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"He is not here, for he has risen. ...

*Go quickly and tell his disciples, he has risen from the dead
and now he is going before you in Galilee.
It is there you will see him".
(Matt. 28:6-*

Editorial

Cardinal Oscar Andrés distilled the essence and emphasis of the Document of APARECIDA (2007), which inaugurated a great missionary impulse in Latin American and the Caribbean. This Document aimed to place the Church in a permanent state of mission, focusing on the fact that to be missionary is first of all a call to be a missionary disciple. **"The Continental Mission in the Light of APARECIDA"** was the theme Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez M., SDB, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, addressed at the USCMA Mission Congress in October 2010.

Prof. John FEEHAN of University College, Dublin affirms that to "be a *missionary disciple*" in the current International Year of the Forest means paying heed to the call to care for and safeguard Trees and Forests because they are "the richest home of biodiversity on land". The missionary disciple has to struggle to penetrate the ultimate meaning of biodiversity, to perceive what is going on in Creation. John FEEHAN in his conference on: **"The Garden God Walked in: Meditations on the Spirit of Trees: The Deeper Nature of Trees"** invites us to sharpen our perception and see Trees and Forests as the mystics see them, so as not to lose sight of mankind's immense moral responsibility for "a unique mode of life's possibility".

The phenomenon of globalization inexorably increases migration flows and consequently heightening the problem of how to manage the differences.

Prof. Emmanuel BABISSAGANA underpins very important aspects of migration: Migrant people affect the fundamental social fabric of societies: **"Les migrations pour faire maître des sociétés nouvelles"**. It is in mobility that the human caravan regenerates and renews itself to perpetuate itself. The lack of migration in the West threatens its existence with decline. The West has to start new processes of conversion necessary to the advent of mixing and crossbreeding.

Prof. B. Steffen Paul, SVD, calls for shared reflection to improve pastoral care for migrant youth in a globalized world: "Migrant Youth and the Mission of the Church. A Pastoral-theological Reflection". Young people are more open to the different trends of globalization and have developed a particular culture. The Church has to create space to meet the migrant youth to listen to them, dialogue and then plan the future with them. This also implies a real pastoral conversion.

Sister Victoria Lau, FMM, in her "Reflection on the Formation of Religious Sisters in Today's China" opens a window to help SEDOS' friends to come into contact with the challenges and opportunities for the formation of Religious sisters as missionary disciples in China. She concludes on a beautiful note saying that "God is creating something new out of 'nothing'". What does she mean by "creating out of nothing"?

When this issue reaches your shores you will be singing the joyful Easter Alleluia!

Cristo è risorto, Alleluia!
Christ is risen, Alleluia!
Il est vivant, Alleluia!
Resucitó, Resucitó, Alleluia!

And we close with this very paschal reflection on "Springtime Overture" by Ed Hayes to wish you:

HAPPY EASTER:

"God of all seasons

with artistic splendor you have given us

an overture to the Resurrection of your Son in the resurrection of spring

from the cold tomb of winter".

NZENZILI MBOMA, FMM
Executive Director

Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga, SDB
Archbishop of Tegucigalpa

The Continental Mission in the Light of APARECIDA

Dear Brothers and Sisters: I am very grateful to have been invited to address you at this important Mission Congress.

These lands which witnessed the first, intrepid spread of the Gospel are a superb setting for reflecting on this essential dimension of the Church.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Document of Aparecida (*DA*) calls us forth to a MISSION on the continent. "This Fifth Conference", the Pope told us, "proposes to define 'the great task of guarding and nourishing the faith of the People of God and also of reminding the people of this continent that by virtue of their Baptism they are called to be disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ'" – Benedict XVI (*DA*, n.10).

Aparecida stresses that we are disciples and missionaries of Jesus. The relation that unites the disciple-missionary with Jesus is not first of all of an intellectual nature; rather, it is a strong commitment in faith to the person of Jesus.

The disciple is one who follows the Lord and makes a total commitment in faith to the person of Christ. This is made clear in the Document of Aparecida (*DA*, n. 243) where it cites Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical decision or a lofty idea, but with an encounter ... with a Person" (n. 1).

Faith is also the key attribute of the missionary. Pope John Paul II tells us in *Redemptoris Missio: Mission is an issue of faith*, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us (n. 11). The conclusion is clear: we must nourish the faith of our flock. Our faith must be integral, that is, it should consist not just in believing in the truths of our faith, but in making a firm personal commitment to Christ. We should strengthen our faith as a loving, devoted commitment to the Lord.

Faith is a decision which commits the whole of one's life. If we are believers, then we will concretize our faith and make it a believable testimony in our lives. That is what Saint Paul tells us: "You have made your faith manifest in works" (I Thes 1:3). We need to go to the very roots of our religious life, to its inner, originating principle, that is, to faith, in order to strengthen it, renew it, and confess it with our lives.

In the measure that our faith grows we will truly be disciples of the Lord and authentic missionaries, "witnesses of the light" and "prophets of the living God".

Faith in Christ produces a vision of humankind which confirms human dignity, with its rights and duties, and gives them a new foundation, thereby promoting a more humane human history.

Pope Benedict XVI in his initial Discourse at Aparecida stated: "More than anything else, these peoples long for the fullness of life which Christ has brought: 'I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly' (Jn 10, 10)". With the help of this divine life, human existence also fully develops in all its personal, familial, social and cultural dimensions (*DA*, n. 4). For this reason our faith has a social thrust. Our faith must demonstrate how effective it can be in transforming the life of society. Our Christian faith has the task of ordering temporal realities in accord with the Gospel.

The aim of evangelization is proclaiming or proposing Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world, so that he is accepted through faith and Baptism and so that faith itself becomes real through a Christian life in which the new commandment of love holds sway.

Thus the task of the Church is above all communicating the Christian faith, and it should do so by awakening it, nourishing it, consolidating it, and bringing it to maturity. Saint Peter had these words for the paralyzed man who was begging at the temple entrance: "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I will give you:

in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and walk” (Acts 3:6). The Church, like Peter, must offer people faith, invite them to faith, encourage them to believe, and sustain them in their faith.

This is the meaning of MISSION which is proposed to us by the Document of Aparecida. As Church, we must evangelize; that is, we should awaken and foster the faith of our people, both in our ordinary pastoral work and as part of the New Evangelization.

In our ordinary pastoral work, we should strengthen the faith of practicing Christians and pastoral agents, whether they be priests, religious, or lay people.

In the New Evangelization, we should nourish the faith of non-practicing Catholics.

We should therefore undertake our MISSION as a **Ministry of Faith** which fortifies both the faith of our pastoral agents and that of those who have fallen away.

Faith arises only in the presence of the proclamation, the kerygma: “How are they to believe”, writes Saint Paul, speaking of faith in Christ, “if they have not heard of him? And how are they to hear of him, if no one preaches him?” (Rom 10:14). And he concludes, “Faith, therefore, comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Today we have need of such kerygmatic preaching in order to awaken faith where it does not exist or where it is dead. Faith comes, therefore, from hearing what is preached.

It is necessary that the basic proclamation be proposed in clear terms for everybody, keeping in mind that most of the faithful have not passed through a catechumenate or been educated in their faith.

We should recognize that some of the new ecclesial movements have provided many young people and adults with the opportunity to hear the kerygma and experience a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. We should ask ourselves whether the same process is also taking place in our parishes.

The proclamation of the kerygma should hold a key place in our Sunday preaching and in all the important moments of Christian life, such as death, sickness, the birth of a child, etc.

II. MISSION AS A CONSTITUTIVE FEATURE OF THE CHURCH

An essential objective of the Continental Mission is becoming aware that the missionary dimension is a constitutive aspect of the identity of the Church and of the disciple of Christ. Thus, with the kerygma as a foundation, the Church seeks to vitalize the encounter with the living Jesus Christ and to strengthen the sense of ecclesial belonging, so that baptized Christians move from being evangelized to being evangelizers and so that, through their witness and evangelizing activity, our Latin American and Caribbean peoples come to possess the fullness of life in Christ.

In order to reach that goal, all of us who are baptized are summoned to “begin again from Christ”, that is, to recognize and follow his presence with the same sense of realism and novelty, and with the same force of affection, persuasion, and hope that was experienced by his first disciples when they met him on the banks of the Jordan 2,000 years ago – and that was experienced as well by the “Juan Diego’s” of the New World. Thanks especially to that encounter and that following, which soon become familiarity and communion overflowing with gratitude and joy, we are rescued from our sense of isolation and go forth to communicate to everybody the true life, joy, and hope which it has been our blessing to experience and enjoy.

The concluding document of the Fifth Conference in Aparecida, recalling the command of the Lord to go and make disciples of all nations, seeks to awaken a strong missionary impulse in the Church of Latin America and the Caribbean. This is without a doubt one of the principal conclusions of this great ecclesial gathering. This missionary impulse focuses on four practical consequences:

- Taking advantage of this hour of grace in the best possible way;
- earnestly requesting and living a new Pentecost in every Christian community;
- awakening the missionary vocation and missionary activity in all baptized persons, and giving support and encouragement to all the vocations and ministries which the Holy Spirit gives to the disciples of Jesus Christ in the living communion of the Church;

- going forth to meet individuals, families, communities, and peoples, communicating and sharing with them the gift of our encounter with Christ, which has filled our lives with “meaning”, with truth and love, with joy and hope.

The Holy Spirit goes before us on this missionary path. For that reason we are confident that our witnessing to the Good News constitutes, in turn, a strong impulse for Church renewal and social transformation.

III. THE CONTINENTAL MISSION IN THE DOCUMENT OF APARECIDA

The Fifth Conference in Aparecida, recalling the command of the Lord to go and make disciples of all nations, was not content with offering us a Final Document, but decided rather to inspire a great missionary impulse in Latin American and the Caribbean with the aim of putting the Church into a permanent state of mission. This invitation involves all of us, and no community is exempt from such a mission.

Most importantly, this Fifth Conference invites us to rediscover our essential vocation as disciples of the Lord. And if we are disciples, we cannot help but be missionaries in the manner of Jesus. For that reason, undertaking the Great Continental Mission in the spirit of Aparecida gives us a great opportunity for:

- being missionary disciples of Jesus Christ
- on the basis of an experience of encountering the Lord
- personally and in community
- in order to begin again from Christ
- in the spirit of the first community
- in such a way that our people have life in Him.

To this end we desire to:

- foster a dynamic encounter with the Lord on the personal and community levels, an encounter which makes missionary disciples of everyone in the Church,
- form communities of faith and shared life which are the fruit of this hour of grace and the new Pentecost which we seek for the Church,
- encourage all the vocations and ministries which the Spirit grants to the disciples of Jesus Christ in the living communion of the Church,
- go forth to meet individuals, families, communities, and peoples in order to communicate and share with them the gift of the encounter with Christ which has filled our lives with “meaning”, with truth and love, with joy and hope.
- be available for living a process of personal, pastoral, and ecclesial conversion so as to awaken the spirit of service in the whole Church,
- help transform society and human relations with the vital force that comes from the Gospel of the Lord.

1. What is the Continental Mission of Aparecida?

The Continental Mission is the Lord Jesus Christ’s sending (“mission”) of each one of us personally and as a member of the Church, a sending animated by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of sharing the Gospel of Life with all people, beginning with those who have fallen away from the community of the Church, but also offering the Gospel even to those who claim to be agnostics or atheists.

The Continental Mission is therefore:

- a missionary impulse of the whole Latin American and Caribbean Church;
- a missionary impulse whose main objective is putting the Church and all its members in a permanent state of mission. This means progressing from pastoral ministry which is simply on-going to pastoral ministry which is decidedly missionary; it means helping all of us in the Church to be committed servants of Life;
- a missionary impulse which uses the methods of Jesus himself: questioning, listening, and offering an experience of encounter with the Lord which fills our lives with joy and meaning.

This Mission means going forth from our churches, rather than remaining in them and hoping that people will come; it means showing people that the Church is a welcoming home, a mother who goes forth to meet others, a permanent school of missionary communion.

- The Mission involves personal, pastoral, and ecclesial **conversion** and demands spiritual, pastoral, and also institutional reforms. That is to say, it requires **profound changes** in our ways of living the

faith, of organizing our pastoral ministry, of administering the Church, and of serving the world. It requires us to leave aside the outmoded structures that hinder our forward movement.

- The Mission involves ecclesial and social transformation, for the Gospel imparts New Life to persons, communities, and cultures. Therefore the Continental Mission proposes to offer our evangelizing service to society itself.

Finally, the Mission has an ecumenical character and does not seek to proselytize, for the Gospel spreads through an overflowing of joy and spiritual contagion, never by proselytizing. For that reason it is suggested that we invite our brothers and sisters of other Churches and Christian communions to accompany us in prayer during this missionary process; we are even encouraged, where possible, to take on some joint actions in solidarity with them.

2. What is the novelty of the Continental Mission?

We are frequently asked what is new about this “Great Continental Mission” and how does it differ from the “missions” that we have always had or the “general missions” which we have organized in the past and which have done good work.

This new missionary impulse differs from the customary “missions” in the following ways:

- it seeks to put the whole Church and all its members in a permanent state of mission; it therefore does not have a fixed limit but extends indefinitely in time;
- it is undertaken in dialogue with the world in which we live, and it seeks out **interlocutors** rather than “addresses” people – that is, we speak **with**, rather than **to people** – in order to share with them our experience of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ;
- its aim is to offer, share, and impart the Christ-Life as the Life of humankind, the Life of the world – both for persons and for society as a whole;
- it seeks to be carried out at all levels of the Church and not only at the parochial or territorial level; it seeks to involve parishes, schools, universities, monasteries, religious congregations, secular institutes, apostolic movements, and new communities;
- it is taking place in a cultural context in which the freshness of the Gospel is our best contribution to the integral development of each country.

In the words of Aparecida:

“The Church is called to rethink profoundly and to re-launch with fidelity and boldness its mission in the new circumstances of Latin America and the world.... It is a matter of confirming, renewing, and revitalizing the freshness of the Gospel as it has taken root in our history, and of doing so on the basis of a personal and communitarian encounter with Jesus Christ which produces disciples and missionaries. This undertaking depends less on great programmes and structures than on new men and new women who incarnate that fresh tradition as disciples of Jesus Christ and missionaries of his Kingdom, as protagonists of new life for a Latin America that seeks to be recognized in the light and the strength of the Spirit” (DA, n.11).

In effect: “The pastoral ministry of the Church cannot prescind from the historical context in which its members live. Their lives are situated in very concrete socio-cultural contexts. These social and cultural transformations naturally represent great challenges for the Church in its mission of building up the Kingdom of God. That is why the Church must, in fidelity to the Holy Spirit who guides it, renew itself in ways that involve spiritual, pastoral, and also institutional reforms” (DA, n. 367).

“This firm missionary commitment should pervade all the ecclesial structures and all the pastoral plans of the dioceses, parishes, religious communities, movements, and other institutions of the Church. No community should excuse itself from undertaking decisively, with all its might, the constant processes of missionary renovation and of leaving behind the outmoded structures which do not favour the transmission of the faith” (DA, n. 365).

The Fathers of Aparecida are aware that, more than a message, what we possess is **a living Person**, the Lord Jesus, who is true Life for a world which looks for life in a thousand ways but fails to find it.

Chapter VII of Aparecida is profoundly inspiring, for it identifies the mission with the proclamation of life, the giving of life, the sharing of life, and the caring for life. There is rich meaning in the two laws which are found in Aparecida: the first is that **life grows and develops in a community that is just and fraternal**; the

second is that **life is the only reality which is attained and which matures in the degree to which it is surrendered** in order to give life to others – that is to say, which increases even as it is shared.

This Mission also invites us explicitly to keep before our eyes always – and transversally – the poor and the excluded. In reality, an important aspect of the Continental Mission is the decision to highlight each year one sector of the suffering persons mentioned by the Fathers of Aparecida, especially the sick, the imprisoned, the drug-dependent, the migrants, the homeless, the shut-ins, etc.

3. Why are we undertaking the Continental Mission at this time?

Because we are in a time of grace: we are in the midst of great cultural transformations that we cannot undergo simply passively, much less reluctantly. Rather, we need to ask for the grace of a new Pentecost. We Christians are not dry leaves driven by the wind, nor are we people who submit passively to cultural changes; we are believers who are ready to create a new culture and become key actors on the stage of history.

We are the heirs of the first community, which had to bear witness to their faith in the Roman Empire; we are the heirs of the Church Fathers who knew how to inculturate their faith in societies that were diverse and sometimes adverse; we are the heirs of those mothers and fathers of the Latin American Church who have kept pace with the times in this Continent of Hope and of Life. We refer especially to the General Conferences of Río de Janeiro, Medellín, Puebla, and Santo Domingo, and to the Synod for the Americas and the Conference of Aparecida.

