



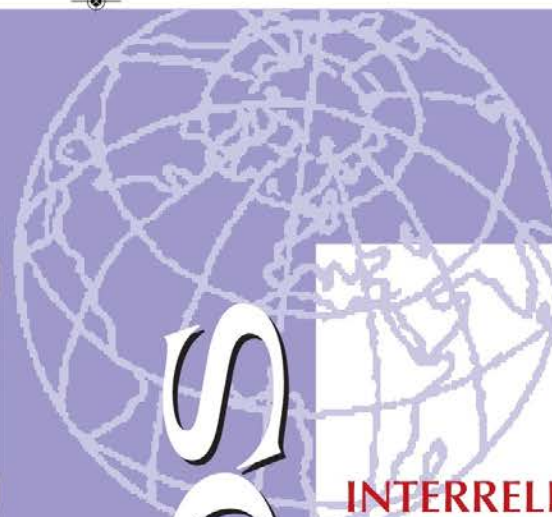
MISSION IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

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INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND MISSION

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Editorial



The up-coming SEDOS Residential Seminar will carry the theme: *Mission in a Pluralistic World*. In this issue there are several articles that could serve as a tool for reflection on the topic of Interreligious Dialogue and Mission.

Anti-religiosity

The first article was a talk Reverend Shoten Minegishi of the Soto Zen Tradition gave at Assisi on the occasion of 30 years after Pope John Paul II had gathered different religious leaders to pray for peace in the world there. He poses a difficult question: “religion may have within itself an anti-religious function that divides believers from non-believers. At a Catholic mass, for example, the reading of the New Testament follows that of the Old Testament.” He concludes: “Similarly, all other religions have an anti-religious function that divides people rather than unites them, which should be the very nature of religion. I believe the religious leaders should take the initiative to underscore this issue and find ways to address it.” We can say the same for the task of missionaries. Although we bring a new message to the world, the link with the “old” message should be searched for too.

Multiple Belonging

Another hot topic of our time is the fact that more and more people take part in more than one religious tradition. Although in the East this is not a new phenomenon, in the West it is. Fr. José María Vigil mentions different Catholic theologians who have reflected on this phenomenon and formulated ways to define it. He uses Pannikar’s words to describe it: the *cosmotheandric paradigm*. Accepting things from different religious traditions is called “syncretism”, mostly used in a negative sense. However, the Protestant minister Daniel Shaw asks himself: “How can we spin ‘syncretism’ in order to raise appropriate questions about what is being blended and how the resulting ‘new thing’ can be viewed positively?” A new term could be given to the

positive aspect in the blending of religions, namely the term *hybridity*, according to him and the authors he discusses in the article.

Judge the tree by its fruits

In meeting other religious traditions we tend to look at what they teach from the outside, without actually *getting immersed* in the respective tradition and religion. The great contribution of many missionaries was and still is that they have the charism, the time, the money, and the courage to put out into the deep ocean of religious experience beyond their own, and to ask themselves what the real difference is in the end. The article by Michel Gerlier about his experience with the spiritual world of the Manjak people in Guinea-Bissau teaches us that we should not judge too fast, and should take the words of Saint Paul seriously: “Try everything and keep the good”. Such an encounter also helps us to formulate our faith in another language.

Teaching respect through dialogue

John Mallare, a Catholic missionary in Senegal, in his article discusses with local priests the importance of dialogue, and how people already live it in their married life. In this world of today where we find everything in the smallest places on earth, it can be the family that teaches the kids how to *respect diversity*, including religious diversity, especially in families with different religious affiliations.

Human values at the center of dialogue

The recent Document co-signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb shows that *human fraternity* – and all human values – should be at the base of all dialogue.

We end this Bulletin with an overview of some of the insights from the last three SEDOS Residential Seminars.

Fr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM
Executive Director of SEDOS

1986-2016 Yesterday as Today

Talk given at Peace Meeting Assisi 2016 “Thirst 4 Peace” by Sant’Egidio.

I would like to begin by expressing my deepest condolence to those who have lost their lives due to the recent major earthquakes that struck central Italy. Japan is also a country with a large number of major earthquakes, so I deeply sympathize with those who have been affected by this disaster.

The Second Vatican Council as the Foundation for Interreligious Dialogue

As all of you may be aware, the Second Vatican Council took place from 1962 to 1965, which has led to the promulgation of the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions. In the statement, the Church urged “her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religious ...while witnessing to their own faith and way of life ... so as to acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians also their social life and culture.” This has opened the pathway for members of the Catholic Church to have dialogues and interactions with members of non-Christian religions. I believe this occasion has also allowed other religious groups to have dialogues with one another.

The East-West Spiritual Exchange

In 1979, when there was a growing interest in Zen Buddhism in Western countries, we launched what we call the East-West Spiritual Exchange with the collaboration with the Catholic Church in Japan. In this program, Zen Buddhist monks stayed in a Catholic meditation monastery in Europe. This exchange has been taking place every four years

since then in Europe and Japan, and there is always a symposium at the end of each exchange event. In the first few years, participants visited the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in the Holy See and discussed their experiences. The Secretary of this council is Bishop Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, whom we have here in this panel today. When we made a report of the 1st East-West Spiritual Exchange to His Holiness John Paul II, he encouraged us to continue holding this event. This has further stimulated our efforts of holding this dialogue, in which we practice each other’s religious training at a Zen Temple and a Benedictine monastery and share experiences thereof.

Prayer for Peace in Assisi as a Pioneering Initiative

In 1986, His Holiness John Paul II invited about 100 religious leaders to Assisi to pray for peace. About the half of the 100 leaders were from religious traditions aside from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. From Japan, leaders of Shinto, Buddhist, and New Religions were invited. It was perhaps the first-ever major event in which people from different religious traditions come together to pray in the same place.



The Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei

In 1987, the year after the first meeting in Assisi, the Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei was launched based on the awareness of the importance for leaders of different religious traditions to deepen mutual understanding and work together in the spirit of Assisi. This event has been held every year since then.

The Community of Sant'Egidio and Its Activities

As all of you may be aware, the Community of Sant'Egidio has been hosting the dialogue since 1987 in the spirit of Assisi. The first meeting that was organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio took place in Rome, but as we had only received the invitation letter a week before the event we were unable to attend. When the second meeting was held in Rome in 1988, I was able to attend the meeting as one of the three participants from Japan.

I can never forget the meeting that was held in Warsaw in 1989. As far as I could see, the venue was packed with a large number of participants, who stood still while praying together.

Since then, I have attended the meetings that were held in such cities as Milan, Munich, Sarajevo, Malta, Brussel, Bari, Bucharest.

Interreligious Dialogue Research Centre

These experiences have led me to establish an Interreligious Dialogue Research Centre in my temple ten years ago. I felt the need to learn from the wisdom of our predecessors and reflect it in our society as a way to respond to the need of promoting interreligious dialogue. The center was therefore not established at the request of a particular organization. My aim is to correct a commonly held misconception that the difference of religion is one of the underlying causes of conflicts as well as to promote ways to prevent conflicts that are triggered by the misunderstanding between different religions.

Our main activity is the seminar that we hold once a month in Tokyo. From June 2007 to August this year, we have held a total of 101 seminars. The seminar runs for two hours each time, and it features a lecture about interreligious dialogue and a Q-and-A session. From the Community of Sant'Egidio, we have previously received Professor Agostino Giovagnoli and Secretary General Alberto Quattrucci as lecturers.

Anti-religiosity within Religion

I decided to hold this monthly seminar because of a critical question I had in myself. My question was that religion may have

within itself an anti-religious function that divides believers from non-believers. In a Catholic mass, for example, the reading of the New Testament follows that of the Old Testament. To my knowledge, this is based on a historical view that God's promises as prescribed in the Old Testament are realized in the New Testament. It follows, then, that in theory Christianity has an element that does not tolerate other religions. Earlier this year, Pope Francis told journalists on his return flight from Mexico that "a person who thinks only about building walls ... and not building bridges is not Christian." It is indeed a very inspiring comment. If, however, we define Christians as those who believe in Jesus Christ as the savior, it then follows that Christianity divides believers of Jesus Christ from non-believers. In other words, an act of believing inherently involves a function that builds dividing walls between people. Similarly, all other religions have an anti-religious function that divides people rather than unite them, which should be the very nature of religion. I believe it is religious leaders who should take the initiative to underscore this issue and find ways to address it.

As a Friend of Christians

It is not my intention to give critical comments only to Christianity. I have always been a Buddhist practitioner, but I studied Western Philosophy for seven years at a Jesuit-affiliated university, learned theology at the University of Munich, and specialized in Western monastic systems at a Benedictine monastery called St. Ottilien Archabbey. Also, I have taught courses on Buddhism and Eastern Philosophy at a Franciscan seminary in Tokyo, and three of my former students are now ordained priests. I define myself as a friend of Christians. In Japan, we have a saying that a sumo wrestler can grow stronger by practicing with his superior. That is why I am asking questions openly and squarely, and if I am wrong I would like to ask my friends to correct me.

It is just that if I like someone, I would certainly like to understand the person correctly, and I would in turn like them to understand me correctly.

I also hope to become good friends with Jews and Muslims as well as Christians. In our research center, we have so far held dialogues with Muslims for a total of 16 times as well as six consecutive lectures on Judaism.

Mother Teresa

On 27 October 1986, I sat near Mother Teresa in this open space in Assisi. I assume many of you know that she brought dying people to her hospice and then wrote down their names on a notebook. She then visited the place of their faith. People who were brought to the home died in about a week. When they died, she held funerals according to the rituals of their faith. I do not think, however, that she did what she did to those with different religious background from a perspective of interreligious exchange or dialogue. To use her words, she served the role to praise the “glory of God”. This means that living for the glory of God naturally entails an interreligious dialogue, I believe.

Dialogue

In this sense, we can never say that we have had enough interreligious dialogues, because act of dialogue is an act of loving other people. We can never say that it is enough to love someone for three days. Just as there is no end to love and our meditation practice, we need to have dialogues as long as we live.

What Religions Should Be

I would now like to introduce a Japanese word for greeting, which is *aisatsu*. This word has a meaning of “approaching someone with an open heart.” Approaching someone with an open heart is a prerequisite for having a genuine dialogue. We live our everyday lives with a necessity to greet all the people that we come across including those from other religions by approaching them with an open heart. It is precisely by opening up our heart to others that we can cultivate our human nature. The Japanese word for peace consists of two characters, and the second character, which reads *wa*, signifies sharing food with others. An act of sharing never arises without paying attention to others. The development of technologies has enabled us to have a convenient lifestyle, but at the same time we are

facing the disempowerment of humanity and the threat of annihilation. I would like to emphasize, therefore, that opening up ourselves to others is the foundation for establishing the peace we are thirst for. The Second Vatican Council introduced a beautiful phrase, that is, “the people of God during its sojourn on earth”. As this phrase emphasizes, it is important to have a kind of dialogue in which we repeatedly seek to approach others by opening up our heart, deepen our mutual understanding, and thereby gain deeper understanding of ourselves. I believe this is one of the main tasks that religions and religious leaders are expected to do in our contemporary society.

Appreciation

Before concluding my speech, I would like to acknowledge my friends (or brothers and sisters) in the Community of Sant’Egidio and the earnest efforts they have been making to create a space for interaction and mutual understanding. I understand it is an extremely challenging task to organize such a large-scale three-day long event while fulfilling other duties. I truly appreciate your passion and hospitality in organizing this event, and I would like to express my deepest respect for your work.

If I may be allowed to make some personal comments, it was my great pleasure to experience the spirit of Assisi and get to know many people when I attended the meeting of prayer in 1986. My encounter with my fellow participants as well as my participation in that event has indeed allowed me to work even harder in the cause of interreligious dialogue. Thirty years have passed very quickly. My sincere hope is that we will start walking on the path of dialogue from this holy land of St. Francis as “instruments for peace” with a fresh and renewed sense of conviction.

In addition, I would like to dedicate my speech to the late Giovanni Masayuki Shirieda, who was the assistant secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the late President Rossano of Laterano University, who had provided warm guidance to the cause of interreligious dialogue organized by the Community of Sant’Egidio.

¿Pertener a varias religiones?

La pregunta es relativamente nueva, hace muy poco tiempo que se hace. Concretamente, es una pregunta más joven que yo. O sea: cuando yo era niño, esta pregunta no existía, nadie la hacía, y por tanto nunca se escuchaba. Pero lo curioso es que si nadie la intentaba formular ni responder era porque en el ambiente ya estaba resuelta y todos sabían la respuesta: solo se podía pertenecer a una religión, a la religión verdadera. O sea: la pregunta no existía porque era innecesaria.

Y ahí estuve yo un gran tiempo: toda mi infancia. Todo el mundo —mi pequeño mundo entorno— lo sabía: Solo había una religión verdadera. Y de las religiones no verdaderas o falsas... ¿para qué te vas a preocupar?

Pero vino el Concilio Vaticano II y aquello fue bastante desconcertante.

No es que dijera que hubiera dejado de existir la única religión verdadera, sino que dejó simplemente de hablar en aquellos términos: parecía feo hablar de única religión verdadera (¡la nuestra, qué casualidad, y qué suerte!): quedaba de entrada un poco presuntuoso.

Las demás religiones no serían "la verdadera"... pero el Concilio Vaticano II les reconoció solemnemente mucho valor. Fue el único Concilio de la Iglesia católica que no habló mal de las demás religiones. ¡Primera vez! Incluso reconoció explícitamente: "la Iglesia católica nada desprecia de cuanto bueno y santo hay en las demás religiones"... Era un lenguaje nuevo, llamativo, y atractivo: qué bien nos sonaba descubrir ahora que también otros pueblos tenían otras religiones, y que con ellas también querían adorar a la divinidad, cumplir sus mandamientos, facilitar el amor entre los humanos, la paz, la coopera-

ción... Era toda una visión nueva, frente a aquellos largos años en los que se rezaba siempre "por los que yacen en las tinieblas y en las tinieblas y de muerte", salmo que, no se sabe por qué, fue aplicado durante siglos a los no cristianos; se acabó el recuerdo diario de las tinieblas y las sombras de muerte.

Aquella pregunta por la única religión verdadera parece como que perdió importancia y fue haciendo mutis por el foro. Los cristianos no debíamos ir por el mundo pretendiendo ser la religión verdadera, sino fomentando todos los valores religiosos de todas las religiones, cooperando con todas ellas. Con el Concilio Vaticano II todos nos convertimos en admira-



dores de las religiones del mundo: la obra de Dios era muy grande, mucho más ancha incluso que nuestra gran religión

y Dios estaba obrando en el mundo desde su mismo origen, extendiendo el bien y el amor, ¡oh maravilla!, cómo descubrir estas cosas tan tarde...

Después se perfilaron más las cosas. Fue durante el mismo Concilio Vaticano II —aunque fuera de él— cuando se planteó por primera vez la pregunta "teológica" por las religiones: *Las religiones como tema delle teologie* (Schlette 1963), "La religión como materia de estudio de la teología". Obviamente, hasta entonces, nunca se había estudiado las religiones como tema de la teología; a nadie se le había ocurrido. Aquel libro inició el despertar de las preguntas que el Concilio estaba desatando sin darse cuenta. Si hasta entonces habíamos estado pensando que solo una religión era la verdadera, y ahora pasábamos a pensar que las otras no eran sin más "religiones falsas", entonces, ¿qué eran las religiones?

¿Qué pintaban en el designio de Dios, si es que pintaban algo?

Y no fue fácil responder, porque hubo que "inventar" una nueva respuesta. La que teníamos de siempre, ya no éramos capaces de repetirla. Ya no sonaba verosímil. Eso de pensar que Dios nos había comunicado a nosotros, solo a nosotros la verdad, dejando a todo el resto de la humanidad en la ignorancia, o el error... —"en la tinieblas y en las sombras de muerte", que era lo que siempre habíamos pensado—, ahora, inexplicablemente, ya "no corría", no nos sentíamos capaces de repetirlo... y efectivamente hubo que inventar una respuesta o conjunto de respuestas nuevas.

Ahí están Jacques Dupuis primero, y muchos otros teólogos y teólogas (latino-americanos, por cierto, *tiempoaxial.org/Por los muchos caminos de Dios*, a partir de 2002) aportando respuestas nuevas, nunca antes dichas que, sin embargo, ahora sí, inexplicablemente, sonaban plausibles. La respuesta del "exclusivismo" ("nosotros tenemos la única religión verdadera, y fuera de ella todas son falsas") cayó casi "por implosión": hizo ruina por sí misma, sin agresión externa, y nadie trató de levantarla; quedó olvidada, desapareció. Cundió entonces una respuesta fácil, la del que llamaríamos inclusivismo, y se hizo oficial. Si había tantas religiones con tantas cosas buenas en ellas, probablemente podría deberse a que todas ellas provenían de una misma religión mayor, para el caso el cristianismo, del cual, muchas religiones más o menos cercanas, de una forma u otra se habían beneficiado por contagio. Con el inclusivismo de alguna manera yo puedo pertenecer también a otra religión además del cristianismo, porque los valores de este están diseminados por muchas de las otras religiones. Y eso funcionó unos cuantos años.

Cuando el mundo de la "globalización" nos sacó de las plazas provincianas del Concilio Vaticano II, nos encontramos con el ancho

mundo de "las grandes religiones mundiales". Fue la época dorada de la "teología del pluralismo". ¿Nueve grandes religiones? No lo habíamos oído antes. Primera sorpresa: la más antigua no la nuestra; el judeocristianismo no era la religión más antigua. ¿Es posible? Será que alguien no ha contado bien. Pues no, parece que el hinduismo era más antiguo, 4.500 años tal vez —el judeocristianismo no llega a 33 siglos, aun medido con benevolencia. Así que, en el ágora de las grandes religiones, comenzamos a jugar ya con más modestia; no somos los primeros, ni los más antiguos... aunque seamos —por ahora— los más numerosos, algo es algo.

Pero este mundo amplio de las "grandes religiones" resultaba un poco más complicado: ¿es que el cristianismo y el budismo podemos llamarnos, igualmente, "religiones"? Dicen que el hinduismo y que el budismo se descu-



brieron a sí mismos como religiones cuando los ingleses (occidentales) les pusieron ese nombre; ellos nunca se habían llamado a sí mismos ni hinduismo ni budismo. ¿Qué tenemos en común el budismo y el cristianismo para que seamos considerados ingenuamente como pertenecientes al mismo concepto de religión? Uno tiene dogmas y normas y doctrinas; el otro no. Uno cree en Dios, el otro no; ¿son igualmente religiones? Lo que está claro es que el término "religiones" hay que ampliarlo, y que no es aquello que me enseñaron a mí de niño, lo que yo vi en mi clase religión, "la única verdadera". Es algo muchísimo más grande y profundo.

A pesar de esas diferencias hay teólogos que han encontrado la necesidad de los puntos de vista tan distantes de las grandes religiones. Paul F. Knitter ofreció, como un último fruto precioso de su dilatada creación e investigación sobre el pluralismo religioso, que el budismo y el cristianismo, a pesar de su rostro a primera vista tan diferente, eran para él rostros igualmente necesarios y complementarios, y

que "sin Buda yo no podría ser cristiano". La historia de aventuras interreligiosas entre cristianos y budistas, por ejemplo, llena una nutrida biblioteca de volúmenes y experiencias; cristianos que han dedicado su vida a compartir la experiencia budista o hinduista, y viceversa; ¡y que lo han conseguido exitosamente, que se han llegado a sentir viviendo las varias religiones, pero con toda plenitud!..

