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Editorial

Easter Greetings to all our Readers!

Easter Joy in the Risen Christ reminds us that God has given humankind this wonderful Universe and has made us partners with Nature to take care of His wondrous Creation. The Risen Jesus reminds us of the 'abundant riches and graces' the Kingdom offers each and everyone of us if we will but look upon the other as brother and sister and share with each other in a spirit of love.

May the Risen Lord move us to open our hearts and minds to discover God living and acting in and through the 'other'!

It is with hearts full of the spirit of the Risen Lord that we invite all of you to explore with **Thérèse Okure, SHCJ,** the meaning of mission *Ad Gentes* today: what we mean by "*bringing the Good News to the Nations*" in today's World. What challenges does dialogue with a globalising culture present? How to evangelize the rich Countries? Thérèse searches the Word of God to find some answers to this question in *"La mission 'Ad Gentes' aujourd'hui: un pont de vue biblique"*.

In "The Word of God in Dialogue With Hinduism and Buddhism", **Mons. Felix Anthony Machado** reflects on the role of Scriptures in Hinduism and Buddhism to see if there is any thread of thought in the Bible which can teach Christians to understand other religions and help pave the way set for an authentic dialogue between them and Christian believers.

In today's World the mass media is a powerful tool for communication and Christians should make an effort to set up 'a network of communication, communion and cooperation' through it. **Joseph Palakeel** in *"Communicating Life – A Theological and Missionary Vision for Communication Ministry"* proposes three preliminary steps: Formation, Participation and Promoting Dialogue.

Is ecology part of our Christian mission? **George Therukkattil, MCBS,** takes for granted that taking care of Creation is an integral part of our mission. In "*Ethical Challenges from Ecology*" he discusses our role in Creation, no longer as stewards but as 'partners' of Nature in taking care of God's Creation. He calls for a new ethics of universal compassion that seeks harmony, respect and concern among all creatures.

What benefit has Globalization brought to the African woman? In *"Globalization and the African Woman: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Effect of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on Woman"*, **Mary Bosco Ebere Amakwe, HFSN,** holds that Globalization is reshaping and restructuring all patterns of social independence and every aspect of a person's life. In this context a new generation of African women is appearing in grassroots social movements to challenge the assumptions of established patriarchal practices.

Fr Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP
SEDOS Executive Director

The Members of SEDOS would like to join in congratulating MISEREOR – the AID Organisation of the German Bishops' Conference – on its 50th anniversary, and warmly thank all the Representatives and Volunteers for their invaluable work and help.

** Cover page and pictures taken from http://www.qumran2.net*

La mission 'Ad Gentes' *aujourd'hui : un point de vue biblique*

(I^ère partie)

- Thérèse Okure, shcj -

1. Que veut-on dire quand on parle de « Mission aux nations » aujourd'hui ?

Quand on observe un objet ou une question, le point de vue, ou l'emplacement où on se trouve détermine ce qu'on voit, et les conditions dans lesquelles on le voit. La présente intervention nous invite à regarder la mission de l'Église aux nations **aujourd'hui**, d'un point de vue biblique. Ce point de vue biblique, et d'autres points de vue, soulèvent une question importante : y a-t-il besoin, et même est-il correct, de parler aujourd'hui de «missions aux Gentils/ nations», alors que les Nations Unies ont déclaré que la liberté religieuse est un droit humain fondamental ? Laissons cette question en suspens et affirmons que la mission aux «nations» n'est pas une option facultative, pour nous, chrétiens, mais un devoir qui nous a été confié par notre Frère Jésus. De plus, cette mission ne consiste pas à amener des nations dans un état d'assujettissement, mais à leur proclamer la bonne nouvelle de leur libération. Si, dans le passé, nous n'avons pas entrepris cette mission dans un esprit de proclamation d'une bonne nouvelle, nous en acceptons la responsabilité, peut-être même nous joignons-nous à Jean-Paul II dans ses *Mea culpa*,[1] mais nous continuons à honorer le mandat reçu du Christ, en le comprenant correctement aujourd'hui.

Deuxièmement, bien que le mandat de proclamer la bonne nouvelle aux «nations» implique une sortie (Jésus lui-même est «sorti» de Dieu pour venir à nous, il est «sorti» de Nazareth pour aller en Samarie, en Judée et à Jérusalem), cela n'implique pas nécessairement que nous limitions (hier et aujourd'hui) cette proclamation aux incroyants. Il est bien vrai que Jésus a demandé que la bonne nouvelle soit proclamée à partir de Jérusalem, le Vatican de sa religion, et qu'elle soit entendue dans les régions de Judée, de Samarie et jusqu'aux extrémités du monde. Le mandat qu'il a donné aux disciples d'être ses témoins n'exclut personne, ni aucun endroit du monde, d'entendre cette proclamation et d'être bénéficiaire de cette bonne nouvelle de l'amnistie générale que Dieu accorde à la création tout entière. La proclamation doit commencer dans la ville de Jérusalem elle-même, et de là se répandre en Judée, en Samarie et jusqu'aux extrémités du monde (Act 1,8). Si donc, dans le passé, nous avons eu tendance à comprendre la mission comme consistant à nous rendre dans des pays étrangers pour sauver ou convertir des incroyants qui, sans cela, seraient perdus, alors nous avons besoin de revoir notre manière de la comprendre pour pouvoir continuer à honorer ce même mandat dans le nouveau siècle. Aujourd'hui, continuer à honorer ce mandat implique par-dessus tout que nous fassions des progrès, dans notre esprit, dans notre coeur, dans notre attitude face aux autres, et une conversion, dans le sens le plus plein, à l'évangile.

Troisièmement, vue du point de vue biblique, la «mission aux nations» fait intégralement partie de la foi biblique qui proclame que Dieu a créé un monde bon, très bon, mais que le mal est entré dans ce monde par le péché de l'homme. Dieu a répondu à ce péché par la promesse de restaurer la création par le salut effectué par la femme et sa descendance (Gen 3,15). L'histoire biblique nous apprend que Dieu a tenu sa promesse à travers la mission de Jésus, Fils de Marie (Mc 4,6). Donc, observée de ce point de vue, aucune partie de la création, ni aucune nation ne doit être exclue du bénéfice de cette rédemption divine.

Quatrièmement, la Bible elle-même est un livre qui est né de la mission et qui traite de la mission. Gen 12,1-3, qui est probablement la genèse de l'Ancien Testament, raconte comment Dieu a appelé Abraham et Sarah à sortir d'Ur en Chaldée, pour se rendre dans un pays que Dieu leur montrerait : ce serait la première étape de la mission divine qu'il leur donnait, pour être le père et la mère dans la foi, desquels allait naître une multitude de nations. De leur semence aussi, naîtrait le Messie, à travers lequel Dieu remplirait sa promesse divine de libérer l'humanité du tort qu'elle s'était infligé à elle-même par le péché du premier homme et de la première femme (Gen 3,15). Le reste de l'Ancien Testament raconte les différentes étapes de ce divin travail missionnaire, et de son voyage au sein des différents peuples. Parmi ces étapes, certaines personnes sont des clés, qui remontent jusqu'à l'Exode, comme Moïse, avec Aaron et Myriam, Josué, Deborah, David et les prophètes. Dans toutes ces étapes, le lien entre l'être et le faire est insécable. L'un et l'autre sont dirigés vers la transformation finale de l'humanité et de la création, pour aboutir à l'instauration du ciel nouveau et de la terre nouvelle qui sont proclamés dans l'Apocalypse (21,1 – 22,4). Jésus et sa mère jouent un rôle clé dans ce divin travail missionnaire. Le rôle de Jésus constitue la nouvelle voie, la nouvelle alliance, le nouveau testament.

La présente étude, évidemment, se concentre sur la mission de Jésus, qu'elle regarde comme la norme qui sert de guide et la règle pour comprendre ce qu'est une Église en mission dans notre XXI^e^ siècle. Le message central de cette mission proclame que la création et le salut de Dieu, effectués à travers Jésus, sont pour tous les hommes. Donc tous les hommes, sans exception, ont le droit d'en entendre parler. Dans la mentalité de Jean-Paul II, au cours des deux mille ans passés, nous avons été comme des gens qui ont travaillé toute la nuit sans rien prendre, dans l'exercice de cette mission. A l'aube de ce troisième millénaire, nous avons besoin de voir et d'entendre Jésus, dans notre barque (la barque de Pierre), qui nous invite à bien faire les choses, cette fois-ci, c'est-à-dire à lancer le filet au large, et à lui permettre de nous ramener la prise du siècle.[2] Pour obéir à ce commandement, il nous faut entreprendre la mission d'une nouvelle façon (nouveau vin, nouvelles outres). Avoir conscience que cette nécessité constitue pour nous un nouveau défi, qui nous pousse, comme des scribes avisés, à découvrir de nouvelles méthodes, de nouveaux concepts, de nouvelles approches pour mener à bien la même ancienne mission adressée aux nations, dans le XXIe siècle, dans nos contextes de pluralisme (religieux et autres), de cultures diversifiées, d'individualisme croissant (personnel et national), de fondamentalisme religieux, économique et politique, de mondialisation et de permissivité morale.[3]

2. Être Église, c'est être Mission. Une évidence qu'on trouve dans le Nouveau Testament

La Constitution missionnaire du Concile Vatican II, *Ad Gentes* (n. 2,22) déclare, entre autres choses, que là où est l'Église, là est la Mission. Cette affirmation va à l'encontre de l'ancien concept de mission, qui la comprenait comme une action menée en direction des païens, des incroyants en pays étrangers. La conception juste s'oppose à l'idée que seuls certains peuples sont appelés à être missionnaires. Par contre, elle affirme qu'être une Église, être des membres du corps du Christ, c'est essentiellement être en mission. Pourquoi en va-t-il ainsi ? Est-ce dans la Bible, comme les Pentecôtistes au Nigeria le demanderaient ?

Jésus est essentiellement quelqu'un d'envoyé, il est Dieu en personne venant pour nous montrer comment être véritablement et pleinement humains.[4] Ou encore, comme on lit dans l'épître aux Hébreux, il est devenu «comme l'un de nous, en tout, excepté le péché» (Heb 4,15). Dans l'évangile de Jean, le nom qu'il préfère utiliser pour parler de Dieu, c'est «celui qui m'a envoyé», et cette expression définit sa relation à Dieu : lui, il est celui qui est envoyé par Dieu. Tout chrétien, tout baptisé, incorporé au Christ (christifié), constitue une branche de sa vigne, et est destiné par Dieu à porter du fruit en mission : il est essentiellement envoyé pour être le Christ dans le monde, exactement comme Jésus a été un envoyé par Dieu dans le monde. Être l'Église en mission, c'est être le Christ dans et pour le monde.

Jésus lui-même a été envoyé en mission par Dieu lors de son baptême, par l'action du Saint-Esprit. De même, après sa résurrection, il envoya en mission ses disciples : «Comme le Père m'a envoyé, moi aussi je vous envoie.... Recevez l'Esprit Saint. Si vous pardonnez aux gens leurs péchés, ils leur seront pardonnés. Si vous les leur maintenez, ils leur seront maintenus» (Jn 20, 21-22).[5] Ce Saint-Esprit allait résider en eux, les inspirer, les enseigner, les guider, les défendre et leur donner la force d'être, dans le monde, des envoyés comme lui-même avait été envoyé, de la crèche à la croix et à la résurrection. Sur la croix, Jésus a donné naissance à l'Église (l'eau et le sang qui sortaient de son côté transpercé symbolisaient les sacrements de l'initiation, le baptême et l'eucharistie) ; lors de la Pentecôte, ce baptême de la terre par Dieu, avec le feu transformateur (Act 2,16-21), le Saint-Esprit a donné naissance à cette Église en tant qu'Église en mission.

L'événement de la Pentecôte a embrassé toutes les nations. A la fois, ceux qui étaient dans la Chambre haute, et ceux qui résidaient à Jérusalem, provenant «de toutes les nations qui sont sous les cieux», tous furent tirés de leurs emplacements respectifs, et conduits ensemble en un même endroit, en dehors de la Chambre haute, et en dehors de leurs maisons, pour former une communauté nouvelle, pour être une église en mission. Née de l'événement pascal, l'Église a mené une vie avant la Pentecôte peut être comparée à la période que le Verbe incarné a passée dans le sein de Marie, et à sa vie cachée. L'Église qui venait de naître à la Pentecôte est essentiellement une Église en mission, envoyée en mission comme Jésus l'a été, de son baptême jusqu'à son ascension (l'étape finale de l'accomplissement de sa mission sur terre). «Mais quand viendra l'Esprit Saint, vous serez remplis de puissance et vous serez mes témoins, à Jérusalem, dans toute la Judée et la Samarie, et jusqu'aux extrémités de la terre» (Act 1,8).[6]

C'est d'une manière bien spéciale que Jésus a transmis le bâton de responsable chargé d'une Église en mission à Pierre, le roc sur lequel il allait construire son Église. Il lui a donné pour consigne : «Nourris mes agneaux», «Occupe-toi de mes brebis», «Suis-moi» (c'est-à-dire demeure surtout un disciple, Jn 21,15-19). L'administration dans l'Église et dans les congrégations religieuses, par conséquent, fait partie intégralement de l'appel à être une Église en mission. En même temps, elle reste essentiellement un appel à être disciple de Jésus, en compagnie des autres disciples. Paître, prendre soin, avoir la charge, (non pas gouverner et commander) sont des éléments centraux dans ce travail d'administration. Jésus demeure le chef réel, tandis que tous les autres sont des disciples, qui sont à égalité à sa suite.

L'évidence qui émane du Nouveau Testament est concluante : être un disciple et être une Église, c'est être en mission. Les membres de la primitive Église ont clairement compris leur identité comme envoyés en mission. Leur Église était visiblement une Église missionnaire, dans laquelle vivre dans le Christ, s'aider les uns les autres et aider les autres, et proclamer la bonne nouvelle, formaient un ensemble inséparable. Dans cette Église primitive, nous n'entendons parler que des personnages-clés : Pierre, Jacques, Jean, Philippe, Paul, Barnabé, Priscille, Aquilas, Apollos, Lydie, Phébée, Dorcas, Timothée, Tite, Silas et ainsi de suite. Mais les Églises dans lesquelles ces personnages ont vécu et travaillé sont toutes des Églises de Dieu en mission. Édifiées par Dieu au sein d'une grande famille, entrelacées et assemblées au sein de l'unique corps du Christ, en tant que «os de mes os, et chair de ma chair» (car l'Église est l'épouse du Christ, Eph 5,31-33), nourries et soutenues par son corps et son sang pour être eucharistie, action de grâces à Dieu et pour le remercier de son grand amour en acte lorsqu'il a envoyé son Fils sauver le monde (Jn 3,16).[7]

3. Aspects de base et défis de la mission

Maintenant que nous avons établi que la primitive Église était une Église en mission, et que Jésus veut que nous soyons une Église en mission, envoyée, comme Dieu l'a envoyée, dans le monde, nous avons besoin d'identifier et de délimiter le contenu, les contours et les aspects de base, ainsi que les tâches de la mission, puisque les nouvelles tendances vont obligatoirement tourner autour de ces tâches.[8] A chaque étape, nous allons nous poser la question de savoir comment nous avons été, comment nous sommes vraiment, et comment nous pourrions être davantage une Église en mission dans notre temps et dans notre environnement. Si, à la lumière de *Novo millennio ineunte*, nous n'avons pas toujours vécu la mission dans le droit fil,

- Pourquoi, comment et où avons-nous dévié de l'évangile et de la recommandation expresse que Jésus nous avait donnée de proclamer la Bonne Nouvelle (non pas nous-mêmes, ni notre Église, ni même la seigneurie universelle ou l'unicité de Jésus, qu'elle soit bien ou mal interprétée) ?[9]
- Que devons-nous faire pour revenir sur la bonne voie et, comme Pierre, faire une pêche qui nous permettra d'attraper beaucoup de poisson, même en plein jour, à l'encontre des règles établies de la pèche ?
- Comment jetons-nous nos filets au large, sur le commandement de Jésus, même malgré nos meilleures raisons et compétences d'hommes qui ont été l'Église pendant plus de deux mille ans ?

Pour des raisons pratiques, nous n'étudions ici que l'importance des relations dans la mission et la tâche des disciples, vue essentiellement comme une moisson. Nous observons les affirmations de Jésus sur sa propre mission dans Lc 4,18-19 et Jn 10,10, ainsi que dans la vie de Paul, apôtre des Gentils. Comment Jésus a-t-il été envoyé, et comment se comportait-il d'une façon habituelle en mission ? En menant cette recherche, nous pourrons rencontrer des méthodes pour vivre la mission et les résultats qu'on peut attendre de la mission.

3.1. L'importance des relations

La mission implique un ensemble de relations entre l'envoyeur, l'envoyé, le public auquel on est envoyé, et la tâche à accomplir. **La relation entre l'envoyé et l'envoyeur est un élément-clé dans la mission**. Quand la représentation entre en ligne de compte, l'envoyé doit avoir la même façon de comprendre et de sentir que l'envoyeur. Le Prologue de Jean déclare que personne n'a jamais vu Dieu, seul le Fils unique engendré/Dieu (*monogenes theos*) l'a révélé (1,18). Jésus lui-même déclare que l'avoir vu, c'est avoir vu Dieu qui l'a envoyé. La parfaite correspondance entre lui et le Dieu qui envoie est attestée concrètement dans sa vie, dans ses paroles et dans ses actes (Jn 14,9-11). Envoyer une personne suppose qu'on a une solide confiance dans cette personne. Cela nécessite aussi, chez l'envoyé, qu'il ne perde jamais de vue l'envoyeur, mais qu'il ait toujours conscience de ce que l'envoyeur ferait et comment il agirait en toute situation. Cela éclaire la réflexion de Jésus : «Le Fils ne peut rien faire de lui-même, mais seulement ce qu'il voit faire au Père» (Jn 5,19). Plus tard, Paul dira à son tour : «Soyez mes imitateurs, comme je le suis du Christ». Dans l'évangile de Jean, ce thème envoyeur-envoyé ajoute une tonalité particulière à la relation entre Jésus et Dieu qui envoie, mais également façonne en profondeur la compréhension que Jésus a de lui-même comme «d'envoyé».[10]

L'envoi donne pouvoir à l'envoyé de mener la mission au nom de l'envoyeur, et avec son autorité. Jésus a donné ce pouvoir à ses disciples de deux manières : il leur a envoyé le Saint-Esprit pour que celui-ci soit avec eux un enseignant, un guide-mémoire de tout ce qu'il leur avait enseigné, et pour leur servir de défenseur et de co-témoin dans un monde hostile (Jn 14,12-21 ; 16). En plus, il a promis d'être lui-même continuellement avec eux (jour et nuit, 24 heures sur 24) jusqu'à la fin des âges, c'est-à-dire jusqu'à l'achèvement de leur tâche missionnaire (Mt 28,20). Cette promesse et ce pouvoir donné ont pour conséquence que l'envoyé doit toujours avoir une grande confiance quand il accomplit sa mission. L'assurance que la mission n'est qu'une mission, et non pas une entreprise personnelle, doit donner courage à celui qui est envoyé pour accomplir la mission «avec une intrépide humilité» (pour paraphraser David Bosch). L'important, ce n'est pas le succès ou l'échec de la mission. Ce qui compte, c'est de rester attaché à la mission jusqu'au bout. C'est ce qu'a fait Jésus lui-même. Sa fidélité à sa mission s'est terminée dans sa mort, par un apparent échec, mais parce qu'il avait accompli cette mission dans une fidélité absolue et dans un amour poussé jusqu'à l'extrême pour celui qui l'avait envoyé (Jn 14,31), il a porté un fruit qui demeure. Il est impossible que le mal puisse vaincre et envahir le monde que Jésus a gagné au prix de sa vie, comme un acte d'amour porté jusqu'à l'extrême et invincible (Jn 13,1 ; 15,13). Il nous encourage quand il nous assure : «J'ai vaincu le monde» (Jn 16,33).