We need to go forth to encounter other people and cultures, not with a defensive attitude, but **with a proposal**, convinced that the Spirit of the Lord is directing history, and persuaded as well that crises yield fruit when they are confronted and so transformed into **opportunities**.

The Fifth Conference, recalling the command to go forth and make disciples (cf. Mt 28:20), desires to **awaken** the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean for a great missionary drive.

- We cannot lose out on this hour of grace. We need a new Pentecost!
- We need to go out to encounter individuals, families, communities, and peoples so as to communicate and share with them the gift of our encounter with Christ, which has filled our lives with “meaning”, with truth and love, with joy and hope!
- We cannot sit back and wait passively in our churches. Rather, we must move out in all directions to proclaim that evil and death do not have the final word, that love is strong, that we have been liberated and rescued by the Lord’s Paschal victory in history, that he calls us to become Church, and that he wants to increase the ranks of his disciples and missionaries for the building up of his Kingdom on our Continent.

4. Who are the agents responsible for carrying out the Continental Mission?

The agents responsible for carrying out the Mission are the missionary disciples, and that means everyone in the Church. This is not the time just for priests, or just for religious, or just for lay people: **it is the time for the whole Church**, a moment to be lived and offered in Church, that is, **in communion**.

- The Document of Aparecida does not dedicate many chapters to the different church ministries and charisms, but it encourages us to promote them intensely and enthusiastically.
- This has surprised not a few people who were expecting a chapter on religious life and another on ministerial life or on lay life.
- This document confirms our vocations and charisms in all their richness and diversity and insists on the full participation of lay people, men and women, in the discernment, the decision-making, the planning, and the execution both of diocesan pastoral projects and especially of the pastoral endeavours of the Continental Mission.

So that this spirit of communion may flourish, our Pastors warn us both about the danger of clericalism, which often impedes and obstructs pastoral growth, and about those lay people who take refuge in Church communities who are incapable of transforming by their witness the prevailing social life and structures. What we need today are missionary disciples in **a Church that is ready for changing times**.

Communion is the great prophecy that the Church can offer our times. That is why Pope John Paul II and the Document of Aparecida summon us to be “a home and a school of communion” through the variety and richness of vocations, charisms, and ministries which the Spirit awakens in us. The Church must be able to

assist and encourage the development of all the gifts which the Lord bestows upon its members. For that reason, it is all the more urgent that we live a spirituality of communion.

5. Who are the principal interlocutors (“addressees”) of the Continental Mission?

In this Mission we prefer to speak of interlocutors rather than addressees or an audience, words which suggest passivity. To be an interlocutor, on the other hand, means having a great deal to say and share. We are not missionaries who “carry” the Truth, but rather we share the truth we have, always willing to give reasons for our hope, even while we learn from the truth we find in others. This was the style of Jesus, who marvelled at the faith of the centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman and who commended the charity of the Good Samaritan.

That is why there is much insistence on the evangelizing method of Jesus in his relations with the first disciples, with the Samaritan woman, with Zacchaeus, with the good thief, and so many others. The same method is evident also in his conflict with the Pharisees and the doctors of the law who “impose” heavy burdens that they themselves will not lift finger to remove.

Our first interlocutors should be those who have left the Church more because of our own attitude than because of the content of the faith. And in cases where the estrangement is due to the content of the faith, the reason might be less the content than our inability to communicate it better or it might be that it was communicated in a moralistic or overbearing manner and without dialogue. Our interlocutors should also include those who profess to be agnostic or atheist; with them we would want to share respectfully the joy of our faith.

The spirit of dialogue implies identity

- For that reason, dialogue should not be confused with a lack of conviction or of personality.
- The person who dialogues best is the one who has the greatest clarity about his/her own faith.
- That is why the formation given to missionary disciples is so important, especially the formation of those who have the mission of bearing witness to the Gospel in the heart of the world.
- We are not, nor can we be, “amateurish” with regard to the Gospel.
- As missionary disciples, we are called to play in the big leagues of faith, hope, and charity.

To obtain this objective we need good formation itineraries, putting ourselves at the School of Mary, living memory of the Church, in order to pass through the pedagogy of encounter and the “places of encounter” with the Lord. We should make the most of the pedagogical potential that is found in popular Marian devotion. We find there an educational path which cultivates personal love of the Virgin, the true “educator in the faith”. Such a path leads us to become ever more like Jesus Christ and fosters a progressive adoption of his attitude.

The places of encounter are not independent of one another; they are linked together in the logic of faith, since they lead to one another and open up as a true spiral in the life of faith of both individuals and communities. In this way we progress from faith to faith and from grace to grace, until we find ourselves face to face with him in the fullness of life and of history.

Also among the interlocutors of the Continental Mission are:

- those **groups of primary interest** (for example, educators, those who serve the poor, public servants, social communicators);
- **Specific sectors** to be focus of the Mission, such as families, young people, schools and universities, workers, business people, artists, etc.
- Other social or pastoral groups which we may decide to focus on in the course of the Mission.

IV. THE PEDAGOGY OF ACTION IN THE CONTINENTAL MISSION

In the process of forming missionary disciples, we would stress five basic aspects which take different forms at each stage of the process, but which are closely connected with one another and nourish one another:

- the Encounter with Jesus Christ
- Conversion

- Discipleship
- Communion
- and Mission

This means:

- knowing the aspirations of the persons – and peoples – that God confides to us, and leading them to an encounter with the living Jesus Christ,
- who fosters in them an attitude of conversion,
- and the decision to follow in the footsteps of Jesus,
- so that, by their living in communion with Christ and being called by him within the communion of the Church, a sense of ecclesial belonging is strengthened and generates life,
- so that they undergo a process of formation that is integral, gradual, kerygmatic, permanent, diversified, and community-oriented – and includes spiritual accompaniment,
- so that baptized Christians assume their missionary commitment and progress from being evangelized to being evangelizers, so that the Kingdom of God becomes actively present among our Latin American and Caribbean peoples and that they thus have fullness of life in Christ.

We can explain these dimensions of the process with words we find in the Gospel itself, words which describe the manner of encountering, forming, and sending those persons who receive the vocation to be missionary disciples so that all peoples might have life in Christ:

Everything begins with a question: “What are you seeking?” (Jn 1:38). The Document of Aparecida comments on this (n. 279):

- “Those who will be his disciples are already seeking him. We need to discover the deeper meaning of this seeking and encourage the encounter with Christ which gives rise to Christian initiation” (Seeking).
- The disciples, who want to meet Christ, ask him: “Teacher, where do you live?” (Jn 1:38). Jesus invites them to go through an experience: “Come and see” (Jn 1:39); “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14:6) (Encounter).
- When Jesus meets Philip, he says to him, “Follow me”. Later, beside the Lake of Galilee, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, amazed at the Teacher’s words and the miraculous catch, “left everything and followed him” (Conversion and Discipleship).
- Jesus called them “so that they would be with him” (Mk 3:14) and “remain in his love”, forming a community of disciples that would later be known for its solidarity and for its union in prayer, in the breaking of the bread, and in the teaching of the apostles, (Communion).
- But the call of Jesus to discipleship is inseparable from the missionary vocation. Already in the encounter on the shores of the lake, Jesus makes clear to them his purpose: “I will make you fishers of men”, and when he calls the twelve he says explicitly that he is calling them in order to “send them to preach” (Mk 3:14). And before ascending to heaven, he sends them “to make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them...” (Mission).

To accomplish this process and win back those people who have fallen away, we have to strengthen four aspects of our Church:

- Personal encounter** with Jesus Christ, as a profoundly intense religious experience, a kerygmatic proclamation, producing the personal witness of the evangelizers, which leads to personal conversion and an integral change of life;
- Living together in community**, since our people desire communities where they are warmly welcomed. It is important that our faithful feel that they are really members of a church community and that they have responsibility for its growth and development;
- Training in Scripture and doctrine**, based on experience and oriented toward community, is necessary to help religious experience mature. It is a basic, essential tool for attaining spiritual, personal, and community knowledge.
- missionary commitment** of the whole community, which goes forth to meet those who have fallen away and takes an interest in their situation in order to re-enchant them with the Church and invite them to return to it.

We should be aware that missionary disciples will arise only insofar as our communities dedicate themselves to evangelizing and accompanying those baptized persons who are not conscious of being disciples, so that they can mature gradually toward a desire to serve and thus respond to the mission which the Lord gives them through the Church.

In this process, the ongoing personal and pastoral conversion of the pastors and all religious is an indispensable element for making a **coherent testimony of life** the basic pedagogical foundation.

Paths to the encounter with Christ.

An authentic proposal for encountering Jesus Christ should take into account the following elements:

- a) Experience of the presence of Jesus Christ in the personal and community life of the believer: in the reading of Sacred Scripture in liturgy and personal meditation; in the celebration of the Eucharist, inexhaustible source of the Christian vocation and limitless font of missionary commitment; in the dynamism of a community life that is participative and fraternal; and in service to the poor and the excluded.
- b) A new appreciation of popular piety, which is a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church, and a manner of being missionary that puts us in touch with the deepest vibrations of the heart of America.
- c) An increased feeling of nearness to Mary, the finest image of faithful following of Christ, and mother and educator of the missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.
- d) Rescue of the witnesses of the Gospel in America, of the men and women who lived their faith heroically on the path of sanctity, along with those who shed their blood in martyrdom.

Furthermore, we should develop a pedagogy of encounter and communion.

Pedagogy of encounter:

The mission should be carried out within the dynamic of the pedagogy of all the encounters which happen between people, between families, between communities. Since every pastor – and likewise every missionary – should reflect the Good Shepherd, it is evident that our pastoral ministry has to be interwoven with sharing, simplicity, cordiality, solicitude, and attentiveness and service to others. In this evangelizing effort the church community makes itself known through pastoral initiatives as it sends forth its lay and religious missionaries, especially to the homes in the most marginalized urban and rural sectors, seeking to dialogue with everybody in a spirit of understanding and loving kindness.

Pedagogy of communion:

It is important that this Continental Mission be carried out as a great expression of communion. Communion with God should be made manifest in universal prayer which invokes the Holy Spirit with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to bring about unity with the Pope, among the Bishops' Conferences, and among the local churches, so that they help one another reciprocally, especially in sharing personnel and resources.

Every local church should open itself generously to the needs of others. Collaboration among the churches, through a genuine reciprocity that prepares them both to give and to receive, is also a source of enrichment for all of them, and it should include all the various sectors of church life. In this regard, the Declaration of the Bishops at Puebla is exemplary:

“Finally, the hour has arrived for Latin America to project itself beyond its own borders, to the nations. The truth is that we ourselves need missionaries, but we must also give out of our poverty.... The mission of the Church is much greater than ‘communion among the churches’: this communion, besides helping toward the new evangelization, should also have a special orientation of a specifically missionary nature”.

V. THE PRIVILEGED ROLE OF LAY PEOPLE

Any missionary effort requires, in a special way, the active and committed participation of the lay faithful in every stage of the process.

- Today the whole Latin American and Caribbean Church seeks to put itself in a state of mission. The evangelization of the continent, Pope John Paul II told us, cannot be realized today without the collaboration of lay people.
- Lay people must play an active and creative part in the elaboration and execution of pastoral projects for the community's benefit.
- This requires, on the part of the pastors, a greater openness of mind, so that they will understand and welcome the reality and the action of lay people in the Church, who by their Baptism and Confirmation are disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ.
- In other words, lay people must be taken fully into account in a spirit of communion and participation.

VI. FORMATION OF MISSIONARIES

Aparecida made a clear and decisive option to provide formation to the members of our communities for the benefit of all baptized persons, whatever their function in the Church's development.

- The formation should be suffused with missionary zeal, which is an impulse of the Spirit energizing all spheres of existence, penetrating and configuring the specific vocation of each person. Thus, the spirituality proper to priests, religious, parents, business people, catechists, etc., each takes on its proper form and develops accordingly.
- Each vocation has a concrete, distinctive type of spirituality, which gives depth and enthusiasm to the concrete exercise of the different tasks. Thus, life in the Spirit should not shut us up in comfortable intimacy, but rather should make us into generous, creative people, joyful in our proclamation of the Gospel and our missionary service.
- Our vocation commits us to considering the just claims of our social reality and enables us to find profound meaning in everything we do for the Church and the world. The Spirit weaves bonds of communion among the diverse vocations, so that all together, as complementary members of a single Body, they accomplish a single mission.

VII. CRITERIA FOR MISSION

Personal and pastoral conversion:

This mission necessarily requires pastoral conversion, both in individuals and in the very structures of the Church. We must recognize what structures are outmoded and seek the new forms that are demanded by our changing times.

- Pastoral conversion of our communities requires us to move beyond pastoral ministry which is simply preservative toward pastoral ministry which is decidedly missionary.
- This will make it possible for the unique programme of the Gospel to be introduced consistently into the history of each church community with new missionary ardour, thus helping the Church to manifest itself as a mother who goes forth to meet people, as a welcoming home, as a permanent school of missionary communion.

Paying heed to cultural signs: inculturation and presence in the new Areopagus

We must keep in mind how complex and varied is the reality of our continent: it has its megalopolises and its vast urban peripheries, and also its huge farming, mining, and maritime spheres. Nor can we forget the hospitals, the prisons, the rehabilitation centers, or the peculiarities of the churches themselves in the different regions.

The mission, even though a single, unified effort, should at the same time be diverse. It is therefore necessary to pay heed to the cultural signs of the epoch, so that all the new and different expressions and values become enriched with the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this way we will have more success in uniting faith with life and will also contribute to a more expansive catholicity, one that is not only geographic but also cultural.

Using new languages: communication

In our mission we must take fully into account modern-day culture, which should be studied, evaluated, and in a certain sense adopted by the Church, so that we use a language understood by our contemporaries. Only thus will Christian faith appear to be a pertinent, significant vehicle of salvation. At the same time, Christian faith should offer present-day society alternative cultural models.

- Using a new language will help us communicate the values of the Gospel in a positive, creative way. There are many people who claim to be unhappy, not so much with the content of the Church's doctrine as with the form in which it is presented and lived.
- In the mission we must use the Church's communications media to good advantage, making them more effective and relevant, whether for communicating the faith or for promoting dialogue between Church and society.
- Another important task is giving our missionary proclamation prominence in the general mass media, as well as in cyberspace, which the new generations use regularly. Just as we already have experience of educational programmes about the faith on radio and television, so also an interactive website might be a useful option for helping us to move our mission forward.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In the context of normal pastoral action

- The carrying out of a continental mission should inject dynamism into existing pastoral plans, with whatever renewal of structures that may be needed.
- A firm missionary commitment should pervade all church structures and all the pastoral plans of dioceses, parishes, religious communities, movements, and other institutions of the Church.
- No community should excuse itself from entering wholeheartedly and energetically into the constant processes of missionary renewal, nor should it refuse to abandon those outmoded structures that no longer favour the transmission of the faith.

And I conclude with the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

“Christian faith will not be able to withstand the ravages of time if it is reduced to baggage, to a list of norms and prohibitions, to fragmented devotional practices, to selective and partial adhesion to the truths of the faith, to occasional participation in some sacraments, to repetition of doctrinal principles, to bland or curt moralisms which do nothing to change the lives of baptized Christians.

“The greatest threat facing us is the gray pragmatism of the Church's daily life, where everything apparently proceeds normally, but where in reality the faith gets worn down and degenerates into meanness.

“We all are obliged to begin again from Christ, recognizing that ‘being a Christian is not the result of an ethical decision or a lofty idea, but with an encounter with an event, with a Person, which gives life with a new horizon and a decisive direction’” (Ratzinger, J., *Present Situation of the Faith and Theology*. Conference given at the meeting of the presidents of the Latin American Episcopal Conferences for the Doctrine of the Faith, held in Guadalajara, Mexico, in May 1996. Published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1 November 1996:cf. *DCE* [25 December 2005] n. 1).