Con una teología amplia en su visión, que haya logrado una visión de conjunto de la acción de Dios en el universo de las grandes religiones, qué duda cabe que se puede responder positivamente, la pregunta por la pertenencia a varias religiones de un modo positivo, sin escrúpulos ni miedos. Como un disco duro puede estar particionado, y puede funcionar todo él y con eficacia, así, un espíritu humano que por formación espiritual ha logrado una especie de "partición" de su espiritualidad puede ser capaz de trabajar con sectores diferentes del disco y/o con sistemas operativos dotados de una compatibilidad, algo tan común como la conocida compatibilidad entre el Windows y el Mac o el Linux... No todo el mundo puede saber manejar un disco duro particionado, claro, pero cualquiera puede saber que eso no es ninguna cosa extraordinaria.

¿Puedo yo pertenecer a varias religiones? Lo mismo, si no estoy entrenado, si nunca he tenido un computador con un disco duro partido, puedo tener dificultades, pero debo saber que la pertenencia a varias religiones es un hecho, y que si es un hecho, es que es posible. La pregunta hoy por la posibilidad de una vivencia plural de las religiones está muy lejos de las latitudes en que se movía cuando yo la oí por primera vez en mi colegio religioso antes del Concilio Vaticano II. Hoy, podríamos decir que no es ningún problema.

Pero podemos apuntar todavía mucho más allá, más allá de donde llegaron las perspectivas del Concilio Vaticano II. Las perspectivas proporcionadas por las ciencias en los últimos tiempos nos trasladan a una perspectiva y una

libertad que nunca habiéramos podido imaginar. Veamos.

Hasta ahora la práctica totalidad de los libros de filosofía y de teología occidentales parten del supuesto incuestionado (¡e incuestionable!) de que el "pensamiento humano" digno de ese nombre solo comenzó con los griegos, y que la "religión-religión", también digna de ese nombre, solo comenzó con Israel. Todo lo anterior solo habrían sido intentos humanos irracionales balbucientes, idolatrías, tanteos mágicos y desvíos religiosos. Aunque nos parezca irreverente decirlo, el pensamiento filosófico y teológico occidental tradicional actual, por muy libre que se cree, está férreamente encerrado por los paradigmas griegos e israelitas (entre otros). No es capaz de imaginar siquiera pensamiento y espiritualidad humana diríamos que... varios milenios antes: no, porque "la historia comienza con Sumer y Egipto" (¡Occidente dixit!).



Por ejemplo, el concepto de Dios único, personal y espiritual nos parece como el mínimo de los mínimos racional exigible para una reflexión filosófica o antropológico-religiosa. Menos que eso ya no nos parece materia susceptible siquiera de un debate inteligente,

sino un mero sinsentido propio de los austrálopitecos, para no pillarnos los dedos.

Hacía mucho tiempo que estábamos convencidos de que "la historia comienza en Sumer y en Egipto", y que más allá (antes) de ellos, todo se perdía en la oscuridad irracional de la noche de los tiempos (que venía a coincidir con "el yacer en las tinieblas y en las sobras de muerte, algo como el sheol"). Pero la historia y la arqueología modernas nos han puesto al descubierto grandes zonas hasta ahora literalmente enterradas, que abarcan varios milenios, no solo anteriores a Grecia e Israel, sino a Sumer y a Egipto, en varios miles de años –por ejemplo los milenios entre el 6.500 y el 4.500–, que nos han descubierto un pasado no solo inédito sino inimaginable, muy diferente a todo lo que hasta ahora conocíamos. No hace falta decir que estas investigaci-

ones son bien controvertidas, lo cual es lógico por cuanto ponen en juego dimensiones que permiten una reinterpretación profunda de muchas de las explicaciones que hasta ahora teníamos por insuperables e indubitables.

Ha sido ya al final del calcolítico cuando han aparecido por primera vez los mitos de separación del cielo y de la tierra, por ejemplo... Hasta entonces, durante miles de años, hemos vivido en un ambiente global holístico sin división, tan profundamente cercano como sagrado, tan divino como humano; el cielo era la parte de la tierra que no alcanzábamos a tocar, por su altura, pero era la misma unidad, tan telúrico, tan terreno y tan nuestro como la tierra del suelo de nuestros pies; y el suelo a su vez no era más que la parte de cielo más cercana, el cielo que abajaba a besar nuestras plantas de los pies y nos compartía su levedad sagrada. Todo era un cielo sin tierra y una tierra sin cielo, un cielo-tierra, un cielo terrestre y una tierra celeste, porque todo era uno, divino y humano, telúrico y celestial, iluminado e iluminante.

Preguntamos, ¿esa forma de entender/estructurar/concebir el mundo, esa forma de comprenderlo y organizarlo "antropoteocósmicamente", que consistía en considerar que sus tres elementos (nosotros, la naturaleza y lo sagrado) éramos solo uno mismo? ¿Era una solemne y bárbara incultura, o era la más profunda e ingenua y clarividente intuición que la humanidad ha tenido hasta la fecha? ¿Y miles de años después, a quién dan razón la física cuántica y la astrofísica de la antimateria y de los agujeros negros? ¿A aquellos humanos del mundo fragmentado y desencantado o los habitantes de aquel sagrado y unificado mundo?

Lo he tratado de un modo más detallado en un pequeño texto sobre "Los humanos, Dios y el Misterio: el nuevo paradigma antropoteocósmico" (eatwot.aca-de-mia.edu/José Ma-



ría Vigil). Los estudios de la arqueológicamente llamada *Vieja Europa*, presentan una visión de la proto-religiosidad de aquellos milenios que trasciende años luz la lucidez racional (de los griegos) y la religiosa de Israel. En aquellos milenios pacíficos matrilineales de la *Vieja Europa* descubrimos cosmovisiones (configuraciones antropoteocósmicas) diferentes, mucho mejores incluso que aquellas que les siguieron tras la caída de la línea matrilineal y de visión holística. Hoy es muy común entre los antropólogos y paleontólogos la pregunta de "¿dónde fue donde nos desviamos?", porque bioevolutivamente hablando hoy es ya obvio que la nuestra no ha sido una bioevolución rectilínea siempre exitosa; y hoy está más que claro, hay camino que desandar, y con urgencia.

Redescubriendo y contemplando las llamativas configuraciones de sus cosmovisiones religiosas –las tan diversas configuraciones "antropoteocósmicas" con que organizaron su mundo–, descubrimos también que la acción del "Misterio" (permítasenos una forma teísta de hablar) estuvo muy presente, y está muy activa, mucho antes del "momento inicial" en que por un comprensible chauvinismo nos hemos empeñado en decir que comenzó todo, cuando, de hecho no fue un momento tan claramente superior, sino, en buena parte discutiblemente inferior a los anteriores. Nos empeñamos en repetir voluntarísticamente las bondades de "nuestra revelación", sin ser capaces de reconocer que esa nueva revelación debería haber sido capaz de detectar, denunciar y corregir efectos negativos de las anteriores configuraciones antropoteocósmicas que heredamos del calcolítico, que venían de antes, que están en la Biblia pero como heredadas, dadas

por supuestas, en el aire mismo que se respira, y que aquella revelación debería haber sido capaz de corregir y de reconducir, si es que este era verdaderamente un momento nuevo y más potente de revelación especial. Pero

no, el cielo y la tierra siguieron separados, la naturaleza seguimos viéndola como "fabricada", material y ya no divina (al revés que el Logos: una naturaleza *facta, non génita*). Dios siguió siendo masculino, dominador del caos femenino, incluso absorbió la feminidad; quedamos solo con un Padre solitario, sin consorte, casi sin familia, y sin cuerpo, espiritual; muy racional, supremamente inteligente, "totalmente otro", sin punto de comparación, y nosotros mismos, los humanos, quedando fuera del mundo, estando en el mundo sin ser del mundo; ciertamente creados de la tierra, pero por el hálito de Dios; caídos aquí en este caos material de barro, carne y sexo, enfangados, y de donde tan difícil se nos hace salir, peregrinos, sin morada en este mundo, esforzados caminantes siempre con la mirada en el cielo y amenazados constantemente por el infierno...Dueños del mundo, eso sí, reyes de la creación, antropocéntricos...Y machistas de arriba abajo.

Por qué la Biblia e Israel no fueron capaces de corregir todo esto, que venía de antes, de las cosmovisiones heredadas,

como con nuevo y corrector avance revelatorio? ¿Por qué tenemos miedo le reconocer con gozo la Revelación con mayúscula, no solo la judeocristiana, sino la integralmente humana, la de siempre, la desde el comienzo de los tiempos? Hoy que somos la primera generación que tiene noticia sobre varios de hominización, con la visión tan amplia como la ciencia nos posibilita, tan gozosos por la Biblia como por tantas otras las cosmovisiones integradas, holísticas, de cielo-tierra, de lo sagrado-y-celeste, del Dios humanado, por todas las que en el mundo han sido –y por todas las que estamos por redescubrir/desenterrar cualquier día.

¿Por qué nos vamos a atascar en un versículo de la Biblia diciendo que ahí fue donde la magia comenzó a ser Revelación, o por un versículo de la liturgia de la comunidad de

Juan en Patmos sobre donde después de cerrar el último libro revelado al último apóstol alguien habría cerrado la revelación y tirado al mar la llave? Tengo para mí el convencimiento de que Juan copió mal: Jesús no habría dicho que solo la verdad nos haría libres... A Juan yo creo que se le escapó la frase complementaria: que solo la libertad nos hará verdaderos... ¿Qué grabadora lo grabó? ¿Pudo ser otra que la grabadora viva del corazón humano en perpetua búsqueda?

Ya sé que tras de todo esto hay mucho que demostrar, y que además hoy por hoy es imposible. Lo digo solo como una intuición que sí tiene base suficiente para que algunos espíritus potentes sean capaces de descubrir que, en realidad, como humanidad no tenemos acta de nacimiento religioso; que toda nuestra historia bioevolutiva es nuestra "historia sagrada" (¡no la judeocristiana solamente!); y que las religiones institucionales (de la época

ya de las grandes civilizaciones) no son sino una forma concreta de organización de su dimensión "transcendente". Con las capacidades inimaginables, mayores que nunca, que

hoy tenemos del conocimiento de nuestro pasado, todas nuestras espiritualidades— sobre todo las que más felices nos han hecho— están a nuestra disposición, y que sí, que yo puedo pertenecer a varias de ellas, a varias religiones, quiero decir, que puedo optar no ya solo por una u otra de las "grandes religiones del mundo", sino que puedo irme mucho más atrás y extasiarme y admirarme y hacer mía aquella cosmovisión antropoteocósmica de la Vieja Europa, o la de los Celtas, o la que todavía algunos espíritus potentes logran respirar en las formaciones arqueológicas de los *menhires*, o la de los *nibelungos* extasiados religiosamente en sus bosques neblinosos (a pesar de las celosas talas de San Bonifacio), o aquellas cosmovisiones antropoteocósmicas donde todavía no había separación entre el cielo y tierra, ni había todavía rastro de un



possible dios masculino racional espiritual que moraba en otro sitio diferente a este único mundo materno divino fecundo que tocamos con nuestras manos y sentimos con nuestro corazón de carne....

Sí, también en este sentido, puedo pertenecer a varias cosmovisiones religiosas, a varios paradigmas antropoteocósmicos, a diversas formas proto-antropoteocósmicas. ¡Y qué *felicidad* la de quien lo ha descubierto! Las religiones oficiales, las teologías académicas, las doctrinas oficialmente reconocidas no lo han descubierto, y parece que les va a llevar tiempo descubrirlo... Muchos místicos y místicas ya lo descubrieron hace siglos, pero no siempre lo dijeron, al menos paladinamente, pues el ambiente no estaba para muchas licencias... Pero como dijo Jesús, solo la libertad nos hará verdaderos.

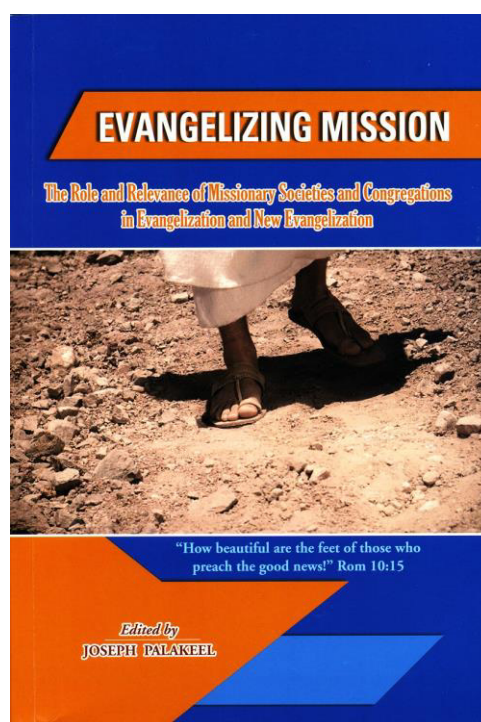
Baste este corto apunte para insinuar que el seguimiento de esa ampliación, vertiginosa, en el curso de apenas 50 años, incluso con esos desarrollos arqueológicos de última hora, es por sí mismo un tema importantísimo, que ojalá muchos estudiantes tomaran como objeto de sus investigaciones de posgraduación.

Un solo peso me queda en el alma, tras escribir este texto, y es el pensamiento que me viene de que algunos lectores van a sentir la tentación de la falta de fe, o la decepción del nihilismo.... Hay personas que comenzaron exactamente donde comienza este texto, en una infancia en vísperas del Concilio Vaticano II; no han tenido la suerte de un acompañamiento que les haya permitido ver toda la amplitud del camino, o han tenido dificultades en la vida que no les han permitido a profundizar suficientemente lo que habría sido preciso para comprender la belleza de este panorama. Y sufro pensando si alguno puede haberse sentido decepcionado o esorientado por el recorrido concreto de este texto con el que he querido acompañarles para transmitirles (quizá inútilmente) esta alegría.

No sé cuánto puedan valer para ellas las simples palabras de un autor firmante; qui-

siera decirles que con gusto daría cualquier cosa por poder compartirles el gozo de este recorrido, que de ninguna manera me ha llevado al nihilismo ni a perder la fe, sino a dar gracias infinitas a la vida y al cosmos por haberme permitido vivir en este tiempo maravilloso de perspectivas tan grandes y universales. Es probable que los próximos 50 años sean todavía más acelerados que los que nosotros hemos vivido. Pero no deja de ser cierto que los que sí hemos vivido nosotros han sido los más acelerados de toda la historia de este planeta. Somos la generación privilegiada que ha vivido una transformación más grande de su fe en el período más corto de la historia. Y estamos muy agradecidos. Ojalá ustedes compartan nuestra inmensa alegría y esa inmensa libertad de ser capaces de pertenecer a todas las religiones de mundo, sin atarnos a ninguna de ellas.

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Beyond Syncretism: A Dynamic Approach to Hybridity



In a recent missions seminar I asked people to call out words they associated with the term "syncretism." The words they gave were overwhelmingly negative: words such as duplicitous, incompatible, neo-pagan, foreign, impermissible, and even demonic were offered. For these students, it seems, missionaries are supposed to avoid syncretism. Louis Luzbetak, a Catholic anthropologist and missionary in the Wahgi Valley region of Papua New Guinea, described syncretism as a "theologically untenable amalgam," which he acknowledged is often a part of crossing socioreligious borders. Furthermore, he recognized that, from an anthropological point of view, both Christianity and Judaism, as they came to be, are syncretistic when compared with their origins. Paul Hiebert defined "syncretism" as "the mixing of different beliefs and practices in ways that distort the truth and power of the gospel." But who determines the nature of distortion? What is being distorted? By what criteria is the truth established? In short, who sets the standard?

In another class I asked for a show of hands for how many thought "syncretism" was a positive term; no hands went up. I tried again: "How many consider syncretism negative?" Most of the class raised their hands. In the discussion that followed, the few who did not raise their hands were international students who acknowledged they were conflicted because of firsthand experience with missionaries. While accepting Christianity, they also valued their local heritage, which they did not want to abandon. Interestingly, it was these students who put their finger on the issue. From whose perspective is syncretism considered a negative response to the Gospel?

When the response to local practices comes from an outside judgment, the result is almost always negative—it is not what outsiders expect; it does not reflect what they "know" to

be "true." Indigenous people, in contrast, desire to maintain their traditions and serve the God who has been with them long before any expatriate missionary showed up. They trust their local heritage, even while questioning where those beliefs have taken them when viewed from a biblical perspective. The Gospel can be powerful only when people accept the basic premises upon which truth is communicated. And truth must be upheld based on what God has said, not what another human being thinks God is saying from a particular socioreligious perspective. As Alan Tippett pointed out, syncretism is the interface between what was there when missionaries arrived and what remains when they depart. Charles Kraft artfully established the need to reframe the entire question of syncretism by emphasizing a "culture-conscious-cross-cultural theologizing," what Robert Schreiter called "local theologies."

The international students intuitively responded differently from most of the class and set me on a trajectory of thinking through why this mixing, or blending, of beliefs and practices (as the Oxford Dictionary defines "syncretism") is frequently considered negative. How can we spin "syncretism" in order to raise appropriate questions about what is being blended and how the resulting "new thing" can be viewed positively? What follows is a coalition of ideas sparked by the writings of the Indian postmodernist Homi Bhabha, the First Nations thinker Richard Twiss, and a plethora of others whose recent writings challenge our thinking and encourage us to consider others before ourselves (Phil. 2:3). This reflection also accounts for the findings of a new book that William R. (Bill) Burrows and I have edited. Thirteen scholars from around the world helped us consider how to apply God's Word to redeem traditional rituals, which people can apply to appropriately worship God in their context. My objective here is to build on these insights as a means to

move beyond syncretism to an appreciation of the new blend, a concept increasingly being labeled *hybridity*.

Recognizing hybridity

Hybridity is not a new idea; it has been a part of the colonial dialogue and moves through modernity to help us understand and appreciate globalization as the mixture of cultural universalism and localization—what Thomas Eriksen calls "big issues" and "small places," namely, panhuman generalities in the context of sociocultural specifics. Hybridity is two sides of the same coin, both of which are necessary. It began in biology with Mendel's genetic experiments and extends to crossing plants within a species to create preferred traits that enhance the product—that is, hybrid plants with manifestations that go beyond the original stock in order to change the characteristics of future plant generations. Hybridity is greater than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, the process by which hybridity is achieved is critical; both process and result must be considered.

Over time, hybridity was extended beyond its biological roots to identify a blending of some kind: racial, linguistic, literary, cultural, and religious, to name but a few. Hybridity represents the new thing that emerges because other entities came together in previously undefined ways to create something different, something heretofore unknown, something unexpected.

Anthropologically, the concept of hybridity is a natural part of the process of assimilating cultural influences from various sources. This process has both positive and negative effects, resulting in an inevitable and dynamic interaction between the peoples involved. Such was Homi Bhabha's political posturing when he noted, "The colonial discourse has reached that point when, faced with the hybridity of its objects, the presence of power is revealed as something other than what its rules of recognition assert." Hybridity, then, is not only inevitable but is also a positive force for change, both for those who hold power and for those who enter the process despite apparent subjugation. Neither can remain what it was prior to interaction; a new thing happens. Jan Nederveen Pieterse argues that globalization

as hybridization is not a homogenizing, modernizing, and Westernizing process; rather, it broadens the conceptualization of the idea and emphasizes what it becomes, not what either in itself was. Hybridity, for him, is a process of convergence, a synthesis of previous principles that are meaningful not only in relation to the contributing ideas but also in looking forward to what can be. "Growing awareness of cultural difference is a function of globalization."

