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Sedos - Via dei Verbiti, 1 - 00154 Roma
TEL.: (+39)065741350 / FAX: (+39)065755787
E-mail address: execdir@sedosmission.org
Homepage: <http://www.sedosmission.org>

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EDITORIAL

Dear Friends, summer, the appropriate time to “recharge” energy; to reconnect with relatives, friends and the creation, is over. We continue our journey onward.

“Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the new evangelization has increasingly presented itself as an appropriate, timely tool in addressing the challenges of a rapidly-changing world, and the way to respond to God’s generosity in our being gathered together by the Holy Spirit to experience God as the Father of us all and to bear witness and proclaim to all the Good News -the Gospel- of Jesus Christ” (Pope Benedict XVI: “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”, the Synod of Bishops, 7-28 October 2012. March 2011).

Since 1964 the SEDOS main thrust has been the ongoing study of the global mission in view of bringing a quality contribution to the Universal Mission of the Church. Today, the SEDOS Members are vibrating with the universal Church because Pope Benedict XVI has called the whole Church to explore new ways for evangelization.

The Transmission the Christian Faith in today’s world, a world which is being shaped by scientific discoveries, challenges theologians, missiologists to continually devote more time in a profound contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity so as to devise a Pneumatological approach of mission. Sister Dr. Mary MOTTE, FMM, a missiologist puts forward suggestions as a contribution to that endeavor.

The Transmission of the Christian Faith requires a deeper understanding of the concept evangelization. **“The Definition of Evangelization”**, is indeed a well-timed article to be published now. Fr. Indunil Janaka Kodithuwakku, of the Pontifical Urban University offers an extensive definition of evangelization and also the reason for which we commit our lives to carry out the mandate received from Christ.

The agents of evangelization have to be able to reconnect with the history of the Evangelization in their own country; and so draw insights from the wisdom of the missionaries who went before them. This was the purpose of the Seminar organized by Sister Mary EZEOKOLI, IHM, Director of the Office of Pontifical Mission Society in the Archdiocese of Onitsha in Nigerian: 18-19 March 2011. Fr. Dr. Charles A EBELEBE, CSSp, developed the theme: “Mission as a Continuous Engagement with Reality”; and delved into the key question: “Where and how did **the rain** of the Gospel meet us”?

Fr. CHELIMO Richard Kimosop is a student at the Pontifical Urban University endeavors to revitalize **“The African Palaver: A Model to Reconcile Africa”**. African Palaver was and still remains an art and act of respectfully discussing, listening and learning from one another; it is an efficient and a dynamic instrument for solving problems and reaching a lasting solution. African theologians have to rehabilitate palaver, and tapping in on its positive values could propose them as a model of reconciliation and a privileged missionary method for promoting renewed Christian life.

Starting from where he stands, Fr. Sean McDonagh, SSC, draws our attention to the fact that Science and Religion seem to collide, especially when tackling the issue of the magnitude of the ecological crisis. Fr. Sean underlines the importance of finding an adequate **“God Talk”** or theology about trees, and forests and the natural world. Pope Benedict XVI could convene a “Synod for Creation” and draw insights and wisdom from the participation of everyone in the Church who comes from different walks of life.

Sister NZENZILI MBOMA, FMM
Executive Director of SEDOS

Sister Dr. Mary Motte, FMM

A Pneumatological Framework for Mission

Introduction

Citing *Gaudium et Spes* John Paul II tells us that God's Spirit "...with a marvelous providence, directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth."¹ These images of *unfolding time* and a *renewing earth* reflect current scientific discoveries affirming creation is still incomplete. And the image of God's Spirit directing this unfolding and renewing reflects emerging theological insights into the Mystery of God. Today a broadly held scientific consensus is moving towards a radically changed worldview, and theology must engage this consensus if it is to be *faith seeking understanding*.² More and more Christian theologians and missiologists are contemplating the mystery of the Trinitarian Creator God in the context of an evolutionary, unfolding universe.³ Approaches in Pneumatology, although not entirely absent from Christian tradition, have not been sufficiently developed⁴. While Divine Mystery will always be beyond the best human understanding, scientific discoveries can provide facts about the universe prompting deeper discernment and a more profound contemplation of Divine Mystery.⁵

Denis Edwards in his Breath of Life: Theology of the Creator Spirit systematically lays out the various elements that could lead to a greater advance in Pneumatological studies. Stephen Bevans has explored the missiological implications of a developed Pneumatology. I attempt to map out suggestions for a Pneumatological approach in mission, drawing on these two sources principally, and also from some others. We are living in a time when an expanding universe and tremendous advances in science continue to challenge theologians to see in a new way. A transformation in theology and missiology will require far more analysis than is possible at present. Denis Edwards does make an important move in that direction in his more recent work, How God Acts: Creation, Redemption and Special Divine Action⁶.

From Scripture and patristic Studies

Bevans illustrates how the presence of the Spirit is recognized through Scripture. At the beginning of creation Genesis 1:2 tells us how the Spirit swept over the waters. The Creator Spirit is recognized as the Life-Giving Spirit in Genesis 2:7. Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures consistently attribute their *authority* to the Spirit, (Ezek 2:2; Mic 3:8; Hos 10:12; Isa 61:1-3; Ezek 37:1-14; Ezek 36: 25-28). Continuing into the New Testament, Luke 1:35 states it is the Spirit by whom Mary conceives Jesus; and it is likewise the Spirit who is poured out on Jesus in Matthew 3:16. In Luke 4:18-19, the Spirit guides Jesus as he begins his public ministry; and in John 14:26 this same Spirit is promised to the disciples to enable them to understand God's purposes⁷. Bevans characterizes the Spirit's activity as *transcending immanence - immanence because God is totally and thoroughly involved and interwoven within cosmic and human history, transcendence because God's presence and activity is beyond the capacity of human beings to predict, control, grasp, or express*⁸. The recognition of this action of the Spirit in the whole of creation suggests another path of insight into cultural and interreligious challenges.

Edwards points to inputs from the Patristic period that contributes significantly to the advance of a theology of the Creator Spirit. The theology of the Word of God as Logos was developed in the second and third centuries. However, It was not until after Nicea (325) that the theology of the Spirit began to move forward. Yet, as Edwards points out, an important input prior to this time is found in the work of Irenaeus (115-190) who kept the theology of the Word and the Spirit together in a theology of creation and salvation. He described the Word and Spirit as the two hands of God, reciprocally interrelated in the one act of ongoing creation. In the fourth century other figures contributed insights about the Spirit.

Athanasius (ca 296-377), was convinced of the unity between the Word and the Spirit. He presented a more clearly articulated theology of the Creator Spirit by extending the then existing doctrine of the Word. He held that creation is *from the Source of all, through the Word, and in the Spirit*, and that the Spirit is the immanent presence of God in creation.

Basil of Caesarea (ca 329-379), associated the Spirit's work with actions which were life-giving, completing and sanctifying. Basil understood God as Communion, and the Spirit or Breath of God as existing eternally with the Word of God and with the Source of All in the unity of the one divine nature - a *unity in communion*. He tells us that God's grace is given through the same Source and the same Word, and that we can have communion (koinonia) in this grace only in the same Holy Spirit. There are clear indications in Basil's work that he thought of the Spirit as involved with the creation of the non-human. He saw the Spirit always in the communion of the Trinity, dwelling in the diverse creatures of the universe and thereby enabling them to exist from the Divine Communion. This is the relationship of ongoing creation.

Ambrose of Milan (ca 339 - 397) developed a lucid theology of the Creator Spirit, insisting that the Spirit is the one who brings life to all creatures. Together with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the Creator of all things, continually sustaining the process of ongoing creation. Ambrose understood the Spirit as the *author of creation, of the life of grace, and of the Christ-event*⁹.

A new relation between Science and Theology

Zachary Hayes traces the development of thinking within the Catholic Church regarding the relationship between Science and Theology. He shows this has been a journey from denial of scientific discovery to an ongoing dialogue which respects the disciplinary autonomy of each but sees both science and theology as *engaged in a common enterprise for the benefit of the human race*¹⁰. The knowledge science has of the cosmos today challenges theologians to explore how to think about the issues of faith in the context of the cosmos as described by science¹¹.

Denis Edwards proposes that the Biblical image of the Breath of God can be understood as breathing life into the universe in all its stages: its law, the initial conditions at its origin and its evolution¹². In sum, the Spirit makes possible the emergence of the *new* at every stage. Movement towards the new begins at the very first instance of creation and is explained by the theory of emergence, namely that the new is dependent upon its pre-existing components, but it is not reducible to them.¹³ Emergence theory rendered theologically understands that God empowers the entire process of ongoing creation from within, giving creation the capacity to transcend itself and become more than it was. The task of theology, therefore, is to move towards a revised and developed theology of creation. Central to Christian theology is the belief that God holds all things in existence over the abyss of nothingness. While recognizing that this belief is essential, Edwards points out that it is in need of significant development. He notes how Karl Rahner's theory of active self-transcendence is a significant contribution in this regard. Rahner emphasizes God as the Absolute Future not only of human beings but also of all creation. Rahner's evolutionary Christology presents Jesus in his humanity as a product of the evolutionary universe. Jesus is understood as self-transcendence of the universe to God and the self-communication of God to the universe.¹⁴ Seeing ourselves as part of an evolving world requires a new understanding of reality, a new way of seeing, requiring a transformed metaphysics and theology. Delio comments how we have moved from thinking about the universe launched by the Creator as it is, to a dynamic vision of the cosmos where creation continues.¹⁵ This shift holds the tension between science influencing culture and a church that is cautiously and very slowly abandoning a pre-modern awareness¹⁶. Theology facing the challenges of science is moving towards, what Stoeger calls a *consistent integrated model of divine action*¹⁷.

Bevans recalls that mission has its origin in God's universal salvific will (1 Tim 2:4). The Trinitarian God reaches out to the world in Love through creation; through the

active presence of the Holy Spirit. The action of the Spirit witnessed in Israel and in the life of Jesus is characterized as *creative, prophetic, life-giving and death-negating*. These same qualities are expressed in the women and men who continue Jesus' mission in the world in the midst of God's people¹⁸. Since Vatican II there have been numerous challenges to mission paradigms which in turn have generated intensive studies and research. These efforts continue to bring about new ways of seeing. A Gospel focus and orientation lead to the discovery of how Jesus, the Fact of God, taught about God's Kingdom. Bevans notes the mission of the Church, like the Mission of God, arises out of the *passion for all that is and can be; it is a passion of relationship*. Attitudes, behaviors and actions truly aligned with the action of the Creator Spirit, are shaped by insights about justice, solidarity and resistance to what is unjust. This path of mission will never contradict Christ or suspend his law of love. This radical missionary vision found in Jesus of Nazareth urges missionary disciples to discern where and how God is leading them in the world of today¹⁹. For over a quarter of a century women and men committed to mission have been discovering the gospel significance of relationships that emerge in a dialogue of life especially among the poor, followers of varying religious faiths and different cultural groups. Scholars have been exploring new ways of grasping the theological and missiological significance of scientific contributions of emergence theory, relationship and the meaning of the new.²⁰ A new paradigm is emerging in mission as theology in general encounters and is questioned by developments in science.

Towards a deeper contemplation of the Trinity and the role of the Spirit

Edwards proposes that when insights from science and theology are brought into correlation with one another, three fundamental characteristics of reality emerge:

1. the entities of the universe are constituted by relationships;
2. individual entities have their own distinct identity;
3. the universe with all its entities has an emergent character and evolves only in time.

Each of these characteristics is intimately related with the other two²¹.

Edwards, as well as others, suggests a helpful, but also humanely limited, approach to the God-world relationship is to think of the Spirit of God as making space *within the divine relational life for a relational world to evolve*²². Moving forward with an understanding of mission profoundly shaped by the Spirit flows from deeper contemplation of the Trinity.

Rahner, as Edwards comments, identifies the need for deeper understanding of the experience of the Spirit and salvation through Christ. The New Testament in such texts as 1 Cor 15:21, John 14:6, Acts 4:12, 1Timothy 2:5 expresses the belief that salvation comes through Christ. On the other hand, texts such as Acts 10:17, 17:23 to 28, and 1 Timothy 2:4 express the belief that God wills all people to be saved. The Second Vatican Council, specifically in Lumen Gentium 16 and Gaudium et Spes 22, expressly states that salvation is universally available in the self-giving of God to us in the Holy Spirit. Rahner's response to the fundamental tension posed by these two beliefs is that the Spirit who is at work in grace throughout human history, is always the Spirit directed toward Christ. The Spirit and Christ are radically interrelated. The Spirit has an inner ordering and direction toward the goals of God's self-giving in the Word made flesh. The death and resurrection are not the beginning of God's love for sinners; they are the consequence, expression and embodiment of Divine Love²³. In *Redemptoris Missio* 5, John Paul II recognizes that participated forms of mediation are not excluded in relation to other religious traditions, but he states that *they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his*. Salvation is always a gift of God, but Edwards notes that if it is to have meaning for humanity it has to find embodiment in history and community²⁴. This search for meaning implies the missiological concern for relating the Gospel to the poor, to cultures and in situations of interreligious dialogue, to persons of other faith traditions. It recognizes how the Spirit is present throughout human history.

Developing a Spirit Christology

Some theologians and missiologists are working towards developing Spirit Christology as a path to deeper insight into the action of the Triune God. Following Ambrose of Milan, Edwards states the Holy Spirit *is the author of the Lord's incarnation*. Reflecting on the role of the Spirit as author of the incarnation is to do a form of Spirit Christology. The Life-Giving Breath of God who enables the universe of creatures to evolve and who enfolds human beings in grace brings about the event to which both creation and grace are directed: the Christ-event. The New Testament provides concrete images of the relation between the Spirit and Jesus. Edwards describes these as follows:

- Mark: Jesus, the One on whom the Spirit descends like a Dove
- Matthew: Jesus conceived from the Holy Spirit
- Luke-Acts: Jesus Anointed with the Holy Spirit
- John: Jesus, the One on whom the Spirit rests²⁵.

Drawing on the work of Congar, Rahner and Kasper, Edwards proposes a trinitarian theology of Jesus as the Spirit-anointed Wisdom of God - a Spirit Christology that is at the same time a Wisdom Christology²⁶. The Holy Spirit empowers the universe, is present in grace to all human beings as self-offering love, and anoints Jesus as the Wisdom of God,. This same Spirit is poured out on the community of disciples in the Pentecost experience, constituting them as the church of Jesus Christ.

Mission understood as participating in the Mission of the Triune God roots mission in the Trinity. This image traces to the early church's efforts to express its experience of Jesus revealing the mystery of God, and of the Spirit inspiring faith and guiding the community²⁷. Bevans and Schroeder comment that *A Christology rooted in a trinitarian understanding of God could certainly avoid the temptation of a focus on Christ that is too narrow*²⁸. They suggest understanding Jesus as focusing on the Reign of God and on the Father as found in the following texts: Mt 11:25-27, Mk 1:15; Lk 18:18-19; Jn 12:44-45; 14:9; 17:1-8. And further they point out that *a Spirit Christology* would attend to both the central role of the Spirit in Jesus' mission (cf. Mt 3:13-4:1; Lk 3:21-22; 4:1, 17-19) and the presence of the Spirit before Jesus' coming and in places beyond the boundaries of the church (cf. AG 4, GS 22, RM 29). Jesus is the *agent par excellence of the Spirit's work of stirring up prophecy; re-creating; restoring life; and bringing healing reconciliation and forgiveness*.²⁹

Feminist theologians have noted that understanding Jesus as *Sophia* adds to a life-giving and inclusive Christology³⁰. Spirit Christology also offers a significant foundation for an ecological Christology. The Spirit of God as the 'unspeakable closeness of God is the conviction that the Spirit of God is creatively and lovingly present to all creatures, and present as the *power-in-relations* in our interconnected planetary life. The earth, then, has a sacramental character; it symbolizes the divine that is present in it³¹. Other instances of the work of the Spirit discerned today are the following:

1. the Pentecostal Movement which in many cases has led to a deeper appropriation of spirituality and worship, to meditative and contemplative as well as charismatic styles of prayer.
2. the Ecumenical Movement in the 20th-21st centuries. At its beginning in Edinburgh 1910 international delegates confessed division as contrary to the will of Christ. In the century since Edinburgh there have been an unfolding number of specific ecumenical movements.
3. Vatican II represents a movement of a different order, which even though this event occurred in the life of one specific Christian church, it has had effects on the wider Christian community. The Council definitively committed the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement. This event and its effects it can be thought of as the work

of the Spirit when seen in the light of Christ's promise to send the Advocate to be with the church and to lead it to truth,³²

To work creatively and critically with the above movement can be thought of as a faithful response to the Spirit. Likewise, resistance to these movements may *grieve* the Spirit (Eph 4:30)³³. The work of the Spirit can also be discerned in the promotion of authentic justice for the poor of the earth.³⁴; and in the feminist movement as it strives for the recognition of the full and equal humanity of women and the need for right relations. The passion for Creation (cf. Romans 8:18-29), needs to be understood in relation to the struggle for justice and the feminist movement³⁵. Grace precedes the Christ-event because while Christians recognize that the work of the Spirit is salvation in and through Christ, they can also recognize the Holy Spirit as always and everywhere graciously present in self-offering love to human beings. John Paul II states:

Between the Holy Spirit and Christ there thus subsists, in the economy of salvation, an intimate bond, whereby the Spirit works in human history as *another Counselor* permanently ensuring the transmission and spreading of the Good News revealed by Jesus of Nazareth³⁶.