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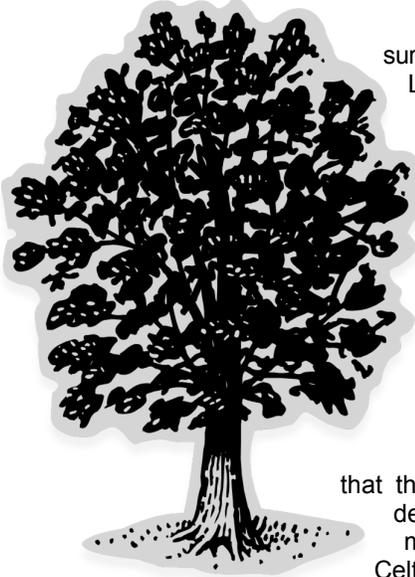
United States Catholic Mission Association: MISSION CONGRESS 2010, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28-30, 2010 ALBUQUERQUE, NM

John Feehan

The Garden God Walked in: Meditations on the Spirit of Trees

THE DEEPER NATURE OF TREES

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There is a widespread story in the folk literature of Europe which surfaces in Ireland – and indeed beyond – in the wonderful tale about Labhraidh Loingseach, a mythical king of the Province of Leinster. King Labhraidh Loingseach had the ears of a horse, an attribute which not surprisingly caused him considerable personal embarrassment; and since he wasn't prepared to add ridicule to his embarrassment by allowing his ears to be seen, he wore his hair very long, and the barber visited the palace only once a year. Moreover, it was a different barber every time, because the unfortunate man to whom the honour fell was immediately executed before he could breath a word to anyone about his monarch's deformity. But on one particular occasion the distraught widowed mother of the unfortunate young barber managed to persuade the king to spare her son, on condition that he swear never to reveal to another soul what he had seen under the royal tresses.

You might think his narrow escape from the headman's axe would ensure that the king's secret was deeply buried in the barber's subconscious: but not deeply enough, because so heavily did the burden of the secret weigh on his mind that he pined away for three years. In desperation he went to a Druid [a Celtic pagan priest], who advised him to go to a crossroads, take the right turn, and then tell his secret to the first tree he met. This he did – the tree happened to be a willow – and he soon recovered.

In the course of time, Craiftine, the king's bard [musician], selected this same tree for the making of a new harp. But when he ran his fingers over the strings of the new harp in the presence of his king and the court, the sounds that came from it and reached the ears of a stunned audience shaped themselves into the words "*Dá chluais chapail ar Labhradh Loinghsech*" – "*Dá chluais chapail ar Labhradh Loinghsech*" – the king has horse's ears. The shock brought the shamed king to his senses, and the story has a happy ending because Labraidh faced up to his disability and had regular normal haircuts ever after, where you or I might have gone after the barber or the Druid.

Now the mythological Labhraidh is vaguely based on a real Chieftain of around the 2nd century B.C., but what are we to make of this society whose tales are woven together by deeds of magic, where trees are not only a vital resource at the heart of the economy, providing everything from the timber of the palace to the harp of the king's musician: but also in need of whispered human words or even heard to sing? A tradition, the unclaimed inheritance of all of us, where there is more to trees than the price of the timber they produce, and there is more to the forest than its ecology. How much more do trees mean to us than that? Or why should they mean more? That's what we want to explore here, looking backward in order to look forward later.

What trees are about

Think for a moment about the *kind* of living things trees are. They are much more than tall, woody plants. Trees are, essentially, a way of life. "Treeness" is a *special way of life that certain plants adopt*. In our time in the Earth's history these special plants are flowering plants of many different families, often quite unrelated, but the kinds of plants that have followed this way of life during earlier phases of Earth history, before plants with flowers had evolved, very different from ours. Then, the trees were like ferns and Seed ferns, Horsetails, Cycads, Gingkos and lots of others that would look strange to our eyes. On this level trees

are the whales of the land: what they all have in common is that they are the dominant life forms on land, and they are the longest-lived large creatures on earth. Eighty-five per cent of earth's biomass is plants, and 90% of the plant biomass is trees. Their height, rigidity, longevity give them a permanence from our human perspective. These are not accidental characteristics; they are what being a tree is all about. These are the attributes that lift them as far as possible into the air, so that they can spread leaf surfaces to intercept the maximum amount of sunlight. Charles Darwin in his Diaries likened trees to giant eyes, which is very perceptive, for they are vast batteries of light receptive cells. They are the main go-betweens in the transformation of radiated energy into all the necessities of all multi-cellular life, plant and animal.

These characteristics are responsible in large measure for the *utilitarian* value trees have for us: providing raw materials in the form of timber and fuel, fruit and other things we can use; as well as the indispensable role forests play in the maintenance and regulation of vital environmental functions such as watershed protection, soil conservation, the maintenance of atmospheric quality and so on.

Trees and the forests in which they live are the richest home of biodiversity on land. Because they take centuries, tens of centuries, to attain their full development and richness, they have time to gather to themselves the immense diversity of living things that define them. We read that, for example, there are something in the order of 60,000 species of insects and spiders in 2 ha of Ecuadorian rain forest, whereas there are only 20,000 in the whole of Britain and Ireland – and there might be as many again 100 km away! The ecologist Edward Wilson described a single tree in the Tambopata Reserve in Peru which had 43 species of ants belonging to 26 genera: This is equal to the entire ant fauna of the British Isles. Peter Ashton found 700 species of trees in 10 selected 1 hectare plots in Borneo – equal in number to the whole tree fauna of North America. And the same holds for birds, butterflies, beetles and other insects.

But there is a real danger that in discussing biodiversity we lose sight of the *moral immensity* of its diminution at our hands. Species are not reducible to numbers. The variety of life is not that of a great stamp collection, with stamps of every nation, every shape and colour. Each species in this catalogue of life is the unique living embodiment of an evolutionary journey as long as our own, a journey that has a common starting point with ours, and like ours is an ongoing journey.¹ Its extinction is *the loss of a unique mode of life's possibility*, each in its way an achievement as great as ours, a 'unique contribution to the commonwealth'. No species on earth has undergone, through all of our universe's time, its marvellous becoming just to be snuffed out of existence at our whim or our pursuit of shallow, trivial ends. Its time will come in the course of life and the Earth's revolutions, but that is not ours to call or foreshorten. If you speak the language of belief in God, and embrace what the revelation of science tells you, then no species is insignificant. Each is worthy in the eyes of God, deserving of our respect and study and admiration. Even, and perhaps especially, the most obscure. 'For heaven God has created the angels', wrote Saint Augustine, 'and for the earth creatures that crawl, and neither is superior to the other: because the hand of man can no more create a worm than an angel'.²

We may like to think of ourselves as being a little less than the angels, but we have been swept along by precisely the same exhilarating evolutionary maelstrom as all the other species which people this moment of life's time with us, 4,000 million years of life having been spent travelling with them, and before that we have shared the same remote origins in the dust of exploding stars.

The area of rain forest destruction is nearly 150,000 square kilometres a year. This is as large as the area of West Virginia or Costa Rica. A straight-line extrapolation of this rate means it will all be gone by 2135 A.D. It is much higher in some areas. Madagascar (one of the great hotspots of biological diversity) has lost 93% of its forest cover. The Atlantic forest coast of Brazil is 99% gone. The forests of most of the islands of Polynesia and the Carribean are gone altogether.

The measure of their loss – about which Sean McDonagh will say more – is incalculable: in terms of the materials they provide us with: timber and food and medicine, their contribution to the functioning and integrity of ecological processes or climatic balances, perhaps in terms of their possible genetic contribution to our future well-being: but incalculable also on a deeper level to which I will return shortly.

What can be the meaning, the purpose, of such unnecessary, extravagant efflorescence of life? If you are not of a religious persuasion this is not really a meaningful question. It is just the way things have turned out, a result of the way evolution works: and all we have to do is to learn about them and enjoy them, make use of them whenever they are useful to us, and take care of them because if we don't there will be consequences in terms of our human welfare.

The last twenty years have witnessed a growing awareness of all of this: reflected in the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the National Biodiversity Action Plans that follow from that. But the real test of concern is the application of those plans at local level, at the level of village or community, where human living confronts, encounters the multitude of other lives that are the forest. Do we *value* the forest deeply enough to take what actions we must if we are to live in harmony with it, with all its other lives? And is its material value – its economic, consumptive, regulatory value – enough to make us *want* to do this? And are we taking due account of all the values it embodies in making our calculation of its true worth?

The reverence that is in our spirit as we stand before the forest has also another spring that feeds it. Trees are at the root of our psyche. We — we as a species — were born in and of the forest, and grew up with it, and – as literally as makes no difference – carry its echo in our genes.

The forest in our genes

Our remote ancestors were creatures of the forest. Our spirit is tuned to its sounds, its sights, its scents. It weaves itself around our very genetic make-up. When the first humanoid primates left the forest to exploit the new evolutionary opportunities presented by events in the Tertiary epoch in earth history and became creatures of the savannah, this new open landscape of natural grassland rimmed with trees, they carried the forest with them.

Every bit as true is the fact that we are *physically* shaped in and by and for that kind of landscape of trees and forest, over a long, long time – over the greater part of our history as a species. So, too, we are all made *psychologically* and indeed spiritually, in and by and for that kind of landscape.

Indeed, I think the awe invoked within us inside our temples, palaces, cathedrals and mosques of stone – from Stonehenge to Chartres – has its genetic origins in the same deep vein of our being. The landscapes of art all feed unconsciously on this same deep stratum. They evoke their response in us because of this sense of *coming home*. The landscapes of the great human cultures all recreate it. And so too, I suggest, does the landscape of religion. In this true Eden in which our human species took shape over millions of years, trees were an integral part of the natural landscape and our developing human relationship with it. As were flowers and grass, sky and water, open space and the sounds of nature. It is then, quite literally and scientifically, true to say that we were *made* to live in a landscape of open space with abundant trees; we are genetically programmed for that. We cannot do without it any more than we can do with air that has lost half of its oxygen and hope to be whole human beings.

It is little more than a few tens of thousands of years ago that our ancestors moved out of the African cradle of mankind. But we also took Africa with us, because wherever possible we have shaped the natural landscapes we made our own to resemble those in which our minds like our bodies are most at home. For a long time fire, the axe and the goat were the tools with which we shaped Nature to our way, then the plough. But all through our long prehistory and history, Nature was always on our doorstep. True, it is no longer the untamed wilderness, but the experience of trees and flowers, birds and wind and stars, rocks and the sight and sound of rivers and the sea – which satisfy our deep psychological need. Places where Nature still breathes awake in us memories of a deeper childhood. The flowers and trees in every hedgerow awake them, the singing of the birds in every strip of woodland, every rocky outcrop shaped by time and the elements, every stream that follows the form of the land. We are more at home among trees. And why wouldn't we be? Were they not the furniture in the nursery of our human species, in which we learned to play?

So we *need* the wild, especially a wild world where fringes of trees frame open spaces with scattered trees, with woods behind, on the edge of the kind of open landscape best perceived and controlled with our special human eyes. We respond to trees then, not so much because it is in our *blood* to respond in this way, but because it is, truly, *in our genes*. We are most at home in their presence because this is where we were born, because this is what we were made for.

This is one level at which trees reside in our spirit. But trees are not woods or forests: a fact which gives another meaning to the expression "you can't see the wood for the trees". That tree-fringed landscape for which we were designed is still man-made, or made by fire and tools; it is our own space, dominated by the openness our eyes were made for, space to hunt and cultivate, even though framed by trees. But the closed forest is a different thing. Here the space, if you like, is God's, it belongs to the spirits beyond Nature, behind the trees: and the experience of the mysteriousness and diversity of Creation is deeper and more acute.

I wonder has it ever struck you that it is also largely by burning the forests of another age that we are wreaking environmental havoc that we bring about the hemorrhaging of the diversity of life on earth. It is by burning the great forests that covered the Earth in earlier geological epochs, by squandering the energy legacy banked in the compressed remains of swamp forests on land in the case of the coal we burn, forests of the ocean in the case of the oil our machines guzzle.

*'Endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful'*³

In my student days I trained as a geologist. And one day – one of the very few days in my life I can put an actual *date* on: it was 12th May 1976 – I was studying and mapping the sandstone rocks in the bed of a river in Central Ireland when I came upon a layer of rock that wasn't sandstone: a grey mudstone, and when I split this open with my geologist's hammer, there before my eyes was the beautifully preserved impression of the twig of a species of Seed-fern, the veins of its wedge-shaped leaves still perfect, rather Gingko-like. But it wasn't a Gingko, because the alluvial system in which this mudstone formed, in which these leaves were preserved, flowed across the land 350 million years ago, at the very end of the Devonian period of earth history. And here they were, out in the sun for the first time since they were entombed all those ages and ages ago.

You all know what relics are.

This is a first class relic in the old official sense. It is not a picture of the Devonian forest, not something that touched the forest, it is a part of that forest. Through it, if I am of a proper mental and spiritual disposition, I can immerse myself *in the real forest* out of which this has come, of which it was a part all of 350 million years ago.

It is a forest like nothing you have ever seen: dominated by great trees as majestic as those that you find in the woods and forests of the world today, but you would feel very strange indeed if you could take a walk in it, because you would recognise nothing: not only not the species, but the groups to which the trees and shrubs belong are unknown to you: because they are long extinct, their descendants in our world banished to the ecological margins while other groups have come to dominate the ecological centre stage that is the forest of today.

Strange to you also because everything is green and brown – so little bright colour: and because in this world there is an unfamiliar silence. There is the wind in the trees and the familiar music of the river flowing over pebbles and rock, and there is a rustling in the undergrowth where disconcertingly large scorpion-like things are scurrying about, and you may catch the odd glimpse of a disturbingly large amphibian. There is no birdsong, and there are no flowers. The insects to pollinate them had not evolved to populate the riot of colour they would bring to the earth in their time: bees and butterflies, hoverflies.

But for all that, you recognise this as **forest**. In fact, you stand here in what is really the earth's earliest fully developed forest. Multicellular life evolved long before this, but there has been multicellular life on land only since the middle of the Silurian period 70 million years before this, 425 million years ago.

And just as the Oak tree in a forest of today supports hundreds of invertebrates and other animals, and a host of fungi, mosses, liverworts and other plants, so too did this Seed-fern in a forest long gone from the earth harbour its great cohort of other species: in a forest no human eye ever saw, no human spirit contemplated in wonder and admiration of that wondrous and strange biodiversity, so different from that of the forests of our age of the Earth.

And this meditation helps us perhaps to approach our question of the meaning and purpose of forest biodiversity from a different perspective. Because when we again ask the question: 'what is it for; what is the purpose of all this burgeoning, bewildering beauty (not merely sensual, but the multidimensional beauty of Being Achieved), what can the answer be, if our well-being is not part of the answer? Because in this Garden of the late Devonian, God truly walks alone in the cool of the evening. There is no human eye to look and wonder. There aren't even any mammals in this world. No human homes will be built of the timbers of these trees, no meals made of the plants and animals that live here. Because none of this glorious efflorescence of life on this ancient Earth, an Earth without us, is for us in the first place. Why were they created, why were they here, if not for us?

There has never been, I think, a more succinct articulation of the answer to that question about the ultimate meaning of biodiversity, of what it is truly all about, of what is going on in Creation, than this by Aquinas:

'God cannot express himself fully in any one creature: and so he has produced many and diverse life forms, so that what one lacks in its expression of divine goodness may be compensated for by others: for goodness, which in God is single and undifferentiated, in creatures is refracted into myriad hues of being'.⁴

And yet in Thomas' day people knew next to nothing about biodiversity. Albert the Great had just written his pioneering Encyclopedias of animal and plant life, but – altogether fascinating though they are – these were little more than anecdotal accounts of the flora and fauna familiar to medieval Europe. Almost nothing was known of the life of invertebrates or non-vascular plants; the microscope was still centuries in the future: and we didn't have the faintest idea of the kaleidoscopic magnificence of the overwhelming biodiversity of tropical forests or of the oceans. Had Thomas known any of this, or known of the biochemical and genetic mechanisms behind it all, what words could he ever have thought adequate?

This reflection of Aquinas must be the foundation of the sentiment and reverence we need to take into the forest with us as we look for the wood for our harp, or our house, for our fire, or the food for our table, the medicine for our illness.

Trees and the unfolding [ex-plication] of the living world

Trees have also profoundly permeated the human imagination since our beginnings, including our spiritual imagination. Back in the 5th century Augustine was fascinated by the natural process by which the entirety of a mighty oak tree could unfold from a tiny acorn. How enthralled he would have been if he could have known the sheer wonder of that process as modern plant science has enabled us to understand it! The unfolding of possibility wrapped up in a seed becomes the template for the even greater mystery whereby all of life has unfolded not only from an acorn sown on this earth of ours, but from a mustard seed of nothingness that contained all possibility within itself, at the beginning of all things 14.7 billion years ago. This is the Universe Story familiar in outline now to most of us, and how thrilled to bits Nicholas of Cusa would have been had he been alive today instead of in the 15th century, when his imagination conjured with images of all that is, all that (as we would say) evolution has achieved, as not just God's revelation of himself: but as the very unfolding of Godself. No day should pass, whether we walk in the forest or on the street, or carried on thought through a window from our bed. No day should pass without our reaching for that thrilling thought, that the tree my vision enfolds, and all that is growing upon it, and all the other species that people this moment of Earth's time with us, are in a sense beyond human comprehension, each in its unique way a living ex-plication of an aspect of divinity.