When these hybridized ideas are applied to God's interaction with human beings, we see transformation to God's intention for the whole of creation. People, created in the image of God and with that image nascent within them, desire, when confronted with God's presence, to become like their Creator (Rom. 8:29). Such is the concept of incarnation as woven throughout the biblical text from Genesis to Revelation by repeatedly bringing God into relationship with human beings. God came to the garden in the cool of the day to talk with Adam and Eve; Creator entered the created world in order to enjoy it. God spoke to Noah, and the result was something the world had never seen. A universal flood swept away humanity as we knew it, but by way of the ark, God saved eight souls, from which humanity started anew. God's repeated conversations with old-man Abraham led to a nation by which all peoples of the earth are blessed. The story continues in order to demonstrate how spiritual presence reflects God's intention within the human condition—Emmanuel, God with us. "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12). Oswald Chambers says it well in his Christmas day reflection: "[Christ] is not man becoming God, but God Incarnate, God coming into human flesh, coming into it from outside. His life is the Highest and the Holiest entering in at the Lowliest door. Our Lord's birth was an advent."

The Abrahamic covenant is best construed as the archetype of the missionary mandate both in the Bible and in our contemporary world. It offers a horizon from which to envision something far wider than the salvation of individuals or the nation of Israel itself. God's promise to Abraham and his descendants re-

flects a dialogue between God and humanity, manifested in God's relationship with Israel. Indeed, the Abrahamic and later covenants unveil a vital part of the cosmic process that aims at bringing to fullness the relationship of God with the world as spoken of in 1 Corinthians 15:28, the day in which God will be "all in all" through the work of Jesus the Christ: God's presence with us—hybridity.

Accounting for mission in our day, hybridity implies (as I suggested some years ago) that those who bear the message will be transformed by those who respond. Both the messenger and the recipient change as a result of understanding God's presence in a context where both are aware of their perceptions. When the two interrelate, however, a new expression emerges, and each learns from the other. These hybridizing dynamics create what Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner call "conceptual blending." Neither is the same as it was before the contact—a dynamic transformation has taken place.

Intercultural dialogue is required not only for appreciating religious expression but also for recognizing anthropological issues pursuant to culture change and social identity. Hence, as Gerald Arbuckle



notes, syncretism is more than "an unacceptable amalgam of religious beliefs and practices . . . to be identified and immediately destroyed by church authorities." The cultural context must be identified and the nature of religious experience within that context understood in light of people's experience with God.

Because of God's amazing creativity, that image can be expressed across the multitudinous ingenuity that is humanity as we know it. Each expression is capable of incorporating God in its context because God is already there. This presence of God in each and every embodiment of culture, in turn, gives others an opportunity to gain new insight about God and spirituality. This new insight relates to the concept of hybridity and serves as a positive recognition of true inculturation. Inasmuch as the Bible is a record of God's communication

to human beings across the ages and in a wide variety of contexts inclusive of creation and re-creation—from Genesis to Revelation—the Word in its many manifestations (from oral to written text and transculturated contexts) must provide the lens of discernment for assessing what is viewed as syncretistic. As long as the critique is lodged in culture, any other culture, by definition, may be perceived as syncretistic. As Hiebert makes abundantly clear, the criteria for judging syncretism must not be cultural, but rather a view from above, revealing God's intent in any cultural environment. The critique comes from God's purpose in any socioreligious context—from above, not from below.

How, then, do people determine what is in accord with the Spirit of Christ? How do peoples such as the Igbo of Nigeria, the Simbu of Papua New Guinea, the Dakelh of northern British Columbia, or Armenian Orthodox believers in the American heartland utilize reli-

gious experience to reflect their Christian identity and self-understanding?

More specifically, how should cultures that recognize, venerate, address, or fulfill obligations to their ancestors and other non-material "presences" (what anthropologists call superhuman beings) take account of these realities at the same time as they are saying yes to Jesus in their lives? These questions do not apply only to societies outside the West. In the translator's preface to Shusaku Endo's monumental work *Silence*, William Johnston notes, "Mr. Endo's thesis is more universal than many of his Japanese readers have suspected. For if Hellenistic Christianity does not fit Japan, neither does it (in the opinion of many) suit the modern West; if the notion of God has to be rethought for Japan (as this novel constantly stresses), so has it to be rethought for the modern West."

Our missiological task, then, is to allow the seed of God's truth to take root and grow to produce life-giving nourishment for all who partake (John 12:24; Matt. 13:31-32). For that to happen we must patiently allow the Holy

Spirit to enhance growth and produce fruit so we can savor its flavor, different as it draws from the soil of each location.

Valuing hybridity

In his posthumously published book *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, Richard Twiss attempted to move beyond the negativity of syncretism by adding the descriptor "counteractive." His objective was to highlight the First Nations perspective rather than the Western habit of automatically assuming that indigenous beliefs and practices were "perceived as incompatible or opposing beliefs." He notes that, in terms of Western systematic theology, Indian (a word often used derogatorily) beliefs and values were "not seen as positive, but rather as antithetical to 'sound doctrine.'" The non-native population, however, set the standard for "sound doctrine," thereby negating thousands of years of spirituality among the peoples of North America. Such reductionism resulted in Native expressions being considered not only syncretistic but also "synonymous with biblical heresy." By using the term "counteractive syncretism," Twiss sought to "diminish, resist or stop" the oppressive outside influences that inhibited the faith journey of aboriginal followers of Jesus.

The reality for Twiss and his friends in the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies was to cast indigenous assumptions as equally legitimate biblically as the Westernized assumptions that derive not from Jesus but from Plato and the Greek extension through the Romanization of Christianity to the Reformation and into contemporary "systematics." The question is, naturally, "What system"? Who is to say this Western progression of theological thought, while reflecting biblical understanding from a particular hermeneutical horizon, negates that of another group of equally sincere believers who interpret Scripture very differently because of their experience with Creator or Yahweh (the almighty God above all other gods), Chukwu (the Igbo creator), the Dema (ancient ancestors of the Simbu in the highlands of Papua New Guinea), Yenkipon (the transplanted Ghanaian god of the Maroons), or Rongo (the

Maori god of peace). Truly, God was there before outsiders arrived.

Twiss's lack of success in popularizing "counteractive syncretism" as a positive term was not a failure but a step in moving toward hybridity. Similarly, the use of "hybridity," as presented here, also seeks to emphasize the positive rather than the negative effects of mixing perspectives in order to move us to the next label, whatever that may be. Twiss (along with Hiebert, myself, and others) urged that the Bible be the criterion enabling people to process culture in their own, often collective, way. Indeed, Samuel Escobar reinforces this message: "The gospel [read: the Bible] dignifies every culture as a valid vehicle for God's revelation. Conversely, this also relativizes every culture: no 'sacred' culture or language is the exclusive vehicle that God might use." This perspective has serious theological as well as behavioral implications that affect every missional endeavor. Local theologies serve as expressions of moving beyond colonial theologies that serve as a systematic overlay of everything else (an assumption that one size fits all). People must be given the right and the opportunity to process Scripture in light of their own socioreligious experience with its variety of expressions, both oral and written, and thus interpret God in a vital and meaningful way.

Such an approach to missioning builds on relevance theory, as I have discussed elsewhere. It reflects people grappling with the reality of their own experience in light of God's interaction with human beings in general. It accounts for specific application to a people's own expectations within the specificity of their context. This approach not only makes missiological sense but also suggests that a biblical theology in context reflects the expressions and structures of the context to which it relates. Furthermore, it reflects good anthropology by recognizing that each human community processes life differently and thereby arrives at different expressions of truth. When the standard is set by the Creator of the universe and people experience that reality in light of what they know, their understanding provides others with an opportunity to discover new things about God. Hiebert was right in reducing the missionary task to

epistemological principles that require serious self-examination before presenting what we know without truly appreciating how we came to "know" it.

Accounting for cosmology as well as religious expression for the purpose of appropriately worshipping God is essential if people are to avoid nominalism and reversion. Indeed, with Twiss, I seek to encourage people "to tell the story of how... [they are] slowly reclaiming [their] own sense of tribal identity," a process that happens "through decolonization and retraditionalization—and becoming an Indigenous expression of the Christian tradition. This is critical contextualization."

Demonstrating how such development is expressed in the specificity of contexts represented by colleagues from around the world was the intent Burrows and I had as we sent out our preliminary ideas with a call for interactive response. We encouraged these scholars to tell their story as a reflection of God's intense appreciation for the beauty of culture. Concurrently, cultural transformation takes place when people are afforded the respect to recognize the incarnated Christ where they live. I now turn briefly to these examples.



Case studies of hybridity

Following two introductory essays, the authors Burrows and I assembled reflected on how local rituals are compatible with Christian life and worship. Our task overall was to relate how the concept of hybridity is being expressed in specific societies around the world. How does Scripture interact with traditional dances, recitals of ancient lore, celebrations, and exchanges between the visible world and the world beyond? What is at stake is whether cries of syncretism raised against traditional, non-Jewish, and apparently even Christian rituals should serve as the hermeneutic key with which to evaluate human effort to bring God into the life and worshipful expressions of people in an intensely multicultural world.

The first block of contributions focuses on the nature of ritual in particular contexts and how the context shapes the way Christianity is viewed as relevant. The authors process their thinking about how their respective cultural contexts connect differently with biblical principles for the purpose of encouraging relevant worship among the people they represent.

Osias Segura-Guzman initiates the exposition by telling how he helped a Costa Rican village pastor appreciate the value of rituals associated with the festival of *Él Baile de la Yegüita*. The rituals are a folk-Catholic reenactment of a local myth that provides the rationale for a spirit of reconciliation between brothers but extended to all villagers. While this step was an important contribution to the pastor's theological development, Osias also had things to learn about reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics, not just in Costa Rica, but also throughout Latin America.

Gabriel Kuman is from the Simbu Province in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, where the pig-kill ceremony serves as a cultural microcosm. The attenuating ritual is closely aligned with a Dema myth that not only reflects how the Simbu connect to their ancestral heritage but also expresses ideas of abundant life that are central to many Melanesian societies. Kuman skillfully ties the rituals accompanying the pig-kill to Old Testament rituals associated with Passover and New Testament Eucharistic practices and beliefs. He displays how Jesus connected those expressions to his own death and thereby helps the Simbu better understand their own mythology. This example is a powerful hybridization that is true to both Simbu culture and biblical intent.

Emmanuel Obasare then acknowledges the personal struggle Maroon shamans in the interior of Jamaica experience as they seek to relinquish their rights of association with the ancient Asante Kromante Spirit in order to develop a dependence on the Holy Spirit. To do so, he blends five key elements of Maroon

spirituality (ancestors, Yenkipon/God, mediums, agreement, and the nature of motivation) with their biblical counterparts. Doing so enables Maroons to transfer their allegiance to God's truth as represented by the presence of the Holy Spirit among them.

Paul Mantae Kim illustrates the critical role of the ancestral rite in ensuring effective Korean family interaction. Using his own family experience, he connects biblical injunctions regarding family relationships to Korean ancestral expectations to highlight the need to bind ritual and relationship together. He uses this understanding to warn the Korean church that this strong element of Korean identity dare not be ignored.

The current reconciliation movement in New Zealand reflects on the horrific tale of personal and tribal tragedy that nearly destroyed the people of Aotearoa as colonial British immigrants marginalized the indigenous Maori inhabitants of the islands (much as happened in Australia and North America). Bradford Haami describes this reconciliation movement, showing how ancient protocol provides the ritualistic access to appeasement between the Maori and the British and, by extension, all contemporary New Zealanders. By appropriating Maori protocol reflective of the treaty period of the mid-nineteenth century, today's inhabitants of these islands "under the long white cloud" can once again experience wholeness and enjoy the peace they all long for.

Petros Malakyan and his protégé, Dan Hopkins, tell a story spanning seventeen centuries of worship in Armenia, now finally past its seven decades as part of the Soviet Union. They show how so-called pagan rituals were shaped into orthodox portrayals of Christian worship, which, in turn, reflect on the biblical rituals subsumed in Jewish temple worship. Armenians use all five senses to enhance experiential worship that lifts their praise to God, even as the smoke from candles and incense sticks wafts its way upward as a symbol of human adoration. They conclude with a personal tale of identification with the prayers of St. Gregory. Despite being far removed from the context of their original expression, they show how those prayers, from a different

time and place, effectively ensure meaningful worship in the American heartland today.

In the second part of the book, the focus shifts to Christian worship, which the various authors show is a portrayal of Christianity among their respective people and not just an artificially imposed religion. The respective expressions of God's presence among them clearly demonstrate people's desire to give honor to God in culturally meaningful ways that express Christian worship.

Chinaka DomNwachukwu builds on Igbo cosmology to deftly demonstrate how cultural hermeneutics shapes this Nigerian people's dynamics of worship and reflects their understanding of spirituality. Despite long missionary influence in his homeland, he demonstrates how the authenticity of Igbo worship of necessity incorporates the role of ancestors, the dignity of age, and the value of spiritual engagement with the cosmos. DomNwachukwu validates the relationship Igbo people have with Chukwu, whom they view as being with them, hearing morning prayers, and respecting elders who hold the traditional *ofo* staff as a sign of spiritual and social authority. He agrees with Éla, who maintains that the church in Africa "must make it a priority to be African in its being as well as its appearance." Clearly, Igbo cultural hermeneutics shapes the dynamics of their worship and reflects their understanding of cosmic reality in an African milieu.

Rural Japan comes alive in Billy Nishioka's narrative of Japanese empathy for the dead. He graphically describes a Christian ossuary designed to provide a place for Japanese families to place their loved one's ashes: a place of ongoing remembrance. Nishioka uses death ritual as a metaphor for Christian sense-making in a Japanese way—holding culturally appropriate memories in community. The ossuary provides a blend of Japanese story with God's story and the deceased's story. Thus, the church can help Japanese people make sense of the Gospel by giving appropriate honor and respect to Japanese identity, using ancestral remembrance as a bridge to God.

Pablo Deiros draws on his many years as a pastor in Argentina to develop what he calls "spiritual missiology." Through the vulnerability of his own story of spiritual power en-

agement and an understanding of the expectations of Argentine people, Deiros connects personal concern with cultural experience to develop rituals that address issues of demonic activity even within the evangelical churches of Argentina and South America in general. He draws on his biblical awareness to connect spiritual power and ritual as a means to encourage faith. For him, spiritual missiology reflects people's faith in God, resulting in fullness of life.

Stuart Dauermann brings the power of a long scriptural-focused Jewish history into contemporary Jewish-American family worship in the most sacred of ritual expressions—Shabbat. In typical rabbinic style, Dauermann connects biblical history to contemporary Jewish families seeking to honor God (*kavod*), while ensuring the relevance of relationships within the home. Through appropriate preparation and extensive use of Jewish symbols, he draws attention to Yeshua as the Messiah, who incorporates history and tradition while living in the reality of now. With clarity, he illustrates how the celebration of Shabbat spills into the living of life, with the other six days also devoted to honoring Yahweh.

Cheryl Bear links indigenous North Americans with their spirituality through the mystical cleansing that takes place during the "smudging ceremony" in its many manifestations. As the smoke hovers over those who put themselves under the cover of Creator, she shows how spiritual cleansing is recognized by virtue of indigenous mythology, the wisdom of elders, and native values that account for an overarching respect for the entire creation.

Joshua Daimoi brings his perspective from the Sentani region on the north coast of the island of New Guinea, where, like the Hebrews, the identity of the people is linked to the reality of their ancestors. Daimoi exegetes

the Book of Hebrews in light of Melanesian expectations of history (as expressed throughout the Bible), time (as it re-presents the mythical past in the anticipated future through the reality of the present), and space (where life is experienced). While not minimizing Melanesian expressions, he presents Jesus as the living ancestor, the object of their faith who is recognized through both social and physical engagement.

Finally, the late John Sanjeevakumar Gupta takes a narrative approach to help us recognize that we dare not confuse culture and religion, especially in a context such as India. Gupta recognizes how the story of God's presence has cultural roots common to the Hebrews and the people of India. Expressing biblical content should, he argues, reflect that common heritage. This perspective clearly has

a huge impact on how to assist Indian pastors and teachers as they present the Gospel in India today—not as the religion of the British Raj, but with the recognition of God's desire for relationship with humble villagers seeking deity.

All these case studies revolve around utilizing traditional

elements from a society's pre-Christian past and present and seeing the struggle to incorporate such elements into meaningful Christian worship in a biblically responsible way. These authors exhibit ways to reflect in worship, prayer, and daily life the principle that Jesus is the Messiah, the *Christos*. Christ-followers are being added to his body, the church, from among all the peoples of earth. As they mature in their identities as disciples, their worship and prayer must be suffused with elements that arise from their wrestling with how they find the Spirit of Christ dwelling among them. This process raises the issue of discernment, which has stretched the church since Jesus confronted Paul on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22) and since Peter was challenged by the Holy Spirit to release



non-Jewish converts from the necessity to obey Israel's ritual laws (Acts 10).

Personal reflection on hybridity

Through the years my border-crossings have brought me into contact with a wide variety of experiences and people around the globe. These people have affected how I view myself spiritually, as well as instilling a deep appreciation for the "other." So here I conclude with a reflection on my own hybridizing experience.

I began my anthropological career as a consultant to the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare at the Health Program Systems Center (HPSC) for the Papago (now Tohono O'odham Nation) in southwestern Arizona. I was tasked to research O'odham medical expressions in order to advise the HPSC regarding the underutilized, multimillion dollar hospital at Sells, Arizona. Everything was in place to assist these obviously needy "Indians," who apparently did not value colonial altruism.

I set out to interview "Papago medicine men" (a somewhat derogatory term): the diagnosticians, singers, masseurs, and herbalists who served as medical experts to provide wholeness not just of body but also of mind and spirit. What I learned from these specialists was the difference between "caused" and "uncaused" illness. The former was spiritually induced illness that could be handled only by traditional experts. The latter (also called "American illness") was not triggered by spiritual beings and therefore responded to Western medical personnel and their machines and drugs—people such as the doctors and nurses and their state-of-the-art equipment at the Sells Hospital.

The difference between caused and uncaused illness could be discerned only by a *O'odham ma:kai*, or Papago diagnostician, who employed ritual to determine the cause of physical or spiritual malaise. Upon discerning the source of the problem, a diagnostician could direct the patient to the appropriate practitioner: Anglo or indigenous. My ultimate recommendation was, therefore, to place a Papago health practitioner (a more positive term for a native specialist) in the foyer of the hospital. O'odham entering the facility would

instinctively consult the diagnostician and then follow his advice to determine the next course of action: obtain assistance for the uncaused illness by using the services of the hospital and its staff or pursue the assistance of a native practitioner, who could deal with spiritual need by placating the offended spirit with a song, pressure massage, or folk medicine as appropriate. To everyone's surprise, the HPSC followed through, and the last time I visited the Sells Hospital, the little booth in the foyer was still there. My conclusion to the resulting health guide published for the Division of Indian Health summarizes my research findings:

Seldom does a ma:kai consider himself in competition with the Anglo doctor, since he believes that illness itself may be cured by medicine, but persistence of the supernatural power will eventually cause death unless properly diagnosed, and subsequently treated by a curer. Therefore, curing ritual does not compete with modern medical practices, but is a coexistent procedure necessary to effect a complete cure. The diagnostic procedures of the ma:kai place primary emphasis on the etiology rather than the epidemiology of illness. The logic of both systems is inherent in the classification of illness allowing for both caused and "uncaused" ailments. Tactics of counteracting power and of curing illness are available....This implies Anglo control of symptoms while the Papago practitioners maintain control of the supernatural realm. Each has control of an area not of prime concern to the other.