Later, in his Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, he states that the Holy Spirit *who was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified, ... holds all things together (Wis1:7), (and) leads us to broaden our vision in every time and place.*³⁷

Edwards points out that a critical stance is required to discern the experience of the Holy Spirit, but this does not overrule the theological claim that humans can and do experience God's Spirit. Taking the lead from Rahner, he specifies that the human experience of the Spirit is not the same as the experience in created objects. For humans this is an experience of transcendence, occurring in ordinary everyday experience, and going beyond the ordinary. In all our particular engagements there is an implicit invitation to give ourselves into a love that is without condition³⁸. Referring to his experience of calling religious leaders to Assisi to pray for peace in 1986, John Paul II states clearly in *Redemptoris Missio* :

Excluding any mistaken interpretation, the interreligious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that *every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart*³⁹.

Conclusion

Bevans, drawing on the current belief about the dialogical nature of mission, proposes that *if God is truly a dialogical God, vulnerability, suffering and growth can hardly be conceived as imperfect qualities*⁴⁰. Edwards' exploration of a theology of the Creator Spirit considers how the Spirit is midwife to the birth of a new creation. He recognizes the Spirit as faithful companion accompanying each creature and that the kind of power exercised by the Spirit in ongoing creation will be consistent with the kind of power revealed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus; it will offer a new gospel vision of relational power and examine how God suffers. The power of the Creative Spirit is the supreme power to love, a love that involves a divine capacity to respect the identity, integrity, and autonomy of creatures and created processes⁴¹.

Edwards summarizes his own thinking in four proposals:

- The Trinity acts in creation in undivided unity, but this undivided unity can involve a proper role of the Spirit in creation

- A starting point for a theology of the proper role of the Spirit in creation can be found in recent theologies that argue for proper roles of the divine persons in incarnation and Pentecost.

- If creation is a relationship between each creature and the Trinity, such a relationship would involve proper relationships with the trinitarian person.

- What is distinctive about each of the trinitarian persons comes into play in the one work of divine creation⁴².

The Gospels recount the mission of Jesus. Today there is need for a *missiological imagination* and a *radical reorientation* towards deeper insight about the meaning of that mission in light of a more profound contemplation of the Trinity and especially with regard to greater integration of the role of the Holy Spirit. Attempting to sketch a Pneumatological approach to Mission, based largely on the work of Edwards and Bevans, indicates that there is a grounding readily available in the Hebrew Scripture and in the New Testament, as well as in the Patristic era, in which the Spirit is seen consistently accompanying the process of salvation history. An important milestone towards a greater awareness of the Creator Spirit is the new recognition of science in theological research. To speak of God is to speak of Divine Mystery and insights about the Trinity and specifically about the role of the Spirit require a new depth of contemplation. Following the insights of Yves Congar, *op.*, a Spirit Christology is developing which leads to deeper insight into the way the Triune God is present and active in creation.

Endnotes:

¹The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World. 1986. n. 26.

² cf. Ilia Delio, *Godhead or God Ahead?* in *God, Grace and Creation*. Philip J. Rossi, ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010. 3 - 22. On page 3 Delio comments: *(the) area of religion and science, like the universe itself, is expanding. The reason for the outburst of growth is due primarily to the remarkable developments in science and technology ...If science is like the rabbit leaping and bounding across the field, theology is like the turtle slowly coming from behind. The task of doing theology today in light of the new science is becoming ever the more urgent.*; cf. also John F. Haught. *Christianity and Science: Toward a Theology of Nature*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007. 3 ff.; Denis Edwards. *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.

³ Stephen B. Bevans, Roger P. Schroeder. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004. 286-304; Edward, *op.cit.*, 117-129, cf. also Kilian McDonnell, *osb.* *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Other Hand of God*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press (A Michael Glazer Book). 2003.

⁴ Edwards, *op.cit.*, 1, 33 - 49.

⁵ cf. Elaine A. Heath. *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 2008. Heath mentions such figures as Phoebe Palmer, Father Arseny, Henri J.M. Nouwen, Mechtild, Bonaventure, Julian of Norwich, Hans Urs von Balthasar, of Magdeburg, Mother Teresa.

⁶ Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. 2010.

⁷ *God Inside Out: Toward a Missionary Theology of the Holy Spirit*, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, July 1998. 102.

⁸ *op.cit.* 103.

⁹ Edwards. *op. cit.* 40-43

¹⁰ *The Gift of Being: A theology of creation*. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press. 2009. 17.

¹¹ *ibid.* 24.

¹² Edwards. *op.cit.* 43.

¹³ Edwards notes that among contemporary scholars, Nancey Murphy, George Ellis, Philip Clayton, Paul Davies and Arthur Peacocke defend the concept of an emergent universe. 45.

¹⁴ Edwards. *op.cit.*

¹⁵ Ilia Delio. *Christ in Evolution*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008. 21

¹⁶ ibid. 22

¹⁷ William Stoeger, sj in Forward to Denis Edwards How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2010.

¹⁸ Ibid. 103.

¹⁹ Ibid. 105.

²⁰ Susan Smith, rndm. *The Holy Spirit and Mission in Some Contemporary Theologies of Mission*. SEDOS Bulletin. April 2002.

²¹ ibid.

²² Edwards. op.cit. Edwards notes this is a form of trinitarian panentheism - a word that comes from the Greek and means 'all things in God. 130.

²³ Rahner as quoted by Edwards

²⁴ Edwards. 62

²⁵ Edwards. op.cit. 66-75

²⁶ cf. Edwards. 79ff: A Spirit Christology proceeds from below; The same Spirit who is Life-Giver, empowering the emergence of the universe, and the Grace-Bearer, enfolding human beings throughout history, now anoints and rests upon Jesus of Nazareth; The Christ event is brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit; There is a true history of the Spirit in the life, death and exaltation of Jesus; The Spirit transforms the negativity of the cross into an event of liberation; There is an inner relationship between the anointing of Jesus by the Spirit and the Spirit's work in us by grace.

²⁷ Bevans and Schroeder 297

²⁸ ibid.

²⁹ ibid.

³⁰ Edwards. op.cit. 75

³¹ ibid.

³² ibid. 87-89

³³ ibid.

³⁴ José Comblin has explored the theme of the Holy Spirit at work in human liberation - to bring freedom and speech to the poor; Guitierrez states Christian spirituality involves a life-long conversion to the side of the poor; the place of the poor is the place where humanity is respected; it is the space that allows the Other to be Other. He further notes: The place of the Spirit is the place of freedom and genuine reconciliation. Others who have explored these insights are Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Mother Theresa, Oscar Romero, Nelson Mandela....

³⁵ Edwards. op.cit. 107

³⁶ The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World (*Dominum et Vivificantem*), 7

³⁷ Cf. also the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition # 686 where it states: "The Holy Spirit is at work with the Father and the Son from the beginning to the completion of the plan for our salvation."

³⁸ Cf. the work of Elaine Heath Mystic Evangelism 29.

and LG 16, GS 45 encyclical on Holy Spirit as noted by senior figures in the Roman Catholic Church such as Archbishop Quinn and Cardinals Martini, König, and Kasper

The Gift of Authority - Anglican- Roman Catholic agreed statement.

³⁹ Power and the Spirit of God : Toward an Experienced based Pneumatology Oxford University Press 2004.

⁴⁰ Stephen Bevans, svd. *Wisdom from the Margins: Systematic Theology and the Missiological Imagination*. in Australian EJournal of Theology. August 2005.

⁴¹ 121-127

Indunil Janaka Kodithuwakku

The Definition of Evangelization

Evangelism or evangelization is derived from the Greek verb *euangelizein/euangelizesthai*. Even when we consult the Bible, we find that it does not give a quick answer in our search for a definition or meaning of evangelization. The word evangelism in fact is not in the Bible — but the words evangelist and evangelize are there, and from these we learn what evangelism is. Its meaning in the New Testament is the proclamation of the inauguration of the reign of God in the person and ministry of Jesus and a call to repentance and faith (Mk 1:15). The Septuagint uses the verb, *euangelizestai* which means “to publish”, “to preach”, or “to tell”. Yet, *euangelizesthai* found in prophet Isaiah 40:9, 52:7, 61:1 could be translated as “to bring or to publish good tidings.” The Greek word *euangelizo* means “to preach, to proclaim the good tidings, to tell the good news.” The angels evangelized. They brought “good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10). Jesus evangelized and he preached the “glad tidings of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). Paul evangelized and he said, “I have preached to you the gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:7), Philip evangelized. He “preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). Evangelism in the Bible, then, was a ministry of the spoken word, Evangelization means “to make known the message of the gospel” or the process of spreading the gospel.

1. Different and conflicting interpretations of evangelism or evangelization

I. Evangelization is sometimes defined according to *method* and *style*. It is then primarily understood as public preaching of a revivalistic nature to large (often outdoor, or television) audiences by specially gifted (often itinerant) “evangelists.” The salvation imparted through this kind of evangelism is usually understood in terms of future eternal bliss or the “saving of the soul.” To define evangelism primarily in terms of method and its aim solely in personal, spiritual, and otherworldly categories is however, dangerous reductionism.

II. Some define evangelization in terms of its results: evangelization is communicating the gospel effectively; it is producing converts. This definition is adopted by various bodies and still popular among evangelical circles. Yet, this definition also demonstrates two drawbacks: a). The aim of evangelism is limited to conversion. b). The ministry of presenting Christ becomes evangelism if and only if it achieves its aim of conversion. The truth is evangelism does not depend on positive or negative results.

III. Evangelization is also defined in terms of the “objects” of the process. Accordingly, evangelism is usually distinguished from mission. Mission signifies non-Christians particularly in the Third World whereas evangelization implies people who are no longer Christians particularly in the West. Thus, mission leads to the first conversion or Christianization whereas evangelism implies calling back or re-Christianization.

IV. The East-West definition of mission and evangelization has come under criticism from different quarters since 1950. “Historically the mission of the church is evangelism alone where mission is understood almost exclusively as “soul-winning.” The ecumenical understanding of mission-evangelism is, by contrast, that of the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. In other words, the total Christian ministry to the world outside the church”¹.

V. Margull and even to a certain extent J. Verkuyl present a theory between the concepts expressed in paragraphs (I) and (IV) above. Margull distinguishes between “missionary proclamation” (evangelism) which takes place in the West, and “foreign evangelism” or “mission.” The latter implies the proclamation of the gospel where no church yet exists, where the Lordship of God has never yet historically been proclaimed, where non-Christians are the objects of mission. Nevertheless, Margull affirms the need of combining both types of missionary activities. Thus, foreign evangelism depends on mission-evangelism.

2. The Distinction between Evangelization and Mission

David Bosch notes that Protestant evangelical movements and Roman Catholics seem to prefer the term “evangelization”, whereas Protestant ecumenicals favour the concept “evangelism.” *Mission* can be defined as the total task God has set the church for the salvation of the world. This ministry of the church involves crossing geographical, social, political, ethnic, cultural, religious, ideological, and other frontiers or barriers. *Evangelization* thus belongs to one dimension of the wider mission of the church which is the centre of mission. According to the above distinction *evangelization* possesses the following features:

I. Evangelization is concerned with the salvation of people (not just “soul”) or integral human liberation. “As kernel and the centre of the Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses people, but which is, above all, liberation from sin and the Evil One, in the joy of knowing God and being known by him, of seeing him and of being turned over to him” (EN 9: see AG 13).

II. Evangelization aims at bringing people into the visible community of believers (AG 13). Yet, it ought to be immediately mentioned that Evangelization is neither proselytism nor ecclesial propaganda.

III. Evangelization is also involved with witnessing to what God is doing/has done/will do in human history.

IV. Evangelization as invitation. Nonetheless, it is neither coaxing nor threatening. Rather people are drawn to God out of free will and conviction.

V. Evangelization and the visible and vibrant lifestyle of the believing community. “If the church is to impart to the world a message of hope and love, of faith, justice, and peace, something of this should be visible, audible, and tangible in the church itself (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35)”².

It is true that evangelization offers people salvation as a present gift and with it the assurance of eternal bliss. Yet, the offer of salvation is not limited to receiving life, rather it also extends the invitation to give life, to receive a commission. “Evangelism is calling people to become followers of Jesus; it is enlisting people for involvement in mission”.³

Furthermore, David Bosch mentions that evangelization should always be contextual. Thus, it takes into consideration the gospel message and the context or the prevailing situation at the grassroots level. In this way, evangelization addresses the socio-economic, political historical and cultural milieu of the people. Bosch defines evangelization as follows: “evangelism may be defined as that dimension and activity of the church’s mission which, by word and deed and in the light of particular conditions, offer every person everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of her or his life, which involves, among other things, deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as saviour and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being incorporated into his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being integrated into God’s purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ”⁴.

The last four decades there has been a tendency to regard “mission” and “evangelization” as synonyms. In 1986, the Roman Catholic memorandum indicated that the Catholic Church uses “mission, evangelization and witness” as synonymous.⁵ It seems that at the end of the 20th century, evangelism or evangelization gradually replaced mission. The Catholic Church today often uses the term “evangelizing mission” to refer to the total mission of the Church. This is clearly visible in EN. **Throughout this book, mission will be equated with evangelization. Evangelization in *Ad Gentes* (AG 6) is** “the proclamation to non-Christians until new Churches are for all practical purposes established”⁶. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), evangelization covers the whole of humanity. “While in

Ad Gentes, evangelization is part of the missionary activity, in EN missionary activity is part of evangelization”⁷. “Dialogue and Proclamation” defines *evangelizing mission* or *evangelization* as “the total mission of the Church in its totality” (DP 8). Besides, being based on EN, DP divides evangelization into two concepts: a broader concept of mission (EN 18) and a restricted one. Accordingly, the first means, “a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative” (EN 24). In a more specific sense, evangelization means «a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus» (EN 22). “This proclamation – kerygma, preaching or catechesis – occupies such an important place in evangelization that it has often become synonymous with it; and yet it is only one aspect of evangelization” (EN 22). DP uses the term *evangelizing mission* for evangelization in its global sense, whereas it uses the term *proclamation* for the restricted understanding of evangelization (cf. DP 8). The document of the Congregation for the doctrine of the faith entitled, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* in 2007 notes that “the term *evangelization* has a very rich meaning. In the broad sense, it sums up the Church’s entire mission: her whole life consists in accomplishing the *traditio Evangelii*, the proclamation and handing on of the Gospel. [...] Understood in this way, evangelization is aimed at all of humanity. In any case, *to evangelize* does not mean simply to teach a doctrine, but to proclaim Jesus Christ by one’s words and actions, that is, to make oneself an instrument of his presence and action in the world”⁸.

Let us examine below the evolution of the term “evangelization” in the course of history and its importance in the life of the Church.

3. Pre-Vatican Concept of Evangelization

In the pre-Vatican era, the term evangelization was not very common and if it was used at all, it referred to the first announcement of the Good News. In the early Church, evangelization meant the first announcement of Christ, dead and risen, to those who had not heard of him.⁹ Once the first announcement of Christ had been made, the recipient moved to the second stage, namely catechism. In the 19th century, the term evangelization was adopted in Protestant circles. At the Union Missionary Convention held in New York in 1854 Alexander Duff said, “the chief means of divine appointment for the evangelization of the world are the faithful teaching and preaching of the pure Gospel of salvation”¹⁰. Similarly, at the Ecumenical Missionary Conference in New York in 1900, Robert E. Speer affirmed, “the aim of mission is the evangelization of the world, or to preach the Gospel to the world [...] to make Jesus Christ known to the world”¹¹. The same view was expressed among Catholic missiologists. In 1961, D. Grassa pointed out that evangelization was the apt term for the missionary preaching directed at pagans with the aim of converting them.¹² Just before Vatican II, the transmission of the Christian message in its dynamism assumed three forms:

- I. Kerygma or missionary preaching
- II. Catechesis or preaching of the Christian initiation
- III. Homily and liturgical preaching.

