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SEDOS



Editorial

1

What kind of ministry for tomorrow?

Fernando Domingues, MCCJ

2

Communion Interculturelle: inculturation et dialogue

Jean Marie Van Parys, SJ

9

Ser Misionero Inter Gentes

Anthony Kalliath, CMI

16

Inculturation in Moral Theology

Julian Saldanha, SJ

24

Fresh Perspectives on Inter Religious Dialogue in Relation to Christian Mission

Jacob Kavunkal, SVD

28

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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers of SEDOS BULLETIN,

As a member of a missionary congregation, the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that started in Belgium (Scheut) and is now international (CICM),



I feel blessed to start working for SEDOS and its SEDOS BULLETIN. My family roots are in the Flemish part of Belgium, and I have had 20 years of missionary life in Japan. Most of my time has been dedicated to studies: MA in Comparative Religion (Lugano), MA in Theology (Louvain), MA in Buddhist Studies (Koyasan), and a PhD in Theology of Religion (Nagoya). Later on I have been blessed with parish work and teaching stints at universities and theological schools in different parts of the world. I hope to make good use of my missionary studies and experience in the service of SEDOS and its bulletin that has as its main aim to supply missionaries with good “documentation and studies on global mission”.

SEDOS BULLETIN uses four languages: english, french, spanish, and italian. Thanks to the work of our Editorial Board we will also be able to offer translations of the main articles on the website of Sedos.

We will also work from now on with one theme per bulletin. The theme of this bulletin is “Multiculturality”, because the upcoming SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR carries the theme, “Multiculturality: Living and Mission”. In this way we can already give some interesting viewpoints or insights concerning the theme of the seminar. The next bulletin will then offer the papers and reflections given at that seminar. With the Advisory Board we will further on discuss which themes are needed for the world of

today, and especially for the world of mission today.

Our Administrator and Secretary will do their best to see to it that the bulletin looks nice, and reaches you in time. We remain open for any good advice to improve the bulletin as an instrument of Mission.

MULTICULTURALITY

The present bulletin has as its theme “Multiculturality”. The first and main article therefore concerns multicultural formation. Fernando Domingues depicts the way we can prepare our younger members in living in a multicultural society through a multicultural religious community. Giving the young only one way of living the religious life is therefore not the real education that is needed in this context. The second article by Jean Marie Van Parys deepens this “intercultural communion” through the need for “inculturation” and “dialogue” to be the cornerstones of a multicultural community.

After these first two articles about “multicultural living” we move on to the topic of “multicultural mission”. The article of Anthony Kalliath points out the theological paradigm shift that has risen through Vatican II by which the Church moved away from the idea that we go as missionaries to the people (mission *ad gentes*). The current idea of mission is that we first live among the people (mission *inter gentes*) and discern with them what they need and how the Gospel values can be integrated. This new way of being among the people in a Christian way demands a new way of conduct. The following two articles therefore discuss this aspect more in depth. The first article is that of Julian Saldanha. He sees that what contributes to the challenge of inculturating moral theology is not only the great cultural diversity, but also the need to think about this in a new way. The second article of Jacob Kavunkal is based on the experience of interreligious dialogue which he sees to be the primary expression of mission today, the mission *inter-Religiones*. His statement is: Interreligious Dialogue is the golden rule for Christians today.

We wish you much reading-pleasure and reflection!

What kind of ministry for tomorrow?

How should we train the young candidates for it?

Fr Fernando Domingues is a Comboni missionary. After having worked for fifteen years in Kenya, near Nairobi, in his congregation's international community, he was appointed Rector of the Pontifical Urban College, Rome, (2005). He has written "*Christ Our Healer*", Nairobi, Paulines-Africa, 2000, and other articles as doctor in theology.

The extra large number of people attending this Seminar on **Intercultural Formation** clearly shows the interest this subject arouses. In our day, vocations are scarce in certain regions whereas they abound in others. This phenomenon is rather perplexing. It is even more difficult to understand why a high percentage of candidates, on reaching the final stage of their formation, leave the Seminary or religious life, while others terminate their "life commitment" after several years of ministry. This is even more surprising since the final years of formation and the first years of ministry have always been considered to be a period of

great generosity and enthusiasm. There are yet more reasons to worry us. In the International Centres where all cultures are much appreciated, the formation there appears to equip the candidates to exercise their ministry poorly. This is certainly not due to the length of the courses which are longer than any other academic or professional training. Curiously, what they find hard is precisely the cultural context! The young people who agree to exercise their ministry in an economically

disadvantaged area do so with the unspoken hope that these years of hardship will help them to obtain a more gratifying post later.

Informal conversations have shown that the aim of young religious, from the developing countries, is to receive a good level of education which will qualify them to settle in more well-off areas in the West.

We feel we must answer two of the most pressing questions. How can we avoid losing so many young people? Does multi-cultural formation lead to personal superficiality which seems to be why such a large number leave in the first years of ministry? We can answer this question in a number of ways. **First:** by refusing to change in any way. After all, our congregation is international and the

candidates know this from the start and must adapt and learn to work in this context. If we lose many, too bad! This could possibly mean that they do not suit us. **Equally,** we could react to this situation by once again imposing uniformity. Pluralism is seen as



• He said: "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." John 21:6

undermining the wish to follow a common objective and the feeling of belonging to a group whose identity is well defined. Therefore, let us return to the same set of values and priorities, to the same theological vision, to the same liturgy, thanks to a sound common discipline. Perhaps it would be better to train the young people together or at least in very large groups, which receive exactly the same instruction, little matter where these formation centres are located. Sometimes a **third** solution is suggested namely, that the

youngsters be formed in their place of origin and that only the most mature be sent to an International Centre to be trained to work abroad. However none of these solutions is totally satisfactory. We are faced with a problematic situation with apparently no solution. However, it may be helpful to put aside our current worries for the time being and seek to view it from a different angle. Therefore I would ask you to consider the following two questions.

What kind of ministry does the Church need today?

How can we form our young members to respond to this need appropriately?

Multi-culturality

In the first place it should be remembered that multi-culturality is not a choice, especially during the period of Formation. The international flux of people, of ideas, information, etc., has existed for a long time and continues to increase. The world tends to promote international study centres. According to statistics at least 1.5 million students enrolled at universities and centres of higher learning outside their own country in 2002. About 80% of these students came from the developing countries to study in the West. The countries that send the greatest number of students to the United States are India and China. Then 80% of them do not return to their country of origin after having completed their studies.¹ The 20% that return are deeply influenced by the university culture of the country that hosted them. On return they obtain posts in the fields of education, economics and politics. These positions enable them to exercise considerable influence on their respective cultures of origin. Even the students who do not leave their country receive a multicultural experience thanks to the many programs of twinning between universities and other institutions of higher learning (exchange of teachers and students for a given period).

Of course there is the danger of creating “a union of people who are no longer equal” or other forms of neo-colonialism,² but the process of globalization continues. Indeed, it is more forcibly imposed. Consequently, any

attempt to create mono-cultural structures for formation is seen to be truly anachronistic.

Some difficulties

The presence of students from different backgrounds in our Formation Institutes is not a problem in itself. Nevertheless, it does not run quite smoothly. To begin with there is the matter of language. Often the students learn a common language in the Novitiate, a language more or less mastered by the end of their studies. But could they assimilate more? Is it possible to study theology in-depth in a foreign language that one only knows superficially?

Can one reasonably expect a deep intercultural exchange, leading to reciprocal enrichment, in a community composed of people from twenty different cultures? What type of formative relationship can be established between a Chinese candidate and a Portuguese Formation teacher? Is a “common culture” possible in such a community in formation? Were one to impose the local culture on all the candidates, inviting them to “forget” their own culture, would that help them to confront the culture in which they will exercise their ministry later?

Serious problems

Would a uniform Formation Centre where everything is clear and well-defined, both at the level of the content and the policies concerning discipline, be easier to conduct? However, the ministers trained in this way would have serious difficulties to face. Since they have assimilated but a single type of theology and liturgy, and have but a single model of priestly and consecrated life, they will be ministering to an ecclesial community whose experience and vision of Christian life do not correspond to their education.

Here, I am thinking of the minister who has learned to see and celebrate the Eucharist as a gift of God, which the priest offers for the faithful as one who has received the special power to consecrate the bread and the wine, so that people may adore Christ exposed in the Holy Sacrament.... This priest will come into conflict with a community in which the Eucharist is seen and celebrated in terms of communion and of the mission accomplished

by Christ through the community presided over by the priest. Some priests identify with a single type of animation of Christian communities. Thus, it is difficult for them to admit that the community, to whom they are sent to serve abroad, form part of the “true” Church, simply because they reject their authoritative outlook.

To promote openness

In our day, multi-culturality (including the plurality of points of view) has become the life-style of the Church. Although this could cause some difficulties the ministers whom we train are expected to serve in this multicultural Church with many faces. Moreover, when we turn our gaze to the world, we see a wonderful range of: mindsets, cultures and religious experiences that challenge us. It is in this real world the ministers of tomorrow are called to serve. It is not therefore a question of accepting or rejecting globalization, but rather of forming ministers who are able and happy to serve the real world and the real [multicultural] Church. The reader will have noticed that I associate the question of multicultural formation with a healthy theological and liturgical pluralism. Naturally they are distinct realities, but they approach each other on the level of attitude. A person with a unilateral view of theology will never succeed in integrating in another culture. In the same way someone whose gaze never goes beyond his own cultural background will remain closed to the notion and experience of Christian life different from his own. The theology and the culture are of little importance in themselves, what is of prime importance is the fundamental attitude of openness to diversity and pluralism. The Church of today stands in need of ministers who boldly open themselves to others!

It seems to me that the greatest challenge to formation is how to promote this theological and cultural openness while avoiding the superficiality that leaves candidates frail and unprepared to face the difficulties they will inevitably meet in their future ministry. Let us think of the seed that fell on stony ground: it grew quickly, but withered as soon as sun rose because it had no deep roots (cf. Mk 4:5-6). The depth of the multicultural formation seems to me to be of crucial importance. Archbishop Luis Antonio G. Tagle, of Manila, the Philippines, can help us with a reflection. I have based the following chapter on his address to the Asian Missionary Congress, in Chiang Mai, (Thailand, 19-22 October 2006).³

To train “narrators”

Archbishop Tagle drew our attention to several people who have succeeded in telling Jesus’ story in a remarkable way. He mentioned Mother Teresa among others. These outstanding figures show what each Christian and every Local Church is called to be and to do. The narrative of Jesus is entrusted to his disciples through the action of the Holy Spirit. To tell it is to make Christ present. This however means that the teller’s own life form part of the story, because that person can only perform this task to the extent that the Message to be proclaimed has transformed his/her own life. Archbishop Tagle also pointed out that each of these people enriched the narrative which can be told in various ways. “The person’s movements, gestures, behaviour, tone of voice, facial expression, pose, are all part of the story”.⁴ The best story-tellers are those whose whole life has become a part of Jesus’ story and active presence in the world today. All they are, every decision taken, every service rendered, has but one objective: to continue to tell this story and to help others to become story-tellers able to recount this very narrative



in their turn. The narrator draws inspiration from the kernel of multicultural formation: the profound encounter between the candidate and Christ in his/her own cultural context.

Identity and Openness

Nevertheless, although recounting the story faithfully, the narrator's style is always personal often anticipating the needs of a varied audience and adding something from his/her own experience.

The young people we are training are preparing to tell Christ's history. This is why a personal encounter with Him is so important; an encounter lived, experienced and explicitly expressed in behaviour that becomes steadily firmer. Here, then, is the good soil into which the candidate sends down roots. Their depth constitutes the foundation of the harmony and plurality of the theological and cultural viewpoints that the candidate will meet and progressively integrate into his own life and ministry. It is more important to accompany the young people in their journey of faith than to offer them valid answers in every circumstance or to inculcate standard types of behaviour, as a sure defence, against every threat imaginable. A person's identity, self-assurance, perseverance, springs from the inner-self and cannot be imposed from the outside. In this context, one hears talk of vertebra that hold together thanks to the skeleton that remains invisible, contrary to snails, molluscs, which depend on an exterior shell for their defence.

On the one hand there is the balance between a person's cultural identity and spiritual depth and on the other, openness to other cultures, sometimes called a third culture.⁵ It is typical of a person who has lived abroad for a long time without totally identifying with the host culture. On return to the country of origin this person may feel a stranger in his/her own land. Nevertheless, that person has a clear, deep personal identity, regardless of where he/she may be, and feels at ease in any context and so mature exchanges with others happen at a deeper level.

An opportunity and not a difficulty

During a friendly conversation, a university lecturer confided to me that he wished to change the title of his course to "Cultural Anthropology and the problem of inculturation". I observed that the term "problem" was inappropriate. In fact, for missionaries and most theologians, "inculturation" is not a question to be resolved, but rather a necessary process. The Christian faith must constantly and in ever new ways express itself in whatsoever culture it comes into contact. In the course of this process, the culture is transformed from within and the new expression of faith enriches the Church as a whole. Thus, new theological approaches come to light which lead to forms of liturgical celebration, spiritual intuition, and unprecedented ways of proclamation. In this way inculturation does not present a difficulty to be overcome, but an opportunity to be put to advantage. Moreover, each time that faith and culture are distanced from each other in societies with a Christian Tradition a new form of inculturation arises. The transmission of the Christian faith from one people to another, from one culture to another, takes place equally in a country termed "mission" as in the West where the migratory flows confront the Christian Communities with other cultures and religious traditions. Formation for a mono-cultural apostolate seems to me to be totally unrealistic. The question is not whether we need a multicultural formation, but how to put it into practice?

To interiorize values

The greatest challenge to Formators is how to help the young people to interiorize the fundamental values of their vocation, as they are bombarded daily by: different points of view, different experiences, unsuspected history, etc. What is the best way to guide their development so that the period of formation, at times dangerous, leads them to assume their responsibilities fully?

To start with there are some dangers to be avoided. The **first** is what is called: "the least common denominator" for the sake of peace. The Formation House then becomes a residence where a candidate, or group of

candidates, lives on a “cultural island”. Conflict is avoided and the cultural identity of each one is protected. **Then**, the approach termed “melting pot” or “start all over again” seems to me to be equally dangerous. Every tiny detail is scrutinized by the community. One continually seeks to mix the different elements of each of the cultures represented in the hope of creating a new one in this way. Such an approach leads to general frustration. Each one feels that his culture is not respected and no one identifies with the “new culture”. A **third** danger to be avoided is formation that “mirrors that of the Former”. The Former, unable to perceive the unique character of each candidate and God’s plan for each,⁶ quite simply takes his own experience as the model to follow. This approach may take various forms: the “fundamentalist way” which consists in identifying (or imagining) a “golden age” in the past, and seeking to re-establish it, or mould the candidates of today to match it. Sometimes, a “contemporary way” is chosen (a Church movement, a particular way of living the charisma of the Institute, etc.) which is presented as *the way* to follow in every detail by each candidate. The dangers I have mentioned have one thing in common: the lack of perception of each candidates’ unique journey to God. When the above-mentioned dangers are not avoided, ministers are formed, who certainly observe the general rules well, but who lack real inner conviction.