This excerpt sounds very much like hybridity. I applied it to the medical environment, blending two very different health care systems. If it was appropriate to a medical adaptation in a cross-cultural environment, why have we been so slow to apply the same principles to spiritual activity in the context of Christian mission, particularly within the church?

I have been studying ritual in one way or another for my entire career, beginning with the O'odham, then in Papua New Guinea among the Samo, and now in research relating to the cognitive science of religion. Bracketing my career with the application of hybridity to the reality of human experience in the context of ritual and ceremony, as well as the

connectivity with superhuman agents, only makes sense. As an anthropologist, it accounts for a lifetime of relational involvement with local practitioners who genuinely desire to assist their people in things spiritual. As a missiologist, I view these traditional specialists as ones who help us appreciate the role of "pastor"—one who processes spiritual power in culturally appropriate ways. As bearers of the Gospel message, our approach should be creative and focused on the principles necessary to apply socioreligious investigation and experience relevant to particular contexts.

Mindful of globalization and of generations of missiologists to follow, I conclude by shifting from a West/non-West, us/them, or even nonindigenous/indigenous phraseology grounded in modernity to an inclusive, both and mode indicated by collective pronouns. As fallen human beings, we are all in this condition together

and have much to learn from one another. As we apply Scripture to our understanding and through the prompting of the Holy Spirit contemplate God's intent for our spiritual expressions, the manifestations of our beliefs and values can

be transformed to increasingly reflect God's intent to have creation worship *Creator*. Our practices (incorporating both biblical expressions and spiritually infused local understandings) serve as manifestations of hybridity as I have presented it here—namely, a means to allow God to permeate into the very fabric of daily living that empowers all of us to be true to our identity while also honoring God. Anxiety caused by the way in which the hybridizing process may have led us away from the radicality of the decision to walk with Jesus recognizes the reality of Satan's delusion and remains an ongoing concern. Twiss offers hope by encouraging the integration of biblical and cultural expressions: "Fundamental to my discourse about syncretism is a great confidence in the

presence, power and persuasion of the Holy Spirit to help keep us from going off the deep end on this journey of personal and spiritual transformation when it comes to cultural appropriation in light of biblical revelation." Our missiological challenge in the twenty-first century is to encourage one another to be who God created us to be by honoring God in ways that make sense in every context. Revealing God's intentions in personal and cultural identity is critical to biblical and cultural expressions of truth. As Jean Marc Ela noted, God does not repress by holding people to a moral code. Rather, God brings reconciliation through Christ who identified with us, died for us, and was raised to new life through the power of the Holy Spirit. In his dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus quickly followed "God so loved the world" with a statement that the Son was

sent to save, not to condemn (John 3:16, 17). For Éla, "doing theology is no longer an academic exercise, but a spiritual adventure."

We must, then, go beyond syncretism to help each other discover new expressions of who we

are in the hands of a loving God! A Cherokee woman put it eloquently:

Jesus does not replace the messengers Creator sent to our peoples, He completes the messages they brought. He does not take away the ceremonies, He restores and strengthens them. His path is not that of assimilation, nor of destruction, but of peace, healing, restoration, and walking humbly with the Creator as the people He made us to be. I am in no way bound or oppressed by following Jesus, but free to follow Him on the Red Road, and take my place dancing before the Sacred Fire.

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Sur le chemin du dialogue interreligieux À la rencontre des Manjaks de Guinée-Bissau

Quand, quelques années après l'indépendance de la Guinée-Bissau (1973), Dom Settimio Ferrazzetta, premier évêque, fit appel aux spiritains pour annoncer l'Évangile au cœur du pays manjak, il trouva immédiatement un écho favorable auprès des missionnaires de Dakar qui ne savaient pas comment se situer devant ce peuple d'immigrés se bousculant aux portes de l'Église. De fait, les Manjaks, originaires de l'ancienne Guinée portugaise, étaient restés, et restent jusqu'à ce jour, viscéralement attachés à leurs traditions. Le phénomène migratoire, qui s'est accéléré à partir des années cinquante, n'a pas affecté cette fidélité.

Premiers contacts avec le monde manjak

À Pikine, la grande banlieue de Dakar où j'ai vécu mes neuf premières années de ministère sacerdotal, 80% de nos paroissiens étaient manjaks, mais nous parlions français et parfois wolof. Un seul confrère dans tout le Sénégal parlait leur langue: le P. Gustave Bienvenu qui, dès 1970, avait eu l'heureuse idée de fonder à Dakar une communauté manjak, regroupant des couples, des jeunes étudiants ou artisans, et même une vieille grand-mère. Il vivait là au milieu d'eux avec une religieuse missionnaire et un séminariste stagiaire. À Pikine, nous faisons souvent appel à lui dans le cadre du catéchuménat des adultes. Il nous aidait à démêler les cas compliqués de polygamie et certains contrats ou compromissions avec la religion traditionnelle. Nous lui faisons entière confiance, mais avec une certaine mauvaise conscience de ne pas parler nous-mêmes la langue et de ne pas pouvoir vérifier la justesse de ses prises de position qui, pour l'époque (1975), paraissaient parfois audacieuses. Il faut dire que la théologie de l'inculturation n'en était qu'à ses débuts, avec la parution d'*Evangelii nuntiandi*.

C'est en collaborant avec le P. Bienvenu à la formation des catéchistes manjaks que mon goût pour le dialogue interreligieux a commencé à s'éveiller. Jusque-là, c'était surtout le lien

entre l'annonce de l'Évangile et le développement qui me préoccupait, ainsi que la dimension missionnaire de la vie personnelle et communautaire. Le P. Bienvenu avait installé, dans un angle de sa chapelle, un petit autel traditionnel sur lequel il faisait des libations, avant ou après la messe, en sa qualité de *nauyäk kato* (chef de famille) chargé de maintenir le lien avec les ancêtres. Je ne sais plus quelle entité le pieu fiché en terre représentait (un saint ou quelque autre défunt?), mais il s'agissait d'une transposition dans l'Église d'un culte traditionnel, le *pëcap des balugum*, culte auquel j'ai été invité bien des fois quand j'ai rejoint l'équipe des spiritains de Guinée-Bissau à Noël 1985.

Mes prédécesseurs avaient choisi de s'installer à Bajob, un tout petit village perdu au fond de la brousse, parce qu'on leur avait laissé entendre qu'il était particulièrement représentatif de l'univers manjak traditionnel. Quelques chrétiens, baptisés au Sénégal ou en Gambie, favorisèrent leur implantation; et c'est à partir de cette base qu'ils rayonnèrent aussitôt sur l'ensemble d'un secteur comprenant une quinzaine de villages. À mon arrivée, six ans après la fondation, j'ai eu la joie de trouver des embryons de communautés chrétiennes un peu partout, avec des signes bien visibles: chapelles, écoles en terre battue, points d'eau aménagés, puits, vergers d'anacardiens, manguiers greffés, maraîchage, etc. Mais, à mes yeux, le plus important c'était l'option que les fondateurs avaient prise d'adopter la vision missionnaire du P. Bienvenu, auprès duquel ils avaient effectué un stage d'une année pour s'acclimater à la culture manjak. L'étude de la langue fut pour eux une priorité et la participation à toutes les manifestations de la culture traditionnelle une préoccupation quotidienne, dans la mesure évidemment où les portes acceptaient de s'ouvrir. Comment aurais-je pu avoir la moindre réticence à mettre mes pas dans les leurs pour prendre part à un dialogue qu'ils avaient si bien commencé?

Immersion au sein d'un peuple

Je suis resté vingt-trois ans à Bajob. Je viens d'y faire mes adieux en juin 2018. Mon expérience missionnaire dans le «pays manjak» s'est déroulée en deux étapes de même durée, entrecoupées de dix années à Ziguinchor, au sud du Sénégal. L'apprentissage de la langue fut évidemment la porte d'entrée. Pour comprendre ce que dit l'autre, il faut commencer par se mettre à son école et utiliser les moyens de communication qui sont les siens. Mes maîtres furent les villageois eux-mêmes, mais je suis reconnaissant aussi à Pierre Buis, le confrère de l'équipe précédente avec qui j'ai cohabité durant mes trois premières années, de m'avoir obligé à laisser de côté la langue wolof, que j'avais apprise à Dakar et que beaucoup d'habitants du village comprenaient pour avoir pratiqué bien souvent la migration saisonnière. Je lui sais gré aussi d'avoir attiré mon attention sur les limites du créole portugais, que l'on peut pourtant considérer comme la première langue nationale de Guinée-Bissau, mais qui n'en reste pas moins une langue véhiculaire, sans doute incontournable pour les échanges commerciaux avec les autres ethnies, mais incapable de traduire ce qu'un Manjak ressent au plus profond de lui-même et d'exprimer les relations qu'il entretient avec le monde invisible.

Il m'a fallu trois ans, je crois, pour parler à peu près correctement la langue manjak, maîtriser la syntaxe et élargir le champ de mon vocabulaire, de manière à entendre ce que les gens disaient et commencer à exprimer quelques idées audibles par mes interlocuteurs. Mais il ne m'a pas fallu trois ans pour me rendre compte que la communication avec des personnes d'une culture totalement différente est faite de bien autre chose que des mots et des phrases agencés selon les règles de l'art. Il faut aussi pouvoir pénétrer dans le monde invisible grâce au langage des signes: les symboles, les rites et les mythes.

En même temps que je m'efforçais d'apprendre la langue, je n'ai pas eu trop de mal à vivre ce que les sociologues appellent l'acculturation, et cela dans tous les domaines accessibles à un étranger désireux de com-

prendre comment vit le peuple qui l'accueille à bras ouverts: l'habitat, l'alimentation, l'artisanat, le travail agricole, le troc et les échanges commerciaux, l'organisation politique, etc. Les fondateurs de la mission m'avaient précédé sur ce chemin avec une grande assurance. Pouvais-je douter un seul instant du bien-fondé du choix qu'ils avaient fait dès leur arrivée?

L'amorce d'un dialogue de vie

Cette immersion sans arrière-pensée dans la culture manjak m'a conduit tout naturellement à «dialoguer» avec la religion traditionnelle. Car il est difficile de séparer le dialogue interreligieux du dialogue interculturel, du moins dans le petit coin d'Afrique qui m'a accueilli. On peut dire que la religion traditionnelle englobe, enveloppe ou irrigue toutes les activités des Manjaks, leurs pensées et leurs paroles, de la naissance à la mort: l'organisation sociale et politique, le travail, les arts, la médecine... C'est pourquoi il est impossible, dans le processus d'inculturation du message évangélique, de trier les valeurs traditionnelles qui seraient théoriquement compatibles avec notre foi, en faisant l'impasse sur le reste, qui ne relèverait que de la sphère religieuse «païenne», comme par exemple la place

qu'occupent les innombrables esprits intermédiaires dans la spiritualité manjak.

Dès mon arrivée à Bajob, je me suis donc trouvé confronté à ce dilemme: quand on soupçonne que les choses sont pour le moins ambiguës et qu'il y a un fort risque de récupération ou même de syncrétisme, faut-il renoncer à rencontrer l'autre? Ou bien faut-il oser la rencontre au risque de se compromettre aux yeux de certains coreligionnaires? C'était l'année de l'initiation. Les futurs initiés devaient entrer dans le bois sacré vers le 20 mars, et y demeurer trois mois, sans jamais pouvoir revenir au village. Ayant appris que 80% des candidats à l'initiation étaient des chrétiens, j'ai cherché à entrer dans le bois, avec l'idée de pouvoir organiser des célébrations de la Parole de Dieu, et même la messe, au moins le jour de Pâques. Les vieux chrétiens tentèrent de s'opposer à ce pro-



jet, prétendant qu'un prêtre n'avait pas sa place dans le bois sacré. Mais leurs arguments n'étaient pas convaincants. J'ai réagi :

- *Dites plutôt que ce n'est pas la place d'un Blanc!*
- *Non! Ce n'est pas la place d'un prêtre!*
- *Dans ce cas, ce n'est pas non plus la place d'un chrétien! Parce qu'un prêtre, ce n'est rien d'autre qu'un chrétien ordonné pour être au service de ses frères chrétiens, là où ils sont! Si les chrétiens peuvent entrer dans le bois, le prêtre doit y aller aussi. Sinon, tout le monde reste dehors!*

Ainsi donc, trois mois à peine après mon arrivée, je me trouvais au cœur même du problème posé par l'évangélisation des Manjaks: un Manjak doit-il abandonner ses coutumes pour devenir chrétien? Pourquoi les vieux chrétiens, qui vont tous aller là-bas, ne veulent-ils pas m'y rencontrer? Qu'est-ce qui, dans le bois sacré, est contraire à la foi au Christ ressuscité? Quel type d'esprit préside à tout ça?

Non! Je n'allais pas attendre jusqu'à la prochaine initiation (vingt-deux ans!) pour comprendre... Je suis entré dans le bois, dès la première semaine, aidé par de jeunes chrétiens déjà initiés et avec la complicité de vieux «païens»... Ce qui est advenu ensuite? Ayant promis sur l'honneur de ne jamais dévoiler ce que j'avais vu et entendu dans le bois sacré, je ne révélerai ici aucun secret. Mais je ne pense pas trahir ma parole en disant ce qui s'est passé dans mon esprit et dans mon cœur de missionnaire au moment où les «vieux» m'ont invité à prier pour les initiés dans un sanctuaire qui n'avait rien à voir avec la chapelle du village. Après un court instant de vertige, la parole de Jésus, demandant aux disciples de ne pas se préoccuper de ce qu'ils auraient à dire quand ils se trouveraient dans une situation embarrassante, s'est imposée à moi comme un flash. Et j'ai prononcé des paroles que je n'ai jamais regrettées parce que j'ai eu la certitude que l'Esprit Saint était avec moi et que *Dabomanin*, l'esprit du bois, n'était ni un adversaire ni un concurrent du Christ sauveur. On pouvait avancer dans le dialogue sans complexe. La porte était ouverte du côté de la religion traditionnelle, il ne dépendait que de moi d'avancer sur le chemin de la rencontre.

Définitivement repoussée la tentation de faire du prosélytisme, écartée l'arrière-pensée

d'opérer des conversions au sens étroit de changement de religion, acquise la confiance réciproque, il m'a semblé que toutes les conditions étaient réunies pour un dialogue lucide et serein. Que *Nasienbatsi*, le Dieu unique, créateur du ciel et de la terre, dont le nom est quotidiennement sur toutes les lèvres, ne soit pas honoré ni adoré de la façon dont un chrétien, un juif ou un musulman pense qu'il devrait l'être, ne signifie pas que les Manjaks adorent des faux dieux. Et je ne vois pas en quoi les sacrifices d'animaux, petits ou grands, offerts chaque jour dans le bois sacré ou sur les autels domestiques à des esprits intermédiaires, offenserait le Christ qu'ils ne connaissent pas ou si peu. Même si je sais, moi, qu'il a versé son sang une fois pour toutes pour le salut de toute l'humanité. La Première aux Corinthiens m'a bien souvent éclairé dans ma relation au jour le jour avec les croyants de la religion traditionnelle: en dehors du danger de scandaliser les faibles, on peut s'engager paisiblement sur ce chemin, comme saint Paul l'a fait lui-même. Je prends quelques exemples.

Le culte des ancêtres

Je commence par le plus simple, celui qui pose généralement peu de problèmes, même aux missionnaires les plus scrupuleux: le culte des ancêtres. Déjà le P. Bienvenu avait ouvert la route dans sa communauté de Dakar-Médina. Les fondateurs de la mission de Bajob lui avaient emboîté le pas sans tergiverser en participant aux libations traditionnelles chaque fois que l'occasion leur en était donnée. Dans la culture manjak, c'est au moyen de pieux sacrés (*icap*), fichés en terre à quelques mètres de la maison familiale, qu'on peut maintenir la communion avec ceux qui ont rejoint le monde des ancêtres (*balugum*). À chaque événement, heureux ou malheureux, le chef de famille (*nauyäk kato*) consulte, à travers la matérialité du *pëcap*, ceux qui sont devenus invisibles, accompagnant ses prières de libations, d'offrandes ou de sacrifices, suivant un rituel bien établi. Ces cérémonies familiales se déroulent tout au long de l'année, au rythme des besoins. Mais à l'approche de la saison des pluies, une fête appelée *kakao* rassemble les membres de chaque famille, au même moment, autour de leurs ancêtres respectifs, pour implorer leur intercession en faveur de ceux «qui supportent encore le poids du jour». On y demande santé, nourriture,

boisson, habit, travail, pluie, argent, école pour les enfants, éducation des nouvelles générations, entente entre les membres de la famille...

Le culte des ancêtres n'est pas près de disparaître dans le monde manjak. Au contraire, c'est lui qui, en grande partie, permet de maintenir la cohésion et le développement harmonieux de chaque famille, en dépit de la mobilité bien connue de ce peuple. Les missionnaires de Bajob n'ont pas hésité à transposer ces rites dans les communautés de base, en plantant les *icap* de leurs saints protecteurs à l'entrée des chapelles et en les honorant, lors des fêtes patronales, par des liturgies originales qui intègrent la fête du saint protecteur et l'antique rite des Rogations en un langage symbolique immédiatement perceptible par les chrétiens manjaks.

Qui sont vraiment les esprits intermédiaires?

Beaucoup moins simple, pour nombre de chrétiens, prêtres ou laïcs, l'exercice du dialogue avec la religion traditionnelle quand il s'agit de participer à des cultes traditionnels dirigés vers d'autres êtres invisibles, les entités spirituelles nommées *gëcai* en manjak; ces esprits intermédiaires que les missionnaires d'Amérique du Sud au temps du Patronat espagnol et portugais, ainsi que ceux d'Afrique au XIX^e siècle, enfermèrent sans distinction dans la catégorie des diables.

En Guinée-Bissau, les missionnaires étrangers qui n'utilisent que la langue créole pour annoncer l'Évangile n'ont qu'un mot pour désigner toutes les entités spirituelles distinctes des ancêtres, le mot *iran* qui est toujours pris dans un sens péjoratif. Un *iran* est un esprit intrinsèquement mauvais; il faut donc y renoncer. Quand j'étais à Dakar, à chaque baptême d'adultes, j'entendais ce refrain repris en chœur par les néophytes: «*Mam baaja, uno batismu-inji, ma wëtan gëcai...*» («Je jure, au jour de mon baptême, de renoncer aux *gëcai*»). Il était donc clair que les *gëcai* étaient tous assimilés à ce qu'on appelle les diables ou démons dans la religion chrétienne. On n'était pas loin de la *tabula rasa* des missionnaires d'Amérique au XVI^e siècle, aux antipodes de l'ouverture pratiquée à la même époque par un Ricci et ses compagnons en Extrême Orient!