Relation entre l'envoyé et les auditeurs. Ceux qui voient un envoyé doivent voir, sentir, entendre et toucher l'envoyeur dans l'envoyé. Le témoignage se fait à travers la vie et les actes : voilà l'idée qu'il faut avoir présente à l'esprit. C'est une redoutable responsabilité ! Jésus, parlant de lui-même, a dit à Philippe : «Celui qui m'a vu a vu le Père» (Jn 14,9). Il a affirmé que ses oeuvres et ses paroles étaient celles du Dieu qui l'envoyait. Sur le même modèle, il attendait que les gens et le monde le voient lui-même dans ses disciples. Pour compliquer encore les choses, il a rappelé à ses disciples qu'il était dans le pauvre à qui il les envoyait, tout autant qu'il était en eux, les disciples. «Ce que vous avez fait au plus petit de ces hommes, c'est à moi que vous l'avez fait». «Quiconque vous accueille, m'accueille, et quiconque m'accueille accueille celui qui m'a envoyé». On ne peut pas s'attendre à ce que les gens voient Jésus en nous, qui nous présentons comme missionnaires et comme Église, si nous ne sommes pas également prêts à voir et à accueillir Jésus dans ceux auxquels nous sommes envoyés, soit chez nous, soit à l'étranger. Jésus attend de nous que notre respect pour les personnes soit à l'image de celui qu'il avait pour les personnes étrangères au peuple d'Israël : la femme de Syrophénicie (Mt 15,21-28), la Samaritaine (Jn 4,1-42) et le centurion, dont il a dit que la foi surpassait tout ce qu'il avait vu en Israël (Lc 7,1-10). Ce rappel nous invite à descendre dans les profondeurs de notre mémoire et à nous demander si, dans le passé, nous avons réellement vu le Christ dans les personnes auxquelles nous avons été envoyés ?

- Voyons-nous le Christ dans les personnes, aujourd'hui, même chez les chrétiens de toutes dénominations, et même chez ceux qui appartiennent à des communautés ecclésiales ou religieuses dont nous sommes très proches ?
- Nous nous présentons comme l'Église en mission aujourd'hui : qu'est-ce que ce titre exige de nous lorsque nous nous rappelons que l'activité menée au titre de la justice (sociale et autre) fait intégralement partie de la proclamation de l'évangile ? Car, en fin de compte, la justice a son mot à dire dans la vérité de nos relations (avec nous-mêmes, avec les autres, avec Dieu).

Voir le Christ dans ceux auxquels nous sommes envoyés : voilà un élément important dans notre nouvelle approche de la mission au vingt-et-unième siècle. Ces personnes auxquelles nous sommes envoyés peuvent-être soit des croyants comme nous, soit les gens parmi lesquels nous menons notre vie quotidienne, ou encore ceux qui sont appelés à croire au Christ ou à recevoir l'évangile pour la première fois.

Être envoyé, cela nécessite que nous développions une saine relation de fraternité avec ceux auxquels nous sommes envoyés, malgré les différences culturelle, géographique, biologique ou autres. La relation de Jésus avec nous l'a conduit à ne plus voir en nous des serviteurs ni même des amis, mais, après sa résurrection, des frères et des soeurs (Jn 20,17).[11] Il ne se contente pas de nous faire connaître tout ce qu'il a appris de Dieu, mais il nous appelle ses frères et soeurs, enfants de Dieu, et nous rend ainsi héritiers de Dieu et co-héritiers avec lui (Rom 8,15-17). Cet aspect particulier de la mission aujourd'hui entraîne de nombreuses conséquences pour la mission de l'Église. Le synode africain a choisi la notion d' «Église famille de Dieu» comme étant celle qui produit la meilleure compréhension de l'Église en Afrique. Benoît XVI insiste sur cet aspect dans son *Deus caritas est*, ainsi que dans son message pour le Dimanche des missions de 2006. Ces affirmations du synode et du pape ne sont que des reconnaissances de ce que Dieu a déjà fait pour nous dans le Christ, et nous a donné dans la grâce du baptême. Nous avons besoin de considérer ceux auxquels nous sommes envoyés comme des frères et des soeurs : la claire conscience de ce besoin agira alors comme un remède parfaitement naturel dans notre monde d'aujourd'hui si cassé et si blessant, avec ses cultures, styles de vie, idéologies, messages politiques et religieux, tous si divers et souvent facteurs de division.

3.2. Moissonner, voilà le travail fondamental dont l'Église a reçu mission

La mission comporte des tâches aux multiples facettes, parmi lesquelles celle de proclamer la bonne nouvelle, d'enseigner aux peuples comment observer tout ce que Jésus leur a commandé, de la baptiser pour les faire entrer dans la famille de notre Dieu-Trinité. Jésus rassemble ces diverses facettes de la mission confiée à ses disciples dans celle de moissonner (Jn 4,35-38). Il les a envoyés moissonner une récolte qu'ils n'ont pas plantée, mais que Dieu et lui-même ont préparée pour eux. En Mt 9,38-10,42, il les a envoyés à sa moisson avec, pour compétence, celle de faire une prière de demande. Le travail est abondant, mais les travailleurs sont peu nombreux, priez le maître de la moisson d'envoyer des moissonneurs à sa moisson. Dans les écrits de Paul, les disciples eux-mêmes sont le jardin de Dieu et ses cultivateurs. Encore une fois, cela est important dans notre monde globalisé. La tentation de penser que le travail nous appartient, ou que son efficacité et sa solidité dépendent de nous constitue un sérieux obstacle pour mener à bien la mission «aux nations non chrétiennes ». De nos jours, les gens ne croient pas qu'il y ait besoin d'une « mission aux nations non chrétiennes», comprise comme une première évangélisation, comme une tentative pour gagner des personnes pour Dieu, dans le Christ. Si nous portions une attention plus grande à notre mission comprise comme une moisson, peut-être saurions-nous/croirions-nous que le poisson est déjà présent, et nous réjouirions-nous en jetant nos filets pour la pêche du siècle (*Va au large*). L'épisode de la pêche miraculeuse nous montre que Pierre et ses compagnons ont eu fort peu à faire dans ce travail. Ce n'est pas eux qui ont créé le poisson dans la mer, ils n'ont nullement pensé qu'ils pouvaient attraper du poisson à cette heure du jour, surtout après toute une nuit de travail sans résultat. Leur rôle a seulement consisté à obéir, dans la foi, aux instructions de Jésus.

Aujourd'hui, nous avons tendance à croire que le temps d'attraper des poissons est révolu. Nous avons peiné pendant plus de deux mille ans et rien pris, ou seulement très peu. Alors, pourquoi se tracasser ? Après tout, les religions ne mènent-elles pas toutes à Dieu ? Peut-être n'avons-nous pas suffisamment prié le maître de la moisson d'envoyer des ouvriers à sa moisson, mais aussi de nous enseigner comment prendre des êtres humains. L'image de «prendre des êtres humains» peut être quelque peu répulsive. Dans son contexte, cette image nous rappelle que, comme les actes de moissonner/récolter, cela suppose que nous amenions dans notre maison et proclamions comme nous appartenant ceux que nous avons baptisés au nom de la Trinité (la formule du baptême) et fait entrer dans la communion trinitaire, les rendant ainsi membres du corps du Christ, et nos frères et sœurs.

- Cette dimension de reconnaître comme des associés ceux que nous avons baptisés, et de les accueillir comme des frères et soeurs, était-elle présente dans notre façon de vivre la mission dans le passé ?
- Sinon, que devons-nous faire aujourd'hui pour nous remettre sur le bon chemin et pour vivre la mission comme Jésus l'a fait ? De quel bagage culturel, racial, psychologique devons-nous nous débarrasser afin d'être en mesure de nous mouvoir librement pour nous embrasser les uns les autres avec l'amour même du Christ ?

3.3. L'être humain est la route à suivre en mission

Dans sa première encyclique, *Redemptor Hominis*, Jean-Paul II, suivant le concile Vatican II, a déclaré que l'être humain était la route suivant laquelle l'Église devait voyager en mission. Il l'a répété dans son encyclique missionnaire classique *Redemptoris Missio* (nn. 10 et 14). Avant lui, Paul VI, dans *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nous avait rappelé que le travail missionnaire est incomplet tant que les évangélisés, ceux qui ont reçu l'évangile, ne deviennent pas, à leur tour, des évangélisateurs. Toutes ces expressions sont des manières différentes de dire que, pour être en état de mission, l'Église doit attribuer une attention, que rien ne peut remplacer, à la personne humaine dans son contexte ; elle doit rencontrer ses besoins, qu'il s'agisse d'un homme ou d'une femme, et lui fournir ce qu'il lui faut pour mener une vie humaine pleinement authentique. Une telle vie se fonde sur la justice, sur la vérité dans les relations. L'être humain dont il est question est un autre Christ car, comme l'a dit Augustin, «un chrétien est un autre Christ». Nous citons volontiers saint Jérôme qui affirme que «ignorer l'Écriture, c'est ignorer le Christ». Si le chrétien est un autre Christ, alors nous devons conclure qu'ignorer le Christ, c'est s'ignorer soi-même, ignorer la dignité que Dieu nous donne, le statut, la valeur, les droits, les devoirs et les privilèges qui nous viennent de ce que nous sommes un autre Christ, un enfant de Dieu.[12]

En ce vingt-et-unième siècle, comment aidons-nous tout chrétien à connaître sa personnalité et à accepter sa responsabilité personnelle de vivre pleinement sa vie en collaboration avec les autres ? Il me semble que c'est là le noyau de notre intérêt pour la mission, vue d'un point de vue biblique, alors que nous célébrons le 150ème anniversaire de la fondation de la Société des Missions Africaines (SMA). Dans notre tentative pour répondre à ces questions, nous nous rappelons que chacun, pris individuellement, est la route, l'être humain dont l'Église a besoin pour effectuer son voyage évangélisateur. Nous nous rappelons que, lorsque nous disons «Église», nous parlons d'une réalité qui est nous-mêmes, et dont nous sommes une partie. Si le corps tout entier, l'Église, doit être en mission, alors les membres qui forment cette Église doivent assumer leur responsabilité personnelle d'être Église en mission. Chacun doit assumer une responsabilité personnelle pour cette mission.

3.4. L'exemple de Paul

On ne saurait trop insister sur le fait que l'être humain est l'unique fondation solide sur laquelle doit se construire le travail de la mission. Paul constitue l'exemple typique qu'il faut citer ici, car il commence par lui-même. La différence est claire entre sa vie précédente, sans le Christ, et sa nouvelle vie, avec le Christ. Il accepte une responsabilité personnelle pour sa nouvelle vie, celle qui est «dans le Christ» (son expression favorite) et pour la mission. Il s'est donné du mal pour réussir à connaître le Christ Jésus et la puissance de sa résurrection. Il est retourné à ses racines et à sa culture juives pour critiquer et comparer cette culture juive avec le canon, le mètre étalon, l'évangile de Dieu, c'est-à-dire le Christ (Rom 1,2 ; 1,16). Son *curriculum vitae* (Phil 3,4-11) récapitule les efforts qu'il a faits pour être dans le Christ et dans l'Église en mission. Sa vie précédente était suivant ses choix, exclusive, pleine d'un orgueil basé sur ses mérites et ses réalisations personnelles : orgueil de la naissance et de la nationalité («Hébreu, fils d'Hébreux»), orgueil d'être un mâle (circoncis le huitième jour), orgueil de ses réalisations personnelles («pour la justice qu'on trouve dans la loi, irréprochable»), orgueil de défendre avec fanatisme sa religion («pour le zèle, persécuteur de l'Église»). Mais une fois qu'il est en Christ, il comprend l'inutilité de toutes ces réalisations, en relation avec les autres peuples, qui sont également appelés à être en Christ. En conséquence, il se montre plus fort dans la foi, il court plus vite et il travaille plus fort que ceux qui étaient chrétiens avant lui. Ce faisant, il reste essentiellement un disciple, entrant pleinement dans la course, et la menant jusqu'au bout, de peur qu'ayant prêché aux autres, il ne soit lui-même disqualifié (I Cor 9,24-27).

Dans son approche missionnaire, il utilise la méthode de la persuasion avec ceux qu'il évangélise, leur lançant le défi de réfléchir sur leur nouvelle vie en Christ et d'en accepter la responsabilité personnelle. Citons-en quelques exemples. Aux Galates, il demande : «O Galates stupides, qui vous a envoûtés ? Vous qui avez d'abord commencé par l'Esprit, comment pouvez-vous finir par la chair ?». Il presse les Corinthiens d'admettre que leur fierté d'avoir des dons spirituels prouve qu'ils sont encore des enfants dans la foi, ou même encore moins, puisqu'ils font des choses dont on n'entend même pas parler chez les païens, comme le fait, pour un homme, de vivre avec la femme de son père. Il les presse donc d'admettre qu'au lieu de s'en glorifier, ils devraient en avoir honte. Ces quelques exemples prouvent concrètement avec quel sérieux il faisait de la personne humaine la route que la mission devait parcourir ... [...]

La mission Ad Gentes aujourd'hui : un point de vue biblique

(IIème Partie)

- Thérèse Okure, shcj -

[...]

3.5. L'option préférentielle pour les pauvres, une nouvelle approche

Au cours des deux mille ans qui viennent de s'écouler, l'Église en mission a fait de l'option préférentielle pour les pauvres son outil principal d'évangélisation. Celsius, au second siècle, se moque de l'Église des premiers temps, qu'il présente comme faite de «ce qu'il y a de fou, de malhonnête et de stupide, et ne rassemblant que des esclaves, des femmes et des enfants».[13] Des textes du Nouveau Testament, tels que I Cor 1,26-29 et Jc 2,1-7, le corroborent, bien que Pline, dans sa lettre à Trajan, les décrit comme «des gens de tout âge, de tous les niveaux sociaux et des deux sexes».[14] Une statistique récente affirme : «le chrétien moyen, dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, est pauvre, vivant souvent dans un groupe minoritaire, dans un pays non-chrétien».[15] L'auteur ajoute, un peu plus loin : «En l'an 2020, 80 % de tous les chrétiens seront des gens de couleur vivant dans l'hémisphère sud». Selon ces statistiques, l'option préférentielle pour les pauvres devrait nous conduire à concentrer nos efforts non seulement sur les pauvres qui vivent hors de chez nous, mais également sur ceux qui vivent parmi nous. L'appel à revenir à nos racines et à jeter les filets nous rappelle la communauté chrétienne des premiers temps. Les chrétiens d'alors, eux aussi, constituaient une minorité dans un monde majoritairement non-chrétien. Mais ceux qui étaient riches, parmi les chrétiens, ne s'asseyaient pas sur le mur et n'exploitaient pas les pauvres. Les gens vendaient, non seulement leurs affaires, mais les terres qu'ils possédaient (par exemple Barnabé) pour permettre à tous les membres de la communauté de subvenir à leurs besoins essentiels.

De nos jours, malheureusement, les riches, même au sein du bercail chrétien et catholique, n'estiment pas, d'une façon générale, qu'il est de leur devoir de prévoir aux besoins des disciples pauvres, hommes et femmes, de leur localité. De nombreux récits parlent de riches donations faites à l'Église, qui lui ont permis de bâtir de grands projets, des églises, des presbytères, etc., et qui ont valu aux donateurs une grande réputation, des places spéciales et des titres dans l'Église. Et ces mêmes personnes riches peuvent ne pas penser que c'est pour elles un devoir de justice de verser à leurs travailleurs le salaire de base. Ils doivent jusqu'à six mois de salaire. Cela se passe non seulement au Nigeria, mais également dans d'autres parties du Tiers Monde, comme je l'ai découvert dans mes rencontres théologiques avec des collègues du Tiers Monde. Ces gens-là comprennent-ils qu'ils doivent être un autre Christ dans le monde ? Comment les amenons-nous à comprendre et à se pénétrer du message que le Christ, de riche qu'il était, a choisi personnellement de devenir pauvre afin de nous enrichir de sa pauvreté ? Et que, en tant que personnes appelées à être le Christ dans le monde, ils ont comme première obligation de payer leurs travailleurs selon la justice, avant de se lancer dans de prestigieux projets au bénéfice de l'Église ou d'entreprises humanitaires qui leur valent un grand nom ? Comment les aidons-nous à comprendre qu'aucun nom ou titre n'est plus grand que celui de fils de Dieu (1 Jn 3,1-9) ?

L'option pour les pauvres, suivant le modèle du Christ, exige plus que d'aider les pauvres à partir d'une situation et d'une position de riche. En réalité, le Christ n'a pas seulement fait une option pour les pauvres, il a choisi de devenir pauvre de façon à nous enrichir de sa pauvreté (II Cor 8,9). Que cela nous plaise ou non, notre

[pp. 58-65]

vie dans nos congrégations religieuses nous place parmi les riches quand nous sommes comparés aux pauvres, à ceux qui n'ont pas le nécessaire de base pour vivre : nourriture, vêtements, toit et emploi. Nous remercions Dieu parce que nous avons pu partager nos richesses avec ces gens pauvres. Mais, quand nous pensons à la condition qui est faite aux pauvres, sommes-nous satisfaits de l'usage que nous faisons de nos biens? Pouvons-nous entendre Jésus qui nous assure, comme il l'a dit au jeune homme riche qui répondait qu'il avait observé la loi toute sa vie, qu'il nous manque encore une chose : il nous faut vendre quelques-unes, sinon la totalité de nos propriétés, terrains, etc., et en donner le prix aux pauvres, si nous voulons réellement être ses disciples en notre siècle ? Peut-être avons-nous développé une théologie de la richesse qui a émoussé notre conscience et nous fait nous sentir à l'aise dans notre richesse, même au milieu d'une pauvreté abjecte ? Ici, nous pensons à la richesse et à la pauvreté, non seulement au plan matériel, mais à l'ignorance, au manque d'instruction, et également aux pauvretés spirituelles et morales.

3.6. Le devoir d'évangéliser les riches

L'option préférentielle pour les pauvres est solidement établie dans la Bible et dans la mission de Jésus, ainsi que dans sa manière de vivre. Mais la croyance que Jésus est l'évangile de Dieu pour chaque homme ou qu'en lui Dieu a réconcilié avec lui-même les choses du ciel et celles de la terre, faisant la paix par le sang de sa croix, doit nous amener à ne pas rejeter *a priori* les riches. Quand Jésus disait à ses disciples qu'il était plus difficile à un riche d'entrer au ciel qu'à un chameau de passer par le trou d'une aiguille, il ne rejetait pas ainsi les riches. Parmi ses disciples, bien que ce soit en secret, il y avait des gens riches : Joseph d'Arimathie et Nicodème. Marthe et Marie devaient être riches pour lui offrir le genre d'hospitalité qu'il appréciait pendant ses visites à Jérusalem. Les chefs religieux étaient, sans aucun doute, des gens riches, qui s'emparaient du bien des veuves sous le couvert de leurs longues prières.

Et cependant, Jésus ne les a pas négligés dans sa proclamation de la bonne nouvelle. Il leur a adressé des paraboles telles que celle du riche et de Lazare, ou du riche insensé, pour les aider à repenser leur propension à s'appauvrir eux-mêmes en accumulant des biens, privant ainsi les pauvres d'éléments qui étaient vitaux pour eux : nourriture, vêtements, logement. L'homme riche apprit trop tard qu'il n'y avait aucun profit à négliger le pauvre quand il faisait des festins somptueux avec des biens que Dieu lui avait confiés pour le bien de tous. Leur communauté était liée par une alliance, c'était un peuple de Dieu. L'esprit du jubilée, qu'il leur était commandé, à tous, d'observer au moins lors de chaque année sabbatique (Lev 15) ou tous les cinquante ans (Lev 25), aurait dû les aider à maîtriser cette consommation imprudente des biens de la communauté au détriment de leurs frères et sœurs. Aujourd'hui, nous avons beaucoup de riches et de Lazare dans l'Église, et même dans nos communautés religieuses. Ces gens trouvent leur plaisir quand ils augmentent la taille de leur capital en bourse, déclarant des profits énormes, vrais ou faux, et réduisant au chômage des travailleurs afin de maximiser leurs profits.