Next, it is necessary to set in motion three basic formative dynamics at each stage of the multicultural formation program. This allows the young people to advance on their path and to gradually develop a balanced personal identity as well as greater multicultural openness. **Education is the first dynamic** which should guarantee this continuity. The challenges coming from outside and the new needs, inherent in the curriculum, must be present within the young person’s personal journey. It is not realistic to expect great leaps forward during formation. The candidates assimilate and internalize the elements they consider to be in line with what they are already and with what they have already done. The progress of each candidate is characterized by a continuous dialogue between their previous knowledge and

religious baggage and the new proposals they receive during the multicultural formation process.

Formation is the second dynamic. A vocation does not develop spontaneously, it must be cultivated. The Formator, in the name of the Church and of the Institute within which he works, presents a number of solid values which form the kernel of a specific vocation. This set of values, priorities and routine serve to strengthen the Candidate’s future identity. Therefore, the Formator is not a passive spectator, his presence is not neutral, he does not take an impartial stand with regard to the Candidate’s progress.⁷ He seeks to live the fundamental dimension of his own specific vocation in order to arouse in candidates the desire to interiorize them in their turn. The fundamental values of the Institute’s charism, or of the Ordained Diocesan Ministry, are an intrinsic dimension of this vocation. Thus, the Former assists the candidate in his constant effort to assimilate each stage of the formation process. In this way, he enables him to make a personal synthesis of the different elements: theology or other subjects on the syllabus, new pastoral experiences, intercultural life in community, his possible cultural shock on encountering the culture of the country where the community in formation is located; the different experiences of prayer, the introduction to some unknown forms of spirituality, etc. One must recognize that the maturation of the human being is very slow and that it demands a continual effort both on the part of the candidate and on that of the Former. Such effort cannot be confined to a number of conferences addressed to the group as a whole. A concrete policy is necessary which emphasizes the importance of regular personal meetings.

Here are some practical suggestions: Plan personal meetings and group dynamics which help each candidate to compare the academic theology being studied with his own life and experience in the multicultural community in formation. It is also good to encourage students from other ecclesiastical contexts and cultures to meet. These encounters will present a good opportunity for an exchange of views and experiences and it will be better if

the Formator is not present. It will certainly be necessary to set periods of silence daily, reserved for the assimilation and deepening of the content, personal experiences, etc., in the context of the encounter with the Lord. Lastly, it is always interesting to organize liturgical celebrations which allow each person to feel that his own ecclesial, spiritual and cultural background is represented while permitting him to discover the Lord who builds unity in diversity. *Discernment of the candidate's aptitude* to become a *member of a particular ecclesial group* is the **third** dynamic. This aspect will help the candidate to find his place in a congregation or a diocese. He must be given plenty of opportunities to become a creative protagonist of the charisma received through the formation dynamic. The Formator should act as a moderator who offers encouragement at the right moment. At some point the candidate will be asked some very personal questions concerning his future insertion. For example: What type of priest, of consecrated person, missionary, etc.: *"have-I the intention of becoming?"* How can I contribute to further the charism of the Institute to which I belong? What sort of support *am I able* to offer the clergy in my diocese? In what fields *am I called* to question my confrères and sisters? What might be *my* field of specialization or my apostolate? One must help the candidate to discern the *place that God has reserved* for him in an Institute of Consecrated Life or in the Presbyterate. The Former will help the candidate as an elder brother or sister.

A multicultural formation will help the candidate to enrich his diocese, or the Institute within which he works, considerably. In this context let us think of the contribution the Apostle Paul made to the Church in Jerusalem — and to the whole Church! — thanks to his multicultural formation in Antioch.⁸ It is extremely important not to neglect the candidate in the final stage of his formation. The candidate needs an elder brother or sister to encourage him while being critical and keeping at a respectful distance.

The Formation Staff

I shall conclude with a word of advice to the Formation staff. Apart from the qualifications required in every ecclesiastical context,⁹ what qualities do Formators need to exercise their ministry in a multicultural setting? Here are some suggestions I have found useful in my work. The Formator is someone who is imbued with the "third culture". He is at ease with his own original culture and similarly he has a good knowledge of at least one other cultural context. In my opinion it is indispensable that Formators view their own ministry as a vocation and that they be ready to serve for several years. One does not learn to be a Formator in an international setting in a short time. Of course, experience is important, but above all one must be able to learn from one's own experience and from that of others. Formers must be able to, want to, work in an international *team*. An equally motivated team is indispensable. This offers Formators the opportunity to live what they teach others. The Formator's example is more important than what he teaches. Furthermore, the candidates sometimes need to confide in someone from their own background, or in someone who has a good knowledge of their culture. Lastly, the Formator needs to be a good "narrator" who can tell the Gospel story in a creative way with vivid examples from his own experience.

Footnotes

1. Cf. P.G. Altabach, "Globalisation and the University: Myths and Realities in an Unequal World", in *Seminarium*, 3/4/2002, p. 817 ff.
2. Cf. *ibid*, p. 824 and 833.
3. Cf. Cardinal L.A.G. Tagle, "La mission en Asie: raconter l'histoire de Jésus", in *Omnis Terra*, n. 426, 2006, pp. 367-375.
4. *Ibid*, p. 370.
5. Fr. Thomas Green, SJ, in the Introduction to "*Opening to God*", Notre Dame, Indiana, Ave Maria Press, 1977.
6. St John of the Cross mentions three blind spiritual guides in: cf. *Fiamma viva d'amour*, B, III, in *Opere*, Roma Morena, OCD, 2001, p. 790 ff. Also cf. Thomas Green in: *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, Notre Dame, Ave Maria, 2000, pp. 84-85.
7. Cf. R. Mion, "Il processo di mondializzazione: una nuova cultura con luci e ombre", in *Seminarium*, 2002, p. 256.
8. In the course of history the following contributed to the Church's progress thanks to

their interest in intercultural dialogue: *St Irenaeus*; the *Fathers of Chalcedon*, re: Africa, the Orient and the West (Rome); *Thomas Aquinas*; *Anselm of Canterbury (Aoste)*; *St Justin de Jacobis* – Ethiopia in the XIX century.

9. *Direttive sulla preparazione degli educatori nei seminari*, Rome, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1993, (Instruction on the Preparation of Seminary Staff).

Ref: *Spiritus* n. 190, Mars 2008, pp. 50-62.

Translated into English by Philippa Wooldridge.

The original French version as well as the Spanish version can be found on SEDOS website: www.sedosmission.org

Communion interculturelle: inculturation et dialogue

Communauté pour la mission

Dans une Congrégation apostolique, le sens de la Communauté, c'est de favoriser la Mission. Notre vie commune est comprise comme un atout pour la mission, et plus encore nos communautés interculturelles. Notre Mission, c'est la mission de l'Église, c'est la mission du Christ en ce monde, celle-là qui lui est confirmée à son baptême, celle-là qu'il transmet à ses disciples après sa résurrection : Comme mon Père m'a envoyé, moi aussi je vous envoie. Recevez le Saint Esprit (Jn 20,21-22).

Cette mission est d'emblée interculturelle: que l'on rapproche Matthieu et Luc, Marc et Paul, Pierre et Jean: la communauté missionnaire de départ est interculturelle. Mais la première extension de la mission primitive pose d'emblée la question de l'interculturalité: faut-il évangéliser les païens, ou non? Les païens convertis doivent-ils se soumettre aux coutumes juives, ou non? Et les chrétiens de culture grecque, ces demi-étrangers, doivent-ils bénéficier pour leurs veuves des mêmes avantages que les chrétiens de culture juive? Problèmes interculturels donc, d'emblée, à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de la première communauté missionnaire. Comment les résoudre?

Déjà, l'exemple de Jésus lui-même ne laisse pas de doute: il guérit la belle-mère juive de Pierre, mais aussi le fils du centurion, et la

filles de la Cananéenne, et le serviteur du fonctionnaire royal...

On voit qu'une certaine crainte de l'interculturalité aurait pu compromettre, dès les débuts, l'accueil du Christ comme Messie et Sauveur, et le développement de l'Église à peine née. On voit aussi que les premiers problèmes interculturels ne seront résolus, ni

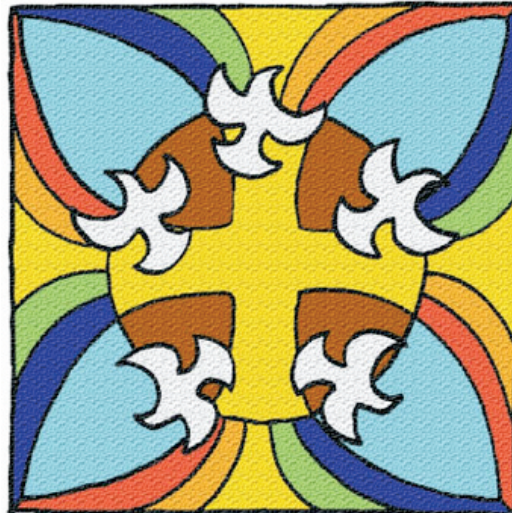
par la domination d'une culture sur

l'autre, ni par la rupture ou l'exclusion. Ils le seront par la foi en Celui qui rassemble tous

les chrétiens, et qui appelle tous les autres; et par la constatation que l'Esprit-Saint est donné aussi de manière égale et plénière à tous les chrétiens, quelle que soit leur origine ou leur culture.

Que doit faire la première Mission, et toute Mission après elle? Poursuivre la Mission de Jésus. Quelle est cette mission de Jésus ?

Cette Mission a deux aspects, imbriqués, dont l'un éclaire l'autre: (1) Annoncer que le Royaume de Dieu est proche, et (2) guérir, ou chasser les esprits mauvais. Montrer la merveille d'un monde dominé par la charité, et combattre ce qui s'y oppose. Parmi les esprits mauvais, n'y aurait-il pas celui qui inspire la méfiance interculturelle? La comparaison qui ne cherche pas à s'édifier, mais qui pose la question de savoir qui est le plus grand.



Un monde à guérir et à sauver. À guérir et à sauver de quoi ?

Le monde aspire à vivre en paix et dans la dignité. Mais alors que pratiquement tout le monde désire sincèrement vivre en paix, on érige et on privilégie presque partout les structures qui créent ou soutiennent des rivalités et des dangers de guerre, qui donnent lieu aux intégrismes et aux fanatismes régionalistes, tribalistes, culturels ou même religieux. Les régionalismes, les nationalismes, qui devraient être des bases de collaboration ordonnée avec d'autres régions ou nations, sont pris comme prétextes à l'exclusion mutuelle et à la guerre. Guerre en grand, entre les nations, ou les tribus de certains États, guerre en petit dans le monde du travail; dans certains coins de l'Église, dans certaines Congrégations et Communautés.

Les religions elles-mêmes, qui devraient conduire les gens à regarder le monde avec un regard aussi vaste et ouvert que celui de Dieu, résultent souvent, pour certaines couches des adeptes au moins, en exclusions, en agressions, en volonté d'élimination de l'autre, en intégrismes et en fanatismes. (Et cela n'arrive-t-il pas entre diocèses et congrégations, entre congrégations internationales et congrégations diocésaines?)

Les différences culturelles et linguistiques, qui devraient figurer au premier rang des richesses humaines de notre monde, sont prises elles aussi comme prétextes à la fermeture de certains groupes sur eux-mêmes, et aux rivalités et aux conflits parfois sanglants qui en découlent.

La *condition sexuée* de l'homme permet l'épanouissement de toute la richesse du cœur et de l'intelligence humaines, dans la rencontre et la collaboration des hommes et des femmes. Elle permet à l'homme et à la femme de vivre dans la joie l'appel à la vie de leurs enfants. Elle invite hommes et femmes aux plus grandes délicatesses du cœur, à toutes les richesses de la tendresse humaine. Pourtant, cette merveille est sans cesse détournée de son sens, utilisée pour le gain et la domination d'autrui, et terrain des plus cruelles souffrances.

En bref, notre monde a tout pour être heureux. Mais un aveuglement, un mésusage des ressources de l'intelligence et du cœur, un

mauvais vouloir, une falsification du sens naturel des réalités humaines et en particulier des relations interculturelles répandent largement le malheur.

Le psychologue Erich Fromm (*Le Cœur de l'Homme*) décrit et tente d'expliquer cette situation aberrante en supposant qu'il y a en chaque personne un instinct de vie et un instinct de mort. C'est ce qu'il croit constater. Mais cela n'explique rien, et surtout, cela ne résout rien.

La mission du Dieu sauveur

Dieu est Sauveur parce qu'il apporte à notre monde la bonne, l'unique interprétation valable et sûre des situations humaines, parce qu'il montre partout le chemin par lequel les choses retrouvent leur sens, les sociétés leur équilibre, et les personnes, leur joie.

La Mission veut apporter le salut de Dieu à ce monde qui va à sa perte, et tout en priorité aux populations qui en ont le plus urgent besoin.

Elle n'apporte pas en priorité des solutions matérielles, financières, techniques, encore que cela ne soit pas entièrement exclu. Elle apporte l'idéal du Royaume: ce monde dans lequel est restaurée la Loi naturelle, don originel du Créateur à sa créature, et dans lequel est ajoutée, comme immense enrichissement de la Loi naturelle, la Chanté. La charité conduit les gens, non seulement à se respecter, et à respecter tout ce que le Créateur a fait, mais à se servir les uns les autres, à faire de leurs vies un service mutuel, jusqu'au don mutuel de leur vie.

Notons qu'une Église missionnaire est tout autre chose qu'une Église établie. Une Église établie est une Église assez sûre de ses formes culturelles, de ses formes d'apostolat, de communication, de ses actions habituelles. Elle vise à conserver un acquis Elle envisage l'avenir comme le maintien d'une tradition.

Une Église missionnaire est attentive à ces situations auxquelles le Christ est attentif en son temps: tout ce que la Loi naturelle et surtout la Charité peuvent guérir. Elle participe à la mission du Christ, qui vient pour guérir les malades (Mt 9,12). Mais l'approche de ces maladies du monde, des régions du monde, des groupes de personnes, et des personnes particulières, passe par

l'Inculturation. Si les missionnaires ont réussi à transmettre la foi dans des cultures dont ils n'avaient pas toujours les clés de lecture et d'interprétation, et dont ils ne connaissent souvent pas le langage, c'est parce que la foi conduit à une rencontre personnelle avec le Christ vivant, et que cette rencontre est possible dans toutes les cultures, quelles que soient les expressions culturelles dans lesquelles la foi a été transmise.

