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The Acts of the Apostles give us a deep insight into how the followers of Jesus spread His message all around the world, sowing the seed of the Kingdom everywhere they went.

Paul was the one who pushed and opened new roads carrying his mission into and around the Roman Empire, preaching the Good News and witnessing to Jesus in word and deed. It is only fitting that we reflect on how the seeds planted by Paul 2,000 years ago have grown and filled the earth. At that time Paul's preaching and teaching created much controversy with the other Apostles. His approaches influenced and shook the close group of Disciples fixed on preaching only to the Jews. Some of the issues, like the role of women in the Church has subsisted up to our day evoking a lot of criticism.

**van Thanh Nguyen, SVD**, in *"Evangelizing Empire: The Gospel and Mission of St Paul"*, reflects on a new approach to understand Paul's work better. The whole endeavour has to be seen within the cultural context of his day. The author proposes a new paradigm shift to help us understand the emphasis of Paul who preached: an *anti-imperial Gospel* to counteract the culture and personality cult of the Emperor, the 'gospel of Caesar'.

The mission Jesus gave His disciples to be witnesses around the world continues today. The disciple needs to have a conversion of heart, a complete change in his/her life so as to be able to influence and bring about the transformation of other people, society and its structures. **Antonio Eiguren, OFM**, in *"Mission For All Times"* presents his reflections on the conversion and transformation of society based on the Experience of Korean Christians between 1784 and 1801.

Proclaiming the Good News brings us into contact with other cultural ways that help us to understand how God interacts with His creatures. Hence, **Terence Farias, SJ**, presents to us *"Our Ministry and Interreligious Dialogue"* emphasizing the 'religious plurality in the world' and how dialogue is an integral part of our life and mission, fostering a specific spirituality that deepens our relationship with God; because dialogue brings us closer to God by being in dialogue with His children.



Our Christian faith shows its dynamism in this dialogue with other religions. **Henri de la Hougue** in *"L'estime de la foi des autres, comme témoignage du dynamisme de la foi chrétienne"*, points to the fact that the Spirit is active and present in the life of other religions. In the same way as our Christian faith is

professed, lived and celebrated, we should learn to look and appreciate the faith of others by considering how they profess, live and celebrate their faith.

An integral part of our mission is to care for and respect God's Creation. **Piotr Krakowczyk, CME**, reflects on the situation of this, our world, in *"The World Seems to be Falling Apart: Violence, Injustice and Ecological Degradation"*. Our prophetic ministry compels us to be engaged in an active way in our proclamation that Christ is 'our peace'.

**Edgar Javier, SVD**, reminds us that God saw His Creation and said it was good, very good. *"God's Dream for Humanity and Creation: One Earth – One People"* is a reflection to help us all to work together by listening to science, listen to what Nature is telling us, listening to one another and working together to heal the Earth by stopping violence, injustice and ecological damage.

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## ***Evangelizing Empire: The Gospel and Mission of St Paul***

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Beginning with the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul on 28 June 2008, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed for the Church a special year to honour and celebrate the 2,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of St Paul the Apostle. It is only fitting therefore as we come to the end of this special year to reflect on the life, mission, and message of this great missionary and evangelizer. But who is Paul really and what essentially is he evangelizing? To understand Paul's mission and message, I propose a new shift in focus and perspective, namely, unveiling the Roman imperial context and ideology.

### **Paul: Appealing or Appalling?**

To set a whole year aside to focus on this great Apostle and evangelizer is only fitting, for after Jesus, if there is any person of stature and importance in the early Church, that person is undoubtedly Paul. First of all, he is an appealing figure. Thirteen Letters out of twenty-seven New Testament works are attributed to Paul,<sup>1</sup> plus half of Luke's sequel — the Acts of the Apostles — is about his life. Simple mathematics shows that Paul alone takes up exactly half of the New Testament.

While he was a figure of importance and held in great esteem, Paul was also appalling. Since the very beginning of the establishment of the Church, Paul's Letters were circulated and collected, which demonstrate the significance of Paul's message and writings. Yet at the same time, his teachings also created confusion and a storm of controversy as reported in II Peter: "Our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (II Pt 3:15-16).<sup>2</sup> Critics of Paul are especially alarmed at his statements about women. Judging from his requirements for women to wear veils at worship (I Cor 11:2-16) and to be silent in the churches (I Cor 14:34), it seems that Paul did not show much respect for women and wanted to keep them in an inferior position. On the topic of same sex union, Paul's position seems uncompromising and homophobic: "Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error" (Rom 1:26-27).

When it comes to Paul, one either loves him or is highly critical of him, but rarely ever feeling indifferent or neutral about him. It is imperative however to keep in mind that Paul's strong and at times appalling statements must not be taken out of context, and still more important they need to be properly interpreted and weighed by his whole vision and teaching of Christianity. Consequently, to simply label Paul as misogynistic based on I Corinthians alone is unfair and unwarranted. One needs to turn to Romans 16 to find a catalogue of prominent women (Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Tryphaina, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, Junias, and Lydia) whom Paul recognized as "coworkers", "apostles", "heads of household", and "deacons". It is old news to say that Paul is complex and difficult to comprehend. Since interpreting Paul always poses a challenge, one needs to study him and his message in its appropriate social, political, and religious settings, for context is everything!

### **New Paradigm Shift: Anti-imperial Gospel**

At the beginning of my "Introduction to the New Testament" class, I always tell my students that context is crucial in biblical interpretation. The context not only influences interpretation but also determines its meanings. For example, if I say, "I love this course", you would not know to which "course" I am referring. It could be a course of a meal, a golf course, or a college course. Unless you knew its context, you would not know what I meant. Since

the context determines the meaning of one's words and action, we constantly need to ask about the context in which biblical authors lived and wrote.

One of the most important elements for understanding Paul's mission and message is the Roman imperial context, which unfortunately has been overlooked until very recently. Interestingly, after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, New Testament scholars began to pay more attention to the significance and implication of Roman imperial contexts for interpretation, not only in the Book of Revelation,<sup>3</sup> but for the whole New Testament corpus<sup>4</sup> and especially in Paul's mission and message.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past ten years, there has been a steady stream of books and articles on Paul and the Roman Empire. A new paradigm shift focusing on the Roman imperial context has stimulated much interest and generated groundbreaking scholarship and publications in Pauline studies. These authors reexamined the social, cultural, religious, and especially political aspects of Roman imperial theology and ideology and have demonstrated that Paul was not primarily denouncing Judaism and the Law,<sup>6</sup> but that he was principally negotiating, challenging, and even resisting the Roman imperial order. Analysis of Pauline terms such as "gospel", "salvation", "faith", "peace", and "grace", has shown that they were borrowed from and were meant to counteract Roman imperial ideology and theology.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Paul's proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ stands in stark contrast and opposition to the gospel of Caesar. Thus, Richard Horsley correctly concludes that Paul's primary mission was to announce doom and destruction on "the rulers of this age" (I Cor 2:6-8; 15:24).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, for Paul, the Roman imperial rule was already coming to an end, for he writes, "This world is passing away" (I Cor 7:31).