La rencontre de Jésus avec Zachée (Lc 19,1-10), quand il entre à Jéricho, en route vers Jérusalem, fournit un bon exemple de ce qu'on veut dire quand on parle d'évangéliser les riches. Ici, ce qui est en jeu, c'est la mission, autant dans sa méthode que dans la nature. Zachée, puisqu'il était trop petit pour voir Jésus, à cause de la foule, grimpe sur un arbre pour mieux voir Jésus. Au jugement de Jésus, la curiosité de Zachée constituait une ouverture suffisante pour qu'il s'invite à dîner chez lui. «Descend vite, il me faut aujourd'hui prendre mon repas dans ta maison». Quelle joie il manifeste ! Nous pensons parfois que les riches ne sont intéressés que par l'argent. Ce n'est pas exact, car dans le cœur de chacun demeure la marque héréditaire de celui qui est créé à l'image et ressemblance de Dieu, dont le coeur, pour reprendre les mots d'Augustin «reste sans repos tant qu'il ne repose pas en Dieu». Il nous faut utiliser le genre d'approche que Jésus a utilisé pour atteindre le coeur de ces gens et les rendre capables d'entreprendre le travail de se convertir. Alors que les gens saints critiquaient Jésus parce qu'il mangeait avec les collecteurs d'impôts et avec les pécheurs, Zachée a déclaré qu'il allait réparer quatre fois (et non deux fois comme d'habitude) tout le mal qu'il a pu faire aux autres. En plus, il décide de donner la moitié de ce qui est vraiment à lui, afin que lui et les pauvres puissent être égaux.[16]

Aujourd'hui, nous répertorions le Fonds monétaire international, la Banque mondiale et autres banques mondiales comme étant les sources réelles de la pauvreté et de l'appauvrissement des nations dont l'économie est faible. Et nous parlons aussi en général des États-Unis, de la Grande Bretagne, du G8, du G22, etc. Certes, des individus, tant dans les pays développés que dans les pays en développement, se trouvent parmi les quelques personnes riches dont les ressources d'une hauteur astronomique appauvrissent les autres. La mondialisation, qui contribue grandement à creuser le fossé entre les riches et les pauvres, est construite et entretenue par des individus. Reconnaître que, en Jésus, Dieu a déclaré l'amnistie générale divine en faveur de tous, nous conduirait, et c'est une mesure urgente, à concevoir des méthodes efficaces pour toucher le coeur des riches, tout en continuant de prier Dieu et de compter sur lui pour faire ce miracle de conversion en leur faveur, ce qui n'appartient qu'à Dieu. Ainsi, sans leur faire aucune menace, nous invitons les riches à remettre leur vie au Christ, et ainsi se sauver, eux et leurs nations, lesquelles, bien que considérées comme les plus grandes, peuvent être les plus pauvres du monde sur le plan moral. Quand on récite la Prière du Seigneur, on demande que le règne de Dieu arrive sur la terre comme au ciel : cela équivaut à prier pour la conversion des riches, qu'ils soient individus, communautés, nations ou zones géographiques.

On peut multiplier ces exemples. Faire de l'homme la route de la mission nous appelle à dépasser le catéchisme habituel et la confession impersonnelle du début de la foi. Il nous faut changer nos méthodes et nous attacher à passer des généralités et des abstractions au cas de chaque individu (homme ou femme) avec ses croyances et ses convictions propres. Il nous faut descendre jusqu'aux racines des réactions individuelles, au niveau du peuple, des masses (des pauvres, principalement des femmes et des enfants, ou des quelques riches qui amassent des richesses à leur détriment et au détriment des autres). Jésus l'a fait en parlant aux gens en paraboles, en prêchant dans leurs rues, dans leurs maisons et dans leurs synagogues, en traversant leurs villes et villages, en leur adressant des défis exactement au niveau où ils étaient, et en les aidant personnellement à trouver les réponses à leurs questions et les solutions à leurs problèmes. Quand les gens se sont posé ces questions, Jésus les a félicités pour leur foi qui les a sauvés et les a invités à mettre en pratique dans leur situation concrète les vraies solutions qu'ils avaient identifiées à travers ses paraboles. Dans notre effort pour être l'Église en mission, Jésus lui-même demeure la voie, la vérité et la vie. Il est donc nécessaire que nous passions brièvement en revue comment il a défini sa mission et comment il l'a accomplie.

4. Jésus comme modèle du missionnaire

Jésus n'a pas simplement envoyé ses disciples en mission avec un mandat de mission ou des instructions. Lui-même avait bien conscience de son mandat de mission et il s'est efforcé de l'accomplir tout au long de sa vie. Ses deux déclarations missionnaires, en Lc 4,18-19 et Jn 10,10, déjà mentionnées, vont nous servir de guides pour observer comment il a accompli sa mission.

4.1. Lc 4,18-19. Il a reçu l'onction et a été envoyé par l'Esprit de Dieu

Dans son discours inaugural à Nazareth, Jésus annonce à l'auditoire qui l'écoute dans la synagogue, et qui attend la venue du Messie, que ce que le prophète Isaïe a prédit il y a longtemps, est en train de s'accomplir effectivement au moment même où ils l'écoutent.

L'Esprit du Seigneur est sur moi. Dieu m'a oint/consacré

- Pour annoncer la bonne nouvelle aux pauvres,
- Pour donner la vue aux aveugles,
- Pour apporter la délivrance aux captifs,
- Pour libérer ceux qui sont opprimés et
- Pour déclarer une année de grâce de

Dieu – l'amnistie générale de Dieu accordée à toute la création (Lc 4,18-19).

Comment Jésus, oint comme Messie par Dieu, a-t-il accompli cette mission, dans son contexte et à son époque ?

· **Apporter la bonne nouvelle aux pauvres.** Dans les Béatitudes, Jésus proclame que les pauvres sont des candidats «bénis» pour le royaume. Les Béatitudes forment la grande charte du Royaume de Dieu (le Royaume des cieux). Parmi les pauvres, au temps de Jésus, il y avait les femmes et les enfants, et les nombreux gens du peuple, qu'Hérode avait dépossédés de leurs terres pour constituer des propriétés pour lui-même ou ses nobles ; ou encore des veuves qui étaient exploitées par leurs dirigeants religieux («qui dévorent le bien des veuves sous couvert de longues prières» Lc 20,47 – 21,1-4). En affirmant qu'il était difficile (quoique non impossible) pour le riche d'entrer dans le royaume de Dieu, Jésus proclamait que le royaume de Dieu appartenait aux pauvres. Qu'ont ressenti les pauvres quand ils ont entendu qu'ils étaient candidats au royaume de Dieu, contrairement à la théologie dominante ? La parabole du riche et de Lazare (Lc 16,19-31) constitue un exemple typique. Le pauvre Lazare n'a rien fait, et pourtant il a mérité une place dans le sein d'Abraham, après sa mort. Dans le projet rédempteur de Dieu, cependant, tous sont pauvres dans la mesure où tous ont péché et sont privés de la gloire de Dieu qui était prévue pour eux (Rom 3,23) en tant que créatures faites à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu (Gen 1,26-27). Le riche, qui se vautrait dans sa richesse pendant que Lazare mourait de faim, était également pauvre sur le plan moral. S'il avait reconnu sa pauvreté morale, lui aussi aurait fait un mouvement qui lui aurait permis de se placer parmi les bénéficiaires de la béatitude, comme Zachée l'avait fait.[17] Ceux qui interprètent cette première béatitude comme : «Bienheureux ceux qui ont conscience de leur besoin de Dieu» sont dans le vrai. Nous n'excluons pas, pour autant, le sens de « pauvreté matérielle », d'autant plus que dans le contexte culturel de Jésus, la pauvreté matérielle, le malheur ou la maladie étaient attribués à des péchés personnels ou dans la famille et étaient vus comme une marque de mécontentement de la part de Dieu (*cf.* Jn 9, 2). Dans le contexte culturel d'aujourd'hui, nous devons compter les riches parmi les pauvres : ils ont un immense besoin de Dieu, même s'ils ne le savent pas. C'est particulièrement vrai puisque l'argent, Mammon, dirige le monde et a enrôlé presque tout le monde pour en faire ses disciples, spécialement sous prétexte de mondialisation et d'un souci exagéré d'une économie en pleine expansion.

· **Proclamer la liberté aux captifs :** Nous n'avons pas entendu dire que Jésus ait visité des prisons. Mais il a libéré des gens maintenus captifs par des esprits mauvais, tels que la femme courbée depuis 18 ans, dans la synagogue, ou le démonique de Génésareth (possédé par «Légion»), des préjugés raciaux (Juifs et Samaritains ; Jn 4), des tabous religieux et culturels, spécialement les lois cultuelles du pur et de l'impur, et les 613 interdits de la Torah, la multiplicité des lois qui dénaturaient le Sabbat et l'empêchaient d'être un don de Dieu aux hommes.[18]

· **Redonner la vue aux aveugles** : Il ne s'agit pas simplement de ceux qui sont physiquement aveugles, tels que Bartimée, l'homme aveugle près de Jéricho (Mc 10, 46-52), les deux aveugles, hors de Jéricho (Mt 20, 29-34), ni l'homme qui était né aveugle (Jn 9). Jésus déclare que la cécité spirituelle est la pire (Jn 9,41). C'est ainsi que l'enseignement qu'il a donné aux gens concernant la vérité sur Dieu a ouvert leurs yeux à la vérité et les a rendus pleins d'admiration pour les façons dont Dieu agit : tout cela, c'est vraiment rendre la vue à des aveugles. Il les enseignait d'une façon autre que celle de leurs dirigeants religieux, qui avaient un intérêt personnel à maintenir les masses dans l'ignorance de leurs droits de peuple ayant conclu une alliance avec Dieu.

· **Libérer les opprimés**. Ici, nous pensons aux nombreux peuples opprimés par des lois injustes, les 613 articles dont les Rabbis ont entouré la Torah. En plus d'avoir pris la défense de ses disciples quand ils cueillaient des épis de blé un jour de sabbat, ou qu'ils prenaient leur repas avec des mains non lavées, Jésus fait, en Mt 23, une condamnation globale de ces lois oppressives quand il déclare malheureux les scribes et les pharisiens (qui faisaient les lois, les interprétaient, et les jugeaient). Nous pensons aussi à ceux qui étaient écrasés par des lois sociales fautives de pureté rituelle : les lois qui amenaient à traiter les lépreux comme des gens rejetés, à déclarer pécheurs les percepteurs d'impôts, ou à maintenir la femme affligée d'une hémorragie depuis douze ans à l'écart des personnes rituellement pures de crainte qu'elle les rende rituellement impures.[19] Nous pensons à la manière dont Jésus à cherché à atteindre les Samaritains en passant par une femme d'une moralité suspecte, et comment il en a fait l'évangélisatrice à la fois de sa nation et de ses propres disciples victimes de préjugés (Jn 4, 9 ; 27-42) ; ou comment il a proposé un Samaritain (un homme d'une race que Sir 50, 25-26 considère comme «n'étant pas un peuple») comme le véritable prochain, au contraire d'un prêtre et d'un lévite, dans la parabole du Bon Samaritain (Lc 10, 29-37).

· **Déclarer une année de grâce de la part du Seigneur, l'amnistie générale de Dieu offerte à tous**. C'est le point culminant de l'oeuvre qu'il accomplit sur la croix : «Quand j'aurai été élevé de terre, j'attirerai à moi tous les hommes» (Jn 12, 32). Il est mort, non seulement pour la nation juive, mais pour rassembler tous les enfants de Dieu dispersés (Jn 11,52), dispersés par le péché d'exclusion pour motif de sexe, de race, de classe sociale, de nationalité ou d'idéologie politique, économique ou religieuse. Paul exprime ce rassemblement en termes de ministère de réconciliation. Dieu, dans le Christ, réconciliait le monde (pas seulement des individus, mais le monde entier) avec l'être divin, et nous confiait (à nous, Église en mission) le ministère de la réconciliation (II Cor 5, 16 – 6, 13). Les lettres de Paul, aux Colossiens et aux Éphésiens, étendent l'amnistie divine, ou réconciliation, au ciel lui-même : la plénitude de la divinité réside dans le corps physique du Christ «afin d'unir à lui toute chose qui existe au ciel et sur la terre, faisant la paix par le sang de sa croix» (Col 1,20).

4.2. Jn 10,10 : donnant la vie en plénitude

Dans la parabole du Bon Pasteur, Jésus déclare que les mauvais bergers exploitent leurs brebis et les abandonnent aux envahisseurs, mais que lui, le vrai/bon berger est venu «pour que [tous] puissent avoir la vie, et l'avoir de plus en plus en abondance» (Jn 10,10).

Ce passage de Jean ne nécessite pratiquement pas de commentaire. Jésus, le Bon Pasteur, a littéralement livré sa vie pour nous, ses brebis. Pour cette raison, nous avons la vie dans toute sa plénitude, à condition que nous ne recherchions pas les biens matériels ou les idéologies anti-chrétiennes, ni ne vivions une vie inauthentique, qui nous emprisonne à nouveau après que le Christ nous ait libérés (Gal 5, 1-2). Dans la parabole, ce sont les brebis qui fixent l'endroit où se rend le Pasteur, et non l'inverse. Nos besoins, en tant qu'êtres humains tombés hors piste ou pécheurs, ont amené Jésus à devenir un être humain semblable à nous en tout, sauf le péché (Heb 4, 15). Parce qu'il a agi ainsi, il peut ressentir nos souffrances et plaider notre cause auprès de Dieu, en tant que notre suprême grand prêtre, qui est lui-même Dieu. Comme je l'ai découvert ailleurs, dans le contexte humain les êtres humains offrent des sacrifices pour apaiser Dieu. Mais en contexte divin, selon l'épître aux Hébreux, Dieu dans le Verbe incarné offre son propre être divin en sacrifice afin de nous attirer à sa divine réalité.[20]

De plus, Jésus n'est pas simplement mort pour nous. Il nous a laissé son corps et son sang comme une nourriture qui demeure jusqu'à la vie sans fin. Ainsi, il a fait de l'eucharistie, cette action de grâce, la norme de toute prière et activité chrétienne. Sa résurrection a provoqué la défaite du pire ennemi de la vie, à savoir la mort. La vie qu'il nous a donnée n'est pas purement une proposition théologique, mais quelque chose de réel. Jésus rend cette vie concrète pour nous, ou fait que cette vie soit nôtre par le baptême et la transmission du Saint-Esprit, qui marque le début de la vie de Dieu en nous. En conséquence, il ne nous appelle plus serviteurs, ni même amis, mais frères et soeurs (Jn 20,17), nous rendant ainsi héritiers de Dieu et co-héritiers avec lui (Rom 8,15-17).

Tout ce qui lui appartient suscite en nous l'émerveillement et la louange. Sa mission, que nous avons brièvement passée en revue ci-dessus, est un guide et elle nous stimule lorsque nous repensons la mission au XXI^e siècle, étudiée du point de vue de la Bible et spécialement comme une nouvelle alliance.

5. Revisitons la vocation missionnaire aujourd'hui

A la lumière des considérations présentées ci-dessus, nous pouvons nous poser quelques questions.

- Avons-nous des principes missionnaires, et les connaissons-nous ? La plupart, pour ne pas dire toutes nos Constitutions contiennent des principes missionnaires. En plus, nous avons tous les principes généraux de mission et le mandat de Jésus, que nous devons aller dans le monde entier et proclamer la bonne nouvelle à toute la création, avec la promesse qu'il sera avec nous jusqu'à ce que la mission soit accomplie (Mt 28,20). Dans quelle mesure faisons-nous de ce principe missionnaire un élément dont nous avons conscience dans notre vie et ministère de chaque jour, spécialement à la lumière de ce que nous avons dit plus haut, que nous sommes l'Église en mission ?
- Qui sont les pauvres, les aveugles, les prisonniers et les captifs dans notre contexte à nous ?
- Comment, aujourd'hui, ouvrons-nous les yeux des aveugles, libérons-nous les prisonniers, apportons-nous la liberté aux opprimés ? Faisons-nous partie d'une de ces catégories de personnes ?
- Comment allons-nous aux autres et au monde, afin que tous, sans exception, puissent recevoir la vie, toujours plus abondamment, plus pleinement et plus authentiquement ?
- Comment répandons-nous l'amnistie générale accordée par Dieu, pour que tous les hommes, sans exception, puissent la ressentir comme un don libre, gratuit, immérité, de la part de Dieu ?

Voilà quelques éléments pour nourrir notre réflexion commune sur la manière dont nous allons retourner à l'oeuvre de l'évangélisation, dans le sillage de l'évangile, et jeter au large nos filets (*Duc in altum*), pour la prise du siècle.[21] Il y a là tout un programme pour nous garder sur la bonne piste pour ce siècle et au-delà. Le message de Benoît XVI pour le Dimanche des Missions de 2006 l'explique très clairement. Il redit le témoignage de l'Écriture, que l'amour est l'âme de la mission. L'amour transcendant de Dieu pour le monde a amené Dieu à donner son Fils unique bien-aimé pour sauver le monde (Jn 3,16). La démonstration que Jésus a faite de son amour l'a conduit à donner sa vie comme ultime preuve d'amour (Jn 15,13). La première lettre de Jean (4,16) souligne que, puisque l'amour est l'âme de la mission, nous ne pouvons pas dire que nous aimons le Dieu que nous ne voyons pas alors que nous haïssons le frère ou la soeur, enfant de Dieu, que nous voyons chaque jour.

Jésus transmet cette annonce que l'amour est le centre de notre qualité de disciple et la marque qui nous identifie comme chrétiens : «C'est un commandement nouveau que je vous donne : aimez-vous les uns les autres comme je vous ai aimés. A ce signe, tous reconnaîtront que vous êtes mes disciples, si vous vous aimez les uns les autres» (Jn 13,34-35).[22] Il considère également cet amour exprimé par l'unité comme l'âme de notre mission : cela va persuader ou convaincre le monde incroyant que Dieu l'a réellement envoyé comme sauveur de ce monde (Jn 17,20-23), que Dieu aime tant. La mesure de l'amour est ici à son maximum, au-delà de laquelle il est impossible d'aller : Nul n'a d'amour plus grand que celui qui se dessaisit de sa vie pour ceux qu'il aime (Jn 15,13). C'est dans ce but que Jésus appelle, prépare et commande le fruit qui va durer, que nous devons porter comme des sarments vivants de sa vigne.[23]

Un autre élément inséparable de cette mission, c'est que nous soyons prêts à effacer les dettes morales que les autres ont envers nous, même à l'intérieur de nos communautés immédiates. En lien avec cela, l'affirmation que Jésus a faite à Pâques de pardonner ou de retenir les péchés (Jn 20,19-23) est souvent interprétée restrictivement, soit pour la ramener à la confession sacramentelle (l'administration du sacrement de réconciliation réservée aux seuls prêtres) ; soit pour dire que Jésus demande ici aux ministres de pardonner certains péchés et d'en retenir d'autres, avec l'assurance que le ciel va approuver ce qu'ils ont fait. Une telle interprétation ne tient pas devant ce qui est le noyau du message du Nouveau Testament de Jésus, l'Évangile de Dieu (Rom 1,1-2.16), à savoir qu'en Jésus Dieu a tout réconcilié avec son Être divin.[24] L'affirmation de Jésus doit plutôt être comprise comme une mise en garde : si nous retenons les péchés des gens, ces péchés sont bien retenus, et nous sommes les premières victimes de cette rétention, puisque nous-mêmes ne sommes alors pas libres. Le message global d'amour qu'apporte le Nouveau Testament est que Dieu ne garde aucune liste de nos mauvaises actions (I Cor 13,4-7). Ce ministère d'amour et d'une réconciliation enracinée dans l'amour est très nécessaire dans notre monde actuel déchiré par les guerres, comme la manière la plus adéquate de traiter le problème de l'autre.[25]

L'amour est la vertu la plus grande, et celle qui va durer, parce que Dieu est amour. L'homme comme route de la mission est celui qui accepte la responsabilité de l'amour – qui ne doit rien à personne excepté la dette de l'amour (Rom 13,8-10 ; *cf.* 12,9-10). C'est pourquoi nous ne pouvons pas restreindre la mission à assister des personnes vivant dans des pays étrangers, spécialement si et où cette assistance n'a pas été motivée, guidée et assaisonnée par la catégorie d'amour que Jésus commande et exige de nous, et sans laquelle nous ne pouvons pas nous appeler authentiquement chrétiens, enfants du Christ et de Dieu dans le monde. Si nous acceptons et adoptons volontiers l'amour comme âme de la mission, nous n'aurons pas de problèmes au sujet de la mission *ad gentes* comprise comme assistance à des incroyants. Je n'ai pas encore rencontré d'homme qui rejette ou se sente opprimé par un amour prêt à mourir pour lui.