Il faut aimer les cultures pour discerner en elles ce qu'elles possèdent de vraies ouvertures à l'Évangile du Christ Jésus, mais il s'agit d'aimer plus encore le Christ et le peuple saint auquel nous sommes unis par la foi reçue au baptême Card. Paul Poupard, Conclusions de l'Assemblée plénière du Conseil pontifical pour la culture, avril 2002.

Toujours et partout la mission implique l'inculturation

Le modèle de l'inculturation, c'est l'incarnation

Le modèle de l'inculturation, c'est l'incarnation. C'est ce que nous rappelait le Synode africain, en 1994. Mgr SASTRE, évêque de Lokossa au Bénin, parlait de la manière suivante aux séminaristes de Ouidah: L'inculturation, c'est le mystère de l'Incarnation qui, à travers l'Église, se perpétue dans le temps et l'espace.

Il y a un double aspect dans l'inculturation:

a- La rencontre entre l'homme et la Bonne Nouvelle, dans ce que l'homme a de plus profond: sa culture ;

b- la culture devenant à son tour une expression de la Bonne Nouvelle du Christ.

Jésus est né dans un pays, à une certaine époque, dans une certaine culture, dans un certain milieu social. Ce qu'il avait à dire et à montrer au monde, il l'a fait dans le cadre de ce pays, de cette époque, de ce milieu, de cette culture. C'est son Inculturation.

Une double inculturation

Ce que nous devons apporter au monde, comme mandataires de l'Église, au nom de Jésus, se fait aussi dans un contexte historique, culturel, social, déterminé, localisé et daté. Mais en un sens, notre inculturation est plus

compliquée que celle du pays où nous sommes envoyés.

Un exemple très simple peut faire voir cette difficulté: le vœu de pauvreté des consacrés. Il n'est pas tout à fait facile de vivre chez soi le détachement évangélique, l'entière liberté devant les biens, l'indépendance par rapport à l'avoir, le partage, l'abandon à la Providence. C'est déjà difficile quand on est chez soi. Mais quand nous arrivons dans un pays dont les conditions économiques sont tout à fait différentes, plus riches ou plus pauvres, nous rencontrons une nouvelle difficulté. Un même et unique évangile doit être reçu par nous sans être dénaturé, comme une Bonne Nouvelle. Il doit aussi être apporté, non dénaturé, comme une Bonne Nouvelle, là où nous sommes envoyés.

Qui doit vivre une inculturation ? Tous ceux qui veulent recevoir l'Évangile dans leur propre culture, et tous ceux qui veulent apporter l'Évangile soit aux hommes et aux femmes de leur propre culture, soit à ceux d'une autre.

Inculturation n'est ni modernisation, ni adaptation

L'Inculturation a parfois été entendue comme modernisation, ou comme adaptation à une région donnée. Le Concile Vatican II voulait mettre l'Église à jour. Cette mise à jour a parfois été mal comprise. Elle n'est pas pure modernisation, pas plus qu'elle n'est adaptation aux idées et aux pratiques locales. Il ne s'agit pas de ne retenir de l'Évangile que ce qui est facilement compris dans le monde moderne, là où on se trouve. Il s'agit de voir comment présenter au monde moderne un authentique Évangile, non édulcoré, dans des formes accessibles aux gens d'ici et maintenant.

Pour cela, il sera essentiel de rencontrer les préoccupations des gens d'ici et maintenant, de connaître leur vie, leurs préoccupations, leurs angles de vision. L'annonce de l'Évangile n'est pas intemporelle. C'est à des gens en guerre, ou à des gens ruinés, ou à des gens en rapide progrès économique, ou à des gens avides d'instruction, ou à des gens qui découvrent les techniques modernes, qu'il s'agit de proposer l'Évangile comme la grande lumière, capable d'illuminer toute personne,

toute situation, toute nouvelle possibilité technique, toute situation nationale ou sociale.

Et nous ne pouvons oublier que chaque culture a ses domaines-clés: la fécondité, l'hégémonie politique, le recours aux traditions, la vénération de grands hommes, réels ou mythiques (les ancêtres), les succès économiques, les prouesses techniques, etc.

Le Message du Synode africain disait :

Le champ de l'Inculturation est vaste, et le Synode qui a si fortement insisté sur sa dimension spirituelle, à travers la place accordée au témoignage, demande de ne perdre de vue aucune de ses dimensions: théologique, liturgique; catéchétique, pastorale, (mais aussi) juridique,

politique, anthropologique, communicationnelle. C'est toute la vie chrétienne qui doit être inculturée (18).

En lisant ce qu'on écrit sur l'Inculturation, on a souvent l'impression qu'on a longtemps vu son importance qu'en ce qui concernée la théologie, la liturgie et les rites, la catéchèse, et secondairement des phénomènes tels que les langues et les traductions de la Bible, la décoration des églises, le costume ecclésiastique ou religieux.

Tout cela n'est certes pas à négliger, mais ce qui est essentiel, c'est de christianiser la famille et l'amour, la formation des jeunes, le travail, la politique, la sociologie pratique et l'anthropologie pratique, et en tout cela, les valeurs.

On pouvait lire en Mars 1993 une bonne réflexion dans *New People Feature Service*, (revue publiée au Kenya): Nous sommes convaincus que la véritable inculturation viendra des petites communautés chrétiennes et des efforts héroïques que font beaucoup de catholiques pour vivre leur foi tant sur les lieux de travail ou de loisir que dans leurs chapelles. Les bibliothèques aseptisées des Instituts théologiques ne sont qu'un instrument de réflexion sur la richesse de la vie chrétienne croissant en Afrique. La première inculturation c'est la sainteté et le martyre qui transparaît à travers la vie des catholiques: les deux existent en Afrique. Et le Père Mveng (Cameroun) ajoutait, à la même époque :

La permanence du Christianisme dépendra du fait qu'il sera devenu ou non vraiment

africain : si les Africains ont vraiment intégré les idées chrétiennes dans leur pensée.

Nous retenons cette manière de dire : Il y a inculturation, non si les Africains; ont célébré la liturgie avec des ornements et costumes africains et dans des langues africaines. C'est très bon, mais secondaire. Il y a inculturation si les Africains ont vraiment intégré les idées chrétiennes dans leur pensée.

Pour que ceci advienne, rien ne, sera plus important que le dialogue, et c'est ce sur quoi nous voulons proposer à présent quelques réflexions.

Essentiel à la mission et à l'inculturation qu'elle suppose : le dialogue

Dialogue de qui avec qui ?

Dialogue entre celui qui veut apporter l'Évangile et celui à qui il veut l'apporter. Ce qui implique peut-être un rapprochement de deux types de préoccupations, de deux ou plusieurs cultures, de deux ou plusieurs séries de valeurs et de critères.

La Proposition 36 du Synode africain disait : il est souhaitable que tous les chrétiens, en Afrique, sachent que l'Évangélisation constitue le dialogue de Dieu avec l'humanité en la personne de Jésus-Christ, si bien que dialoguer est le mode d'être du chrétien à l'intérieur de sa communauté comme avec les autres croyants et hommes de bonne volonté.

Un pas capital du dialogue de Dieu avec l'humanité, c'est l'Incarnation. Dans l'Incarnation, Dieu se met au point de vue de l'homme avec un tel amour, qu'il se met pleinement à son niveau. Infiniment plus grand, plus puissant, plus intelligent, plus libre, il assume pleinement la condition humaine avec toutes ses limites, sa vulnérabilité, ses entraves.

Entrer en dialogue, c'est donc d'abord se mettre autant qu'on le peut, au point de vue de l'autre, dans un mouvement d'amour qui laisse de côté toute supériorité objective, toute prétention à la domination.

C'est donc d'abord, non chercher à se faire entendre et à convaincre, à imposer sa volonté, ou ses convictions et ses idées, mais à écouter l'autre avec sympathie, sûr que de toute personne, groupe de personnes, institution, on a quelque chose à apprendre et à recevoir.

Donner priorité à l'écoute attentive et respectueuse, ce n'est pas donner raison à tout le monde, ni accepter n'importe quelle théorie ou affirmation, mais c'est faire l'effort de chercher à comprendre. Et si le comportement ou les paroles d'une personne ou d'un groupe nous choquent, écouter l'autre quand même, avec aussi peu de prévention qu'on le pourra.

Jésus à qui on présente la femme adultère, ne l'approuve pas. Mais il ne la rejette pas non plus. Et il cherche à éclairer cette situation pour tout le monde, et à replacer cette situation dans son cadre réel. Si on doit éliminer physiquement tous ceux qui ont été coupables comme elle, il ne restera plus grand monde. Ce n'est pas une solution. Certainement pas celle que Dieu veut.

Ce que Dieu veut, c'est que tout le monde aborde tout le monde avec humilité, avec l'intention de faire grandir tout le monde. C'est ce que Jésus fait dans son Incarnation. Sur cette base, un dialogue peut commencer, qui sera profitable à tout le monde. Il faut, en tout cas, toujours,

commencer par écouter et par essayer de comprendre. Et si nous sommes devant le mal, l'erreur ou le mensonge, nous efforcer de saisir tous les aspects de la situation, pour ne dire finalement que ce qui s'y applique vraiment, en apportant le point de vue de l'Évangile. Ici encore s'applique ce que Nicodème rappelait à ses collègues pharisiens : Notre loi juge-t-elle un homme sans d'abord l'entendre et savoir ce qu'il a fait? (Jn 7, 51). Pour dire quelque chose de sensé, d'utile et de constructif, il faut d'abord écouter. La formule des Pères synodaux est très riche dans sa simplicité : Dans la société humaine, le dialogue est le mode d'être du chrétien. Écoute humble, information aussi complète que possible, prise de recul par rapport aux faits particuliers, effort pour comprendre l'autre, recherche du point de vue évangélique, désir d'apporter un progrès et un mieux pour tout le monde en s'oubliant soi-même;

Les Exercices Spirituels de St Ignace supposent un dialogue continu entre celui

qui les fait et celui qui les propose. Il y faut, de part et d'autre, un effort de compréhension humaine et d'intelligence dans la Foi, pour que l'échange ne tourne pas à la discussion spéculative, et que l'âme du retraitant reste docile et réceptive. Pour cela St Ignace donne la recommandation suivante :

Pour que le directeur et le retraitant trouvent davantage aide et profit, il faut présupposer que tout bon chrétien doit être plus prompt à sauver la proposition du prochain qu'à la condamner. Si l'on ne peut la sauver, qu'on lui demande comment il la comprend ; et s'il la comprend mal, qu'on le corrige avec amour ; et si cela ne suffit pas, qu'on cherche tous les moyens adaptés pour qu'en la comprenant bien on la sauve. (Ex, 22)

La prière attribuée à Saint François d'Assise, elle aussi, dit cette disposition fondamentale du dialogue:

Que je ne cherche pas tant à être consolé, qu'à consoler, à être compris qu'à comprendre, à être aimé, qu'à aimer.

Voilà, je crois, ce que le

Synode veut dire en nous disant par Jean-Paul II, qui répète ici les

Pères synodaux: *L'attitude de dialogue est le mode d'être du chrétien, à l'intérieur de sa communauté comme avec les autres croyants et les hommes et les femmes de bonne volonté (E.A. 65).*

Une forme de dialogue qui peut être exemplaire dans notre réflexion, sur la communauté interculturelle, c'est le dialogue œcuménique. Un certain dialogue œcuménique est déjà amorcé dans notre Congo, et nous pouvons nous en réjouir.

Dans notre Congo, nous pouvons nous réjouir qu'en bien des endroits, les traductions bibliques ont été faites dans une belle collaboration entre membres de diverses confessions. Nous pouvons nous réjouir de voir des cultes œcuméniques répondre à certains événements qui touchent profondément tout le monde. Nous pouvons nous réjouir de voir une attitude commune des différentes confessions dans l'appréciation des situations politiques et sociales. Cette unité a tellement de chances d'être efficace, que les



• Jésus au puits avec la samaritaine

autorités anciennes, qui la craignaient, tenaient à la fin à recevoir séparément les représentants des différentes confessions religieuses pour traiter des questions qui intéressaient toute la nation. Cette expérience est une raison particulière pour resserrer l'action commune.

Le Pape affirme, dans l'Exhortation apostolique qui clôt le Synode : *Tous ensemble, les chrétiens sont responsables du témoignage à rendre à l'évangile dans le continent Les progrès de l'œcuménisme ont aussi pour fin de nous permettre de rendre plus efficace ce témoignage (E.A.65).*

Certains craignent parfois que le dialogue œcuménique ne rende un peu floues les raisons que nous avons de nous attacher à l'Église catholique plutôt qu'à une autre. Rappelons un fait: À Lubumbashi (RDC), les principales Églises ont arrêté ensemble, la position qui suit :

Que chaque chrétien vive le mieux possible sa foi, telle qu'il l'a reçue et qu'il la comprend, sous les yeux de ses frères. C'est en étant un bon catholique, que le catholique apportera.

Que chaque chrétien vive le mieux possible sa foi, telle qu'il l'a reçue et qu'il la comprend, sous les yeux de ses frères. C'est en étant un bon catholique, que le catholique apportera à son frère méthodiste ou luthérien le meilleur témoignage du Christ. Et c'est en étant un bon méthodiste que le méthodiste apportera à son frère catholique le meilleur témoignage qu'il peut rendre au Christ. Et de même avec les Kimbanguistes et les Pentecôtistes. Et chacun cherchera à admirer ce que réalise la foi chez son frère ou sa sœur d'autres confessions.

Et personne ne cherchera à débaucher son frère ou sa sœur d'une autre confession. Il y aura alors enrichissement mutuel, et croissance dans la Foi pour tous. Le dialogue ne créera pas la confusion, mais l'édification mutuelle.

Ainsi les chrétiens des différentes Églises pouvaient prier ensemble, sans se gêner les uns devant les autres quant à leur manière de prier. Et elles pouvaient, mais elles l'ont fait trop peu, collaborer dans des actions communes. Chaque groupe culturel peut en prendre de la graine, pour la bonne marche des communautés interculturelles.