### **Imperial Propaganda and Theology**

But what exactly was Rome promoting that caused Paul to launch such a staunch opposition to imperial rule? Before we answer that question, we need to penetrate the social and political forces that shaped the media of ancient Rome. While radio, television, billboards, bumper stickers, the internet, and newspapers are the primary means of communication today, ancient Rome "possessed less technical but no less sophisticated means of propagating its worldview".<sup>9</sup> Roman media was comprised of temples, monuments, theaters, arches, inscriptions, festivals, coinage, games, baths, statues, cities, aqueducts, and so forth. These ancient media, when taken together, resonate a powerful theological message that Rome was beneficent, powerful, and divinely legitimated to conquer and rule. Furthermore, its Emperor was divinely sanctioned to be the saviour of the world and the guarantor of peace and security. Since the gods have chosen Rome, those who submit to Rome's rule will benefit from the gods' blessings such as peace, security, justice, faithfulness, and fertility.<sup>10</sup> The following examination of three ancient media productions will illustrate how powerful Roman imperial propaganda was in promoting its theology and ideology.

### **Legends and Inscriptions**

Before Augustus, who was formerly called Octavian, defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium (31 B.C.E.), Rome experienced years of turmoil and civil war between rival warlords. It was Augustus who put an end to civil strife and brought order, peace, and prosperity to the Roman Empire. It was during the long reign of "Augustus" (Latin) or "Sebastos" (Greek), which means the "revered one" or "one who is worthy to be worshipped", that the *pax romana* was achieved, fulfilling the hopes and dreams of the known world. Thus, the people of Rome were particularly grateful to his contribution and declared him as "Son of God" and "Saviour" of the world. The legend and myth of the divine Caesar Augustus is best captured in Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid*: "Here is Caesar and all of Iulius's [Julius Caesar] progeny, coming beneath the revolving heaven. This man, this is he, whom you often hear promised to you, Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will establish once more ... the Golden Age in the fields once ruled by Saturn" (6.789-94).<sup>11</sup> This national epic poem and many other legends and myths<sup>12</sup> not only reflect the background and tradition for legitimizing the descendants of Augustus and his successors, but also proclaim an imperial theology that is divinely sanctioned.

The Romans were not the only ones who were grateful for Augustus' contribution and benefaction. Even the Greeks in Asia Minor declared him to be divine and consequently changed their calendar in order to coincide with his birthday. The famous Priene inscription from the Provincial Assembly of Asia (today's Western Turkey), which is dated around 9 B.C.E., gives an historical account of Augustus being honoured and worshipped as divine and the saviour who fulfilled humanity's hopes and aspirations:

Since the Providence that has divinely ordered our existence has applied her energy and zeal and has brought to life the most perfect good in Augustus, whom she filled with virtues for the benefit of mankind, bestowing him upon us and our descendants as *saviour* — he who put an end to war and will order peace, Caesar, who by his epiphany exceeded the hopes of those who prophesied good tidings [*euaggelia*]. . . .; and since the birthday of the god first brought to the world the good tidings [*euaggelia*] residing in him. . . . For that reason, with good fortune and safety, the Greeks of Asia have decided that the New Year in all the cities should begin on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, the birthday of Augustus (OGIS 458).<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, Augustus was depicted in poetry and inscribed on stone tablets as Son of God and Saviour of the world. Moreover, his reign or victory was announced as “gospels” or “good news”. His reign and those of subsequent Emperors too were celebrated as religious events. Josephus, for example, tells how cities rejoiced and offered sacrifices to the gods upon receiving the good news of Vespasian’s enthronement (*J.W.* 4.10.6 §618).

### Coinage

Ancient coins reveal a lot about the social, political, and religious worldview of the time. Fortunately for us archaeologists have uncovered numerous Roman coins, particularly of Augustus Caesar (27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.). On many of his coins, which were minted all over the Empire from Asia Minor to Spain, Augustus was declared as “Caesar Divi F”, which is the abbreviation of the Latin “Caesar Divi Filius” or “Son of the Divine [Julius] Caesar”. If Julius Caesar was divine and Augustus was his adopted son, Augustus then was the “Son of God” (see image 1). Sometimes on the reverse side, the emperor stands on the globe and holds the symbol of the “return of the Golden Age”, including the cornucopia, which indicates the new age of prosperity as shown in image 1. The divine title and mythic symbols attributed to Augustus and other emperors were well known throughout the Roman Empire in the New Testament time (see image 2).<sup>14</sup> One should not underestimate the power of Roman coins. Like walking billboards they promoted a Roman imperial theology which everyone carried about in their hands or in their purses. Dieter Georgi correctly noticed, “everyone carried the flyer of this ideology about in the form of Roman coins”.<sup>15</sup>

#### Image 1

*Augustus Denarius minted between 32-29 B.C.E. On one side (left) is a bare head of Octavian; on the other side (right) it reads CAESAR - DIVI F, with the goddess Pax standing and holding an olive branch and cornucopia. Courtesy of <http://www.romancoins.info/12C-JulioClaud.HTML#Augustus>*



recto

verso

### Imperial Cults

Unlike the subjugated people of Judea and Britain, the Greeks from the Roman Province of Asia Minor welcomed rather than resisted Roman rule. The *élites* of these Asian cities even competed with each other to cultivate imperial favour and privileges. It is important to realize that the imperial cult was not initiated by Augustus nor imposed by the imperial family, but it was the local Asian *élites* who requested to honour and to worship the emperor. Local *élites* began honouring the emperor by placing statues of the emperor beside those of traditional gods. Shrines and temples to Augustus and eventually subsequent emperors were erected at the most prominent points in city centres. For example, built on the eastern side of the Acropolis in Athens, Augustus’ temple received the first ray of sun light and thus took precedence over the Parthenon of the Athenian goddess Artemis. Eventually other cities, such as the great metropolis of Ephesus, where Paul spent three years in his mission, completely reconstructed their city centres with public space oriented specifically to the temples dedicated to the Emperor.<sup>16</sup> Inside these sanctuaries, statues or images of the emperor were inserted and placed alongside traditional Graeco-Roman gods. The emperor was often depicted in military garb like the gods, naked like the gods, and represented in colossal size like the gods. The presence of the Emperor was felt in all the public places and civic centres of the Empire.