A call to action

We have reached a point in the history of the Earth where two critical developments have come together. On the one hand, our growing scientific understanding has given us an appreciation of the utterly marvellous creation that trees embody, the mesmerisingly complex and diverse ecosystems their woods and forests constitute, in ways no people before us could have had: and a deeper awareness of the values they represent: utilitarian, psychological, spiritual. And yet, as our understanding has grown, our appreciation has dimmed, our sense of their worth.

And then on the other hand, such is the footfall of our species on the Earth, the result of the uncontrolled increase in our numbers and the determination of so many to live far beyond their means, beyond anything the Earth can support for us; such is our footfall that the great over-arching rainbow that is the diversity of Life on Earth is becoming ever dimmer and narrower.

This **Year of the Forest** is not just an occasion for more conferences and colourful commemorative stamps. It needs to be the call at midnight that hurried Five Wise Virgins into action because 'The Bridegroom is here'.⁵ We need to act, each in his/her own life, his/ her own community, as best we may in our different lives. We need to act, both urgently and effectively. For most of us it will be at parish level. May each of you leave here with the firm resolve to plant a seed of initiative that will ensure the Recovery of Forest. May that seed that you will sow germinate, literally and metaphorically, until the branches of its maturity intertwine with the branches of other initiatives in Forests of the Future.

Conclusion

Our knowledge of evolution has opened to us the shocking, awful realisation – with consequences as yet barely grasped by our human philosophy and theology, let alone economics and politics – the shocking realisation that we and the trees – and all that lives – are related. Not metaphorically: genetically.

The Oak is my cousin, in the same way Mary is my cousin, just that much more distantly: and yet not all that distantly either, because genetically speaking I am one-third Oak.

This does not mean that if we listen long and hard enough the trees will speak to us in the words we speak to each other, as the willow of Craiftine's harp spoke in the Hall of the King. In certain ancient cultures it is a ritual obligation to beg forgiveness of a tree whose life is to be sacrificed in the interest of our human lives. Trees that speak and are spoken to are to be found everywhere in the language of mythology. But it is only in the make-believe fantasy worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien's "Middle Earth" that trees talk. There are such traditions in every culture, seeking to articulate the intuitive knowledge that there is more to trees. But we in ours cannot do this because our concept of spirit has had to mature and be distilled through a scientific world-view. We cannot go back to being Druids any more than we can return through the one-way gates to the Garden of Eden.

Yet they do indeed speak to us. But in a language that goes far deeper than the superficiality of words. The word is also articulated in other than human speech. And it is in that communication between us that the spiritual function of the wood is exercised. Humanity will have lost its soul, Thomas Merton once wrote, when the trees are silent, when the trees say nothing.

The experience of trees is like a tuning fork that awakens harmonies in the genes that govern our mental well-being, in which are rooted aesthetic, psychological and spiritual creativity. Yet woods have been largely excised from the body of human experience, leaving a void, a wound, we scarcely appreciate, until suddenly we stumble upon it in a corner where it has somehow managed to survive, or to which it has been restored, and it takes our breath away. In the past everybody, children and adults, knew trees by their names. Today, they know the names of T.V. or cinema stars, the music charts and sport, but of no trees. Nevertheless anonymous trees people their dreams, and will people the dreams of their own children, even if the last woods have vanished from the earth.

End notes

¹ *The Ancestor's Tale* by Richard Dawkins.

² *Creavit in coelo Angelos, in terra vermiculos; non superior in illis, non inferior in istis. Sicut enim nulla manus Angelum, ita nulla posset creare vermiculum.* Augustine, "Liber soliloquiorum animae ad deum".

³ This is the last line of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*.

⁴ 'Distinctio rerum et multitudo est ex intentione primi agentis, quod est Deus. Produxit enim res in esse propter suam bonitatem communicandam creaturas, et per eas repraesentandam. Et quia per unam creaturam sufficienter repraesentari non potest, produxit multas creaturas et diversas, ut quod deest uni ad repraesentandam divinam bonitatem, suppleatur ex alia: nam bonitas quae in Deo est simpliciter et uniformiter, in creaturas est multipliciter et divisim'. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a 47.1.

⁵ cf. Matthew 25:1-13.

**(Send by Fr. Francesco, OFM, from the Conference presented in Rome by UISG/USG/
JPIC)**

Emmanuel Babissagana
***Les migrations pour faire naître
des sociétés nouvelles***

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Traditionnellement, l'intérêt pour les recherches scientifiques sur le thème de la migration est proportionnel à son caractère problématique. La société d'accueil, comme le dit Pierre Bourdieu, ne se pose vraiment le problème des immigrés que pour autant que les immigrés lui posent problème¹. Notre époque n'échappe pas à ce mode de fonctionnement. Le mécanisme est connu et probablement aussi ancien que les sociétés humaines: lorsque la conjoncture économique est défavorable, l'étranger devient le bouc émissaire sur qui se focalise l'essentiel des maux dont souffre la société². La migration apparaît comme un danger, une menace contre laquelle il faut absolument se prémunir. La fin justifie alors les moyens intellectuels, juridiques, politiques et économiques utilisés pour y parvenir³. L'objectif principal est de constituer, dans l'imaginaire collectif, la migration comme problème en soi, comme terreau de toutes les menaces qui pèsent sur la société, son identité, sa sécurité, sa perpétuation, voire son esthétique.

Restituer le phénomène migratoire

Cette situation fait que l'objet « migration » que les sciences sociales sont amenées à étudier en Occident n'est pas d'abord un phénomène observable, descriptible et analysable, mais bien plutôt un problème ou une menace en soi. Dans ce contexte, l'idée que les migrations puissent ou doivent être promues pour faire naître des sociétés nouvelles peut à première vue apparaître comme une provocation ou un propos dénué de sens. Comment un problème en soi, terreau aussi criminogène et vecteur par excellence de la décadence, peut-il être source de renouvellement d'une société ou de création de nouvelles sociétés ?

Derrière cette apparente impossibilité surgit une difficulté majeure qui concerne l'exigence de neutralité et d'objectivité. Lucien Goldman évoque « le maximum d'objectivité subjectivement possible »⁴ dans le traitement de la question migratoire. Est-il en effet intellectuellement possible et moralement acceptable d'être neutre lorsqu'on examine un phénomène présenté comme un mal en soi? Le problème de fond vient du fait que l'objet « migration » n'est pas objectivement construit par les sciences sociales, il est constitué en dehors d'elles et leur est en quelque sorte imposé par la conjoncture comme « produit fini » et par nature problématique. La science du migrant qui en résulte, cette « science du pauvre », se révèle finalement être une pauvre science, qui n'a la maîtrise ni de son objet (il est constitué en dehors d'elle), ni de son fonctionnement (celui-ci dépend d'une problématique imposée de l'extérieur, chômage, sécurité, ou autre), ni même parfois de sa finalité, quand elle sert de légitimation scientifique d'une certaine politique migratoire, ou quand *a contrario* elle vise à la contester ou la délégitimer scientifiquement.

C'est pourquoi dans les lignes qui suivent, nous allons essayer de revenir du problème au phénomène des migrations. Un traitement sérieux et objectif de la question migratoire ne peut avoir pour point de départ ni l'idéologie, ni les clichés, ni les préjugés. Cette restitution préalable du phénomène migratoire offrira une base objective pour, dans un deuxième temps, examiner le potentiel novateur ou destructeur des migrations pour nos sociétés. Nous terminerons par l'indication de quelques exigences fondamentales à satisfaire en vue d'un avènement pacifique des sociétés nouvelles que nous promettent les migrations actuelles.

L'objet « migration »

Restituer la migration dans ce qu'elle a de purement phénoménal suppose qu'on en délimite préalablement le concept. Or il se trouve que les termes les plus usuels sont généralement les plus difficiles à définir, comme si la familiarité avec ces termes nous privait de la distance nécessaire au travail de conceptualisation. Le chemin le moins laborieux consiste peut-être à repartir de l'étymologie même du mot migration.

La racine *migrare* commune aux termes « migration » et « immigration » évoque l'idée de déplacement dans l'espace, de changement de lieu ou de résidence. Cette première détermination fondamentale reste toutefois trop générale pour pouvoir spécifier l'immigration ou la migration humaine. La littérature a, en effet, un large répertoire de termes pour désigner les phénomènes de changement de résidence ou de lieu, de déplacement interne ou transfrontalier : déplacement, exil, expatriation, transplantation, implantation, exode, fuite. Il s'agit là de situations humaines et de statuts juridiques différents. Posons donc avec plus de précision la question des critères spécifiques permettant de distinguer le migrant ou l'immigrant de l'expatrié, du déplacé, de l'exilé ou du réfugié.

En outre, le changement de résidence ou le déplacement d'un lieu à un autre est différemment qualifié selon que l'on se situe du point de vue du lieu de départ ou du lieu d'arrivée. Dans le premier cas, la migration prend la forme d'une émigration, tandis que dans le second, on parle plutôt d'immigration. Il en résulte une deuxième détermination fondamentale : la migration est un phénomène qui se décline indissociablement sous les aspects de l'émigration et de l'immigration, elle est un processus qui comporte deux moments essentiels, le fait de quitter son lieu d'origine et le fait de s'installer dans un nouveau lieu. Bien qu'il ne soit pas certain que l'émigration pose moins de problèmes au pays de départ que l'immigration au pays d'arrivée, force est de constater que c'est ce deuxième moment de la migration qui fait le plus l'objet de réflexions et de débats dans nos sociétés. Dans les lignes qui suivent l'usage du mot migration renverra à l'immigration, sauf indication contraire.

Cette détermination de la migration, en immigration ou émigration, reste insuffisante pour en délimiter les contours, car le changement de résidence est différemment qualifié selon qu'il s'effectue du Nord au Sud⁵ ou inversement. En effet, lorsqu'une personne en provenance du Sud s'installe au Nord, elle est généralement qualifiée d'immigré; tandis que lorsqu'une personne en provenance du Nord s'installe au Sud, elle est généralement désignée par d'autres qualificatifs: expatrié, coopérant, Belge, Français, ou encore étranger. Il en résulte qu'au Sud, les termes « migrant » et « immigré » ne servent pas pour désigner ceux que l'on désigne comme tels au Nord. Au Sud en général, les mots « migration » et « immigration » ne sont pas *a priori* d'application locale, ils sont pour ainsi dire des termes exotiques, importés ou imposés⁶. Ce qui fait dire à la chanteuse grecque Angélique Ionatos que décidément « quand les gens descendent du nord au sud ce n'est pas du tout la même chose que quand ils montent du sud vers le nord ».

Un certain vocabulaire migratoire

Cette différence laisse apparaître une constante que l'on retrouve tant au Nord qu'au Sud, à savoir que le vocabulaire migratoire est en général réservé aux déplacements des personnes appartenant à des classes sociales inférieures ou en situation de précarité. Tandis que lorsque des personnes appartenant à des classes plus aisées changent de lieu de résidence pour une raison quelconque (fiscale, professionnelle, personnelle, etc.), on parle plutôt d'expatrié, de coopérant, d'étranger, quand on ne les désigne pas simplement par leur titre ou leur fonction. Il en résulte que le vocabulaire migratoire recouvre une certaine catégorisation sociale. Le contenu du concept de « migration » varie ainsi selon que l'on appartient à l'une ou l'autre classe, selon qu'on met par exemple l'accent sur l'arrachement à la terre natale pour l'un ou sur les problèmes sociaux qui en résultent pour l'autre.

Le contenu de ce concept varie également en fonction de la typologie des migrations, une typologie qui ne cesse de s'élargir du fait que la migration est un phénomène dynamique, qui se développe et se

complexifie inexorablement grâce à la globalisation et au développement des transports et des communications⁷. Il en résulte un foisonnement de significations particulières irréductibles les unes aux autres, une multitude de conceptions partielles et conjoncturelles de la migration qu'il n'est pas aisé de réunir sous l'unité du concept. Aussi nous semble-t-il plus indiqué de reprendre l'essentiel des éléments définitionnels évoqués plus haut et de circonscrire notre propos à une réalité bien délimitée. La migration sera entendue comme le déplacement, vu du Nord, de personnes en situation de précarité sociale (et notamment économique), d'un espace vers un autre; ce processus comportant deux moments constitutifs, l'émigration ou le départ du lieu d'origine, puis l'immigration ou l'installation au lieu d'arrivée. Nous ne précisons pas si cette installation est provisoire ou définitive, car cela n'est jamais facile à déterminer *a priori*, y compris pour les concernés eux-mêmes.

Il importe à présent d'examiner si ces mouvements de populations comportent comme tels un risque destructeur ou plutôt un potentiel novateur, en l'occurrence lorsqu'ils concernent les sociétés occidentales.

La migration, une hérésie potentiellement novatrice

La réflexion que l'on propose ici vise à déterminer comment les migrations peuvent favoriser l'émergence de sociétés nouvelles en Occident. Une démarche plutôt négative semble la plus indiquée. On essaiera de montrer comment les migrations, du seul fait de leur inexorable déploiement, poussent les sociétés occidentales à s'ajuster, à s'adapter à cette nouvelle donne, et donc à se renouveler d'une certaine manière. Pour ce faire, le paradigme de l'hérésie nous semble fort approprié. L'hérésie comporte, lorsqu'elle est bien fondée et articulée, la capacité d'amener la doctrine ou le système dominant à corriger les failles dont elle est le produit, à s'ajuster et à se renouveler. Notre méthode consiste donc à établir en quelques points saillants un parallèle entre le potentiel novateur de l'hérésie pour la théorie dominante et le potentiel novateur de la migration pour le système dominant.

Première constatation. L'hérésie est le fruit d'une doctrine ou d'un système pris pour référence, en général un système dominant. Il en est de même des migrations contemporaines, qui sont le fruit d'un système global consacrant la liberté comme principe premier d'organisation de nos sociétés, et notamment la liberté d'aller et venir.

Deuxièmement, l'hérésie a pour spécificité de s'inscrire en faux, en tout ou en partie, par rapport à la doctrine dont elle est issue. Les migrations contemporaines de même, notamment lorsqu'elles sont dites « clandestines », s'écartent sur deux points importants du système libéral dont elles sont issues. Premièrement, elles manifestent que la liberté d'aller et venir s'applique davantage aux capitaux et à ceux qui en disposent. Les pauvres sont voués au cantonnement car ils constituent une menace pour les plus nantis. Aussi ne sont-ils habituellement admis à se déplacer qu'en tant qu'esclaves, colonisés, déportés ou, pour reprendre un terme plus à la mode, « choisis ». Cependant, grâce au développement des transports, des moyens d'information et de communication, les pauvres attendent de moins en moins d'être choisis pour migrer; pas plus qu'ils n'attendent d'être porteurs de capitaux. Il leur suffit d'avoir assez d'argent pour tenter l'aventure à la recherche d'un mieux-être. On touche ici au deuxième point, à savoir que si le système libéral dominant consacre le droit d'aller et venir, il ne consacre paradoxalement pas le droit pour tout homme de s'installer dans le pays de son choix. Prenant le contre-pied de la pratique dominante, les migrations contemporaines tendent d'une certaine façon à créer un droit inconditionnel à s'installer partout sur terre, au nom de l'aspiration légitime et irrépressible de tout être humain à un mieux-être, et dans certains cas à la survie. À travers cette remise en question de fait du droit dominant, les migrations, comme les hérésies, interpellent le système dont elles sont issues, l'invitant à s'adapter et à se renouveler. C'est dans cette capacité d'interpellation et d'invitation au changement qu'il faut voir une première vertu novatrice des migrations pour les sociétés d'accueil.

Il y a un troisième parallèle entre les migrations et les hérésies. Toutes les deux ont la particularité d'être irrépressibles. Ni l'Inquisition, ni les guerres saintes, ni le bûcher, n'ont jamais eu raison du fait

hérétique. On pourrait en dire autant du fait migratoire. Aucune politique répressive n'a, et n'aura probablement jamais, raison des migrations. Bien au contraire, plus on tente de les maîtriser et de les endiguer, plus elles se complexifient et se diversifient, tant la plupart sont mues par une aspiration irréprensible à un mieux-être et dans bien des cas à la survie.

Immigration ou migration ?

C'est ici qu'il importe de prendre toute la mesure des réflexions d'Umberto Eco sur la véritable nature encore relativement occultée des phénomènes migratoires auxquels sont confrontées les sociétés occidentales. Pour Umberto Eco, on parle d'immigration lorsque « quelques individus (voire beaucoup, mais dans une mesure statistiquement négligeable par rapport à la souche d'origine) se transfèrent d'un pays à l'autre (comme les Italiens et les Irlandais aux Etats-Unis, ou les Turcs aujourd'hui en Allemagne). Les phénomènes d'immigration peuvent être contrôlés politiquement, limités, encouragés, programmés ou acceptés »⁸. Mais il n'en va pas de même des migrations, ajoute Umberto Eco, car quelles qu'en soient les modalités, les migrations se produisent comme des phénomènes naturels, et sont ainsi par définition incontrôlables. On a « migration » quand « un peuple entier, peu à peu, se déplace d'un territoire à un autre ». La distinction ainsi établie entre la migration et l'immigration tant du point de vue de la quantité que de celui du caractère naturel appelle chez U. Eco une autre plus radicale au plan culturel. À savoir qu'on n'a immigration que « lorsque les immigrés, (admis sur décisions politiques) acceptent en grande partie les coutumes du pays où ils immigreront », tandis qu'on a migration « lorsque les migrants (que personne ne peut arrêter aux frontières) transforment radicalement la culture du territoire où ils immigreront ».