Signalons encore, à ce sujet, la recommandation de Jean-Paul II dans Vita Consacrata (101) au sujet de l'aide que peuvent apporter les communautés religieuses au rapprochement des Églises: « Je désire encourager les Instituts qui, en vertu de leur caractère primitif ou d'appels ultérieurs, se consacrent à la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens et engagent pour cela des programmes d'étude et d'action concrète. En réalité, aucun Institut de vie consacrée ne doit se sentir dispensé de travailler pour cette cause. En outre, je pense aux Églises orientales catholiques, en souhaitant que, notamment par le monachisme masculin et féminin, dont le développement est une grâce qui doit être constamment implorée, elles puissent contribuer à l'unité avec les Églises orthodoxes, dans le dialogue de la charité et par le partage de la spiritualité commune, patrimoine de l'Église indivise du premier millénaire. » Il semble que ce texte ait été rédigé après l'audition du témoignage d'une Supérieure générale libanaise, qui, entre autres choses, accueille des religieuses orthodoxes dans sa Congrégation. On peut penser aussi aux Bénédictins et Bénédictines d'Angleterre, dont les uns sont catholiques, et les autres anglicans, et qui ont toujours gardé, à travers les aléas de l'Histoire, d'étroites relations entre eux.

Conclusion

Il est temps de conclure. Nous le ferons en nous résumant :

1. Notre Mission, c'est la Mission de l'Église, c'est la Mission même de Jésus, qu'il a confiée à l'Église. Le contenu de la Mission est répété dans les Évangiles: Annoncer que le Royaume de Dieu est proche et chasser les esprits mauvais. Notre monde a besoin d'être délivré des fléaux que son indulgence aux esprits mauvais entraîne : la faim, la guerre, les divisions, les contrefaçons de services publics, les contresens politiques, les aberrations sociales, les abus que chaque sexe fait de l'autre... La Mission veut apporter à ce monde malade le salut de Dieu, moins par des techniques que par un esprit : l'esprit de Jésus.

2. L'inculturation a pour modèle l'Incarnation. Jésus est homme d'un pays à une certaine époque. C'est dans ce contexte qu'il

livre un message pour toujours, des exemples toujours éclairants et entraînants. Nous avons à vivre l'Inculturation à un double niveau: celui de notre culture d'origine, et celui de la culture du Peuple ou de la région où nous sommes envoyés. L'Inculturation n'est pas d'abord modernisation ou adaptation régionale. Elle est intégration des idées chrétiennes dans la pensée et les pratiques d'aujourd'hui et d'ici.

3. Dialoguer est le mode d'être du chrétien (Paul VI et Jean-Paul II). Une condition - essentielle de la Mission et de l'Inculturation est le Dialogue. Dialogue entre le porteur de l'Évangile et celui à qui il veut l'apporter. L'Incarnation est un moment capital du dialogue de Dieu avec ses créatures. La Mission s'inscrit dans ce mouvement.

4. Dialoguer c'est d'abord écouter, même celui qu'on ne comprend pas ou dont on n'admet pas la conduite, même celui qui s'oppose à nous, dans l'esprit de la prière de François d'Assise : ... que je ne cherche pas tant à être compris qu'à comprendre.... Les communautés interculturelles (communautés religieuses, mais aussi communautés de travail, d'habitat, de recherche scientifique ou d'action sociale, d'activités diverses...) peuvent connaître — comme toutes les autres — leurs difficultés. Pour toutes les personnes droites, et animées de bonne volonté, elles constituent des lieux de grand enrichissement mutuel, et d'inculturation particulièrement féconde de l'Évangile, et d'unité de notre monde dans sa diversité.

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www.sedosmission.org

Ser misionero inter gentes

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1. De *Ad Gentes* a *Inter Gentes*

El cambio que implica de *Ad Gentes* a *Inter Gentes* habla de un redescubrimiento de la práctica de la *Missio Dei* que siempre ha sido *Inter Gentes*. El actual escenario de globalización exige tomar conciencia de un cambio que recupere la credibilidad perdida de la Iglesia. En este contexto globalizador se produce un desplazamiento radical del modelo jerárquico a las redes sociales. Los medios de comunicación, el mercado, la informática y la movilidad contribuyen a generar una democracia participativa donde todos toman parte activa en los acontecimientos mundiales. La moderna comunicación digital ha deconstruido unas estructuras jerárquicas y ha construido una comunidad alternativa con medios sociales como Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Internet, SMS, Blog Mobile etc¹. El impacto que está ocasionando es inmenso. La "Primavera Árabe" (movimiento insurgente popular por la democracia en el mundo Árabe) es un episodio clásico de cómo los medios pueden convertirse en una verdadera agencia para generar cambios radicales y revolucionarios a través de las redes sociales². La nueva generación es ciudadana de Internet, la "mediocracia" invade el mundo cibernético y los medios sociales luchan por cambiar unas democracias representativas por otras más sustantivas y participativas.

Una nueva cultura del diálogo, la asociación y la armonía es realmente la onda de este contexto globalizado y desterritorializado con una gran variedad de tradiciones religiosas,

movimientos seculares e ideologías de todo tipo que conducen a nuevas configuraciones, síntesis e identidades. En un escenario como éste, la *Missio Dei* tiene que hacerse vida en la realidad concreta de los pueblos. La relevancia de *Inter- Gentes* tiene que brillar precisamente en un escenario tan globalizado e intercultural como el nuestro. La ortodoxia y la ortopraxis necesitan un nuevo referente en la misión *Inter-Gentes*, para que la Iglesia y su misión convengan y sean creíbles. En este mundo nuestro tiene que ser fiable el liderazgo. La crisis de la misión de la Iglesia es de credibilidad. El único camino para recuperar el terreno perdido es volver al pueblo. Nuestra opción fundamental debe ser por el pueblo, y ganárnoslo, como lo hizo Jesús. La Iglesia necesita un nuevo estilo y arte para vivir *Inter gentes*. A ella se le exige hoy en día una imaginación distinta para ser sensible con las personas, y una nueva creatividad para convivir con el actual contexto pluralista. La Iglesia tiene que ser más dialogante, abierta y amplia en su identidad y existencia misioneras.

2. *Missio Dei Inter Gentes*

En la tradición bíblica, desde sus mismos comienzos, La Misión de Dios se ha llevado a cabo inter-gentes. La identidad del Dios de Israel radica en un igualitarismo basado en la alianza. No es un Dios distante, sino un Dios que actúa en la historia. Por su propia iniciativa, se somete a la condición humana y se hace vulnerable incluso con su "no-pueblo", Israel. Esta vulnerabilidad se prolonga en la lógica de la Encarnación. El Dios del Cielo se hace Dios-Madre en el Verbo Encarnado, al poner su tienda entre nosotros. Él es el Emmanuel. Más que el Dios *para* nosotros es el Dios *con* nosotros. Más que el Dios *Ad Gentes* es el Dios *Inter-Gentes*. El misterio de la Encarnación en el que lo secular y lo sagrado constituyen un todo reconciliado (Col 1, 20), es la fuente de la

tarea misionera *inter-gentes*. Dos aspectos aparecen aquí muy claros: 1) El designio divino de ser parte de la vulnerabilidad humana; 2) Lo sagrado y lo secular forman una unidad.

La Misionología de *Inter-Gentes* debe partir de un Dios que, en Jesús de Nazaret, asumió la vulnerabilidad humana y la secularidad de lo

sagrado. El corazón de la misión *inter-gentes* es que Dios fue Dios en la Cruz, símbolo supremo de la vulnerabilidad humana. El Dios bíblico que actúa en la historia asume los vaivenes de la historia, actuando como Salvador en todos sus procesos y no al margen de ellos. Con su anonadamiento reconcilia consigo al mundo. La solidaridad de Jesús con la humanidad "vacándose de sí mismo y tomando la condición de esclavo (Fil 2, 7), y toda "la creación con sus gemidos y dolores de parto" (Rom 8, 22), nos hablan de un Dios Cristiano, cuya lógica divina es ser tan vulnerable que hace de su misma vulnerabilidad una mediación salvadora. En la tradición Dalit, Dios es Dios por la muerte (kolayil uditha deivangle). Dios nace en el misterio de la



· La Anunciación (Beato Angelico, siglo XV)

muerte, la última vulnerabilidad de la existencia humana. Y esto tiene que ver con la esencia de la tarea misionera. Hay un núcleo penumático en la *missio inter gentes*. Según Pablo, Jesús Resucitado es el primer fruto de la resurrección. Él es el *ésjatos* en el que el *ésjaton* alcanza su plenitud. Es el verdadero Logos y el Ethos de la existencia por medio de su Espíritu. Cristo Resucitado prolonga su misión *inter gentes* por su mismo Espíritu y la perpetuará hasta el fin de los tiempos. En palabras de Pablo, Jesús Resucitado es la Gloria de Dios escondida en el seno de la realidad (Col 1, 27). La realidad toda está ahora impregnada de la vida y de la luz del Resucitado. De esta manera, en el misterio de la Resurrección adquiere la *Missio Dei inter gentes* un nuevo y dinámico perfil. La cristiana economía salvífica está toda ella en

función de *inter-gentes*. El Dios cristiano no es una mónada monolítica lejana. Es un Dios que nace en nosotros, que muere en nosotros y resucita en nosotros como *ésjatos*, hasta que despunte el *ésjaton*.

La Encarnación es, en verdad, el modo y modelo de la *Missio Dei inter gentes*.

La Encarnación es la pedagogía vital del ser cristiano *inter-gentes*, no como algo que aconteció de una vez por todas, sino como un proceso que se inicia en la creación, se prolonga en la Encarnación del Hijo de Dios y se consuma en el *Ésjaton* por la fuerza del Espíritu del Resucitado.

3. Misión cristológica Inter Gentes

La Encarnación es el compromiso incondicional de Dios con el devenir el mundo, asumiendo sus "angustias y esperanzas" (GS 1). La estrategia de la Encarnación da auténtico sentido a la religión

en el ámbito secular. A diferencia de los Esenios, contemporáneos de Jesús, para él la religión no fue más que una "experiencia de amor", especialmente con los marginados de aquella sociedad. Para él fue más importante practicar la religión en la vida diaria, conviviendo con la gente de

a pie que creer en dogmas o practicar ritos. Hizo su camino cumpliendo la voluntad del Padre, manifestada en los retos de la misma existencia. Para dar a entender la verdadera religión, fue iniciativa creadora suya dar más importancia a las obras que a las palabras. Esta es la lógica de la Encarnación. En una palabra, Jesús secularizó la salvación descubrió lo sagrado en lo profano. Es decir, la práctica cristiana no es una opción por el mundo del pecado y de la corrupción, sino por un proyecto de vida (*sadhana*) en el corazón del mundo, haciendo propias sus angustias y transformándolas en amor que diviniza.

La lógica de la Encarnación estuvo ya operante en los mismos comienzos de la fe Israelita. Fue crítica de la noción pagana de deidad, susceptible de ser confinada a un "espacio sagrado" en las hornacinas del

templo. La fe israelita democratizó el sacerdocio, entendiéndolo como "pueblo sacerdotal". Y Dios hizo la alianza con el pueblo, no con la casta sacerdotal. Rechazó la colocación de una imagen suya en un espacio sagrado. La larga tradición profética en el antiguo Israel fue severamente crítica de la institución del templo, abogando por una religión encarnada en la sociedad civil, abundante en frutos de justicia y de misericordia, especialmente con el pueblo excluido. Los profetas desafiaron a la sociedad de su tiempo, inculcándole la necesidad de vivir su religiosidad en los asuntos temporales, concretamente en la forma de tratar a seres tan vulnerables como las viudas y a los huérfanos (Is 1,11-17; Mi 6, 6-8; Jer 7, 1-11; Am 2, 6-8).

El mismo Jesús se identifica una y otra vez con esta tradición profética cuando predica el Reino. Como laico israelita, rehusó identificarse con la casta religiosa de Saduceos y Fariseos. Jesús implantó la religión en el ámbito profano, como la casa, la mesa, la orilla del lago, la playa, la barca, el mar, el mercado, la calle, las viñas, los trigales, los olivares, etc. Para proclamar la Buena Noticia del Evangelio, no recurrió a categorías teológicas, sino a ejemplos y dichos de la cultura popular: la sal, el árbol, la semilla, la luz, el agua, la levadura, el rebaño, la tierra, el cielo, el grano de trigo, el campo.

Por sus parábolas desfilan personas de la sociedad civil: mujeres prostituidas, enfermos, ciegos, niños, mujeres, samaritanos, pastores, etc. Empleó un lenguaje teológico netamente vital: Dios como Padre, Dios Pastor, Padre del hijo pródigo, en lugar del abstracto lenguaje de los Fariseos y Saduceos. De esta manera, derribó la división entre lo sagrado y lo profano. Humanizó a Dios, haciéndole cercano y accesible en la vida ordinaria, para que podamos adorarlo en espíritu y en verdad. Así manifestó Jesús su fe públicamente, haciendo de la religión un espacio profano.

Por decirlo de otra manera, la credibilidad de la fe religiosa descansa prioritariamente en el ámbito profano, y en lo profano tenemos que buscar lo sagrado. Dando público significado a la praxis religiosa, Jesús nos dio una imaginación creativa y una práctica innovadora para ubicar la violencia de la sociedad de su tiempo en otro plano y nueva

perspectiva. La religiosidad de Jesús es un cambio radical del culto a una cultura que descubre las implicaciones sociales y políticas de la enseñanza religiosa. En toda la historia de la humanidad, encontramos dos grandes personalidades que dieron público significado a las enseñanzas religiosas y a la manera de comportarnos ante la violencia. Jesús transformó las fuerzas del mal en fuente de Vida Nueva por el misterio del amor. La lógica del amor de Jesús y su perdón encuentran una innovadora praxis política en el camino "*ahimsa*" de Gandhi. *Ahimsa* no fue un arma para derrotar al oponente, sino para transformarlo mediante una recíproca conversión. Gandhi se inspiró en la mística de la Cruz en su religioso-político *sadhana* de *ahimsa*. Es recomendable que las religiones y sus prácticas den público significado a sus enseñanzas básicas, como las que encontramos en los relatos evangélicos.

4. Diálogo como misión Inter Gentes

El diálogo con el mundo y con la variada tradición cultural y religiosa es un corolario de la misión *inter gentes*. El diálogo es la onda actual del testigo cristiano. El Papa Pablo VI enfatizó el estilo dialogal de la Iglesia con la creación del *Secretariado para las Religiones No Cristianas*³ en 1964. Desde el Concilio Vaticano II se ha fomentado positivamente el diálogo con las diferentes tradiciones religiosas, convirtiéndose en un elemento constitutivo en la teoría y en la práctica⁴. Pablo VI, en la *Declaración sobre las Relaciones de la Iglesia con las Religiones No-Cristianas*, (1965) dio una importancia decisiva a la práctica del diálogo en la fe cristiana. El Papa exhorta a todos los católicos a comprometerse en el "diálogo y la colaboración" "con prudencia y amor" para reconocer, preservar y promover los bienes espirituales y morales, así como los valores socio-culturales que en ellos existen" (NA 2).