**Image 2**

*Augustus AV Aureus. Lyons mint, 15-13 B.C.E. AVGVSTVS DIVI F, bare head right / IMP X below Augustus seated right on platform, receiving branches from two soldiers. Courtesy of <http://www.romancoins.info/12C-JulioCland.HTML#Augustus>*



Imperial shrines and temples were not the only way people felt connected with their Emperor. Festivals, holidays and intercity games were also established to honour the Emperor. Augustus' birthday, for example, was celebrated not only as the beginning of the year but the beginning of a new era and the beginning of the new term of public office. Athletic games and music competitions were also organized in his honour. Sacrifices too were offered to the Emperor as a way to cultivate and express their devotion (piety) and commitment toward him. These public imperial events united the inhabitants and strengthened the network of loyalty with other surrounding cities.

Consequently, the Imperial Cult, through the proliferation of shrines, temples, statues, coins, and festivals, became the most important means of social cohesion and powerful expressions of connecting with the Emperor. These expressions, when taken together, promoted an imperial theology that powerfully proclaimed the legitimization of Rome and its divinely sanctioned agents. The impact of the Imperial Cult was pervasive and unavoidable for the Christians of the first century. As Richard Horsley correctly assessed, "In order to imagine how the presence of the Emperor pervaded public space, Americans could think of how the visual displays, music, aromas, and advertising of the five-week festival of Christmas pervade public and private life from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. Although the Imperial Cult and its festivals did not invade private life, they did last not simply for five weeks, but all year round".<sup>17</sup> In many of the seven cities mentioned in Revelation, the cult of the Emperors was present. Pergamum, for example, was well known for housing the temple of Roma and Augustus. In the city of Smyrna, a temple was dedicated to Tiberius and the Roman Senate. While in Sardis there was a temple of Augustus, Laodicea honoured Domitian with an imperial altar. In the cities where Paul had founded Christian communities, the Imperial Cult was strongly felt. In Ephesus, where Paul stayed for three years, there was a temple of Roma and Julius Caesar, an altar of Augustus within the temple of Artemis, and a huge temple of Domitian which one can still see today. Noticeably, Ephesus, along with Pergamum and Smyrna, was called "Temple-Warden [of the Imperial Cult]", which was a title of civic pride.<sup>18</sup> In Corinth, a temple dedicated to Octavia, the sister of Augustus still stands tall with three columns surviving even today. The City of Rome of course had many imperial temples. There were temples built in honour of Julius Caesar, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, just to name a few. As one can see, the widespread influence of the Imperial Cult in many, if not all the early Christian communities, has significant implications for understanding and interpreting Paul's mission and message.

### **Paul's Reaction to Imperial Claims and Theology**

#### ***Defying Caesar's Gospel***

Although the gospel of Caesar had been well established in cities like Philippi, Corinth, Thessalonica, and Ephesus, Paul travelled throughout the eastern Mediterranean cities proclaiming a different Gospel, namely the "Gospel of God":

<sup>1</sup>You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain,<sup>2</sup> but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the *gospel* [*euangelion*] of God in spite of great opposition.<sup>3</sup> For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery,<sup>4</sup> but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the *gospel* [*euangelion*], even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.<sup>5</sup> As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed;<sup>6</sup> nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or

from others,<sup>7</sup> though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.<sup>8</sup> So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the *gospel [euangelion]* of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.<sup>9</sup> You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the *gospel [euangelion]* of God (I Thes 2:1-9, italics added for emphasis).

Paul's earliest testimony in First Thessalonians clearly clashes with the gospel of Caesar. Paul was commissioned to proclaim the Gospel of God and was compelled to announce it with courage and without shame.<sup>19</sup> Since it opposed the Gospel of Caesar, Paul suffered much for being an evangelizer.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Paul never wavered in this mission to challenge the imperial propaganda:

<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different *gospel [euangelion]* — <sup>7</sup> not that there is another *gospel [euangelion]*, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the *gospel [euangelion]* of Christ.<sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a *gospel [euangelion]* contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a *gospel [euangelion]* contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!<sup>10</sup> Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.<sup>11</sup> For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the *gospel [euangelion]* that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin;<sup>12</sup> for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:6-12, italics added for emphasis).

For Paul, the one and only Gospel is about God's only begotten Son. Paul writes in the opening address to the Romans as follows:

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the *gospel [euangelion]* of God, <sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,<sup>3</sup> the *gospel [euangelion]* concerning his *Son*, who was descended from David according to the flesh<sup>4</sup> and was declared to be *Son of God* with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our *Lord*,<sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,<sup>6</sup> including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the *Lord* Jesus Christ (Rom 1:1-7, italics added for emphasis).

Since most of Paul's Letters were written during the reign of Nero (54-68 C.E.),<sup>21</sup> Paul's proclamation of the Gospel of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ as *Lord* and *Saviour* clearly defies the gospel of Caesar in general and Nero in particular. The abundant confessions of Jesus as "Son of God",<sup>22</sup> "Lord",<sup>23</sup> and "Saviour"<sup>24</sup> overtly repulsed the status and claims of Caesar, for they were titles normally attributed to the Emperor:

<sup>19</sup>Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a *Saviour*, the *Lord* Jesus Christ (Phil 3:19-20, italics added for emphasis).

The pre-Pauline Christological hymn found in the Letter to the Philippians is a good example of communal imperial resistance and defiance:

<sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:5-11, italics added for emphasis).