4. Vatican Council II and Evangelization

In the council documents the term evangelization is found approximately 30 times with diverse meanings.¹³ *Lumen Gentium* presents evangelization in two ways: the traditional sense namely missionary preaching (Cf. LG 17) and in a broader sense viz. “the proclamation of Christ by word and testimony” (LG 35). *Ad Gentes* also uses the term evangelization with both broad and more restricted meanings. Articles 17 and 20 seem to present evangelization in the traditional sense whereas in articles 14, 27, 29 and 30, it is understood as the whole of missionary activity. Thus, even though the proclamation of the Gospel is the primary aspect of evangelization, it embraces other factors as well.

Christus Dominus too seems to define evangelization as missionary preaching and apostolate as pastoral care. *Gaudium et Spes* encourages the adaptation aimed at presenting the Gospel in an intelligible fashion to all men and women. "Indeed this kind of adaptation and preaching of the revealed word must be the law of all evangelization" (GS 44).

5. Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN) and Evangelization

It is no exaggeration to call EN, a fruit of the Synod of Bishops (1974). Pope Paul IV himself affirms it. "We do so all the more willing because it has been asked of us by the Synod Fathers themselves" (EN 2). It presents the global understanding of evangelization. Pope Paul VI in EN focuses on two simultaneous processes: "the ongoing evangelization and conversion of ourselves as a Church and the movement into the world to share the good news"¹⁴. Accordingly, EN presents the need of dual conversion: the Church and the World. "The Church which is evangelized by constant conversion and renewal, in order to evangelize the world with credibility" (EN 15). Hence, there is a double mission with two moments of evangelization. The Church exists to evangelize, to proclaim the good news of the Word-made-flesh. Pope Paul VI states, "The Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the Twelve" (EN 15). The Vatican Council II expresses it when it describes the "pilgrim Church" as "missionary by its very nature" (AG 2). EN recognizes the complex act of evangelization as the Church's "deepest identity" (EN 14). This can be called the explicit or *ad extra* dimension of the evangelization process which corresponds to the evangelization process of the Son, the Word-made-flesh. The second moment of evangelization is that of living the Gospel mystery by faithfully responding to the mission of the Spirit through which God shares with us his life and love. This can be named as *ad intra* or the interior dimension.

i. Christian witness, both personally and as a community or the wordless witness of a genuine Christian life (EN 21).

ii. The proclamation of name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth (EN 24).

iii. Such proclamation needs to be carried out with due respect to culture and the context (EN 20).

iv. The necessary link between evangelization and human advancement – development and liberation. In evangelization it is impossible to ignore the importance of problems concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world (Cf. EN 31).

v. Evangelical proclamation sometimes needs to be exercised vis-à-vis inter-religious dialogue (53).¹⁵ As a matter of fact, EN does not lay much emphasis on inter-religious dialogue. Yet, more recent documents present dialogue as "one of the integral elements of the Church's evangelizing mission" (DP n. 9).

vi. Evangelization is communitarian or ecclesial: Proclamation provokes a conversion in the life of the listener and thereby leads to entry into the community of believers (EN 23).

vii. The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others (EN 24).

6. From Christ the Evangelizer to Evangelizing Church

EN bases its theology of evangelization on the concrete ministry of Jesus and his preaching on the Kingdom of God. It further presents Jesus as the first and greatest evangelizer (Cf. EN n. 7). "The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1) is "the good news of God" (Rom 1:1-3). The core message of Jesus was the proclamation of the kingdom of God. "Only the kingdom therefore is absolute, and it makes everything else relative" (EN n. 8). "To other towns I must announce the good news of the reign of God, because that is why I was sent" (LK 4:43), reveals both the urgency and the sense of purpose of Jesus' mission. Through the proclamation of the kingdom of God, Jesus makes available God's salvation to everyone. The precondition to gain salvation is that each individual must undergo "a total interior renewal which the Gospel calls *metanoia*; it is a radical conversion,

a profound change of mind and heart" (EN n. 10). EN further clarifies God's salvation as "liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One" (EN 9). Since, the Good News of the Kingdom which is coming and which has begun is meant for all people of all times, those who have received it, can and must communicate and spread it (Cf. EN 13). In other words, evangelization, whether in terms of its pastoral activity, its re-evangelization or its first proclamation, emanates from its vocation to continue Jesus' mission in the world (EN 15). According to *EN*, the process of evangelization goes through the following stages: 1. Silent proclamation of the Good News or life witness (21); 2. The need of explicit proclamation (22); 3. incorporation into the church (23); 4. The evangelized goes on to evangelize others (24).

7. Redemptoris Missio (RM) and Evangelization

Pope John Paul II in RM strives to answer to the burning question: "why mission?" Mission exists, because «true liberation consists in opening oneself to the love of Christ. In him, and only in him, are we set free from all alienation and doubt, from slavery to the power of sin and death. Christ is truly "our peace" (Eph 2:14); "the love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14), giving meaning and joy to our life" (RM 11). It further notes that Jesus' mission was to bring integral salvation to the whole person and all mankind. Since all people are searching for the newness of life in Jesus which is the "Good News" for all of humanity, Christians are bound to share with all mankind this richness and newness received from God (Cf. RM 11). The Pope further highlights the urgency of missionary activity (RM 1). He then attempts to remove the doubts and ambiguities from this mission. "*Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant?* Has it not been replaced by inter-religious dialogue? Is not human development an adequate goal of the Church's mission? Does not respect for conscience and for freedom exclude all efforts at conversion? Is it possible to attain salvation in any religion? *Why then should there be missionary activity?*" (RM 4) RM affirms that "Christ is the one Saviour of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God" (RM 4). Thus, salvation can come only from Jesus (RM 4) and *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation (RM 55). Yet, RM also recognizes the universal project of God's salvation. "The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from ordinary means which he has established [...]", and that the Holy Spirit "offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God" (RM 6, 10, 28) presents an inclusive Christology. The Pope elucidates the missionary approach: "the Church proposes; she imposes nothing" (RM 39).

The Pope distinguishes evangelization as being three situations: i). *Ad gentes* or the first evangelization; ii). The ordinary pastoral work; iii). New evangelization or re-evangelization of fallen Christians (RM 33). He also names the modern "areopaghi" or new sectors where the Gospel has to be proclaimed today thusly: the world of communications, global village, evangelization of modern culture, the peace, development and freedom of the peoples, human rights of peoples, especially those who are a minority, the promotion of the rights of women and children, the safeguarding of creation, and international relations (RM 37). Pope John Paul II stresses the need to illuminate these new social phenomena with the Gospel. "I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time" (RM 92).

8. Pope Benedict XVI and Evangelization

According to Pope Benedict, the source of evangelization is the personal encounter with Christ. "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (DCE 1).

Besides, he affirms that evangelization is not an option but a divine command. "[Evangelization] is not something optional, but the very vocation of the People of God,

a duty that corresponds to it by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ himself"¹⁶. This command is given to all the baptized to serve humanity in the encounter with Christ.

"That the entire People of God, to whom Christ entrusted the mandate to go and preach the Gospel to every creature, may eagerly assume their own missionary responsibility and consider it the highest service they can offer humanity"¹⁷. He further adds that "The rediscovery of the value of one's baptism is the basis of the missionary commitment of every Christian, because we see in the Gospel that he who lets himself be fascinated by Christ cannot do without witnessing the joy of following in his footsteps... we understand even more that, in virtue of baptism, we have an inherent missionary vocation"¹⁸. Pope Benedict also underlines in *Verbum Domini* (VD) "the need within the Church for a revival of the missionary consciousness present in the People of God from the beginning" (VD 92). Moreover, he observes that the *missio ad gentes* manifests the maturity of an ecclesial community. (VD 95). The insistence of Pope Benedict on proclamation of the "Word" does not limit the process to mere verbal communication. Instead, he invites all Christians to proclaim in deed as well as in word. Thus, he presents a holistic approach of evangelization: serving Jesus in "the least of his brethren" (DV 99), in the word of God and commitment to justice in society (DV 100), in reconciliation and peace (DV 102), in practical charity (DV 103), in the protection of creation (DV 108), and in proclaiming the word of God to young people (DV 104), to migrants (DV 105), to the suffering (DV 106), and to the poor (DV 107).

With the Motu Proprio, *Ubicumque et Semper*, (everywhere and always) in 2010, Pope Benedict established a new office (dicastery) at the Roman Curia: "Pontifical Council for Promotion of the New Evangelization." The new dicastery aims at reinvigorating the Churches living in traditionally Christian territories which are in need **of** a renewed missionary impulse, an expression of a new, generous openness to the gift of grace.¹⁹ The objectives of the new Pontifical Council are:

- I. To deepen the theological and pastoral meaning of the new evangelization.
- II. To promote and to foster in close collaboration with bishops' conferences, the teaching of the Magisterium relative to the new evangelization.
- III. To make known initiatives already under way in local churches and to promote new initiatives, also involving resources of religious institutes, groups of the faithful and new lay communities;
- IV. To study and to foster the use of modern means of communications as instruments for the new evangelization.
- V. To promote the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

9. Federation of Asia Bishops' Conferences

The fifth Plenary Assembly in 1990 of FABC was concerned with the evangelizing mission of the Church in contemporary Asia. It first invites Christians to a renewal of mission, which means the renewal of the faith that God so loved that he sent his Son to be the saviour of all. FABC defines mission thus: "mission will mean a dialogue with Asia's poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions (FABC 1)"²⁰ It then tries to answer the question: Why indeed, should we evangelize? It thus seeks a renewal of the motivation for mission. The reasons are as follows:

- I. We evangelize, first of all, from a deep sense of gratitude to God, the Father "who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing" (Eph 1:3), and sent the Spirit into our hearts so that we may share in God's own life. Mission is above all else an overflow of this life from grateful hearts transformed by the grace of God.
- II. But mission is also a mandate. We evangelize because we are sent into the whole world to make disciples of all nations.

- III. We evangelize also because we believe in the Lord Jesus. We have received the gift of faith. Unfortunately for many Catholics, faith is only something to be received and celebrated. They do not feel it is something to be shared.
- IV. We evangelize also because we have been incorporated by baptism into the church, which is missionary by its very nature because it is the result of the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit (Ad 2). The Church exists in order to evangelize (LG 14).
- V. We evangelize because the Gospel is leaven for liberation and for the transformation of society.²¹

Under the mode of mission in Asia, FABC highlights the proclamation of Jesus Christ, as the central and primary element of proclamation. It then defines what proclamation means thus: "But the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia means, first of all, the witness of Christians and Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, *a proclamation through Christ-like deeds*. [...] Proclamation through dialogue and deeds – this is the first call to the Churches in Asia"²². With regard to the explicit proclamation it notes: "But we shall not be timid when God opens the door for us to proclaim explicitly the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour and the answer to the fundamental questions of human existence"²³. Concerning the manner of proclamation, FABC specifies: "we shall proclaim the Gospel in the manner of the Lord Jesus, who expressed his mission in these terms: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to preach, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18-19)"²⁴. The First Mission Congress in Asia in 2006, working as a pastoral-catechetical congress presented the ideal methodology of evangelizing in Asia as story-telling or faith sharing.

Conclusion

It is the bounden duty of the Church to evangelize always and everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the first and supreme evangelizer, sent the Apostles as he was sent by the Father. "As the Father sent me so am I sending you" (Jn 20:21). Hence evangelization is a continuation of the work desired by the Lord Jesus and it expresses the Church's very nature. Thus, "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity" (EN 14). Besides, Jesus gave his disciples the assurance, "I am with you always, to the close of the ages" (Mt 28: 19-20). Emil Brunner, notes "the Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning"²⁵ Donald G. Miller comments that "Without flame, no fire; without mission, no Church"²⁶. Today there are countless people who are waiting for the proclamation of the Gospel, who are thirsting for hope and love. "Woe to me if I do not preach it" (1 Cor 9: 16)!

Today, the evangelizing mission embraces different elements. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder identify six elements of mission as follows: witness and proclamation, liturgical action and contemplation, inculturation, Inter-religious dialogue, working for justice, commitment for reconciliation.²⁷²⁷ See, Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context and Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, New York 2004.

Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross name five marks of mission as follows: to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, to teach, baptise and nurture new believers, to respond to human need by loving service, to seek to transform unjust structures of society and to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Furthermore, they observe that the five marks are neither a perfect nor a complete definition of mission. Asian Mission Congress 2006 favours the term "telling the story of Jesus" for evangelization. Thus, mission signifies keeping the story of Jesus alive, forming community, showing compassion, befriending the "other", carrying the Cross, witnessing to the living person of Jesus. Accordingly, the method of evangelization uses stories, parables and symbols.

Endnotes:

¹ David Bosch, «Evangelism, Evangelization» in Karl Müller, et al, Dictionary of Mission, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 1993 Dictionary of Mission, 153.

² Ibidem, 152

³ Ibidem, 154.

⁴ Ibidem, 154.

⁵ Memorandum from a Consultation on Mission in Rome, May 1982, International Review of Mission, 71(1982), 458-477.

⁶ J. Masson, "Function of Missionary evangelization or New Churches", in *Omnis Terra*, 68, 4 (1975) 175.

⁷ Paul Vadakumpadan S.D.B, *Evangelization Today, Understanding the Integral Concept of Evangelization in the light of Contemporary Trends in the Theology of Mission*, Sacred Heart College, Shillong India, 1989, 73. The observation of Y. Congar on *Ad Gentes* sheds much light on this discussion. 1. *Ad Gentes* was written for the situation in which old Christian countries sent missionaries to so-called mission countries. This has changed. 2. The action of lay people was envisaged in AG as assistance to the work of the clergy. 3. The world is no longer divided into mission-sending Churches and mission-receiving Churches. 4. Perhaps, AG is too Church-oriented. 5. AG falls short of present demands in the case of "liberation." Cf. Y. Congar, "Ad Gentes Divinitus-a Document for all seasons", in *World Mission*, 26 (1975-76) 18-20.

⁸ Congregation for the doctrine of the faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, 2007, 02.

⁹ Cf. G. De Rosa, "Significato e Contenuto di Evangelizzazione", in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 128, 1 (1977) 320-336. For the evolution of the concept of evangelization see, J. Lopez-Gay, "Evolucion historica de la Evangelizacion", in M. Dhavamony (ed), *Evangelization*, in *Documenta Missionalia* 9 (1975) 160-190.

¹⁰ As cited in Paul Vadakumpadan, S.D.B, *Evangelization Today*, 8-9.

¹¹ Ecumenical Missionary Conference New York, 1900, Report of the ecumenical conference on foreign missions held in Carnegie Hall and neighbouring churches, April 21- May 1, NY, 1900, 1, 20.

¹² D. Grasso, "Evangelizzazione, catechesi, Omelia. Per una terminologia della predicazione", in *Gregorianum* 42 (1961) 263.

¹³ Cf. AA 6, 26; GS 6, 14, 17, 23, 29, 30, 35, 36, 38-40; PO 5, 19; LG 17, 35; CD 6 etc.

¹⁴ Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, "Preface", in Kenneth Boyack (ed), *Catholic Evangelization Today, A New Pentecost for the United States*, Paulist Press, NY 1987, 1.

¹⁵ See also RM n.55.

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, 40th Anniversary of Vatican II's "Ad Gentes," March 13, 2006.

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, prayer intentions, October 2009.

¹⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, October 29, 2006.

¹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI MOTU PROPRIO UBICUMQUE ET SEMPER, Establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, 21.09.2010.

²⁰ For All the Peoples of Asia, Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991, Daudencio B. Rosales – C.G. Arèvalo (eds.), Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Philippines, 1992, 280.

²¹ Cfr. Ibidem 280-281.

²² Ibidem, 282.

²³ Ibidem, 282.

²⁴ Ibidem, 282.

²⁵ Emil Brunner, *The Word in the World*, SCM Press, London 1931, 11.

²⁶ Donald G. Miller, «Pauline Motives for the Christian Mission», in G. H. Anderson (ed), *The Theology of Christian Mission*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tenn 1961, 79.