Este diálogo con las religiones mundiales se sitúa en el marco más amplio del origen y destino del ser humano en la divina Economía, según la nueva visión del Concilio. La Constitución Pastoral sobre la Iglesia en el Mundo Actual se refiere a "todos los hombres y mujeres de buena voluntad, en cuyo corazón obra la gracia de modo invisible". "El Espíritu

Santo ofrece a todos la posibilidad de que, en la forma de sólo Dios conocida, se asocien a este misterio pascual" (GS 22). Al adoptar esta posición teológica, el Concilio se refiere al "plan de salvación" (LG 16), diciendo que "en todo tiempo y lugar son aceptos a Dios los que le honran y practican la justicia" (LG; He 10, 35), "los que se esfuerzan por hacer el bien" (LG 16 y "los que se guían por la conciencia del deber" (DH 1)⁵ están incluidos en el designio salvador de Dios. Por consiguiente, las otras religiones no son caminos independientes o paralelos de salvación; están positivamente incorporados en ese proyecto. El Concilio incluye a todos los que profesan otras religiones y buscan, "aunque sea a tientas, al Dios que da vida y aliento y todo a todos" (He 17, 25-28) y al Salvador que quiere la salvación de todos"

(1 Tim 2, 4)" (LG 16).

La Declaración de Diálogo y Proclamación⁶ por el Pontificio Consejo para el Diálogo inter-religioso en 1991 muestra el firme e irreversible compromiso de la Iglesia para un Diálogo con las Religiones del Mundo en su vida misionera. Su punto de partida es la positiva nueva conciencia y reconocimiento del pluralismo religioso en un mundo de movilidad y de comunicación. "Su telón de fondo fue el " Día Mundial de Oración por la Paz" en Asís, el 27 de octubre de 1986. Su premisa es la Misión Evangelizadora como la entiende la *Redemptoris Missio*, pero con un objetivo más amplio de desarrollo integral, justicia social, liberación humana (DP 44) y cultura (DP 45). Hay que admitir que el diálogo es visualizado en el ámbito de la proclamación del Evangelio como mandato de Cristo Resucitado (DP 58. Sin embargo no es visto como un tráfico de sentido único en la práctica del diálogo. Implica apertura, receptividad y respeto a las diferencias (DP 47). Los frutos del diálogo son: 1) el *Enriquecimiento Mutuo* por ambas partes (DP 9); RM 55); 2) el *Cuestionamiento Mutuo* (DP 32); 3) Una llamada a la "purificación" (DP 32); 4) a la *transformación* (DP 47); 5) a la



· Papa Francisco con el líder de los budistas de Corea

"conversión" (DP 41). Se produce así un cambio cualitativo de *Ad Gentes* a *Inter Gentes* (del pueblo a con el pueblo), entendiendo el diálogo como se expone en este documento. Más bien, la Iglesia se ve a sí misma como una comunidad peregrina entre peregrinos (DP 36).

Cabe mencionar aquí que la Iglesia es plenamente consciente de los "peligros" de un diálogo que frustra la base de la fe cristiana cuando la misión dialogante no está enraizada en los preámbulos de esta fe. La Iglesia nos recuerda que la versatilidad y vitalidad del diálogo es la fe en Jesús, "constante" de la misión dialogal. Siendo Él el diálogo radical entre lo Divino y lo Humano por la Encarnación, se convierte en mandato y referente de la misión dialogal. Él es la "orilla" desde la cual tendemos puentes de diálogo en el mundo de las religiones y de las búsquedas religiosas.

Tenemos que buscar la unicidad de Jesús en su universalidad que se realiza en la presencia dialogal del Resucitado por medio de su Espíritu que todo lo habita. La unicidad de Jesús no sabe de diálogos excluyentes, sino incluyentes y abiertos. Esta es la Nueva Vida, "primicia de su Resurrección". La fe en Jesús y la salvación que nos ofrece es, pues, la razón y motivo de toda evangelización dialogante⁷. La *Dominus Iesus* cita la *Lumen Gentium* para reafirmar la razón teológica de la inmensa esperanza y promesa latente en el diálogo misionero: "la única mediación del Redentor no excluye, sino que suscita en sus criaturas una múltiple cooperación que participa de la fuente única"⁸. La Iglesia que es continuación de la misión de Jesús busca su unicidad siendo dialogante, y esta identidad debe construirse por medio de una misión dialogal (*Dominus Iesus*, 16 y 17).

De esta manera, la Iglesia vive de acuerdo con su vocación de ser *católica*, que etimológicamente significa "omnipresente". La universalidad no es un concepto virtual, sino que es Unicidad hecha realidad en la omnipresencia por medio de una presencia

dialogal y experiencia de la "Plenitud de Vida" consumada en Jesús Resucitado, Señor de la historia y de la creación.

El diálogo ha calado profundamente en el alma y en la conciencia de la Iglesia. La Iglesia Católica va dando pasos dialogantes de manera asidua y constante. El de la Iglesia tiene que ser un diálogo auténtico para participar en la *Missio Dei* en el actual escenario de pluralismo religioso. No puede haber marcha atrás. El diálogo es la nueva experiencia y el nuevo desafío para la misión de la Iglesia, siempre sorprendida, porque el alma de la Misión es el Espíritu que sopla donde quiere y como quiere, de acuerdo con una lógica que supera todo razonamiento humano. Nuestro compromiso con la *Missio Dei* tiene que ir acompañado de una entrega incondicional al ritmo y al designio del Espíritu, que revela al Señor Resucitado en diálogo con las religiones.

Sin embargo, la idea de "Diálogo", que es una metodología occidental, tiene todavía que asumir religiosos matices. En un encuentro inter-religioso, el diálogo ha de ser una práctica religiosa y una celebración. Al menos en Asia, el diálogo es el mismo tiempo medio y fin, convirtiéndose en espacio de fecundo intercambio de fe religiosa que genere nuevas formas y síntesis como Sijismo o Sufismo. O con otras palabras, el diálogo debe abocarnos a la armonía de las religiones, porque solo él podrá hacer realidad un verdadero conocimiento. Tengo a veces la sensación de que el diálogo con personas de otras religiones puede ayudarnos a conocer y a descubrir al desconocido Cristo en la cristiandad. Y más que ningún otro camino, el diálogo es un medio para profundizar en el conocimiento de nuestro ser cristiano y en la práctica religiosa de nuestra propia conversión que llevará, a su vez, a la conversión de otras personas a Jesucristo. En realidad, la obra del Padre es revelar al Hijo. Y esto no pueden revelarlo la "carne ni la sangre".

En este sentido, el diálogo interreligioso que nos lleva como de la mano a una armonía religiosa es una práctica idónea y convincente de la *misión inter gentes*.

5. Missio Inter Gentes en la sociedad civil

El segundo espacio válido de la misión *inter gentes* es la sociedad civil, que ha adquirido especial protagonismo en las dos o tres décadas pasadas. Cada vez más, la gente ve la sociedad civil con buenas dosis de esperanza para tratar temas sociales, éticos, religiosos y económicos que con frecuencia no asume el Estado. Los modernos y omnipresentes medios de comunicación juegan un papel vital para incrementar la presencia de la sociedad civil en el mundo actual. Si bien es cierto que hay mucha ambigüedad en lo que al concepto de sociedad civil se refiere⁹, podemos decir que es un espacio "secular" y "público" inundado de debates y movimientos sociales. La tradicional división entre "secular" y "sagrado" no es disuasorio en estas conversaciones. Es la esfera del diálogo de culturas, religiones, ideologías y sistemas. El consenso en torno a temas tan candentes como la controversia sobre el *burka* de las mujeres, de la conversión de una religión a otra, de la homosexualidad o el celibato, se ventila en el ámbito de la participación y sabiduría ciudadanas. Su influencia es inmensa y versátil. Sobre todo, implica dar un "significado público" a todas las prácticas "privadas" en un medio mucho más amplio, defendiendo y respetando los derechos humanos y la justicia social, que frecuentemente se niegan en exclusivos espacios religiosos.

Cada vez más, la Misión entre las religiones ha de concebirse y practicarse en el "espacio secular" de la sociedad civil. Las religiones ocupan hoy ese espacio. Lo "sagrado" se experimenta más en las "seculares" luchas libertarias, y ya es más un "asunto público" que privado. Para su mayor credibilidad y atractivo, las religiones tienen que construir sus identidades en el "espacio secular" que proporciona la sociedad civil. De lo contrario, mermará la influencia de las religiones organizadas.

El concepto de "secular" surgió con la llegada del Protestantismo. Europa estaba desgarrada por guerras religiosas después de la Reforma. En este contexto político, lo "secular" se proyectó como una concepción no-partidista, como una tercera fuerza (*tertium quid*) para contener el conflicto, aunque más

tarde se interpretó lo "secular" como opuesto a lo "sagrado"¹⁰. Ahora se entiende el espacio secular como "esfera pública" en la sociedad civil. A veces, la sociedad civil se entiende como "espacio público". Es un espacio difuso donde los individuos privados se reúnen para discutir asuntos de interés público. Diferentes razones, como la separación entre el Estado y la Iglesia y valores aportados por la Ilustración: autonomía de la razón, el humanismo y la Revolución Industrial, con la consiguiente prosperidad económica, contribuyeron a la formación de la esfera pública y a los acuerdos pactados en ella. En su esencia, el carácter del ámbito público, tal como se desarrolló en Europa el siglo 18, fue secular y democrático.

En India, sin embargo, la esfera pública tiene otro significado. Coexisten lo "secular" y lo "religioso". Aunque el Estado Indio considere la religión como un asunto privado, la política oficial, que reconoce la igualdad de todas religiones, (*sarva-dharma-samabhavana*) ha abierto más y más espacio público a todas religiones en la sociedad civil. Como resultado, la esfera pública es un espacio de celebración. Es decir, lo "secular" es el lugar donde se celebra lo "sagrado" en auténtica armonía con las religiones. En este sentido, el secularismo de Asia/India es distinto del secularismo de Occidente en el que existe una notable división entre estado y religión, aunque también es verdad que Occidente se está contagiando del secularismo asiático. Por ejemplo, la caída del Comunismo en Europa se debió en gran medida a la participación de la Iglesia en el espacio secular.

El camino de la *missio inter gentes* es el ámbito secular en la sociedad civil. Es un espacio vibrante cuya fuerza es su creativo pluralismo que abarca varios movimientos, independientemente de apoyos religiosos o profanos, y promueven un diálogo fecundo para la transformación cultural y social. En este contexto, las religiones son consideradas cada vez más como patrimonio de la humanidad, y ya no tanto como propiedad exclusiva de un grupo confesional. Biblia, Gita y Corán son positivos agentes de cambio social y de progreso, sintiéndose desafiados a interactuar en la sociedad civil, probando así

su credibilidad y competencia formando parte de la solución.

De esta manera, la división entre lo sagrado y secular es algo muy vago y difuso en la sociedad civil. Siempre se discutió que la secularización, debida a la modernización, contribuyó al declive de la influencia de la religión en la sociedad posterior a la Ilustración. Pero hoy, por el contrario, ha crecido la influencia de la religión en la esfera pública, y se ha producido un repunte de lo religioso a escala mundial. Un sondeo promovido por el Centro para Sociedades Desarrolladas, en Nueva Delhi, da testimonio de la enorme influencia de la religión en la sociedad India. Según ese sondeo, 10 personas son *muy* religiosas, y cinco son religiosas. Es decir, que el 90% de las personas encuestadas se declararon religiosas -practicantes de ritos, visitantes de lugares de culto y de peregrinación-. Dentro de esas personas, el 30% dijeron haberse vuelto más religiosas en los últimos cinco años¹¹. Por otro lado, aunque la gente está perdiendo la confianza en las religiones organizadas, esto no significa que disminuya su interés por la religiosidad.

Según datos de una encuesta en Estados Unidos, la gran mayoría de la población prefiere ser "aconfesional"¹². Muchos buscan una espiritualidad sin religiones o una religión sin pertenencia¹³. La sociedad civil brinda un espacio secular para experimentar lo "sagrado" sin vinculación a búsqueda religiosa alguna. De esta manera, el "espacio público" se convierte en templo donde los "dioses" se reconcilian y reciben culto en las actividades del bien común.

La nueva evolución de la sociedad civil resuena en la misión cristiana. El Dios bíblico se revela siempre en los procesos históricos, en la matriz misma del "humano gemir de la creación" (Rom 8, 22) que es la verdadera "Pascua" de la Realidad. La revelación de Dios no está "fuera", sino vitalmente inserta en el "Corazón del Mundo", en sus "tristezas y angustias" (GS 1). La Misión, como "prolongación" que es de la historia de Jesús encarnada en la historia de su pueblo", implica el renacimiento de una nueva Iglesia en el texto y textura del espacio cívico, donde vibra la misma dinámica del Cordero Pascual. La credibilidad y relevancia de la Iglesia solo

pueden hacerse realidad por medio de una nueva práctica de inserción en los movimientos populares que luchan por la justicia social y los derechos humanos. El nuevo paradigma de la misión es que la Iglesia tiene que reconstruirse a la luz del significado público del Evangelio.

Jesús realizó prioritariamente su misión en el ámbito secular de la sociedad civil de su tiempo, y no precisamente en los pórticos del poder ni en los altares del templo. Jesús se reveló en y a través de la misma "vida de la gente", siguiendo la pedagogía del Dios del Antiguo Testamento. En su totalidad, la religión de la alianza del primer Testamento dio identidad al pueblo. Por la relación creada en virtud de esa alianza, Yavé confirió verdadera identidad, dignidad y personalidad a Israel, su "No-Pueblo". Reconstruyendo olvidados símbolos, le dio una nueva definición en el período post-exílico.

Jesús aparece en los Evangelios como paladín de los marginados *anawim* en la sociedad de Palestina y del Imperio Romano. Pablo y otros abogaron por un legítimo espacio para los gentiles en la Iglesia naciente. El Apocalipsis es prolífico en símbolos que hablan de la rehabilitación de los marginados. La primera comunidad cristiana nació en las periferias. La Palabra de Dios se revela a los desposeídos en la sociedad civil, y el palco de la salvación no es otro que las afueras del mundo. Jesús fue crucificado en los extramuros de Jerusalén, como un "dalit" (paria) (Jn 19,20). La lógica y dinámica de la revelación bíblica resplandece en la fuerza de la periferia y no en la falibilidad del centro. Es indudable que la vocación cristiana es una llamada imperiosa a vivir en los márgenes del espacio civil. Porque éste es el lugar que Dios visita y la oscuridad donde Él se esconde (Salmo 18, 12). Y es evidente que los centros de la misión cristiana están sobre todo en los países de Asia, África y América Latina¹⁴.