### Challenging Caesar's Peace

Another central message of imperial propaganda is the claim that Rome had brought about the Golden Age of prosperity and therefore established true peace for the whole world. Massive monuments of peace, such as the *Ara Pacis* (Altar of Peace), were built to honour Augustus and his successors all over the empire.<sup>25</sup> Coins were minted to proclaim the peace of Roman imperial order and establishment. The goddess Pax (peace) often appears on coins declaring and sanctioning the gift of *Pax Romana Eterna*.<sup>26</sup>

When Paul wrote First Corinthians around the year 55 C.E., Nero had just ascended the throne as the Emperor of Rome. Interestingly, Nero's reign (54-68 C.E.) was proclaimed and promulgated as the rebirth of the Golden Age of *peace*, prosperity and salvation of the Empire (*basileia*):

The golden age of untroubled *peace* is born again, and kindly Themis returns to earth freed from stain and rust. The happy times are ruled by a youth [Nero] who won the victory while still in his mother's arms. When he shall himself reign as a god ... *peace* will appear ... and clemency has broken in pieces the weapons of madness... Full *peace* will come upon us, a *peace* which ... shall bring back a second reign of Saturn (*Ecccl.* 1.33-99, italics added for emphasis).<sup>27</sup>

Paul's Gospel of Jesus Christ however challenged the good news of universal imperial peace and the Roman political slogan of *Pax Romana Eterna*. In First Thessalonians, Paul writes:

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you.<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.<sup>3</sup> When they say, "There is *peace* and *security*", then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape (I Thes 5:1-3, italics added for emphasis)!

Paul indicates that the day of the Lord is coming and that his *parousia* will shatter the false *peace* and *security* [*eirene* and *asphaleia*] of the Roman imperial establishment. Furthermore, Paul announced doom and destruction on the "rulers of this age" (I Cor 2:6-8; 15:24) and on the Roman imperial order, for the world is "passing away" (I Cor 7:29, 31). According to Paul, true peace cannot come from human conquest or from carnal desire but can only be realized in the alternative Christian community. "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). Various authors have keenly noticed that an anti-imperial challenge is found at the beginning and closing of every Pauline Epistle:<sup>28</sup>

- Grace to you and peace ... May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely (I Thes 1:1 and 5:23);
- Grace to you and peace ... The God of peace will be with you (Phil 1:2 and 4:9);
- Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Phlm 1:3);
- Grace to you and peace ... send him on his way in peace (I Cor 1:3 and 16:11);
- Grace to you and peace ... Live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you (II Cor 1:2 and 13:11);
- Grace to you and peace ... Peace be upon them, and mercy (Gal 1:3 and 6:16);
- Grace to you and peace ... The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you (Rom 1:7 and 16:20).

In summary, Paul's mission and message make better sense if they are interpreted as competing with the gospel of Caesar. Pauline terms and titles such as "Gospel", "peace", "Lord", and "Saviour", were commonly associated with imperial theology. Since these are terms that borrowed from and stand over against Roman imperial theology and are found on every page of the Pauline Epistles, they clearly challenged and directly defied Caesar's gospel and theology.<sup>29</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Many scholars today agree that only seven of the thirteen Letters are *definitely* Pauline (Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, I Thessalonians, and Philemon) while the rest are either *probably not* from Paul (II Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians) or *definitely not* from Paul (I and II Timothy and Titus).

<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup> Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2001); Richard Bauchham, "The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18", in *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the*



*Book of Revelation* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1993). The whole issue of January 2009 of the journal *Interpretation* focuses on "Revelation as a Critique of Empire". In this issue there are four major articles written by prominent scholars: Craig R. Koester, "Revelation's Visionary Challenge to Ordinary Empire"; David R. Barr, "John's Ironic Empire"; Warren Carter, "Accommodating Jezebel and Withdrawing John: Negotiating Empire in Revelation Then and Now"; Allen D. Callahan, "Babylon Boycott: The Book of Revelation". See also vanThanh Nguyen, "A Vision of Cosmic Transformation (Rv 21:1-5)", *The Bible Today* 46 (Nov/Dec 2008) 371-76.

<sup>4</sup> Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Order* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007); van Thanh Nguyen, "The Roman Empire and the New Testament", *New Theology Review* 21 (2 May 2008) 84-86.

<sup>5</sup> Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2004); John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire* (1997), 6. In the introduction of this edited book, Horsley makes a strong case that Paul was not only primarily opposing Judaism nor was he even intending to found a new religion called Christianity. According to Horsley, this type of interpretation is erroneous and anachronistic since the term "Christianity" had not been coined, let alone a religion called, "Christianity" (8).

<sup>7</sup> Dieter Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down", in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997) 148-57, here 148.

<sup>8</sup> Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire* (1997), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 88.

<sup>10</sup> Carter, *Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 83.

<sup>11</sup> Quotation taken from Jewett, "Corruption and Redemption", 27. For a complete text, see <http://www.theoi.com/Text/VirgilAeneid6.html>, accessed on 7 March 2009. The *Aeneid* was written by Virgil in the late first century B.C.E. (29-19 B.C.E.) and depicts the legendary story of Aeneas, a Trojan who travelled to Italy, where he became the ancestor of the Romans. The epic's purpose is to glorify traditional Roman virtues and legitimize the Julio-Claudian dynasty as rightful heirs of the gods and heroes of Rome and Troy.

<sup>12</sup> See Jewett, "Corruption and Redemption", 26-31; Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 89. Although written probably during the reign of Emperor Hadrian (c. 120 C.E.), it is noteworthy to mention Suetonius's *The Lives of the Caesars* when he writes about *The Life of Augustus* and tells how he was miraculously conceived of a human mother, Atia, but a divine father, Apollo (94.4). For full text of *The Life of Augustus*, see [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Augustus\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Augustus*.html), accessed 7 March 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from John D. Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007) 148. For a full text of this Priene inscription and explanations, see Craig Evans' article entitled, "Mark's Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Graeco-Roman Gospel", found on <http://www.craigaevans.com/Priene%20art.pdf>, accessed on 7 March 2009.

<sup>14</sup> For more Augustus' coins with the inscription DIVI F, see Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 91.

<sup>15</sup> Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down", in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, 148.

<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive study on the power of imperial cults, see S.R.F. Price, "Rituals and Power," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997) 47-71.

<sup>17</sup> Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2004) 17.

<sup>18</sup> Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 103.

<sup>19</sup> The word "gospel" appears 52 times in the seven authentic Letters of Paul.

<sup>20</sup> In Philemon verse 13, Paul tells us that he was imprisoned for the Gospel.

<sup>21</sup> Except for I Thessalonians, which was probably written at the end of the reign of Claudius in the early 50s, all the other authentic Pauline Letters were produced during Nero's reign.

<sup>22</sup> Rom 1:4, 9; 5:10; 8:3; I Cor 1:9; II Cor 1:19; Gal 2:20; 4:4, 6.

<sup>23</sup> The title "Lord" appears 184 times in Paul's authentic Letters: Romans (44x); I and II Corinthians (99x); Galatians (4x); Philippians (15x); I Thessalonians (24x); and Philemon (5x).

<sup>24</sup> While Jesus is referred to as "Saviour" only once in Philippians 3:20, the word "salvation" or "saved" appears 27 times.