²⁷ See, Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context and Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll, New York 2004.

²⁸ Cf. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, *Mission in the 21th century, Exploring the five Marks of Global Mission*, Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London, 2008, xiv.



(graphic from qumran.net)

Rev. Fr. Dr. Charles A. Ebelebe, CSSp

Mission as a Continuous Engagement with Reality

Fr. Dr. Charles A. EBELEBE , CSSp, is a Lecturer at the Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu, Enugu/Nigeria.

This is a Paper Fr. Ebelebe presented at the Seminar Organised by the office of the Pontifical Mission Society (PMS) for all the Religious Working in the Archdiocese of Onitsha/ Nigeria from February 18 – 19, 2011 at the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha

Introduction

I thank Sr. Ezeokoli for the invitation to address this august body. It is not every day that one gets the opportunity to speak to religious men and women who are like the cream of the Church, more so those of Onitsha archdiocese, the mother church in Igboland. That may partly explain why I had some difficulty putting together this paper. The other source of my difficulty was the topic: "Mission as a Continuous Engagement with Reality." What did the organizers have in mind when they coined this topic? The alternative topic, "Mission for Money?" was itself a question begging to be answered. It wasn't much better but it did provide some idea as to what the organizers might have in mind. In the end, I decided to stop worrying about what the organizers might have in mind and tell you what I have in mind. Who knows? The Spirit works in mysterious ways; what I have in mind might coincide with that of the organizers. If it doesn't, well, maybe you will find something in it that you can use.

I begin by first defining mission, the key term in our topic. I reserve for last a particular aspect of the reality of mission in the archdiocese of Onitsha that I wish to highlight. In between I discuss some aspects of mission that I consider particularly relevant to our mission in this part of the world.

What is mission?

If I were to ask a few people here to define mission for us, we are likely to get different answers. Let's go ahead and try it. (Ask some members of the audience to say what they think mission is.)

Usually, one good way of discovering the meaning of a word is to go to its roots or etymology. Mission comes from the Latin word *missio*, meaning, 'I send.' Thus, mission in the context in which we are using it has its origins in the fact that "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). To know what mission is, all we need to do is to look at Jesus, to ask, "why was he sent?" Jesus answers the question himself several times and in different ways in the pages of the Scriptures. One answer that clearly comes to mind was early in his ministry when Luke the evangelist tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and was given the scroll of the Book of Isaiah from which he reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk 4: 18-19). This was how Jesus defined his mission, this was why he was sent by the Father, this was, as it were, his manifesto. Every part of Jesus' ministry was covered by this manifesto which the evangelist Luke himself summarized by saying that Jesus went about doing good (Acts 10:38).

Just as the Father sent Jesus, Jesus sends his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21). The Synoptic Gospels record two instances of such sending of the disciples, namely, the sending of the Twelve apostles and the sending of the seventy-two disciples. Matthew, the evangelist, tells us that after choosing the Twelve, Jesus sent them out with the following instructions: "Do not go into pagan territory or

enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (10:5-7). Luke's own account of the sending of the Twelve did not have this caveat about pagan territories and Samaritan towns, instead Luke summarizes the mission of the Twelve as follows: "He summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (the sick)" (9:1-2). Luke adds that the disciples did as Jesus ordered for "they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and curing diseases everywhere" (9:6). Luke records another commissioning, that of the seventy-two disciples, which opens this way: "... the Lord appointed seventy-two others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, 'The harvest is abundant but the labourers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out labourers for his harvest'" (10:1-2). The passage continues with some specific instructions about how to carry out the mission, but we will leave those for now.

The mission of the church takes after these earlier missions of the Twelve and the seventy-two. However, because of the unique position of the Twelve in relation to Jesus' mission and ministry, the church is usually said to have inherited the mission of the Twelve. After his resurrection, Jesus appears to the eleven apostles and commissions them as follows: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you until the end of the age" (Mt. 28:18-20). This is the classic missionary passage. Mission, therefore, is what the church does in obedience to this explicit command of Jesus. Mission can also be described as what the church does in imitation of Christ. But even more fundamental is the fact that the very existence of the church is missionary. In other words, the church did not exist before it received a mission. It was in doing mission that the church came to be. Mission gave birth to the church. We can therefore say that mission is how the church is; mission is constitutive of what it means to be church; or put differently, it is in the nature of the church to be missionary, or as Vatican II puts it, "The Church is missionary of its very nature" (AG, 2).

Now that we have an idea of what mission is, it will be helpful to look back to how this mission was first practised in our land. Where and how did the rain of the gospel meet us? This is important because as the Igbo saying, "Onye na-amghi ebe mmiri bidoro maba ya, anaghi ama ebe o no kwusi;" also, "Onye na-amaghi ebe ano li ozu, na-esi n'ukwu abo ya." Most of us here indeed were not there at the 'burial' in question and that is why we need to educate ourselves about the circumstances in which it took place.

The Advent of the Catholic Church in Igboland¹

We cannot possibly address this subject at length in a paper such as this. All we can do is highlight the key persons, places, and events.

Catholicism came to southeastern Nigeria in 1885 through the agency of the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans).² The Anglicans, through their missionary arm, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), had preceded the Catholics in Igboland by 28 years, having arrived in 1857. The man who led the Catholic missionary enterprise in Igboland was a Frenchman from the region of Alsace, a veteran of the Sierra Leonean mission, Fr. Joseph Lutz.³ He was accompanied on this pioneering mission by Fr. Johan Horne and Brs. Hermas, and Jean-Gotte. Ikenga-Metuh and Ejizu in their book, *A Hundred Years of Catholicism in Eastern Nigeria: 1885-1985, The Nnewi Story*, provide a good summary of the circumstances leading to the founding of the Lower Niger mission.⁴ Fr. Lutz laid the foundation of what is today the Basilica of the Holy Trinity at the mouth of the River Niger at Onitsha. The next important phase of the mission was ushered in with the appointment of another Alsatian, Fr. Alexandre Leon Lejeune, as the head of the Lower Niger mission. Fr. Lejeune was already a seasoned missionary in Africa, having laboured in the Libreville mission in Gabon for several years. He was well suited for the tough challenge that the Niger mission had come to represent. He it was who laid a more solid foundation for the mission through a general improvement in the living conditions of the missionaries as well as a change in missionary strategy which brought about better results. Lejeune died in 1905 in Paris at the age of 45.

The appointment on September 28, 1905 of the Irishman, Fr. Joseph Shanahan, as the Prefect Apostolic of the Lower Niger mission, marked a high point in the history of the mission. Shanahan was Lejeune's "apprentice" and "very cordial friend,"⁵ which might explain why he beat out two more experienced missionaries⁶ to this post. His appointment must also have been informed by the desire by Rome and Paris (the Spiritan Headquarters) to yield to political expediency by changing the French face of the mission to an Irish one in line with the British colonial presence in Nigeria.⁷ The beginning of the Irish missionary character of the Southern Nigeria mission must therefore be put at this date. But this development was not automatic, for French missionaries continued to work alongside the Irish long after Shanahan's appointment. One notices a certain kind of forgetfulness on the part of the Irish to give credit to their French predecessors in this mission, a forgetfulness that the Igbo Church has done little or nothing to rectify.

Fr. Shanahan's tenure straddles the first and second periods in the history of Catholicism in Igboland namely, those of the beginnings and the expansion. In the initial years of his administration, the mission was still a Prefecture. It was elevated to the status of a Vicariate in 1920 and Shanahan consecrated its first bishop, but even then the mission could be seen as still in its infancy. However, by the time Shanahan handed over the mantle of leadership to Bishop Charles Heerey in 1927, the mission was definitively in a period of rapid expansion.⁸ This period of rapid expansion lasted all through Heerey's tenure and transitioned into the period of consolidation with the accession to the headship of the mission of Archbishop Francis Arinze, the first indigenous leader of the mission.

Such are the main lines of the story of the origins of Catholicism in Onitsha and in Igboland. Having reminded ourselves about how it all started, we may now return to the subject of mission to highlight some of the major contexts of mission today.

The Content of Mission

One of the best received official missionary documents of recent times was Pope Paul VI's 1975 Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi*. As its title indicates, Paul VI speaks here about evangelization, but this term is to be understood as synonymous with mission. In other words, where we see the word 'evangelization,' we are to read 'mission.' There are different aspects or components of mission. Of these many aspects of mission, Paul VI singles out a few for special mention.

Mission as Proclamation

The first essential aspect of evangelization that Pope Paul VI highlights is proclamation, which aims to convert individuals and societies (18). According to the pope, proclamation is such an important aspect of evangelization that the two have often become synonymous. He writes that, "There is no true evangelization if the name, teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" (22). The ultimate aim of this proclamation, he says, is achieved when its addressee enters and adheres to the Church, accepts its sacraments, and in turn evangelizes others (23, 24). Pope John Paul II, in his 1990 missionary encyclical, *Redemptoris mission*, has similar things to say about proclamation, which he includes in the broader term, '*mission ad gentes*.' The targets of the Church's mission ad gentes, the pope says, are non-Christians among whom it proclaims Christ and his Gospel, builds up the local Church, and promotes the values of the Kingdom" (34).

A differentiation is sometimes made between mission and missions. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council make such a differentiation in Article 6 of *Ad Gentes*, the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church. They say:

The special undertakings by which the preachers of the gospel, sent by the Church and going into the whole world, fulfil the task of preaching the gospel and establishing the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ, are commonly called "missions". These undertakings are brought to completion through missionary activity and for the most part take place in certain territories recognised by the Holy See.

We can see from this differentiation that what the Council Fathers refer to as "missions", is missionary activity properly so called; in other words, the act of proclaiming the good news to those who have not yet heard it or have scarcely heard it. This is usually in countries or cultures other than the preacher's, and the goal is conversion and admission into the Church. By mission, on the other hand, the Council Fathers mean pastoral care and other evangelizing activities of the Church. A little later in the same Article 6, the Council Fathers go on to spell out this difference when they say that, "Missionary activity among the nations differs from both the necessary pastoral care of the faithful and from the attempts that need to be made to restore unity among Christians." The Fathers make haste to add that these activities are very closely connected.

Many theologians and missiologists consider this differentiation between mission and missions or pastoral care and primary evangelization as problematic. Most will agree with Suso Brechter that except in the very early stages, it is practically impossible to separate mission and pastoral care.⁹

There is hardly any of us here today who is engaged in mission, understood as mission *ad gentes* or as primary evangelization. Most, if not, all of us in parish ministry are engaged in pastoral care. But does that mean that every person within the territory covered by the Onitsha archdiocese has heard the good news? Of course, not. There are probably localities within the Onitsha archdiocese that can still be described as areas of primary evangelization. [*Who among us wants to go to such places?] Besides these, however, one can imagine that there are many non-believers even in our urban parishes. These, too, should be legitimate targets of our evangelizing mission. But how many of us are out looking for these non-believers? Hardly any. Home visitation has all but disappeared from the priests' and sisters' evangelistic tool box. The church has now become a big market that does not notice the absence of one shopper (Eke ututu amaghi n'otu onye abiaghi ahia). The priest, it would seem, has no business with anyone in the area covered by his parish until he or she walks through the doors of his church. This shouldn't be so. A parish priest should be a preacher of the good news both to those inside and outside the church.

It will certainly be a tall order to expect a parish priest in a typical urban parish in today's Onitsha, say, Our Lady of Fatima, Woliwo, to do regular visitation to the homes in the area covered by his parish. Not only does he not need to do this in order to be said to be preaching the good news outside his church, it is even considered undesirable. The problem is that we have inherited a church structure that is very clerical, very top down; a church that considers evangelization to be the task only of priests and sisters. The fact, however, is that by their baptism and confirmation, lay people have been commissioned to be missionaries, to evangelize. It will be difficult for lay people to take up seriously the responsibility they have as evangelizers under the present church structure that we operate in Igboland. We will need to find a church structure that empowers lay people to take up their missionary mandate. The structure of Basic Christian Communities or BCCs, (They are also called Small Christian Communities (SCCs) or Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs)), which is prevalent in South America, would be one such church structure that empowers lay people to be missionary. Pope John Paul II describes these communities as "good centres for Christian formation and missionary outreach" (RM, 51). Religious priests can be trail blazers in this area by incorporating SCCs as a pastoral model in their communities. This is a much more effective way than our current parish structure of bringing the church to the grassroots and of reducing, if not eliminating, the problem of nominal and anonymous Christians.

Mission as Witness of Life

Another important aspect of evangelization that Pope Paul VI highlights in *Evangelii nuntiandi* is the witness of life, to which, he says, all Christians are called (21). Pope John Paul II on his part refers to witness and proclamation as two important and essential paths of mission. Even while emphasizing proclamation as having a "permanent priority," the Pope says that the Church as a community of faith, "Is called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of corruption of political or economic power; by not seeking her own glory and material wealth; by using her resources to serve the poorest of the poor and by imitating Christ's own simplicity of life" (RM, 43).

Francis Libermann, the co-founder of the Spiritans was convinced of the necessity of holiness for the success of his congregation's mission in Africa and never tired of urging personal holiness on his missionary sons. According to Libermann, the call to holiness is addressed to every priest, but it is especially indispensable in a priest destined for the missions. He writes in 1851 to one of his priests stationed at Great-Bassam in the Guinea mission: "The Africans do not need and will not be converted by the efforts of clever and capable missionaries. It is holiness and the sacrifice of their priests that will be the instrument of their salvation."¹⁰

Mission as Inculturation

Another aspect of evangelization that Paul VI identifies in *Evangelii nuntiandi* is mission as evangelizing culture and cultures with "the relationships of people among themselves and with God" as its beginning and end point. The pope points out that evangelization is not identical with culture but they are not incompatible, for the gospel and evangelization are capable of permeating all cultures but without becoming subject to any one of them (20). In *Ecclesiae in Africa*, Pope John Paul II develops this theme at greater length. He reports that the Synod, of which *EA* was the product, "considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the particular churches, for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa" and "one of the greatest challenges for the Church on the Continent on the eve of the Third Millennium" (59). The basis of inculturation, according to the pope, is the Incarnation, for just as 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,' (Jn 1:14) "so too the Good News, the Word of Jesus Christ proclaimed to the nations must take root in the life situation of the hearers of the Word." The pope then offers a definition of inculturation as, "precisely the insertion of the Gospel message into cultures. For the Incarnation of the Son of God, precisely because it was complete and concrete, was also an incarnation in a particular culture" (60).¹¹

Mission as the inculturation of the gospel message in each local Church is an area where I believe the Igbo Church has not done as well as it could. In my recent book, *Africa and the New Face of Mission*, I criticised the Irish Spiritans for having made little effort to embed the gospel message in Igbo culture and soil. I blamed them for bequeathing an ostensibly Irish Church to the Igbo. I blamed them for not listening to the injunctions of their co-founder, the Venerable Father Libermann, who was a prophetic voice in this area. Even though he predated the term "inculturation" Libermann completely grasped its essence and had uttered the following prophetic words long before mission as inculturation became fashionable: "Strip yourself of Europe, its customs and its mentality; make yourselves Negro with the Negroes in order to form them as they ought to be, not in the European manner, but leave to them what is their own."¹² But in the book in question, besides blaming the Irish Spiritans I also underlined the fact that in the forty years since the Irish Spiritans left Igboland, not much has changed. The Igbo Church can hardly be described as a inculturated Church.

One aspect of inculturation that I would like to highlight is language. Practically every missionary document, from Benedict XV's *Maximum illud* (1919) to John Paul II's *Redemptoris missio* (1990) has emphasized the importance of missionaries learning the local language of the people among whom they work. In *RM*, for instance, John Paul II says that for foreign missionaries to contribute meaningfully to the process of inculturation, they "must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations," and they cannot do this without learning the local language (53). But there are very few foreign missionaries in Igboland today and yet inculturation still suffers. The reason, I think, is because we who are now missionaries to ourselves are unfamiliar with our culture and language. How many of us here can read Igbo fluently let alone write it? In fact, how many of us here can speak Igbo fluently? [* Cue in: Program on Hi Nolly: "Ndi ama ama," where even the host struggles to speak Igbo with no English. *Credit to Prof. Pita Ejiofor na otu "Suwakwa Igbo" and Gov. Peter Obi. All Igbo clergy and religious should be a member of this association.] How can we engage in mission as inculturation if we can't even speak our own language? Many congregations here own and run schools. How many of such schools promote the Igbo language among their pupils? It is quite possible that schools run by

the religious in this archdiocese are among those where students are penalized for speaking Igbo. The monasteries played an invaluable role in the rebirth of European languages and culture in the period of the Renaissance. Can the religious of Onitsha archdiocese help save the Igbo language and culture from extinction? The question of the future of the Igbo language and culture is a missionary issue and is one that should worry every right-thinking Igbo man or woman.