À la question de savoir si les sociétés occidentales sont aujourd'hui confrontées à des phénomènes de migration ou d'immigration, la réponse d'Umberto Eco est sans détour: « Les phénomènes que l'Europe essaie encore d'affronter comme de l'immigration sont en réalité des cas de migration »⁹. Ces phénomènes migratoires invitent par conséquent à un changement radical de politique, à agir davantage sur les causes humaines (politiques et économiques notamment) des migrations plutôt que d'essayer de les endiguer, comme on le fait en vain aujourd'hui. Il y a là une invitation à un changement profond d'attitude, de perception de nous-mêmes et des autres, ainsi que de notre avenir commun, en tant qu'assignés à résidence sur terre. Les migrations contemporaines nous adressent comme un impératif de changement de vision du monde et des autres, un impératif de renouvellement de nos manières d'être et de faire avec les autres, car tôt ou tard leur mal-être sera également le nôtre, si nous continuons d'y contribuer activement ou passivement. En nous éveillant à la misère humaine, à notre responsabilité dans ces drames dont nous ne voyons que la partie émergée de l'iceberg, les migrations contribuent de manière puissante à l'émergence de nouvelles sociétés en Occident. Quoique relativement nouveau, ce processus est en marche, comme en témoigne l'émergence des mouvements altermondialistes et d'autres organisations qui œuvrent à l'avènement d'un monde autre, plus solidaire, plus juste, plus humain, un monde nouveau pour des sociétés nouvelles.

Ceci nous amène au quatrième parallèle entre l'hérésie et la migration, à savoir que c'est dans les failles et les injustices du système dominant qu'aussi bien l'hérésie que la migration trouvent leur origine et leur légitimité, voire leur justification. On voit que les migrations actuelles se sont amplifiées depuis la décennie 1990, au moment où ont commencé à se faire sentir les effets des politiques macroéconomiques et des programmes d'ajustement structurel initiés par les institutions financières internationales quelques années plus tôt, sous la houlette des pays riches¹⁰. Les migrations, comme les hérésies, ne sauraient laisser personne indifférent, notamment en raison des multiples défis et problèmes nouveaux qu'elles soulèvent.

Dès lors, comment réagir ?

Une première option serait d'organiser la chasse au migrant comme jadis la chasse à l'hérétique, dans l'espoir que la disparition des hérétiques ou des migrants fera disparaître le fait hérétique ou le fait migratoire. Mais on a vu que cette voie était aussi impraticable que vouée à l'échec.

La deuxième option consisterait à déplacer le combat contre les migrations du terrain physique au terrain discursif et de parvenir à une dé-légitimation publique et universelle des migrations (comme on l'a fait jadis des hérésies). Mais cette voie semble également vouée à l'échec: on ne peut délégitimer l'aspiration à un mieux-être d'une si grande partie de la population mondiale. *La troisième option* résulterait de l'échec des deux premières et consisterait à laisser l'hérésie s'établir en système extérieur au système dominant, comme une Eglise tolérée. Cela équivaldrait à prôner en quelque sorte le *statu quo*, la constitution de deux mondes, celui des pauvres d'un côté et celui des riches de l'autre. Les mouvements migratoires actuels ont prouvé à l'évidence qu'une telle coexistence n'est pas possible sur le long terme. Aucune puissance militaire ne pourrait empêcher le choc de ces deux mondes dont l'un aspire inexorablement au mieux-être dont l'autre jouit et le prive en partie. Il semble bien que cette voie est également impraticable, car vouée à procurer à l'humanité un avenir sombre, dont Jacques Attali n'hésite pas à déjà écrire l'histoire.¹¹

Reste *une quatrième et dernière option*. Elle consisterait en ce que la doctrine dominante accepte d'une certaine manière la légitimité et la pertinence de l'hérésie, puis qu'elle corrige en son sein les failles qui en ont permis l'émergence. C'est sans doute le moyen le mieux indiqué pour, à la fois, désamorcer l'hérésie et se renouveler, même si cela peut être une opération douloureuse. Une telle option amènerait les Occidentaux à reconnaître la pertinence des vérités (pas toujours aisées à admettre) dont l'hérésie migratoire est porteuse. A savoir que, sauf brusque changement du cours des choses, nos sociétés sont appelées à connaître un brassage de grande ampleur dans les décennies à venir. Il en résultera, qu'on le veuille ou non, un métissage profond de nos sociétés, semblable à celui qui s'est opéré en Amérique latine où il est aujourd'hui difficile, voire impossible, de dire si tel Mexicain ou tel Péruvien a des ancêtres européens, amérindiens ou peut-être africains. Il est possible qu'un phénomène de ce genre attende l'Europe et nul nostalgie du passé ne pourra l'empêcher.

Telle est sans doute une des vérités qu'apporte le fait migratoire et qu'il faut assumer dès à présent en travaillant à l'avènement pacifié d'un monde autre. Les lignes qui suivent entendent indiquer quelques impératifs auxquels tous sont désormais tenus de se soumettre.

Migrations et impératifs de renouvellement

Les impératifs dont il s'agit se présentent à la fois sous la forme de défis à réaliser et d'obstacles à surmonter. *In fine*, le problème de fond que posent les migrations est celui de l'autre, de sa différence, de sa place et de son rôle. Si les migrations promettent une coexistence de plus en plus proche, il est temps de commencer à déshabituer, ou même à exorciser, les esprits de certains clichés répugnants et de mécanismes discriminatoires récurrents *vis-à-vis* des autres. Cet exorcisme devra être radical et rigoureux, pour être efficace. Il devra remonter aux sources profondes des mécanismes et les extirper à la racine même. Aussi ne suffira-t-il pas d'indiquer l'ethnocentrisme comme la cause fondamentale des mécanismes de rejet de l'étranger; car cette démarche laisserait ouverte la question de l'émergence elle-même de l'ethnocentrisme.

Extirper les racines de la discrimination

Dans son ouvrage susmentionné (cf. *supra*, note 5), K. Stenou tente de dégager l'importance de ces « vieilleries » que sont le mythe et le préjugé dans l'effort de compréhension des mécanismes de l'exclusion et de la discrimination à notre époque. Elle montre que ces phénomènes sont primordialement tributaires de longues traditions mythiques, de préjugés enfouis dans les mémoires et toujours prêts à renaître pour nourrir d'une mythologie perverse les attitudes et pratiques *vis-à-vis* des différents. Pour y parvenir, K. Stenou nous propose un voyage au cœur de nos préjugés, le but étant « d'éclairer de quelques coups de projecteurs les obscurs cavernes d'une interminable préhistoire du préjugé quand, à partir d'incertitudes et de réticences, de peurs fugitives et d'angoisses profondes, les mythes prennent racines, prolifèrent et se fortifient, alors même que l'ouverture au monde et la découverte d'horizons nouveaux auraient dû les affaiblir ou les extirper ». ¹²

En prendre acte et tâcher de pallier les mécanismes de discrimination qui sont encore à l'œuvre dans nos sociétés paraît aujourd'hui d'autant plus important que le phénomène de globalisation accentue inexorablement les flux migratoires et pose en conséquence avec plus d'acuité le problème de la gestion des différences. Aussi importe-t-il de se demander quels scénarios réservent les mouvements migratoires sans cesse croissants. Pourrons ou saurons-nous « composer » avec l'ampleur de cet ailleurs culturel toujours plus varié, toujours plus inexorablement différent et déroutant? Saurons-nous préserver les acquis juridiques, éthiques et anthropologiques concernant le respect de l'intégrité de chacun, de tout être humain, quel qu'il soit et d'où qu'il vienne ? Sans nier ni minimiser les peurs réelles que suscitent les mouvements migratoires, comment éliminer les craintes imaginaires et les réflexes qui en font systématiquement des lieux de violence potentielle, des ferments d'actes discriminatoires ?

S'adapter à l'inexorable multiculturalité des sociétés

Dans notre expérience actuelle, la réalité de nos sociétés est celle d'une hétérogénéité sans cesse croissante. Toute société est aujourd'hui hétérogène d'une certaine façon. De ce fait aucune n'échappe en principe au cycle infernal de l'intolérance. Le processus de globalisation en cours accentue cette hétérogénéité en brisant progressivement les cloisonnements et les niches culturelles. Le risque d'une monoculture planétaire semble vite compensé par un mouvement inverse. La montée des extrémismes (séparatistes, sécessionnistes, indépendantistes ou encore nationalistes et religieux) à laquelle nous assistons illustre bien ce processus inverse par lequel des minorités tendent à se rétracter pour éviter d'être anéanties ou de devenir anonymes dans le mouvement de globalisation. Ces replis identitaires engendrent de nouvelles formes de différenciation socioculturelle qui elles-mêmes convoquent sans cesse à de nouvelles formes d'adaptation, d'intégration, d'acceptation et de tolérance mutuelle.

Tolérance

La première exigence à laquelle tous sont par conséquent astreints dans la lente construction de sociétés pluriculturelles consiste à vaincre sans cesse la double tentation à laquelle ils sont de plus en plus soumis: condamner les comportements qui heurtent affectivement, et nier les différences qui ne sont pas comprises intellectuellement. Dans cette perspective, les différences apparaissent comme des traits différentiels susceptibles d'engendrer des différences encore plus déroutantes, et cela sous l'effet même du mouvement tendant à les faire disparaître. On peut ainsi penser qu'au fur et à mesure que le mouvement de globalisation s'accroît, inversement, les particularismes se multiplieront et se raidiront. Rien ne sera donc définitivement établi, ni sur le plan des idées ni sur celui des comportements. Vraisemblablement, il faudra sans cesse se recycler, sans cesse sortir du nombrilisme pour s'ouvrir à la nouveauté étrange des autres. Il s'agira de favoriser en permanence les conditions et les modalités *d'une culture de la sortie de sa culture*. Le phénomène de la mondialisation qui accélère les migrations est déjà d'une aide efficace en ce sens, car en nous ouvrant de force à d'autres univers culturels, il invite à désacraliser la culture et offre à chacun l'opportunité d'ouvrir sa particularité à celle de l'autre. Ce processus restera requis tant que la sortie de sa propre culture ne sera que partielle, mais toujours il faudra veiller à ne pas la confondre avec la dilution dans le tout ou le même, empêchant le déploiement des spécificités culturelles. Comme le dit Michel Alliot, « pour préserver la dignité de l'homme », il faut préserver « sa richesse, c'est-à-dire sa diversité ». ¹³ C'est pourquoi l'ouverture culturelle est nécessairement proportionnelle au degré de tolérance réciproque à propos des différences fondamentales. Une tolérance dont on conviendra avec K. Stenou qu'elle « n'est pas la résultante obligée d'une évolution positive sans replis ni revers, mais que chaque génération doit en redécouvrir l'impérieuse nécessité; que ses idéaux n'expriment pas un concept immuable et figé, mais une notion dynamique qui peut s'enrichir de nouveaux acquis dans un souci de perpétuelle vigilance ». ¹⁴

Vigilance et prévoyance

La vigilance est d'une importance capitale en ce domaine. En effet, lorsqu'on oublie que chaque homme porte tout à la fois les virtualités de l'humain et de la bête, du monstre et du saint, lorsqu'on ignore que ces virtualités peuvent aisément se déployer chaque fois que les conditions le permettent, alors on sombre dans un sommeil qui peut conduire à des tragédies, comme le montrent celles qui ont traversé le

XX^e siècle, et dont certaines se poursuivent encore. Cette vigilance devra prendre la forme de la prévoyance. Car, comme le montre K. Stenou, des formes de rejet et d'altération de l'autre se nourrissent encore aujourd'hui de clichés réducteurs, de traditions mythiques et de craintes imaginaires. Elles engendrent ce qu'on peut qualifier avec Umberto Eco d'intolérance sauvage,¹⁵ parce qu'imperméable à la critique rationnelle. Ainsi, la vigilance ne peut être efficace que si elle s'exerce dans des structures de prévention et des programmes éducatifs dès le plus jeune âge. Car l'intolérance sauvage se combat à la racine, par une éducation constante qui doit commencer dès la plus tendre enfance, avant qu'elle soit écrite dans un livre, et avant qu'elle ne devienne une croûte comportementale trop épaisse et trop dure. Cette éducation ne se voudra pas seulement théorique. Elle devra favoriser l'échange, la rencontre et l'acceptation effective de l'autre dans sa différence. On ne redira jamais assez que le lieu par excellence où s'exorcissent les préjugés, les vecteurs de la discrimination et de l'intolérance, est celui de la confrontation réelle, de l'échange concret, de l'apprentissage quotidien. C'est là que se démentent progressivement les mythes de l'intolérance et de l'exclusion, les accusations réciproques de barbarie ou de sauvagerie. C'est là que l'on découvre que le prétendu barbare est un semblable malgré les différences apparentes. C'est là enfin que l'on découvre avec Lévi-Strauss, que « le barbare, c'est d'abord celui qui croit à la barbarie »¹⁶, qui en fait un critère discriminatoire et un motif d'exclusion.

Si la vigilance (via la prévoyance) apparaît ainsi comme la puissance, le mouvement qui doit prévenir l'inhumanité, la tolérance quant à elle s'avère en être l'acte, le révélateur phénoménologique en même temps que le vecteur éthique. En cela, la tolérance s'inscrit dans un processus dynamique où elle se distingue nettement de l'indifférence, autre forme policée de discrimination. Lévi-Strauss l'a bien compris et nous met en garde. « La tolérance n'est pas une position contemplative, dispensant les indulgences à ce qui fut ou à ce qui est. C'est une attitude dynamique qui consiste à prévoir, à comprendre et à promouvoir ce qui veut être. Car la diversité des cultures humaines est derrière nous, autour de nous et devant nous. La seule exigence que nous puissions faire valoir à son endroit (créatrice pour chaque individu des devoirs correspondants) est qu'elle se réalise sous des formes dont chacune soit une contribution à la plus grande générosité des autres ».¹⁷

Que conclure?

Pour reprendre une image sur laquelle s'ouvre *L'homme nomade* de Jacques Attali, l'histoire de l'humanité est semblable à celle d'une caravane. La sédentarité n'est qu'une brève parenthèse dans l'histoire de cette caravane; une parenthèse qui a vu l'invention des États, dont certains voudraient paradoxalement empêcher la caravane humaine de poursuivre son chemin, celui de la libération de l'homme et de l'amélioration de ses conditions de vie. *In fine*, la migration se présente comme ce par quoi nous devenons des humains, ce par quoi nous nous libérons des contraintes naturelles, sociales et politiques pour émerger comme hommes, accéder à un mieux-être. Vouloir interrompre ou maîtriser ce mouvement semble en définitive relever soit de l'utopie, soit de l'ignorance. C'est dans sa mobilité que la caravane humaine se régénère et se renouvelle pour se perpétuer. Aussi est-ce davantage l'absence de migrations vers l'Occident qui le menacerait de disparition ou de décadence. Les migrations en garantissent le renouvellement, même si certaines modalités ne peuvent être totalement maîtrisées, du fait de la nature difficilement contrôlable des mouvements migratoires. Dès lors, il nous revient désormais impérativement d'amorcer les processus de conversion nécessaires à l'avènement des brassages et métissages annoncés.

Au-delà des exigences d'ordre politique et économique, c'est dans ces conversions fondamentales des esprits que se trouvent les ressorts essentiels des sociétés multiculturelles présentes et à venir. Alors, il faut apprendre à nous décentrer, à relativiser notre particularité pour faire de la place à l'autre et enrichir notre identité de sa différence. La paix du futur, dans nos sociétés métissées issues des migrations, sera à ce prix. Car c'est en les soustrayant à leur historicité et à leur contingence, en les constituant en réalités absolues et intemporelles, qu'on a fait de l'ethnie, de l'État, de la nation, de la religion, de la culture, de la frontière, de la propriété et de l'argent, des divinités sanglantes et meurtrières.

Références

¹Cité par Abdelmalek Sayad, *L'immigration, ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*. Bruxelles, De Boeck-Wesmael, 1991, Préface, p. 9. A. Sayad relève en conséquence que l'immigration est en général préalablement constituée en problème avant d'être l'objet des sciences sociales (cf. *ibid.* p. 62-63).

