first section, the bishops focused their attention on the problems of vocation and the formation of the secular clergy and religious. Referring to the deep social problems in Latin America, the Bishops said: "... the apostolate of the laity is not simply to collaborate with the priest in liturgical and prayer activities, but it must also be a missionary apostolate".[5]

The Bishops proposed the creation of a sub-secretariat for "the preservation and propagation of the Catholic faith", with a specialized section for "Missions, Indians and People of Colour". The Bishops stated: This Conference, remembering the most meritorious action of the Church and its missions in the defence and the elevation in the spiritual, moral and social life of the indigenous population of Latin America:

a) Urgently requests from the Prelates of the Mission Territories to continue, in a vigorous way, this human and Christian work, and also requests them to be permanently preoccupied in raising the interest of the civilian authorities. The natives must be protected, always and everywhere, in their human dignity as persons as well as their material goods;

b) Respectfully expresses its desire for the creation, in the near future, of an Institute of an ethnological and indigenous nature, in Latin America. This institution should develop a serious and well-organized project to resist the dangers presented by analogous institutions of non-Catholic inspiration;

c) Exhorts all Catholics and especially the Professors of Schools and Institutes, to continue the effort to eliminate all practices and customs that appear as racial discrimination.[6]

The Bishops explicitly requested that the indigenous people be protected as persons. This means, to respect their human rights,

their cultures, their land and their material goods. They also requested the end of discrimination against indigenous people in their education by the Governments and by the Church, as well. The Bishops strongly suggested and pleaded for the creation of an indigenous-ecclesial institute, to take better care of the indigenous situation all over the continent.

Another factor of great importance at the Rio Conference was the creation of the "Episcopal Council for Latin America and the Caribbean", a Catholic Church organization that has guided the life and mission of the Church in Latin America to the present day. The Document expressly says: "The General Conference of the Episcopate in Latin America has unanimously and kindly approved to request from the Holy See, the creation of a "Latin American Episcopal Council".[7] CELAM was approved by Pius XII on 2 November 1955. It established its headquarters in Bogota and by January of 1957 it had the status that defined, with clarity, its mission "as the organism for the contacts and collaboration of the Episcopal Conferences in Latin America".[8]

In the second part of the document, in the programmatic speech, Cardinal Piazza said to the Bishops, concerning the problem of evangelization: "We only have to open the Pontifical Yearbook to realize how many territories of mission still exist in Latin America. We can hardly find a nation in which there is not an officially recognized Prelature or Apostolic Vicariate. It means that evangelization is still for you a road to run. Therefore, the missionary activity prevails over any other".[9]

In his speech, Cardinal Piazza emphasized the urgent need of the mission "*ad intra*". The territories of mission under the Congregation "*Propaganda Fide*" demonstrated the need for evangelization in Latin America. Cardinal Piazza encouraged and admired the missionaries who, despite many difficulties and sorrows, fulfilled the missionary task in the most inhospitable places of this continent.

With the creation of CELAM began a new collegiality and missionary creativity in the Latin American Church. From 1955 the year of its creation till the Second Conference in Medellin (1968) eleven meetings took place, clear evidence of the enormous interest the creation of CELAM raised among the Bishops in Latin America. As a way to emphasize the communion with the universal Church the "Pontifical Commission for Latin America" was created, offering CELAM direct access to the Holy See. Both institutions were responsible for the organization of the later conferences, starting with the Conference in Medellin.

Between the Conferences in Rio and Medellin an important event happened in the Catholic world. Pope John XXIII summoned the Second Vatican Council on 25 January 1959. It began on 11 October 1962 after four years of preparation. The grassroots Catholics and their local Bishops became actively involved in the preparation of the Council, their ideas, input and concerns were coordinated by CELAM, who prepared a document with the contribution of the regional Church in Latin America for the Council.

Another relevant event in the Church of Latin America was the creation of the "Department of Missions" (DMC, today DEMIS-CELAM). It was in answer to the request of the Rio Conference for the creation of a sub-secretariat to act on "the preservation and propagation of the Catholic faith" with a specialized section for "Missions and Indians". The theologian Ricardo Cuellar affirmed:

"DEMIS was created in the organizational Assembly of CELAM, after the Vatican Council in Rio de la Plata, Argentina, in 1966. This was the initiative of the Colombian Bishop Gerardo Valencia Cano, member of the Yarumal Mission Society. He was elected as its first president from 1966-1969. This organism of CELAM will play a key role in the missionary and missiological directions of the Latin American Church in the years to come. Unlike the European missiology that came from the universities, the Latin American missiology was elaborated by the missionary bishops and their collaborators, particularly in the context of the evangelization of the indigenous people".[10]

The successive bishop-presidents of the Mission Department contributed in different ways to the development of the Latin American missiological reflection and the awareness towards the indigenous people. Bishop Samuele Ruiz García (1969-1974) prioritized the evangelization of the indigenous

people, starting from their cultural identity. Bishop Roger Aubry (1974-1979), based the theology of mission on the Paschal Mystery of Christ. He urged a specific evangelization culturally differentiated with the indigenous and Afro-American populations and the so-called "specific missionary situations". He called the Latin Americans to be involved in the mission "*Ad Gentes*"; he said, we are members of a missionary church "we must give from our own poverty", this will make us strong in faith (Puebla 368).[11] Aubry's voice was heard clearly and loudly, today, we have many Latin Americans, both men and women in foreign missions around the world and some of these missionaries are indigenous people. Bishop Augusto Castro Quiroga contributed to a more explicit missionary commitment of Latin America, in the context of the Conference in Santo Domingo in 1992.

2. The Second Conference in Medellin 1968

The decade of the 1960's in Latin America was characterized by the beginning of dictatorships in most of its countries and the implementation of the "Doctrine of the National Security". The first military *coup* took the Government of Brazil in 1964, in Peru in 1968, and it was implemented in other countries in the following years. The armed forces became troops of occupation in their own countries. The world was divided in two blocs: the United States and the Soviet Union.[12] These military Governments ruled the countries through terror and fear, persecution and death of political leaders, kidnappings and the unjust imprisonment of the people who opposed their views, and human rights abuses. The situation of indigenous populations got worse. They lost their land to tenants, and major hydroelectric, mining and lumber projects were set up in indigenous territories, causing human displacement in very precarious conditions. In this complex context the role of the Catholic Church was crucial. Courageous Bishops stood up for the poor and indigenous people.

Talking purely from the missiological point of view, two important encounters were organized by the newly created Department of Missions (DEMIS): Ambato (1967) and Melgar (1968).

Ambato 1967. The "First functional and organizational encounter of the DMC took place in Ambato, Ecuador, on 24-28 April 1967. The Agenda of this meeting included three points: **First**, the delimitation of the concept of 'Mission' in Latin America; **second**, missionary urgency; and **third**, the missionary pastoral plan on the continent".[13] The third point had relevance for the purpose of the mission among indigenous people; it presented the socio-cultural characteristics of the areas in which the missionary activity was conducted. It stressed how the Gospel of Jesus was proclaimed to concrete human groups, with their own social, economic and cultural realities. The Document of Ambato explicitly mentioned the indigenous people. It recognized that the missionary work among the natives must pay attention to the socio-economic and political conditions, and also to the identity and the cultural values of the indigenous people that are being evangelized.

Ambato asked the foreign missionaries to adapt to the cultural conditions of the mission territories. The work of evangelization is still in the hands of foreign missionaries, there is no mention of indigenous evangelizers. Adaptation is part of the colonial model of mission, but an appropriate formation for missionaries in theology and social sciences will lead to a liberating and inclusive evangelization of indigenous people in the following decades.

Melgar 1968. A year after Ambato and a few months before the Conference of Medellín, the Department of Missions organized another encounter from 20-27 April 1968, in Melgar, Colombia. The Document of Melgar is divided into four parts: **First**, "Some of the most urgent problems of the Missionary Church in Latin America", an analysis of the problematic of mission in Latin America from the theological and pastoral perspectives; **second**, "the Missionary Church", which is an enriching theological reflection; **third**, "Missionary Situations in Latin America", the signaling of the diverse missionary situations on the continent; and **finally**, "Directions for a Renewal of the Missionary Pastoral in Latin America", offering practical guidelines and directions.