¿Cómo comprometernos en la misión? En este mundo nuestro de redes sociales, lo más adecuado y convincente es situarnos proféticamente del lado del pueblo y con el pueblo, más que pensar en "proyectos" y "estrategias". El nuevo método de acompañamiento es "aprender del pueblo y con el pueblo". Esta misión en el espacio

secular nos llevará a una "profecía radical y participativa" que no excluye a ningún segmento de la sociedad. Una práctica misionera así significa un común peregrinar con el pueblo. La Iglesia no es ajena al movimiento popular, sino participante en él, y necesitada, al mismo tiempo, de convertirse en una peregrina más entre los peregrinos. Lo más importante no es la mera comunicación de la fe, sino una apropiación y aproximación de la fe en diálogo con las religiones del mundo. No busquemos la unicidad cristiana en una ontología cristológica exclusiva, sino en una relación epistemológica de la omnipresencia de Cristo. En resumen, un compromiso radical y eficaz en la sociedad civil tiene que ser el nuevo talante y práctica de la misión cristiana inter gentes¹⁵.

Conclusión

La misión cristiana inter-gentes es a la par concepción y práctica desde sus mismos comienzos. El desplazamiento de "ad gentes" a "inter-gentes" necesita, en el contexto global, un cambio como el que se ha operado de un modelo jerárquico a unas redes sociales participativas. El presupuesto teológico es la Encarnación. Los dos espacios vitales donde la Iglesia puede ser misionera son el actual escenario multireligioso y el emergente del ámbito civil. La fe cristiana y su comprensión se ampliará y profundizará si la misión se realiza con este espíritu. La credibilidad y competencia de la Iglesia pueden recuperarse echando las redes en el gratificante océano de las búsquedas religiosas y en los movimientos seculares del marco civil. Así estará la misión inter-gentes en la orientación correcta, y la Iglesia podrá seguir avanzando en su camino.

(Tradujo del inglés Teodoro Nieto)

¹<http://www.pewresearch.org/data-trend-v-media-and-technology/social-networking-use/>

² "Primavera árabe" es una expresión acuñada por los medios de comunicación para indicar la ola revolucionaria de manifestaciones y protestas en el mundo árabe. Hasta el momento, han destronado a gobernantes de Túnez, Egipto, Libia, y Yemen; han hecho erupción y levantamientos civiles en Bahrein y en Siria. Protestas mayores han estallado en Argelia, Irak, Jordania, Kuwait Marruecos y Sudan. Protestas menores han tenido lugar en Mauritania, Omán, Arabia Saudí, Djibouti y Sahara occidental.

En las manifestaciones se han empleado algunas técnicas de resistencia civil: persistentes campañas de huelgas, manifestaciones, marchas y mítines, uso efectivo de los medios de comunicación para promover la organización, la comunicación y crear conciencia ante la represión gubernamental y la censura de Internet".

³ En 1988 se le cambió el nombre por el de *Pontificio consejo para el Dialogo interreligioso*.

⁴ Esta nueva conciencia en la Iglesia aparece con toda claridad en los documentos del Concilio Vaticano II: Constitución Dogmática sobre la Iglesia (*Lumen Gentium*), Constitución Pastoral sobre la Iglesia en el Mundo Actual (*Gaudium et Spes*), el Decreto sobre la Actividad Misionera de la Iglesia (*Ad Gentes*), la Declaración sobre las Relaciones de la Iglesia con las religiones No-Cristianas (*Nostra Aetate*).

⁵ Concilio Vaticano II, *Declaración sobre la Libertad Religiosa - Dignitatis Humanae* 1).

⁶ Ver Pontificio Consejo para el Diálogo Interreligioso, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (Roma: 1991).

⁷ Ver, Declaración "*Dominus Jesus*", de la Congregación para la Doctrina de la Fe sobre la Universalidad Salvífica de Jesucristo y de la Iglesia (Roma, 2000, n. 13).

⁸ Concilio Vaticano II, Constitución Dogmática sobre la Iglesia *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

⁹ Ver Neera Chandhoke, *The Conceits of Civil Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Félix Wilfred, *Margins, Site of Asian Theologians* (New Delhi: ISPck, 2008), 282.

¹¹ Ver, K. N. Panikkar, Religion in the public sphere (The Hindu, Sept. 8, 2009).

¹²<http://www.tepalm.com/news/2009/apr/10/religion-survey-shows-number-people-claiming-no-fa>

¹³ Ver David Kettle, "Believing without Belonging: Cultural Change Seen in Theological

Context", *International Review of Mission* vol. 94 no. 345 (October 2005). 507-523.

¹⁴ Ver, Felix, Margins, *Site of Asian Theologians*, ix-xxii.

¹⁵ Ver, Anthony Kalliath & Francis Gonsalves, eds. *Church's Engagement in Civil Society, A New Way of Being Christian in India Today* (Bangalore: ITA & ATC, 2009).

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Inculturation in moral theology

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1. A Necessary Task

The task of inculturation in moral theology is part of the inculturation of theology in general. It is a task which was laid on the 'young churches' by Vatican II. From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these churches are to borrow all those things which can contribute to "the revelation of the Saviour's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life" (AG 22). To this end, "theological investigation must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area". In this way, "a better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. As a result, avenues will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life" (AG 22). This mandate was repeated by Pope John Paul II in 1998 in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, with explicit reference to India. After referring to India's rich religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity, he declared: "In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought" (AG 72). Yet, compared to

other branches of theology, moral theology has been very tardy in undertaking inculturation. Furthermore, even twenty years after Vatican II, moral theology in India had remained tied to canonical and philosophical-ethical ways of thinking.¹ It was found "to be weighed down, among other things, by paternalism, legalism and individualism".² One reason for the general tardiness may be that inculturation in this field is very challenging and difficult; it can also prove quite controversial. All the same, it is incumbent on moral theologians to render this service to the local church. It is much easier to purvey/impose on the young churches a readymade moral theology elaborated in a Western context. Questions and problems arising from the 'Third Church' of the Southern hemisphere hardly figured in the media in the run up to and during the Synod on the family in Rome in October 2015. It indicates that the Church has not entirely shaken off its Eurocentric bias. Communion for the divorced and (civilly) remarried hogged the limelight, but not the problems involved in inter-faith marriages which have been on the rise in Asia. Moral theology in India must confront the questions and problems which our people face here.

What contributes to the challenge of inculturating moral theology is not only the great cultural diversity involved but also the large role which reason must play in this field.

2. The Challenge of Cultural Diversity

This challenge arises from the need to take seriously the multiplicity of cultures, when developing an ethics and orienting it in the light of Christian faith. The diverse ethical systems and behaviour patterns (laws, customs) are historically and culturally conditioned. Besides, every people organizes its values in a certain hierarchical order. Thus if the Greek polis gave priority to justice and

prudence, Confucius gives priority to benevolence and gentleness.³ Furthermore, as V. McNamara puts it: "Judgments are not made in a vacuum. They are made by people who see the world in a particular way because they are particular sorts of people".⁴ And as the anthropologist Kraft points out,⁵ ethical judgments are a form of interpretation, based on world-view assumptions. The 'household codes' of ethics which appear frequently in the Pauline epistles⁶ and early Christian literature⁷ derive from Hellenism or Hellenistic Judaism. E. Hillman points out⁸ that the ethical teaching of the early Church followed in general that of the teachers of other schools: Platonism, Stoicism, Roman Law, Aristotelianism. The post-Constantinian theory of the just war was borrowed from pagan antiquity, in contrast to the earlier positions of Justin, Origen, Cyprian, Athenagoras and others. For centuries Western Christians lived with slavery, crusades, burning of heretics and witches. Missionaries have imposed Western individualistic moral and legal codes on people of other cultures. How much of what was imposed proceeded from Christian faith and how much from Western culture? J.T. Noonan illustrates the point: "What was forbidden became lawful (the cases of usury and dissolution of marriage); what was permissible became unlawful (the case of slavery); and what was required became forbidden (the persecution of heretics)".⁹

The problem is expressed in the pointed questions which Fuchs asks, from a missionary context¹⁰:

"How far are Christian ethics and Canon Law conditioned by cultural principles of the Jews, Greeks, Romans and Germans?"

"Is every paragraph in Canon Law of divine right, or are some regulations taken over from the civil law of the western nations? Should they be imposed on the Christians of the whole world? Should there not be a plurality of law codes, as we have a Canon Law for the Latin ... and Eastern Churches?"

"What is the missionary to do in countries where the customs of pre-marital sex behaviour and of wooing differ from Christian ethics...?"

"Are the marriages valid in communities in which child marriage, or marriage arranged by the parents is the norm?"

Vatican II indeed enjoined upon the young Churches the task of introducing the faith "into the upright institutions and local customs through appropriate canonical legislation" (AG 19). No progress has been made in this direction.

Polygamy for example is a vexed issue, not only in Africa but also among some tribes in India.¹¹ Kraft explains¹² why discarding of wives is considered extremely irresponsible in these cultures. Polygamous unions are preceded by careful financial negotiations; they provide women with security and men with help at home. Bujo explains how polygamy safeguards stability and family bonds. He enters a plea for a transitional tolerance of polygamy, before monogamy can become the rule.¹³ In India there are also issues arising from caste structures and the joint family. In tackling these and other moral issues, we should beware of "speaking more about law than about grace, more about the Church than about Christ, more about the Pope than about God's word" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, N. 38). To do so would be to place the 'cart before the horse'. The foundation for this sense of proportion is the fact that the first and principal proclamation (*kerygma*) is that, "*Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you. And now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you...* Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation" (Nn. 164-65). From this faith proceeds the conviction that "God's saving love precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part." Already St. Thomas Aquinas had stressed, that "mercy is the greatest of the virtues" and that the precepts which Christ and the apostles gave to the people of God 'are very few'.¹⁴ Nida expresses the unease of many missionaries:

"More and more missionaries are coming to feel that in many instances disservice has been done to the cause of the gospel by spending so much effort setting up a new marriage code rather than proclaiming a new way of life."¹⁵

The issue surfaced starkly during the Synod on the Family, held in Rome in October 2015. In his Discourse at the close of the Synod, Pope Francis summarised his observations: "what seems normal for a bishop on one continent, is considered strange and almost scandalous for a bishop from another; what is considered a violation of a right in one society is an evident and inviolable rule in another. What for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion". He drew the conclusion: "Cultures are in fact quite diverse, and each general principle needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied".¹⁶ This is not tantamount to absolute relativism. For certain values are in fact acknowledged as fixed reference points.¹⁷ However, the way they are expressed may differ from one culture to another. Besides, every ethical system needs to be subjected to a critique by reason and divine revelation. As Pope Paul VI said: it is a question "of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, N. 19). As a consequence, missionaries have brought a large measure of liberation to countless peoples. It was a liberation from the fear of demons, "trial by ordeal of poison, haunting fears of black magic, cruel mutilations in the name of religion, pathetic squalor resulting from caste disabilities... legal and social disabilities of women..."¹⁸

3. The Large Role of Reason

Reason probably has a much larger role to play in moral theology than in other branches of theology, not only because of the need to study cultures and social mores but also because particular applications of the general moral law are the province of reason. St. Thomas Aquinas explains: "In our virtuous actions we are directed by natural reason, which is a kind of rule of human conduct ... And so in this realm there was no need for precepts to be provided over and above the moral precepts of the law (in the Ten

Commandments) which are dictated by reason".¹⁹ C. Curran summarizes the subsequent tradition: "Catholic scholars generally have understood natural law as based solely on human reason".²⁰ Hence moral theologians have to demonstrate the reasonableness of the moral precepts they uphold; it does not suffice to appeal to Church teaching. Reason will therefore have the lion's share in evaluating moral injunctions.

The Magisterium can only propose for faith what has been revealed.²¹ Now particular applications of the general principles of the moral law have not been revealed. Nevertheless divine Revelation teaches a certain view of humans and the world which can lead to practical conclusions regarding moral behaviour. For this reason, the Magisterium can provide authoritative guidance to Catholics in moral matters (GS 50; DH 14). We see this in the case of Paul, who when laying down certain precepts, is careful to distinguish that it is "I and not the Lord" (1Cor 7:12,25) who does so. This does not dispense the Magisterium from demonstrating the reasonableness of what is being taught.

It is important to realize this, so that while insisting on certain forms of moral behaviour we do not revert to Mosaic legalism. No one understood this better than St. Paul, who struggled lifelong against the Judaizers. He insisted that the purpose and goal of the Law are to culminate in a "more excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31), which directs us to be "perfect" (Mt 5:48) like our Father, i.e. 'wholehearted' and 'undivided' in our love. So, "The Sermon on the Mount does not lay down a static code of conduct (like the Law of Moses, or the code of Manu), but spells out a pattern of eschatological existence towards which we are to walk".²²

4. Local Moral Codes

I referred above to the Hellenistic 'household codes' incorporated into the New Testament. They "reflect the social mores of the time" and have been given "a Christian ethical perspective".²³ The motivation for practicing them is that "this pleases the Lord" and is the way by which Christians are to "serve the

Lord" (Col 3:20,24). India has highly developed ethical systems which need to be assimilated critically into a Christian moral theology. For example, one distinguishes *guḍas* and *purushârthas*; the *gruhashthâshrama*; there is also the 8-fold discipline (*a°tânga-yoga*) spelled out by Patanjali and the 8-fold path of virtue developed by Buddha. The ethical values and outlook of Gandhi in modern times could become a starting point for an inculturated Christian moral theology. Furger comments²⁴ that the concept of 'dharma' provides a holistic, cosmic (rather than a Western individualistic) motivation to ground morality. Nevertheless Dharma as the sum of religious, ethical, social and ritual duties must be purified from a too rigid obedience to authority, in the light of the theme of the Kingdom of God.

In conclusion, we may say that moral theology in India has the double task of confronting local questions and problems through inculturated systems and categories of thought. Studies and research, particularly at the doctoral level, should be directed to this end.

Footnotes

¹ F. Furger, "Inkulturation - eine Herausforderung an die Moraltheologie", *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 1984, 244.

² F. Podimattam, "Moral Theology in India Twenty Years after Vatican II." *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 1983, 440.

³ F. V. Antony, "Inculturation of the Christian Ethos", *Kristu Jyoti*, 2002, 159-200.

⁴ "Christian Moral Life", in: *The New Dictionary of Theology*, J.A. Komonchak (ed.), Theological Publications in India, 2003.

⁵ C.H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Orbis Books, 1998, 419.

⁶ Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:22-6:9; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Tim 2:8-15; 6:1-2; also: 1 Pet 2:13-3:7.