Le problème, c'est que, une fois revenus au pays manjak, la plupart de ces baptisés dakarois

retournaient rapidement, et sans état d'âme, au culte traditionnel célébré sur les autels des *gëcai* dans la concession familiale, le bois sacré ou tout autre lieu réservé à ces rites. Le nom de Dieu y est toujours prononcé, mais les sacrifices, eux, sont tous dirigés vers les *gëcai*, en permanence sollicités pour résoudre les problèmes personnels ou communautaires concernant les vivants et les morts. Ignorer ce culte, le snober tout en continuant à annoncer l'Évangile, c'est, à mon sens, se condamner à marginaliser les chrétiens ou, ce qui n'est pas mieux, en faire des gens perpétuellement écartelés entre les exigences de la religion traditionnelle, indissociable de leur culture d'origine, et celles de la religion chrétienne dans laquelle ils sont entrés par le baptême. Mais lutter contre ce culte sous prétexte qu'il est maléfique, pour ne pas dire diabolique, c'est décider qu'aucun dialogue n'est possible puisque la rencontre commence et se poursuit avec ce préjugé tenace: les *gëcai* sont des démons!

Juger l'arbre à ses fruits

Reste heureusement une troisième voie: celle de l'Évangile de Jésus qui nous dit qu'un arbre se reconnaît à ses fruits. C'est ce chemin que j'ai choisi de suivre dès mon arrivée en terre manjak: celui du discernement des esprits au cas par cas. Ne jamais rien généraliser, mais vivre les rencontres au fil des événements. Sur ce chemin, je crois avoir rencontré de vrais diables que j'ai expulsés, comme il se devait, avec la force de l'Esprit de Jésus (Mc 16, 17). Mais, le plus souvent, je n'ai rencontré que des diabolins en chair et en os avec qui j'ai essayé de dialoguer pour comprendre les raisons d'un comportement déviant ou malveillant.

Quant à la fréquentation des lieux sacrés des Manjaks, tous habités par des *gëcai*, je confesse que j'ai tout simplement suivi mon instinct: je n'ai jamais forcé une porte qui se fermait, mais je n'ai jamais non plus refusé d'entrer là où on m'y autorisait... Une fois au-dedans, je me suis efforcé de discerner les esprits à la lumière de l'Esprit Saint et avec l'aide des Manjaks chrétiens vivant en permanence ce dialogue interreligieux. S'il faut, par exemple, verser trois litres de vin de palme et égorger un tout petit poulet sur l'autel du médecin traditionnel pour que son *ucai* l'autorise à soigner un patient mordu par un serpent ou souffrant d'une maladie quel-

conque, grâce aux plantes dont il a le secret, de quel droit peut-on traiter de «diable» un esprit aussi bienveillant? La santé et la paix sont des fruits éloquentes qui permettent de discerner à quel esprit on a affaire.

Sur ce chemin de la rencontre avec la religion traditionnelle, j'ai eu la chance de bénéficier de l'aide précieuse de deux experts assez exceptionnels, un bibliste et une anthropologue. Le premier n'est autre que mon confrère Pierre Buis dont j'ai parlé plus haut. Spécialiste de l'Ancien Testament, il m'a beaucoup éclairé sur la place des anges et des démons dans la Bible, en me rappelant qu'ils n'y étaient entrés que tardivement, au temps de l'exil à Babylone; et que, même dans l'Écriture sainte, il est bien souvent difficile de reconnaître si on a affaire à des esprits bienveillants ou à de mauvais esprits. Quant à l'anthropologue, Maria Teixeira, elle souligne la même ambiguïté dans le monde des *gëcaï*, en dressant un tableau presque exhaustif des «principaux acteurs de l'invisible». Elle écrit ceci:

Dieu a envoyé sur la terre des puissances, les ngëcay. Une partie d'entre eux sont bons et œuvrent dans l'ensemble pour le bien, tandis que d'autres sont mauvais, la plupart de leurs actions sont orientées vers le mal.

A priori, il est impossible de distinguer un bon ucay d'un mauvais: «Il faut aller vers lui et le connaître pour le savoir. C'est comme pour les hommes», disent les officiantes.

L'orientation bénéfique ou maléfique d'un ucay dépend en partie de la personne qui s'adresse à lui. Puissances et humains sont étroitement liés dans l'action. La quasi-totalité des puissances domestiquées sont neutres, ambivalentes et compétentes pour exécuter le bien et le mal tout à la fois. Les hommes sont comme les puissances qu'ils desservent, capables d'attitudes ambivalentes¹.

S'il en est ainsi, on voit bien comment le dialogue interreligieux peut se dérouler au jour le jour. Une fois mises de côté ou éliminées les pratiques directement liées aux esprits diaboliques, un immense champ d'investigation

s'ouvre devant celui qui veut vraiment dialoguer avec les croyants de la religion traditionnelle, et aussi avec les nombreux chrétiens manjak adeptes de la double appartenance. Pour ces

derniers, on peut même dire que le dialogue se passe à l'intérieur de leur propre personne, une sorte de «dialogue intrareligieux», pour reprendre une expression que je trouve particulièrement heureuse; comme l'écrit Paul Coulon: «Dans le fond, le véritable dialogue, aujourd'hui, dans les communautés chrétiennes, est en réalité un *dialogue intrareligieux*: c'est chaque chrétien africain qui confronte en lui-même – chaque communauté en

elle-même – sa foi chrétienne et son héritage traditionnel².»

Dire la foi dans un autre langage

Pour en revenir à ma propre expérience, je voudrais ajouter que, si l'immersion dans le monde manjak traditionnel, sans *a priori*, m'a permis de mieux comprendre les relations de ce peuple avec Dieu et avec l'ensemble des êtres visibles et invisibles, si l'empathie m'a empêché de «diaboliser» tout ce qui paraît mystérieux ou effrayant à un hôte trop pressé, le dialogue de vie, au jour le jour, m'a aussi appris à exprimer ma foi dans un langage qui a été un peu plus accessible à ce peuple. Je l'ai fait à travers la catéchèse et la liturgie, en prenant ma part du patient travail d'inculturation de l'Évangile. Mais je sais bien que, même en parlant correctement la langue de l'autre, la rencontre avec Dieu, le tout Autre, restera toujours un profond mystère pour chacun d'entre nous. En fin de compte, seul l'Esprit Saint, qui précède et accompagne tous nos dialogues, peut les rendre féconds. C'est lui qui nous conduit tous, disciples du Christ et adeptes de la religion traditionnelle, vers «la vérité tout entière» (Jn 16, 13).

**(Ref.: Article received from the Author.
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on our SEDOS web site)**



¹ Maria Teixeira, *Rituels divinatoires et thérapeutiques chez les Manjak de Guinée-Bissau et du Sénégal*. L'Harmattan, 2001, p. 33.

² Paul Coulon, «De Africa nunquam satis. On ne se lasse jamais de l'Afrique», *Mémoire Spiritaine* n°21 (1^{er} semestre 2005), p. 169.

La famille comme enjeu du dialogue interreligieux

Conférence donnée à l'assemblée des prêtres de l'Afrique de l'Ouest organisée par l'Union du Clergé Sénégalais, le 04 novembre 2014 à l'Hôtel Fleur de Lys, Dakar, Sénégal.

Monsieur l'Abbé Camille Joseph Gomis,
Président de l'UCS,
Chers confrères prêtres,
Chers invites,

C'est un grand honneur pour moi d'être présent à ce 2e Congrès de l'Union Régionale des Prêtres de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. En même temps, c'est un grand plaisir et une fierté, de entretenir vous tous, *du thème de la famille comme enjeu du dialogue interreligieux*. Je voudrais exprimer mes sincères remerciements à **Monsieur l'Abbé Pierre Ndione**, ancien président de l'UCS, qui m'avait invité il y a quelques mois pour vous partager mes réflexions sur ce thème. J'espère bien que je serais à la hauteur de vos attentes.

Introduction

En réfléchissant sur le thème que l'on m'avait demandé à aborder, je pensais personnellement, qu'il serait important de connaître d'abord quelques éléments du dialogue interreligieux, parce qu'il est une réalité quotidienne, surtout dans notre pays, le Sénégal, et dans la sous-région, d'où vous venez. Ce dialogue est aussi présent, dans les degrés différents, dans de nombreux pays du monde.

En vérité, c'est un redoutable privilège de traiter ce thème, parce qu'il est d'actualité et il implique tous les segments de la société et de l'église, d'autant plus qu'il n'y a pas longtemps, a eu lieu à Rome, précisément en Octobre dernier, le synode pour la famille, convoqué par le Saint Père François, centré sur le thème de compassion et de miséricorde.

En effet, j'avais jugé bon de vous parler d'abord du dialogue interreligieux du point de

vue chrétien. Ensuite, je parlerai du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien au Sénégal en général. Enfin, je vais essayer de contextualiser la famille dans le cadre du dialogue interreligieux, afin de pouvoir mettre en évidence sa place dans ce même dialogue et comment elle en est enjeu.

Le Dialogue Interreligieux

Comme vous le savez tous, le document de base de l'Eglise, ou bien, le document qui fournit une base solide pour les relations entre religions qui se sont développées au cours des dernières décennies à propos du dialogue interreligieux, c'est l'encyclique *Nostra Aetate* (*Déclaration sur la relation de l'Eglise avec les religions non-chrétiennes*), promulguée le 28 octobre 1965 par le Pape Paul VI, que le Pape François vient de béatifier.

Nostra Aetate..., qui sont les premiers mots du texte latin, signifient : *À notre époque*. Il est le plus court des documents du concile Vatican II mais il en est peut-être également le plus révolutionnaire. Fondateur du dialogue interreligieux contemporain, il renouvelle entièrement les relations que les catholiques souhaitent établir avec les juifs, musulmans, bouddhistes, hindous et même ceux qui suivent les autres religions.

Certaines parties de cette déclaration méritent notre attention dès le début. J'attire votre attention d'abord sur **trois points** :

«L'Eglise catholique ne rejette rien de ce qui est vrai et saint dans ces religions. Elle considère avec un respect sincère ces manières d'agir et de vivre, ces règles et ces doctrines qui, quoiqu'elles diffèrent sous bien des rapports de ce qu'elle-même tient et propose, cependant reflètent souvent un rayon de la vérité qui illumine tous les hommes. Toutefois, elle annonce, et elle est tenue d'annoncer sans cesse, le Christ qui est « la voie, la vérité et la vie » (Jn 14, 6). (Nostra Aetate 2).

Dans un autre paragraphe, l'Église catholique déclare qu'elle estime les musulmans pour leur adoration d'un seul Dieu qui a parlé aux hommes. Elle estime leur attente du jour du jugement, leur jeûne, leur aumône et leur prière:

«L'Église regarde aussi avec estime les musulmans, qui adorent le Dieu unique, vivant et subsistant, miséricordieux et tout-puissant, créateur du ciel et de la terre, qui a parlé aux hommes. Ils cherchent à se soumettre de toute leur âme aux décrets de Dieu, même s'ils sont cachés, comme s'est soumis à Dieu Abraham, auquel la foi islamique se réfère volontiers.» (Nostra Aetate 3)

Nostra Aetate postule également qu'Allah est le même Dieu que le Dieu d'Abraham dans l'Ancien Testament. Les chrétiens et les musulmans partagent la foi abrahamique. Les musulmans ne reconnaissent pas Jésus comme Dieu, mais l'Église se réjouit de leur dévotion pour sa mère la Vierge Marie:

«Bien qu'ils ne reconnaissent pas Jésus comme Dieu, ils le vénèrent comme prophète; ils honorent sa Mère virginale, Marie, et parfois même l'invoquent avec piété. De plus, ils attendent le jour du jugement, où Dieu rétribuera tous les hommes après les avoir ressuscités. Aussi ont-ils en estime la vie morale et rendent-ils un culte à Dieu, surtout par la prière, l'aumône et le jeûne.» (Nostra Aetate 3).

Ces déclarations nous donnent une idée sur l'importance du dialogue interreligieux dans la vie de l'Église. Alors qu'il a été promulgué il y a 50 ans, précisément le 28 octobre 1965, le contenu de ce document reste valable et pertinent pour nous aujourd'hui.

La valeur du DIR, et notamment du dialogue islamo-chrétien n'a jamais été aussi pertinente que dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, où les musulmans et les chrétiens se côtoient et continuent de vivre ensemble. En réalité, les chrétiens et les musulmans se retrouvent face à l'autre n'importe où et partout, collaborant pour le progrès humain ou d'autres activités. Avant, il y avait une division claire entre les partisans des deux religions; maintenant, cette division a quasiment disparue, car les chrétiens se trouvent maintenant dans les pays arabes, et les musulmans se sont implantés en

dehors du Moyen Orient, en Afrique, en Europe occidentale et en Amérique.

Dans notre monde, il y a une multiplicité d'idéologies, de cultures et de religions. Les gens doivent vivre ensemble, même s'ils sont très différents les uns des autres. Il en va de même avec nos églises locales d'aujourd'hui, dont le contexte permet nécessairement aux fidèles de côtoyer de nouveaux voisins. Mais la question qui se pose maintenant est la suivante: *Pouvons-nous aller au-delà de la coexistence (convivenza) ou de la tolérance et apprendre à connaître les uns les autres?* C'est le défi de notre mission aujourd'hui en tant que chrétiens et musulmans.

Ce qui est vrai, c'est que les différences entre les peuples ont souvent été la cause des conflits douloureux et elles demeurent aujourd'hui une source constante de discorde. L'Église croit que seulement le dialogue intense et courageux parmi les musulmans, les juifs et les chrétiens peut aider ces croyants afin de déterminer les raisons de leurs différences et la façon par laquelle ils peuvent s'entendre. Le secrétaire pour les rapports avec les Etats, Mgr Dominique Mamberti, a déclaré le 03 octobre 2014, lors d'une réunion des nonces avec la Pape François:

Pour combattre le fondamentalisme et le terrorisme, il faut favoriser le dialogue interreligieux. La paix doit être recherchée à travers le dialogue et non pas à travers des choix unilatéraux imposés par la force...

Il rappelle également que:

...dans les pays à majorité musulmane, les chrétiens et les minorités sont des citoyens à part entière et doivent voir leur liberté religieuse respectée.

La persistance de ce problème déformé a poussé le Concile Vatican II à déclarer que:

Même si, au cours des siècles, de nombreuses dissensions et inimitiés se sont manifestées entre les chrétiens et les musulmans, le saint Concile les exhorte tous à oublier le passé et à s'efforcer sincèrement à la compréhension mutuelle, ainsi qu'à protéger et à promouvoir ensemble, pour tous les hommes, la justice sociale, les valeurs morales, la paix et la liberté. (Nostra Aetate 3)

Beaucoup de gens parlent du dialogue sans une bonne compréhension de ses besoins et de ses méthodes. Cela n'a rien à voir avec les extrêmes, soit d'un syncrétisme facile qui rendrait toutes les religions semblables, ou une polémique sans compromis qui nierait que les différentes religions ne peuvent jamais se rencontrer. Le vrai dialogue n'est possible qu'à partir de sa propre identité. Dans un message adressé le 19 mai au cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, président du Conseil pontifical pour le dialogue interreligieux, à l'occasion du 50e anniversaire de la création de ce dicastère, le Pape François a déclaré:

Le dialogue interreligieux n'implique pas de relativiser la foi chrétienne ou de mettre de côté le souffle qui habite le cœur de tout disciple et le pousse à annoncer à tous la joie de la rencontre avec le Christ !

Le dialogue est plutôt une aventure audacieuse pratiquée par les gens qui désirent s'enrichir mutuellement de leurs différentes manières, de fraternité dans le partage de valeurs communes et de l'ouverture à tout ce que le Seigneur pourrait leur parler dans l'intimité de leur conscience.

Même les musulmans doivent adhérer à cette façon de penser, comme leur conseil le Saint Coran:

Si ton Seigneur l'avait voulu, tous les habitants de la terre auraient cru. Est-ce à toi de contraindre les hommes à être croyants alors qu'il n'appartient à personne de croire sans la permission de Dieu (C 10: 99-100).

Les chrétiens doivent développer un esprit de dialogue marqué par le respect et l'amour ainsi que l'intelligence et la compréhension, puisque les chrétiens qui veulent être fidèles à l'Évangile ne peuvent pas être indifférents à une vraie rencontre avec ceux qui, même s'ils ne partagent pas la même foi, néanmoins cherchent à honorer Dieu comme ils avancent sur leur chemin particulier vers lui.

Jésus lui-même a montré une attitude d'écoute et d'ouverture à l'égard des non-juifs. Son attitude a provoqué le scandale chez ses coreligionnaires et l'incompréhension chez ses disciples. On peut dire que toute la vie de Jésus a été une succession de ren-

contres étonnantes; un dialogue non-stop. Nous pouvons en citer quelques instances: La rencontre avec la syro-phénicienne en Mt 15, 21-23; la rencontre avec le centurion de Capharnaüm en Mt 8, 5-13, et la rencontre avec le possédé syrien en Mt 8, 28-34, pour ne pas tout mentionner.

Les chrétiens, en évitant la rigidité doctrinale ou un esprit polémique, doivent explorer, sous la direction de l'Esprit, toutes les manières possibles de convergence entre eux et les musulmans.

Il est important, avant de s'engager dans le dialogue, de faire l'Évangile notre règle et idéal. Il est nécessaire de souligner constamment les valeurs communes qui unissent les chrétiens et les musulmans à tous les niveaux, à la fois de leur expérience avec Dieu et de leur service à l'humanité. Apprenons de ce que le Saint Coran nous dit: «*Concurrencez donc dans les bonnes œuvres*» (C 5:48).

Le dialogue vise essentiellement à une meilleure compréhension de l'autre, un approfondissement de sa foi et de sa conscience religieuse, une quête plus zélée et plus concentrée de la volonté de Dieu et de la conversion au Seigneur, Celui qui nous a tout remis en question, qui pardonne et qui transforme.

Le dialogue ne peut donc pas avoir pour but la volonté de «convertir» l'autre personne à sa propre religion à n'importe quel prix ni d'essayer de faire douter la foi dans laquelle ils ont été élevés. Au contraire, le Saint Coran nous dit: «*Pas de contrainte en religion!*» (C 2: 256).

Dès les premiers chapitres de la Bible, le concept de du dialogue interreligieux est déjà présenté. Dans le livre de la Genèse (Gn 1-11), Dieu atteste qu'il y a une fraternité entre tous les hommes. Ne sommes-nous pas tous «*des fils d'Adam*»? L'apparition de la figure d'Abraham dans Gn 12 vient marquer comme d'un sceau d'authenticité le dialogue. En effet, en Abraham «sont bénies toutes les nations». Tous, chrétiens et musulmans se reconnaissent en Abraham. C'est notre «père dans la foi».

L'enjeu du dialogue islamo-chrétien repose de prime abord sur la foi commune en Dieu unique, le Dieu d'Abraham. Cette fraternité de foi implique chez tous les croyants l'adoration commune et la solidarité dans la recherche de

la justice, de la paix et du développement durable.

Le Dialogue Islamo-chrétien au Sénégal

L'Islam sénégalais est un islam confrérique. Il est aussi un islam très tolérant et ouvert, que les Sénégalais pratiquent avec un certain syncrétisme (*confusion, mélange*), dans la mesure où il y a encore des survivances (*ce qui existe d'un ancien état*) de pratiques ancestrales, typiquement païennes. Ces pratiques sont puisées du tréfonds (*ce qu'il y a de plus secret*) de la culture africaine avant l'arrivée des religions monothéistes comme l'Islam dès le XI^e siècle et le Christianisme avec la pénétration coloniale au XVII^e siècle.