² À ce propos, Ernest-Marie Mbonda, affirme que « L'histoire de l'humanité est celle de l'exclusion des migrants ou des étrangers, ou de leur intégration utilitariste, sous le mode de l'exploitation, de l'esclavagisation ». (La justice globale et le droit d'être migrant, Sherbrooke, éditions GGC, 2005, p. 21). Voir les chapitres IV et V pour plus de détails sur l'universalité du rejet de l'étranger, de la Grèce antique à l'Afrique contemporaine, avec notamment les cas de l'Afrique du Sud, de la Côte d'Ivoire, de la Guinée équatoriale, du Gabon, de la Lybie. C'est le lieu de préciser que malgré l'extraordinaire publicité qui leur est faite en Occident, les migrations des Africains sont pour l'essentiel internes, c'est-à-dire qu'elles se déploient à l'intérieur du continent africain.

³ Il s'agit en premier lieu de la diffusion récurrente d'images de migrants échouant par centaines sur nos plages ou essayant de traverser clandestinement les frontières. Les spectres de l'invasion barbare et de l'irruption de la misère du monde sont ainsi continuellement entretenus, l'objectif étant, entre autres, de légitimer les mesures contre les migrants. Notons aussi les expulsions massives de migrants, l'établissement des quotas d'expulsions et d'accueil, l'augmentation des mesures restrictives pour l'obtention des visas, le renforcement de la coopération entre États pour lutter contre les migrations illégales, la subordination de l'aide aux pays tiers à la lutte contre les migrations illégales, la construction de barrières visibles et invisibles entre pays riches et pauvres, l'intensification des contrôles aux frontières, la création de nouveaux instruments législatifs pour réguler, contrôler et désormais criminaliser les migrations non autorisées, la création d'institutions et de campagnes de sensibilisation pour préserver l'identité nationale, la limitation voire l'interdiction de l'expression culturelle des étrangers. En outre, la question migratoire est régulièrement évoquée dans les médias en rapport avec un problème : immigration et emploi, immigration et chômage, immigration et sécurité, analphabétisme, intégration, délinquance, criminalité, logement, etc. Avec le temps, même la vieillesse des immigrés commence à entrer dans le lot des problèmes que posent les migrations aux sociétés occidentales.

⁴ Propos prêté à L. Goldman par Mohammed Fouad Ammor, « Rapport de synthèse » (p. 223-231), dans *La migration clandestine, enjeux et perspectives*, Actes du colloque organisé par l'Association Marocaine d'Études et de Recherche sur les Migrations, Rabat, 29 au 29 avril 1999, p. 228.

⁵ C'est par souci de simplicité que nous utilisons les référents géographiques « Nord » et « Sud » pour désigner l'espace géographique occupé par les pays économiquement développés, et celui occupé par les pays économiquement sous-développés ou en voie de développement, en l'occurrence la plupart des pays africains. Toutefois, le fait d'adopter cette terminologie ne signifie pas que nous ignorons les mécanismes ethnocentriques qui en ont favorisé l'émergence, mécanismes en vertu desquels chaque peuple tend à se placer géographiquement au centre du monde, rejetant les autres soit en dessous (au Sud), soit à la périphérie. Pour plus de détails, voir Katerina Stenou, *Images de l'Autre. La Différence: du Mythe au Préjugé*, Paris, Seuil/Éditions UNESCO, 1998, p. 133-134.

⁶ L'imposition ici est bien souvent le résultat de la puissance des médias du Nord, qui tendent à uniformiser les discours.

⁷ À titre d'illustration, on peut évoquer ici le phénomène de migrations virtuelles qui se développent notamment entre l'Inde et les États-Unis d'Amérique, avec ces informaticiens basés en Inde mais qui travaillent pour des firmes américaines, sans être toutefois soumis à la législation américaine du travail. Pour plus de détails à ce propos, voir A. Aneesh,

« Repenser les migrations: les flux de "matière grise" de l'Inde vers les États-Unis », p. 45-46, dans *Genèse et enjeux des migrations internationales, Alternatives Sud*, vol. 11-2004/1.

⁸ Umberto Eco, *Cinq questions de morale*, Paris, Grasset, 1997, p. 153-154.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

¹⁰ Ces politiques ont contribué au démantèlement des politiques sociales dans les pays pauvres, processus qui se poursuit encore aujourd'hui, notamment à travers les exigences du marché libre qui privent ces pays de leur souveraineté économique. Faute de perspectives d'avenir dans leur pays, ces populations entreprennent tout naturellement, comme le font instinctivement les animaux en quête d'eau ou de nourriture pendant la saison sèche, de migrer vers des lieux plus cléments, où ils espèrent trouver de meilleures conditions de vie.

¹¹ Jacques Attali, *Une brève histoire de l'avenir*. Paris, Fayard, 2006. Voir également du même auteur, *L'homme nomade*, Paris, Fayard, 2003.

¹² Katerina Stenou, *o.c.*, p. 12.

¹³ *Le droit et le service public au miroir de l'anthropologie*, textes choisis et édités par Camille Kuyu, Paris, Kathala, 2003, p. 245.

¹⁴ K. Stenour, o.c, p. 110.

¹⁵ Cf. U. Eco, o.c, p. 164-166.

¹⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale deux*. Paris, Plon, 1973, p. 384.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 422.

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Migrant Youth and the Mission of the Church

A pastoral-theological reflection

The worldwide movement of migration has many faces

The worldwide migration movement with its many aspects provokes manifold reactions from all sections and levels of society. Since it affects all levels and groups of society, all have to respond adequately to the challenges posed by this movement.

Migration is often determined by a free decision of the migrants themselves, taken fairly frequently not only for economic reasons but also for cultural, technical or scientific motives. As such it is for the most part a clear indication of social, economic and demographic imbalance on a regional or world-wide level, which drives people to emigrate (EM 1).

It is no surprise that especially young people take the risk to emigrate. Quite often they are commissioned by their families to find new sources of income to assist their relatives in their struggle to earn their livelihood for survival.

Since the late 1980's Italy is experiencing the immigration of tens of thousands young Bangladeshi men. The story of their dedicated struggle to reach the Italian labour market is outstanding. Although a great percentage of them are immigrants with documents and legal employment, they often started with no documents and without any official employment as street vendors or windscreen cleaners at the traffic lights.

In the last decade Rome, the Italian capital, has experienced an unending stream of young male migrants from Afghanistan, mainly belonging to the Farsi speaking Azara population, an ethnic group which makes up around 20% of Afghanistan's population. Italy was often not the country where they had planned to settle. So many moved further to reach countries like Norway, Sweden and Great Britain.

Over the last two decades European countries have made it increasingly more difficult for migrants and refugees to enter legally or illegally. The fingerprint regulation among the European Governments enabled them to send migrants without documents back to the country where they had first entered in Europe. Even after several years of successful participation in educational programmes migrants are expelled when such fingerprint identification is discovered in another European country. Italy has another visible number of young migrants from the Maghreb countries in North Africa. Despite their common Muslim background the two groups show very different patterns of adaptation and integration into Italian society and the labour market.

Let us take a look as well at two increasingly visible groups in Italian society from overseas. First of all there is the huge group of immigrants from the Philippines. Women had been the pioneers of Filipino migration and they might still be the dominant factor in this migration movement. But once they found a place in Italian society their husbands and children could settle here as well. More and more children from Filipino parents or mixed marriages with a Filipino parent are being born in the new home country. The number of male migrants from this country is also slowly increasing, especially in the form of family unification. Husbands are allowed to enter the country where their wives found work many years earlier. Here too we encounter an increasing number of migrant youth from the second and third generation, some were still born in the Philippines but more and more are being born in Italy.

Filipinos have a great advantage which helps them to build relationships with Italians. They both come from cultures with a Catholic sacramental culture and worldview. Many Catholic Filipinos are joining Filipino faith communities in their new home country. The first initiative often comes from the migrants themselves. Women play a special role in community life since such communities have many aspects in common with Domestic or House Churches and Christian Neighborhood communities. An increasing number of Filipino migrant youth are looking for more specific activities among themselves inside the Catholic Migrant communities. A recent festival showed the potential and need for a specific youth ministry among the migrant youth. Intergenerational difficulties in mutual understanding and communication can be addressed and even gradually overcome when the migrant youth have their own places to meet, to talk and to celebrate.

The next increasingly visible group in Italy and especially in the economic and administrative capitals of Milan and Rome is the Group of Latin Americans. They come mainly from Peru and Ecuador, but also from Brazil and the other countries of this continent. The Latin Americans have several advantages in their nevertheless stony way to settle in Italy. They have partially common linguistic, religious and cultural roots with the population of their new home country, but they have their own distinct cultural, religious and linguistic roots which distinguish them from their distant 'Latin European cousins'. A great percentage of the people in this group are under 25 and more and more youngsters of the second and third generation. Latin Americans have special Catholic communities in Rome. There are also a good number of Protestant churches, usually of Pentecostal background which offer them services, pastoral care and active participation in Christian community life.

The present debate about immigrants in many Western countries is very much focused on the complex phenomenon of integration. Many established immigration countries like Canada and Australia are developing special programmes to support their immigrants, especially the young generation to get integrated into their educational system and into their labour market. European societies and their political and economic leaders are increasingly concerned about the lack of integration of the Migrant youth. The awareness is growing that European countries cannot afford to lose a whole generation of young immigrants for their labour market and as tax payers. The new citizens of the young generation have to be prepared to take over qualified jobs in the diversified labour market in a very different way from how their parents entered the labour market.

There is no lack of sociological studies which prove the disadvantages the migrant youth face compared with the youth of the host countries. Studies prove the tremendous differences which exist among migrant youth according to their respective ethnic and social background. The wide range of migrant youth stories regarding educational and professional success or failure should prevent us from making any simplification in this very complex issue. But statistics also show that migrant youth in general are either over-represented or under-represented in certain categories of educational and professional success and failure.

Questions to ask the churches

What do we really know about the Migrant Youth as members of established Christian Churches or migrant Christian communities and Churches?

What role are the Churches playing in the process of accepting and integrating migrant youth into civil society as such and of their own church members of foreign origin? The educational and social institutions run by the Christian Churches are able to play an important role in such a process. Is that role fully recognized and used by the Churches?

On looking more closely at this issue we see that the Church has always been a transnational actor with a long experience as a global player. Active international religious agents and Churches have therefore often been among the first to offer access and places to Migrant youth in their educational, social and health institutions.

The Churches' concern for migrant youth and refugees

A. The Papal Messages for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees

One way, among many, to show the Churches' concern for young migrants or youth with a background of migration is looking at the Annual Message from the Roman Pontiff for the World Migration Day, which the Catholic Church celebrates every year in January.

The concern of the Catholic Church for Migrant youth was expressed by Pope Benedict XVI¹ in his Message for the 94th World Day of Migrants and Refugees celebrated on 13 January 2008. His Message of that year was dedicated to Young Migrants. Through the Pontiff's words the Church shows its sympathetic understanding of the situation of Migrant Youth. She promotes an organic insertion process, but defends as well the right of young migrants to reject complete assimilation which would cut them off from their specific inherited cultural roots.

For the young migrants, the problems of the so-called "difficulty of dual belonging" seem to be felt in a particular way: on the one hand, they feel a strong need not to lose their culture of origin, while on the other, the understandable desire emerges in them to be inserted organically into the society that receives them, but without this implying a complete assimilation and the resulting loss of their ancestral traditions.²

Talking about different forms of abuse the Pope raises a number of questions which show his serious concern:

How can they look to the future with confidence? While it is true that much is being done for them, even greater commitment is still needed to help them by creating suitable hospitality and formative structures. Precisely from this perspective the question of how to respond to the expectations of the young migrants arises? What can be done to help them?

The Pontiff is aware that the family and schools bear the biggest part in the process of getting settled and inserted into a new cultural context and that they are often overburdened by this responsibility. Therefore they deserve full support from all sections of civil society and from the church and its various communities and associations. Migrant parents especially are not adequately prepared to deal with these new situations and the clashes arising with their children. They need not only our understanding, but even professional help and counselling.

Of course, it is necessary to aim first of all at support for the family and schools. But how complex the situations are and how numerous the difficulties these young people encounter in their family and school contexts! In families, the traditional roles that existed in the countries of origin have broken down, and a clash is often seen between parents still tied to their culture and children quickly acculturated in the new social contexts.

The young generation from families with a migration background or the so-called second/third generation migrant youth faces a number of problems and hardships, which require special understanding and willingness to reform the educational system so that youth with a migration background are not marginalized in the educational system. The Pope shows a great profoundness in addressing this challenging and complex problem. Likewise, the difficulty should not be underestimated which the young people meet in getting inserted into the educational course of study in force in the country where they are hosted. Therefore, the scholastic system itself should take their condition into consideration and provide specific formative paths of integration for the immigrant boys and girls that are suited to their needs. The commitment will also be important to create a climate of mutual respect and dialogue among all the students in the classrooms based on the universal principles and values that are common to all cultures. Everyone's commitment — teachers, families and students — will surely contribute to helping the young migrants to face in the best way possible the challenge of integration and offer them the possibility to acquire what can aid their human, cultural and professional formation. This holds even more for the young refugees for whom adequate programmes will have to be prepared, both in the scholastic and the work contexts, in order to guarantee their preparation and provide the necessary basis for a correct insertion into the new social, cultural and professional world.³

The following year the Roman Pontiff dedicated his Message to Minor Migrants and Refugees. In that Message Pope Benedict continued and deepened his reflection from the previous year. He added the theme of social integration and the role educational and social structures play in it.

A typical aspect of the migration of minors is the situation of children born in the host country or of those who do not live with their parents, who emigrated after their birth, but joined them later. These adolescents belong to two cultures with all the advantages and problems attached to their dual background, a condition that can nevertheless offer them the opportunity to experience the wealth of an encounter between different cultural traditions. It is important that these young people be given the possibility of attending school and subsequently of being integrated into the world of work, and that their social integration be facilitated by appropriate educational and social structures. It should never be forgotten that adolescence constitutes a fundamental phase for the formation of human beings.⁴

B. Pastoral concerns

We are used to admit that we live in a globalized world. We talk and read in recent years a lot about the globalization of the financial markets and the globalized economy. Only slowly do we see how much the worldwide movement of migration is related to the global forces which influence all the national and local economies and labour markets and the disparities which result from such forces: the globalization of migration, the globalization of poverty, the globalization of human life as such and life-styles as its expression, and a growing awareness of a globalization of collective responsibility. The need of international meetings and conferences organized by the United Nations and its bodies as well as with national political and economic leaders is obvious and not denied. How effective they are is not always so obvious and their effectiveness could be improved. But how do the Local Churches (dioceses) of the Catholic Church react to the globalization of migration and the globalization of collective responsibility? The challenges of migration

have to be dealt with in concrete local contexts. The Roman Pontiff as we have seen with the example of the Messages for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees point to the challenges we all face in our globalized world, but the pastoral responses have to be given in the practical context by the concrete local Church. The role of advocacy the Church feels obliged to play is fulfilled by the Universal Church on global level as well as the local Churches on the regional and national levels.

The migrant youth ministry needs active agents in the local churches. It has a kind of *ecclesiogenesis*, an ecclesial ministry born, nourished, developed and lived out by Christians, first of all by the Christian Migrant families and youth themselves as well as by the welcoming local Christians and their communities who respond to a call they have received from the Holy Spirit which guided their discernment process of the signs of the times. The local Churches have to undergo such a process to discover that God has called us to transform our Christian communities into communities which are evangelized by serving the marginalized and becoming evangelizing communities for their own members and beyond their borders.

Who is getting involved in the projects with and for migrant youth?

Who is integrating Christian/Catholic Migrant youth into the local Church? Are the local territorial parishes recognizing the presence of such Migrant youth? And what are they doing to welcome and respect them?

In addition we should not underestimate the power and responsibility that migrant youth have their own process of settling into a value system, culture, society and Church which differs in many ways from the value system, culture, society and Church they received from their parents, relatives and people from their particular country of origin.

We know the tremendous importance of being accepted by their peers in school, among friends, in the neighborhood and work place has for these young people.

All people assisting migrant youth in education and formation have to be receptive human beings with empathy for the young generation. Family, schools and parishes as well as social and administrative institutions are first of all made up of people and only with a human face can institutions play their role as partners in the process of assisting the young generation to mature and grow into precious members of society.

Even the most fundamental institution, the family, cannot shoulder the task of raising and accompanying the young generation alone. The family needs the support and solidarity of other families faced with the same task. The migrant family has to carry an even heavier burden and is therefore more in need of support from other migrant and local 'native' families. It is not easy for them to build up good relations with families in their new country of residence. Only if they have such contacts can they fully arrive and settle in the new country.