Mission as Liberation

The 1971 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Justice in the World*, has this insightful statement on mission as liberation: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

While observing that mission as liberation speaks especially to the Third World, Pope Paul VI sounds some notes of caution on this aspect of evangelization. The liberation that the Church works for, he insists, is not simply a "temporal project," and "cannot be reduced to material well-being" (32). Continuing, the Church, says the pope, "reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual vocation and refuses to replace the proclamation of the Kingdom by proclamation of forms of human liberation" (34). Again, "The Church links human liberation and salvation in Jesus Christ, but she never identifies them," for she knows that "not every notion of liberation is necessarily consistent and compatible with an evangelical vision of man, of things and of events" (35). The liberation that the Church works for is the same that Christ announced and gave his life for, a liberation that cannot be achieved by violent means (37-38). Such liberation would have to include the safeguarding of fundamental human rights, among which "religious liberty has a place of primary importance" (39).

Mission as liberation was not among the aspects of mission that were emphasized by our Spiritan ancestors in the faith. That may explain why our effort in this area still leaves much to be desired. Until quite recently and for quite a long time, Anambra State was turned into a land of lawlessness and anarchy by a greedy and self-serving political class. One searches in vain for a prophetic response from the Church in Anambra during this sad period in Anambra history. The Church in Onitsha just as others in Igboland has hardly any stripes to show in the area of mission as liberation. This needs to change, and maybe the religious in Onitsha can help bring about this change. Nigeria is in dire need of prophetic voices who will challenge a corrupt and oppressive political class that is holding the country hostage. The religious in Onitsha can be those voices, and this current political transition period might be a good time to raise them.

I began this section with Pope Paul VI and I will let him conclude it. The pope reminds everyone that though these various elements of evangelization "may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive," they are in fact "complementary and mutually enriching" (24).

Having highlighted these various aspects of mission and some of their implications for us, I will finish with a brief commentary on what I consider a particular challenge for the religious working in the archdiocese of Onitsha.

The Reality of Mission in Onitsha Archdiocese

Onitsha is a commercial city, the commercial centre of south-eastern Nigeria. The language in Onitsha is the language of money. This reality affects the mission of the religious in the archdiocese. Of the evangelical counsels one can safely assume that the religious in Onitsha will be most challenged by that of poverty. This probably explains why the organizers of this seminar suggested, "Mission for Money?" as an alternative topic for this paper. Money talks everywhere in Igboland but especially in Onitsha. In most dioceses in Igboland, the bone of contention between the diocesan clergy and the religious clergy is often the issue of allocation of lucrative parishes, schools, and other

establishments of the church. This ugly situation did not begin today. It goes back to the era of the Irish Spiritans in Igboland. No sooner did the number of indigenous diocesan priests become more than a handful than they began to agitate for appointment in the big parishes and schools that the Irish Spiritans were in no hurry to cede to the management of the diocesan clergy. Of course, this was not the only bone of contention between the two groups but it was a major one and it created bad blood between them to the point of becoming an object of public scandal. It was in this scenario that the civil war came with the eventual exit of the Irish Spiritans, which led many of the diocesan priests to see the war as a *felix culpa*, a sad and unfortunate incident but one that brought about a happy result. The lucrative parishes and schools that the Irish Spiritans wouldn't willingly give up to the diocesan priests, the war has forcefully wrestled away from them. The diocesan priests could now pray with the psalmist, "when God delivered Zion from bondage, it seemed like a dream;" they could now extol God's solicitude in the song, "Chineke o bu otu oru gi di?" The situation that I describe was to be found in the few dioceses in Igboland in the late 1960s but nowhere was the situation more contentious than in Onitsha archdiocese.

We are in a similar situation today. Many diocesan priests are unhappy to see religious priests ministering in rich parishes or heading big schools. Such priests would readily remind the religious of their vow of poverty, as if they themselves have taken a vow of wealth, as if they were excluded from the summons of the Beatitudes, as if they did not hear that it will be difficult for a rich man to enter heaven. And now that we have many religious orders working in the archdiocese, the contest for lucrative parishes is no longer between the diocesans and the religious but now among the various religious orders as well. Religious orders now compete among themselves for the bishop's favour. Often, no sooner has one religious order fallen out of favour with the bishop than others line up to take its place. In other words, one religious order's misfortune becomes another's fortune. Bishops have sometimes taken advantage of this situation to treat religious orders as dispensable objects that could be used and dumped at will. Such a situation is unfortunate and unacceptable.

In general, religious orders are like the commando forces of the church, trained for the more difficult tasks of the church. The Rule of Life of my own order, the Spiritans, describes the mission of the Spiritans in the church as follows: "We [Spiritans] give preference to an apostolate that takes us to: those who have not yet heard the gospel message or who have scarcely heard it; those oppressed and most disadvantaged, as a group and as individuals; where the church has difficulty in finding workers" (SRL, 12). Many other missionary orders probably have something similar. However, the fact that we Spiritans prefer areas of primary evangelization or difficult missions does not mean that we are to be restricted to only such missions. We will also need to train our seminarians and their formators; we will need to pay our workers and maintain our houses, among other things. It would be difficult for us to meet such needs if we were to be restricted only to hard and unrewarding apostolates. What I say of the Spiritans can be said of other religious orders as well.

An interesting dimension to the issue is that today's hard and unrewarding mission is often tomorrow's lucrative parish. It has happened often enough that a parish or mission that no diocesan priest wanted, say, 20 years back becomes the object of their envy after a religious order has toiled hard to make it viable and desirable. Diocesan priests who would not be caught dead in such a parish 10 years previously now scheme and plot on how to wrestle it away from the religious. It becomes a question of "Emechata anu nkita, o guba onye uzo ulo." In some dioceses it can be a recurrent pattern, where the religious would build up a parish after years of sweat only for it to be taken away and handed over to the diocesans. Such a situation is unfair because *o nwegi onye obi ya na-eri nke ojoo*. Having said that, the bottom line is that the religious should not be struggling with the diocesan priests for rich parishes. Ours is a call to go the extra mile in imitation of Christ.

Conclusion

I have tried in this paper to highlight some essential elements in the Church's contemporary understanding of its mission in the church and in the world. In the process I have identified some areas that call for reflection on the part of the religious working in the archdiocese. There is no doubt that the religious working in Onitsha archdiocese have performed creditably and can very well hold their heads high. If I have highlighted the challenges and not the achievements, it is because I would like us to do even better; I would like us to achieve more. I thank you for your attention and pray that God will prosper the work of your hands.

Endnotes:

¹ I am dependent for this section on a lecture I gave at the Enugu diocesan Centenary Lectures held at the Ofu Obi Centre in May 2010.

² There are some who think that "Spiritans" is a modernized acronym for Holy Ghost Fathers. The fact is that both appellations have been used interchangeably from the very beginning of the order in 1703.

³ Fr. Lutz had worked in Sierra Leone from 1877 before being appointed to **head the Niger mission**.

⁴ See Celestine Obi, ed. *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1985*. Onitsha: Africana Fep Publishers, 1985, p. 117.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-15.

⁶ These were Fr. Charles Vogler, who was already 7 years in the mission before Shanahan's arrival and who we are told spoke German, French, English and Igbo, and Fr. Louis-Joseph Lena, who also spoke French, English, and Igbo, and both of whom were described as excellent missionaries.

⁷ For the role played by Sir James Marshall in bringing about this new policy, see Obi, *ibid.*, p. 111.

⁸ As with the appointment of Bishop Shanahan, or even more so, Bishop Heerey's Irish nationality seemed to have tilted the scale in his favour against the Spiritan General Administration's preferred candidate, Fr. Marcel Grandin, who was handicapped by his French nationality (See Spiritan General Archives, B/191/b/111, as cited by Mary-Noelle Ethel Ezech in her *Archbishop Charles Heerey and the History of the Church in Nigeria, 1890-1967*. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005, p. 57, fn 52).

⁹ Brechter, "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*. vol. iv, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 121.

¹⁰ Walter van de Putte and James Collery, (eds. and trans.), *The Spiritual Letters of the Venerable Libermann.. vols 3, 4, and 5: Letters to Clergy and Religious*. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), 5:246; *Notes et Documents*, 9:62. I saw that the importance of holiness to the missionary vocation was well highlighted in Msgr Adigwe's paper, so these few words will suffice.

¹¹ I am drawing here from my book, *Africa and the New Face of Mission: A Critical Assessment of the Legacy of the Irish Spiritans Among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*. (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 147.

¹² Letter to the Spiritan Communities in Dakar and Gabon, November 19, 1847.

CHELIMO Richard Kimosop

The Palaver: A Model To Reconcile Africa?

Introduction

The present African world presents many complex issues and problems to be addressed. There is crisis in almost every stratum of community existence throughout the continent, which calls for sincere efforts and profound solutions. People in every epoch have always tried to seek better ways or models to solve persistent problems in their communities, departing not from ideas but concrete facts and realities in their particular contexts. Many African communities, in order to confront these crises, had adopted the palaver model, which still serves to analyze these problems and to seek lasting solutions. If this African palaver model, therefore, is profoundly re-activated and transformed to bring out the spirit that has animated it, then, it could help in solving the present challenges facing the Churches and the states in Africa and, indeed, in the whole world. In this article we will discuss the African palaver, not as a simple historical model, but as a dynamic one, instrumental in solving various challenges especially in the present situations of conflict in Kenya in specific and Africa in general. Our approach will be based above all on the African palaver as a model of reconciliation and as a privileged missionary method for effecting renewed Christian life.



Meaning and Significance of Palaver

The word "palaver" is a technical term that is derived from a Portuguese word *palavra*, meaning a talk between tribal people and traders¹; or from a French word *palabre*, which connotes a lively discussion, debate, a process of a tribunal in a village.² Palaver, therefore, refers to a respectful and participative communitarian debate with the aim of finding solutions to pressing individual, family, and community issues.³ It is a process that brings up to date the effective resolution of many issues in African communities. It can further be described as a popular community assembly, through which by the power of the word everything that concerns life of an African is discussed including public affairs, the resolution of conflicts, the formulation of juridical acts, etc.⁴

Palaver has a communitarian character, since its scope is to attend to and heal the interests of every individual person and of all the people. Its origin and historicity cannot exactly be pinpointed, for it is as old as man's first steps in family life and in a wider community, right from the time of his earliest ancestors.⁵ It arose spontaneously out of the necessity to organize the family and community activities and to tackle problematic and sensitive issues affecting the entire community. It is an appropriate community method and practice through the power of the word to resolve conflicts among people, to create judicial acts, to discuss public affairs, to strengthen mutual links of solidarity among all members of the community, to eliminate or isolate divisive tendencies and forces in each member of the community as well as in the entire community.⁶

Bénézet Bujo defends this great ancestral patrimony of palaver in many African communities from unfounded criticism, when he affirms that; "the palaver is by no means superfluous talk or useless negotiation but an efficient institutionalization of community action."⁷ The palaver, nevertheless, should be differentiated from a mere meeting. It is

invoked on rare occasions to deal with serious family or community issues, and it is open to all people, unlike a meeting that is called by the head of the family or the chief to inform on a specific issue. Meetings are informative and limited in nature, while the palaver goes to root causes, involving discussions and binding resolutions.

Targets and functions of the African Palaver

In many traditional African communities, the palaver played the most crucial role in promoting life and organizing families and communities. Where this model of dialogue and consultation is in continuous practice, that community has improved standards of living and harmonious co-existence. Because of the forceful and degrading interruption of this kind of community life and organization by external forces, many African communities were gradually impaired and incapacitated. The introduction of foreign values and systems, which were transplanted from a quite different cultural background, corrupted the people and alienated them from their original cultural values and systems of governance.⁸ After many years of continuous subordination, these African communities are now seeking new avenues towards an introspective, participative and empowering system, which can only be realized through a palaver. The "Three-Selfs" formula (self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating) advocated by some Protestant missiologists could have been a positive response towards realizing this intrinsic yearning for the empowerment of the African individual, but the formula was superficially implemented.⁹

Nevertheless, to-day, as in pre-colonial Africa or in unconquered territories, the African palaver is arousing new interest even among intellectuals as a unique and privileged means to transform the African as an individual and to reconstruct society with the co-operation and responsibility of all the citizens.¹⁰ The main target and functions of a palaver in traditional African societies, was to render these communities humane, to develop their intellectual capacities, to ensure the harmonious co-existence of all human beings and to enable all to attain a dignified and happy life.¹¹ These targets and functions were evident in the various realms and interventions in traditional society: a) promoting life and organizing communities, b) reinforcing cultural and religious values, c) formulating and renewing ethical laws, d) enhancing democracy, responsible leadership and good governance, e) mediating, healing and reconciliation.

Generally, to realize the last function, a holistic healing and reconciliation - in its social and spiritual domains that incorporate both individuals and entire communities - requires concerted efforts from all quarters of society. It involves specific processes and norms, which include:¹² a) that individual persons concerned take initiative to talk over their issues without outside intervention, there being a willingness to improve relationships and overcome parochialism. b) If the above initiative fails, then an elder, a priest or any respectable person, is approached by any of the individual persons to act as a mediator between the two parties to propel the reconciliation process forward. c) If both the above attempts do not bear fruit, then the wider community is involved, and the council of elders takes charge of the whole process until everything is harmonized and all the parties are fully satisfied. In this third stage, other serious issues are also dealt with, such as conflicts between couples, land issues, family feuds and clan feuds among many others. d) In case of more serious issues like homicide, murder, arson, adultery, witchcraft, suicide, incest, robbery with violence, etc., the above procedures are superseded. The gravity of the matter calls for immediate and serious deliberations with rigorous rites of purification and healing. There is a special team of elders constituted and recognized for such vital functions whenever they are needed. This is because the matters mentioned above are very sensitive and comprise those offenses that not only disrupt harmonious relationships in the horizontal dimension but the vertical dimension as well.¹³

The Palaver in Christian theology and African literature

Many African authors are searching for appropriate and lasting solutions to the present situations of conflict in the continent. They all agree that immediate solutions must be found to restore hope and confidence among the general public. Furthermore,

they acknowledge that only those solutions should be sought that are fundamental and touch the heart of the individual African in order to heal his wounded personality. They believe that once the African has regained his dignity, then he can slowly and surely solve his everyday problems in a community palaver. One way, according to some of these authors, is to attempt to re-affirm theories about cultural values by giving greater importance to the spiritual and ancestral heritage. This need arose on account of the challenges of modernism and urbanization in the cities and towns, resulting in new lifestyles and education systems that were purely academic and exam-oriented. These education systems, they say, are in most cases supervised by former colonial masters, who fund the programs and hence dictate the system to be followed, to the detriment of African culture, beliefs, governance and self-realization.¹⁴ The positive cultural values that were held by the people for many years are now found intermittently only in the villages. Reacting to these disparities, M.N. Nkafu notes that; "Traditional morals founded on life, community awareness and values, carved in the heart of every member of the clan or tribe, were completely ignored."¹⁵

Some of the prominent authors, who have in their different fields contributed to the quest for reconstruction, peace and reconciliation of African society, can be explored further. Among these African authors is Bénézet Bujo, a Catholic priest from Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo). He has published many works on contextual theology. His major contribution, especially as regards the palaver as a model of reconciliation, can be seen in his three major works.¹⁶ In his book on *African Theology in its Social Context*, we can confidently deduce that if Christ is the ancestor par excellence, then he is the giver of peace and reconciliation in all their fullness. An ancestor is a mediator and reconciler between the living and God.¹⁷ Harmonious relationships presuppose the continuous linkage between the living beings in the physical world and those in the spiritual world, a concept that Bujo articulates very well in his ecclesiology, which flows directly from his "Ancestor Christology". Just as Christ cannot be separated from his Church, the ancestor or clan elder cannot be separated from his descendants. There is a continuous link through prayers, libations and offerings.¹⁸ In his work, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, Bujo gives a beautiful synthesis of the palaver as an authentic model for reconciliation, especially in his reflection on the relationship between conscience and the ethics of the palaver. He affirms that the palaver is not understood as endless talking, which would mean a waste of time or a war of words; rather, it is based on mutual understanding and agreement, being communicative action institutionalized by tradition.¹⁹ The participants in a palaver are either the sages, who have shared in life-experiences of the people, or the entire people, who have all the liberty to contribute, criticize, blame and accuse anybody, thus contributing to the desired solution.