<sup>25</sup> Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> For illustrations of Roman coins, see <http://www.romancoins.info/12C-JulioClaud.HTML#Augustus>, accessed 13 March 2009.

<sup>27</sup> This quotation comes from Calpurnius Siculus, a Roman poet who wrote seven pastoral *Eclogues*, probably when Nero was Emperor (54-68 C.E.). The quote is adapted from Jewett, "Corruption and Redemption", 30-31.

<sup>28</sup> Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 72-73.

<sup>29</sup> Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down", 148.

**Antonio Egiguren, OFM**

## ***Mission For All Times***

### **Introduction**

In the early hours of 16 November 1989 eight savagely assassinated human bodies were found lying under tropical palm trees on the green lawn of the campus of the *Universidad de Centro América* in El Salvador (UCA). One of them was that of the Rector, Ignacio Ellacuría, architect of the great transformation that made the tertiary institution an instrument, both scholarly and practical, for social transformation.<sup>1</sup> His work, both as an academic scholar and as a missionary priest, was powered by his profound conviction that any missionary task – be it that of a university, parish, diocese, Province of a religious order, convent or friary – needs to be aimed at social transformation, understood as the creation of humane living conditions for the poorest of the poor, otherwise these institutions risk becoming mere transmitters of empty ideologies.<sup>2</sup> Ignacio was simply following in the footsteps of Jesus, the first missionary sent by the Father into the world, who sought, through powerful words and actions, to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

From his followers Jesus demanded a change (*metanoia*) of heart and mind so as to articulate new human relationships based on “the service of the faith and the promotion, in society, of evangelic justice”.<sup>3</sup> This change of heart and mind was the condition for entering God's Kingdom. Pursuing Jesus' vision, his followers, coming together in community (what we call the Church), established a movement with the same goal of building the Kingdom of God and a community (Church) that would be its symbol and servant.<sup>4</sup> Mission proceeds, then, from a personal experience of ‘falling in love’ with this Jesus, who presents both a utopian project to create a new world and concrete personal demands – in effect, a consistent lifestyle. Thus one could say that mission is about a consistent lifestyle with power to transform individuals and societies. Mission, then, as that activity which seeks to establish the kingship of God by living out the very same life-style of Jesus of Nazareth, demands first of all a consistent personal life-style and an ecclesial action capable of transforming peoples, society, and the structures which oppress the poor.

This experiential encounter with the person of Jesus as the meaningful force that inspires people to carry out any missionary activity, demands also a new methodology in the reflection of missiology. The foundations of this methodology can be synthesized in the following elements which need to go hand in hand: pre-eminence of the historical reality, the realization of a historical praxis which liberates, both of these aspects need to be seen from the eyes of the oppressed and the poor. This is what happened in the early years of the missionary activity of the first Christians in Korea in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The first method was also applied by Ignacio Ellacuría. In the 1980's this Basque Jesuit missionary intellectual, born in Bilbao, transformed the Central American University Jose Simeón Cañas of El Salvador (UCA). With Ellacuría as rector of UCA, the university experienced a profound transformation; from being an education centre for the élite young aspiring to get degrees in order to gain access to places of power and control of the country, Ellacuría transformed the university into a centre in which the scientific research of the national reality (the scientific datum) was to be found in the history of the here and now of the national reality and of the people of El Salvador, and the results of the research were to be placed at the service of the transformation of society to benefit the oppressed ones.

In some of his many prophetic interventions, Ellacuría affirmed that if any ecclesiastical institution – or educational institution for that matter – parish, diocese, convent, province or even the Vatican, were not at the service of the social transformation, understood as the improvement and the humanization of the standard of living of the oppressed, it would risk transmitting pure ideology and benefit but a few privileged people.

A similar missionary praxis was also suggested by Francis of Assisi. Indeed, the book written by J. Hoeberichts “Franciscus en Islam” is a detailed analysis of the same methodology. J. Hoeberichts, during many years himself a Franciscan missionary in Pakistan, looks at Chapter XVI of Francis’ Rule of the year 1221 “on the Brothers who go between Saracens” and reads it in the context of a country with a Muslim majority.

The text reads as follows: “The Lord says: ‘behold, I am sending you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be therefore prudent as serpents and simple as doves’ (Mt 10:16). Therefore, any brother who by divine inspiration, desires to go among the Saracens and other non-believers should go with the permission of his minister and servant.... As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among [the Saracens and non-believers] in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and to confess that they are Christians. Another way is to proclaim the word of God when they see that it pleases the Lord, so that they believe in the all-powerful God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...”.

Hoeberichts, after describing in great detail the historical context in which Francis of Assisi wrote this particular Chapter of the Rule, goes on to analyze the intellectual rationale that justified the launching of a new crusade against Muslims as it appears in the written texts of the Popes Innocent III, Honorius III, and Gregory IX, and the great preacher of the crusades James of Vitry.

Hoeberichts is convinced that the quoted missionary chapter Francis wrote is the result of his own personal experience as he visited and encountered the Sultan. This personal experience was for Francis the reason that inspired him to write on the two ways of doing mission. Moreover, Hoeberichts is persuaded that Francis’ reason for venturing onto Muslim territory was not due so much to his eagerness to seek martyrdom — weakening the real prophetic meaning of the missionary journey of Francis — as to challenge the leaders of both the Christian and Muslim camps to seek first the goodness of God, to express their faith in God, origin of all that is good, no matter where the goodness of God may be found. Francis, as the son of a merchant — argues Hoeberichts — perfectly understood that the true reason behind the crusades to conquer the land of Jesus, more than an action motivated by faith, was Europe’s determination to snatch from the Muslims the profitable trade routes between Asia and Europe in order to control them.

Thus, after criticizing the arrogant and imperialistic attitude that the Church has shown on an institutional scale — because she has often let herself be manipulated by Europe’s imperialistic objectives and has not been able to evade or to distance herself from them, in spite of the many cultural, social and sanitary institutions she has been able to create; often regarded in the improperly called “mission territories” as just another subtle way of manipulation and control that benefited only the interests of the empire — Hoeberichts takes Francis’ model of mission as the most suitable. It is one which the Pakistani Muslims accept: “The brothers, when going by the world, that they do not get involved in discussions, on the contrary, that they may show they are subject to all by the love of God, live as Christians and only preach if they discern that it is the will of God”. We have so much to learn from other peoples and their religions! God who is only good, the ultimate good, is also present in other religions and cultures. Let us then use, as Arnulf Camps proposes, the Socratic maieutic method in our missionary praxis.