In the first section of the Melgar Document the most relevant issue concerning indigenous cultures is the recognition of cultural plurality in Latin

America. "In addition to the dominant Western culture, in Latin America there is a great plurality of cultures and a cultural mixing of Indigenous, Black, Mestizos and others".[14] There are implications in the recognition of the cultural plurality as a "fundamental aspect" of the problematic of missions in Latin America. The first would be the theological consideration of the cultural history of each culture ("languages, customs, institutions, values and aspirations"). Another one would be the diverse expressions of faith manifested in each of the local Catholic Churches. The Document questioned and criticized "a mono cultural" Church as an agent of the predominant Western culture. At a civil level, it criticized the models of national integration as destructive of the cultures and proposed the recognition of both patrimonies for mutual enrichment.

In the **third part** of the Melgar Document a key concept appears: "Missionary situations", based on theological criteria for constant human situations that are in need of evangelization, which surpassed the legal-territorial concept of mission that delimits for evangelization for the mission territories. In the **fourth part**, the Document stated that the social and human development work of the Church "does not necessarily imply the creation of the Church's institutions". The Church would help the indigenous communities in assuming their own responsibility, avoiding all paternalism. "It is very important that the missionary presence of the Church respect the cultural diversity and help each culture to evolve following its own characteristics" (Melgar 22).

In many indigenous areas in Latin America the presence of the Church has been of great importance to the preservation of these cultures so that they would not to be erased from the map. The preservation of the local languages has always been a strong preoccupation of the Catholic Church from its beginning in America. At present, there are ecumenical translations of the Bible, the liturgical and catechetical texts, and some magazines and bilingual newspapers in native languages.
The Christian Churches use the native languages in religious teaching and human development programmes. There was also a growing presence of the Church in radio broadcasting; but not yet in serious television programmes, which is still one of the greatest means of communication and the best instrument for the formation of public opinion.

Finally, Melgar spoke about "the formation of missionaries", and highlighted the human and spiritual qualities required to become a good missionary. "The missionary shall be equipped with a human balance that will allow him or her to be inserted in a new and strange situation". The missionary must be open to acculturation, indigenization, surrendering and incarnation. It also highlighted some important training components such as "a good training in anthropology, linguistics, psychology, social communication and theology, as well".[15] We can conclude that Melgar asked for an integral formation of the missionaries that includes the human, the spiritual and the social scientific areas.

The DMC presented two documents at the Medellin Conference. One official contribution to the conference was a sociological study prepared by Fr Jose Manuel Roman, entitled: "The Reality of the Missions in Latin America". The other contribution was a lecture given during the conference by Bishop Samuele Ruiz García, on the subject "Evangelization in Latin America". There is no indication that the Document of Melgar was presented at this conference.
The Medellin Conference took place thirteen years after the Rio Conference, from 24 August to 6 September 1968, in Medellin, Colombia. Pope Paul VI was present for the inauguration of the Conference in Bogota. It was the first visit of a Roman Pontiff to the Latin American Continent. After the Visit of the Pope, the Bishops went to Medellin to discuss the most urgent questions and problems facing the Church in Latin America and to implement the necessary changes requested by Vatican Council II. For this reason, the subject at Medellin was: "*The presence of the Church in the present transformation of Latin America, in the light of the Vatican Council II*".

In the Medellin Document the term "indigenous peoples" is mentioned four times. It appears first as recognition of the missionaries of the past, "those who have been active and charitably present in the diverse cultures, especially indigenous cultures, of the continent ...".[16] Medellin recognized the presence and the work of evangelization of the Church among

indigenous people from the beginning of evangelization in Latin America.

It again refers that "this Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate expresses its pastoral preoccupation and concern for the human development of the indigenous and peasant populations".[17] The Bishops requested authentic and urgent agrarian reform, the granting of land to the peasants and indigenous people, and access to technology for industrial development in the indigenous geographical areas.

Identifying the indigenous population among the most marginalized the Document states:

There exists ... a vast sector of marginalized people, the illiterate, and especially the illiterate natives, very often even deprived of the most elementary benefit of communication by means of a common language. Their ignorance is a cruel servitude. Their liberation is the responsibility of all Latin American people. It is our duty to bring them education and training, so that they can be empowered to become the authors of their own progress and can develop in a creative and original way their cultural world with their own resources, so that they can benefit from their own efforts. In the case of the indigenous population they should be respected in their own cultural values, without excluding the creative dialogue with other cultures.[18]

A good educational system must be provided for them, so that they can become "authors of their own progress", and can discover the worthiness of their cultures and make others respect their cultural heritage without isolation from the national societies.

Finally, the Medellin Conference reminded the consecrated Religious people of the need "to take care of, to educate, to evangelize and to promote the marginalized social classes". It urged "the consecrated men and women religious, with an eminently missionary spirit, to worry about the numerous indigenous groups of the continent".[19] The double dimension of evangelization appears clearly in this document: the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and human development.

Therefore, we can conclude that at Medellin indigenous groups appeared within the marginalized classes, with their own cultural identity, that requires human development to come from their unjust and inhumane situation. The document emphasized the role of education to enable indigenous groups to become creative agents of their own history. The awareness of respect for the values of indigenous cultures emerged strongly from the Medellin Conference. This emphasis would find a new vitality and would have historical resonance at Puebla.

The Second Vatican Council ended in 1965. The Bishops of the different local Churches of the Catholic world went back to their dioceses and tried to implement the changes suggested by the Council. The Medellin Conference was held to apply the changes approved by the Council to the Latin American reality. That is why the theme of Medellin was "the presence of the Church in the present transformation of Latin America, in the light of Vatican Council II".

The Council had strong and immediate effects on the Churches of Chile and Brazil. These two national churches began the implementation of the Council by organizing the Basic Ecclesial Communities where lay people could talk about the social problems of the neighborhood or village, enlighten with the Gospel message and theology, and take practical measures to solve their local problems. In Bolivia, Bishop Adhemer Esquivel and his team began to prepare the Quechuan and Aymara Indians to become leaders of the Church in their local communities through the study of the Vatican II Documents especially *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, where native people was able to discover their role in the Church and society. In Peru, Cardinal Juan Landázuri, after his return from Medellin, left his episcopal palace and moved to a small house in a poor neighborhood of Lima. Other Bishops of the Andes began pastoral visits to the most remote villages of their dioceses. All these changes were guided by the spirit of the Vatican Council and the Medellin Conference, empowering the people in Church and society.

The Conference of Medellin understood The Second Vatican Council from the perspective of Latin America. The main emphasis in all the Medellin Documents is the need: for integral human development; to promote local leaders in Christian ethics, politics and social awareness. An historical landmark of the Medellin Conference is its "preferential option for the poor" and for the integral liberation of the humankind. All these changes in the Church caused one of the most important Latin American theologies to emerge: the theology of liberation. [...]

The Awareness of the Latin American Church to the Reality of the Indigenous Cultures

- Nicanor Sarmiento -

3. The Third Conference in Puebla 1979

In the 1970's most Latin American countries were under a military dictatorship.

The vast majority of the population got poorer; there was social and political unrest, and consequently human rights abuses; assassinations and the imprisoment of political leaders who opposed the military Governments were common. In this context, the Bishops raised their critical voice against the abuses committed by the military. This led to the persecution of catechists, consecrated men and women religious, priests and bishops. In 1976, the Ecuadorian Army in Santa Cruz took into detention a group of Latin American Bishops who were returning from a regional meeting in Riobamba, Ecuador; because of their involvement with indigenous organizations. As a result of the political and social awareness in the grassroots several organizations were created to resist the military repression. Among those organizations we can name the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights and the Ecumenical Movement of Human Rights in Argentina.[20]

Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo led the preparatory commission at Puebla and with the support of some officials in the Vatican he prepared the so-called "*Green Book*". The National Episcopal Conferences rejected it as too timid and they continued the preparatory process. As soon as they arrived for the Conference in Puebla, the Bishops assumed the responsibility as Pastors: they analyzed the human and spiritual situation of Latin America in the light of the Word of God and of theology. They came to pastoral conclusions regarding the social and human reality. For example, the Bishops realized that "the 'poor were poorer' and the situation of poverty was even worse than at the time of the Medellin Conference.[21]

The Third General Episcopal Conference of Latin American Bishops took place in Puebla de Los Angeles, Mexico, from 28 January to 13 February 1979. It was a conference of the Latin American Bishops, with some priests, men and women religious and lay people.

The general theme for reflection was "*Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future*". The document was divided into five parts: "Pastoral overview of the reality that is Latin America"; "God's saving plan for Latin America"; "Evangelization in the Latin American Church: Communion and Participation"; "A Missionary Church serving evangelization in Latin America"; and "Under the Dynamism of the Spirit: Pastoral Options".