Repenser la mission, au XXI^{e} siècle, à partir du point de vue du Nouveau Testament, apporte des défis exaltants. Le défi central apparaît quand on situe la mission dans la personne humaine, quand on reconnaît que c'est pour le bien de cette personne que la mission est entreprise, que cette personne doit accepter la responsabilité de sa véritable identité d'enfant de Dieu, d'être un autre Christ dans le monde, d'avoir la mission, en qualité d'enfant de Dieu, d'aimer comme Dieu aime, là où il (ou elle) se trouve. Considérer ainsi la mission bannit l'idée que quelques personnes seulement sont appelées à être missionnaires, ou de concevoir la mission comme une assistance à des incroyants. L'Engagement missionnaire (qu'elle soit la première évangélisation ou une évangélisation continue) est, bien sûr, toujours nécessaire. Mais, si les personnes évangélisées ne deviennent pas, à leur tour, des évangélisateurs, comme Paul VI le note dans *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 15), alors le mouvement missionnaire n'a pas atteint totalement son but ni l'étape où il peut porter des fruits. Le document souligne aussi l'absolue nécessité de mettre en relation la proclamation de l'évangile avec la vie actuelle des gens, dans leurs conditions socioculturelles diverses et concrètes de vie, et le besoin de reconnaître et de sauvegarder les droits et devoirs de chaque personne, de la famille, de la communauté et de la nation (*cf.*, n. 29).

Malheureusement, bien des chrétiens aujourd'hui ont encore à découvrir leur véritable identité de chrétiens. Le succès de la mission de Jésus s'explique par la solide connaissance qu'il avait de son identité de Fils de Dieu et de Messie, et par son engagement à vivre en conséquence. Parce qu'il était solidement enraciné dans cette connaissance, il a été impossible de le rendre infidèle à cette mission, soit directement par l'attaque de Satan dans l'épisode de la tentation, soit indirectement, comme lors de la réaction de Pierre à Césarée de Philippe, puis dans la persécution de ses dirigeants religieux. Jésus a vécu complètement la mission de s'attacher à Dieu, comme le niveau premier et fondamental de la mission. Plus tard, Paul a également fait sien le même esprit d'ardent engagement. Nous devons prendre sur nous la tâche de demeurer conscients et d'éveiller notre peuple à cette conscience de sa noble identité de chrétien : c'est la tâche première dans cette nouvelle première évangélisation. Quand nous disons «première évangélisation», nous visons celle qui se fait selon l'esprit du Nouveau Testament que nous avons vu ci-dessus. Beaucoup de gens sont chrétiens depuis des années, et ont pourtant à recevoir cette «première évangélisation». Ici, nous visons non seulement les gens «ordinaires» ou «laïcs», mais même nous-mêmes, qui sommes prêtres, religieux et évêques. Bien souvent, les laïcs peuvent être plus fidèles à la loi de l'amour et ministres de la réconciliation que nous-mêmes.

Puisque nous voulons faire avancer la réflexion sur la mission *ad gentes*, il nous faut être très pratiques.[26] La discussion doit nous amener à passer en revue les questions de race, de couleur, de lois injustes concernant l'immigration (qui empêchent de s'établir dans les différentes nations et d'y réaliser des échanges). Nous avons besoin que le Christ nous guide, lui qui a accueilli tous les peuples, qui leur a donné à tous la possibilité et la liberté d'habiter la terre, et de l'habiter en paix et gratuitement. Comment enfin nous rendons-nous dans le monde entier, aujourd'hui, pour rassembler une moisson d'hommes et de femmes vivant une fraternité que nous n'avons pas inventée, mais qui est don de Dieu à travers la création et la rédemption ? Comment réalisons-nous cette tâche, dans la collaboration, conscients que la collaboration est un impératif pour nous, qui sommes les membres de l'unique famille de Dieu, l'Église ? Comment montrons-nous, par un mode de vie trinitaire que nous sommes enfants d'un Dieu-Trinité qui n'existe qu'en communion et n'agit que dans la collaboration pour procurer ce qui est bon pour nous ? Puisse le Saint-Esprit continuer à nous guider et à nous inspirer, lui qui est le principe de la vie de Dieu en nous, et «d'agent principal de la mission»,[27] alors que nous comprenons de mieux en mieux, et de plus en plus profondément, notre engagement au service de la mission auprès des nations, comme Jésus nous en a donné l'ordre.

Notes

[1] Origène. *Contra Celsius*, 3,44.

[2] Tertullien, *Epîtres*, 10.96.6. Voir aussi Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), spécialement le chapitre 2, pp. 51-73.

[3] Keith F. Peckers, S.J., "Sharing the Ring. When the Archbishop Meets the Pope", *International Herald Tribune* (Thursday, 23 November 2006), 8.

[4] Pour une étude plus poussée sur l'histoire de Zachée, voir Beate Kowalski, «Conversations about Poverty in the Lukan Church», in J. Hears et P. de Mey, eds, *Theology as Conversation : Towards a Relational Theology* (BETL CLXXII ; Leuven : Leuven University Press, 2003), 125-144.

[5] L'article de Kowalski, mentionné ci-dessus (voir note 16) voit un contraste entre le riche déclaré, qui s'est éloigné, tout triste, quand Jésus lui a dit de vendre ses biens, de donner l'argent aux pauvres et de devenir son disciple (Lc 18,18-30) et Zachée (Lc 19,1-10), qui a répondu positivement, et ainsi a eu part au salut divin.

[6] Brad H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody : Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, 103-112), explique que l'attitude de Jésus concernant le Sabbat est très proche de la loi orale juive, qui insistait sur le primat de la vie par rapport à toutes les autres lois.

[7] Sur ce sujet : T. Okure, «Epilogue : The Will to Arise: Reflections on Luke 8:40-56)", in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and Church in Africa*, Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, eds. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 221-230.

[8] T. Okure, "Hebrews: Sacrifice in an African Perspective", in *Global Bible Commentary,* Daniel Patte et *alii.*, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 535-538.

[9] L'expression *Duc in altum* est le slogan de *Novo millennio ineunte*, la lettre apostolique de Jean-Paul II, lors de la clôture du Grand Jubilée de l'an 2000.

[10] Il est important de noter ce qui fait la nouveauté de ce commandement. L'amour de Dieu et du prochain était également le centre de l'alliance de l'Ancien Testament, cela est exprimé dans le *Schema Israel* (Deut 6,4). Les évangiles le redisent à l'occasion de la question que le spécialiste de la loi pose à Jésus : «Quel est le premier commandement de la Loi ?» (Lc 10,29-36). Mais le nouveau commandement de Jésus va plus loin. Il n'est plus simplement question d'aimer le prochain comme soi-même, mais de livrer sa vie pour ce prochain, afin qu'il (ou elle) puisse avoir la vie en plénitude. Jésus a d'abord donné cet amour en exemple avant de le donner en commandement. C'est là que se trouve la nouveauté du nouveau commandement du Nouveau Testament.

[11] Dans *The Johannine Approach to Mission* (pp. 211-213, note 10, ci-dessus), j'ai découvert que les sarments vivants, élagués par Dieu pour qu'ils portent beaucoup de fruit (alors que les sarments morts sont coupés et rûlés) sont en liens avec la promesse faite à la mission de porter des fruits.

[12] Le temps de ce verbe est le passé continu (*en*) : Dieu était actif dans le Christ tout au long de son ministère, pendant qu'il réconciliait le monde avec l'Être divin. Notre mission n'est donc pas de demander à Dieu de le faire, puisque Dieu l'a déjà fait ; elle est plutôt de proclamer au monde «qu'il est réconcilié». Telle est la bonne nouvelle.

[13] Pour plus de détails, voir : T. Okure, "The Ministry of Reconciliation (II Cor 5 : 14-21) : Paul's Key to the Problem of 'the Other' in Corinth", *Mission Studies* 23, No. 1 (2006) 105-121. Sur le même sujet : John Mansfield Prior, dans le même volume, "'Power' and 'the Other' in Joshua: The Brutal Birthing of a Group Identity", 27-43; c'est clairement une manière non-évangélique de traiter l'autre, très en vogue de nos jours.

[14] Jean-Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, chapitre IV, donne de vastes horizons et champs de mission *ad gentes*.

[15] *Redemptoris Missio*, chapitre III, nn. 21-30.

Réf. : *Bulletin SMA*, n. 125, Juin 2007, pp. 13-44.

The Word of God in Dialogue With Hinduism and Buddhism

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On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council signing the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue's Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, *on 18th November 1965, a Round Table Discussion was held on the significance of this very important document. Mons. Felix Anthony Machado (Via dell'Erba, 1, 00193 Roma, Italy, dialogo@interrel.va) comments on it from the point of view of interreligous dialogue. He reflects on the role of Scriptures in Hinduism and Buddhism and the conditions for an authentic dialogue between them and Christian believers.*

Introduction

I wonder if it is possible to find a thread of thought in the Bible which can teach Christians to understand other religions and to relate to their followers with the respect which is due to them. Is it possible, may I ask, to identify some themes through which the "history of salvation" crosses the history of religion of a particular people and illumines it so that we are able to discern the "seeds of the Word" which are present in the universal religious experience? Such deeper knowledge of other religions would also help us understand better our sacred Scriptures in view of a more effective and adequate evangelisation of peoples.

"Does the Bible say anything about other religions?". This question has been the object of study in recent times. Worthy of particular mention is the book by Wesley Ariarajah, *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* (WCC, Geneva, 1985) in which the Srilankan author tried to interpret the biblical teaching favouring the emerging new relationship between Christians and peoples of other religious traditions. One can establish a favourable attitude of the Bible towards people of other religions by citing examples such as the Gentile priest Melchizedek (Gn 14:17-20), the Queen of Sabah (I Kgs 10:1-13), Abel, Enoch and Noah (Gn 4-9), Jb (Jb 1:1). But one may also defend a negative attitude towards the people of other religions by citing examples, such as the massacre of the priests of Baal at the instigation of Prophet Elijah (I Kgs 18:18ff, Dt 7:1-5; Jos 6:17-21) or by quoting verses, for example, from the *Letter to the Romans* 1:18-32:

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them... So they are without excuse; ... claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

The Chosen People are called to give witness to the One God in the midst of nations that worship many gods. They, the Chosen People, are often tempted by the cults offered by the surrounding peoples. Hence the sharp message from the Prophets. It must be affirmed that, strictly speaking, other religions are not the direct concern of the Bible, especially of the New Testament. Jesus Christ, the complete and final revelation of God, is the messenger of God in whom God's saving grace erupts. The antithesis of his message was not a different religious conception of the world but a refusal to accept in faith the gift of God (Mk 6:1-5).[1]

As a Christian, I begin my remarks by

assuming that Jesus Christ is the Word of God in whom the fullness of the Godhead is revealed in a mysterious way. In other words, "in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, who is 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn 14:6), the full revelation of the divine truth is given".[2] "By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is made clear to us in Christ, who is the Mediator and at the same time the fullness of all revelation" (W. M. Abbott, S.J., *Dei Verbum,* n. 2). Therefore I do not wish to enter into discussion on questions such as: 'Is revelation given outside the Biblical religion?' or 'Do non-Biblical sacred texts of other religions complement those of the Christian faith?'. My intent is to reflect on how the Word of God can be witnessed to in dialogue with Hindus and Buddhists. The Word of God means for me Jesus Christ.

The words of the late Pope John Paul II may be of help to clarify our understanding of the Word of God in relation to other religions. When preparing for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, he wrote:

> "Jesus does not in fact merely speak 'in the name of God' like the Prophets, but he is God himself speaking in his Eternal Word made flesh. Here we touch upon *the essential point by which Christianity differs from all the other religions,* by which *man's search for God* has been expressed from earliest times. Christianity has its starting-point in the Incarnation of the Word. Here, it is not simply a case of man seeking God, but of God who comes in Person to speak to man of himself and to show him the path by which he may be reached. This is what is proclaimed in the Prologue of John's Gospel: 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known' (1:18). *The Incarnate Word is thus the fulfilment of the yearning present in all the religions of mankind:* this fulfilment is brought about by God himself and transcends all human expectations. It is the Mystery of Grace" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, n. 6).

The Pope clarifies further:

> "In Christ, religion is no longer a 'blind search for God'(*cf.* Acts 17:27) but the *response of faith* to God who reveals himself. It is a response in which man speaks to God as his Creator and Father, a response made possible by that one Man who is also the consubstantial Word in whom God speaks to each individual person and by whom each individual person is enabled to respond to God. What is more, in this Man all creation responds to God. Jesus Christ is the new beginning of everything. In him all things come into their own; they are taken up and given back to the Creator from whom they first came. *Christ is thus the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definite completion*" (*ibid.*).[3]

I intend to reflect here on how, to my knowledge, Hindus and Buddhists relate themselves to their respective sacred texts. The Word of God, according to the Christian Scriptures is not unrelated to other religions. I hope that my reflection may contribute to a wider discussion in view of strengthening the Christian-Hindu and the Christian-Buddhist dialogue without obscuring the Christian's commitment to proclaim Jesus Christ, the Word of God, to all people as their Lord and Saviour.

Understanding of the Sacred Texts in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions

It must be emphasised that all religions differ one from the other. Christians should not consider other religions as an undifferentiated and monolithic block. The world cannot be simply divided into "Christian and Non-Christian". In other words, when relating to other religions, we need to approach each religion as a differentiated and complex reality. When the sacred texts of some other religion are approached by Christians they will be obviously struck by points of convergence, as well as points of divergence, between the two traditions.

Before I draw my conclusions it is necessary to present briefly some basic ideas concerning the sacred texts in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. It is important in dialogue to know the partners. The sacred texts of Hinduism and Buddhism hold a central place as they communicate the core religious experience of these religious traditions. One can hardly pretend to know Hindus or Buddhists if one ignores their sacred texts or overlooks the role of these texts as read and understood by the followers of the respective religious traditions.

The *Sanatana dharma,* as it is called by the adherents of what is generically known as Hinduism, is associated with "scriptures", a word derived from the Latin. "Scriptures" literally means "that which is written". When refering to "scriptures" the Hindu tradition uses the expression, "Shruti", which signifies "that which is heard". But eventually the Shruti also came to be written. All "Scriptures" suppose an oral tradition. The Hindus recognise that holy words have been operative in human history. They thus believe that the sacred words have an oral reality as much as a written one, but the way they have found their way into human lives is not through the eye (written word) but through the ear (that which 'is heard' by the *rishis* or the wise).

What is appreciated is the "spoken" and "heard" quality of the sacred texts. The emphasis is on the "hearing" as a mediating sense of religious experience. Indeed, the very act of writing is considered ritually polluting. Consequently, the printed page is not the primary home of the sacred texts. Hence the importance of a guru. Sacred texts as a "reified boundaried entity" fail to do justice to the Hindu *Weltanschauung*. Written documents, unvivified by personal relationship are considered lifeless. If a teacher does not find a student worthy of inheriting his manuscripts, he will, in his old age, simply discard them by throwing them into a river. My observation is that Hinduism emphasises the oral over the written aspect of words. "Vak", roughly translated as "word", is eternal, intrinsically powerful and supremely authoritative. It is never outmoded and is always worthy of recitation, regardless of whether it is understood or not. It is interesting to observe the emphasis given in Hinduism to the "sacred sound". This is another reason why the name for the Veda is 'Shruti', because it is the hearing of the "uncreated, eternal Vak", the word, in the human way.

Hindus speak of a holistically engaging, particularly sensual and visual, apprehension of the divine. The sacredness of the 'vak' is not on account of its intelligibility. For example, the sacred texts have to be heard by all but not necessarily understood by all. Can we say that a good Hindu is preoccupied by the 'form' and not so much by the 'meaning' of the sacred text? Comparisons are odious, but in order to reach a more exact understanding I would compare the 'master of Shruti' (*Shrotriya*) who recites the sacred texts at ceremonies without understanding them to a medieval monk copying manuscripts or a book producer of a modern society. What a Hindu is expected to do is to 'participate' in the sacred texts which are recited because the sacred texts are considered 'holy' in themselves, without depending on the holiness of the one who recites them. This is why what is important is to 'hear' and 'recite', rather than 'read' and 'understand'.

An interesting discussion is carried out with regard to the 'cognitive authority' of the sacred texts in Hinduism. It is affirmed that the 'cognitive authority' applies not to objects already known by perception or other sources of empirical knowledege but to objects not known from such sources. For example, even if a hundred scriptural utterances were to say that fire is cold or that it is not bright they would have no cognitive authority; according to Sankaracharya, if the sacred texts were to say such things then we would have to assume that they intend some other meaning, or else we would be understanding its cognitive authority amiss. In other words, it is not the business of the sacred texts to challenge the evidence of the senses, mental logic, etc., nor is it the business of such knowledge to challenge the scope of the sacred texts, the cognitive authority of which concerns the vision of things unseen.

In fact, in Hinduism the aim of the sacred texts in the life of a believer is to teach them verities (truths) which lie outside the horizon of empirical knowledge, such as our relationships to one another in the light of the Transcendent, about what happens after death, about beings beyond this visible world, etc. Of course, the place of critical reason is not absent here because reason substantiates belief, purifies it, shows its limits, renders it plausible, refutes opposite points of view and provides justification for a critical commitment.

Shudras, the servile class according to the *varnashramadharma* or the caste system, and women are prohibited from even hearing the Veda. The Puranas may be heard by all; they are the "Smriti" (that which is 'remembered'), an easier form of truth, adapted to the conditions of their class; the Smriti interpret and clarify Shruti in a form comprehensible for all mankind in its changing, historical situation. The truth once revealed in Shruti must ever be newly interpreted or explained in Smriti.

According to the Hindu vision, the Veda are eternal and have no personal author. They reside in the bosom of the Absolute. In the ultimate sense, neither the sages, nor Brahma, nor even the Lord himself composed the Veda; the Veda is simply promulgated, not authored.

The Buddhist *Suttas* (the Pali word for the Sanskrit *Sutras)* express the doctrinal teaching of the Buddha and claim to be his very word. The *Suttas* are many. They are considered on the same level as Shruti in Hinduism. The teaching, once imparted by the historical Sakyamuni Buddha, is seen as part of the eternal Dharma which is repeatedly proclaimed throughout the ages. The teachings of Buddha open with the stereotyped formula, "Thus have I heard". What is the place of sacred texts in Buddhism? The Buddha himself is supposed to have said, "As a raft, O monks, will I present you the doctrine, useful for escaping, not for retaining" (Buddha explains that though the raft has been very useful for crossing the river, the right thing is to leave it behind and walk on without it). Final liberation is a fruit of personal insight rather than of faith in the Buddha. "Buddha does not liberate men but he teaches them how to liberate themselves as he has liberated himself. Men adhere to his preaching of the truth, not because it comes from him, but because, aroused by his word, a personal knowledge of what he preaches arises in the light of their minds" (H. Oldenberg).

Michael Fuss makes an interesting observation: "Since the Dharma is recognised as superior to the Buddha and existing independently from him, the historical heritage of Sakyamuni's life had been completely entrusted to the reception by the disciples and their preaching. They themselves may determine the sources, establish their authority and give their correct interpretation".[4]

According to Mahayana Buddhism, a *Sutta* is defined as "an anonymous document elaborated usually collectively over many centuries, which has to be significant without being controversial or sectarian".[5] Due to lack of doctrinal authority the recognition of a canon of the sacred texts in Mahayana Buddhism differs from the Christian concept of Biblical canonicity. There is also the difficulty that Mahayana does not represent a uniform sect. In Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism or "doctrine of the Elders" the *Tipitaka* (three baskets, *vinaya, sutta* and *abhidhamma)* are the canonical sacred texts since they give the original teaching of Sakyamuni. The Mahayana Buddhism recognises this authority of *Tipitaka* somewhat like the Old Testament in relation to the New Testament in the Christian Bible.

Mahayana Buddhism considers itself the only vehicle to nirvana, whereas Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism according to them, though authentic as well, is considered as provisional truth only.

Some Reflections

Sacred texts form an essential part of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Their role is understood differently in the respective traditions. They are vehicles of liberation/ salvation for their adherents. The sacred texts, for example in Hinduism, have a single purport or ultimate concern, which is (the realisation of) Brahman, the truth of truths, *satyasya satyam.*

What should be appreciated and taken very seriously with regard to Hindus and Buddhists is their sincere, honest and "restless searching of the human heart" for the absolute or transcendence. In this search they have recourse to their respective sacred texts. The first thing to be admired of Hindus and Buddhists is their submission to a wisdom which comes from beyond them. To be able to invoke, that is, to call upon, something greater than ourselves and so break our own boundaries is the beginning of wisdom, the source of hope, and the condition of joy. History bears witness to the fact that both Hinduism and Buddhism have been born, grown and flourished around their sacred texts.