In what follows, I shall offer a brief overview of the three mission methods developed in the book, *True Confucians, Bold Christians: Korean Missionary Experience. A Model for the Third Millennium*.<sup>5</sup>

I begin with the kenotic model, as it was practiced by the first group of Korean Christians at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This necessarily connects them with the missionary method of accommodation used by Matteo Ricci, from whom the Korean Christians got their inspiration. Finally a brief mention of the *conquista* method of mission as it was carried out in Thailand.

### **The Experience of the Korean Christians (1784-1801)**

Quoting Emil Brunner, Lamin Sanneh begins his article, “Theology of mission”, with a powerful statement: “The Church lives by mission as fire lives by burning”.<sup>6</sup> Sanneh gives several interpretations of this image. Christian faith expressed in mission animates the life and thought of the believer and causes inner transformation. Mission is an activity of the Church in which the believer witnesses to the Kingdom Jesus had already inaugurated, but is not a means to bring the Kingdom.<sup>7</sup> The Church’s mission, right from the start, was conducted in a

cross-cultural setting, involving dialogue between Jew and Gentile, and in concrete geographical places, such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Cyprus and Libya. People who had been freed (Gal 5) by their faith continued Jesus' mission, accompanied by the creative Spirit of God. These people felt free to translate and express Jesus' life and message in other languages, using the cultural symbols and rituals available in the new environment. Jesus' followers created a social movement in which human relations and new social and economical structures were part of the Master's message and mission.

These views of Lamin Sanneh can rightly be applied also to the historical events that happened in Korea during the period 1784-1801. In the author's short historical overview of Christianity in Korea, the genuine intuition of a group of bold Christians about what to be missionary meant for them can be discerned. These Korean Christians, with no help from outside missionaries, guided only by a rather large literary production they were able to acquire from China for the period 1630-1784, understood the demands, both personal as well as a communitarian, Jesus placed upon his followers. These missionaries in their own land were persuaded that to follow Jesus was first of all about leading a consistent personal life that urges the transformation of social structures capable of humanizing human relationships and improving the standard of living of the oppressed and the poorest of the poor.

This genuine intuition appeared to be shaped by the personal history of the very protagonists, but more significantly by the Catechism that one of the leaders of the Christian community wrote. Jeong Yak-jong was the author of the Catechism and the title of the Catechism was *Chu-Gyo Yo-Ji* or *The Essentials of the Teachings of the Lord*. This important document was written between 1786-1794, and not in Chinese characters but in the Korean Alphabet.

The Catechism describes with clarity what the Christians understood and believed to be the central message of Jesus: the establishment of the Reign of God in the here and now. During the 16 years of the historical period to which the book refers, the nascent Korean Christian community wrote one of the most beautiful, amazing and at the same time painful pages of the history of the Church. Starting from a deep religious experience and moved by the desire to reach moral perfection (True Confucians) which they nurtured through the reading of the classic Confucian texts, and in their eagerness to find truth the Korean Christians were found by the Lord, who is always closer to us than we are to ourselves.

The lives of those Korean Christians were completely transformed with the reading of two important books that Matteo Ricci (Italian Jesuit missionary in China 1582-1610) had written earlier in Chinese. The first book *De Amititia*, narrates the experience with a God who is like a friend, is near to us, is kind and affectionate, affection that becomes also the source and inspiration for all human relations when these are characterized by tolerance, human etiquette, and human compassion. The second book was *Tianzhu Shiyi: On the True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. In this book Mateo Ricci appreciates the original intuition of the Confucians about God, when they refer to Him in terms of Heaven, Supreme King, Principle, etc., and showed Him respect and devotion in their daily lives through the practice of what Confucians culturally referred to as *Filial Piety* or *Filial Devotion*.

The meaning of the term *Filial Piety* expressed the personal and social relations of Korean society. The basic concept of *filial piety* was structured around the principle of *loyalty, faithfulness*, which was expressed in the five levels of human relations: *loyalty* to (1) *Heaven* (= King, Ruler);<sup>8</sup> *loyalty* (2) to the Ancestors, expressed in a very detailed manner though the offering of ritual sacrifices; *loyalty* (3) to the parents and the elders; *loyalty* (4) to the husband; *loyalty* (5) to the friend.

Moreover, in *Tianzhu Shiyi*, Ricci severely attacked the misconceptions of the Buddhists, Taoists and shamanists. He also explained that Christianity centred in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and in the last chapter proposed a government model — which caught the attention of the Korean intellectuals — of the Catholic Church.<sup>9</sup> There were many other books that the Korean Christians read and discussed.<sup>10</sup>

In the years previous to 1784<sup>11</sup> Korea was characterized by great internal divisions of a political and intellectual nature. Overwhelming poverty also reigned, which to a great extent was the result, on the one hand, of the corruption of the dominant political classes and officials of the public administration, the *yangban*, and on the other of a perverse administration of the human and natural resources, particularly bad land distribution.

In this state of things, the intellectual class had also found itself to be divided and holding opposing views regarding the causes of the political turmoil and the ways of solving the social problems. On one side stood the *old guard*, more interested in maintaining their grip on political power and preventing other capable people from gaining access to office than in serving the needs of the citizens. The *literati*, intellectuals, belonging to this group, held strongly to the Confucian ideas of the reformer Chu Hsi, who saw in the person of the king and his governors, the inspiration and measure of the social and personal moral norm.

On the other hand, the leaders of a new movement called *Shil Hak (New School)*, integrated with great thinkers with encyclopaedic knowledge, wanted to be permitted access to office and to use their skills to make the lives of the peasants more bearable. These intellectuals pleaded for a return to the classic Confucian thought of Confucius, Mencius pressing for a return to the figure of the King-Sage, who by his irreproachable conduct could become the source and inspiration of the highest moral demands capable of transforming individuals and society, and leading to the improvement of the life of the oppressed. The will of such a King-Sage would, in addition, be also more easily accepted as the will of Heaven. This second group of intellectuals pleaded for a total reform of the government structures and political administration, the strict implementation of the rules to enter office in view of acquiring the nation's most brilliant and capable brains able to answer the urgent national necessities, mainly regarding industrial and agricultural modernization. It was urgent to free the masses from hunger and misery.

No doubt these intellectuals of the *Shil Hak (New School)* were inspired by what was happening in Europe, where the recent developments in science and technology and the use of new methods in agriculture had generated an enormous progress in the well-being of the population.