The two new themes that appear in Puebla are the importance of cultures in evangelization, and the Latin American Church's awareness of foreign missions. At the end of this Conference as a symbolic gesture they sent hundreds of Latin American missionaries to Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Going back to the theme of this paper, I ask the question, "what is the approach of Puebla to the evangelization of the indigenous cultures?". If we look for the term "indigenous" in the plural we find eighteen explicit references.[22] The term "indigenous" in the singular is used twice (DP 307, 464). And the term "pre-Columbian cultures" also appears twice (DP 201, 409).

The missiologist Juan Gorski who studies the evangelization of culture and of the cultures in the Puebla Document, says:

The originality of Puebla consists in the explicit awareness of cultural diversity and the

call for evangelization that arises from such awareness. What Puebla affirmed about this cultural diversity may be grouped under three general headings: the identification of particular ethnic groups, the pastoral approach to those ethnic groups in the past, in the present, and the guidelines for the future, and the different ways of expressing the evangelization of these groups.[23]

The three points raised by Gorski help us to identify the different ethnic groups, see the service offered to them, and to evaluate those cultures in the Gospel perspective. Each ethnic group requires an inculturated evangelization because of its uniqueness.

We normally speak of a single culture when referring to Latin America, unifying the different races that coexist in this continent. However, the reality is that in the Latin American cultural base there are three great cultural groups, as Puebla pointed out:

Latin America presents the encounter of Spanish and Portuguese peoples with the pre-Columbian and African cultures. Racial and cultural integration has profoundly marked this process, and there is every indication it will continuo to do so now and in the future (DP 409).

We can observe the "racial integration" as a result of five centuries of coexistence and intermarriage between these groups. The Hispanic and mestizos cultures are predominant in this society. However, the presence of the indigenous cultures that originally inhabited Abya Yala[24] represents a visible minority struggling to find their place in Latin American society. The Afro-Americans, who arrived on this land during the Spanish and Portuguese colonial era, represent the other visible minority with a certain influence in Latin America. Puebla does not mention the presence of other groups such as the Asian Americans.

Now I will focus on the indigenous cultures. The Puebla Document treats "indigenous and Afro-American cultures", as if they were similar cultural groups and deserved identical attention. Indigenous and Afro-American are two cultures with a different set of values and origin. Geographically the Indians occupy rural areas and Afro-Americans the urban and costal areas. There are hundreds of native languages and there is no single Afro-American language spoken in the region today. Puebla was aware of the cultural differences between the indigenous groups: "This fact cannot hide the persistence of diverse indigenous or Afro-American cultures in a pure state, nor the existence of groups with diverse degrees of national integration" (*cf.* DP 410).

We can notice two categories: first, the indigenous groups that consciously identify themselves as native, with their own identity and originality, such as the Zapotecs, the Mapuches, the Kunas, the Quechuas, the Aymaras, Manes, Mayans, and others. These groups are integrated within their respective countries as indigenous cultures. Secondly, there are small groups in the remote areas isolated from national society and Church evangelization. Some of these groups are isolated because the national and regional Governments do not care for them. Other groups purposely isolated themselves from the influence of the dominant mestizo society. The Bishops in Puebla called this attitude "unfruitful isolation" (*cf.* DP 424), because isolation makes them vulnerable to the impact of the dominant society. The Church in Puebla is in favour of the integration of the indigenous cultures into the national societies, this was the current movement promoted by national Governments and the Churches in the 1960's and 1970's. The Bishops are in favour of evangelizing these isolated groups with a new attitude and liberating approach, such evangelization must respect their cultural values, territories, languages and customs. Puebla is against any aggressive economic development and political integration that would lead to the extermination of the indigenous cultures. The Bishops in Puebla made the commitment to denounce these abuses in a prophetic way, because the Church "promotes the dignity and freedom of the Latin American people" (DP 8).

The Bishops are aware of the sins and errors committed in the history of the evangelization of the indigenous peoples, native religious practices were eradicated and condemned. The colonial Church imposed Western Christianity, as a result of the Church's intolerance most of the Andean rituals are celebrated at midnight. At the same time, the Bishops recognized the presence of authentic native Christian communities thanks to the evangelizating efforts of the Church. Puebla highlighted the courage of the missionaries both men and women who work with these groups. In the eyes of the Church the indigenous are not the "problem", but are "living people", with rich cultural values. Puebla insisted that these cultures be called to encounter Christ. The Bishops affirmed that, by their adherence to the Church, they have much to contribute to the enrichment of the Christian tradition and for

the fullness of their own culture. In spite of these efforts, Puebla is aware of the existence of some "perduring situations: our indigenous peoples who are habitually left on the margins of life, and who are inadequately evangelized, or sometimes not at all; also the Afro-Americans, who are so often forgotten" (DP 365).

The Puebla Conference responded to the urgent need of an integral evangelization of these cultures:

"The Church of Latin America has resolved to put fresh vigour into its work of evangelizing the culture of our peoples and the various ethnic groups. It wants to see the faith of the Gospel blossom or be restored to fresh life. And with this as the basis of communion, it wants to see it burgeon into forms of just integration on all levels – national, continental Latin American, and universal. This will enable our peoples to develop their own culture in such a way that they can assimilate the findings of science and technology in their own proper way" (DP 428).

The Document demanded that the local Churches that are at the missionary service of the native people, promote an integral evangelization by considering the efforts of the past, by doing what is positive today, and by projecting it into the future.

About the third point, the theological considerations under which the indigenous cultures appear have their "general principle in the incarnation" (*cf.* DP 400). By this theological and biblical principle we can search for the "seeds of the Word" present in cultures (DP 401-403), present in the cultural values and waiting for the proclamation of the living Word (DP 451). John Gorski affirms that "the cultural wealth of the indigenous people not only demands a new and positive consideration of the traditions of the past but also a high appreciation of their present and future contribution to the Church and to evangelization".[25] The Puebla Document says:

The Holy "Spirit, who filled the whole earth, was also present in all that was good in pre-Columbian cultures. That very Spirit helped them to accept the Gospel. And today the Spirit continues to arouse yearning for liberative salvation in our peoples. Hence we must discover the Spirit's authentic presence in the history of Latin America" (DP 201).

"The indigenous cultures have undeniable values. They are the peoples' treasure. We commit ourselves to looking on them with sympathy and respect and to promoting them. For we realize "how important culture is as a vehicle for transmitting the faith, so that human beings might progress in their knowledge of God. In this matter there can be no differences of race or culture" (John Paul II, *Speech* Oaxaca 2: 71 *AAS,* p. 208), (DP 1164).

The Bishops are committed to respect the indigenous cultures and discover the presence of the Spirit of God in them. They are in favour of an incarnated and integral evangelization, by respecting and promoting the richness of their cultural values. They are against poverty, the social and political marginalization of the Indigenous groups, which make them "the poorest among the poor" (DP 34). They urge Governments to improve the living conditions of the Indigenous people.

As a part of the implementation of Puebla, I want to mention two events, the creation of "The Latin American Ecumenical Coalition for Indigenous Pastoral" and the Missionary Congress in Bogota 1985 because of their importance in shaping the indigenous pastoral apostolate.

First, until Puebla, the great protagonist of indigenous pastoral was the Department of Missions of CELAM. From the 1980's on, other institutions began to promote and to coordinate the native ministry. The Indigenous Christians and their missionaries overcame their denominational differences and welcome ecumenical initiatives. The Methodist minister Paulino Montejo wrote:

In the decade of the 1980's and at the beginning of the 1990's, the Latin American Ecumenical Coalition for Indigenous Pastoral" ("La Articulación Ecuménica Latinoamericana de Pastoral Indígena" (AELAPI), was created in a dialectical process, followed by the fortification of national organizations of pastoral for Indigenous groups".[26]

The AELAPI, as an ecumenical institution, played an important role in organizing pastoral congresses, surveys on indigenous related issues, and organizing the five Latin American Gatherings on Native Theology. This ecumenical effort is a challenge because the attendance of the Protestant Churches is low. What really matters is that, in spite of our theological and pastoral differences and of the mutual feelings of rejection, we have begun to walk together; it seems that our cultural identity is able to solve our religious differences and this is a signal of the Spirit of Pentecost for all Christians.