All these issues are even more important for migrant youth. They can easily find friends from migrant families from the same linguistic and ethnic origin. But making friends with peers of the country where they now live during their most important years will make a great difference. Every young person is longing to be accepted by his/ her peers in the place they live. If they are not fully accepted by members of the host country and even if they feel they are being labelled as "strangers" with a negative connotation their insertion process into the new country and culture will remain ambivalent and incomplete. Such ambivalence creates in children and youth a situation of psychological stress which can hinder their healthy growth into mature and responsible human beings and members of society with consequences for their educational and professional development. Such migrant youth stand out in the statistics on school drop-outs and those failing to complete their professional training and studies as many studies in different Western countries show.

The Church's mission is first of all to be available and at the service of the migrant youth and their families in general and the Catholic migrant families and youth in particular.

The Church as universal sign of salvation

Proclaiming the Good News that God's Reign has come, according to Mark (Mk 1:14), is the real mission of Jesus. The Church's mission can be nothing less than to continue this mission of Jesus'. "It is the Kingdom present now that creates the Church and keeps it constantly in existence. The Church is therefore the result of the Spirit, who makes God's final saving intentionality effectively present as the true source of the community called Church.... The Church contains what it signifies: a community in which the Kingdom is already present and mediated to all who come in contact with this community".⁵

The Church as the People of God is not built on the *ius sanguinis* but is born from the power of God's Spirit which unites us all from all tongues, nations and cultures into the people of the new Covenant. Since the Pentecost the Church is built up from people of all nations, languages and cultures. The communion experience in the Church is rooted in the communion all members of the Church find in God.

"The task of the Church to be at the service of the Reign cannot be reduced to a mere collaboration among persons of goodwill in the common effort towards the transformation of humanity. The Church, conscious of being the custodian of the 'mystery' revealed by God in Christ, has a specific mission of illuminating, guiding and stimulating the history of humankind in such a way as to endorse, both in a formal and conscious way, the realization of the Reign of God here and now in this world".⁶ The Church as such is the visible sacrament that means sign and instrument of the Reign of God in humankind. But how does the Church live and realize her mission as universal sign and instrument of God's salvation? Where can such a reality be encountered? Alberich, a Spanish practical theologian, gives us a very helpful explanation.

"The ideal of the Reign of God is made present in the world in the four fundamental forms of ecclesial visibility:

- Reign of God realized in love and service to people (sign of *diakonia*);
- Reign of God lived in fraternity and in communion (sign of *koinonia*);
- Reign of God proclaimed in the Salvific proclamation of the Gospel (sign of *martyria*);
- Reign of God celebrated in the celebrative and liberating rites of the Christian celebrations (sign of *leitourgia*).⁷

The *koinonia* is more than a life style of the members of the Church, it is a constituting element of the Church which binds them together in fraternal love and solidarity and enables them for mission. The Church as *koinonia* is the Church as sacrament, a place to encounter God's grace and loving presence. We cannot talk about *koinonia* without talking at the same time about the Churches' mission to celebrate the Reign of God in its ecclesial visibility in the dimension of the *leitourgia*. The celebrating Christian community is already a missionary community by dimension.⁸ The church's mission is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people on earth. Direct first and new evangelization, but as well life witness and catechetical instruction can be forms of that ministry of the Church. Without the ministry of service in assisting and promoting people to life as human beings loved by God and made in his image, which is performed in all the forms and activities of solidarity, in all forms of human growth and liberation, in human education and formation, her mission will lack an essential element. The Church's very nature and self-understanding flow from that mission of proclaiming God's Reign among humankind. As a visible sign and instrument of God's love she performs her mission in this four visible signs of *koinonia*, *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*. All four signs belong to her. Therefore no ecclesial ministry can be carried out without one of these signs.

We are talking here about the Pastoral care of Migrant Youth and the Pastoral care of Migrant Families in the context and activities of the local Churches and by the Christian communities.

Pastoral care for migrant youth in a globalized world

Youth Ministry can be characterized as the multiform activity whereby the Christian community, in the light of its self-understanding as a community "*animated by the Holy Spirit*", empowers the young to become agent-subjects-in-relationship and to advance towards fullness-of-life-for-all through concrete life-situations, and thus contribute to building up in the world God's Reign, proclaimed and manifested in and by Jesus Christ.⁹

Migrant youth feel especially the need to be accepted and integrated into the society and public culture they live in. What does integration mean for them? Growing up in the country, learning the language is in most cases not the biggest challenge. It will happen in a natural way if they are enrolled in pre-schools before their enrollment into primary schools. The familiar background will still be the most influential factor in early motivation to learn the language of the country.

Integration should be understood as a complex and reciprocal process which involves not only the immigrants and refugees but the receiving society as well. The migrants must be able to participate in their own way and at their own pace in the public and accessible community life of their host countries. Mastering the national language is of course essential for exchanges with members of that host culture and society, but there will also be other 'stones' or difficulties on the way. They must be recognized so that the integration process which respects both the host culture and the culture of the immigrant can take place. Otherwise the many obstacles the immigrant will meet on his journey are so many 'stumbling blocks' but once recognized and used as positive opportunities to increase communion and understanding among immigrants and the local population and their culture they will be transformed into 'stepping stones'.

The Churches' mission is first of all to be a witness of hope and human liberation. As such she has to give encouragement and motivation to the immigrants to help them to use their own talents and imagination on their life journey as immigrants.

Immigrants should not be seen primarily as people to be pitied and helped. They have to be recognized as individuals with their own dignity and their own human resources. This makes even more sense when we talk about migrant youth. They want to have a real chance for social integration, which includes being legally accepted and integrated as citizens who have equal access to the social security and health systems, the educational system and professional training system. Even more important for them is that they be recognized and respected as being different due to their cultural, religious, ethical and linguistic roots, which form an essential part of their identity.

Pastoral care for migrant youth can be carried out therefore only in a dialogical, ecumenical, interreligious and intercultural way.

Pastoral care for migrants and their integration does not happen in an empty space, it happens in a given social and cultural context with people from different social and cultural backgrounds and formation. But it is important to notice that all the actors in such an intercultural process are people who are always bound to their own culture, religion or religious tradition (there is also plurality within the same church) and tradition. The term 'pastoral care' might be understood to mean only care for the migrant as a member of our church. But perhaps we should broaden our vision and look at what is already a reality worldwide with *Caritas* acting on the diocesan, national and international levels, the Jesuit Refugee Service and with the Roman based Sant' Egidio community with its worldwide activities in favour of migrants and refugees. Is that not also a ministry of the church for and with migrants? The activities of the JRS and Sant' Egidio for non-Christian migrants and refugees aim to protect the human dignity of those people by assisting them in the difficult process of their integration and earning a livelihood. Their approach is built on the profound belief that migrants in general, and the migrant youth in particular, are the main agents of their own human and professional growth and that they should not be degraded as mere objects of charitable care and assistance.

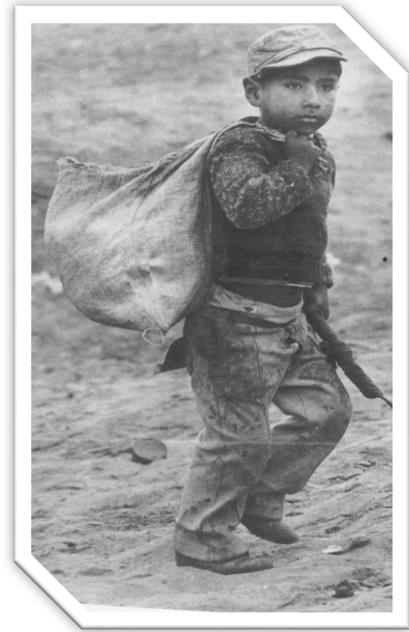
All migrant ministry by the Church has to be dialogical, ecumenical, intercultural and interreligious in its approach to build up a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

The integration of migrants and refugees is built on three pillars:

1. First of all built on a culture of dialogical communication
2. Second, they need access to the labour market to earn their own livelihood.
3. Third, they must be able to participate in their own way in the life of civil society.¹⁰

Towards a specific ministry for migrant youth

Do we really need a specific ministry or pastoral apostolate for migrant youth? Or can we integrate the migrant youth into our ordinary youth ministry? I think we need a double strategy. First, we have to help our



Christian communities to become aware of the presence and particular cultural heritage of migrant youth in our midst. Christian communities and the local Churches have to create places to encounter one another. That needs a welcoming and trustful atmosphere on both sides. Young people are usually more open to venture on such a journey to encounter the other's 'otherness', but here they do not need to travel to other continents; they have to discover that the representatives from other cultures already live in their own neighborhood.

A Symposium of European Bishops, held in 2002, came to an important conclusion regarding the significance of youth and indicating an approach of real pastoral conversion.

“Evangelizing the young and letting oneself be evangelized by them’ becomes a reciprocity that corresponds to a Church as communion to which Vatican II calls us. Today the providence of God calls the Churches of Europe to consider *young* Christians not only as a specific sector or object of youth apostolate, but to recognize them and receive them as a gift of Christ to his Church in her mission, 'reading' situations and problems with them and realizing programmes and initiatives with them. That means making a change for the better, a real pastoral conversion. So helping them in their formation, establishing forms of listening, dialogue, meeting, and planning with them is to fulfil God's will.¹¹

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor indicates some very important aspects:

So this is a time for very acute listening, not least to our young people. Young people are more in touch with the changing tempo of our times than we are. It follows that they have a crucial part to play in the intense dialogue which must take place between the Church and the modern world, as part of the preamble to discovering new and meaningful ways to evangelise — to spread the Good News.¹²

Crucial questions were raised by the English Primate.

Are we in dialogue with contemporary culture and young people, and they with us, or are we talking past each other? Because if we are not in dialogue we cannot be evangelisers. Jesus engaged with those he met. He spoke to them about themselves. Are we talking to young people about their lives?¹³

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor is convinced that the experience of community life is particularly helpful and needed for personal growth both of youth and young adults. That counts most for Migrant and refugee youth. Therefore we need Christian ministers, Faithful and communities who are led by God's Spirit to encourage young people to consider sharing their unique gifts (particularly the gifts of joy, of healing and of forgiveness), for a time, in a community setting.¹⁴

Migrant ministry as based on the Christian Brotherhood experience

Any authentic Christian ministry is geared towards *oikodome*, the edification of the Church community, where God's Reign is manifested and proclaimed. The Austrian Pastoral theologian Paul M. Zulehner says:

the Church is composed by too many immature members who have not developed their life of faith. Therefore there is a lack of vital and efficacious communities. The response to this shortage of community should be only the edification of community.¹⁵

Zulehner sees the *koinonia* as a mystic fruit, quoting the second Eucharistic prayer: "May all of us who share in the Body and Blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit".¹⁶

The call to follow Christ has in all times given birth to manifold communities conceived as 'family of God', where all are God's children and therefore the members of the Christian communities experience each other as brothers and sisters related to God. The 'fraternity' (*koinonia*) became therefore the essential characteristic of the Christian community.¹⁷ The young theologian Joseph Ratzinger wrote 1960:

Christian brotherhood is above all brotherhood based on the common paternity of God... the fatherhood of God is mediated by the Son, and including brotherly union in the Son. If, therefore, Christian brotherhood is to be vitally realized, both a vital knowledge of the fatherhood of God and a vital joining with Jesus Christ in a unity of grace are necessary¹⁸

Gaudium et Spes states clearly:

As the first born of many brethren and through the gift of His Spirit, He founded after His death and Resurrection a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love. This He did through His Body, which is the Church. There everyone, as members one of the other, would render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each. This solidarity must be constantly increased....(n. 32)

End Notes

¹ MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI FOR THE 94th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (13 January 2008) *Young Migrants*, in www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes20071018_world-migrants-day_en.html

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI FOR THE 96th WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (2010) Theme: *Minor migrants and refugees*, in www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091016_world-migrants-day_en.html Date of publication: 16 October 2009

⁵ J. Fuellenbach, *Church — Community for the Kingdom*, Orbis Books, New York 2002, pp. 88-89.

⁶ E. Alberich - J. Vallabaraj, *Communicating a faith that transforms*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2004, 38-39.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁸ "Newbegin (1958) has introduced the helpful distinction between the church's missionary dimension and its missionary intention". D BOSCH, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis Books, New York 1991, p.373.

⁹ J. Vallabaraj, *Animating the Young. An Introduction to a Holistic Paradigm of Youth Ministry*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2005, p. 7.

¹⁰ Cfr. J. Voss, *L'approccio pastorale verso una più stabile integrazione dei migranti e dei rifugiati nel contesto del dialogo ecumenico, interreligioso e interculturale*, *People on the Move*, XLI n. 111, December 2009, 157-162.

¹¹ Final message, X Symposium of the European Bishops, Rome, 28 April 2002. The 10th Symposium of European Bishops on the theme "Youth of Europe in the process of change. Laboratory of the faith" took place in Rome, 24-28 April 2002.

¹² Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, *Evangelising the Young in a Post-modern Europe*, 10th symposium of European Bishops 2002.

¹³ "Community is hugely important in a post-modern culture, suspicious of institutions and top-down evangelisation. One of the most profoundly formative experiences in the evangelisation of a young person is the experience of a shared faith journey. Young people meet Jesus in each other. That experience of communion must be encouraged in our parishes and in our dioceses. There are all sorts of ways in which that can be achieved — pilgrimages, justice and peace work, fellowship groups. Even more powerful, and in a sense contradictory — in contemporary terms -is the experience of community life. This can be particularly helpful for personal growth in the period between leaving school (or university) and when we become engaged in the kind of commitments which make availability for service and community life more difficult. We should actively encourage our young people to try living a more explicit community life. It goes without saying that we ourselves need to experience community life. But I will return to that in a moment... One test we

should apply to assure the authenticity of our communities is that they are centred on, witness to and build up the unique gift of every human person. If they do not, they may not be authentically Christian, and we should be vigilant." — *ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵ P.M. Zulehner, *Teologia Pastorale. 2. Pastorale della comunità. Luoghi di prassi cristiana*, Queriniana, Brescia 1992, 138.

¹⁶ In German it says: "Wir bitten dich: Schenke uns Anteil an Christi Leib und Blut und lass uns eins werden durch den heiligen Geist". In Italian it says: "Ti preghiamo umilmente: per la comunione al corpo e al sangue di Cristo lo Spirito Santo ci riunisca in un solo corpo".

¹⁷ Cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Die christliche Brüderlichkeit*, Kösel Verlag, München 1960.

¹⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Christian Brotherhood*, Burns & Oakes, London - New York 2005, 44.



Victoria Lau, FMM
Reflections on
the Formation of Religious Sisters
in Today's China

According to the statistics of the Holy Spirit Study Centre, in 2009 there were more than 5,400 religious Sisters in mainland China. Disregarding the accuracy of this figure (because there is a joke saying that God does not even know the exact number of the religious Orders of Sisters in the world), this number is undoubtedly significant compared to the number of priests (3,300). Thus we should not overlook the role of Sisters in the development of the Catholic Church in mainland China. Statistics show that there are 100 dioceses in mainland China, and that there are 106 Congregations of Sisters. This means that in every diocese there are one or more Congregations. These figures show the importance that women religious have for the Church in China. Thus the development of the Sisters and their devotion to their vocations will definitely effect the overall development of the Church in China.

In 1996, our late Holy Father Pope John Paul II promulgated the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, and later in 2002, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life promulgated an *Instruction* with the title *Starting Afresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*. Both documents stress that the Church is very much concerned with the formation of people in consecrated life, since continuous formation can prepare them to reflect the mind and heart of Jesus in whatever circumstances they meet. The Church also demands that the formation of consecrated people should be all-round, systematic, and life-long (*Vita Consecrata*, nn. 65-71, *Starting Afresh From Christ*, nn. 14,15). In his Letter to the Church in China in 2007, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI also emphasized that: "for the future of the Church in China it will be necessary to take steps to ensure, on the one hand, that particular attention be paid to the care of vocations and, on the other, a more solid formation with regard to the human, spiritual, philosophical-theological and pastoral aspects should be carried out in seminaries and religious institutes" (*Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of China*, 2007, n.14). In this way, the consecrated life can be a powerful witness in today's China. Due to the historical and social situation in China, the formation of consecrated persons there has its own unique challenges and needs.