Almost every sector of life in Africa has something to improve on with respect to the general well-being of the African, the proclamation of the Christian message and solidarity with the whole world. Within these concerted efforts, the African palaver has made tangible strides towards reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa. Jean-Marc Ela, who has been nick-named "*the promoter of theology under the tree*", sums up the importance of the African palaver in the entire life of the typical African, who cherishes the word spoken through the sages in the community palaver, and even more in the maturing ecclesial communities in Africa.²⁰

The centrality of the palaver in many African communities can further be attested to in African oral and written literature. Well-known writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Ole Sonyika, Chinua Achebe, et al., depict in vivid ways how the palaver has been and is still very useful in developing African societies. Chinua Achebe in his books: *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *A Man of the People*; shows the role of the elders in influencing and guiding the way of life of the community. Things turn negative only when there is no full consultation and agreement among the elders, especially during the introduction of Christianity and Western civilization.²¹ The community could no longer hold together because the white man had disparaged the things that bound people together and they had fallen apart. The community was going through a very serious crisis of values and leadership.

This void was somehow being filled with the approach and policies of Mr. Brown, who sought to convert the Omuofia people to Christianity progressively. He used friendly

dialogues and conversations with the local people, even at times during palaver deliberations with the men of title and the elders. This approach was in fact praised by the people, and they found it very interesting listening to him and his strange teachings. He was generally accepted by the people, and in two years he founded a church with a sizeable number of adherents. There were, of course, exceptions: those (extremists) who rejected everything about this new religion, like those who rejected St. Paul, when he preached on the *Areopagus* of Athens (Acts 17:16-34).²²

Mr. Brown was succeeded by Rev. J. Smith, who had a different approach to evangelization and to understanding the African. He was rather rude and disrespectful to the Umuofia people. He scorned the people's socio-religious organization. In brief, Rev. Smith was a Christian fundamentalist, less given to dialogue, and more to confrontation than his predecessor, Mr. Brown. Rev. Smith condemned immediately and openly Mr. Brown's policy of compromise and accommodation, he saw things black or white: either Christian or devilish. During his tenure there were more conflicts between the converts to the new religion and the local people, resulting in the use of force, torture, extortion, desperation and loss of lives.²³ The author, through these episodes, especially those in his book, *No Longer at Ease*, wants to exalt the art and act of discussing, listening and learning from one another, which Mr. Brown tried to cultivate with the Umuofia people. In these works, the author exalts the African palaver that allows people to search for solutions to human aspirations, community's challenges and society's problems.

In East Africa, we have Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who in many of his writings, especially the *Petals of Blood*, *the Grain of Wheat* among others, shows how the African palaver has been and can still be used to promote a sense of conscience among the people. He maintains that the palaver educates people to be responsible and to become protagonists of their own empowerment and liberation.²⁴ Through his interesting literary work, Ngugi has marvelously depicted the power of unity and communal decision-making to effect lasting solutions to the challenges facing people in every epoch. The protagonists, who plan and execute those liberating programs, are themselves victims of the new oppressive and corrupt regime represented by Chui, Kimeria and Mizigo. The unity of the people in the palaver assembly facilitated their defeat and the dawning of a new lease of life and responsible leadership.

The Role of the Modern African Palaver in Reconciliation

The African palaver as discussed above was and is still very instrumental in resolving disputes and issues of everyday living. In fact, the healing of the horrors of apartheid and the management of the South African transitional government were facilitated by the spirit operating in the African palaver. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa, the victims and perpetrators were able to express their suffering and guilt respectively, albeit with a lot of pain, reluctance and suspicion.²⁵ It was only through this commission, which is really a modernized form of African palaver, that the wrongs of the past were openly discussed, challenged, scrutinized and eventually left behind. All the people of South Africa were moved, crying for justice, healing and forgiveness, towards a new beginning, an integral reconciliation and reconstruction. The same success story of healing and reconciliation is evident in Mozambique, Angola, and Sierra Leone after many years of war, thanks to the many players who had a part in this sweeping achievement of holistic reconciliation, transformation and reconstruction in these African states.²⁶

The active participation and incorporation of eminent persons of good reputation from the different sectors of society, taking the role of the sages in traditional African society, added to the palaver the desired representation and trust in the entire process.²⁷ It is worthwhile to note, too, that the spiritual dimension was fully invoked and utilized to move many people to conversion by transforming the actual circumstances of victims and perpetrators to that of deliverance and forgiveness respectively. Christ, who is both victim and savior, played the major part in effecting true healing and reconciliation within and among these African countries and continues to do the same in many other situations of hatred, conflict, injustice, marginalization, war, etc. in the world.²⁸

The Kenyan situation is at once unique and challenging. The skirmishes that ensued after the disputed general election of 27 December 2007 left a lot to be desired in Kenya. They gave a clear indication that Kenya, known both regionally and internationally as a model of success and an oasis of peace in eastern Africa, was treading on dynamite, which was waiting to explode at the slightest provocation. The swift intervention by regional and international leaders under the co-ordination of the former Secretary General of United Nations, Kofi Annan with his famous adage "Responsibility to Protect (R2P),"²⁹ saved Kenya from tribal and national turmoil. The recommendations of the *Waki Commission*³⁰, sanctioned by the Annan mediation, got overwhelming parliamentary and government support to undertake major changes for the good of all Kenyans and to end impunity, tribal animosity, corruption and poor leadership.

Among these changes is the inauguration of a new constitution, the formation of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya (TJRC), reform of the civil service, et al. It is through the TJRC that the modern African palaver will play a major role in bringing healing and reconciliation to the different people in Kenya, both victims and perpetrators. It will serve further to create a trusting atmosphere so that the commission can allow people to share their feelings, pain, frustrations, fears, and losses and hence release the tensions that are devastating them. It is only after this stage that the commission can embark on addressing, to the satisfaction of many and the prosperity of Kenya, the underlying issues of contention, that have dogged Kenyans for many years.

The African Palaver and its Missionary Implications

Can the African palaver contribute positively to renewed Christian commitment in Africa? In other words, can the African palaver provide a participative community model of *kononia*, *diakonia*, *kerygma* and *agape*? This can be answered affirmatively as it has been attested to in the existing models in third world churches, especially in Africa and Latin America. The Small Christian Community model or the Basic Ecclesial Community model is derived from the rich concept of African community built through the African palaver³¹ This ecclesial model has contributed immensely to the promotion of conscience among the grass-roots populations in third world countries, causing an unquenchable search for truth, democracy, equity, justice and peace. The inauguration of the messianic times, the new reign of God by Christ, which was continued by his disciples worldwide (Mt 5:17-19; 28: 19-20), is being re-activated through these communities. It is in line with the growing reign of God that the world's marginalized people are consistently demanding justice in sharing the world's resources. Such models, together with the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, are enabling these communities and associations to become a different society.³²

Despite this opportune contribution of community participation, however, African society and the Church are still in a deplorable condition in terms of spiritual and material empowerment. There is still much to be done to address the fundamental challenges like poverty, urbanization, poor governance, international debt, the arms trade, the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons, demographic concerns and threats to the family, the liberation of women, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the practice of slavery, ecological destruction, tribalism, religious fundamentalism among many others mentioned in the *Lineamenta* of the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa.³³ This worrying scenario indicates that achieving responsible Christian maturity and autonomy in Africa is still an enormous task. But which is the best way forward? The Church in Africa through her Bishops has already identified the solution in calling all people to conversion, justice and holiness.³⁴ This will essentially lead to the admission of guilt of omission or commission from all citizens of Africa and from all former and present accomplices of Africa's colonial despoilers. The majority must admit that they have failed to live as true Africans, as true human beings and above all as true disciples of Christ, who are supposed to be the light and the salt of the world (Mt 5:13-14).³⁵

The African bishops, in the Synod of Bishops for Africa held in Rome, 4th-25th October 2009, have already identified this palaver model as promising in healing the wounds and scars of hatred engulfing the African nations, as they began the long search in the light of the Gospel to deliver Africa from the bondage of darkness, sin, ignorance,

wars and disease.³⁶ The Holy Father accompanied the Synod Fathers throughout the whole period of hard work, prayer, discussions and attentive listening. At the end of the three-week session, he shared his satisfaction and his comforting hope to all the participants and the entire people of Africa and adjacent islands. He stressed that despite the many challenges facing the continent, the risen Lord never tires of intervening for the oppressed and against that which attempts to dehumanize humanity of every era and every land.³⁷ Therefore, the Church in Africa and her people should not lose hope but trust in the Lord of victory, Jesus Christ, who has defeated suffering, injustice and eventually death, the last and final enemy of man.

The quest of justice, peace and reconciliation should be tackled with mutual commitment and responsibility. In fact, these themes among others that are geared towards the basic well-being of man and of all creation, should be periodically reviewed and discussed in reciprocal palavers in world-recognized bodies like the United Nations, World Trade Organization, Church Ecumenical Councils, and many other world organizations, where different people from all five continents are equally represented, heard, and respected, and the deliberations implemented irrespective of economic or military power.³⁸ These world regulatory bodies should also create mechanisms that guarantee surveillance of minimum reforms and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms in every part of the world, as all people have the same dignity, origin and destiny. It is only this way that the fundamental development of all people will be guaranteed and lasting peace attained and maintained

Conclusion

We have discussed how the African palaver model may and can offer great opportunities for transforming the Church and society in Africa. There is urgent need to transform the paradigm of governance of the Church and state in order to complement each other and hence realize that holistic development of the African person. The role that this African palaver has played and continues to play even within contemporary African communities cannot be underestimated. In fact, the sages through the African palaver had over time established how to balance practical life and speculative thought, thus leading to harmonious existence and guaranteeing consistency. If these positive cultural values can be illumined and perfected further by the Gospel teachings, then the palaver can enrich the African person and move him/her towards a holistic life style that rejects all forms of sin that promote unwarranted conflicts and thus give a chance to reconciliation and the reconstruction of harmonious communities.

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Seán McDonagh, SSC

Trees And 'God Talks'

I grew up in rural Ireland in the 1950s, surrounded by trees. Fine horse-chestnuts lined both sides of the road that linked the Killaloe and Limerick roads. In summer their intertwining canopies shut out the light which gave the road its name — the Dark Road. In the fields around our house there were stands of oak, birch and sycamore. About 40 yards away to the south and west my father planted a shelter belt of *leylandis*. We had different varieties of apple trees in the orchard and two pear trees. I entered St. Columbans Seminary at Dalgan in 1962. The estate on which the seminary was built had extensive woodlands, full of indigenous trees such as oak, hazel, holly, ash, Scotch pine, willow, elm and rowan. The woods also contained a number of exotic species, including sturdy Cedars of Lebanon and a few Californian Redwoods. The trees had been planted in the 1820s by General Taylor who had fought alongside Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo. According to locals, the woodlands were planted to mark where different British regiments had lined up to do battle with Napoleon.

During my seven years at the seminary I heard very little that might have increased my love or respect for trees. Students were not allowed to walk in the woodlands and we were not even encouraged to give the trees the basic respect of knowing their names. There was one ceremony each year which gave prominence to a tree. It was the beautiful, plaintive melody which was sung during the Exaltation of the Cross on Good Friday. As the celebrant unveiled the Cross, the celebrant sang, *Ecce lignum crucis in quo salus mundi perpendit* (Behold the wood of the cross on which hung the Saviour of the world). The faithful answered, *Venite Adoremus* (come let us adore). The truth is that we were not being asked to focus on the Cross, but on the figure of Christ nailed to it. Unfortunately, the natural world did not figure at all in our education for ministry in the 1960s. Little has changed in the intervening four decades in seminaries. Theology and Scripture presentations focus almost exclusively on the divine and human realms with little consideration for the rest of creation.

Ministry in Mindanao in the 1970s

My generation of missionaries was blessed for a number of reasons. The main one being that we were given an opportunity to learn local languages in a professional way, using the insights of modern linguistics. After studying the local language, *Cebuano*, in the autumn of 1969 and the first half of 1970, I was assigned to the Parish of Oroquieta in north-west Mindanao, the Philippines. It was quite a peaceful place, but there were significant pockets of grinding poverty, especially among those living in the *barrios*. The Catholic Church in Mindanao was dedicated to promoting the well-being of people through a number of initiatives, especially in the area of land reform.

Everything changed in September 1972 when the then President, Ferdinand Marcos, declared martial law. Many Church workers, especially those who were involved in promoting social justice, were arrested and some were murdered. For the next 14 years, Church people focused their energies on protecting the human rights of the people against the military and the guerillas as well as promoting social justice. During this time I had little knowledge of, or concern for, the environment. The only time environmental degradation crossed my mind was when Panguil Bay in north-west Mindanao turned chocolate brown after a day or so of monsoon rains or a typhoon. Even then, my



concern was more for the farmers who had lost the precious topsoil than for the integrity of the forest and the well-being of other creatures in the web-of-life.

Working among the T'boli

My interest in trees and forests blossomed during the twelve years I spent working among the T'boli people in the Province of South Cotabato in Mindanao. The rainforests are a world of beauty, colour and fruitfulness which encircle the globe in the tropical areas of Africa, Central and South America and Asia. At least half, and possibly as many as 80%, of the world's animal and plant species live in the rainforests of the world. Unfortunately, this has not spared them from the bulldozers and chainsaws of global logging companies. In Mindanao, international and local logging companies plundered the rainforests, especially in the years following World War II. A few companies and individuals became extraordinarily wealthy.

Ethno-linguistic communities such as the T'boli, who for many centuries had depended on the tropical forests for all their needs, including food, building materials, medicinal plants and inspiration for their music, poetry and religion, were devastated by the destruction of the forest. The destruction of the tropical forests in the Philippines has greatly impoverished the country from the perspective of biodiversity and many species have been driven over the precipice of extinction.

Importance of Forests for the local climate

A study carried out in Central America in the 1980s showed that a single rainstorm can dislodge up to 150,000 kilogrammes of top soil from one hectare of hillside once the trees have been cut. The comparable figure from a forested hillside is a mere 44 kilogrammes. Intact forests regulate water run-offs and thus mitigate the risk of flooding and drought. The destruction of forests also impacts rainfall. Cutting trees leads to a reduction in evapotranspiration which in turn leads to less rainfall. Much of the rainfall in southern Brazil, northern Argentina and Paraguay is a direct result of the water recycling activity of the Amazon Basin. According to James Astill in *The Economist*, "a decrease in regional precipitation would be calamitous, but the actual effect could be much worse".¹ On hydrological grounds alone, protecting forests is essential for the future of agriculture.

Soon after arriving in the T'boli ancestral territory in the Philippines, I realized how important the forest was for these tribal people. It became clear to me that, unless the remaining area of forest was protected, the T'boli would literally have no future. So, one of the major goals of my 12 years working among the T'boli was geared towards helping them to protect what was left of the forest. I was also involved in initiatives to replant indigenous species of trees in areas where the forest had been destroyed. That meant learning as much as I could about the rainforest from the T'bolis themselves and also from the writings of biologists, botanists and *entomologists*. *It was an exciting but often dangerous journey. In April 1988, Fr. Carl Schmitz, a 70 year-old Passionist missionary, was murdered partly because he spoke out against illegal logging. In July of that year, Fr. Mario Escoba, a Divine World Missionary, was murdered in Butuan city in northern Mindanao. He had documented atrocities committed by logging companies against local settlers in the local area.*

Rainforests under attack across the globe

The rainforests are under attack, not just in the Philippines but right across the globe from the Amazon to New Guinea. In 2011, only 60 percent of Earth's original tropical forests remain. According to Astill, writing in the Economist, "Despite many campaigns by NGOs, vigils and rock concerts for the rainforests, and efforts to buy it, lease it, log it and not log it, the destruction proceeds at a furious clip. In the past decade, the FAO (UN Food and Agriculture Organisation) records show that around 13 million hectares of the world's forests, an area the size of England, have been lost each year. Most of this was tropical rainforest, razed for agriculture".² Astill reports that the destruction of rainforests has slowed down in recent years in Brazil, Indonesia, Costa Rica and Guyana.