Second, the Department of Mission of CELAM organized a congress in Bogota in 1985.[27] Under the theme: "The evangelization of indigenous people on the eve of the half

millennium of the discovery of America" (Bogota 1985). I will highlight the theological implications of this document. Historically speaking, this encounter at Bogota marked the passage from an "*indigenist pastoral*" (*pastoral indigenista*), which means, foreign missionaries leading and organizing the indigenous evangelization without the participation of indigenous people, to an "*indigenous pastoral*" (*pastoral indígena*),[28] which involves the full participation of indigenous people in the organization of the pastoral wook. The document recognized the growth of the Indigenous population. Puebla (1979) spoke of thirty-six million; and Bogota (1985) refers to forty million that "are identified as pertaining to an ethnic group, generally peasants, from jungle areas or those who migrated to the outskirts of the cities". Bogota appealed to Puebla to affirm that indigenous people in the eyes of Christ "are human, civilized, adult, in process of salvation, and with a full right to maintain their own cultural identity".[29] The evangelization process must help the discovery of "the Word of God hidden in the heart of each culture" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 5). The Document of Bogota, considered that "mestization" is the most important cultural factor that influences the disintegration and extinction of the indigenous cultures. On the other hand, it appears clearly in this document that "the indigenous communities have the right of being evangelized, and some indigenous people explicitly request it and even demand it on many occasions". The Church evangelization must promote human and spiritual liberation of the indigenous people, and create mature local Churches, with their own hierarchy, theology, liturgy and faith expressions, in communion with other particular Churches, mainly and fundamentally with the Successor of Peter.[30]

4. The Conference in Santo Domingo 1992

In the 1990's, the indigenous movements and organizations won public recognition nationally and internationally. The Indigenous presence so often ignored by the Governments became visible when they marched on the streets and placed their demands for vindication to local, regional and national authorities. In countries such as Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico the indigenous population represents more than half of the national populations. In Ecuador Indigenous people forced the corrupt Government of the country to resign. In Mexico and Guatemala the indigenous organizations forced their Governments to dialogue with them about the social and economical problems that are affecting their communities. In 1992 Rigoberta Menchú, a Quiche Indian, received the Nobel Peace Prize.

This created a mixed message among the Indigenous people, for some the achievement represented betrayal, for others a well-deserved reward.

The commemoration of the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Europeans in America and the beginning of Christianity on this continent woke up the awareness of the indigenous movements at the political, social and religious levels. The purpose of the Conference in Santo Domingo was the celebration of the five hundred years of evangelization in America.

The National Bishops' Conferences worked on the preparation of the Santo Domingo Conference in several stages, and had some very fruitful moments. The working document or "*Instrumentum laboris*" was drawn up by CELAM and approved by Rome. However, at the beginning of the Conference, the Chairman put this document aside as "a document for consultation". This decision created disagreement and uneasy feelings among the Bishops; many of them even doubted whether they were in a "Conference of the Latin American Bishops" or whether they were simply called to a "conference for this Episcopate". The conservative trend was not able to maintain the direction of the Conference because of the prophetic voices of some Bishops. The final redaction of the text was a compromise to please the different tendencies of the Latin American Church. For this reason the Santo Domingo Document is weak and contradictory on certain theological issues. The prophetic tendency of Bishops affirmed the essential theology of Medellín and Puebla and asked for an inculturated evangelization. In the end, the communion and the collegiality of the Latin American Bishops overcame their theological and pastoral views.

The main subject of the Conference in Santo Domingo was: "*The New Evangelization, Human Promotion, and Christian Culture: Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today and Always*" (Heb 13:8). The document has three sections. **The first** is: "Jesus Christ, Gospel of the Father". It begins with the profession of Faith. **The second** section is "Jesus Christ, Evangelizer living in His Church". In this section the document approaches the subjects of new evangelization, human promotion and Christian culture. **The third** section is: "Jesus Christ, Life and Hope of Latin America and the Caribbean". It offers the pastoral guidelines of the Bishops.

In Santo Domingo there are four references

to "Indigenous people" (SD 38, 138, 245, 299); eight references appear on "indigenous cultures" (SD 30, 32, 80, 84, 251, 270, 302, 303); and one as "pre-Columbian cultures" (SD 17). The Bishops in Santo Domingo, like the Bishops in Puebla, referred to the "Indigenous people and Afro-Americans", as if they were the same cultural reality. The Bishops said: "We have devoted particular attention to an authentic incarnation of the Gospel in the indigenous and Afro-American cultures of our continent" (SD 32).

At the beginning of the Conference in Santo Domingo, Pope John Paul II asked for forgiveness for the abuses committed by the Church during the five hundred years of the Christian presence in Latin America. The Bishops, following the example of the Holy Father, said: "We must recognized the full truth about the abuses committed, due to lack of love in those people who where unable to recognize in the Indigenous people their brothers and sisters and children of the same God and Father. With John Paul II we want to ask God's pardon for this 'unknown holocaust' in which baptized people who did not live their faith were involved" (*cf.* SD 20). Latin American Church history shows us that millions of Indigenous people died from war, the hard work imposed on them, and the deceases brought by the Europeans. In the name of God native cultural values and religious practices were condemned. This evangelical gesture of the Pope and of the Bishops was the beginning of a new era. Christian morality teaches us that forgiveness requires reparation of harm caused by sin, without reparation forgiveness will remain an empty word. The Bishops' response was to promote an inculturated evangelization among the Indigenous people.

Inculturation is "the continuous dialogue between the person of Jesus and his message with cultures", in our case with the indigenous cultures. At the Conference in Santo Domingo the Bishops did not give a definition but described the phases, fields and aspects of the inculturation process of the missionaries and of the pastoral life of the Church. The Bishops stated that: "all evangelization must therefore mean inculturating the Gospel. Every culture can thus become Christian, that is, point toward Christ and draw inspiration from him and his message. The inculturation of the Gospel is an imperative to follow Jesus" (*cf.* SD 13).

Among the fields for the inculturation of the Gospel the Bishops suggested the proclamation of the Word and catechesis. It is urgent to have pastoral agents and catechists with a solid formation and training in the Bible and the teachings of the Church, so that they can become "effective instruments of the inculturation of the Gospel" (SD 49). The Bishops pointed out "popular religiosity" as another important field that requires inculturation (SD 53).

In continuity with Medellín and Puebla, Santo Domingo recognized that "Latin America and the Caribbean is a multiethnic and pluricultural continent" through the coexistence of Indigenous groups, Afro-Americans and Mestizos (SD 244). Given the present pluricultural processes and the influence of modern and postmodern cultures, the Document proposes a process of inculturation, which John Paul II has called the "centre, means and aim of the New Evangelization" (SD 229).

The Bishops recognized "the growing impoverishment in which millions of brothers and sisters are plunged – to the point where it is reaching intolerable extremes of misery – is the cruelest and most crushing scourge that Latin America and the Caribbean are enduring" (SD 179). Santo Domingo added "new suffering faces": those disfigured by hunger, terrorized by violence, aged by inhuman living conditions, and anguish over family survival. The Bishops continued, "The Lord asks people to discover his own face in the suffering faces of our brothers and sisters" (SD 178, 179).

The Bishops wished to meet the pastoral challenges with "programmes of priestly and religious formation, specific courses in missiology, and instruction for candidates to the priesthood on how important it is that the Gospel be inculturated". The Bishops also urged the formation and training of "native pastoral agents with a missionary spirit" so that they can "courageously agree to send missionaries – whether priests, religious, or lay people", beyond the boundaries of their local Churches (*cf.* SD 128).

The Santo Domingo Document stated: "After having joined the Pope asking forgiveness of our Indigenous and Afro-American brothers and sisters … we intend to carry out an inculturated evangelization:

"Offer the Gospel of Jesus with the witness of a humble, understanding, and prophetic attitude, esteeming what they have to say through a respectful, frank, and fraternal dialogue; strive to learn their languages.

"Acquire greater critical knowledge of their cultures in order to appreciate them in the light of the Gospel.

"Foster inculturation of the liturgy by appreciating and drawing on those symbols, rituals, and religious expressions of theirs that are compatible with the clear meaning of the faith, while maintaining the value of the universal symbols and in harmony with the Church's general discipline.

"Accompany their theological reflection by respecting their cultural formulations, which help them to provide a reason for their faith and hope.

"Acquire greater knowledge of their world vision, which makes the complex of the God-human-world a unity that pervades all human, spiritual, and transcendental relationships.