It should not be ignored that Hindus, in particular, manifest great respect for the Holy Bible. Many recognise in it the power of God and thus it is widely read, prayed and meditated upon among Hindus. Reverence towards sacred texts, which comes spontaneously and naturally, is something positive to be noted in Hindus and Buddhists.

Witnessing to the Word of God in dialogue with Hindus and Buddhists Christians must bear in mind three objectives: **(1)** To develop a deep respect for Hindus and Buddhists and for their respective religious traditions; **(2)** To safeguard the integrity of the Christian faith; and **(3)** To continue the evangelising mission of the Church.

Deep Respect for Hindus and Buddhists and for their respective religious traditions

The Second Vatican Council reaffirms the traditional doctrine according to which salvation in Jesus Christ is, in a mysterious way, a reality open to all persons of good will. But the Council has also openly acknowledged the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong. It attributed these values to the active presence of God through his Word, pointing also to the universal action of the Spirit. From this it can be seen that these elements, as a preparation for the Gospel (*cf. Lumen Gentium,* n. 16), have played and do still play a providential role in the divine economy of salvation.

Dialogue and Proclamation [6] states: "Making its own the vision and the terminology of some early Church Fathers, *Nostra Aetate* speaks of the presence in these traditions of 'a ray of that Truth which enlightens all' (n. 2). *Ad Gentes* recognises the presence of 'seeds of the word', and points to 'the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations' (n. 11). Again, *Lumen Gentium* refers to the good which is 'found sown' not only 'in minds and hearts', but also 'in the rites and customs of peoples' (n. 17)". How and why the Church must relate positively to other religions and their respective adherents is explained succintly and clearly in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio.*[7]

Again, *Dialogue and Proclamation* helps us to clarify the Church's relationship to other religions:

> "While proclaiming the message of God in Jesus Christ, the evengelising Church must always remember that her task is not excercized in a complete void. For the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is present and active among the hearers of the Good News even before the Church's missionary action comes into operation (*cf. Redemptor Hominis,* n. 12; *Dei Verbum,* n. 53). They may in many cases have already responded implicitly to God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, a sign of this being the sincere practice of their own religious traditions, insofar as these contain authentic religious values. They may have already been

touched by the Spirit and in some way associated unknowingly to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ (*cf. Gaudium et Spes,* n. 22).[8]

Safeguarding the integrity of the Christian faith

Dominus Iesus recalls to the Catholic faithful[9] that:

> "in the practice of dialogue between the Christian faith and other religious traditions, as well as in seeking to understand its theoretical basis more deeply, new questions arise that need to be addressed through pursuing new paths of research, advancing proposals, and suggesting ways of acting that call for attentive discernment. In this task (it is necessary to recall) ... certain indispensable elements of Christian doctrine, which may help theological reflection in developing solutions consistent with the contents of the faith and responsive to the pressing needs of contemporary culture".

One will easily find a close similarity with regard to certain contents of the sacred texts of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. One is then tempted to draw conclusions by putting the texts one next to the other. But it must be kept in mind that there does not exist a clearly defined epistemological status between what Hindus believe the Absolute to be or what Buddhism teaches about liberation and what the Christian faith claims concerning the mystery of God.[10]

Continuing the evangelising mission of the Church

It should be remembered that "Christians who lack appreciation and respect for other believers and their religious traditions are ill-prepared to proclaim the Gospel to them" (*Dialogue and Proclamation,* n. 73, c). In proclaiming the Word of God we need to have an attitude which bears qualities *(ibid.,* n. 70) such as: To be "**respectful** of the presence and action of the Spirit of God in the hearts of those who listen to the message, in the recognition that the Spirit is the 'principal agent of evangelisation' *(Evangelii Nuntiandi,* n. 75); to be **dialogical**, for in proclamation the hearer of the Word is not expected to be a passive receiver. There is a gradual progress from the 'seeds of the Word' already present in the hearer to the full mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Church must recognise a process of purification and enlightenment in which the Spirit of God opens the mind and heart of the hearer to the obedience of faith; to be **inculturated** by being incarnated in the culture and the spiritual tradition of those addressed, so that the message is not only intelligible to them, but is conceived as responding to their deepest aspirations, as truly the Good News they have been longing for (*cf. ibid.*, nn. 20, 62)".

Notes

[1] *Cf.* Felix A. Machado, "The Teaching of Christianity Regarding Religious Plurality", in *Omnis Terra,* 372, May 2001.

[2] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Declaration* Dominus Iesus, *on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church,* Vatican, 6 August 2000, n. 5.

[3] *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, n. 6.

[4] *Buddhavacana and Dei Verbum. A Phenomenological and Theological Comparison of Scriptural Inspiration in the* Saddharmapundarika Sutra *and the Christian Tradition,* New York, E.J. Brill, 1991.

[5] C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism, An Historical Sketch,* London, E. Arnold, 1921, Vol. II, 48.

[6] Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,* n. 16.

[7] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio,* 7 December 1990, nn. 55-57.

[8] *Dialogue and Proclamation,* n. 68.

[9] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus, On the Unicity and Salviftc Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church,* Vatican, 2000, n. 3.

[10] *Cf.* International Theological Commission, *Christianity and World Religions,* Vatican, 1996, n. 4.

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Communicating Life
- A Theological and Missionary Vision for Communication Ministry -

- Fr Joseph Palakeel -

Ever since the publication of *Inter Mirifica* by the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has channelled resources to make the power of the communication media serve the Gospel. The 40th World Communications Day Message by Pope Benedict XVI entitled *Media: Communication, Communion and Cooperation* (Sunday, 28 May 2006) has re-emphasized the need to harness the power of the Media as an "influential and appreciated resource for building the civilization of love" (n. 1, 4) through "a constructive presence and a positive perception of the media in society". The Pope is proposing to make the media "a network of communication, communion and cooperation". For this, he has proposed three steps: (a) "*Formation* in the responsible and critical use of the media" and in the "impact upon the mind of new vocabulary and of images"; (b) "*Participation* in the mass media … as a good destined for all people"; and (c) "the promotion of *dialogue* through the exchange of learning, the expression of solidarity" (n. 4). This vision is foundational to Catholic communication ministry.

1. Communication Ministry in the Church

In the last 40 years, communication ministry has claimed for itself an important role in the Church. This is especially so because of the insistence of the Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* to "develop specific pastoral plans for social communications" at all levels of the Church.[1] After listing the elements of a pastoral plan for communication, *Aetatis Novae* lays out specific "Guidelines for Designing Pastoral Plans for Social Communications in a Diocese, Episcopal Conference or Patriarchal Assembly" (n. 24) and even details the process (n. 25ff). This has inspired the organization of communication ministry at diocesan and national levels, and the opening of many communication centres as well as starting communication formation for pastoral personnel.

One of the latest contributions of significance in this respect comes in the form of the *Guidelines for Communication Ministry in the Missionary Society of St. Thomas the Apostle* (MST).[2] It is a 25 page document (www.mstworld.org/Subpages/DC/Guidelines.pdf), which enunciates the theological vision, formation strategy and administrative norms for communication ministry in the missions, "providing inspiration and guidance coupled with clarity of vision and continuity of action". *Basing itself on the recent developments in Communication Theology and communication studies, the Document pioneers an integral "communication vision" for the pastoral-missionary apostolate in contemporary conditions.* The clarity of theological principles, the specificity of programme and the vision of communication ministry as a ministry at the service of all the other apostolic activities make this Document an extraordinary pastoral-missionary plan for social communications.

2. The Theological Foundations

The theological vision of the *Guidelines* is drawn from the emerging communication theology perspectives on Revelation, Church and Mission in relation to the communication revolution and its cultural implications. From a communication theology perspective, religion is all about communication between God and humanity and among people themselves. Religions have always used the best communication media and strategies of each era; religious meanings are made, preserved and

[pp. 72-75]

transmitted through verbalizations (oral, written and printed texts), visible symbolization such as rituals, symbols, art, icons and architecture and above all, through theological reflection. This is all the more true of Christianity: "Communication is at the core of the Christian understanding of God, man and the world" (*Guidelines*, p. 7).

2.1. Christianity as Communication

Creation and revelation reaching the climax in Incarnation, constitute the self-communication *ad extra* of a God who is a Trinity or communion of persons through mutual self-communication. Accordingly, the ministry and mission of the Church is to make ever present and real God's self-communication to the ends of the earth and time (*cf.* Mt 28:18-20). The Church accomplishes this through her proclamation, caring service and living in community as a universal sacrament of salvation. Thus communicating the Word of God (God's Self-communication is the central mission of the Church and hence, a more communicative Church means a more missionary and pastoral Church. All her ministries are intended to make this communication effective, while the communications ministry should be at the service of all the other ministries.

2.2.Evangelization as Communicating Life

St John says that God's revelation is the "word of life", "the eternal life … made visible to us" in Jesus Christ and the proclamation of this Good News is intended to bring everyone to fellowship with one another and with the Trinity so all may have perfect joy (I Jn 1:1-4). The explicit goal of God's self-communication is to give life: "I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). The essence of mission is to communicate life. To evangelize means to promote the communion of people through proclamation of the values of the Kingdom. This calls for a comprehensive perspective on mission and ministry: the missionary or pastoral apostolate is not limited to the religious-spiritual dimension; rather it is aimed at the holistic liberation of every human being and the universe itself into the freedom of the children of God, created in the image and likeness of God who is communication and communion (*Guidelines*, pp. 10-12).

2.3. Theology of Pastoral Missionary Communication

Grounding itself on an integral perspective of theology, communication and mission, the MST *Guidelines* list three basic principles of any communication ministry in the Church (*Guidelines*, pp. 9-10). Pastoral/missionary communication should:

Ø be grounded in the *ad intra* and *ad extra* communicative relationship within the Trinity, modeled after Jesus, the perfect communicator, and guided by the Holy Spirit who is the communicative element in revelation and salvation;

Ø flow from the essential vision and mission of the Church as a communicating community (communion) and be in accordance with the nature of man as the image and likeness of God who is communication; and

Øfollow God's strategy of communication in creation, revelation and Incarnation. It should be adapted to time and place, receiver-centred, multi-sensorial, natural, symbolic, participatory and leading to communion.

3. A New Approach to Communication Ministry

The above theological perspective on communication and mission generates a new approach to communication ministry in the Church. Currently the predominant view of communication is inspired by the conviction that "the media of social communications can and should be *instruments* in the Church's programme of re-evangelization and new evangelization in the contemporary world", because they are "*means* devised under God's Providence" (IM1) and *"the Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means*" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 45). This *instrumental* view of communication is inherent even in most of the Church's initiatives in communication.

An emerging view of communication is the *inculturation* perspective, inspired by the missiological theory of the evangelization of cultures: "It is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications" (*Redemptoris Missio,* n. 37, *Aetatis Novae,* n. 11). Pope John Paul II was convinced that it is in the field of communication that Gospel and culture are called to meet and he characterized the media as "the modern Areopagus" (*Redemptoris Missio,* n. 37c) and as the "housetops" from which the Gospel can be proclaimed. *The biggest challenge facing Communication Theology is to transcend the instrumental and inculturation perspective to an* **integration** *approach, where communication is valued as an integral element of evangelizing and pastoral ministry.*

3.1. An Integral View of Communication

There is a growing conviction that communication is not just an instrument or technique (media), but constitutes the most vital activity of the human being or any institution. This calls for a shift from a predominantly instrumental to an integral approach to communication itself, where communication is considered as the defining factor in the creation of culture and construction of meanings, rather than a mere instrument (medium) of interaction. For example, the digital revolution we are witnessing is not just technological progress or a change in medium; it has affected the way people think, feel, behave and live and even the mental habits of knowing and making sense/meaning. To be an effective evangelizer today, the Church has to go beyond an instrumentalist view of communication and embrace the new style, language and culture of communication at every time and place. Human society is moving quickly to multi-media and multi-sensorial communication through the integration of images, sound and text. However, side by side with this post-literate culture, there exists, especially in most mission regions, other cultures which are still oral and literate at various levels. Therefore, a communication strategy for mission should embrace oral, literate and digital communication.

3.2. A Ministry of all Ministries

We have seen that the central and defining mission of the Church is to communicate the Good News in word, deed and life. This renders "communication" the most significant task of the Church. Communication is, undoubtedly, the central activity of the Church but it does not mean that the communication ministry is the most important ministry among all the diverse ministries. On the contrary, *Communication becomes a ministry at the service of all the other ministries*, playing a strategic and vital role in planning, coordinating and executing other activities more effectively. In other words, the communication ministry is a ministry at the service of all the other ministries, functioning in view of, and in collaboration with, the other ministries. In this way, communication is a ministry of ministries.

3.3. Priority to Formation

In the period the instrumental view of communication prevailed, Church communicators focused on the production/procurement and distribution of the communication resources used in ministry and mission. However, the media explosion and marketing trends have prompted churches to shift the thrust of communication ministry more and more to publicity-generation and public relations. But *the integral theological perspective on communication demands all pastoral personnel to be communication experts*, in the sense of being master communicators rather than technical experts. This makes communication formation of pastoral personnel and all the faithful in the media culture the primary task of the communication ministry, without neglecting the other aspects of public relations and production. Formation itself is not to be understood as just training in the critical use of media or skills of media analysis; rather *pastoral formation in communication should focus on the new language and new culture* shaping the emerging world views by constructing new meanings and generating novel ways of self-expression.

3.4. Focus on Communication Strengths

The multi-media and multi-sensorial communication made possible by the digital revolution offers unique possibilities for reinforcing the inherent communication strengths of the Church. Making the Church more communicative means strengthening and revitalizing the communication strengths of the Church throughout the centuries — manuscripts, books and other texts, art and architecture, signs, symbols and sacraments, rituals, festivals and popular piety.

4. A Master Plan for Communication Ministry

The above theological vision of the *Guidelines* makes it a unique master plan for communication ministry in contemporary culture. The Document speaks about missionary and pastoral communication strategies and programmes. It is fine-tuned to the primary charism of MST, viz., mission *ad gentes*, or communicating the Gospel to all creation so that all may have life in abundance. Second in importance, and contributing to the first, is generation and animation of missionary consciousness in the existing Christian communities, which ensures continued missionary enthusiasm and support. All the communication activities, like formation and training, production and distribution, publicity generation and public relations, organization and administration, are aligned to these two primary goals of the mission *ad gentes* and missionary animation. The solid foundation of Communication Theology, the integral view of communication in mission, priority given to formation and the contextual approach to strategy make the *Guidelines* a valuable Document on communication ministry in mission.

In addition the Document meets all the requirements of a "Pastoral Plan for Social Communications" as envisaged by the Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* nn. 23-33. It, therefore, deserves wider attention. The innovative theological vision of communication which envisages the communications ministry as a ministry *at the service of all the other apostolic activities*, coupled with a plan of action and a formation strategy, make the *Guidelines* an appropriate "communication vision" for the pastoral-missionary apostolate in the twenty-first century.

Notes

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[1] Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Aetatis Novae*, Rome 1992, nos 21ff. "More than a quarter century after the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Social Communications, *Inter Mirifica*, and two decades after the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications wishes to reflect on the pastoral implications of this situation", (n. 1).

[2] *The Missionary Society of St Thomas the Apostle* (MST) is an indigenous missionary society, founded in 1968 in Kerala, India, devoted to mission *ad Gentes* as its primary charism. MST has 284 priest members and over 100 seminarians and works in less-Christian and non-Christian areas in India and outside. For detailed information on MST see: www.mstword.org. To read and/or download the *Guidelines* visit: http://www.mstworld.org/Subpages/DC/Guidelines.pdf).

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Ethical Challenges from Ecology

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Abstract:

Faced with the alarming enironmental crisis, we need an ethics of universal compassion, one that seeks harmony, respect and concern for all creatures, not merely one that promotes the advantage of the human race but one that aims at the good which conserves and promotes all creatures, the supreme good being earthly and cosmic integrity. We are mutual custodians. We are mothers, not masters, of Creation. We need an ethic of partnership. No more stewardship, but servants of and partners with Nature who care for creation, who commit themselves to join in solidarity with indigenous communities struggling for their cultures, their right to land and sea, with peasants and farmers seeking land reforms. It is in doing so that we reflect God's creative and sustaining and compassionate love. It is an ethic of communion, not domination, that propels *cosmogenesis*. Such an ethic links together the issues of justice, peace and ecology. An act of covenanting for preserving the gift of the earth's atmosphere and for nurturing and sustaining the world's life; for combating the causes of the destructive changes to the atmosphere which threaten to disrupt the earth's climate and create widespread suffering and for building a culture that can live in harmony with the integrity of Creation.

Keywords:

Ethics, ecology, universal compassion, nature, rights, eco-sensitivity, global world order.

A French diplomat, undergoing a routine medical check-up after serving three years in Kolkata, was asked how many packs of cigarettes he smoked a day. When he protested that he had never smoked in his life, his doctor did not believe him: three years of breathing Kolkata's air had given him lungs resembling a habitual smoker's. The state of India's environmental health is deplorable. The dismal picture, coupled with the corrupt enforcement of environmental regulations, reflects the sad state of Indian ecology in the first years of the 21st century. Ecology is the problem of problems, and indeed the question of questions that makes all other questions relative.

Ecological crisis

India today is home to many of the world's most polluted cities. Factories belch forth noxious black clouds; effluents pour untreated into rivers; sewage systems reek and overflow. Despite the tree-huggers of the *Chipko Andolan*, deforestation and over-cultivation take their own environmental toll of rural India. As a result of unchecked pollution, respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases and lung ailments are rife in India. The total health costs for the country resulting from illnesses caused by pollution are estimated at some 4.5 per cent of India's gross domestic product. In other words, about half of our country's annual economic growth is being wiped out by pollution, and development is taking place largely at the expense of the environment.

Not only in India is the situation so. The ecological issue takes the same form in many Third World Countries. Land is being eroded very rapidly due to over-grazing or the stripping away of the tropical forests. The desert is advancing in many semi-arid places. The cutting down of the trees means that firewood is hard to come by — and the search for fuel leads to further stripping of the land and further erosion and desertification. The resultant change in the climate forces peasants — mainly women — to walk miles carrying the water they need in their homes. The poverty of the people and of the land causes peasants to put ever greater demands on the Earth — this in turn soon leads to greater poverty.

Quite recently these problems have been greatly increased by the fact that the more industrialized countries have been trying to lessen their own ecological problems by exporting some of them to the Third World. Toxic industrial waste, and even radioactive materials, have been dumped in poorer countries by unscrupulous Multi-National Companies. Governments in these countries may not have the technological expertise available to them to monitor the waste material, or officials may be bribed to allow dangerous dumping to take place.

Even more risky is the development of nuclear energy in some Third World Countries. First World scientists and Governments often express alarm about this proliferation. There may well be an element of colonialism or even racism in such alarm. But the fact is that the use of nuclear power is inherently dangerous and the more widely it is used the greater the danger. And in some of the newly developing countries the controls on the way it is used may be even less stringent than in Western countries. In many places people have to live with the constant threat of an industrial or transport accident which could poison whole towns or tracts of the countryside or large stretches of rivers or beaches. If such an accident should involve nuclear material the danger is almost unlimited.

Further, some of the ecological abuses of the Third World are affecting the world as a whole. The most obvious example is the wholesale cutting down of the tropical rain-forests. The Amazonian rainforest is being destroyed at double the rate of all previous estimates. Satellite images show that an average of 15,500 sq km of forest is being cut down by selective logging each year. This is besides a similar amount clear-cut annually for cattle grazing or farming. Selective lodging negatively impacts many plants and animals and increases erosion and fires. Additionally, up to 25 per cent more carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere each year from the decomposition that loggers leave behind. About 400 million tons of carbon enter the atmosphere every year because of traditional deforestation in the Amazon and an additional 100 million tons of carbon occurs through selective logging. When a tree trunk is removed, the crown, wood debris and vines are left behind to decompose, releasing carbon dioxide gas into the atmosphere. A thinned canopy also makes the forest drier and more prone to fires.