Ce caractère de l'islam au Sénégal, décrit souvent comme non-violent, pacifique, libéral et non-contraignant (*contraindre: forcer qqn*), procède aussi de la nature de la structure sociologique du pays composée d'ethnies qui sont ouvertes, et qui ont assimilé des cultures venues d'ailleurs mais qui sont restées fortement attachées à leurs valeurs ancestrales africaines.

L'appartenance à une même souche (*origine/source*) sociale ou ancestrale et à une même religion traditionnelle demeure la base sur laquelle se construit la vie sociale dans toutes ses dimensions religieuses et économiques.

Au Sénégal, le sens du dialogue et de la concertation (*consultation*) sont des valeurs auxquelles on est attaché. Par contre, les jugements de valeurs tranchés, l'absence de concertation et de compromis dynamique ne font pas recettes. En effet, plusieurs facteurs constituent ce dialogue: Il s'agit du cousinage, des mariages mixtes, des liens de parentés, du partage d'intérêts communs, de la tolérance ancrée dans les traditions et gestes quotidiens de la vie des Sénégalais.

La société Sénégalaise, riche des éléments ci-dessus cités, est structurée de telle sorte qu'elle n'est pas étanche (*qui ne laisse pas pénétrer les fluides*) ou fermée. Elle est plutôt

porreuse et flexible, reliée entre ses différents segments par des ponts. Cette porosité, cette perméabilité, constituent un terreau fertile, favorable à la tolérance car, *in fine*, aucun groupe social, religieux ou professionnel n'est étanche, n'est pur, et n'a de suprématie sur un autre groupe social, religieux voir politique.

Je viens de citer une vertu que les Sénégalais estiment beaucoup: celle de la tolérance. Cette tolérance (*muun* en Wolof) pratiquée au Sénégal vient surtout de la nature mixte des familles. Des membres d'une même famille se réclament souvent de confessions religieuses différentes sans que cela nuise aux liens familiaux (*ex. Dans une famille, on peut trouver un papa musulman, une maman chrétienne, et les enfants appartenant aux religions différentes*). C'est pour dire que les relations familiales, claniques et ethniques peuvent être des voies de tolérance ou de convivialité. Aussi,

ces relations conservent une vraie tolérance religieuse. Par exemple, au Sénégal, les fêtes catholiques sont aussi celles des musulmans et les fêtes musulmanes sont partagées par les catholiques. Très souvent, les clivages (*séparation d'un ensemble en deux*

groupes) religieux disparaissent dans les cérémonies culturelles et identitaires que les chrétiens et les musulmans fêtent ensemble.

Je peux alors dire que le dialogue Islamo-Chrétien au Sénégal est une réalité tangible et que nous le vivons véritablement, bien qu'il y ait des exceptions. Entre les communautés religieuses du Sénégal, on essaye de vivre une coexistence pacifique, une relation de tolérance, de respect, une convivialité qui procède certes d'une inclination naturelle des Sénégalais envers les valeurs de chacun.

La Famille comme enjeu du dialogue Interreligieux

Après un aperçu plutôt long du dialogue interreligieux et du dialogue Islamo-chrétien au Sénégal, je voudrais maintenant nous situer dans le contexte de la famille d'aujourd'hui. Cette approche nous aidera à identifier le rap-



port entre le dialogue interreligieux et la famille, afin d'en tirer les enjeux.

Je commence par dire que l'Afrique possède, enracinée au cœur de sa culture, une perception aiguë de la réalité familiale; tout en découle et tout y converge.

Par exemple, si l'on parle d'une famille traditionnelle Africaine (Sénégalaise), on peut constater certaines choses (je le dis en tant qu'observateur, sans prétendre être expert en sociologie):

➤ Que ce soit en ville ou en brousse, les enfants occupent une place centrale dans la vie de la famille. L'enfant est considéré comme une assurance contre les incertitudes et les risques de la vieillesse. Aussi, la vie du ménage est dans une très large mesure conditionnée, sinon déterminée par la présence des enfants. En ce qui concerne l'homme, en effet, il tire une fierté certaine d'une nombreuse progéniture qui lui confère un brevet de virilité. L'enfant est perçu comme un don de Dieu et l'homme veut, pour être en harmonie avec sa foi et ses traditions, mettre au monde le maximum d'enfants surtout males qui assureront sa descendance. C'est l'une des justifications masculines de la polygamie. Pour mieux plaire à leur mari, les femmes rivalisent entre elles pour avoir des enfants et il n'est pas rare de voir des femmes, mères d'une famille déjà nombreuse, aller consulter des médecins ou des marabouts pour avoir d'autres enfants, parce que leur coépouse va en avoir plus qu'elles.

➤ Le célibat continue à être considéré comme une situation anormale. La vie matrimoniale des hommes est un sujet dont les femmes ne peuvent parler avec leur mari et tout se joue au niveau de la jalousie entre les femmes. En régime polygamique, l'homme est tenu par le droit coutumier et islamique d'avoir des relations égales avec chacune de ses épouses.

➤ Plus souvent, la jeune fille, dès son plus jeune âge, est préparée au mariage. La pression est forte, et une femme non mariée est un poids pour sa famille, voire une honte. Les jeunes filles, qui sont en général contre la polygamie, n'ont souvent pas le choix et lorsqu'elles l'ont, elles cherchent d'abord un mari qui a de l'argent, qui puisse leur faire vivre une «grande vie» (tissus, bijoux, sor-

ties). Les hommes qui ont ces moyens, sont en général, polygames.

Voilà un concept de la famille traditionnelle en Afrique. Je crois qu'à un certain degré, ces observations demeurent valables jusqu'à nos jours. Maintenant, qu'est-ce que tout cela à voir avec la famille comme enjeu du dialogue interreligieux?

Nous sommes dans une phase critique de l'histoire humaine ou nous pouvons dire avec certitude que dans la plus grande partie du monde, beaucoup de changements, voir phénomènes, se font sentir, et la famille n'y est pas épargnée. Le phénomène actuel est l'apparition, au cœur des sociétés traditionnelles, de villes modernes dont tout découle et où tout converge également. C'est ce qu'on appelle **la mondialisation ou la globalisation**. Cela signifie également que les peuples de ce monde, de plus en plus, se mêlent les uns aux autres. Le monde est devenu un petit village où l'on se communique facilement, et où les nouvelles passent à peine après avoir eu lieu. Au centre de cette mondialisation, il y a les personnes. Fort heureusement, ce sont les mêmes personnes qui apportent avec eux leur foi ou leur religion. Confrontée à ce processus d'urbanisation et de globalisation importé des cultures occidentales, la famille subit une mutation profonde et se trouve ébranlée dans ses bases et sa finalité. Et c'est là que se trouve la première preuve que la famille est un enjeu du dialogue interreligieux.

La famille est enjeu du dialogue interreligieux, car elle joue un rôle majeur dans la formation de la société et de l'Église, dorénavant mondialisées. On dit que la famille est la cellule de base de la société. Elle est également le lieu privilégié pour la transmission de la vie, qui constitue la communauté d'accueil des enfants par naissance ou par adoption. Les enfants ont besoin d'une famille pour les aider à grandir et à développer leurs talents. C'est le lieu où ils apprennent l'attention aux autres, la notion de service, le respect du bien commun. La famille, est le lieu où se forme le futur citoyen, où il apprend le sens des responsabilités. La famille, fondée sur le mariage avec son projet de fidélité à la parole donnée, contribue de manière unique et irremplaçable au bien de la société.

Ainsi dire, la qualité de vie de la famille, c'est aussi la qualité de vie de la société, et de l'église dans laquelle elle vit. Car la famille est le premier lieu où les personnes, surtout les enfants, apprennent à vivre une vie de dialogue, entre eux-mêmes, quelle que soient leur appartenance religieuse. C'est là où chacun développe son concept de l'amour et du respect des personnes quelles qu'elles soient. C'est là que le processus de dialogue et d'ouverture est appris. Si la famille n'offre pas une telle ouverture, il est clair que le reste du processus échouera, malgré le soutien et la formation que l'école et l'église offriront.

Parlant toujours des enfants, la famille est aussi le lieu où les enfants apprennent les valeurs de base de la vie relationnelle, *e.g.* le respect, la délicatesse, ainsi que les valeurs (Sénégalaises) comme la patience (*muun*), la tradition d'hospitalité (*teranga*), le respect de l'autre (*kersa*) et le sens d'honneur (*dion*). Toutes ces valeurs, selon la Sœur Thérèse Ndione,



«s'abreuvent à la source de la religion traditionnelle par la croyance en l'Être suprême reconnu comme Dieu» et «de là découle le sens de l'unité de la famille, de la solidarité et de l'entraide» Donc, la famille cherche à tout prix à préserver cette unité, qui ne signifie pas simplement être uni, mais qui tient, sans doute, à deux motifs éminemment nobles qui sont, selon :

- Une foi en Dieu sans faille, à la recherche de Sa Volonté.
- Un respect de l'homme et de ses choix religieux, conséquence de sa liberté responsable.

Mauvais aspects de la culture

Néanmoins, c'est aussi dans la famille que les mauvais aspects de la culture doivent être corrigés. Nous savons bien que la famille n'est pas toujours à la hauteur de bien éduquer les enfants, ce qui fait que les enfants devien-

nent plutôt des perturbateurs, ou pire, des menaces à la société. Par exemple, déjà très tôt, ils apprennent à boire, à se droguer, à fumer, à se prostituer, etc. Comme cadre normal des sentiments où la vie chrétienne/islamique s'enracine (y compris là où l'on apprend la manière de se comporter), la famille, en commençant par les parents et les aînés, devrait porter au cœur sa responsabilité de prêcher la paix, la tolérance et l'entente. Bref, prêcher le dialogue et exercer la liberté des hommes au sein de nos familles et de perpétuer cela aux générations qui viennent.

Ce dernier est très important. C'est précisément cette liberté qui va pousser le chrétien surtout à choisir le style et mode de vie qui lui convient. En matière de religion, il est censé

déclarer et pratiquer sa foi. Bref, la famille devrait être un vrai espace de liberté, où chacun est respecté, et est libre de pratiquer ses choix (*e.g.* religion, avenir).

Dans les familles homogènes, ce que je viens de poser comme problème pourrait ne pas exister, mais cela

est-il le cas chez les familles mixtes?

Les familles mixtes

Pour les chrétiens, le mariage est une alliance entre un homme et une femme unis par un même amour. Cette alliance ou union est bénie par Dieu. Dans cette alliance se révèle le plus pleinement l'histoire des alliances entre Dieu et l'humanité scellée dans l'amour du Christ qui a donné sa vie pour nous. Le sacrement de mariage sanctifie l'union d'un homme et d'une femme et situe l'amour des époux au cœur de l'amour de Dieu pour l'humanité. C'est un engagement pris devant Dieu. La compréhension musulmane du mariage n'en diffère pas tellement, sauf du caractère sacramentel définitif. Pour les musulmans, le mariage est un contrat et une institution- un contrat «bilatéral, basé sur le libre consentement des deux parties contractantes». Le mariage musulman est une institution qui se manifeste par une communauté intime qui

contribue à préserver l'humanité par les enfants qui naissent.

Sans doute, il n'est pas de situation de proximité plus grande entre deux êtres que celle du couple. Aspirant normalement à une unification qui concerne tous les éléments des personnalités, la vie conjugale est directement concernée par une foi qui entraîne, en Christianisme comme en Islam, un projet de vie commune bien précis. Certains choisissent alors de mettre la foi de côté. Mais cela ne résout pas grande chose car il faut bien finalement choisir entre monogamie ou polygamie, et entre bien d'autres problèmes.

Souvent, en paroisse, nous rencontrons des cas où une femme chrétienne et mariée à un musulman, et que le mari musulman n'accepte pas une régularisation à l'église. Cette situation empêche la femme d'accéder à la communion, et cette souffrance, elle devrait la porter. C'est pour dire que les mariages avec

disparité de culte sont une grande difficulté pour les pasteurs, surtout que le choix de religion est mis en jeu. Il est alors conseillé que

les gens ne s'engagent pas dans ce mariage avec disparité de culte à la légère car c'est une affaire compliquée, surtout que l'église acceptent ce genre de mariage pourvu que certaines conditions soient remplies: Le mariage ne doit pas distraire la partie chrétienne de sa foi en la personne de Jésus Christ, et que la personne avec qui on veut se marier accepte le principe de la monogamie et du mariage pour la vie. Malheureusement, les gens peuvent signer ces accords et qu'ils ne le respectent pas.

Lorsque l'Eglise catholique propose à ces couples l'aide de la religion, elle le fait dans le respect de la foi du conjoint musulman. Il est bon de savoir quel est le **triple but** qu'elle poursuit alors.

- que l'entente et l'amour conjugal s'épanouissent, permettant la prise en charge et l'éducation (y compris religieuse) des enfants;

- que les souhaits légitimes des familles et leurs rôles soient reconnus et respectés

- que la responsabilité religieuse personnelle soit possible tant pour les époux que pour leurs enfants, et que soit donc respectée la liberté d'option.

L'accueil des couples mixtes ne s'agit plus seulement de deux individualités, mais de la fondation d'une famille dont la descendance prendra place dans la lignée, gardienne des traditions, parmi lesquelles la place de la religion est importante. Nos sociétés, nos paroisses, et nos communautés religieuses ont des progrès à faire quant à l'accueil des couples mixtes, au respect de la décision des personnes et au soutien que chacun leur doit.

L'Apostasie

Je voudrais terminer cette intervention en parlant d'un problème courant dans le déroulement du dialogue interreligieux: celui de

l'apostasie.

On entend souvent qu'il y a des pressions liées au choix de religion où les ascendants estiment faire leur devoir

«pour Dieu» et éviter des conversions dans leurs propres familles. Mais qu'advient-il quand ce devoir pour Dieu entre en concurrence avec le respect de la liberté de la personne? Si nous sommes différents, Dieu veut-il la contrainte ou ne nous appelle-t-il pas au contraire à un dépassement continu en vue d'un meilleur service?

Selon l'article 18 de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme (1948):

*Toute personne a droit à la liberté de pensée, de conscience et **de religion**: ce droit implique la liberté de changer de religion ou de conviction ainsi que la liberté de manifester sa religion ou sa conviction, seule ou en commun, tant en public qu'en privé, par l'enseignement, les pratiques, le culte et l'accomplissement de rites.*

Pour l'église catholique, le droit à la liberté religieuse est exprimé explicitement, en particulier, dans le document du Concile Vatican II



Dignitatis Humanae no. 2 par le Bienheureux Paul VI, qui déclare que:

...la personne humaine a droit à la liberté religieuse. Cette liberté consiste en ce que tous les hommes doivent être exempts de toute contrainte de la part tant des individus que des groupes sociaux et de quelque pouvoir humain que ce soit, de telle sorte qu'en matière religieuse nul ne soit forcé d'agir contre sa conscience ni empêché d'agir, dans de justes limites, selon sa conscience, en privé comme en public, seul ou associé à d'autres. Il déclare, en outre, que le droit à la liberté religieuse a son fondement réel dans la dignité même de la personne humaine telle que l'ont fait connaître la Parole de Dieu et la raison elle-même.

Les musulmans répètent volontiers que l'Islam est une religion tolérante et que la liberté religieuse y est souverainement garantie. Trois versets du Coran, la première source du droit musulman, sont alors souvent cités comme preuve:

1. *Pas de contrainte en religion! (C 2: 256)*
2. *La vérité émane de votre Seigneur. Que celui qui le veut croie donc et que celui qui le veut soit incrédule (C 18:29)*
3. *Si ton Seigneur l'avait voulu, tous les habitants de la terre auraient cru. Est-ce à toi de contraindre les hommes à être croyants lors qu'il n'appartient à personne de croire sans la permission de Dieu (C 10:99-100)*

Ces versets, cependant, n'ont pas empêché les légistes musulmans classiques de prévoir, à l'instar de leurs collègues contemporains juifs et chrétiens, la peine de mort contre toute personne qui quitte leur religion. En fait, la liberté religieuse pour ces légistes est une liberté à sens unique: liberté d'entrer, interdiction de sortir. En principe, on est libre de devenir ou de ne pas devenir musulman. Qui est musulman doit rester pour toujours, même s'il a hérité l'Islam de ses parents. Pourtant, aucun verset ne prévoit une telle peine. Le Coran parle de l'apostasie en utilisant soit le terme *kufr* (*mécréance*), soit le terme *rida* (*revenir en arrière*). Des châtiments contre l'apostat y sont prévus dans la vie dernière. Seul le verset 9:74 parle de châtiment douloureux en ce monde, sans préciser en quoi il consiste. Ce verset dit en effet:

Ils jurent par Allah qu'ils n'ont pas dit (ce qu'ils ont proféré), alors qu'en vérité ils ont dit la parole de la mécréance et ils ont rejeté la foi après avoir été musulmans. Ils ont projeté ce qu'ils n'ont pu accomplir. Mais ils n'ont pas de reproche à faire si ce n'est qu'Allah - ainsi que Son messenger - les a enrichis par Sa grâce. S'ils se repentaient, ce serait mieux pour eux. Et s'ils tournent le dos, Allah les châtiara d'un douloureux châtiment, ici-bas et dans l'au-delà; et ils n'auront sur terre ni allié ni secourer.

Le concept d'apostasie s'est assez vite élargi pour comprendre aussi bien ceux qui abandonnent l'Islam que ceux qui en ont une conception divergente ou se constituent comme des opposants politiques. Ainsi, la peine de mort pour apostasie serait applicable à des personnes qui, de bonne foi, se croient de bons musulmans.

De nombreux chrétiens se convertissent chaque année à l'Islam. Les revues musulmanes s'en réjouissent et publient régulièrement des listes des chrétiens convertis à l'Islam. Il existe aussi des musulmans qui se convertissent au christianisme, en moindre nombre. Ces convertis, selon les musulmans, sont passibles de la peine de mort, même s'ils vivent en occident. C'est ici qu'il conviendrait de s'interroger enfin sur les exigences actuelles de la liberté religieuse, y compris de changer de religion.

Etant donné que nous parlons de la famille comme enjeu du dialogue interreligieux, on ne peut pas ne pas traiter ce sujet d'apostasie même si c'est un dossier véritablement difficile à aborder.

Beaucoup de familles mixtes sont touchées par ce problème, qui, malheureusement, crée de tensions entre membres de la même famille. Raison pour laquelle certaines mesures devraient être prises pour éviter que cela devienne incontournable.

En somme, il importe que les mariages islamo-chrétiens exigent un effort constant de partenaires. Les réussites existent lorsque chacun, restant profondément fidèle à sa foi et à sa communauté religieuse, est en même temps ouvert à l'autre et attentif à lui faciliter la pratique qui est la sienne, et lorsque les enfants apprennent au foyer familial que la vie heureuse est celle qui se bâtit avec Dieu. En même temps, ces mêmes enfants prennent

conscience des menaces de la société actuelles (comme le phénomène du «mariage pour tous»).

Ne s'agit-il pas là d'éléments de base pour tout dialogue et ne peut-on pas dire que le mariage mixte est une éminente situation de dialogue islamo-chrétien pour qui s'applique à le vivre ainsi, à la condition d'y être préparé.