"Promote within the indigenous peoples their own native cultural values by means of an inculturation of the Church so as to embody God's Reign more fully" (SD 248).

In Santo Domingo, the Bishops made the commitment with a project of life and evangelization among the indigenous cultures in Latin America. The main purpose of this project was the creation of the indigenous local Churches, born from the inculturation of the Gospel. The Bishops stated that it is a legitimate desire that the native local Churches have their own theology, so that they can explain and provide reasons for their faith; have an incarnated liturgy to express and celebrate the same true God following the rituals, signs and symbols of their own cultures; have their own spirituality, their ways to pray, their interior spiritual life. Their ways of relating to God, to other human beings and to nature, can be shaped according to their cultural cosmology and become true ways of sanctification.

Conclusions

This brief journey through the Documents of the four General Conferences of CELAM and some of the missionary congresses organized by the Department of Missions (DEMIS-CELAM) has given us the testimony of the growing awareness of the Latin American Church and its Bishops regarding the task of the evangelization of the indigenous cultures. I will offer some conclusions:

The awareness of the Church to the indigenous reality is a slow process; these changes are possible because the Spirit of God was already present in the cultures that heard the Gospel of Jesus and believed in it. These Christian communities born from the evangelization process of the Church are becoming vibrant local Churches.

The evaluation of the indigenous cultures in the life and reflection of the Latin American Church is documented in the four Conferences. At the General Conference in Rio de Janeiro, the Bishops pleaded for "the protection of the indigenous groups in their persons and their material goods". In Medellín, the Church requested the human development and evangelization of the native people so that they can emerge from their condition as a "marginalized class". Puebla made an explicit "evangelical consideration of the ethnic groups" and the Bishops concluded by saying: "we commit ourselves to consider the ethnic groups with respect and affection and to work for their integral promotion, acknowledging how important culture is as a vehicle for the transmission of faith, so that people can progress in the knowledge of God". In Santo Domingo, the pastors committed themselves "to appreciate and to value the cultures in the light of the Gospel, to promote the inculturation of the Liturgy, welcoming with esteem their symbols, rituals and religious expressions compatible with the clear sense of the faith; to accompany their theological reflection and respecting their cultural formulations that can provide reasons for their faith and hope" (*cf.* I Pt. 3:15).

In the Documents of the missionary encounters organized by the CELAM Department of Missions and other organizations, as well, we can discover progress which goes from simple "respect of the cultural values of the indigenous groups", to the discovery of the "seeds of the Word" in the patrimony of the indigenous cultures; the recognition of the presence of God in those cultures. These documents go even further, to the awareness that "the Christian Churches not only have the right but must proclaim Christ, as well", and "each particular culture has the right to be evangelized". The Lord of history and God of all peoples has been making His road in the middle of their joys and hopes. Even through the various forms of tension, aggression, incomprehension and mistakes God has been indicating the footpath towards the main goal, the knowledge of His Son and the building of the Kingdom of God.

The growing awareness and the evaluation of the Indigenous cultures from part of the Latin American Church has made possible the establishment of an "indigenist pastoral", pastoral for the natives, "indigenous pastoral" evangelization process that involves indigenous people, and the elaboration of the "Christian indigenous theology", which is one of the Latin American theologies that nurtures the life of faith of Indigenous people. Certainly, the leaders of the Latin America Church have moved from

paternalistic practices, towards the acceptance of native church leadership and to empowering inculturation projects in the indigenous communities. This is what I call conversion of the Church to the indigenous cause.

The different documents produced by the Latin American Church are very rich and new in their theological and missiological contents. This testifies that Latin American Missiology was born in the mission field.

In conclusion, I hope to have made by this paper a contribution to the evangelization of the Indigenous people in Latin America and to the purpose of this course. Without any doubt, the documents of the Latin American Bishops will continue inspiring new processes in Latin America and other continents.

Bibliography

Cleary, Edward. *Path from Puebla: Significant Documents of the Latin American Bishops since 1979*. Translated by Philip Barryman. First ed. Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1989.

Eagleson, John and Scharper, Philip, *Puebla and Beyond*. Translated by John Drury. First ed. New York: Orbis Books, 1979.

Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops. *Santo Domingo Conclusions: New Evangelization, Human Development, Christian Culture "Jesus Christ....The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever"* (Heb 13:8). Translated by Phillip Berryman. First ed. Washington, D.C.: Publishing and Promotion Services United States Catholic Conference, 1993.

Bueno, Eloy, y Calvo, Roberto. *Diccionario De Misionología Y Animación Misionera*. Vol. 2. First ed. Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2003.

Hennelly, Alfred T., J.S., *Santo Domingo and Beyond: Documents and Commentaries from the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops*. First ed. New York: Orbis Books, 1993.

MISAL 2006. *Medellín Conference of Latin American Bishops: Final Documents*. Medellín, Colombia, 2006.

Las Conferencias Generales del Episcopado Latinoamericano: Río, Medellín, Puebla Y Santo Domingo. Trimilenio: Tecnología al Servicio de la Nueva Evangelización Version 1, Lima 1995.

Sarmiento Tupayupanqui, Nicanor. *Caminos de la Teología India*. Editorial Verbo Divino, Editorial Guadalupe y UCB, Cochabamba, 2000.

Gorski, Juan, F. *"El desarrollo de la Misionología en América Latina"* en apuntes a la *Introducción a la Misionología",* Universidad Católica Boliviana, Cochabamba 2000. Conferencia General del Episcopado Latino-Americano, Río de Janeiro, 25 de Julio-4 de Agosto de 1955, Conclusiones, Pro Manuscrito, Tipografía Poliglotta Vaticana, 1956.

Perez Esquivel, Adolfo, *"Los Derechos Humanos"* en Encuentro de Riobamba: 10° Aniversario de la Pascua de Mons. Proaño y 30° Aniversario de Medellín, Editado por la coordinadora de Pastoral Diocesana, Riobamba, Ecuador 1998:19. Premio Nobel de la Paz.

Gorski, Juan F., *El desarrollo Histórico de la misionología Latinoamericana, Orientaciones teológicas del Departamento de Misiones del CELAM: 1966-1979,* La Paz, Bolivia 1985:15.

Departamento de Misiones – Demis 9, *Melgar 3*, en *Documentos de Pastoral Indígena,* Centro de Publicaciones – CELAM, Bogotá, 1989. En adelante lo citaré como DEMIS 9, 1989.

Departamento de Misiones del CELAM-DMC, Centro Nacional de Pastoral Indigenista (CENAPI), Xicotepec de Juárez, Puebla, México, *Documento final del Primer Encuentro Pastoral sobre la misión de la Iglesia en las culturas aborígenes*, en *Pastoral Indigenista*, Indo-American Press Service, Bogotá, 1970.

Cleary, Edward L., *In Crisis and Change: Church in Latin America Today,* Second Printing, edited by Orbis Books, New York, 1985. Chapter 2, New Church: From Medellín to Puebla, downloaded from Dominican website www.dominicans.org/~ecleary/crisis/index.html.

Tercera Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano, *Puebla: la evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de América Latina,* programa para Windows. Trimilenio: Tecnología al Servicio de la Nueva Evangelización, Lima.

Gorski, Juan F., *La evangelización de la cultura y de las culturas en el documento de Puebla: un estudio misionológico*, tesis de licenciatura, presentada en la Pontificia Universidad Gregoriana, Roma 1982:85-86. Es una disertación no publicada de 160 páginas.

Departamento de Misiones 83, *De una pastoral indigenista a una pastoral indígena,* Publicaciones CELAM, Bogotá, 1987:377. Esta publicación pone en su estructura el documento de Bogotá 1985 con las "opciones pastorales" que se han de tomar en la evangelización actual de los pueblos indígenas de América Latina.

Cabestrero, Teófilo, *"Santo Domingo, a dos años después la recepción del documento"* publicado en Revista Pasos, No 54, 1994. Obtenido del Website del Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones: www.dei-cr.org/index.php.

Encuentro de Riobamba. *10° Aniversario de la Pascua de Mons. Proaño y 30° Aniversario de Medellín,* Editado por la Coordinación de Pastoral Diocesana, Riobamba, Ecuador, 1998.

García Gonzáles, Javier, *El rostro indio de Jesús, hacia una teología indígena en América Latina,* Editorial DIANA, México D.F. 2002.