Many reputable scientists believe that the loss of oxygen produced by these forests, and the smoke from their burning, are bringing about a 'greenhouse effect' which will raise the average temperature all over the world. This, they say, will in turn lead to the melting of huge amounts of ice at the North and South Poles. The resultant rise in the water level of the oceans may cause much of Bangladesh and other heavily-populated low-lying areas to be totally engulfed by the sea.

World peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources. There is a relationship between ecological problems and structural poverty. Unjust land distribution means that farms are so small that the soil becomes exhausted. In search of new land, the farmers cut down forests in an uncontrolled way. This destruction of the natural heritage is also caused by the need of heavily indebted countries to increase their exports in order to pay off their debts. Ecology and the nuclear threat were major concerns of the West. On the other hand, unjust international economic relationships and structures and forced underdevelopment are more pressing issues of the Third World. Problems relating to injustice, lack of peace, and the degradation of the environment are all linked together and interrelated. Issues of justice, peace and ecology are related. The root cause of the different threats to life is an unjust economic world order. This in turn is linked to the misuse of science and technology to gain power over nature and over others. Ultimately the ecological crisis is a set of attitudes, goals and values — an ethical crisis. It is an integral and crucial part of the justice agenda. A good deal of modern so-called development is really a matter of the plundering by a relatively small number of people of resources which had been available for the benefit of all — and of future generations. It is an unbalanced, unjust, and ecologically exploitative development that favours a minority at the expense of many others.

Response of Christian Ethics to the Ecological Crisis

In the Christian perspective, Creation is God's gift and humans along with other components of the earth community live out their lives as a gift or loan from God. Creation is something sacred and our attitude towards it should be one of reverence and responsibility. Contrary to an earlier Christian instrumental attitude, which explored and exploited Creation, the Christian ethic today sees that the usual Scriptural basis to prove the syllogism: 'Imago Dei': *therefore* human dignity does not follow. This syllogism in Gn 1:26-31 is a narration of the rescue operation on the pattern of Exodus. God's likeness in humans here is attributed to their collective co-responsibility in God's liberative responsibility to the whole of Creation. Hence 'imago Dei' is not so much our dignity as our responsibility and here, 'rule over' means 'to take charge'.[1] "It is not in terms of rights that the Book of Genesis describes the first violation of inter-human justice, but as spurning to be one's brother's (and sister's) keeper (Gn 4:9)".[2] Besides, if rights are derived from human dignity, argues Aloysius Pieris, how could infra-human creatures have any rights? It is the Covenant model that we are co-responsible for the whole of Creation that meets this challenge.[3] Therefore, we have to take up the challenge of healing our planet. A more caring and reverential attitude towards Creation is necessary.

The new Christian ethic today approaches the earth as our home and as a sanctuary which needs to be treated with responsibility, care and reverence. The earth discloses the lineaments of divine revelation. "Human and other forms of life are dependent upon forces we do not create and cannot fully control, forces that bring us into being and sustain us and life around us, but forces that also limit and destroy us and determine the destiny of the cosmos. This dependence — a matter of fact, no matter how it is interpreted — evokes a sense of the sublime, or for some of us a sense of the divine".[4] Creation exists for God and we should relate to all things in a manner appropriate to their relation to God.[5] This new understanding of God-experience is crucial for an altered ecological consciousness. "There is an urgent need to connect or reconnect all things by means of a powerful Centre.... This Centre makes us suffer when it breaks apart, which we perceive as an unjust attack against the earth, its ecosystem, its flora and fauna, and particularly against its poor and oppressed, both men and women".[6]

Besides, the new Christian ethic emphasizes our faith in the Universe sharing and participating in the resurrection of all flesh. There is a future for the stars, for the mountains, for plants, for animals and for people. Christian faith is adamant about this. This assurance of a general resurrection enabled the early Christians to speak of the cosmic Christ and of the Spirit's dwelling in the energy of the universe and of life. The omnipresence of Christ and the Spirit is a favourite theme of St Francis of Assisi, who saw all created things and beings, from the sun and the moon to birds and snails, as sacraments of God and as brothers and sisters. Teilhard de Chardin updated this experience in the context of modern cosmology and tried to identify the emergence of consciousness as the unequivocal sign of God's presence in the movement of matter toward ever greater complexity.

The ecological crisis has led us to think about a new spirituality that is oriented to the earth, especially to the living and non-living segments that are oppressed. It calls for "a spirituality that demands a prophetic commitment, born not of simple indignation, but of a mystic experience of unity with the Divine and with all things. Such a commitment will be indispensable in inaugurating or at least reinforcing a new civilizing paradigm that is more spiritual, compassionate, tender, and fraternal. This spirituality will help to guarantee a promising future for planet Earth and for all tribes that inhabit it".[7] Eco-protection measures the depth of our spirituality. Ethics degenerates into codified precepts and mechanical behaviour if it does not express a form of spirituality of integrity or mysticism. The Spirit sleeps in stone, dreams in flowers, awakens in animals, knows it is awake in men and feels awake in women. Such a vision can sustain an ecological mysticism.

A New Global World Order and New Global Ethic

Humans have survived the fury of two World Wars, but they will not survive the fury of the war they are waging against Nature. The approaching eco-disaster is visible even to those whose vision is imperfect. Therefore, before it is too late, we must turn away from the utilitarian paradigm.

In other words: conduct life in consonance with the laws of ecology. But it would not be enough to have only ethical values to ensure a harmonious relationship between humans and nature at the community level. The new ethical order has to find another form of centrality. This should be eco-centric and should seek the equilibrium of the earthly community. For the sake of equilibrium human beings must impose limits on their own desires. Only an ecological ethic established on the basis of respect for otherness, on the acceptance of diversity, on solidarity and on the evaluation of uniqueness, will help people to dethrone the dominant utilitarian paradigm that is so serious a threat to life and peace among all creatures in nature. We have to have a code of conduct for this purpose at the global level and also a global code of environmental ethics to guide the behaviour of the global society.

The world has become a global village. Today ecological issues concern the whole world. So what we need most of all is a new global order and a new global ethic on whose fundamentals we can all agree. Ecological questions have to do with reaching a new level of globalization, of world awareness and consciousness, where there is universal understanding of the importance of the earth as a whole, the welfare of nature and of humankind, the interdependency of all and of the apocalyptic catastrophe menacing all creatures. Ecology presents a global interest, a question of life and death for humankind and the planetary system. The word 'globalization' so often used has primarily negative associations, since the process of globalization is all too often only criticized for its excessive and harmful effects, whether those of global market capitalism, industrialist militarism or excessive consumerism. Yet it is perhaps too often forgotten, especially among critical ethicists, that the consciousness of the *global*, of one planet as one world, also has important positive features in terms of a greater sense of belonging together, and has produced the remarkable growth of a new sense of global responsibility which tries to address global problems through concerted efforts, through a growing consensus and the search for a shared ethic grounded in the same intentions and spirit. "No human life together without a world ethic for the nations; no peace among the nations without peace among religions, no peace among religions without dialogue among religions".[8]

We have realized that changing our world means that we have to develop our commitment and will to change our ways. Only then can we create a new global order animated by a different and new ethic. People need to develop a greater spirit of caring for the earth but this new ethic cannot develop properly without a change in the awareness of our connection with, and dependence on, the earth and its products. What is required is an ecological ethic to effect a transformation of values that in turn leads to action to heal the planet. A planetary, ecological vision together with a commitment to a culture of non-violence and peace also undergirds the principles of *The Earth Charter* approved by UNESCO.

A Socio-economically Just Ecological Ethics

Poverty is our main environmental problem. The problem of poverty is one of

the principal problems of the environment. It is impossible to develop an adequate respect for Nature without taking into account the way in which poverty adversely affects marginalized and impoverished human beings. This situation of social injustice includes an element of ecological injustice, and *vice versa*. The discussion therefore should focus attention on economically just concerns and address the justice issue.

It is a well-known fact that the resources of the world are distributed unevenly. The industrialized nations in the Northern hemisphere consume a disproportionately high share of the resources and contribute by their lifestyle to the destruction of the ecological equilibrium in the South. Many low lying areas of Bangladesh are being submerged by water not through the fault of the people in Bangladesh, but by the impact of the economic activities of the people in the Northern hemisphere, in particular the burning of fossil fuels for space heating, the transportation industry and electricity production, which cause global warming and the resultant rising of the sea level. The industrialized nations, almost all located in the Northern hemisphere, are responsible for 80 per cent of the pollution of the earth (the United States alone 23 per cent). And the solutions suggested by the societies there are short-sighted, i.e., conservationism and environmentalism, without critically scrutinizing the actual model of society and the paradigms of development and consumption that are the main causes of the worldwide ecological crisis, especially the bad health and premature death of the poor. It is a product of the people in this region who have despoiled nature in their countries and have robbed the colonized people of the entire world, and after all that are now claiming a safe environment and ecological reserve for themselves. While the main nations in the Northern hemisphere are responsible for the global ecological crisis, they are also the countries that are unwilling to take the main responsibility for correcting the destructive process. Instead, they seek to impose the burden of helping Nature to recover on countries in the Southern hemisphere.

Population growth is often labelled as an 'environmental problem' but it has been shown that it is not so much the number of people, but what they consume, what part of the 'ecoscope' they use, that is crucial. Significant is the issue of the Northern hemisphere's over-consumption. Thus a more important factor to consider when population pressure and environment are linked is the overexploitation of resources to satisfy the greed of the people of the Northern hemisphere. The depletion of natural resources and increasing environmental toxicality are the by-products of the Northern hemisphere, i.e., the lifestyle of affluent societies toward land and control over resources so that more and more people have to cope with less and less fertile land and other resources. Thus both poverty and excessive wealth are detrimental to the environment.

So, on deeper analysis, we find that the ecological crisis is mainly due to the spirit of competition and rivalry that is characteristic of the capitalist market economy. Capitalism has removed all the moral barriers that used to keep the growth of production and consumption within ecologically acceptable limits. Under capitalist conditions the selfless *homo collectivicus* of the organic community is permanently ousted by *homo economicus* whose sole motivation is self-interest.

Accordingly, Nature's image as fertile and abundant gives way to that of a poor and 'stingy' Nature characterized by the new notion of 'scarcity'. While scarcity is generally perceived as a natural fact it is actually socially and economically induced. Apparent scarcity is merely the result of the artificially generated need for an ever swelling stream of consumer goods of increasingly doubtful usefulness.[9]

Thus, there is a connection between the

emergence of the concept of scarcity and a particular brand of equality. Organic societies are characterized by an 'equality of unequals'. They are composed of a great variety of individuals and groups that fit together like the pieces of a mosaic, in a 'unity-in diversity'. To indicate that this unity is not uniform or homogeneous but rather multiform and heterogeneous, we speak of 'wholeness' instead of 'oneness'.

In modern societies, the 'equality of unequals' is replaced by an 'inequality of equals'. Here people are each others' equals in name only whereas in fact they differ greatly in terms of income and status. Modern societies apply a uniform standard by which people can be compared and, consequently, ranked. Thus modern equality has produced hierarchical relationships that would be unthinkable in organic societies. It turns cooperative creatures who respect each other's limits into rivals mercilessly fighting each other in the battle over scarce resources.[10] To stop this dead-end struggle, we must learn once again to experience 'otherness', 'not hierarchically on a 'scale of one to ten' with a continual emphasis on 'inferior' and 'superior', but ecologically, as variety that enhances the unity of phenomena, enriches wholeness and more closely resembles a food-web than a pyramid'.[11]

... Hence, each nation following its private agenda is surely not the way to save the planet. Instead each nation has to cooperate in the global agenda for justice, peace and harmony.

Holistic Eco-Ethics

Humanity and environment are not two discrete phenomena. They constitute an integrated life-cycle system and hence have implications for each other. Eco-ethics is the means to strengthen the bonds between the two. A new eco-ethics demands that everyone goes beyond his/her personal, regional, and national interest to consider the earth as his/her home and take care of it. Hence, each nation following its private agenda is surely not the way to save the planet. Instead each nation has to cooperate in the global agenda for justice, peace and harmony. We have to develop an interdisciplinary understanding of things, a holistic approach to focus on *wholes* that are more than the sum of the parts. The pioneer of this holistic approach is Alfred North Whitehead. According to him the materialist mechanism was based on a one-eyed rationality and was therefore handicapped by a superficial perception of nature. As an alternative to materialistic mechanism, Whitehead advanced his own doctrine of 'organic mechanism'. Organisms are characterized by the intimate relationship between parts and the whole. Sublim ordinate organs are fully subservient to the organism to compare which must maintain its stability within a continuously changing environment.

Holistic ecology as practice and theory comprises and relates all existents one to another and with the environment in the perspective of the infinitely small elementary particles. "We began to think of the universe as a collection of objects rather than as a communion of subjects so that we no longer hear the voice of the rivers, the mountains, and the sea. The trees and meadows are no longer intimate modes of spirit presence. This sense of the sacred dimension of the universe has to be recovered".[12] Our development model has to be replaced with a more broad holistic vision that takes the ecological aspect into account and a new holistic ethic that sees the universe as a communion, a cosmic consciousness, with our existential milieu as a Thou to commune with, rather than as an 'it' to bring under our dominion, and a new value system, which goes beyond anthropocentrism.

This brings in the question of the model of development. What kind of development model is to be envisaged? We are wedded to the idea of a development not in the holistic sense but in the narrow, materialistic sense. Naturally our approach to development is through exploitation, degrading people and the environment. This attempt to drive the devil of technology out of nature with the help of the Beelzebub of human intervention reflects the profoundly ambivalent character of nature development. This ambivalence is already evident in the very expression 'nature development'. Nature development can be seen and described as an implicit form of cultural politics, which manages to engage certain social groups while at the same time threatening to sideline other groups to the point where their interests and needs can no longer be voiced in politics.We need an ethics of sustainable development — sustainability education — a culture of tolerance, non-violence and peace. We need an ethical and spiritual education for sustainable living. The concept of sustainability is suggested as the goal. But sustainability should not be reduced to merely a strategy of development but it should incorporate a vision of alternate consciousness and lifestyle. An alternate lifestyle based on a prudent use of natural resources and a redirection of our social and economic structures is urgently required. It presupposes a renewed relationship between humans and nature. A participatory society that assumes responsibility for one another and for the earth alone is sustainable.

Again, the ecological crisis raises some fundamental questions to our value-system and lifestyle especially to the modernist totalizing ideology of development. Our thinking and ethic is totally anthropocentric. The world of non-humans rarely comes to our consciousness. Liberation is understood as a process by which humans and humans alone are rescued from the material world. If we are to prevent the environmental crisis from ending in catastrophe, environmental ethicists agree, we must convert to non-anthropocentrism and judge life-forms on their intrinsic value instead of their instrumental value. We have to overcome our dominant way of thinking, which is too analytic and not synthetic enough. We have to decide to what extent this or that science has to be developed which leads to the degradation of the environment, or this or that model of development is an instrument by which nature is plundered. We have to face the problem beginning from the fate of the most threatened people and creatures. We have to think of such appropriate technological devices as the filtration of noxious gases, noise reduction and decontamination of rivers and lakes. Such projects have to be studied and advanced, so that technology that has devastated nature can also contribute to its healing. It is not enough to attack the consequences and ignore the cause. That is tantamount to grinding down the wolf's teeth without changing his wolfish nature. We lack a fundamental vision of a model of society that would promote a sustainable kind of ecological development.

Eco-politics

Politics has to do with power and control of the common good. Unfortunately we live in a society where there are two classes: those who have power and those who do not have it. Whatever class one belongs to at some time one discovers that one's wants are not in harmony with the 'others' right to live and enjoy nature. How do we satisfy our wants? Do we do so in solidarity, respecting natural cycles? Those who have power do not set limits and want others to satisfy their wants. They hold power and control politics in order to satisfy their wants and desires. The price paid for this is the aggressive use of the ecosystem — atmospheric pollution, destruction of nature and so forth. Thus there is today a form of socio-economic and political violence directed against peoples, nations, and classes; the consequences are ruined relationships, hunger, disease, and death and ecological crime against the most complex beings in nature. It is important to emphasize that the progress of eco-politics which is based on a new model of society has to aim at the social fabric, integrating all divisions in the perspective of a vast cosmic community. There is need therefore to have an eco-politics that safeguards all appropriate aspects of social ecology rather than merely sporadic interventions which essentially benefit only the powerful.

Eco-technology

In modern society, whether socialist or liberal bourgeois, economics is the science of limitless growth or, in more technological terms, of the unlimited expansion of productive forces. The axis on which a modern society turns is its economy, seen as the whole set of powers and tools for creating wealth: this means nature and other human beings are exploited. The model of unlimited growth is possessed by a demon: it is constructed on the basis of the exploitation of the working classes, on the underdevelopment of the dependent nations, and on the rape of nature. "Idolatry of technology, of consumer goods, of human control and corporate power is at the heart of the collective and individual sins which constitute the environmental crisis".[13]

Scientists are discovering that the technology developed by other scientists poses serious threats to the health of people and to the life of the earth itself. The scientific achievements that released humankind from the gripe of poverty, hunger and disease have now become the most lethal weapons threatening human survival itself. We are thus faced today with the ethical dilemma: the more we depend on technology, the more we are thrown into the environmental crisis — the more we produce, the more factories we build, the more we are subject to new dangers of ecological catastrophe. Therefore, more science and more technology are not going to get us out of this dilemma. Not even super computers are capable of detecting and foreseeing and foretelling climatic changes. Hence there is need for an eco-technology.

Larry Rasmussen in his admirable volume: *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, draws our attention to three revolutions that have drastically changed the Human-Nature relationship. They are agricultural, (especially the intensive form of cultivation for large-scale production) industrial and informational. The crucial factor in these revolutions is the technology used. The nature of technology has an impact on the character of the work humans do. The pressure on the environment also varies according to the kind of technology that is used. Perhaps the Industrial Revolution has brought about a situation whereby the earth's resources are exploited and manipulated to such an extent that the life of the earth itself is in great peril. "To earth, industrialization looks more and more like a succession of more complex and environmentally disruptive and damaging ways to meet the needs and wants of one particular; inordinately aggressive species".[14] The industrial culture is based on a particular mind-set or an assumption that aggressive domination over nature is the absolute right of the human species and the earth has limitless resources for human use. Science and technology are tools for further exploitation. We need not repeat the discussion on the ecological damage, in most cases irreparable, of the industrial revolution. The industrial paradigm for development has led to environmental degradation, resource depletion, loss of meaningful work role, inequitable distribution and ineffective control of technology.

Further, technology paved the way for the rule of Multi-National Corporations. The world's money, technology and markets are controlled and managed by gigantic global Corporations, which overrule all local interests and local culture to give way to the larger global good that free-market exchange creates. A common consumer culture today unifies all people in a shared quest for material gratification. There is perfect global competition among workers and localities to offer their services to investors at the most advantageous terms. Corporations are free to act solely on the basis of profitability without regard to national or local consequences. Relations, both individual and corporate, are defined entirely by the market. And, there is no loyalty to place and community.

Information Technology and Cyber Culture

What kind of information do we need? It is not so much information of the kind information technology manipulates, as the choices that ethics poses. What understanding do we lack in order to live with the earth and with one another, on terms enhancing for life in its many contexts? No doubt the achievements brought about by the new technology are remarkable. The cyber culture has ushered in a new world. It is a change in the human condition, where most people do not earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow.

It is a society in which not everybody does the same work. Its culture creates borderless networks and for this reason loyalty to locality and community is not a virtue to be jealously safeguarded. A global culture that cuts across all barriers is in the making and we still do not see the full impact of it.

Information as coded, recoded, trans-coded reality carries a certain contempt for being earth-bound at all. It prefers avoiding the messy world of finite, limited, placed, dependent bodies. The earth-bound is denigrated; the abstract and precisely mathematical is elevated. The logic of unlimited growth and control of nature remains the same. Enormous power is now concentrated in people who have access to the new technology and there is no guarantee that they will use it for the well-being of the earth. In fact, corporations are using the new technology to increase their profit by managing money and the market. In split seconds investments can be withdrawn as happened in some of the South Eastern countries a few years ago.

The Rights of Non-human Nature

So far we have dealt with the ecological questions purely in terms of their effect on humans. But more and more people are coming to believe that there are wider issues at stake. Animals and plants share this Earth with us. Do we have an unlimited right to use them and abuse them solely for our own convenience? Does it make sense to speak of animals rights? Should we accept that even the Earth itself has a right to flourish? Do we have an obligation to care for the Earth and its species, even if this imposes limits on the kind of development we may promote?