⁷ *Didache* 4.9-11; 1 Clement 21:6-8.

⁸ E. Hillman, "Pluriformity in Ethics: A Modern Missionary Problem", *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 1973, 264-275.

⁹ Quoted in C.E. Curran, *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teachings*, Paulist Press, 2003, 293.

¹⁰ S. Fuchs, *Anthropology for the Missions*, St. Paul Publications, 1979, 57.

¹¹ K. Rangmo, "Understanding Polygamy in Nyishi Society", in: T. Mibang (ed.), *Marriage and Culture*, Mittal Publications, 2006, 393-404. I have lived with the Nyishi tribe.

¹² C.H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, Orbis Books, 1979, 363.

¹³ B. Bujo, "Polygamy in Africa: A Pastoral Approach", *Theology Digest*, 1985, 230-34.

¹⁴ S.T. II-II, q. 30. a. 4; I-II, q. 107, a. 4: quoted in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nn. 37,43.

¹⁵ E.A. Nida, *Customs and Cultures*, William Carey Library, USA, 1976, 131.

¹⁶ *The Examiner*, 31 October 2015, 8-9.

¹⁷ See P. Kreeft, *A Refutation of Moral Relativism*, Ignatius Press, 1999.

¹⁸ E.A. Nida, *Customs and Cultures*, William Carey Library, USA, 1976, 253.

¹⁹ S.T. I-II, q. 108, a. 2

²⁰ "The Natural Still Applies", *The Tablet*, 12/7/2014, 10.

²¹ F. Mobbs, *Beyond Its Authority?* E.J. Dwyer, Australia, 1997.

²² G Soares-Prabhu, *The Dharma of Jesus*, Orbis Books, 2003, p 184.

²³ R. Brown & others (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Sec. 54:26; Theological Publications in India, 1991.

²⁴ Furger, "Inkulturation - eine Herausforderung an die Moraltheologie", 248.

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Fresh Perspectives on Inter Religious Dialogue in Relation to Christian Mission

Arguably most Christians have come to the conviction that dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions is integral to Christian mission in modern times. This is manifested through the surge in theological literature on Inter Religious Dialogue (IRD). Most of the time, however, it reflects either a spirit of Christian superiority, or an attitude of resignation, “since, nothing else is possible.” On the other hand, our age with its prevailing reality of globalization accompanied by instant communication and mass migration, has effected in many respects a vision of one world along with its characteristic religious pluralism. Equally, we experience also the dividing walls of violence of many shades, poverty and injustice. This is a great challenge for Christians in the context of their call to be witnesses of the good news of Jesus Christ, in concrete, “the arrival of the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:19). This article shows that the Christian response to this context is engagement in IRD as the Christian participation in God’s self-reaching out in love and this, in fact, has to become the primary expression of Christian mission today.

The Good News

Though the four evangelists differ in their perspectives, they converge in their presentation of the good news. Mark the first one to write the gospel, begins by stating how the good news began to be (1:1) and how it comes to be continued (16:7), with the description of the ministry in between. The ministry itself is the focal point and it is a narrative of how through his ministry Jesus ushers in the divine reign (1:14-15). Mathew concurs with Mark by repeating almost the same words (4:17). Luke, the evangelist whose purpose was to make a “systematic narration of the events” (1:3), dwells on how

God’s reign is brought on earth by Jesus (4:18-21). In the second part of the Lukan narrative, the Acts of the Apostles, Peter summarizes the entire mission of Jesus as “going about doing good” (10:38). The fourth evangelist though sparse in the use of the terminology of the divine reign, nevertheless, is faithful to the reality in so far as he states that the mission of Jesus was manifesting the deeds of light, “that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God (3:21, 16-21). Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming the arrival of the acceptable of year of the Lord, which was good news to the poor. Jesus, above all, had an intimate experience of God that others did not have, and this he tried to share with all, with his followers and with others, with all its implications, being compassionate to one another, leading to communion. The salvation that Jesus spoke about was a transformation of life on earth with right relationship with the neighbour and with God (see, f.i., Lk 10:25-37; 19:1-10; Mt 25:31-46, and others).

Later Developments

Though Jesus’ primary message was good news to the poor, he spelt it out through the prophetic words of Is 61.1-2, sight to the blind, ability to walk to the lame, setting at liberty the captives — in one word concern for the neighbour (Mt 25:31-40). The religious system transformed it into a discourse of heaven and hell, punishment and reward, an after-death reality.

The religious establishment interpreted the mission of Jesus as atonement, and the mission of the church as that of saving souls for whom Jesus had paid by his blood, a salvation that is confined only to the church. Hence Christian mission was primarily to bring as many as possible into the church. Salvation itself was interpreted as an otherworldly reality that can be gained only

within the church. Naturally the church's mission was seen mainly as an exercise of church planting and church expansion.

The Christian Call

Vatican II made a corrective move by insisting how all have a common origin and a common destiny (NA 1) and exhorted Catholics to enter prudently and lovingly into dialogue with followers of other religions and thus "acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture" (NA 2). In this, the Council was only upholding the biblical revelation that affirms the creation of all humans by God into God's own image and with whom God entered into an eternal covenant (Gen 1.26-28). Evangelist John made this vision as the opening theme of the Gospel. The Word, through whom God created all and who enlightens all, became

This same call is continued through the formation (creation)² of the new community of the disciples of Jesus Christ. The Matthean inaugural sermon unmistakably points to their service as the salt and light to the world (Mt 5:13-16). Even the post-resurrection mission mandate is linked to this role, by including the teaching of "all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20). There have to be communities of disciples of Jesus in every culture precisely for serving as the salt, light and leaven (Mt 13:33). Hence the message of the Kingdom is accompanied by the creation of the new community (Mk 1:15-20; 3:13-14). This role of the Christian community today, as the Vatican Council declared, is fulfilled through IRD. Not only the Catholic Church, but the other churches too made IRD a priority.³

In the past Christian theology in general was trying to explain away other religions, with the theories of preparation, fulfilment, seeds of the Word, etc., always holding that Christianity is the only God-willed religion. Rather, we Christians have to ask ourselves what is the service that we can render to a world in which God is actively involved, always rooted in the Christian call to service. The church now regards with esteem the believers of all religions, appreciating their moral and spiritual commitment. As Pope Francis has

flesh (1:1-4, 9). All revelation and religious knowledge is traced to the same Mystery. Equally, all salvation is through the same Mystery. There is no reason to make a distinction between natural and supernatural revelation and natural and revealed religions, in so far as every religious activity is the response to the same revealing Mystery.

However, the bible insists equally how right from the beginning God calls individuals and peoples for a specific service. Thus, Abraham is called to become a blessing to all (Gen 12:3). In the same spirit Israel is called to serve as a light to the nations (Is 42:6; 49:6). In fact, right before God makes the covenant with Israel, they are told that they are made his people so that they are to be a kingly, priestly and holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). All the three roles remind them of their vocation to be of service to the rest of the nations.

pointed out, "there have been so many events, initiatives, institutional or personal relationships with non-Christian religions in these fifty years, since the publication of *Nostra Aetate*."⁴ The Pope characterized these as expressions of the church's hope that all believers in God would favour friendship and unity between peoples. Indifference and opposition have changed to collaboration and benevolence. "Former enemies and strangers, we have become friends and brothers."⁵

Discipleship does not adopt a "one-among-the many" attitude, but the call to follow the Word Incarnate in his mission of realizing the divine reign. As John Paul II wrote to Cardinal Cassidy on the occasion of the XIII International Meeting of Peoples and Religion, "we must all be bolder on this journey, so that the men and women of our world, to whatever people or belief they belong, can discover that they are children of the one God and brothers and sisters to one another."⁶

The Christian call, Pope Francis reminds us, is to be "missionary disciples" (EG 120). However, this does not mean that we reach out to the followers of other religions only as raw material for church growth, but as collaborators in realizing the divine reign. Our call is not to proselytize, but respect others' beliefs and thus inspire others through Christian witness so as to grow together

through communication. In this the Christian community has an important role to serve as the leaven.

Inter Religious Dialogue

Right at the beginning I must caution that IRD is not an entity but a process of becoming. It is a process of becoming a community of persons, respectful and respecting, transforming and transformed, renewing and renewed. This allows the process of IRD a certain amount of spontaneity as well as open-endedness. It acknowledges the need to turn to each other and together to the ground of our being, to the goal of our existence. Thus, it is permeated by a sense of radical transcendence and at the same time down to earth immanence in so far as it is primarily directed to the horizontal level of understanding and acceptance. It is through and through guided by the mandate to “seek first the divine reign” (Mt 6:33). IRD is a cooperative and constructive interaction among people belonging to different religious traditions⁷ leading to communion.

IRD is a symbol of the Kingdom, to which we are pilgrimaging: it is a “diffuse symbol”⁸ (Gerald A. Arbuckle), i.e. its meaning depends on the different contexts of the dialogue process: faith, religion, and commitment to transformation leading to a religiously experienced meaning. After all symbol is an embodiment of meaning, enabling humans to communicate, perpetuate and develop a vision of human life. Symbol has the innate ability to make us feel ‘at home’ At the same time, by the same logic, it invites us to enter into the world of the symbols of the other and this is the mystery of, the dynamic of IRD, ushering in the gifts of different faiths that will serve as a reservoir of common pilgrimage — the reality of IRD.

A symbol is any reality that by its very dynamism or power leads to another deeper reality through a sharing in the dynamism that

the symbol itself offers (and merely by verbal or additional explanations.)

A good many of modern problems and conflicts, strangely though, have religion at their root, whether it is the Arab-Israel conflict, conflicts in the Middle East and Syria, the Kashmir problem, Indonesian conflicts, the conflicts in the southern Philippines and many others. In theory, practically all religions have the inbuilt theological underpinning for mutual understanding and collaboration. The belief in the *antaryamin* in Hinduism, i.e., the Divine indwells in all human beings, the Islamic vision of all humans by nature making a self-surrender to God, the Buddhist teaching of universal compassion, the Christian call to love and care for the neighbour, the basic understanding of harmony in the Chinese and Confucian religions, the understanding of

Yahweh, the creator of all and as the Lord of History in Judaism, the vision of the salvation of the universe as understood by the primal religions, are all inviting religions to come closer and to collaborate, rather than to compete and combat with each other. Right relationship with neighbours is the focus of all religions. This is the challenge of Inter Religious Dialogue. Christians in particular, by their call to

witness to the coming of the divine reign in Jesus Christ, by profession are called to IRD.

Prophet Isaiah’s vision, 6:1-8, reminds us how our history, our experience of God, does not begin with us. The history of all people of God is part of our intimate relationship with God. “All the earth is filled with his glory” (Is 6:3). Isaiah’s vision tells us also that no one, not even Isaiah or Moses, can have a total vision of the divine and this is an invitation for religions to touch the Holy as experienced in the other, to be enriched by the other. God’s dialogue with humans does not begin with any particular religion but with creation. The bible insists also on a universal covenant of God with humans (Gen 9:9-17).



This is a challenge for all followers of the different religious traditions to look into what we have in common rather than what differentiates us. It has to be acknowledged how all religions advocate peace, love, unity and tolerance, which in the past, due to narrow missionary zeal, was overlooked. Equally, it is a call not to compare religions order to establish one's own superiority. What is important is to realize how each religion has a particular service to render to humanity, and ask how together we can usher in a superior quality of human existence.

Already the Old Testament paves the way for inter religious understanding leading to enrichment of one's religion. The Babylonian exile paved the way for the exiles to come into contact with the leading religion of the Babylonian world, Zoroastrianism and to be enriched by it, in the understanding of the only God. We come across strict monotheism in the Bible only towards the end of the exile (Is 45:18) though there was already the monolatry — the Zoroastrian understanding of the two ages that served as the theological underpinning of the belief in the idea of resurrection of the dead. Sean Freyne writes: "The doctrine of the two ages is the theological underpinning for the belief in the idea of the resurrection of the dead – a doctrine that finds its first unequivocal expression in Daniel: 12:2-3".⁹ Judaism's adaptation to a life without the temple through the institution of the synagogue, too, results from the Zoroastrians who did not have one central temple but a temple where a community existed.¹⁰ In the gospels, as we have seen already, Jesus is not an advocate of a religion as much as a quality of life based on love and mercy. The early Christians were quite creative in their openness and sensitivity to the religious world of the times manifested in doing away with circumcision (Acts 15), in the theological interpretation of Jesus as the Lord rather than as Christ/Messiah (Acts 11:20 in contrast to Acts 9:22), and in similar theological and practical developments.

Christian Service

The Christian call stands in continuity with the call of Israel as a chosen people, to serve humanity as a kingly, priestly and holy nation

(Ex 19: 6). This was repeated by Jesus in his sermon on the mount by reminding the community of his disciples that they are to serve the world as its light (Mt 5:14) and salt (5:13) (Cf also 1 Pt 2:9). The Christian community is the continuation of the *ministry* of the Incarnate Word (Jn 20:21) who creates and enlightens all humans coming into the world (Jn 1:1-4, 9). The Christian community is aware, on the one hand, of the presence of the divine in all humans, on the other, and at the same time, it realizes how it has a service to render to humanity, as the sacrament of the divine reign. Today this can be realized primarily, not exclusively, through IRD. To quote Jurgen Moltmann, "The church's abiding origin in Israel, its permanent orientation to Israel's hope, Christianity's resulting special vocation to prepare the way for the coming kingdom in history — all this will also give its stamp to the dialogue with the world religions."¹¹

Even as Jesus was anointed by the spirit to bring the good news to the poor, so also the Christian call is to be an agent of the good news to the poor (Mk 3:14-15; Lk 24:48-49; Mt 5:13-15 and Jn 20:21). What is required is a return to Jesus' own (God's own) priorities. This in today's world can be done only in collaboration with all. That is what makes IRD the fulcrum of the church's service to the world today.

Scientists tell us how we have entered a new geological epoch, that of the Anthropocene, i.e., human actions affecting the very metabolism of the planet postponing the next ice age at least by 50,000 years.¹² This makes the care of the earth, as our very immediate neighbour, also very much part of the realization of the acceptable year of the Lord. Pope Francis made care of the earth a central concern of the Catholic Church and invites followers of all religions "to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. ... The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that "realities are greater than ideas."¹³

In IRD we work united in our common humanity and mutual responsibility, as well as in the shared values and convictions. In this Christians, as the expression of their service to the realization of the acceptable year of the Lord, can and must take the lead to foster a culture of human ecology that increasingly promotes harmony within individuals and in their relationships. The community of the disciples, the little flock (Lk 12:32), has to become the leaven and light in this movement of IR collaboration.