However, still within this group of intellectuals of the new school, a smaller group arose, whose members were in addition interested in the study of the Western religion. *The History of the Life of Jesus* by Julio Alleni had captivated them in such a way that it became impossible for them to escape its attraction. The Catechism to which I referred above was indeed the answer that this group of Christian intellectuals, in a communitarian way, gave to the call of Jesus who spoke about the grain which falls into the earth, dies and produces much fruit (*cf.* Jn 12:24). Thus, this community of believers became the germ of transformation of the suffering and humiliated Korean society. This first generation of Christians — who were not only intellectuals but also belonged to the upper class, some even belonged to the royal family — by reading the life of Jesus and other books, were firmly persuaded that the social evils which afflicted the masses of people could not be addressed only by means of science and technology. They found it was necessary to make a place for God, so that He also would become a protagonist in the process of the needed personal and social transformation. In addition this God was for them, a personal being, a judge, also of the king, before Whom all will have to render an account of their actions at the Last Judgment.

As it is not possible to go into the life and martyrdom of the first Korean Christian community in great detail here, I shall only refer to some of the main points of their theological intuition; the main social issues and what contribution they offered to their fellow citizens.

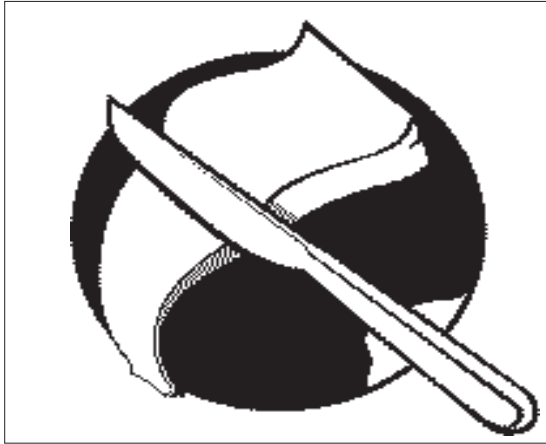
### **1. God is Supreme and is the Creator of Heaven and Earth**

The Catechism of Jeong Yak-jong Agustín begins by affirming the existence of a personal and Creator God. The greatness of God is mainly shown in the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God. God has made them His children; therefore they are equal in dignity. To declare the equality of man and woman was in itself a revolutionary provocation in those times. In addition, the Catechism affirms that human reason can prove the existence of God.

God is more than the concept of Heaven of the classic Confucianism, capable, yes, of inspiring a desire for moral perfection in man, but not enough to invite human beings into an affectionate personal relationship with God; not enough to awaken compassion for the oppressed; not enough to urge all into making the utmost effort to remedy the social evils. The Confucian concept of *Heaven* inspired individuals to attain moral perfection, while the God the Korean Christians discovered invited them, in addition to the necessity of a high moral standard, to communitarian prophetic action in favour of the oppressed. Chapter 35 of the Catechism narrates

the life of Jesus, especially his compassion towards the poor, the sick and sinners; the miracles reflect the action of Jesus, in favour of them, culminating in his passion, death and Resurrection.

The historical life of Jesus was such a surprise for the Korean intellectuals who read it, that they could do no less than imitate him. With such clear ideas about God and the concrete demands for daily life that emanated from the life-style of Jesus, the Christians did not hesitate to re-interpret the meaning of the concept of *Filial Piety*. The first to undergo the consequences of this transformation in the minds and hearts of the Christians was the figure of the king. The king as a creature of God will have to respond for his actions before Him at the Last Judgment. Heaven and hell exist with which all will be rewarded or punished, because the soul of man is immortal, created in the image and likeness of God. All the actions of the king as well as of his officials, who pass laws and norms that affect



the daily life of the citizens, are written in the Book of Life, and of all of them will have to give an account to God at the moment of death and the Last Judgment.

The person who developed these ideas in a depth that astonishes us today, was Jeong Yak-yong John Baptist the younger brother of the author of the Catechism. Jeong John Baptist was not martyred during the great massacre of year 1801, like the author of the Catechism. Jeong Yak-yong John Baptist, due to his close relationship with the king and because he was held in great respect on account of his sharp, encyclopaedic mind, was not martyred but sent into exile instead. During his 18 years in exile, he wrote 300 works on all the scientific disciplines. His most important reflections are contained in his famous Trilogy Encyclopaedia: “On good government”, “On the reform of the administration”, and “On the political and legal responsibilities to which public servants must be held”, including the king. These texts are carefully studied in Korean universities even today. Jeong Yak-yong John Baptist brought to Korea concepts such as democracy, social justice, civic responsibility of the political class, etc., which even in Europe were still in gestation after the French Revolution of 1789. Based on the historical life of Jesus, the Christians began to put into practice an ecclesial model, (which in my thesis I termed *transforming kenotic method*), which was soon confronted by the ruling institutions. The rulers mercilessly persecuted these ideas and the people who held them. This culminated in the physical elimination of the first generation of Christians in 1801.

### ***God who reveals himself as kenosis in Jesus***

Confucianism tried to respond to the question: what can be done to make man abandon his selfish tendencies and enter into a dynamic of social generosity. For Confucius, then, the perfect man is one that possesses *Jen* (humanity) consisting in the adjustment of the personal will to the will of Heaven. For a Christian, according to the Catechism of Jeong Yak-jong, a generous man is one that in addition to the Confucian principle of *Jen* harmonizes his human nature with the principle of universal order and so is able, with his words and example, to become like Jesus, who showed his divinity in the act of washing the feet of his Disciples, and by doing so is capable of transforming others, thus, creating communion between Heaven and Earth. This is what the Catechism refers to as the “Kingdom of God”. In this process Jesus is the model to follow. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. For a Christian the pursuit of the example of the historical Jesus is a task that cannot be avoided.

How did the Christians live these convictions in their daily life? What concrete steps did they take to accelerate the building of the Kingdom of God in Korea? I shall refer to two areas of major concern in those times: establishing a firm basis on which to build a new and modern society, and the cultural concern.

## **2. Acceleration of the formation of a modern society.**

Together with the group of Christians, there were also many others schools of thought that arose during the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their common denominator was a generalized displeasure at the social and economic policies of the Kings of the Yi Dynasty which caused the masses of the people a great deal of suffering, poverty, and misery. The kings had altogether diverged from the Confucian concept of King-Sage. The general atmosphere of society was marked by corruption, the cruel abuse of the people by the dominant class, generalized poverty and hunger due to a bad distribution of workable land, strict division of the social classes, in which lower ranking jobs were held in disdain and common people could not even enter the city gates. Such a desperate situation demanded an answer, and the first generation of Christians tried to give one. These are some of the steps they took.