Gorski, John F., *"What Every Priest Should Know About: The Missions, Missionary Activity, Mission 'Ad*

Gentes', and Evangelization, Conference presented to the Pontifical Mission Society in the USA, 2005.

Lernoux, Penny. *"Prophets of Change in Latin America, Catholic Bishops Challenge the Military".* Downloaded from Website: www.aliciapatterson.org/APF001976/Lernoux/Lernoux02/Lernoux02.html

Footnotes

[1] Las Conferencias Generales del Episcopado Latinoamericano: Río, Medellín, Puebla y Santo Domingo. Trimilenio: Tecnología al Servicio de la Nueva Evangelización. Versión 1. Lima 1995. MISAL 2006. Medellín Conference of Latin American Bishops: Final Documents. Medellín, Colombia, 2006. Eagleson, John and Scharper, Philip. *Puebla and Beyond.* Translated by John Drury. First ed. New York: Orbis Books, 1979. Hennelly, Alfred T., J.S., Santo Domingo and Beyond: Documents and Commentaries from the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops. First ed. New York: Orbis Books, 1993.

[2] *Cf.* Doig Klinge, Germán. *"The General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate: Rio, Medellín, Puebla and Santo Domingo",* conference addressed at the Symposium "One hundred years of Evangelization in Latin America". It was published by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America as: Los cien años de la evangelización en América Latina. Actas del simposio histórico celebrado en la ciudad del Vaticano, el 21-25 de junio de 1999. ed. Librería Edetrice Vaticana, ciudad del Vaticano 2000:373ff.

[3] *Cf.* Camarero, Daniel, *CELAM* in Dictionary of Missiology and Missionary Animation, director Eloy Bueno and Roberto Calvo, Publishing House Monte Carmelo, Burgos, Spain 2003:181-183.

[4] Gorski, Juan, F., *"El desarrollo de la Misiología en América Latina"* en apuntes a la Introducción a la Misiología", ("The Development of Missiology in Latin America", in notes to the "Introduction to Missiology"), Bolivian Catholic University, Cochabamba 2000.

[5] Rio, Conclusions 89.

[6] Rio, Conclusions 89.

[7] Rio, Conclusions 97.

[8] *Cf.* Camarero 2003:182.

[9] *Cf.* Piazza, Cardenal Adeodato, *"El problema de la Evangelización"* en "Conferencia General del Episcopado Latino-Americano, Río de Janeiro, 25 de Julio – 4 de Agosto de 1955, Conclusiones, Pro Manuscrito, Tipografía Poliglotta Vaticana, 1956:97.

[10] *Cf.* Cuellar Romo, Ricardo, *CELAM (DEMIS-Departamento de Misiones),* en Diccionario de Misionología y Animación Misionera, Directores Eloy Bueno y Roberto Calvo, Editorial Monte Carmelo, Burgos, España 2003:187.

[11] *Cf.* Cuellar Romo, 2003:187.

[12] *Cf.* Perez Esquivel, Adolfo. *"Los Derechos Humanos"* en Encuentro de Riobamba: 10° Anniversario de la Pascua de Mons. Proaño y 30° Aniversario de Medellín, Editado por la coordinadora de Pastoral Diocesana, Riobamba, Ecuador 1998:19. The author of this article won the Nobel Peace Prize.

[13] *Cf.* Gorski, Juan F., *El desarrollo Histórico de la misionología Latinoamericana, Orientaciones teológicas del Departamento de Misiones del CELAM: 1966-1979,* La Paz, Bolivia 1985:15.

[14] Departamento de Misiones – Demis 9, Melgar 3, en Documentos de Pastoral Indígena, Centro de Publicaciones – CELAM, Bogotá, 1989:7. From now on I will cite as Demis 9, 1989.

[15] *Cf.* Melgar 59, en DEMIS 9, 1989:50.

[16] *Cf.* Segunda Conferencia General del Epicopado Latinoamericano, *Medellín, Introducción 2,* programa para Windows, Trimilenio: Tecnología al Servicio de la Nueva Evangelización, Lima.

[17] *Cf.* Medellín, Conclusiones 1,14.

[18] *Cf.* Medellín, Conclusiones 4,3.

[19] *Cf.* Medellín, Conclusiones 12,13.

[20] *Cf.* Perez Esquivel, 1998:20.

[21] Cleary, Edgard L., *In Crisis and Change: Church in Latin America Today,* Second printing, edited by Orbis Books, New York 1985. Chapter 2, New Church: From Medellín to Puebla, downloaded from Dominican website www.dominicans.org/~ecleary/crisis/index.html

[22] *Tercera Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano, Puebla: la evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de América Latina, programa para Windows. Trimilenio: Tecnología al Servicio de la Nueva Evangelización, Lima. (DP 8, 9, 19, 34, 121, 234, 309, 365, 410, 422, 441, 581, 711, 733, 1164, 1176, 1266).*

[23] Gorski, John, F., *La Evangelización de la Cultura y las Culturas en el Documento de Puebla: un estudio misionológico,* tesis de licenciatura, presentada en la Pontificia Universidad Gregoriana, Roma 1982:86. It is an unpublished dissertation of 160 pages.

[24] Ediciones Abaya Yala, *Catálogo1988:5.* El nombre "Abya Yala" es un término con los indígenas Kunas del Panamá, denominan al Continente Americano en su totalidad. Abya Yala significa "tierra en plena madurez".

[25] *Cf.* Gorski, J. F., 1982:103

[26] *Cf.* Montejo, P., en Memoria Bolivia 1997:122-123.

[27] *Cf. Bogotá,* en DEMIS 9, 1989:95-116. No indica la fecha exacta del encuentro. Siempre lo citaré como el documento Bogotá, puesto que DEMIS – CELAM lo llama así.

[28] Departamento de Misiones 83, *De una pastoral indigenista a una pastoral indígena,* Publicaciones CELAM, Bogotá, 1987:377. Esta publicación pone en su estructura el documento de Bogotá 1985 con las "opciones pastorales" que se han de tomar en la evangelización actual de los pueblos indígenas de América Latina.

[29] *Cf.* Bogotá, en DEMIS 9,1989:106-107.

Répondre à la violence de la misère
L'enseignement de Joseph Wresinski

- Jean Tonglet* -

«La violence du mépris et de l'indifférence crée la misère, car elle conduit inexorablement à l'exclusion, au rejet d'un homme par les autres hommes. Elle emprisonne le pauvre dans un engrenage qui le broie et le détruit. Elle fait de lui un sous-prolétaire. La privation constante de cette communion avec autrui qui éclaire et sécurise toute vie condamne son intelligence à l'obscurité, enserre son cœur dans l'inquiétude, l'angoisse et la méfiance, détruit son âme».[1]

C'est avec ces mots qu'en 1968, le père Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), fondateur du Mouvement ATD Quart Monde, entamait une réflexion sur le thème de la violence faite aux pauvres. Faire reconnaître la misère comme une violence a été et demeure un combat. Nous n'avons que trop l'habitude de présenter et d'analyser la misère comme une question de politique sociale, voire d'assistance sociale. Nous avons toujours du mal à la penser comme une violence, c'est-à-dire comme une violation caractérisée des droits de l'homme, fondés sur sa dignité inaliénable. Penser la misère comme une violence, en parler en évoquant la violence du mépris et de l'indifférence qu'elle suscite, c'est procéder à un véritable retournement, et vivre une révolution copernicienne dans notre manière de considérer les pauvres.

La violence de la misère avance souvent masquée. Elle se dissimule derrière le visage de l'ordre, de la raison, de la justice même. C'est «au *nom de l'ordre moral*», écrivait le père Joseph Wresinski dans le même texte, «*que nous nous introduisons dans leurs pauvres amours, les bousculant, parfois les dénigrant, toujours les jugeant, au lieu d'en faire le tremplin de leur promotion familiale*».[2]

Les plus pauvres, dans les sociétés occidentales comme ailleurs dans le monde, vivent la violence comme un destin. À travers l'histoire, ils ont vécu l'expérience d'être relégués au plus bas du monde et d'y vivre comme des victimes de choix de toutes les violences. Cette histoire, qui n'a pas été écrite, ou trop peu, a marqué les esprits et les corps, dans leurs attitudes profondes comme dans leurs gestes de tous les jours.