1. Problems of formation in Sisters' Congregations today as a result of historical and social factors

The Congregations of Sisters on mainland China were basically disbanded after 1952. Foreign Sisters were expelled from China, and the Chinese Sisters were under surveillance, sent home, imprisoned, or sent to labour camps. Some married, and the convents were confiscated. It was not until the 1980's, at the time of the opening and reform of China, that the Church re-opened; religious congregations were gradually restored. Some old priests and Sisters established new congregations from scratch. The 1980's and 90's were the golden age of vocations. Vocations were numerous, and during this time many dioceses established a new generation of congregations, or reinstated the pre-existing religious orders. Since it was not possible to restore the entire tradition and structure of the religious congregations, the restoration depended very much on the number of Chinese Sisters still remaining, and to what extent they had maintained the traditions of the original congregation. Thus the congregations that were restored during the 1980's were basically those that before the Liberation were larger with more Chinese Sisters, and with a deep-rooted tradition. In the 1990's the Church in China developed steadily, and evangelical and pastoral work began again. Many Bishops and priests were aware that the Church needed religious women involved in pastoral work. Thus, many dioceses recruited young women to join religious orders and there was a rapid increase in the number of religious

Sisters. Since the founding of these religious orders was task oriented, e.g., for evangelical or medical work, there was no clear idea of the philosophy of the congregation. These congregations were classified by their location or diocese, and not according to their charism, as is done by their counterparts in the universal Church. Congregations that have grown out of this extraordinary historical background were bound to encounter many challenges regarding formation and continuous growth.

1.1 Lack of a systematic formation or no formation at all, in the consecrated life

The religious congregations in China had been disbanded for 30 - 40 years. Thus when they re-grouped, or when new religious orders were set up, there was a gap in the Sisters' ranks — either too few Sisters were left from the original Congregation, or the old Sisters did not have the proper training to take up the role of training the new generation of Sisters when the Congregation was restored. A Sister once told me that in their diocese, there was only one old Sister, and she could neither remember the exact name of their Congregation, nor explain the Constitutions passed down within their Congregation.

Many Congregations had financial difficulties when they were first restored. As a result the young recruits had to work hard to make a living. Apart from saying the Rosary together, they practically had no other formation.

The Congregations with a more solid tradition were luckier. When their religious orders started up again, some old Sisters still lived with them, prayed with them, and shared the charism of the religious order with them. Although there was no structured formation, the older Sisters, teaching by word and deed, trained the young novices. Nevertheless this type of training was definitely incomplete.

1.2 Lack of Formators

In other cases, a Bishop or a priest set up the Congregation in the diocese. However, the Bishop and the priests knew little about the consecrated life, and no one could take over the role of forming the Sisters.

Due to the historical and social factors mentioned above, Chinese religious orders are short of Formators. At the early stages of the restoration of the congregations, the older Sisters took care of the young Sisters, but most of them had never thought of acting as Formators. They might not be the most suitable persons to do formation work, but the situation had left them with no option but to take up this role. Although they wished to do the job well, they were not competent. Nonetheless, their efforts were the driving force for the restoration of these congregations in China. The situation was even worse for the new religious orders. So some Bishops would send the young women who had just joined the Congregation to more stable Congregations in other diocese as novices to learn some skills for evangelical work, for instance, medical skills or painting, so that in the future they could earn a living for their Congregation or diocese. At the conclusion of a few years of training, they would return to their own dioceses to take their vows. Then they would be sent to serve in different parishes. This phenomenon still prevails today. However they still did not know much about the consecrated life and with their lack of experience of religious life were uncertain as to what it was. The Bishop would sometimes invite knowledgeable priests to give talks to the young Sisters.

In some cases, the religious order was not able to find a suitable person to be the Formator. The priest who had established the congregation could only ask a married woman, once a member a religious Order, to teach the young women who had joined his congregation. Probably such a practice is not uncommon even today. Thus we can see the difficulty in finding suitable Formators in China, which is due to the closure of the religious orders for several decades.

1.3 Lacking in an all-round formation

Due to the above-mentioned conditions, in the mid to late 1980's, the Bishops of many dioceses invited overseas religious orders to help in the formation of their young Sisters. However, due to the situation in China, Formators from the outside could only give short-term Formation Courses or programmes on an irregular basis. Some were only in the form of an underground gathering. In this situation, the formation topic could only be established according to the local need. If possible the Formation Programme would cover just one theme. The programme might be a one-off, partial, unsystematic, or a general sharing. At one meeting it might be a sharing on praying and prayers, while the next meeting might be on the Bible, followed by a session on pastoral ministry. A Formation Programme conducted in this way can hardly provide an all-round knowledge of the consecrated life; neither can it provide the Sisters with a deep integral experience. A Sister once told me that she had joined many Formation Programmes, but that she still did not know what the consecrated life was.

1.4 Challenges to the formation of Sisters for real life situations

Formation for the consecrated life is not only gaining some knowledge or taking a theology course, although "profound knowledge" can ignite passion, which can motivate further action, and be a guide when making a choice. The consecrated life is more than that; it is a way of life. Therefore the most important elements in formation for religious life are: meaning, focus, and the direction of this way of life. Besides "knowledge", life experiences and role models are essential teaching aids.

The present situation in China makes it difficult for the Sisters to apply their "knowledge" and "what they have learned" to their everyday life, resulting in a conflict between their knowledge and its application in real life. For example, when talking about the community life of consecrated persons, from their training the Sisters know that the religious community is evangelical by nature since it bears witness to the Kingdom of God. But in reality due to pastoral needs, or to financial or personnel reasons, very often only one or two Sisters live in a parish. They may not even have the chance to get together with the other Sisters of their own congregation for a year. Another example concerns the vow of "poverty". Some of the parishes where the Sisters serve are wealthier, and some are poorer, depending on the financial condition of the parish. This results in some Sisters being well off, and some not so well off, even though they belong to the same congregation. Today, with China's economic take-off and the influence of materialism, the discrepancy between knowledge and reality is more marked and presents a barrier to formation for the consecrated life. The value of consecrated life is fading. Simultaneously hedonism, competition, the pursuit of academic achievement, the struggle for power, and self-centredness are gradually eroding religious communities.

1.5 The pros and cons of receiving training abroad

In recent years, some places in China, such as Beijing, Shanxi and Shaanxi, have provided training opportunities for Sisters. The courses are for one or two years, or perhaps regular training sessions spread over several years. No doubt these are of great help for the formation of Sisters. Furthermore, following the example of priests going abroad for further study, in recent years Sisters are also going abroad for study, e.g., to the Philippines, the U.S.A, Ireland, Germany, Italy and France. Some Sisters even study for doctoral degrees, greatly enhancing the quality of their congregations. Nonetheless this leads to other problems:

- (1) As mentioned earlier, the consecrated life is a way of life, and not a theology subject. In other words, a doctoral degree in theology is not necessary for a Sister. Of course, I cannot deny that, as mentioned before, a more profound knowledge of God can deepen one's relationship with Him, and hence one can respond more positively to His grace. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily so. The biggest problem that the Sisters studying abroad face is that while they study many subjects, they rarely experience life in a religious community. This is exactly what is missing in China. Many times these invaluable learning experiences not only do not enable the Sisters to become better consecrated persons, they may even be the cause of their leaving the community. Recently Churches abroad have become aware of this

problem. Hence the Bishops' Conferences of many countries or the local Churches beseech the international religious orders to open their doors to the Chinese Sister students. In addition to providing them with food and lodging it is even more important to offer them a stable religious community. Thus while studying abroad, they can also experience genuine religious community life. I have asked a few Sisters about this, and they all said that the present arrangement of living in a convent is much better than living in a hostel. At least they have a regular time for prayer. One of them told me that the convent where she is staying even assigns an older Sister to watch over her and talk to her. This is a very fortunate case. But in countries that receive a large number of Chinese Sister Students, such as the Philippines, it is difficult to arrange for Sisters' Congregations to host them.

- (2) The second problem is that of adaptation when the Sisters return to China after their studies. In recent years during conversations with the Sisters, they often talk about the situation of those Sisters who have returned to China after studying abroad. The returnees feel that their fellow religious Sisters in China do not accept them. At the same time, the mainland Sisters feel that the returnees look down upon them, and make unreasonable demands upon them. These complaints reflect the conflict caused by the separation of these sisters in time and space and the disparity in their way of thinking. This issue was discussed at a recent meeting of Sister Superiors of a certain Region, indicating that this is already quite a serious problem for some religious communities in China.
- (3) The formation of Sisters in China still places much emphasis on the Bible and theology. The curriculum still lacks a systematic and an overall introduction to the consecrated life. There is also a lack of spiritual companions to guide the Sisters in their spiritual reflections. The reason for this may be the difficulty in finding such guides. The late Bishop Li Du'an of Xi'an could not find suitable guides to explain the "consecrated life", so he himself tried his best to reflect upon Pope John Paul II's 1996 Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* for his Sisters. He studied one chapter, and taught one chapter — a perfect example of a good Pastor.

2. Some suggestions and some feasible examples for implementation

In view of the various challenges facing the religious congregations in China, I would like to make the following suggestions.

2.1 Strengthen mutual cooperation among Religious Orders

In view of the enormous demand for formation in Religious Congregations, no single Religious Order can handle it alone. In *Vita Consecrata* our late Holy Father Pope John Paul II said: "In the work of formation, the more solidly established Institutes should help those of more recent foundation by contributing some of their best members" to guide them (n. 66). Recently the Holy See again made a similar appeal: overseas religious congregations that have a solid foundation should give assistance to the new religious orders in China; overseas formation institutions and personnel should cooperate in carrying out formation work; and the religious congregations in China should help and support one another, sharing resources and their formation programmes with one another. This is the Catholic spirit and is also a witness to the communion of God's Kingdom. Overseas and mainland congregations should abandon their local biases and cooperate. They should share their resources, for only by doing so can they provide a good basic formation. Such cooperation can also witness to the love and communion of God's Kingdom within the Church and in society. In recent years there are successful examples of several overseas religious orders working together to plan and to conduct Formation Programmes for Sisters on mainland China. In China, there are also examples of religious congregations from various regions working together to plan and to organize Formation Programmes for their Sisters. In other cases some religious orders welcome other religious congregations from the same Province to participate in their Formation Programmes. Today, some Regions have organized a formal or

informal Regional Association of Religious Superiors of Women to discuss the formation of Sisters. This is most praiseworthy.

2.2 An All-round formation curriculum and formation plan specifically designed for consecrated persons

Whether overseas or in China, institutions that take up the work of the formation of Sisters have to provide an overall, structured formation curriculum and formation plan for the consecrated life. As the Pope said in his Letter (see the *Letter to the Catholic Church in PRC*, 2007), there should be a systematic interpretation of various aspects of the consecrated life. These include such aspects as: call and response, the spiritual life, the three vows, community life, evangelical mission, and the structure of a religious congregation, as well as aspects of theology, ecclesiology, spirituality, church history, and psychology. At the same time life experiences and methods for interpreting life should be provided (cf. *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, published by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in 1990). In China today, some Regions and some Formators have tried to implement these suggestions. For instance, they have inaugurated three-year Formation Programmes for the consecrated life, and three-year Formation Programmes for leaders of religious congregations. If the organizers of these Formation Programme were to get together to share their experiences, and discuss and reflect upon their experiences, I believe that a more systematic and all-round Formation Programme and materials for Sisters formation would gradually come into being and develop.

2.3 Forming Formators and Administrators

There is need for a more long term and more fundamental direction. When talking about formators and administrators, I refer also to Bishops and priests. The Formation Programme for priests in the seminary should include a few sessions on the consecrated life. Topics to be discussed would be: "What is the consecrated life?"; "What is the mission and role of the consecrated life in the Church?", as well as other related topics. Since Bishops and priests are responsible for teaching in the Church, their understanding of the consecrated life would lead them to support and promote Sisters' formation. It would also enhance cooperation between the clergy and the Sisters for the good of the Church. For the formation of the Formators, attention should not be focused on methodology alone. Forming the personality and the spirit of the Formator is of greater importance. As *Vita Consecrata* says: "But above all they [those in charge of formation] will disclose the beauty of following Christ", (n. 66). Their attitude is more important than their skill. They should perform this duty humbly, because we have only one Teacher — Jesus Christ; all Formators are only being invited to share in the work of God. The personal experience of the Formator, his/her consistent response to God's invitation and returning to Him enables him/her to accompany the Sisters in the Lord to move on in their consecrated life.

3. Discovering the charism and writing the Constitution — a matter much related to formation

Due to historical and social reasons, most of the religious orders in China today are grouped according to Regions or dioceses, and not according to their charisms, as the traditional religious orders are grouped. Once a Sister asked me: "Your congregation has its Founder, and you often say that you follow the spirit of the Founder. Where can we find the spirit of our congregation?". This is an issue the congregations in China have been most concerned about recently. As mentioned earlier, at the establishment or restoration of their congregations, some used the old Constitutions, which they found. Bishops or priests prepared some Constitutions, after referring to the Constitutions of several overseas congregations. At the same time, older Sisters dictated some Constitutions from memory, and the younger Sisters wrote them down. Meanwhile, many congregations do not even have a set of Constitutions. A Sister told me: "Our congregation has been established for more than ten years, but we still do not have Constitutions. During all these years, when our Sisters took vows, we made our vows on Constitutions that did not exist". In this situation, Sisters of the same

congregation do not have a common direction or a common mission in their consecrated life. They also do not have a clear idea of the meaning of their vocation to the consecrated life. Therefore in recent years, many congregations have begun to look for their charism, and to revise their Constitutions according to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the signs of the times. Many Sisters' Congregations in China did not begin with a Founder having a charism and then establishing a religious order with followers to carry out that charism. Congregations of this type, which are already established, will have an arduous task to find out God's special call for them, and then map out the blueprint for their religious life, namely the Constitution. This endeavour would require that all members discern together. The members of the congregation must meditate on God's Word together, examine their common experiences in the past, and reflect upon the condition of the Church and the Society in which they live. Through prayer and sharing they must try to assimilate the call of every member. Then through a second sharing, the face of God is revealed to them, and as that face becomes clearer, it will inspire the whole community to respond with one accord. This process of shaping the Constitutions can be said to be a pilgrimage for the religious congregation, a process of communication between God and humankind. One religious congregation has spent three years shaping the Constitutions, and then another three years in testing it and making revisions, before presenting it to the bishop for his approval.

Laying a firm foundation is a long process. It means that the Sisters should have a basic understanding of the meaning of a vocation, charisms, and the consecrated life. They should also have prayer experiences and the experience of communicating with God. Charisms are a gift of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will bestow different charisms for the good of the Body of Christ — the Church. Writing the Constitutions is different from any other kind of writing. It is a prayerful journey to discern God's will. During this journey the community will discover God's face revealed to them, and then respond to this call by a particular way of life or through a certain service. They shall live out the mystery of Christ that they have found through their prayer and contemplation. By their way of life, they can demonstrate and encourage others to pursue eternal life. The Sisters will become a source of vitality for the whole Church, and this spiritual vitality will be manifested in all aspects of their religious life. In this way their Constitutions will be formed.

As for the revision of the old Constitutions of a religious order, in order for the old Constitutions to be accepted and possessed by the present members, we usually encourage the young Sisters to interview the old Sisters, and from their memory of past days, to get some idea of the focus of this particular religious order. What slogans used they to emphasize? What liturgical traditions did they celebrate? What were the customs and habits of the religious order? The young Sisters should review the history of the religious order, the life of the Founder, and go through the old Constitutions carefully. They do not need to memorize the regulations, but rather try to look for the mystery of Christ that was emphasized in the old Constitutions. They should meditate on the face of God revealed in the old Constitutions, and then reflect on the call and need of the Church and of society today. In the dialogue between meditation and the present reality, they should give thanks for the work God did through this congregation in the past. They should also thank God for their new call and mission today, and revise their Constitutions accordingly.

Whether the religious orders are writing new Constitutions, or are revising old ones, they need qualified people to accompany them in the process. The adviser should have a discerning heart, be contemplative in prayer, be humble in front of God and the people, and always be aware that he/she is only an instrument of God. They should realize that every charism is a gift of God and not a human creation. Therefore the adviser should have reverence for God and respect for members of the congregation. They should respect the process this community is going through, and respect the sharing and fruit of the reflection of each member. He/She should assist in an advisory capacity only, helping the Sisters to synthesize their experiences and to pray with them. But he/she should not write the Constitutions for them, because they are their Constitutions.

Conclusion

When we review the history of the re-establishment of the religious orders in China, we should acclaim the wonder of the work of God. In the darkness God says, Let there be light and there is light; God allowed new life to come out of the shadow of death; God renews everything from the past. In this article, I talked about the problems and the challenges the Sisters in China encounter in their formation. It is not meant to show up the weaknesses of the Church and of the religious orders in China. Rather this review and discussion enable us to see that God has created something out of "nothing". We also see the struggle of our Sisters in China in the midst of very difficult conditions. We see how they strive to respond to God's call, and commit themselves to the mission God has entrusted to them. They should not be looked down upon or criticized. Rather they deserve our appreciation, care, concern, assistance, sharing and company, because it is by their response to God's call, and through their prayers, that the Church in China has achieved its present attainments.

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