*Climate change will also have a negative impact on global forests. While forests will thrive in high northern latitudes such as Finland, this will be off-set by increased forest dieback elsewhere, caused by "rising aridity, drought, pests and fires — all symptoms of global warming. Melting permafrost will also release billions of tonnes of methane into the atmosphere. Methane is a very potent greenhouse gas. Scientists also warn that if the average global temperatures increase by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius by the end of 2,100, this will effectively destroy all rainforests and release 50 gigatonnes of carbon into the atmosphere."*³

A viable theology of creation

*As a religious person, I believe it is important to have an adequate "God Talk" or theology about trees, forests and the natural world. When I began writing about ecology and theology in the early 1980s there was very little treatment of the subject in Catholic Social Teaching. In fact, despite a number of initiatives by Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Bishops' Conferences, concern for ecology and trees is still very much on the margins of Catholic thought. For example, in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Chapter X on "Safeguarding the Environment" is the weakest chapter in the book. There is only one reference to the plight of forests. That is No. 466 which states that, "in this regard, each person can easily recognize, for example, the importance of the Amazon, 'one of the world's most precious natural regions because of its biodiversity which makes it vital for the environmental balance of the entire planet'".*⁴

Cedars of Lebanon (*Dedus liban*)

In reality, it is not difficult to find a theology of trees and the environment in the Bible and the experience of Christians down through the centuries. In the Bible trees can set the moral and religious context for the life both of the individual believer and of the community. For example, the Cedars of Lebanon grew to a height of 120 feet. Many cedars were more than a thousand years old. The long life and erect stance of cedars represented a symbolic challenge for humans. "The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a Cedar of Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. In old age, they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap showing that the Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Ps 92[91]: 11-15). The cedar tree was chosen for the construction of the Temple of God in Jerusalem probably because the wood was resistant to a variety of insects and that it lasted for a long time (cf. I Kings 6:9-20).

"In the inner sanctuary, Solomon made two Cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high" (I Kings 6:23).

The Olive (*Olea europaea*)

In the Bible the olive tree is seen by St. Paul as a symbol for the nation of Israel (Rom 11:15-25) Olive oil was widely used for cooking in Israel. It was also used at night as a fuel for lighting a room. Olive oil was used in the Tabernacle both as a fuel for lighting an area and also for the ceremonial anointing by the priests of God (Ex 30:24-25; Lev 24:2-4). In Psalm 52[51]:8, the psalmist compares himself to an olive tree in the House of God. "But I am like a green olive tree in the House of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever". The olive tree even plays a role in the Book of Genesis. When the dove returned to Noah's ark with an olive leaf in its mouth, Noah knew the waters had receded from the earth.

Vines (*Vitis vinifera*)

In the New Testament in Chapter 15 of his Gospel, John presents Jesus as the true vine. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower" (Jn 15:1). The believers are the branches, but they cannot bear fruit unless they are joined to and sustained by the vine tree. "Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15:1-5). Those who abide in me, and I in them, bear much fruit because apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Being cut off from the vine has serious consequences for the believer.

"Whoever does not abide in me, is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (Jn 15:6).

The Palm tree (*Phoenix dactylifera*)

The date palm tree is one of the most useful and beautiful trees in the Bible. Its deep tap-root system means that it can grow where there is very little water. Not only did it produce dates, it also produced sugar, oil, wine, thread, tannin and dyes. The seeds could be fed to animals, especially cattle, and leaves were used as roofing material. The popular belief that the fruit became sweeter as the tree aged, is reflected in Psalm 92[91]. Mats and bags were also made out of the fibre of the palm tree. The inhabitants of Jerusalem waved palm branches and placed them on the road when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on an ass's colt (*cf.* Jn 12:13; Mt 21:8).

In the Book of Revelation, the great multitude of the redeemed will greet the resurrected Lord Jesus. They will be "clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands"; crying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7: 9-10).

Trees used as Satire

The author of the Book of Judges uses the contrast between useful trees such as the olive, the fig and the vine, and 'problem' trees such as brambles to ridicule the ambition of Abimelech to become king (Judg 9:7-15).

Susanna and the Judgment of Daniel

Daniel saved the life of Susanna whom two judges had accused of having sex with a young man. Daniel separated the judges and asked them, under what tree did they see Susanna and her supposed lover lying? One said a mastic tree (*Pistacia lentiscus*) the other a holm oak (*Quercus ilex*). Both were seen to be lying, so Susanna's life was saved and the wicked judges put to death (Dan 13:50-59).

Parable of the Mustard Seed (*Brassica nigra*)

This is one of the shorter [parables of Jesus](#). It appears in three of the [Canonical Gospels](#) of the [New Testament](#). The differences between the [Gospels](#) of [Matthew \(13:31-32\)](#), [Mark \(4:30-32\)](#), and [Luke \(13:18-19\)](#), are minor, and the three parables may be derived from the same source. At the most obvious level the parable suggests the growth of the Kingdom of God from tiny beginnings to worldwide Church.

Matthew's version, "He set another parable before them, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is smaller than all seeds. But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches'".

The plant referred to here is generally considered to be a [black mustard](#), a large annual plant which grows up to 9 feet, from a proverbially small seed (this smallness is also used to refer to faith in Matthew [17:20](#)).

The nesting birds may refer to Old Testament texts which emphasise the universal reach of God's Kingdom. However, a real mustard plant is unlikely to attract nesting birds, so that Jesus seems deliberately to emphasize the notion of astonishing extravagance in his analogy. In the natural world trees do support an enormous amount of biodiversity. Both species of the oak tree (*Quercus petraea* and *Quercus robur*) support 284 species of insects.⁵

Some commentators claim that, there is a "subversive and scandalous" element to this parable, in that the fast-growing nature of the mustard plant makes it a "malignant weed" with "dangerous takeover properties".

[Ben Witherington](#) notes that Jesus could have chosen a genuine tree for the parable, and that the mustard plant demonstrates that, "though the dominion appeared small like a seed during Jesus' ministry, it would inexorably grow into something large and firmly rooted, in which some would find shelter but that others would find obnoxious and try to root out".⁶

The drama of redemption is played out between two trees at the beginning and end of the Bible.

Finally, the drama of human history is framed between two very significant trees. In Genesis, the first Book of the Bible we find that God planted, "the Tree of Life and the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the middle of the Garden of Eden" (Gen 2:9). In chapter 3, Adam and Eve were admonished "not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. You must not eat it or touch it under the pain of death" (Gen 3.3). The serpent then told Eve that: "No, you will not die! God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods" (Gen 3:4-5). Eve and Adam disobeyed God's command when they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree. As a result, they were expelled from Paradise and found themselves in need of salvation and redemption. Their disobedience also affected their relationship with nature. "Accursed be the soil because of you. With suffering shall you get your food from it every day of your life. It shall yield you brambles and thistles and you shall eat wild plants. With the sweat of your brow you shall eat your bread, until you return to the soil, as you were taken from it. For dust you are and to dust you shall return (Gen 4:17-19). The last Book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, we find that one of the signs that salvation has been achieved by the death and Resurrection of Christ is the reappearance of the "Tree of Life" planted in the new Jerusalem along the banks of the river and bearing leaves which bring healing and comfort" (Rev 22:1).

Nature in Celtic Christianity

Dr. John Feehan in his book, *Farming in Ireland, History, Heritage and Environment*, makes the point that, "the sacred places of pre-Celtic Ireland were not the caves and buildings of stone which Christianity inherited from Rome, nor were they like the temples of other great religions. For the Celts the sacred place was the *nemeton*; the grove of trees, living, full of spirit, whispering of things in our own spirit we can hardly comprehend and barely articulate.

"Groves and individual trees played an important role in the lore of the Druids, and there is no doubt of the pre-eminence of the oak tree, which of all the trees was most full of symbolism for European Druids and the Celtic people they served".⁷

Feehan tells us that the sacred groves of the pre-Christian era were carried over into the Irish Christian Church of the 5th century. "It is more than likely that many or even most of the early Christian churches were founded on the site of druidic oaks or other sacred trees which still echo faintly in the names of these places: *cill dara* (Kildare), *dair-mhagh* (Durrow), *doire Calgaich* (Derry)".⁸

Columban and Creation

If, in my theology courses in the 1960s, I had been exposed to the thinking of our patron, St. Columban and other early Celtic saints instead of authors such as Adolphe Tanquerey, I would have been much better placed to have developed a theology of creation much earlier in my missionary work. In his Sermon, 'Concerning the Faith', Columban wrote about the presence of God in nature and the importance of understanding nature if we wish to know God. *Amplius non requies de Deo; quia volentibus altam scire profunditatem rerum ante natura consideranda est*, (Seek no further concerning God; for those who wish to know the great depth of things must first know the natural world).⁹

Bishop Chamnoald, at one time a disciple of Columban tells that Columban would call out to the creatures when he went into the woods to fast or pray, and that they would come to him at once. He would stroke them with his hand and caress them: and the wild things and the birds would leap and frisk about him for sheer joy as pups jump on their masters. Even the squirrels would answer his call, climbing into the hands and onto the shoulders of Columban and running in and out of the folds of his cowl. Chamnoald said that he himself had seen this, and that we should not marvel that bird and beast should obey the command of a man of God. Animals are involved in several of his principle

miracles including: escape from hurt when surrounded by wolves, and obedience of a bear which evacuated a cave at Columban's command. With this intense Celtic love for nature it is understandable that nature poetry developed in Gaelic almost one thousand years before it appeared in English or other European vernacular languages. One of the best known of these poems comes from the Monk Marban. He feels nurtured and protected by nature, especially when he is alone. Trees figure very prominently in the poem.

For I inhabit a wood
Unknown but to my God.
My house of hazel and ash
as an old hut in a rath.

And my house small, but not too small,
Is always accessible:
women disguised as blackbirds
take their words from the gable.

The stag erupts from rivers,
brown mountains tell the distance;
I am glad as poor as this
Even in men's absence.
Death-green of yew,
huge green of oak
Sanctify,
and apples grow
close by new nuts;
Water hides.

Young of things,
bring faith to me,
guard my door;
the rough, unloved,
wild dogs, tall deer,
Quiet does.

In small tame bands
the badgers are,
Gray outside;
and Foxes dance
before my door at night.
All at evening

The day's first meal
since dawn's bread;
Trapped trout, sweet sloes,
and honey, haws
beer and herbs.
Moans, movements of
silver-breasted
birds rouse me:
Pigeons perhaps,
and the thrush sings,
constantly.

Black-winged beetles
boom, and small bees;
November
though the lone geese
a wild winter
music stirs.

Come fine white gulls
all sea-singing
and less sad,
lost in heather,
the grouse's song
little sad.

For music, I
Have pines, my tall
Music-pines.
So who can I
Envy here, my
Gentle Christ?¹⁰

The Christian community must begin to see itself once more as part of the wider community of life. Insights from biology, botany, zoology and entomology show us the wonderfully cooperative community of forests. These insights will help us celebrate the beauty and wonders of forests and trees with poets, musicians and other artists. They will also help shape an ethical consensus which will guide human interaction with trees, forests and the wider natural world.

Need for a relevant and viable theology of Creation.

In the past two decades, both the late Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have addressed the ecological issue on a number of occasions. The most notable documents are: *Peace with God the Creator: Peace with All Creation* (January 1st 1990), Chapter 10 of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), *Caritas in Veritate* (July 2009), *If you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation* (January 1st 2010) and The Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps, (January 11th 2010). But it is not all words. The Vatican has installed photovoltaic panels on the roof of the Pope Paul VI Auditorium. In addition, it is funding tree-planting in **Hungary** as a way of off-setting its carbon omissions. However, I will argue that despite the above writings and initiative it is difficult to support the claims that the documents are very competent and insightful from an ecological perspective.

True magnitude of the ecological crisis

Firstly, none of the above documents give any overall sense of the magnitude of the current ecological crisis facing the planet, humankind and every other creature living on the planet. The only document that has any sense of the overwhelming nature of the problem was an Address by Pope John Paul II at the General Audience on Wednesday, 17 January 2001, (n. 4), in which he called for an “ecological conversion” for everyone. In that Address he used the word “catastrophe”, and he stated that humanity needed to stop before the abyss. This document is not found in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nor have I seen it quoted in official documents since. It seems to me that, if an individual or institution does not have an accurate appraisal of the true magnitude of the ecological challenges facing the earth, one cannot claim that that individual or institution understands the current ecological crisis. Furthermore, unless one understands the magnitude of a problem, one cannot design an appropriate response. So, despite an increased sprinkling of ecological language and concerns in addresses and documents from the Holy See, these still lack an accurate analysis of the problem. One can make all kinds of excuses, for example, that the immediate problems facing the human community are so immediate and pressing that there is little energy left to look beyond to see what is happening to the wider earth community, even though such oversights will have dire consequences for every creature, including humankind.

Take the two most serious ecological issues facing the planet — climate change and the destruction of global biodiversity, or, in theological language, the irreversible destruction of global biodiversity: God’s creation. Both of these concerns merit only one paragraph each in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Given the enormous pain, death and destruction caused by these human-created global phenomena, and the devastation they will continue to wreak on the planet, every living creature, and humankind in the future, a single paragraph from the leadership of the Catholic Church is, in my opinion, incompetent and not very responsible.

Urgency of Dealing with the Ecological Crisis

The second element which must inform any ecological analysis is clarity about the urgency of tackling the issue. Is it something that must be addressed on a massive scale immediately, or is it something that can be postponed until other issues, such as poverty or unemployment are first confronted and solved? Once again, in reading the above documentation, one gets no sense that the authors are aware of the urgency of the particular issue. On climate change, for example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has made it clear that, unless greenhouse emissions begin to drop by 2016, there will be no realistic chance of keeping the average rise in global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius. In the past two years, the scientific consensus has moved towards the conclusion that we will need to reduce carbon emissions to 350 parts per million if we want to achieve that goal. The scientific consensus is also clear that, if the average global temperatures rise by more than 2 degrees Celsius, huge areas of the planet will be uninhabitable for humans and many other creatures. This is why the failure

to reach a fair, ambitious and binding treaty at Copenhagen in December 2009 was such a tragedy.

On 6 December 2009, after praying the Angelus, Pope Benedict XVI wished success to the world leaders who would gather in Copenhagen to seek an agreement on how to tackle climate change in a fair and just way. In his brief remarks, the Pope recalled that the way to protect the earth was to include respect for God's laws and the moral dimension of human life. He went on to say: "I hope that the work will help identify actions respectful and favourable to solidarity — development founded on the dignity of the human person and oriented towards the common good" (www.zenit.org December 6, 2009). He spoke about protecting the interests of the poor and future generations. It is regrettable that he did not include the public details of the Holy See's position at the UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen.

At all the previous UN Climate Conferences, the Holy See was represented by the local Nuncio who could not be expected to have a detailed knowledge of the various strands of the negotiations. In Copenhagen, the Holy See Delegation was headed by Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Permanent Observer for the Holy See at the United Nations in New York. He has written and spoken regularly about climate change within the UN. The Delegation included Marcus Wandering, a climate expert, and Paolo Conversi, an official from the Vatican Secretariat of State who also teaches human ecology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. The Vatican Delegation lent its support to a robust Treaty which involved sufficient curbs on greenhouse gas emissions to keep the average global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius. The target set for rich, industrialized countries was a 40% reduction in greenhouse gases before 2020. It also championed a scaling up of the Adaptation Fund to at least \$195 billion per annum. This fund would be made available to economically poor countries in order to help them adapt to the consequences of climate change which are already affecting the planet. I believe that it would have been very effective, in terms of moral pressure, if Pope Benedict XVI had included these figures and the rationale behind them in the Angelus Address of 6 January or in *Caritas in Veritate* for that matter. As it is, very few people know what the Vatican's position is on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Unfortunately, at the UNFCCC in Cancun in December 2010, the Vatican reverted to its previous practice of being represented by the local Nuncio. It also made no public statement.

Ecology is a science based on data

Thirdly, ecology is a science which is based on empirical data about what is happening in particular ecosystems and the biosphere as a whole. Despite this data-focused nature of ecology, none of the above documents based their ecological reflections on scientific data. The drafters of these documents have available to them competent scientific data from reputable bodies such as the IPCC or, in the area of the destruction of Biodiversity, from the UN Convention on Biodiversity. There was no reference to these bodies or to any other scientific authorities in the documents.