The Eco-crisis today reflects the human failure to look beyond itself, beyond human interests. The classical discussion assumes that reason and awareness alone are the grounds on which the concept of rights ought to be constructed (Aristotle and Aquinas). These grounds will naturally exclude not only animals and the plant world but also new-born babies and the mentally disabled and the aged. The intrinsic rights of the biotic world should be based on other grounds than rationality.

The perspective that the earth and every form of life have intrinsic value brings the rights of non-human Nature into the ecological discourse. The traditional Christian ethics was very anthropocentric, interested only in the welfare of humans. The assumption is that only creatures with consciousness and reason can be aware of their rights. The non-human world exists for humans and has no innate rights. But it is a big mistake to believe that human welfare is possible without the well-being of the rest of the planetary community.

Against this background, the new Christian eco-ethics affirms the intrinsic right of the non-human world to exist. The rights language now used for the non-human world represents a sharp change in our attitude towards it. The non-humans have the intrinsic right to exist, to be free. They do not exist for humans; the anthropocentric world always considers them as objects of our pleasure and exploitation. There is, of course, a difference between human rights and biotic rights in the sense that humans can exercise moral responsibility about the treatment of the non-human world, but not about the flora's and fauna's treatment of one another.[15] While there is a significant difference between animals and humans, the feeling of pain is common to both. Animals are included in the discourse on justice on the basis of sentiency, the capacity for experiencing pain. One may extend this argument to the whole biotic community. A man can have no natural right to abuse and torment a beast, merely because a beast has not the mental powers of a man. Any creature when it reaches the threshold of experiencing and anticipating pain possesses rights. Non-humans do not exist for humans alone.

This brings a new awareness of human responsibility to nature and paves the way for the recognition of the inherent value of the non-human world. Although it was a minority view when it was propounded, it assumes greater significance today when we are seeking a new ethics on which to ground our commitment to the earth. This new ethical standing of the non-human world will deepen our commitment to it. Wanton destruction of life in the world and a callous disregard for the earth's resources is a violation of their inherent and God-given right. We are then questioning God's Lordship of the earth. Humans are not owners of the earth. They are not even stewards (Is 40:21-25). How can humans who are part of Nature become stewards of Nature? Everything in Nature is to be cared for. Everything in Nature has claims and rights.

Conclusion

We need an ethics of universal compassion, one that seeks harmony, respect, and concern among all creatures, not promoting the advantage of the human race alone — one that aims at the good which conserves and promotes all creatures, the supreme good being earthly and cosmic integrity. We are mutual custodians. We are mothers not masters, of Creation. We need an ethics of partnership. No more stewardship, but servants (partners with Nature) who care for Creation, who commit themselves to join in solidarity with indigenous communities struggling to retain their cultures, their right to land and sea, with peasants and farmers seeking land reforms and to have reverence for the ecological space of other living creatures. It is in doing so that we reflect God's creative, sustaining and compassionate love. It is an ethics of communion, not domination, that propels *cosmogenesis*. Such an ethics links together the issues of justice, peace and ecology. An act covenanting for preserving the gift of the earth's atmosphere and for nurturing and sustaining the world's life; for combatting the causes of the destructive changes to the atmosphere which threaten to disrupt the earth's climate and create widespread suffering and for building a culture that can live in harmony with the integrity of Creation.

Notes

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Globalization and the African Woman: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Effect of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on Women

- Mary Bosco Ebere Amakwe, HFSN -

Introduction

A good summary of the social effect of digital and electronic technology, is found in the words of "the patriarch of media criticism" (Kappelman, 2001, p. 3) – McLuhan who said: "the medium, or process, of our time – electric technology – is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and re-evaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Your education, your government, your family, your neighborhood, your job, your relation to 'the others'. And they're changing dramatically" (1967, p. 8). Understanding the effects of technology as it relates to human beings and their relations with one another in communities was McLuhan's priority. After writing twelve books and hundreds of articles, this "prophet of the electronic age" (Kappelman, 2001, p. 1) was the first to sound the alarm of the negative effect of these innovations. This has forced many scholars to come up with the thesis that adopting ICT is not necessarily a good thing, for instance, Postman in *Technopoly* suggests that we would be better off without such technologies (1993, pp. 119-20). But such debates are outside the scope of this article, as we are proceeding on the assumption that the digital divide, inequality and sexual exploitation (fruits of the former) are problems that need to be solved especially as they affect African women.

1. Theorizing globalization, ICT and women

No matter the field of study, volumes can be found on globalization and its effects – positive or negative. "Whether globalization is anathema to social justice or not, it is a given in the 21st century"(Robins, 2002, p. 242). Bhasin defined it poetically when she said that globalization "means profit is paramount. For profit, anything will be made and sold: armaments, pornography, junk drinks and food, violence, just anything. Globalization means consumerism of the worst kind and plunder of nature. Globalization means centralization of control over resources and decision-making. Globalization also means lack of popular participation. Globalization means an attack on diversity whether it is agricultural … or cultural diversity…. Globalization means the culture of the rich.… Globalization means increase in violence and militarization…. Globalization also means patriarchy becoming more powerful, more entrenched. In this global village control over knowledge and information is an important source of power" (1994, p. 5). On a positive note, Tiongson argued that "globalization and the convergence of various forms of new information technologies have fuelled the widespread and rapid promotion of ideas and values at the local, national and global levels on a scale and intensity never before experienced" (1999, p. 6). As a result, women are now seriously examining how these developments have "engendered or hindered the advancement of the status of women and the attainment of equality between women and men"(*ibid.*). By so doing, women are diagnosing the ambiguities of globalization. These obscurities inflamed by ICTs are the areas under examination in this paper especially in my own part of the world, Africa, with particular attention to the degree they affect Nigerian women.

This exposition will be done by answering questions like: by the importation of ICT into the country, are Nigerian women "being sold a bill of goods? Can the new ICTs really help them take their rightful place in the decision-making that governs their existence?" (Robins, 2002, p. 240). The vast majority of African women especially those in rural areas are struggling daily to meet life's basic needs. Under those conditions, are ICTs relevant? This is why the "fast paced growth of cyberspace and the technology behind it makes research by feminists all the more important" (King and

Hyman, 1999, p. 1). Therefore, this essay is not just an attempt to provide a "woman-centred vantage point for the examination of communication technologies" but also an evaluation of the ways these innovations affect and marginalize the African women. Although socially and politically, women are excluded and are negatively impaired by these technologies. However, in the last decade, women have benefited from the use of these 'machines'. At the same time, women have been studying and questioning exploitation through and by the electronic media. They have been urging Governments to regulate the use of ICTs, known as Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) though with little result. But the challenge is to battle on and this write-up is a contribution to this.

2. Who is the African woman?

For decades, the under-privileged situation of women especially in the developing world has been an object of concern not only for scholars but also for governments and philanthropists. In African societies, for instance, women are characterised as "minors for most of their lives, falling under the guardianship first of their fathers and then of their husbands" (Sudarkasa, 2005, p. 25). Girls right from birth are perceived in the light of their future roles as prospective wives and mothers (see Nnoromele, 2002 and Oyewumi, 1997). Among the Igbo tribe of Nigeria, for example, at birth a baby girl is referred to as "*Akpa-ego*" (bag of money), or "*unoaku*" (house of money), or "*obute aku*" (source of wealth). These names are allusions to bride wealth, which would accrue when the girls get married and other benefits that would be derived through interaction with prospective in-laws (Amadiume, 1987, p. 77. Also see Nwabueze, in Olurode (ed.), 1990, pp. 93-107). In this sense, a girl or a woman is seen as "an appendage of the husband, her father, the family, the village or the ethnic group"(Osinulu, 1990). She is never a free person.

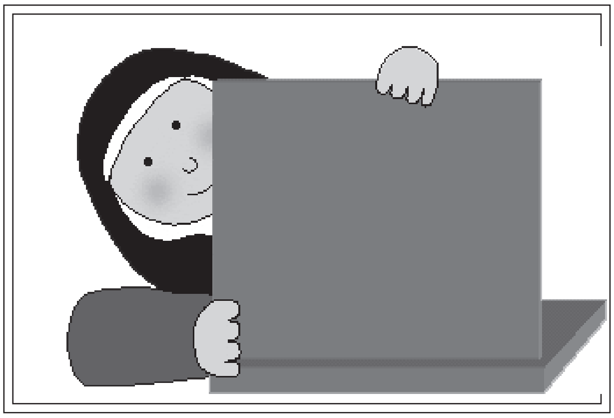
This notion according to Olurode, lowered the position of women. For centuries, this idea has become gradually embellished and dissembled and, in part clothed in a milder form, but by no means abolished. In her opinion, this is one of the "most absurd notions that have come down to us from the period of enlightenment of the eighteenth century" (1990, p. 3). As we shall see later, this is exactly why

women are regarded as the opposite of men. Oduaran affirmed that in Nigeria women are "often treated as second-class citizens, mostly relegated to the background of society", (1997, p. 61) because Nigerian society is essentially male-dominated. Usually, according to Akpa, "there is a popular myth at the base of the status of women in traditional Nigerian society … the sense of inferiority" (2001, p. 6). Summarising it all, Levitin and others stated that "the best of woman was a lesser man" (1973, p. 90). However, we would not deny that this feeling of inferiority is changing with the growth of ICT, which gives many "Sub-Sahara African women access to computers, the Internet, and other related technologies" (Mbarika, Fayton, Kvasny and Amadi, 2007, p. 1), and therefore leading to some change in the perception of their role. On the other hand, as we shall see below, we must also admit that these innovations perpetuate the age-long situation of women mainly because of the 'macho-image' attached to modern technology.

3. The homo-techno myth

Since the "dot-com boom of the late 1990s" (Shannon, 2006, p. 10), the household word is new technology this, and hi-tech that, which in Western language connotes new discoveries in the area of science and technology. In contemporary society, new technologies implicitly or explicitly depict power and power is usually associated with men. Linn observed that even a cursory review of scholarly literature on technology reveals that the terms 'woman' and 'technology' are not separate; they are related terms in a vocabulary of power-relations that defines the objects men make and manipulate as 'technical', and those of women as 'nontechnical', as 'natural', sometimes even 'nurturing', 'humane', or 'humanistic' (1989, p. 196). Kramarae argued that "technological processes have been studied from the (usually implicit) vantage point of men's experiences. When one puts women at the centre of analysis, male biases and masculist ideologies become clearer, and one discovers new questions as well as fresh approaches to old questions" (1988, p. 7).

On the same note, Hillman ascertained that, "the specific consciousness we call Scientific, Western and Modern is the long-sharpened tool of the masculine mind that has discarded parts of its own substance, calling it 'Eve', 'female' and 'inferior'" (1972, p. 250). Accordingly, Armstrong observed that when histories of technology mention women (and they do so rarely), women are usually conceived as "consumers" of technology, as users of telephones, typewriters, and similar machines (1989, p. 197). This is why in Nigeria, for instance, women consider the word "technology" to have male connotations (Elijah and Ogunlade, 2006, p. 6). Today other usages like, 'virtual world', 'cyberspace', cybermarts, cyberoffice, e-business, name them, put women who are almost ignorant of these 'digital vocabularies' in their so-called 'natural place' – the 'other world of silence'. This is the 'andric-techno image' or 'masculistic techno mystification' we are talking about. Lawley referred to this as "deterministic view of a computer ideology imposed from above" (1993, p. 3) which makes women 'losers' because it confers power and knowledge on only a few – who are mostly men. As a result, in 2006 for instance, the U.S. Department of Labor statistics indicated a "marked decline – more than 10% – in the number of women in the IT workforce" (Smith, 2006, p. 1). This indeed is troubling from a female perspective since it is clear that a significant number of women are excluded from the above 'techno-discourse' especially in Africa. Only time will tell when women will become part of the so-called "Digital Generation" (Rossetto, 1993, p. 10) to be able to understand what is going on. From the look of things, it is not only the ICT critical analysts who are bothered about the issue of "dehumanization through echnology", (Lawley, 1993, p. 2) also authors in the "fields of literature and literary criticism"(*ibid.*), are voicing their concern. This is why Davenport sees technology not "as a tool *for* change" but "as *the* change agent" (1990, p. 227).



4. The "boom" and "doom"[4] of ICT for women

As the wave of ICT continues to blow stronger and stronger every day, women of all classes, ethnicities and nationalities are encountering the monumental changes produced by its global impact. Studies on the effect of ICT on society have shown that there is a range of issues, which make it clear that the ICT have winners and losers, beneficial consequences and harmful applications (Elijah and Ogunlade, 2006, p. 2). Also Winner is of the opinion that the digitization of society is not without consequences – a process he described as, "a vast, ongoing experiment whose ramifications no one fully comprehends" (1995, p. 2). On the same note Ellul argued that, "all technical progress has three kinds of effect: the desired, the foreseen, and the unforeseen" (1990, p. 61). Hence, ICT is failing people in many ways especially women in Africa. However, any discussion of the effect of ICT on women in this part of the world, "must take into account the gendered nature of the social, economic, policy and technological systems which frame opportunities for women" (Robins, 2002, p. 236). If, as 'cyber-high priests' claim that the new ICTs can help women transcend obstacles of culture, education and poverty to take more equitable places in their countries' economic and political sectors, studies have proved that they also can "deepen the digital divide between haves and have-nots and reproduce colonial power relations" (*ibid.*, p. 238).

The Boom: ICT encourages and facilitates networking

Despite the problems caused by ICTs as we shall see later, the online sharing of information and the creation of new cyber-communities are touted as crucial to women's education and political organization. The emergence of ICT is seen as "an opportunity for African women to overcome some of the systemic and traditional disadvantages that they have faced" (Robins, 2002, p. 237). For instance in Senegal, Robins found that the Progressive Communication's WomensNet connects organizations in the international women's movement, works with community stations and women's organizations to generate educating programmes (*ibid.*) for women. Also the African Women's Media Center (AWMC) in Senegal, conducts a yearly cyber-forum to network women journalists from French-speaking African countries on a topic of importance. In 2001, for instance, 140 women journalists from 15 countries of Africa went online to learn more about HIV/AIDS, how to use the Internet to do research and access reliable and timely information. Also Uganda's Healthnet is one of many organizations across the continent that monitor and promote women's use of, and access to, health information (*ibid.*). Again, the African Women Global Network links institutions to improve the standard of living of African women and their families. In addition, the African Women's Media Centre does training and helps to establish partnerships among women journalists and women's groups (*ibid.*, p. 238). These communication systems according to Lawley, help women to escape boundaries and categories that have in the past constrained their activities and identities. By providing women with an opportunity to express their ideas in a way that transcends the biological body, ICT gives them the power to redefine themselves outside of the historical categories of "woman", "other" or "object" (1993, p. 4).

Helps to empower women

As already mentioned, information technology has been useful especially in showing women the way out of the cultural *cul-de-sac* in which they so often find themselves (Sylvestre, 2005, p. 1). For instance, the study of Elija and Ogunlade found that Nigerian "women's access to ICT-based economic and educational activities increase their contributions in both business and home-based activities" (2006, p. 6). These in turn, improve women's socio-economic status, provide access to information, communication, freedom of expression, and formal and informal associations. ICT also provide options for women, including overcoming illiteracy through distance education, creating opportunities for entrepreneurship, allowing women to work from home, and care for their families. Accessing ICT from rural locations enhances and enriches their quality of life (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the anti-poverty measures introduced through the use of ICT has been able to generate a substantial amount of employment through the use of mobile phones by many Nigerians to earn a living (*ibid.*, p. 9). Young women in particular do this by opening small call centres usually along major roads, in squares and market places. Also, Ndukwe found that in Nigeria over 2,000 people are directly employed by GSM operators and about 40,000 Nigerians are benefiting from indirect employment generated by GSM operators (2003). Similarly, according to a report by *M2 Presswire*, in 2005, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) launched the establishment of a network of at least 100 Multipurpose Community Telecentres (MCTs) in 20 African countries. These centres are meant to "provide an enabling environment where women can actively participate in the economy and expand their role in communities through the use of ICTs" (2005, p. 1). Despite all this, African women still feel the ache of the "amputation caused by new technologies" (Kappelman, 2001, p. 3).

The Doom — ICT strengthens the "old boys' network"

As already mentioned, "the potential of the Internet for African women is linked to the issues surrounding other political, economic and cultural aspects of globalization" (Robins, 2002, p. 235). A careful analysis of the points presented above will show that the African woman has 'little place' in the ICT world. The great promise of the ICT is resulting in some all too-familiar, oppressive patterns. Women in the information economy because of their low level of ICT literacy are typically found in the less prestigious and low-paid jobs, especially those that require little technological competence. In Nigeria, for instance, women make up "30 per cent of all technical and related workers. However only 1 per cent of engineers are women" (Chinye, 2002).

African women are the less educated and form the majority of the poor. Robins, quoting a South African journalist noted that "the typical profile of an Internet user in Africa – educated, wealthy and male – has not changed since the continent went online in the early 1990s" (Robins, 2002, p. 237). Dutton and Peltu in their study, explained how new ICTs are developed and implemented to reinforce existing power structures. Since African women are at the bottom of the various power hierarchies, there are vast implications to current efforts to wire Africa into the global cyberspace network (1996, p. 5). In the 'wired Africa', "the familiar and still formidable constraints are again rearing their ugly heads, poverty and illiteracy, insufficient skills – with male-dominated corporate control of technology added to the list"(Robins, 2002, p. 238). Furthermore Robins argued that the "high-level discussions of the global marketplace almost exclusively omit women's particular problems … women are lagging behind when it comes to the gains from globalization. Gender inequalities in the labour market and the workplace are not new. The changes in the information age favour skilled and well-educated workers, a category in which women are underrepresented" (*ibid.*, p. 242).

Encourages pornography

Although we are talking about the *new* information and communication technologies, many concerns regarding them are not new. Communication scholars of critical tradition mainly study ICTs in their role of "dehumanizing interaction and individuals", (Lawley, 1993, p. 2) especially the Internet. For instance, Agger expressed the concern that "sexual … violence will be systematically reproduced in a technocratically controlled environment" (1985, p. 8). The Internet, in the opinion of Robinson, has made pornography (which has found a natural home online) more widely available. If sex sells, then the Internet has become the primary place to purchase it (2005, p. 8). "Online sex" (Lawley, 1993, p. 6) or what Turkle referred to as "TinySex", (1995, p. 4)[6] erotica or the expression of sexuality dominate the web. An on-line survey of Internet users conducted by Stern and Handel found that sexual pursuits, ranging from visiting web sites with sexual themes to intense online sexual interactions, may be the most common use of the Internet (2001, pp. 283-294). Also Dodd affirmed that "sixty per cent of the Internet (about 300 million Web sites) contains sexually oriented material" (2006, p. J.03) and Weiss sustained that these Web pages "grew from 14 million in 1998 to 260 million in 2003" (2006, p. B.07). Probably one of the most unexpected uses surrounding the growth of the Internet concerns the development of online relationships and their potentially addicting nature (see Kuipers, 2006, pp. 379-401). Griffiths observed that "pornographers have always been the first to exploit new publishing technologies" (2001, p. 333). According to the study by Sprenger, it was "estimated that the online pornography industry will reach $366 million by 2001" (1999, pp. 2-3), although other estimates like that of Blue Money around the same period affirmed that it was already $1 billion (1999, p. 5). Six years later, the Bangkok Post declared that the "pornography industry is worth billions of dollars a year" (2005, p. 1).

Similarly, Hughes in her study traced this argument back to the mid-1990s when the hottest place for commercial development was the Internet with sex-related adverts. According to her, "in early September 1995 there were 101,908 commercial domains on the Web, which was 26,055 more than at the end of July and 72,706 more than at the end of 1994. The sex industry was leading the way" (1999, p. 3) In another study, the author remarked that "Web pornographers are the most innovative entrepreneurs on the Internet" (1997, p. 4) and their transactions are principally with the image of women. According to Oldenkamp, the majority of pornography viewed on the Internet depicts women as sexual objects and thus reminds women of their unequal status within the society since the majority of the viewers of pornography on the Internet are men (1997, p. 160). Again, Hughes noted that the "largest pimps on the web, the buyers for live strip shows are 90 per cent male, 70 per cent are between the ages of 18 and 40. The buyers are young men in college, and businessmen and professionals who log on from work" (1999, p. 2). Even where the Internet services were meant for good, men still use it for pornographic reasons. For instance, according to a 2000 report in the *New York Times*, in a remote, Cotopoxi region of Ecuador, the Internet was introduced under the tutelage of aid workers. The peasants planned to gather crop information and sell their crafts over the web. However, it was discovered that some of the men were using the computer to visit pornographic sites (CXLIX (51, 381): 4; 4 May 2000, Online).