Violence de la faim qui ronge et qui tue, violence des conditions d'habitat déplorables, violence des retraits d'enfants, violence de l'ignorance à laquelle on est condamné, non seulement soi-même mais aussi ses enfants : on pourrait multiplier les exemples et décliner ce thème dans tous les domaines de l'existence. Je songe, en écrivant ces lignes, à ce quartier de Marseille que j'ai connu au début de mon engagement dans le Mouvement. Coincée entre une voie ferrée rapide et une bretelle d'autoroute, la Cité Bassens était un lieu réputé pour la violence qui y régnait. Quelle violence n'était-ce pas, en effet, d'avoir posé ces cubes de béton mal agencés, sous-équipés, au milieu d'un véritable désert social, à l'écart du reste de la cité, contraignant plusieurs centaines de familles à vivre dans l'entassement et en permanence entre eux, sans relations avec le monde extérieur ? De l'autre côté de la voie ferrée, un terrain vague accueillait les jeux des enfants du quartier. Il fallut 13 ans et 11 enfants happés par les trains en traversant la voie pour que soit enfin construit un mur de protection. En novembre 1976, une plaque y fut apposée «*à la mémoire des 11 enfants de notre cité victimes de l'incompréhension de la société. Ils ont payé de leur vie l'absence de ce mur de protection réclamé pendant 13 ans*».

En région parisienne, ces mois derniers, des familles du Val d'Oise, occupantes d'un terrain depuis près de 30 ans, avec leurs caravanes, ont été avisées que du fait de la construction d'un parc public, il leur fallait quitter les lieux. Des dizaines de vies basculent

ainsi dans la précarité : où aller ? Comment payer le loyer ? Pied à pied, elles se sont défendues devant la justice. Le procès en appel vient d'être perdu. Où iront-elles ?

Il ne faut donc pas s'étonner que de telles violences engendrent le désordre et la violence.

Écrasés par la misère, les hommes et les femmes qui subissent cette violence l'intègrent en eux. Traités comme moins que rien, littéralement comme des déchets — et ne dit-on pas, sans mesurer la violence du propos que « toute société porte en elle un déchet ? » — ils et elles sont réduits au silence, à la honte, à l'inutilité. Il n'est pas étonnant alors que la violence éclate. Les visages se crispent, les voix s'élèvent, les poings se ferment. Serait-ce de la haine ? Ou plutôt, comme le rappelle le père Wresinski, une réaction à la souffrance que la violence qui leur est faite éveille en eux. «Si *parfois ses poings se ferment, ce n'est pas qu'en eux s'enserre la haine, c'est que dans la misère, il n'a personne à attendre, il n'a pas à serrer fortement, cordialement la main d'un Jésus-Christ. Sa violence est construite du désespoir de l'indignité*».[3]

Et de rappeler que «la *violence appelle éternellement la violence et notre réponse à la violence inconsciente et aveugle du misérable est celle du dégoût, du mépris, du rejet toujours plus intense; c'est l'exclusion du patrimoine commun et le renfermement dans les cités dépotoirs. Notre réponse, c'est le gendarme, le car de police, le bulldozer qui, en rasant le bidonville, détruit cette caricature de la propriété privée qui est celle des exclus: un peu de bois, un morceau de tôle ondulée ou du papier goudronné, quelque vieille caisse trouvée dans les débris d'un marché....*

«*Notre réaction est d'élever un peu plus les bastilles de nos intérêts, de nos privilèges, de nos institutions et de réduire un peu plus l'entrebâillement des portes de nos églises, de nos temples. Nous, les sécurisés, nous nous endormirons alors dans la paix, dans la quiétude, toujours ignorants de celui qui était près de nous et qui était notre frère*».[4]

Au lieu de chercher à comprendre en quoi les réactions violentes des plus pauvres à la violence qu'ils subissent remettent en cause notre manière de vivre ensemble, de faire société avec tous, nous sommes tentés de nous protéger, d'élever des murs, d'opposer à la violence de l'injustice celle de la répression. Serait-ce donc une fatalité ? Y aurait-il une autre voie à explorer? Dans la suite de son texte, le père Joseph Wresinski affirme sa certitude, enracinée dans sa vie d'homme né dans la misère et de prêtre. Il y a, nous dit-il, une violence « *infiniment plus efficace»,* qu'il appelle «la *violence de l'amour*». Écoutons-le :

«S'il est vrai que la violence appelle la violence, n'y a-t-il que celle de l'exclusion, de la baïonnette dressée sur le ventre du misérable ? À notre avis, il en est une infiniment plus efficace. Elle prend ses racines au fond même des hommes que nous sommes, elle se nourrit de notre cœur, du meilleur de nous-mêmes, de nos désirs de joie, de paix à répandre, à donner. Elle se nourrit de notre rencontre du Dieu de charité, de notre idéal de justice.

«Cette violence est celle qui provoque les vraies révolutions, profondes et définitives, les résurrections qui rendent vie, respect, honneur, gloire et bonheur à tous les hommes, qu'ils soient riches ou pauvres. C'est à cette violence-là qui est celle de l'amour que nous sommes voués les uns et les autres, que nous le voulions ou non, du fait que nous sommes véritablement des hommes et que nous avons pris conscience qu'aucun autre homme ne peut jamais nous être étranger ou ennemi.

«Le sous-prolétaire, lui aussi y est voué. Si nous le connaissions tant soit peu, nous saurions qu'il ne nous demande rien d'autre que d'être un homme et qu'il ne désire rien d'autre. Il nous demande que tous les hommes soient reconnus comme tels, traités comme tels.

«Il ne demande rien d'autre que ceci, que l'école soit pour ses enfants le creuset de l'intelligence, que l'Église soit le chemin vers la communion de tous les hommes face au Dieu de leur foi, que la société soit juste et franche, que la technique, l'économie soient au service du partage des biens de la terre.

«Le sous-prolétaire appelle tout comme nous la création d'un monde nouveau. Le sens de son combat est aussi de transformer les structures d'une société de sorte que l'honneur, la justice, l'amour, la vérité soient les fondations sur lesquelles tout homme, et donc lui, recevra la plénitude de ses droits: les pouvoirs de penser, de comprendre, d'aimer, d'agir et de prier. Si le misérable nous interroge, s'il nous pose des questions et nous oblige à nous en poser, ce n'est pas parce qu'il nous demande de ralentir notre marche, mais qu'au contraire il nous contraint d'aller plus vite et plus loin, de voir infiniment plus grand et d'être plus ambitieux que nous ne le sommes. Il nous entraîne dans un véritable vertige de remise en cause générale de l'humanité».[5]

C'est à une véritable révolution, celle de l'amour et de la justice réconciliés, que les plus pauvres nous convient. L'histoire du monde nous apprend en effet qu'organiser

les pauvres de sorte qu'ils puissent arracher le pouvoir aux riches et prendre leur place, conduit à de terribles désillusions. L'opprimé ne risquet-il pas de se transformer en oppresseur ? «*Qui garantirait que le misérable, devenu riche demain, serait meilleur que le riche d'aujourd'hui ? Qui nous dit que Lazare, assis à la table du riche, ne le chassera pas pour l'exclure à son tour; qui nous assure que, devenu puissant, il n'organisera pas la violence et la destruction à son tour ? Ne devrions nous pas nous attendre à ce que des pauvres d'aujourd'hui ne sortent des tyrans qui opprimeront les riches déchus de leur puissance ? Comment empêcher que la justice pour tous, l'honneur et la prière pour tous, ne deviennent une nouvelle fois, par les misérables d'hier élevés au pouvoir, l'injustice, le mensonge, la haine, la guerre du monde de demain ?*».

La lucidité du père Joseph Wresinski fait fi de tout angélisme ou de tout romantisme sur les pauvres. Il veut voir, il veut affronter le risque de la situation : le sous-prolétaire pourrait, à son tour, chercher à opprimer voire à détruire l'homme. D'où vient ce risque, se demande-t-il ? «*De ce que les pauvres voient les puissants de ce jour vivre dans l'abondance et user de leurs biens pour dominer et écraser. Comment, si un jour le misérable prenait leur place, ne serait-il pas tenté de faire ce qu'il a vu faire et de recréer la société telle qu'il l'a connue, fondée sur la violence ?*».