Conclusion

C'est une heureuse coïncidence que cette intervention vient au lendemain du Synode sur la famille qui reconnaît la famille comme lieu de l'annonce de l'évangile. Il est clair depuis que l'annonce n'est pas le contraire du dialogue interreligieux. Elle l'enrichit plutôt et consolide la foi de ceux qui y croient et ceux qui en sont les parti-

sans. Le Concile Vatican II a demandé à nous catholiques de «redécouvrir les exigences apostoliques d'un dialogue ouvert» dans lequel les partici-

pants acceptent pleinement les uns les autres et de partager ensemble aussi bien le contenu de leur foi que les valeurs de leur tradition, d'autant plus que les chrétiens et les musulmans aujourd'hui se retrouvent en interaction les uns avec les autres dans une grande variété de situations historiques et des circonstances personnelles. Quand on parle du dialogue interreligieux cependant, nous n'entendons pas seulement le moment où les gens vivent ensemble, mais aussi à la façon dont ils dialoguent les uns avec les autres, même si, par exemple, ils appartiennent à de confessions différentes.



En vérité, Dieu invite les adeptes de l'Islam et de Jésus de tirer maintenant des leçons de leur histoire qui leur permettront de se rendre compte que, en suivant la voie du dialogue, ils seront en mesure de donner un meilleur témoignage de coopérer pacifiquement au service de Dieu et de l'humanité.

Un petit conseil aux familles Chrétiennes: Le fait de s'engager dans le dialogue n'est qu'une étape ultérieure de l'évangélisation. Elles devraient d'abord être évangélisées et être encouragées à redécouvrir l'Evangile, à lire la Bonne Nouvelle avec les enfants dans les foyers et dans les communautés ecclésiales de base, et à prier à ce sujet. Cela aidera à augmenter leur foi, l'espérance, l'amour, la joie et la paix dans les familles. La maison où

vit la famille mériterait d'être appelé un «chez soi» que si la joie de vivre ensemble en harmonie est l'air que respirent tous les membres de la famille.

Le dialogue interreligieux pré-

suppose non seulement une cohabitation mais aussi le fait de vivre ensemble tout en vivant toutes les expériences possibles, bonnes ou mauvaises, et cela est pratique, tout d'abord, au sein de nos familles respectives. La famille est bien un enjeu de dialogue interreligieux comme elle définit l'avenir de la qualité du dialogue qui existera dans la société, dans l'église et bien sûr, dans le monde.

(Ref.: Article received from the Author)

Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together

A document at the occasion of the Apostolic journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to the United Arab Emirates, 3-5 February 2019.

Introduction

Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved. Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures and all human beings (equal on account of his mercy), believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need.

This transcendental value served as the starting point for several meetings characterized by a friendly and fraternal atmosphere where we shared the joys, sorrows and problems of our contemporary world. We did this by considering scientific and technical progress, therapeutic achievements, the digital era, the mass media and communications. We reflected also on the level of poverty, conflict and suffering of so many brothers and sisters in different parts of the world as a consequence of the arms race, social injustice, corruption, inequality, moral decline, terrorism, discrimination, extremism and many other causes.

From our fraternal and open discussions, and from the meeting that expressed profound hope in a bright future for all human beings, the idea of this Document on *Human Fraternity* was conceived. It is a text that has been given honest and serious thought so as to be a joint declaration of good and heartfelt aspirations. It is a document that invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in *human fraternity* to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.

Document

In the name of God who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters, to fill the earth and make known the values of goodness, love and peace;

In the name of innocent human life that God has forbidden to kill, affirming that whoever kills a person is like one who kills the whole of humanity, and that whoever saves a person is like one who saves the whole of humanity;

In the name of the poor, the destitute, the marginalized and those most in need whom God has commanded us to help as a duty required of all persons, especially the wealthy and of means;

In the name of orphans, widows, refugees and those exiled from their homes and their countries; in the name of all victims of wars, persecution and injustice; in the name of the weak, those who live in fear, prisoners of war and those tortured in any part of the world, without distinction;

In the name of peoples who have lost their security, peace, and the possibility of living together, becoming victims of destruction, calamity and war;

In the name of *human fraternity* that embraces all human beings, unites them and renders them equal;

In the name of this *fraternity* torn apart by policies of extremism and division, by systems of unrestrained profit or by hateful ideological tendencies that manipulate the actions and the future of men and women;

In the name of freedom, that God has given to all human beings creating them free and distinguishing them by this gift;

In the name of justice and mercy, the foundations of prosperity and the cornerstone of faith;

In the name of all persons of good will present in every part of the world;

In the name of God and of everything stated thus far; Al-Azhar al-Sharif and the Muslims of the East and West, together with the Catholic Church and the Catholics of the East and West, declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.

We, who believe in God and in the final meeting with Him and His judgment, on the basis of our religious and moral responsibility, and through this Document, call upon ourselves, upon the leaders of the world as well as the architects of international policy and world economy, to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace; to intervene at the earliest opportunity to stop the shedding of innocent blood and bring an end to wars, conflicts, environmental decay and the moral and cultural decline that the world is presently experiencing.

We call upon intellectuals, philosophers, religious figures, artists, media professionals and men and women of culture in every part of the world, to rediscover the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence in order to confirm the importance of these values as anchors of salvation for all, and to promote them everywhere.

This Declaration, setting out from a profound consideration of our contemporary reality, valuing its successes and in solidarity with its suffering, disasters and calamities, believes firmly that among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and a prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles.

While recognizing the positive steps taken by our modern civilization in the fields of science, technology, medicine, industry and welfare, especially in developed countries, we

wish to emphasize that, associated with such historic advancements, great and valued as they are, there exists both a moral deterioration that influences international action and a weakening of spiritual values and responsibility. All this contributes to a general feeling of frustration, isolation and desperation leading many to fall either into a vortex of atheistic, agnostic or religious extremism, or into blind and fanatic extremism, which ultimately encourage forms of dependency and individual or collective self-destruction.

History shows that religious extremism, national extremism and also intolerance have produced in the world, be it in the East or West, what might be referred to as signs of a "third world war being fought piecemeal". In several parts of the world and in many tragic circumstances these signs have begun to be painfully apparent, as in those situations where the precise number of victims, widows

and orphans is unknown. We see, in addition, other regions preparing to become theatres of new conflicts, with outbreaks of tension and a build-up of arms and ammunition, and all this in a global context overshadowed by uncertainty,

disillusionment, fear of the future, and controlled by narrow-minded economic interests.

We likewise affirm that major political crises, situations of injustice and lack of equitable distribution of natural resources - which only a rich minority benefit from, to the detriment of the majority of the peoples of the earth - have generated, and continue to generate, vast numbers of poor, infirm and deceased persons. This leads to catastrophic crises that various countries have fallen victim to despite their natural resources and the resourcefulness of young people which characterize these nations. In the face of such crises that result in the deaths of millions of children

- wasted away from poverty and hunger - there is an unacceptable silence on the international level.



It is clear in this context how the family as the fundamental nucleus of society and humanity is essential in bringing children into the world, raising them, educating them, and providing them with solid moral formation and domestic security. To attack the institution of the family, to regard it with contempt or to doubt its important role, is one of the most threatening evils of our era.

We affirm also the importance of awakening religious awareness and the need to revive this awareness in the hearts of new generations through sound education and an adherence to moral values and upright religious teachings. In this way we can confront tendencies that are individualistic, selfish, conflicting, and also address radicalism and blind extremism in all its forms and expressions.

The first and most important aim of religions is to believe in God, to honour Him and to invite all men and women to believe that this universe depends on a God who governs it. He is the Creator who has formed us with His divine wisdom and has granted us the gift of life to protect it. It is a gift that no one has the right to take away, threaten or manipulate to suit oneself. Indeed, everyone must safeguard this gift of life from its beginning up to its natural end. We therefore condemn all those practices that are a threat to life such as genocide, acts of terrorism, forced displacement, human trafficking, abortion and euthanasia. We likewise condemn the policies that promote these practices.

Moreover, we resolutely declare that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women in order to make them act in a way that has nothing to do with the truth of religion. This is done for the purpose of achieving objectives that are political, economic, worldly and short-sighted. We thus call upon all concerned to stop using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanati-

cism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression. We ask this on the basis of our common belief in God who did not create men and women to be killed or to fight one another, nor to be tortured or humiliated in their lives and circumstances. God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want His name to be used to terrorize people.

This Document, in accordance with previous International Documents that have emphasized the importance of the role of religions in the construction of world peace, upholds the following:

- The firm conviction that authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, *human fraternity* and harmonious coexistence; to re-establish wisdom, justice and love; and to reawaken religious awareness among young people so that future generations may be protected from the realm of materialistic thinking and from dangerous policies of unbridled greed and indifference that are based on the law of force and not on the force of law;

- Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings. This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives. Therefore, the fact that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture must be rejected, as too the imposition of a cultural way of life that others do not accept;

- Justice based on mercy is the path to follow in order to achieve a dignified life to which every human being has a right;

- Dialogue, understanding and the widespread promotion of a culture of tolerance, acceptance of others and of living together peacefully would contribute significantly to reducing many economic, social, political and environmental problems that weigh so heavily on a large part of humanity;

- Dialogue among believers means coming together in the vast space of spiritual, human and shared social values and, from here, transmitting the highest moral virtues that religions aim for. It also means avoiding unproductive discussions;

- The protection of places of worship - synagogues, churches and mosques - is a duty guaranteed by religions, human values, laws and international agreements. Every attempt to attack places of worship or threaten them by violent assaults, bombings or destruction, is a deviation from the teachings of religions as well as a clear violation of international law;

- Terrorism is deplorable and threatens the security of people, be they in the East or the West, the North or the South, and disseminates panic, terror and pessimism, but this is not due to religion, even when terrorists instrumentalize it. It is due, rather, to an accumulation of incorrect interpretations of religious texts and to policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression and pride. This is why it is so necessary to stop supporting terrorist movements fuelled by financing, the provision of weapons and strategy, and by attempts to justify these movements even using the media. All these must be regarded as international crimes that threaten security and world peace. Such terrorism must be condemned in all its forms and expressions;

- The concept of *citizenship* is based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice. It is therefore crucial to establish in our societies the concept of *full citizenship* and reject the discriminatory use of the term *minorities* which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority. Its misuse paves the way for hostility and discord; it undoes any successes and takes away the religious and civil rights of some citizens who are thus discriminated against;

- Good relations between East and West are indisputably necessary for both. They must not be neglected, so that each can be enriched by the other's culture through fruitful exchange and dialogue. The West can discover in the East remedies for those spiritual and religious maladies that are caused by a prevailing materialism. And the East can find in the West many elements that can help free it from weakness, division, conflict and scientific, technical and cultural decline. It is important to pay attention to religious, cultural and historical differences that are a vital component in shaping the character, culture and civilization of the East. It is likewise important to reinforce the bond of fundamental human rights in order to help ensure a dignified life for all the men and women of East and West, avoiding the politics of double standards;

- It is an essential requirement to recognize the right of women to education and employment, and to recognize their freedom to exercise their own political rights. Moreover, efforts must be made to free women from his-



torical and social conditioning that runs contrary to the principles of their faith and dignity. It is also necessary to protect women from sexual exploitation and from being treated as merchandise or objects of pleasure or financial gain. Accordingly, an end must be brought to all those inhuman and vulgar practices that denigrate the dignity of women. Efforts must be made to modify those laws that prevent women from fully enjoying their rights;

- The protection of the fundamental rights of children to grow up in a family environment, to receive nutrition, education and support, are duties of the family and society. Such duties must be guaranteed and protected so that they are not overlooked or denied to any child in any part of the world. All those practices that violate the dignity and rights of children must

be denounced. It is equally important to be vigilant against the dangers that they are exposed to, particularly in the digital world, and to consider as a crime the trafficking of their innocence and all violations of their youth;

- The protection of the rights of the elderly, the weak, the disabled, and the oppressed is a religious and social obligation that must be guaranteed and defended through strict legislation and the implementation of the relevant international agreements.

To this end, by mutual cooperation, the Catholic Church and Al-Azhar announce and pledge to convey this Document to authorities, influential leaders, persons of religion all over the world, appropriate regional and international organizations, organizations within civil society, religious institutions and leading thinkers. They further pledge to make known the principles contained in this Declaration at all regional and international levels, while requesting that these principles be translated into policies, decisions, legislative texts, courses of study and materials to be circulated.

Al-Azhar and the Catholic Church ask that this Document become the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and institutes of formation, thus helping to educate new generations to bring goodness and peace to others, and to be defenders everywhere of the rights of the oppressed and of the least of our brothers and sisters.

In conclusion, our aspiration is that:

- this Declaration may constitute an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, indeed among believers and non-believers, and among all people of good will;
- this Declaration may be an appeal to every upright conscience that rejects deplorable violence and blind extremism; an appeal to those who cherish the values of tolerance and fraternity that are promoted and encouraged by religions;

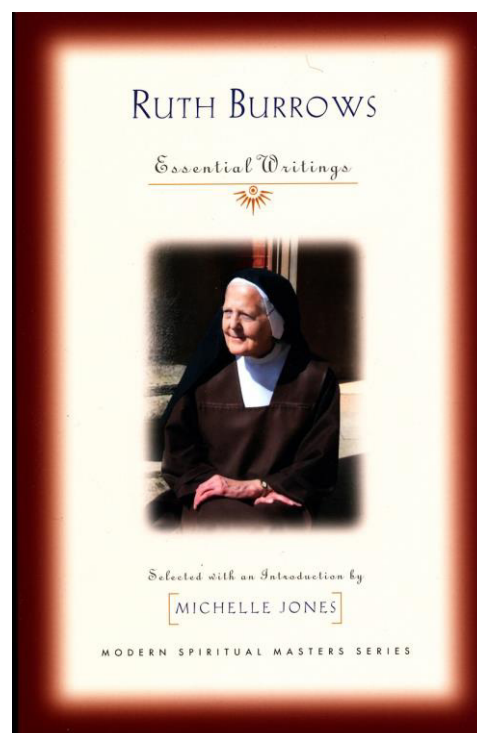
- this Declaration may be a witness to the greatness of faith in God that unites divided hearts and elevates the human soul;
- this Declaration may be a sign of the closeness between East and West, between North and South, and between all who believe that God has created us to understand one another, cooperate with one another and live as brothers and sisters who love one another.

This is what we hope and seek to achieve with the aim of finding a universal peace that all can enjoy in this life.

Abu Dhabi, 4 february 2019

His Holiness Pope Francis

***The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar,
Ahmad Al-Tayyeb***



(Gift from Orbis Books to SEDOS Library)

Saluting difference, staying faithful

The landmark declaration, signed by Francis in Abu Dhabi, caused disquiet in some quarters for affirming religious pluralism, but it is both inspirational and true to Catholic teaching.

The Document jointly signed earlier this month by the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb, and Pope Francis has caused disquiet in some quarters. "The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in his wisdom through which he created human beings," it declares.

Some Catholic commentators were offended by this use of "pluralism" and claimed that the idea that God "willed" the diversity of religions was contrary to Catholic teaching.

On his flight home from Abu Dhabi, Pope Francis told reporters: "I want to restate this clearly. From the Catholic point of view, the document does not deviate one millimetre from the Second Vatican Council."

He is dead right. Accepting that the diversity of religions is willed by God conforms to the council's teaching found not only in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions (*Nostra Aetate*), but also in other documents (notably, but not exclusively, in *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes*, and *Gaudium et Spes*). And accepting religious diversity as willed by God also corresponds to the teaching of Pope St John Paul II, as well as authoritative Catholic theologians.

The Belgian Jesuit theologian Jacques Dupuis' book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, sparked an animated debate over the status before God of other faiths when it was published in 1997. Is reli-

gious pluralism a situation in the history of salvation directly willed by God (pluralism *de iure*) or merely tolerated by God (pluralism *de facto*)? Although Dupuis never claimed fellow Jesuit Karl Rahner's support, a pluralism *de iure* was expounded by Rahner, a leading expert at Vatican II and considered by many to be the greatest theologian of the twentieth century.

In *Nostra Aetate* the Fathers of the council declare that there are "things that are true and holy in these [other] religions". The council goes on to make an extraordinarily positive declaration about other religions: their "ways of acting and living, precepts and doctrines

often reflect a ray of the Truth that illumines *all* human beings' (my italics). Speaking of what is "true and holy" evokes the two dimensions of God's self-communication: revelation (truth) and salvation (holiness). By refer-

ring to the "Truth that illumines all human beings", the council recalls the prologue of John's Gospel (1:9) and the Word of God. If Christ the Word of God is the truth for everyone, he must also be life for everyone (John 1:4), and such life means real holiness.

Nostra Aetate recognises in general what is true and holy in other religions. It spells out the truth and holiness that it finds in Hinduism and Buddhism, and then moves on to comment on what Christians and Muslims share. The council preserves the core belief that God has communicated in Christ the *fullness* of revelation and salvation. But the availability of this *fullness* through Christian faith and the Church does *not* mean that elsewhere there is only emptiness and no gifts of God. The teaching of *Nostra Aetate* is irreconcilable with any such claim.



The Council's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*) refers to "the seeds of the Word hidden in the religious traditions" of various peoples. These are "the riches which the bountiful God has distributed to the nations". The disciples of Christ should "try to illuminate these riches with the light of the Gospel". But, for reasons that are not sinful and remain hidden in the mystery of divine providence, the Gospel may not reach and be accepted by Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and others. Nevertheless, the God-given seeds of the Word and riches ("distributed" by God through the religious traditions of peoples) remain present and effective. These others can be saved in and through their religions.

The teaching of Vatican II is incompatible with such assertions as: "the followers of other religions cannot be saved through their religions but only despite them", or "God merely tolerates for a time the existence of other religions, and in no sense directly wills their existence". God wills the salvation of all. For millions of people that can take place only through their inherited beliefs and practices.

At the Gregorian University in Rome where I taught for more than 30 years, a Polish student of mine, Aleksander Majur, had written as his doctoral thesis, *The Teaching of John Paul II on the Other Religions*. John Paul II never issued an encyclical on the world religions. But he repeatedly spoke and wrote about them; Majur had abundant material for his 350-page volume. In a 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (the Mission of the Redeemer), he insisted that, while manifested "in a special way in the Church and her members", the Holy Spirit's "presence and activity" are "universal". He added: "The Spirit's

presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society, history, peoples, *cultures and religions* (my italics)."

John Paul II's teaching reminds me of Rahner. Sadly, some critics never move beyond rejecting the term "anonymous Christians", which Rahner originally suggested and then dropped as a secondary affair. What mattered far more were his reflections on the supernatural, grace-filled elements to be acknowledged in non-Christian religions. Significantly, Rahner added that for a religion to be "intended by God", it does not have to be "pure and positively willed by God *in all its elements*" (my italics). Christianity is certainly intended by God. But is it pure and positively willed by God in all the elements that have shown up in its history?



Before Rushing to judgment on the statement of the Pope and the Grand Imam, critics might re-read some relevant texts from Vatican II and Pope John II. The teaching of John Paul II includes the remarkable speech he made in Morocco in 1985

to more than 80,000 young Muslims. ("We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection..... Christians and Muslims, we have badly understood each other, and sometimes, in the past, we have opposed and even exhausted each other in polemics and in wars. I believe that, today, God invites us to change our old practices.") The document just signed by Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar also ranks as momentous teaching, which has come from a Pope visiting the Arabian peninsula itself, the birthplace of Islam.