Encourages international prostitution and trafficking in women

In recent years, many countries and NGOs have been battling to control the explosive condition of prostitution and the trafficking of women across international boarders. The "unprecedented growth of sophisticated global networks that control the sex trade has allowed the traffic to become a massive trails-continental industry" (Ray, 2006, p. 62). We may say that these are old social problems that have been digitized, hence making things more difficult for women. According to Hughes, "when those with power introduce a new technology into a system of oppression and exploitation, it enables the powerful to intensify the harm and expand the exploitation" (1999, p. 1). This characterizes what is happening as predators and pimps, who stalk, buy and exploit women, have moved to Internet sites. It is true that the nature of sexual abuse and exploitation are not the same in all cultures and nations, but the recent, rapid economic and political restructuring in many regions of the world aided by globalization through ICT, has escalated this problem.

Within this milieu, women are increasingly becoming commodities to be bought, sold and consumed by tourists, military personnel, organized traffickers, pimps and men seeking sexual entertainment or non-threatening marriage partners (*ibid.*). The computer-based telecommunications systems – the Internet and cell phones, for instance, can send texts, images, audio and video files around the world in milliseconds. The cyberspace has been expropriated to accelerate and deepen the marketing of women and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation (Harrison, 2006, p. 365). This in our opinion is a 'human rights disaster'. Let us take as an example the 1999 UN Report Against Trafficking in Women, which said that "there are approximately 200 million people around the world who are forced to live as sexual or economic slaves and women are the majority" (1999, [part 1 of 16], p. 3). Xinhua News Agency also reported that in recent years, "10,000 Nigerian women have been trafficked into Italy alone" (2002, p. 1). Another 1999 report of the United Nations stated that, "between 700,000 and 2 million women and children worldwide are trafficked every year" (1999, p. 3). This particular report singling out Nigeria averred that about "50,000 Nigerian women engaging in sexual business have been stranded in the streets of Europe and Asia" (*ibid.*, p. 4). Nigeria is known as the African country that provides most victims of the global sex industry, with 70 per cent of the 70,000 of trafficked victims from Africa. This percentage of young Nigerian women who fall victim to the traffickers end up in Italy (Capdevila, 2002, p. 1) alone.

This is sturbing because we should not forget that if a woman's life is limited by lack of education and employment opportunities, by racism, by illegal immigration or migration, by economic or political crisis, by childhood sexual, physical or emotional violence, or by poverty, then sexual exploitation will aggravate and intensify the inequalities, disadvantage and harm" (Hughes, 1999, p. 1) she suffers. Prostitution and trafficking are not victimless crimes, or just another form of work, as profiteers of these trades would have us believe. Even when women voluntarily enter into these situations, in the hope of making money or finding a better life, the dynamics of the brutal, often illegal sex industry, quickly leave the women with few other options and make them powerless to quit the dirty job (*ibid.*, p. 2). Because there is little regulation of the Internet, the traffickers and promoters of sexual exploitation have rapidly utilized the Internet for their purpose (*ibid.*).

Encourages social alienation, isolation and discrimination of women

The above 'presumption' has been the hard truth about the negative effects of ICT on women. Carried away by the excitement of new technology this or that, debates and studies are often concentrated on its positive effects. In fact, underneath these 'technological glories' also lies their venom. Addressing this problem Golding and Murdock advised that "… the important issues posed by the new communications technologies are best addressed by revisiting the basic questions about social inequality and patterns of social access and exclusion" (1986, p. 83) caused by these innovations. On the other hand, Frissen sustained that, "we work on the premise that technology is not neutral but made up of the ideas and values of those who own" and control them (1992, p. 31). In effect, women do not have the same access to technology as men do because technology is socially and culturally constructed as a male practice carried out in male dominated society (Siew and Kim, 1996, p. 74). This is why Warnick evinced that "in the real sense of the word, the Internet excludes and marginalizes women even while it attempts to invite them on-line" (1999, p. 1). Also Sinclair argued that the "sheer size and seeming complexity of the Internet seemed to have a chilling effect on women's interest in venturing on-line"(Sinclair, 1996, p. 6). No wonder she described the Internet as a "vast realm", a "trackless forest", a "seemingly borderless world", a "digital jungle" and a "bizarre universe" (*ibid.*). Sherman saw this "huge and unknown space" as having "dark alleys and odd characters to avoid". Characters like "virtual adultery" (Sherman, 2002, p. 27) which affects women in one-way or the other. For instance, the study of Grover found that virtual adultery causes divorce mostly in the West (Grover, 1996, p. 1). A woman can divorce or be divorced because of this.

Accordingly, Spencer described the Internet as a "toxic environment for women"(Spencer, 1997, p. 84). If control and power are the Internet's grammar, sexual harassment, she claimed, "is its subtext". Furthermore, she affirmed that Internet "discourse is male; the style is adversarial" (*ibid.*, p. 86). Chat Garcia making a general observation maintained that the new ICTs also have created contradictory realities for women – "from new work opportunities (particularly in production of electronics and computer hardware; computer encoding) to increased unemployment (bank tellers, telephone operators), greater interaction and intercultural exchange and activism to deeper exclusion" (Chat Garcia, 1998, p. 2). This is the point Webster made when she said that "in the information society, the position of women in the labour market is in no way contributing to greater gender equity" (Webster, 2000, p. 120) because according to her "work remains one of the key areas in which women are currently excluded from full social and economic enfranchisement and from the opportunity to develop to their full potential as members of society" (*ibid.*).

On her part, Tiongson observed that, "science and technology education continues to be biased against girls and women, which explains why they are underrepresented in the technical aspects of the information and communication sectors. Women are mostly concentrated in clerical work while only a few are engaged in computer systems administration and technical development. Women in low grade technical and service jobs also make up the largest group of computer users" (Tiongson, 1999, p. 6). Accordingly, Menzies warned of "new technology becoming, literally the extension of man, and by extension, the retraction of women"(1997, p. 3). In her opinion, the new technology has also meant the "elimination of many service-related jobs traditionally held by women, such as telephone receptionists and banking services, or the transfer of such work to the home where workers are employed on contract, constantly monitored through their telephone or computer. Women who work in these conditions find that they have little reason to go out during the day"(*ibid.*). Also in their study, Gillard *et al.* highlighted a systemic paradox: that ICT skills development initiatives designed to support lone women parents … ironically serve to reproduce the participants classification as socially excluded (2007, p. 19) which according to Heather may lead to the "disappearance of women as social beings" (Menzies, 1997, p. 3).

To avoid this, something has to be done and Webster gave some indications by asking: "what are the factors promoting the improved social inclusion of women in a future information society? What exclusionary factors operate and how persistent are they? How may women of different ethnic groups fare in the emerging information society? And are the improvements in girls' educational performance sufficient to secure them all a more equal place in the workplace and in other areas of social life? Finally, what policy initiatives – in addition to those already under way – would contribute to greater gender equity? (Webster, 2000, p. 120). These are some of the questions we have so far tried to answer and therefore they form part of our recommendations.

6. Way forward

∫ *Educating girls and women to cultivate interest in the study, use and to pursue careers in ICT.*

Here we would like to talk about the two forms of education and training – informal and formal. The first is what we may call 'early childhood socialization' (Amakwe, 2006, pp. 22-23) – 'preschool period' during which children's ideologies, orientation and behaviour are formed with the help of parents, other family members and carers. As we shall see subsequently, what happens to a child at this stage affects him/her later in life. For instance, their "early exposure"(*ibid.*, pp. 69-72) to the knowledge and use of ICTs will eventually be carried on to adulthood. But as the case may be, in Africa, there are still differentiated early childhood socialization processes between girls and boys not only in regards to ICTs but also in all spheres. In Nigeria, for example, daughters are taught to be gentle, meek and subservient and sons to hard, aggressive and domineering (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001, p. 24). Boys are called "sissies" if they cry while girls are admonished if they exhibit aggression or competitiveness (Northern, 2002, p. 1). As in other areas, the learning about the so-called 'hard and scientific things' are usually meant for boys and the reverse is the case for girls. In this era, boys at the early stages of their lives are taught to feel at ease with the 'magic machines' of ICTs whereas girls are not even though a recent research from South Africa questions this assumption (Bovee, Voogt and Meelissen, 2007, pp. 1762-1776).

This brings us to the concept of formal education and training – the second stage in a child's development process. What happens to a child here is as important as in the first stage. But unfortunately in Africa where "families have traditionally put boys' education first", (Dickson, 2007, p. 2) the fact that a low percentage of girls and women attend formal education cannot be over emphasized. In 2003 in Nigeria, for instance, the total primary school enrolment was 80 per cent with girls proportioning 44 per cent and boys 56 (Ebigbo, 2003, p. 95). Again in Ethopia, LaFraniere found that an estimated 24 million girls have no elementary school education (2005, p. 1). Even the Government of the country at this point acknowledged that "access to ... education for women and girls falls short of what is required to achieve parity with men and boys" (Taylor, 2005, p. 8). This is why in 2005 the dual campaigns of

Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) made universal primary school enrolment for boys and girls a priority for developing countries (Kombe, Fieno, Bhatt and Smith, 2005, p. 609). Still with these initiatives, Smalls quoting UNESCO noted that South Africa, for instance, "is one of the 54 countries in sub-Saharan Africa ... that are not expected to educate girls as well as boys by 2015" (Smalls, 2007, p. 4).

It is important to note that even when girls and women attend school, they are "not receiving the same quality or even quantity of education as their male classmates"(Asimeng-Boabene, 2006, p. 711) in the 'hard subjects'. Confirming this, the study of Der on female education in maths and sciences in Senegal found that "women make up ... 15 per cent in science and technology disciplines" (Der, 2002). These discoveries confirmed the report given by The Federation of African Women Educationists (FAWE), which stated that "African women have the lowest participation rates in the world in science and technology education, at all levels" (2003). Similarly, Olurode remarked that in Nigeria, "a majority of women are still not being trained … in areas that will enhance their chances at competing for positions in public life" one of which is in technology (1990, p. 11). Oyelaran-Oyeyinka and Adeyinka also found that in this country, women's participation in modern science and technology based occupations has been remarkably limited (1998, p. 164) even though economists and policy makers from around the world have argued that a well trained workforce in science and technology is essential for economic development, given the nature of the modern capitalist economy (McEneaney, 2003, p. 221).

Hence, it is imperative that women from all walks of life obtain ICT skills (Anuja, 2002, p. 1). Huyer summarised this beautifully when she argued that, "the single most important factor in improving the ability of girls and women in developing countries to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by information technology is more education, at all levels from literacy through scientific and technological education" (Huyer, 2003, p. 2). To help in achieving this, several women and professional associations exist in Nigeria like: Nigerian Association of Women Scientists (NAWS); Nigerian Association of Women in Science, Technology and Mathematics (NAWSTEM); Forum of African Women Educationists (FAWE) Nigerian Chapter, etc. These bodies with the help of funds from the Government help in granting scholarships to girls and women in science and technology education, organizing vocational remedial courses for girls opting for science subjects and by organizing career talks to feature different women in science and technology education (Imhanlahimi and Eloebhose, 2006, 587) and career. Also in Cameroon in 2003, Suzane Bomback launched a programme to give ICT training to women which she called "Operation 100,000 women by 2012" in collaboration with the Yaounde-based African Institute for Computer Science (2005, p. 1). Therefore, initiatives such as these should be welcomed in Africa though as the case may be, even with these projects, one finds that African women themselves have an ambivalent attitude towards ICTs (Anoush, 2006, p. 476).

§ Globalizing African women's needs and dignity through ICT

It is a known fact that in the Western media whenever there are talks about projects for Africa either by Governments or NGOs, we are used to seeing sick and wretched African women sitting under huts, their long dry breasts hanging down, and with dirty, sick babies around them. These scenes have been put on again and again for decades usually accompanied by the announcement of millions of dollars donated to help these women. But still, every year statistics from that part of the world show a high percentage of uneducated, unemployed, poor, sick and abused girls and women. None of these reports ever conclude without figures recording yet another high percentage of women and girls with HIV/AIDS. The question then arises: are these broadcasted projects real and with the right intention? How are they carried out? Who are the coordinators to make sure that the aims are achieved? Are the beneficiaries (the supposed African women) even aware of such projects? Mottin-Sylla attested to this fact when she affirmed that despite her organization's work to use the Internet to network women and to lobby against their discrimination in Africa, "sometimes the local African women's groups that should have their voice heard were not even aware of any campaign happening"(Mottin-Sylla, 1998). This is why Gillard *et el* suggested that ICT initiatives should be "accompanied by changes in pedagogic practice that accommodate the more wide-ranging needs of those targeted for inclusion, as well as changes in employment settings (Gillard, Mitev and Scott, 2007, p. 19).

∫ *Making women part of the ICT system*

As we have seen so far, "technological systems and their effects are a form of ideology, shaped by the designers and managers of technology" (Hubbard, 1983, p. vii). Therefore, only when women become part of this process of designing and creating can they gain control of these tools – "exerting substantial influence in the larger spheres of design and implementation"(Lawley, 1993, p. 4). How can this be achieved? Only through "training and educational programmes,"(*ibid*.) as already explained. This is crucial for women because according to Zimmerman, "without political and financial control over new technologies, women will find themselves replaying a familiar scenario in which new technologies serve to reinforce old values" (Zimmerman, 1982, p. 355). On the other hand, Lawley argued that, "the goal of including more women in the economic and political control of technological change is a worthy one, but should not be seen as the only part for feminist action *vis-à-vis* that technology"(Lawley, 1993, p. 4).This is why in this essay we advocate that women should be part and parcel of the technological system not only from the financial and political point of view as Zimmerman suggested but also from the 'theoretical' standpoint. This will mean the "active participation of women in deconstructing, reconstructing and contextualizing the discourse of ICT"(Cheung, 2001, p. 1). Thus, women will be aware of the wider social context where ICT is deployed, and the marginalization and negative effects brought about by its development, the capitalist and globalisation force interwined with it (Ribeiro, 1998, p. 325). This in turn, will help women to awaken the so far "subjugated knowledge"(*ibid*.) of ICT that affects them. Our task as women is not to "denounce technoscience, but to raise situated knowledge to the same status as it deemed appropriate in the social context where the knowledge/technology/practice/medium is used"(Cheung, 2001, p. 2).

Therefore, women in all spheres especially those in academia should engage in continuous and constant research and study on the evolution of ICTs and its effect on women. Through this process, women themselves will become the 'gatekeepers' or 'watchdogs' of these systems as regards to women. In order for this to be meaningful for women of every race, class and age, it is important for women to be doing what Cheung referred to as "contextualization – in a way appropriate to the local context"(*ibid*., p. 1) restructuring the "importance of cultural changes in the consciousness level"(*ibid.,* p. 9). Such "changes should concern not only the women directly involved in the making of power, but also ordinary women in their daily encounter with information and communication" (*ibid*.) systems. For instance, I was excited to read from the *Nigerian Daily Sun* online that the new Microsoft Vista will be "available in more than 70 countries … with 99 languages anticipated by the end of the year, including Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba"(Odili.netnews, 2007, p. 1) the three major languages spoken in Nigeria. If this works out, it will facilitate the use of the Internet by the majority of Nigerian women who are illiterate but can read and write these local languages.

∫ *Need for regulation policy on the part of Governments and States*

Given the importance of communication and the speed with which ICT evolves, it is important that Governments in the African regions adopt and implement gender-aware ICT policies (BBC Monitoring Africa, 2004, p. 1). There is the urgent need to review, amend, and enforce existing laws, or enact new laws, to prevent the misuse of the Internet for trafficking, prostitution, and the sexual exploitation of girls and women (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, [Part 14 of 16], 1999, p. 4). For instance, following The Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, aimed to eliminate trafficking in persons, especially women and children, in July 2003, the African Union adopted a Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa and called on States to take measures to ensure the prevention, punishment and eradication of all forms of human trafficking (M2 Presswire, 2003, p. 1). In the same year, a non-governmental organization – Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) was founded in Nigeria by the wife of the then Vice-President – Mrs Titi Abubaka. The work of this body yielded positive results like the deportation of 142 girls and young men from Italy, 160 from Spain, 59 from The Netherlands, 4 from the United States, 13 from South Africa, 6 each from Ireland, Côte d'Ivoire and Republic of Niger (Toye Olori, 2003, p.1). Also in Gabon on 9 May 2006, representatives from 26 countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) met to ratify the Palermo Protocol aimed at preventing, curbing and punishing the trafficking of persons, especially women (BBC Monitoring Africa, 2006, p. 1). In addition, there should be support for a rating system on the Internet, so that pornography can be rated and software programmes screen it out. Support for international judicial and police cooperation in the investigation of the misuse of the Internet for the purpose of promoting and/or carrying out trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and girls should be intensified. Countries that send men on tours and receive mail order brides should also ban the operation of such agencies and prohibit the advertisement of these services from computer servers in their countries (Hughes, 1999, p. 5). Governments and States should investigate and use as evidence of crimes, acts of discrimination, advertising, correspondence, and other communications over the Internet to promote sex trafficking, prostitution, sex tourism, bride trafficking and rape.

Also maximum cooperation between Governments, national and regional law enforcement bodies in order to combat the escalating trafficking and prostitution of women and the globalization of this industry (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, [Part 14 of 16], 1999, p. 4) should be reinforced. For instance, the formation of International Regulatory bodies like: the Independent Tiplines and Vigilantes: Anti-pornography association formed in the United States and Western Europe in 1997. Ethical Hackers Against Paedophilia (EHAP): A 17 member secret organization of skilled computer technicians that surfs around the Internet looking for sex offenders who abuse children and women. Morkhoven: A Belgian anti-pornography vigilante group, which does not operate on the Internet, but in July 1998, was instrumental in exposing an international internet child pornography ring (*ibid.*), etcetera. If Bill Gates himself will restrict his own daughter to use the Internet only for 45mins a day just for home work and for him and his wife to keep constant watch over their daughter's browsing, (Olycom, 2007, p. 1)[9] that says a lot. It means that this computer metaphysician knows that the situation of the new ICTs is more complex than we have so far discussed.

Conclusion

The African women are coming of age. In many parts of the continent a new generation of African women is rising up in grassroots social movements to challenge the assumptions of established patriarchal and cultural practices in that society (Ilo, 2006, p.1). We think that the role of globalization especially through ICTs is very important in this struggle. But in recent years, the fact that the actual processes of globalization leave emerging cultures vulnerable to ideas and beliefs which may otherwise be "alien" (BBC Monitoring Media, 2005, p. 1) to them is worrying. As we have seen so far, technology is a crucial part of this process and, of course, a process, which is male-dominated. Can this be changed by women becoming more involved in this techno-trend – not only as users, but also as technological inventors, makers, and repairers?(Hubbard, 1983, p.vii). But we should not deny the fact that this is a "revolutionary agenda for today, very few people – women or men – control these tools at these levels"(Robins, 2002, p. 239). But women should not be discouraged by this. They should hop on the 'technological train' and not look back. This is the only way to tackle the problems discussed above. African women should become part of this system. It is worthy of note that even as Africa taps into the global information grid, it produces neither hardware nor software, and relies on foreign experts to set up and run systems for it (*ibid.*). From our analysis so far, it is apparent that the impact of ICT in the developing world and Africa in particular, "can only be understood within a web of contingencies". Neither a naïve celebration of ICT potentials nor its condemnation as a new digital colonialism adequately captures the situation Robins, 2002, p. 236).

For further study and debate, we would like to conclude by asking the same questions buzzed by Davenport: "Does mechanization affect human values, and if so, how? To what extent and under what conditions should we allow technology to shape our definition of ourselves as a civilization or a species?" (1990, p. 227).

Ref.: Text given by the author for SEDOS. November 2007.

SEDOS Coming Events

NEXT SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR
20-24 May 2008

"Missionary Church in a Globalising World"

Missionary Church
New Mission Presence
Being Missioner vs. Doing Mission
Role of the Religious