Ne voulant se résoudre à cette issue, ayant appris des plus pauvres — et notamment des enfants [6] — qu'ils n'avaient pas cette haine au coeur, il s'interroge sur les moyens à mettre en œuvre pour conjurer ce risque. «*Si, regardant les riches d'aujourd'hui, les plus pauvres trouvaient parmi eux des hommes profondément hommes, respectueux de tous leurs frères, larges dans la magnificence, travaillant réellement, concrètement à créer un monde nouveau basé sur la justice, l'amour, la vérité, la paix; s'ils trouvaient dans les riches d'aujourd'hui des hommes obsédés de la dignité de leurs semblables, il y aurait des chances qu'ils choisissent de les imiter plutôt que les autres, de collaborer avec eux à la création du monde*».[7]

De même que la violence appelle la violence, l'amour engendre l'amour, nous dit le père Joseph. Et d'en appeler alors à l'engagement personnel de chacun — «La misère est l'œuvre des hommes ; seuls les hommes peuvent la détruire» — et au rassemblement de tous autour des plus pauvres. N'est-ce pas ce qu'il a voulu signifier par le texte gravé sur la Dalle en l'honneur des victimes de la misère inaugurée le 17 octobre 1987 à Paris, Place du Trocadéro : la misère est une violation des droits de l'homme — c'est-à-dire une violence — et pour faire respecter les droits de tous, «s'unir est un devoir sacré».

L'engagement personnel et communautaire auquel les plus pauvres nous appellent est d'une radicalité peu banale qui s'inscrit dans la radicalité du message évangélique. «*Si le monde de demain doit être un monde sans oppression, cela exige que nous vivions la réalité de la parole du Christ: 'Le royaume souffre violence'*».[8] De quelle violence parle-t-il ici? «*Une violence faite à nous-mêmes, une violence qui est dépossession de notre orgueil, de notre esprit de domination, qui est abandon volontaire de biens que nous apportons à la réalisation de la fraternité, de la vérité, de la paix*».[9] Et d'aborder ainsi un thème sur lequel il reviendra à plusieurs reprises dans les longues conversations entretenues, génération après génération, avec les volontaires du Mouvement : celui de la nécessité du choix de la pauvreté. «*Si les pauvres nous voyaient vivre vraiment pauvres, ils nous regarderaient, prendraient modèle sur nous et nous ferions de cette pauvreté la vérité demandée et pratiquée par le Christ». À tous ceux qui mettent en cause le monde de l'opulence d'aujourd'hui, il rappelle que pour changer la vie, il faut d'abord accepter de changer de vie, personnellement. Qu'il n'est pas de monde futur plus juste, plus vrai, plus fraternel qui ne passe par le prix payé par le Christ. Le monde de demain passe par notre disponibilité à l'appel d'amour qui monte de la terre. Il passe par notre dépouillement. Les fondements seront la mise en commun et le partage de ce qui nous a été donné, afin que tout serve à tous, à leur bonheur.*

«Il faut aussi savoir que ce dépouillement ne sera accepté et reconnu comme point de référence que si notre dépossession se poursuit sans discontinuer, si notre idéal est non seulement de nous rapprocher sans cesse de l'homme le plus pauvre, mais aussi de nous identifier à tout ce qui en lui est vérité, amour et justice, de nous solidariser ainsi à sa cause et de l'aimer à tel point que celle-ci devienne complètement la nôtre jusqu'à son achèvement.

«Alors, le sous-prolétaire, ayant trouvé en nous l'homme à imiter et non pas à abattre, s'acharnera avec nous à créer un monde de justice, un monde de vérité, un monde d'amour et de paix. Et si, en cette terre, il y avait encore de la violence, ce sera la violence de l'amour partagé».[10]

Le volontariat ATD Quart Monde, à sa mesure, à la suite du père Joseph Wresinski, et avec d'autres hommes et femmes qui de tous temps ont cherché à rejoindre les plus pauvres, s'efforce de vivre de ce feu. À la frontière de deux mondes, celui des pauvres et celui de la société, ces membres sont des gens de frontière. «*Il faut que [vous apparteniez] aux deux mondes*», disait encore le père Joseph en s'adressant à eux, «*si vous voulez vraiment faire aller les riches au-devant des pauvres et faire passer les pauvres dans le monde des riches. Si nous voulons que la société des pauvres soit accueillante aux riches et la société des riches, accueillante aux pauvres, il nous faudra avoir des valeurs communes aux deux côtés, des valeurs qui feront que chacun de ces mondes nous reconnaisse comme lui appartenant, comme étant de ses membres et capable de parler pour lui.*

«Or, quelle est la valeur primordiale que nous découvrons à travers la misère ? Non pas la misère elle-même, assurément, mais bien l'état de pauvreté qui confère aux hommes la simplicité, la modestie, la compréhension des choses de la vie. L'état de pauvreté qui est le contraire de l'opulence, de l'orgueil, de la puissance qui fait ombre aux petits. Notre pauvreté permet aux gens dans la misère de nous reconnaître comme faisant partie de leur communauté, de nous accepter, de nous écouter, d'admettre que nous les aidions à passer de l'autre côté. Notre pauvreté fonde leur confiance, car elle est le signe de notre sincérité et de ce que nous sommes en réalité: des volontaires à la détresse qui désirons être le plus près possible des familles, pour les aider à sortir de leur misère.

«Choisir de vivre dans une certaine indigence valorise, aux yeux des pauvres, leur propre état. S'ils voient que nous avons vraiment des difficultés à vivre, que nous nous imposons librement des privations et qu'en cela, notre situation devient voisine de la leur, celle-ci sera valorisée. Puisque nous acceptons volontairement d'être pauvres, c'est que l'état de pauvreté n'est pas un état sale ni honteux. Sans doute demeure-t-il un état pénible, mais les pauvres peuvent croire qu'il n'est pas un état inférieur, sous social, sons religieux, sous professionnel, en somme un état mauvais. Ceci me paraît singulièrement important, car je ne crois pas qu'il soit possible à quelqu'un de sortir d'où il est, si auparavant il n'a pas accepté de se servir, pour en sortir, des valeurs qui sont celles de son état présent. Je ne pense pas qu'il soit possible de se promouvoir, d'évoluer, en essayant simplement de chercher chez le voisin ce qui pourra vous faire avancer. Je pense qu'une personne peut sortir de son état, dans la mesure où elle aura reconnu et pris en considération les valeurs de son état, de son milieu. C'est là une des clefs pour ouvrir la porte au pauvre. Sa pauvreté doit pouvoir lui servir de tremplin, de point de départ».[11]

En cette année 2006, au cours de laquelle nous célébrerons le 50e anniversaire de l'arrivée du père Joseph Wresinski au Camp de Noisy-le-Grand, ces réflexions sur la violence et sur les moyens d'y répondre nous frappent par leur pertinence, au-delà des contextes qui évoluent au rythme de nos sociétés. Nous n'avons pas fini de les comprendre et de les méditer.

Notes

* Jean Tonglet a rejoint le volontariat international ATD Quart Monde en octobre 1977 après avoir achevé des études d'assistant social à l'Institut Joseph Cardijn à Louvain-la-Neuve. Il a travaillé à Marseille et en Belgigue et a été représentant du Mouvement auprès de l'Union Européenne de 1988 à 1994. II travaille actuellement au Centre International Joseph Wresinski dans le Val d'Oise. [jean.tonglet@atd-quartmonde.org].

[1] «La violence faite aux pauvres», revue *Igloos*, n. 39-40, 1968.

[2] *Ibidem.*

[3] *Ibidem.*

[4] *Ibidem.*

[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] Je pense à ces enfants de la cité de promotion familiale de Noisy-le-Grand qui écrivaient: «Je voudrais bien qu'un jour, on mette les gens riches dehors, et les gens pauvres dans les maisons. Comme ça, les riches, ils verront ce que c'est. Et après on rendrait les maisons aux riches, et, peut-être que, s'ils ont des places en trop dans leurs maisons, ils accueilleraient les pauvres chez eux ... ».

[7] «La violence faite aux pauvres », revue *Igloos*, n. 39-40, 1968.

[8] *Ibidem.*

[9] *Ibidem.*

[10] *Ibidem.*

[11] «Pourquoi choisir la pauvreté? », intervention devant les volontaires en octobre 1963, publiée dans la Revue *Quart Monde,* n. 192, décembre 2004.

Réf. : *Spiritus* (*Expériences et recherches missionnaires*), n. 182, mars 2006, pp. 93-100.

NEXT SEDOS CONFERENCE

"Mission and Ecology"
Christian Mission in the Light of an Environment Under Threat

Gearóid Francisco Ó Conaire, OFM
Secretary General JPIC Commission

---

21 September 2007 - 4,00 pm

Brothers of the Christian Schools – Via Aurelia, 476 - ROME