(Ref.: *The Tablet* 16 February 2019)

Need for Structural Changes in Mission

The world is in transformation, and so is mission today. We all notice the changes in the world around us, in the fields of digitalization, globalization, communication, as well as some negative effects such as: the complexity of the digital world, the problem of cultural and religious identity, and the loneliness of modern human beings.

However, changes also bring opportunities. They challenge us to see beyond the changes and transformation what is taking place in our *mission activities*, and how we can handle and even enhance these changes in the right direction by implementing the needed *structural changes*.

We will take up three themes concerning Mission today. These important topics were discussed at the last three SEDOS Residential Seminars in Rome, Italy:

Interculturality: Living and Mission (2016),
Economy at the Service of Mission (2017),
Youth and Mission (2018).

This article is based on the in-put given by the different Speakers at the seminars interspersed with some personal observations.¹

From Internationality to Interculturality

We can live in another culture without really having lived there. We can even live in an international religious community without having had any experience of another culture. Multiculturalism is an occasion to learn, but we have to be willing to learn. Essential for leaders of congregations — on the level of management — is to create inter-cultural communities. They need to look at formation to see to what extent it makes people aware of the in-

fluence of their own culture and whether or not it makes people ready to embrace a new culture; however without denying their own charism.

Intercultural Communities

It is difficult to separate human emotions from cultural feelings. At times it is all too easy to defend ourselves by saying that we come from a different cultural background. But is this always the case? As Christians we have our “sub-culture”, or maybe even a “supra-culture”. That is the culture that binds us together. What divides us is our respective national and cultural background. We have chosen to live together as brothers and sisters in Christ, and that is our challenge and pleasure. Although the world is becoming one global family, people have not always chosen this. As an international congregation we have chosen to be one family of many nations and cultures. Jesus called everyone his brother and sister. That is why as religious missionaries we have the opportunity, and even the duty, to show the world that it is possible to live and work with people from different cultures in one religious community.

This means that as members of a religious community we should work on being an *inter-cultural* community and not live in a community that resembles a hotel where people, from different countries, stay as guests without any real interaction.² Creating this interaction intentionally is what typifies an *intercultural community*. Married people share “table and bed”. We, men and women religious, share “table and prayer”. At first, the best way is to eat according to the custom of the place, and to celebrate the liturgy according to the local custom. In this way, everyone is equal. But then create occasions when we can share the way we eat in our own place, at home, and the way we celebrate the Eucharist at home. In

¹ The reader can find the talks by the different specialists in the field in the SEDOS Bulletin of May-June 2016, 2017, and 2018. I will only mention the names were needed.

² Pope Francis’ words, in May 2014, to the different Colleges in Rome.

this way, we can feel more at home, and learn to appreciate other cultures. God already blessed the diversity present in man and woman when he created them. Why should we kill this diversity then? Let us learn to appreciate the differences, and know where we are one.

Human beings are partly biological, partly cultural, and these two elements are interdependent. It takes time for instance for the body to adjust from eating potatoes to eating rice, or from rice to corn. It takes time too, from being an outspoken American to an ever smiling Japanese, or from a punctual German to a worry-free Mexican. Thus, we should not ask too much of our brother or sister religious or expect them to change instantly. It takes time. Only, we need the will to change. There are many possible attitudes towards this change: in-

difference, separation, ghetto mentality, assimilation, exclusion, inclusion, parallelism, interpenetration, pluralism, or dialogue: too many to discuss here.

It is good to know that this process of cultural integration is not an easy one, and we should not be too quick to criticize our brother or sister religious if he or she is not able to do it the way it should be done. We are all on the way. The most important thing is not to stop working on ourselves in order to be more open to cultural differences. This is why formation is needed.

Intercultural Formation

In order to be more open to cultural difference and to adapt to the new culture we live in and work with, we need to have a cultural formation. In this formation there are many aspects to be tackled: demography, history, ideology, psychology, religiosity and sociology. On a psychological level a person may

experience problems of acculturation, inculturation, adaption, communication, or just stress in adapting to the new culture. It is not easy to change our way of behavior towards people, the way we voice our feelings, the way we communicate. Nevertheless, if we do not make an effort, we will remain foreigners in the country.

A culture is a collective consciousness, and this has to become part of our individual consciousness too. In order to enter a new culture, one has to get out of one's own culture. As we move from a *mono*-cultural to a *multi*-cultural environment, we have to create an intercultural environment. In order to create this intercultural environment there is a need for a learning process. Jon Kirby (SVD) speaks in this context of *exit-learning and entry-learning*. As missionaries we have to learn to leave

not only our own country but also our own culture, and to enter consciously and willingly the new culture. There are different possible



reactions to this. Those who are unwilling to do this at all show a *denial orientation*. They will not recognize the differences in a community, will avoid them, and might even show passive aggression. There are others who will go on the defensive and see differences from the perspective of "the norm". Such difference is a threat to them, and they will use stereotypes.

There is no attempt to sympathize. Those who tend to look at the differences in a positive way will begin to have cultural sensitivity. They are aware of their own privileges, but will hold on to them. This type of leader wants standardization in community life ("That is not the way to pray!"). Next, there are those with an *acceptance orientation*, who

are curious and interested in other cultures. In community life they are able to recognize the difference and they work towards integration and try to negotiate. However, they are still unable to adapt to other types of behaviour. Lastly, there are those who have an *orientation of adaptation*. They are able to look at the world with different eyes. In community, they look at diversity as a resource. They can do “code-shifting” while retaining their “core-identity”. A mature form of this last orientation is exercised by those who seek to integrate with the other culture.

The missionaries we used to look up to were those who had gone the whole way, who became Filipino with the Filipinos, Eskimo with the Eskimos, Belgian with the Belgians. But can they still be themselves? Do they still like their home country and culture? Are they truly “changed-agents” or have they only changed their cultural habits? Are they still carrying the Christian message forward? What we need today are missionaries who can be “change-agents”, who have an intercultural competence, who can make the transition between cultures to help others to bridge the gap between cultures. This *intercultural competence in religious life* is an on-going process. Being aware of who one is and what one’s culture typifies will help one to accept the other culture and do the “translation”, and help others to do the same. One becomes a “change-agent”. Whether we shake hands as Europeans, or bow our heads as Japanese, we are greeting each other, are we not? Whether we eat with a knife and fork, or with chopsticks, we are eating, are we not? However, some things do not only depend on one’s cultural background but on one’s personality. If one feels upset at the work, would one express one’s feelings openly or not? There is a difference between an Asian and a European in this regard, but also a difference from person to person. When you are a shy guy by nature, you have to learn to be more assertive. Moving to a culture that is akin to your own personality may not always be a change for the better on the psychological level. In my humble opinion, it is harder to change one’s character than to change one’s culture. The greatest *Jihad* (holy war), according to many Mus-

lims, is one’s inner struggle against one’s weaker self.

What we should not change

According to Professor Diana de Vallescar Palanca, the organization of our religious life turns around mission, with its specific identity and vision. This has a perennial dimension. Only on a second level comes the person and culture with the policy of how to provide intercultural formation and assess the process behind it. Sometimes we mistake the charism of a Congregation with the culture in which it was born. For instance, the manner of medical mission has changed much over the course of time, i.e., from building big hospitals with foreign money to serving the poor with alternative local therapies. But helping the sick remains the purpose of this specific mission.

According to Msgr. Sanchez de Toca, the Christian faith is cultural, but at the same time also supra-cultural. That is why we can speak of “inculturation”. Believing is also an on-going process. When one thinks one knows God, one does not know him in fact. Faith is an on-going search. And it also requires intellectual humility. I do not have the Truth. The Truth has me, and it opens me to other people. We should never give up being Christians, with our sublime religious message. Sometimes, for the sake of mission, we integrate into another culture or religion so much that we forget why we are doing it, what our contribution can and should be to that new culture. The culture does not have to become Christian, but should become more Christian. This means that one should enhance the Christian values within the new culture. For instance, are we ready to eat raw fish that is still shivering on our plate? Can we enjoy cooked eggs with unhatched chicks in them? Can we eat the pork of pigs that have not been treated humanely? Can we sip coffee whose beans have been grown by modern slaves? Can we employ a cleaning lady in the house without giving her proper social insurance coverage? What is our Christian contribution to the culture in which we live? Are we living what we believe in and preach? The same goes for interreligious dialogue.

Money serves the Mission

Money makes the world go round, they say. But in our Christian thinking this is not the case. Money serves the mission, and not *vice versa*. However, there is a certain culture in the Church concerning money that is not healthy. It even causes mismanagement and fosters corruption. Guidelines and structures have to be put in place to avoid all of this, although the human aspect in dealing with money cannot be completely excluded.

Economy at the service of Mission

Money is an instrument of mission. It sustains our existence (internal assistance) and it helps our charitable works (external assistance). The only thing that is different from the world around us is that it is not “my money” but “our money”, as Father Andre Kazadi, CICM shared in a panel discussion. As a young religious one looks at the money one receive as personal “petty cash”, but when one grows up in the Congregation one understands that the young cannot receive that needed money if the older ones do not save and share.

In olden times, as was the case in my Congregation, every missionary had to find ways to support his or her mission work. Each worked hard to finance his/her own mission. When the Congregation became international, not all the confrères had the same financial backing from family and friends, and so the idea came up that all the money received should go into a common fund from which the projects could be financed. Now, the problem with this new system is that confrères ask the Provincial Superior to help them finance projects, instead of being creative and looking for alternative ways to finance their mission. In a certain sense, we risk creating “spoiled children” by giving too much easily.

Money is hard to earn, and easy to spend. The economy needs people to spend money, but we should know where and when to spend. The economy in olden times, as Professor Luigino Bruni said, was related to work (*homo faber*), whereas now the economy is related to consumerism (*homo ludens*). But can one consume without working for it? Of course not. Even a thief works to get the money he desires. One often hears missionaries say the words: *Without money I cannot do mission*. One wonders which came first, mission or money? Jesus did not start with money, but with a mission! When one starts working, the money will come, as is the way in every job. People only give when they see what you do with it, and we have to accept that God cooperates through Holy Providence with what He finds worthwhile for His mission.

Money is not dirty

In religious life, we think that working with money is not a truly missionary job. Pastoral work, caring for the sick, the homeless, the deprived, is indeed a very Christian endeavour, but taking care of money is this too. We do not own the money, we are its steward. Besides the financial resources of a Congregation, there are the human resources as well as the technological resources, according to Sr. Daphne Alphonso, MSOLA. Taking care of an aging mother as a religious and being released for this purpose for one year is a great burden on the Congregation, but a great grace for the person/people involved. Otherwise how can a religious work properly if her father or mother is dying? The economy has to be at the service of mission. Taking care of your dear ones is a basic act as a Christian. But also using the money to serve the poor, our personnel, and infrastructure is our common mission. To place the poor at the center of our mission will be a



symbolic act, sign, that is stronger than words. What do we really treasure? *Where your treasure is, there is your heart* (Mt 6:21).

The way we deal with money also depends a lot on the cultural background: the culture in the family, the culture in the country, the culture in the Congregation, the culture in the mission, and so on. Also, gender difference plays a role in the way we spend. And according to a study, middle-aged religious spend the most because they are also the most active. It is therefore difficult to be too strict when it comes to money matters, but general guidelines are needed.

Breaking the vicious circle of corruption

The money in our care has to be managed well. How many Congregations suffer because of financial mismanagement? More education is needed at all levels of the Congregation: Initial Formation as well as Ongoing Formation, especially for those who are in charge of the finances of a religious House, a Province, or a Congregation, is important. Furthermore, those in charge of the finances should not be left on their own. Sometimes too much confidence is allowed in financial matters. Of course we have to trust our brothers and sisters, but when it comes to money control is necessary. *When it comes to money there are no friends*, my parents used to say. One should be objective, obey the rules, and accept control. There is therefore an urgent need for new structures concerning the follow-up, transparency, expertise, training, and qualifications. How can we allow someone to deal with the money of all, if the person has no basic training, knowledge, skills, and the needed diplomas? And why should a person not agree to have the finances audited? If everything is done according to the rule, why be afraid of an outside auditor who comes to check the financial report? Instead we should be happy to have some comments from outsiders. For instance, a financial auditing-system for the Provinces has been put in place recently by the General Bursar of my own Congregation to support the local Bursar, but also to avoid fraud. We are thinking of doing the same thing concerning our missionary projects, a kind of “mission audit”, not only

on the level of finances but also on the level of missionary efficiency.

Thanks to Pope Francis, talking about corruption is no longer a *tabu* in the Church. We admit that we are sinners, and that we need people to help us to keep on the right track. Instead of fearing the controller we should be thankful that someone can help us to be “a person for all”, as Jesus was. The reason why people commit fraud, according a famed criminologist, is because there is an *opportunity*, a *motivation*, and a *rationalization* (fraud triangle). *Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain*, according to Mr. Willi Kawohl who works for *Transparency International*. He pointed out that the vicious cycle of corruption lies in *ignoring* the facts, in *concealing* the problems, or in *enabling* corruption. To fight it, we need to *prevent* it through, among other things, transparency, good communications, and code of conduct; to seek to *identify* the corruption in time and to protect the whistle-blowers; and lastly to *enforce* the system through disciplinary guidelines.

The best methods recommended by Professor Dr. Christoph Stückelberg are among others:

- Reflect on the theological, ecclesiological, and ethical basis,
- Set up a code for responsible conduct of leaders,
- Create a set of minimum *standards for election of candidates*.

Young people will renovate the Mission

The youth of today has grown up with the reality and possibilities of internet, in a global world, but not always with the same financial freedom their parents had. Their values are more humane and Christian than we might think at first, and their sense of community is also Christian-like. The only difficulty is that they need — and want — to be evangelized by people who live the faith.

Sharing economy

Young people have no problem in sharing, according to Professor Emilia Palladino. For instance what is important for them is to be

able to use a car when they need to. This means, *not to have* it, but *to use* it. Look for instance at the rising use of rental bikes or cars in big cities. Youth also prefer buying online, whereas older people are still hesitant about it. This is because they can compare the prices as they have less money than their parents had. Youngsters do not buy a house early, nor do they leave home soon. Marriage is also for a later age, second half of the twenties, and having children is even left for their thirties. They value fitness highly, and therefore smoke less because they do not want to waste their valuable life. Beauty is less important to them than health. Eating healthy food is therefore a priority, and one can see the success of restaurants that give priority to this approach to food. Young religious also like to live in smaller communities of four or more members. From all these aspects we can see that the Christian values are not a problem for them.

Internationality is not a problem

Evangelization must be open to pluralism because for youth this is no problem. They are used to many nationalities, cultures, religions, food styles, and so on. *They have an inner urge to the call of multiculturality*, as Brother Paul Raj, FSG states, and they love the new, unique and exciting experience of the mission. The only question is whether short-term commitments can be set up for them. Committing themselves to a life-long engagement is a difficulty. One can see this phenomenon in the parish, as well as in the soccer club or in volunteer work. We must not be too hard on the youth of today, also because there are so many possible choices in the world of today. Instead, we should offer them many opportunities to experience religious life in order to help them make a life-long choice.

Challenge to overcome individuality

The millennials, the youth born around the millennium, also have their problems. They

are more narcissistic. It is the Me, Me, Me generation. The youth are “connected” through the internet, as Father Timothy Radcliff, OP reasoned, but they are only connected with those with whom they agree, whom they “like”. There is a great lack in communication skills. Real talking among them is rare. When



a person says, “I am that way” no further discussion is possible. But, to avoid facing problems is to avoid progress. Without crisis there is no change, no life! With Facebook, for instance, you can “like” or “dislike” someone, but in life

that is not always the case! The child that is born, sickness that comes your way, the job that is offered to you, so many occasions in which you sometimes have to go on liking to the very end. There is no relationship free from pain. Friends one can choose, but brothers and sisters one can only welcome. Also in religious life. As Christians we especially want to love those who do not love us or those who are not loved by others. The “other” reveals who I am, through being different!

A problem that is related to this ‘Me generation’, as Sister Bruna Zaltron, OSCM pointed out, is that youth no longer have adults who can contradict/correct them, a father, a mother, or even grandparents, because they too like to be “ever young”. The reason there are no vocations is because there are no adults, she concludes. They are also overexposed to, but not “fed” on, religious matters. Youth will listen to the heart, and look for genuine disciples of Jesus.

Quality of religious life

Brother Paul Bednaryczk, CSC has made a profound study of vocations in America, and he concludes that the *quality of religious life* is what attracts the young. Congregations should therefore stimulate vocation animation with the cooperation of the superiors, and create a culture of vocations with the cooperation of all members, and have a vocation director and/or team. The use of the social media with

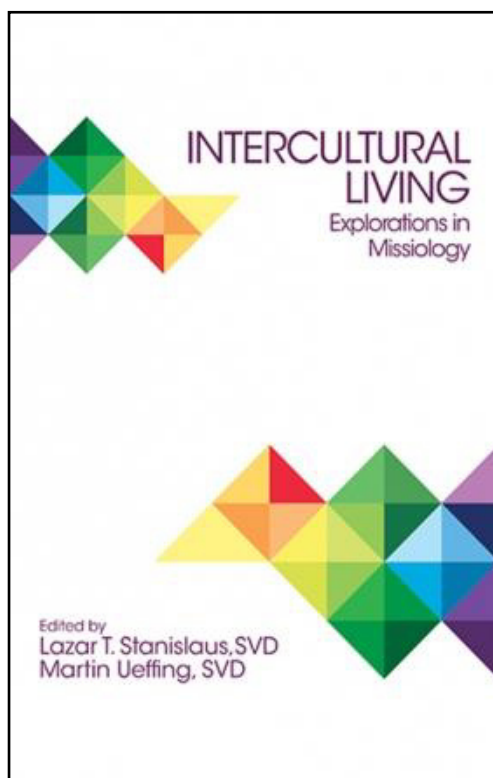
the active cooperation of young people to test its validity is needed, as well a good discernment programme (hands-on learning and theological reflection), and being open to members from other cultures (problem of time and food).

Young religious seek balance between prayer, work, and community life. They like to live in groups of four or more. And the religious habit is a needed radical witness today! We need to understand that those who come to us today will not be like us. We have to ask ourselves: do we really want to bring Jesus to the youth? Then we have to do it in *koinonia*, *in union with them*, and *not for them*. They are not the objects of formation, but subjects. The youth of today like to participate in the formation programming, as well as in every decision-making process and they respect the one who has to take the last decision. Participative leadership combined with strong and creative leadership is thus *a must* in dealing with young vocations (or those who are young of heart). In this way, we respect their individuality while challenging them to take into account the needs of the Congregation and its charism.

Conclusion

Missionaries are warriors on the frontline to change the world in the “right” direction. We are ‘change-agents’. The only thing we have to do to fulfill this task is to listen closely to, and watch, the world around us, to discover how the Holy Spirit is at work. What is the Lord asking me/us to do? How can I/we do it? What do I/we need to do? *Every time has its historical necessity*, as philosopher Karl Marx taught. And the great historian Arnold Toynbee warned us that *a culture that does not answer the historical necessity will perish* because it loses its “*raison d’être*”. This reasoning is also valid for religions, as well as for every Congregation. It is thus a challenge and a duty for the Mission of the Church to give answers — in an ever new way and loyal to our charism — to the many changes all of us are experiencing in the world of today.

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