The Vatican has no problem when quoting UN documents on economic, social, political and historical data or in dealing with almost every other aspect of Catholic Social Teaching. It has no difficulty in referring to research conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Why is there one *modus operandi* when dealing with economics and a different one when it comes to looking at ecological issues? Other religious organisations, such as the World Council of Churches, include scientific data in their reflections on issues such as climate change. Similarly, Bishops' Conferences in Germany, Ireland, the Philippines, the United States and Australia have written Pastoral Letters on ecological issues. The majority of these documents base their moral and religious reflections on ecological issues on a number of sources. These include empirical data on the topic in question, the new perspective we have gleaned in recent decades on the Universe and the Earth, and the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

Archbishop Giampaolo Crepaldi's defence of *Caritas in Veritate*

In a reflection entitled, "Benedict XVI Offers Middle Ground on Environment", on www.zenit.org (January 10, 2010), Archbishop Giampaolo Crepaldi, the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, gave what I consider to be an extraordinary explanation for this lack of scientific data in Papal documents on the environment. He claimed that "in the countries of north-central Europe, and especially in Germany, Benedict XVI's Encyclical *"Caritas in Veritate"* was the object of severe criticism, precisely in regard to the question of the environment, and particularly in regard to climate change". Archbishop Crepaldi continued, "So it was logical to look forward to this year's World Day of Peace Message dedicated to the theme: 'If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation'. Benedict XVI did not miss the opportunity to restate his teaching and thus probably once again upset all those who tend to weigh down ideological themes with excessive ideological burdens". The central point of the message is, in my opinion, found in paragraph 13, where the Pope says that "a correct understanding of the relationship between man and the environment will not end by absolutising nature or by considering it more important than the human person".

Speaking about the papal document Crepaldi continued: "the Church expresses misgivings 'about notions of the environment inspired by eco-centrism and biocentrism' because it eliminates the difference between man and other living things, favouring an 'egalitarian vision of the dignity of all living creatures'". He went on to say that, "This gives rise to a new pantheism with neo-pagan accents which 'would see the source of man's salvation in nature alone, understood in purely naturalistic terms'".

These same sentiments were already expressed in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Number 463 states that "a correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited. At the same time, it must not absolutise nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself. In this latter case, one can go so far as to divinize nature or the earth, as can readily be seen in certain ecological movements that seek to gain an internationally guaranteed institutional status for their beliefs". In the second paragraph of No. 463, it goes on to state that, "the Magisterium finds the motivation for its opposition to a concept of the environment based on eco-centrism and on biocentrism in the fact that 'it is being proposed that the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings be eliminated, since the biosphere is considered a biotic unity of undifferentiated value. Thus man's superior responsibility can be eliminated in favour of an egalitarian consideration of the 'dignity' of all living beings'".¹¹

The Vatican's vision based on inadequate understanding of modern science

The problem with the above texts is that they are based on an inadequate understanding of modern science. In his book, *The Singing Heart of the World: Creation, Evolution and Faith*, the Irish scientist Dr. John Feehan writes about the unity at the heart of the universe and, in a special way the unity that marks the living world. He writes that "the animal, mammal or bird or insect or worm, is from its unique perspective the subject, each at the centre of a world, and all their worlds overlap and influence each other and this is what, in the words of Albert Schweitzer, is the "science of the architecture of creation". "The differences that distinguish one species from another exist to the extent that each species is uniquely adapted to exploit the resources of one particular niche, which is different from another creature".¹²

Earlier on in the book, he points out that "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".¹³ He quotes Saint Augustine "for heaven God has created the angels, 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".¹⁴

One might ask if the approach of people such as Fr. Thomas Berry or Dr. Feehan denigrates the human as the Vatican documents seem to fear. Not at all. Feehan critiques the hubris of believing that we are the only beings on earth that have intrinsic value, but also celebrates what is truly unique about the human mode of being and the responsibilities

which accrue to knowing our proper place in the scheme of things. He writes, "We are, of course, very conscious that we humans are unique. We are so aware of it that for a long time we thought of ourselves as altogether superior because of this special human talent, in the process losing sight of our place in creation, so firmly were our eyes fixed on a destiny that would see us enjoying eternity with God, in whose image we conceived ourselves to be made — unmindful of the fact that so is every other creature on the earth". He goes on to write that "we can now ask the question of what is special about the human mode of being in a more essential way: what is this special human talent, and how are we meant to use it, knowing our place in creation as we now do, and having a better grasp of family history?"

We are no less a part of the family than before, but we have been promoted to a new post of responsibility in the family, so to speak. If our living, in common with all that lives but in a way distinct to us, can in some sense be thought of as sharing in an incomprehensible well-spring of life that out of infinity infuses the cosmos (we might call it Divine Life), we can through this new human mode of apprehension be said in some sense to share in the Divine Mind".¹⁵

I will agree, of course, that some of the ideas that Archbishop Crepaldi challenged are found in the Deep Ecology Movement associated with the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. This movement insists that "all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and reach their individual forms of unfolding and self-realisation with the larger Self-Realisation".¹⁶ I do not know of a single Catholic theologian who accepts this position. Many competent theologians, such as Fr. Denis Edwards from Australia, Dr. Celia Dean-Drummond and Dr. Mary Grey from Britain; Elizabeth Johnson, Mary Ellen Tucker and Thomas Berry from the U.S.; Leonardo Boff from Brazil and Dr. John Feehan, rightly situate humankind within an emergent cosmology and a living, evolving world. But even before modern scientific discoveries gave us an insight into the extraordinary age of the universe and its evolutionary emergence, Francis of Assisi was telling us that in nature all creatures are kin, in other words part of our family. He expressed this most beautifully in the *Canticle of the Creatures*. All creatures are understood as kin. St. Francis was not a pantheist and he is the Patron of Ecology.

Donal Dorr on *Caritas in Veritate*

In an otherwise positive review of *Caritas in Veritate*, the Irish theologian Fr. Donal Dorr writes that "the whole Encyclical is written from within an older anthropocentric paradigm, the ecological issues are treated almost entirely in terms of present-day human concerns. What is needed today, however, is a kind of Copernican revolution leading to a major paradigm shift. We need to locate all our human concerns — and especially our approach to economics — within the far wider context of an ecological and cosmic vision. Nothing would be lost and much would be gained if what the pope had written in this encyclical about economics and business were framed within this wider vision".¹⁷

I am aware that the translation from the Italian of what the Archbishop said may be crude and may distort his meaning. I cannot see however what all this fear of an eco-centric approach to the biosphere and possible pantheism has to do with the fact that Pope Benedict XVI did not deal in any substantive way with climate change, in an Encyclical issued five months before one of the most important conferences of the 21st century. I do not understand how a scientific analysis of the causes of climate change, or the horrendous consequences which it holds for the future of all life, and the steps that need to be taken to avoid this catastrophe, could lead to pantheism.

An exclusively homocentric view of creation is understandable for people such as Archbishop Ussher of Armagh (1581-1656) who, using the Hebrew Scriptures and other ancient documents, calculated around the year 1630 that the earth began on 23 October^d 4004 B.C., and that all the creatures which are now on earth were there from the beginning.¹⁸ According to Ussher within this kind of cosmology it is easy to see how someone even as perceptive as Aristotle would place man at the pinnacle of the world and claim that everything else on the planet was there to serve man. In the *Politica*, Aristotle writes that, "nature makes nothing without some end in view, nothing to no purpose, it must be that nature has made (animals and plants) for the sake of man".¹⁹

What does 'human ecology' mean?

Throughout the recent papal teaching on ecology we find a very strange and confusing notion called "human ecology". *Caritas in Veritate* states "*when 'human ecology' is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits*" (n.51). I presume that what the Pope is saying is that societies which respect human beings, especially the most vulnerable — the unborn, the young and the elderly — will also be more inclined to respect the environment. But, does one have to invert the scientific categories of the Linnaean taxonomy to make this point?

The Linnaean system, which is still used in biology, begins with the widest category called Biota (all life). The next step up is known as Domain. In that category we are *Eukarya* since we are composed of eukaryotic cells. In terms of Kingdom we come under Animalia or animals. We fit into the Phylum of Chordata. On the next step up we come under the Class of mammalia or mammals. We are of the Order of primates, of the Family of Hominidae, or hominids, and the Genus Homo or humans. Finally, in terms of Species we are *Homo sapiens*. Humans are at the end point of this evolutionary process which emerged over 3.8 billion years ago. The latest research indicates that modern humans emerged about 200,000 years ago and migrated out of Africa about 125,000 years ago.²⁰ Yet, the term "human ecology" claims that every facet of the evolution of life mentioned above, plus other aspects of ecology, such as the relationship between the biosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere and atmosphere are subsumed by the term "human ecology" even though modern humans are probably less than 200,000 years old.

This notion seems totally at odds with what we know from the various sciences, which is that the earth is almost 5 billion years old and that life on earth is about 3.8 billion years old. There were fully functioning ecosystems in the Lower Carboniferous period from 354 to 324 million years ago. At that time there were no flowering plants or birds, but there were giant horsetails and ferns and an array of creatures, most of which are now extinct. In religious terms I am sure that God would have spoken the words in Genesis, "it is good" over this and other phases of the evolution of life on earth. God would not be waiting for *homo sapiens* to arrive over one million years ago to give meaning to the broad sweep of creation. It is important theologically to remember that God has a history with Nature which is independent of His/Her relationship with humanity.

In developing its teaching on the Earth the Holy See would do well to incorporate many of the insights from Bishops' Conferences around the world, going back to the first Pastoral Letter on the environment entitled, *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?*. That was written by the Philippine Bishops as far back as 1988. The Australian Bishops' 2002 Social Justice Statement: *A New Earth, The Environmental Challenge*, contains a lot of insightful material. In 2007, the Committee on Domestic and International Policy from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops produced, *Faithful Stewards of God's Creation: A Catholic Resource for Environmental Justice and Climate Change*.

In 2009, the Irish Bishops' Conference wrote a *Pastoral Reflection on Climate Change*. In dealing with issues such as "solidarity" that document avoids the homocentric language of Vatican documents. On page 21, it reads: "As Christians we cannot consider ourselves or our obligations in isolation from others or from the endangered earth and its creatures". Further on in that paragraph they state, "This responsibility extends to the whole creation and to all the finely balanced life-systems of our world, which may be threatened by even marginal changes in the earth's climate. One of the most effective ways for the Catholic Church to give leadership in the area of protecting the planet would be for Pope Benedict XVI to call a Synod for Creation. Each local Church could begin to reflect on creation in its own area and see how Christians could give leadership in moving towards a more sane and sustainable world. In preparing for such a Synod, everyone in the Church, young, old, farmers, industrial workers, bankers, scientists, fishermen, theologians, contemplatives, religious, teachers, doctors, liturgists, artists, poets and writers would be able to share their insights and wisdom. This would give a great impetus to the task of caring for the earth that cares for every creature. I believe it would also give new life and focus to the Catholic faith in our contemporary society.

Promote the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Some practical suggestions. Religious Congregations should support the FSC. This is an independent, not-for-profit organization established to promote the responsible management of the world's forests. The FSC label provides a credible link between responsible production and consumption of forest products, enabling consumers and businesses to make purchasing decisions that benefit people and the environment as well as providing ongoing business value. The FSC's forest certification standard is recognised as the global gold standard for responsible forest management.²¹ The Vatican and all religious congregations should pledge that they will only use FSC certified lumber in any building programme.

The REDD Debate

REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) has been part of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for over a decade. It is seen as a vehicle to lower CO₂ emissions since forest degradation accounts for 20% of greenhouse gas emissions. Apart from the carbon sequestration dimension of REDD, it has the potential for reforestation countries, such as the Philippines, which had been denuded during the 20th century. REDD could deliver multiple benefits in the area of climate change, protecting biodiversity and securing a sustainable agricultural base for many countries, where food security is becoming a major issue. The recent UNFCCC Conference in Cancun, Mexico, earmarked \$60 billion dollars for REDD initiatives. I have suggested that Catholic Development Agencies such as *Caritas Internationalis*, CAFOD and Trocaire get involved in REDD. I think the Justice, Peace Ecology office of Religious and Missionary Congregations might also monitor REDD.

Religions must support the UN Convention on Biodiversity (CDB)

The Convention on Biodiversity emerged from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Its objective is to protect biodiversity and to ensure that there is a fair and equitable distribution of any financial benefits derived from biological and genetic resources. The Nagoya Meeting wrestled with these questions and ratified the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits (ABS). Initially, Governments from the global North and especially Northern biotech and pharmaceutical corporations were opposed to sharing the benefits of biological resources with countries from the global South where the biological and genetic resources originated. They feared that lawsuits might be brought against them for some products which they developed based on biological resources from countries in the South. Under the Nagoya Protocol a multi-billion dollar fund will be set up to compensate countries in the Global South for any benefits which accrue from the commercial use of their biological resources. The Protocol is potentially worth billions of dollars to countries which are rich in biodiversity and could act as an incentive for them to protect the biodiversity of their forests and marine resources.

The Nagoya Meeting also drew up a strategic plan to conserve biodiversity in the period between 2010 and 2020. The delegates from the 193 countries agreed to protect 17 percent of the land area of the world and 10 percent of the oceans by 2020. At the moment, about 13 percent of the land area of the world and only 1 percent of the oceans are protected areas. Details of the roadmap to achieve the above targets by 2020 are quite vague and critics say that the targets are not ambitious enough.

Unfortunately, the United States, the richest country on the planet, has not signed the UN Convention on Biodiversity. Organisations of civil society and Churches in the U.S. need to lobby their Government so that it signs the CBD immediately.

Despite claiming to be a pro-Life Church, the Catholic Church has very little teaching on biodiversity. Biodiversity only merits one half of a paragraph in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* and the concern is completely homocentric. No. 466 states that, "the environmental value of biodiversity, must be handled with a sense of responsibility and adequately protected, because it constitutes an extraordinary richness for all of humanity". Eight hundred years ago, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that each

creature has the ability to represent the goodness of God in a unique way. Therefore the extinction of species does not merely impoverish the biosphere; it also diminishes our understanding of God. Today the vast majority of creation theologians argue that species have intrinsic value, in other words value in themselves and not merely because they can be of benefit to humankind. In responding to the present ecological crisis the Catholic Church urgently needs to develop a viable theology of creation.

Endnotes:

¹ James Astill, "Seeing the Wood", *The Economist*, September 25th to October 1st 2010, p. 4

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Veritas*, pp. 220-221.

⁵ *Our Trees: A Guide to Growing Ireland's Native Trees in Celebration of A New Millennium*, 2002, p. 44.

⁶ Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A socio-rhetorical commentary*, Eerdmans, 2001, [ISBN 0-8028-4503-7](https://doi.org/10.1017/9780802845037), pp. 171-172

⁷ John Feehan, *Farming in Ireland, History, Heritage and Environment*, Walsh Printers, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, p. 304.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, Volume II, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. G.S.I. M. Walker, School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, 1957 p. 65.

¹⁰ John Montagues (ed.) *The Faber Book of Irish Verse*, Faber and Faber, London, 1974, pp. 57-58.

¹¹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

¹² John Feehan, 2010, *The Singing Heart of the Universe, Creation, Evolution and Faith*, Columba Publications, Dublin, p. 86.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 76.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 76. "Creavit in coelo Angelos, in terra vermiculos, non superior in illis, non inferior in istis, Sicut enim nulla manus Angelum, it nulla posset creare vermiculum. "Augustine, *Liber soliloquiorum animae ad deum*".

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 110.

¹⁶ Bill Davis and George Session, *Deep Ecology and Living as if Nature Mattered*, Salt Lake City, Gibbs-Smith, 1985, p. 64.

¹⁷ Dr. Donal Dorr, *Theology, the Economy and Ecology*, edited by James Noyes and Adrian Pabst, forthcoming this year (2010), SCM Press, London.

¹⁸ Mary Mulvihill, "Humane hanging and other stories", *The Irish Times*, 27 June 2009, p. 6.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, edition, p. 79.

²⁰ Ian Sample, "Out of Africa, 55,000 years early? Human migration backdated". *The Guardian*, 28 January 2011, p. 11.

²¹ <http://www.fsc.org/>



WORKSHOP:

To inhabit a Digital Continent: Challenges and Opportunities for Evangelization

animated by Sister PINA RICCIERI, FSP

Sr Pina Riccieri belongs to the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Paul. She recently earned her Doctorate in Educational Psychology at the Pontifical Faculty of Education "Auxilium» (Rome) with a thesis on "the Formation to Consecrated Life in the Time of the Web ". It is a proposal for Ongoing Formation in Consecrated Life on-line. At this time she is doing vocational ministry as well as formation work. She collaborates with the USMI.

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