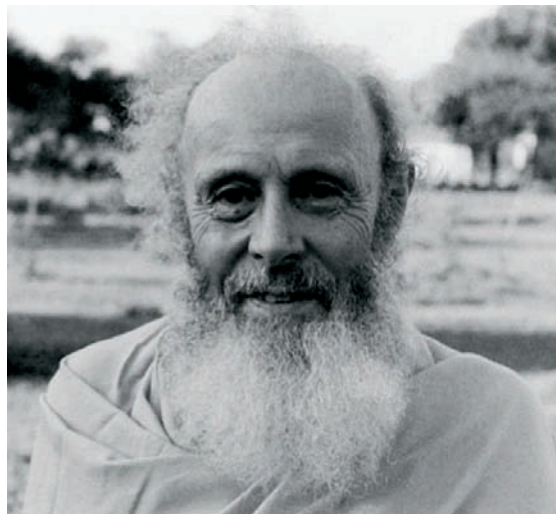
Christian commitment invites us to appreciate the fact that every culture and every religion is a manifestation of divine love and goodness, though mixed also with human selfishness. It is here we see the significance of the healing mission of Jesus with his message of the Kingdom. Any local Christian community anywhere in the world must enter into dialogue with local religions as the continuation of the Lord Jesus' ministry. This made the Evangelical churches affirm in their October 2010 Cape Town Commitment: "In the name of the God of love, we repent of our failure to seek friendships with people of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other religious backgrounds. In the spirit of Jesus, we will take initiatives to show love, goodwill and hospitality to them."¹⁴

Metaphysical Humility

We Christians cannot play God or dictate terms to God by asking God to do "home work" (Kosuke Koyama), i.e., restrict God's salvation to those whom we recommend, but allow ourselves to be subject to God's plans. This requires a metaphysical humility that acknowledges our own limitations and the perfectibility of our religious tradition and our understanding of it, as well as the religious truth to which others respond prompted by the mystery of the same Word that became flesh (Jn 1:9). As Catherine Cornille has suggested,

this humility is motivated also by "the recognition of the partial and finite nature of the ways in which ultimate truth has been grasped and expressed in the teachings and practices of one's own tradition."¹⁵ Obviously, such humility demands the giving up of claims of ultimate and exclusive monopoly over truth and revelation in so far as it can only lead to interreligious conflicts and violence, not to speak of the fact that the bible does not always support such claims.

Raymond Panikkar has cautioned us of the need to have an ontological humility in interreligious dialogue in so far as dialogue reminds us of our temporality, our contingency, our constitutive limitation. "Humility is not primarily a moral virtue, but an ontological one; it is the awareness of the place of my ego, the truthfulness of accepting my real situation, namely, that I am a situated being, a vision's angle on the real of the real, an existence."¹⁶



· Abhishiktananda (1910-1973)

Such a metaphysical humility enabled mystics like Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths to be enriched by entering into the very soul of Hinduism. Abhishiktananda was the first Catholic Priest to sit at the feet of a Hindu guru making himself a disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi. This enabled Abhishiktananda to realize that the great primitive Upanishads, like the Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka, are the incomparable witness to the awakening of the soul to the Mystery of being and of the self, and these earliest formulations of that experience have never been surpassed.¹⁷

Historical Consciousness

Our history, the time in which we live, is not just a succession of events, a chronology, but it is very much part of God's plan for us, in which God acts. Thus, it is very much a *Kairos*, divine time (salvation history). Through our involvement in IRD we

Christians are called to collaborate in the divine design to convert *chronos* into *Kairos*.

The late Pope John XXIII expressed this historical consciousness through his pointing out the need to read “the signs of the times”¹⁸ which can be characterized as the ongoing divine revelation in history. The spring time of religious revival that we witness everywhere may be said to be a sign of the time in this sense and has to be taken seriously as long as it enables humans to grow in love and concern for each other.

All religions must build bridges among themselves based on the inter connection of the understanding of the ultimate Reality, despite differences in the specific grasp and explanation of the same. Today scholars like David Tracy and Francis Clooney speak of comparative theology, i.e., theology developed not only on the basis of our own scriptures but also in the light of our reading of the scriptures of other religions.¹⁹ It underlines the need for thinking interreligiously, interpreting home tradition in critical correlation with other traditions. Similarly, there has to be a certain amount of willingness to place oneself into the religious world of the other, not only intellectually by trying to understand the reality behind the religious symbols of the other, but also through an honest attempt to enter into the religious mind set of the other with a view to understand the other from within. Catherine Cornille expresses it well: “Even though religion is certainly more than a feeling, the affective dimension does play a crucial role in the religious life of any person, and a proper understanding of another religion would thus be seriously impoverished with access to the meaning of a particular belief or practice for the person involved.”²⁰ Religions would require empathy to enter into relationship and communion with one another.

Witnessing to Jesus Christ

Empathy for one another will lead the followers of religious traditions to a certain reciprocity in dialogue sharing their religious experience with an openness to understand each other’s faith. It is here that the Christian will witness to Jesus Christ, making it clear that what makes the Christian be involved in inter religious dialogue is precisely in

response to Jesus’ call to collaborate in ringing in the divine reign. This is a significant form of mission in the post-colonial era. Obviously, we can pray and hope that at least some, with whom we enter into dialogue, may be attracted to Jesus Christ and commit themselves to follow him in his ministry without ruling out the possibility of the dialogue partner too having similar desires. At any rate, mission in the post-colonial world is not any more a one way traffic but a sharing of one’s spiritual experience with others.

Dialogue generally presupposes a certain level of informational exchange and the growth of knowledge about the dialogue partner’s faith. This in turn, can lead to some sort of mutual religious fecundation, reciprocal inspiration and transformation. Interreligious dialogue, thus, becomes the context of witnessing, open to various possibilities that are to be left to the receiver and to divine inspiration. However, in interreligious dialogue there is no question of any one-sided prophetic mission, nor is interreligious dialogue as such aimed at winning the dialogue partner to one’s own religion. However, the Christian partner enters into dialogue as part of his/her commitment to follow Jesus Christ in his mission of making God’s presence concrete and tangible in the world (Mt. 1:23 Jn 12:45), by becoming other-centred and working for the wholeness of life for all, as Jesus did. Similarly, the World Council of Churches in its *Guidelines on Dialogue* (1979) asserts: “Dialogue, therefore, is a fundamental part of Christian service within community. In dialogue Christians actively respond to the command to “love God and your neighbour as yourself. As an expression of love engagement dialogue testifies to the love experienced in Christ” (n 18). What is required is a historicization of the call of the World Council of Churches as well as Vatican II. As Massimo Faggioli, an expert in Vatican II wrote: “One of the ever-growing and important elements of Vatican II is the practical implications of *ressourcement* and *rapprochement* — “deepening” and “reaching out,” “reconciliation by proximity.”²¹

Each religion has kerygmatic as well as mystical aspects though some religions may

emphasise one over the other.²² Christianity is a combination of both these aspects especially in the fourth gospel. God reveals to humans from outside calling for transformation. Christianity tries to live this call. Simultaneously, as Gerd Theissen has shown there is, particularly in the fourth gospel, with its claim for absoluteness with boundless love, there is the mystical tradition as well.²³ Theissen has emphasized how “this Gospel of love must be seen as the only thing which is absolute in religious dialogue.”²⁴

IRD is a theologically loaded process of understanding and exercising Christian mission as a participation in God’s self-reaching out. Through IRD Christian community becomes a communication of the good news of the divine reign, refraining from anything that is religiously divisive or fundamentalistic. Pope Francis reminds us how IRD is a “new form of missionary creativity,” (*Amoris Laetitia* 57), Summoning all Christians “to revive our hope and make it a source of prophetic visions, transformative actions and creative focus of charity” (AL 57).

Conversion in IRD

Engagement in IRD can get bogged down with the issue of conversion.²⁵ As we have seen conversion, understood as a transformation, is integral to IRD. For the Vatican Document, *Dialogue and Mission* “conversion is the humble and penitent return of the heart to God in the desire to submit one’s life more generously to him.”²⁶ In this sense conversion is central to IRD, even as it is part of the daily life of any one as a process of maturation.

Biblically understood, conversion is a return (*shub* in Hebrew) to the originary relational situation of harmony and communion with God and with one another (Ps 51:13; Ps 19:7; Is 1:27, etc.). Jesus’s summon to conversion in the context of the arrival of the divine reign was in tune with this biblical spirit manifested in his teachings (Mt 5:38-48; 7:1-5, etc.) and many parables (Lk 10:29ff., 18:23ff., etc.).

The deeper commitment to God, normally, is through the religion to which one belongs, though the possibility cannot be ruled out that one becomes convinced that the dialogue partner’s religion is the God-intended religion

for that person, thus, leading to a conversion from one religion to another. However, proselytization from one religion to another is not the intent of IRD.

Concluding Remark

At its earliest stage Christian mission was a sharing of an experience (1Jn 1:1-4), without any reference to any fall or atonement. It continued in that spirit until the time of the emperor Constantine and the imperial conquests thereafter. Gradually mission becomes merged with political motives and this process reaches its climax during the colonial times when mission was understood exclusively as an engagement with the followers of other religions — mission *ad gentes*. Post colonialism brings the challenge to return to the original Kingdom-centred mission that requires a mission along with and in collaboration with the followers of other religions — mission *inter-Religiones*. In this process the Christian community has to play a constructive and vital role due to their commitment to follow Jesus Christ through IRD. Apart from this proactive impulse to IRD, the Christian community has to ensure that it does not contribute in any way to the religious madness and violence fuelled by religious sentiments that one comes across in many parts of the world. As the Interreligious Consultation, jointly organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Office for Interreligious Relations and Dialogue of the World Council of Churches, stated: “All of us believe that religions should be a source of uniting and ennobling of humans. Religions, understood and practiced in the light of the core principles and ideals of each of our faiths, can be a reliable guide to meeting the many challenges before humankind.”²⁷ IRD is the golden rule for Christians today.

Footnotes

¹ Cf. Blackburn, W. Ross, *The God who Makes himself Known: The missionary heart of the Book of Exodus*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2012), 89-95.

² In the Greek original the evangelist Mark uses the verb *epoiesen* (3:14), the same verb that is used in Gen 1.1, and in both instances it means created/made.

³ WCC, *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, Geneva: WCC, 1979.

⁴ Pope Francis, Inter Religious Dialogue: Address to the General Audience Wednesday, 28 October 2015.

<http://www.va.vatican.va/Francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/pope>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John Paul II, "Message to Cardinal Cassidy," *Pro Dialogo* 106/1(2001):12.

⁷ See Terry C. Muck, "Missio-logoi, interreligious dialogue, and the parable of the Good Samaritan," *Missiology*, 44/1 (2016):8.

⁸ Gerald Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, Theology*, (Collegeville, MI: Michael Glacier, 2010), 25.

⁹ Freyne Sean, *The world of the New Testament*, (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, 1983), 95.

¹⁰ Though one hardly comes across scholarly literature stating that the synagogue worship rose due to the influence of Zoroastrianism, scholars like Martin A. Cohen do recognize how the synagogue originated during the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century BCE (Cf. Martin A. Cohen, "Synagogue," *The Encyclopaedia of Religions*. Vol 14, New York, NY: McMillan, 1987: 209-218), and this in turn supports Freyne Sean's position that the Jewish synagogue came into being under the influence of Zoroastrianism (Sean. 1983, 96).

¹¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, (London: SCM Press, 1977), 150.

¹² Science and Environment, BBC.com/news/science-environment-35307800. Accessed on 14-01-2016.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, (Vatican: Vatican Press, 2015), n 201.

¹⁴ "The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (Vol 35, No.2 (April 2011):72.

¹⁵ Catherine Cornille, *The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008), 10.

¹⁶ Raimon Panikkar, *Intra Religious Dialogue*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 37.

¹⁷ Swami Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, (Bangalore: CISRS, 1969), 51.

¹⁸ John XXIII, Apostolic Constitution "Humane Salutis". (December 25, 1961 in Walter M Abbott, (ed) *Documents of Vatican II*, (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 704.

¹⁹ David Tracy, "Comparative Theology," *Encyclopaedia of Religions*, Vol 13, Lindsay Jones (ed), 2nd edn, (Detroit: Macmillan, 2005), 9125-34; Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2010).

²⁰ Catherine Cornille, *The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 138.

²¹ Faggioli, Massimo, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 176.

²² Cf. Johannes Nissen, *The Gospel of John and the Religious Quest: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 190.

²³ Gerd Theissen, *Lichtspuren. Predigten und Bibelarbeiten*, (Guetersloh: Kaiser, 1994), 156-158. Cf. J. Nissen, *The Gospel of John*, 71.

²⁴ Gerd Theissen, *Lichtspuren*, 161. Quoted in Nissen, *The Gospel of John*, 191.

²⁵ See, for instance, the Inter-Religious Consultation on Conversion organized by the PCID and WCC, Lariano (Italy) May 12-16, 2006 in "Report from Inter-Religious Consultation on Conversion," (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc/-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation>, accessed on 06/02/2016).

²⁶ Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions*, (Vatican City, Pentecost 1984), no 37.

²⁷ WCC. *Current Dialogue*, Issue 47, June 2006. <http://wcc-coc.org/wcc/what/interreligious/>

Ref: Article received by SEDOS from the author.

SEDOS SUMMER WORKSHOPS

ITALIAN CONVERSATION WORKSHOP

Sedos wants to offer **Italian conversation and grammar level B1-B2**, for religious men and women

who recently came to Rome to study or to work.

The idea is to have the workshop the last two weeks of June and the first two weeks of September, the days of Monday-Wednesday-Thursday, from 10am to 12am.

The conversation exercise will be lead by our secretary *Leila Benassi*, who is a native speaker and has a license to teach Italian.



MINDFULNESS AND YOGA WORKSHOP

Sedos wants to offer **Mindfulness** and **Yoga** for religious men and women who are stressed up by the work or are interested in these spiritual practices. These are **inner-peace**. The idea is to have the workshops the last two weeks of June and the first two weeks of September, from 4pm till 5.30pm, twice a week. These workshops will be lead by our director *Peter Baekelmans*, who teaches Buddhism at the faculty of theology at KU Leuven and has a yoga teacher degree from Nashik, India.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH STORIES WORKSHOP

Sedos wants to offer workshops on **Intercultural Competence** for religious men and women who want to improve their living and thinking together in a multicultural way. The idea is to have a two-hour workshop in which one learns to see the unity and diversity of cultures and religions. It is a **peace-building** exercise. In this first workshop on intercultural competence we will use stories from different religions and cultures.

This first workshop will be lead by our director *Peter Baekelmans*, who is specialized in Comparative Religion and has a PhD in Theology of Religions.

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