### ***A Message of Equality***

The group of Christians, starting with the concept of a Creator God, established equality among people as the cornerstone for social reform. In the Catechism it is stated that the equality of people must be expressed and shown by actions of love as these appear in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. Christians constantly repeated the refrain: “we all are sons and daughters of the same God”. A butcher as such, had no social status and could not enter the cities. One who became a Christian confessed as he was being put to death: “I have never been a person, I had never been considered one until I entered this religion”. People in higher social positions also applied this principle of equality by refusing to marry people of a higher social status and willingly married into the lower classes. The Catechism again emphasizes that human dignity does not come from the social rank one may have in this world or from fame, or money; not even from the moral virtues a person may have been endowed with, but from the fact that we all are sons and daughters of God.

### ***Promotion of the dignity of the Woman***

There are many studies that analyze the place of the woman in society during this historical time. The principle of the *Filial Piety* of the espousal fidelity was understood in fact as a principle that obliged the woman to be faithful and loyal to her husband but did not bind the man with the same responsibilities. Women, from childhood were educated to serve men. After birth, boys were wrapped in blankets and placed in cradles, whereas baby girls were placed on the ground. Women did not have their own proper name and were always called in relation to her child: “the mother of...”. At the end of the Yi Dynasty, there was already a great movement of feminine emancipation but this was still more remarkable in the group of Christians. In the figure of Jesus Christian women found the spiritual inspiration for their emancipatory activity. Based on the principle of equality, Christians did not hesitate to encourage women to devote themselves to teaching the Catechism, explain the Bible, preside over liturgical gatherings, do charity work and even write books. Women were the ones who initiated the translation of the works of Matteo Ricci into the popular vernacular using the Korean alphabet. Women played a pre-eminent role in helping the first Chinese priest Chu Wen-mo, during the five years of his pastoral activity in Korea. Women established communities of common life, centres of education for poor women and charity workshops. Some of the women still chose the life of perfect chastity, even though they were married in public (a woman could not marry). Women opened the first residences to welcome the orphaned children of martyrs. Women did not have any problem either in giving their lives for the faith during the time of the great slaughter of 1801.

### ***Promotion of the dignity of the minor***

The concept of the *Filial Piety* placed on children the obligation of fidelity to their parents and the elder in the family. Minors could be punished and mistreated by their elders for failing to comply with the norms for offering sacrifices to the ancestors or for neglecting such practices, or not showing deep enough signs of mourning on the passing of an elder, and the civil authorities could not get involved in these family matters. The Catechism again, starting from the love of Jesus for children, establishes that the concept of filial piety obliges parents to respect their children, to love

them and to treat with them with affection. The children, particularly during periods of persecution, served as messengers between imprisoned Christians and their families outside.

### 3. Creation of a New Culture

The creation of a modern, just, dynamic and equal society with high moral standards was without doubt an ideal that united many different intellectual schools of *Shil Hak* (New Learning). Through the literature that arrived from China, Korean intellectuals knew that a better administered society in which people lived up to high moral standards was possible. These same books also made them aware of the fact that there was a different world beyond China, namely Europe, where a majority Christian society had been capable of harmonizing Gospel values and human and social development. To achieve this goal of harmonizing Gospel values and human and social transformation, Korean Christians were convinced that some groundwork was needed. I shall briefly refer to three areas of attention: need to activate the use of the Korean Alphabet, to engage in charity work, and to create new political structures and just laws.

#### ***Use of Han Geul: National Alphabet***

So that culture can function as a thrust for change and social transformation, it is necessary that it be accessible to the greatest number of people possible. In this regard, Christians joined in the daily popular uproar that insisted on making use of the Korean Alphabet (*Han Geul*). At that period government officials and intellectual groups used the Chinese characters for official texts. The mass of the people did not understand them and for those who could read Chinese, its content seldom went beyond the boundaries of Chinese society. As a reaction against the officialdom that employed Chinese characters as a tool to deepen class consciousness further an eagerness spread throughout the nation to use its own Korean alphabet. *Han Geul* was used in popular literature, for writing satirical comedies, poetry and popular picturesque works of subtle criticism against the system. Folksongs and ancestral legends were being written more and more in *Han Geul*, regarded of low quality, even vulgar, by the intellectual classes. Christians used *Han Geul* to write their first Catechism, their prayer books, hymns and devotional novenas. In this regard it is important to mention the work of some women, like Yu Lutgarda and Mrs Kweon who translated some of the works of the Jesuits into *Han Geul*. Mrs Kweon even wrote essays in Korean of an educational character aimed at clarifying some contradictions between Christian thought and Confucianism.

#### ***Social and Charitable work***

Official court records testify to the interrogations, now kept in the archives of Seoul, where reference is made to these social and charity activities in great detail and how some women confessed to have donated huge economic resources from their own personal account for the benefit of the poor, because Jesus did it. Ladies of the aristocracy made numerous donations to the most abandoned, fully aware that this could lead to prison for them and even to martyrdom, as actually happened.

#### ***Urgency to create new political structures and just laws***

The king, along with bureaucrats, exerted a sovereign and absolute control over all the aspects of the political, social and economic life of the nation. The Christian intellectuals, invoking the superiority of God over the king, clearly and almost defiantly emphasized the final responsibility of the king and his role, of which he would have to give an account at the Last Judgment. Jeong Jak-yong affirmed, as mentioned above, that the people were the maximum authority in a modern and balanced nation. The king and his officials were to serve this people, not to rule over them.

### 4. Neither Conquest nor accommodation

The kenotic model of mission lived and applied by the Korean intellectuals and the first generations of Christians, without help from foreign missionaries, is compared in the thesis with two other models of doing mission. First, the conquest model, applied by the Portuguese



and Spanish missionaries in Thailand during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and second, the model of accommodation applied by Matteo Ricci in China between 1582-1610.

Without pretending to offer a ruthless criticism of the *conquest model*, it is necessary to affirm that it was the result of the self-understanding of the Church at the time. The Church saw herself identified with the world: to be a world citizen, it was necessary to be of the Church. Someone living in the world could make the transition through the Church from the world to the Kingdom of God, which the Church believed was the Church in its perfect form.

The Church offered all the necessary mediations for this transition to take place. This self-understanding of the Church had some very concrete consequences as far as mission praxis was concerned: the *conquest method* of missionary praxis was not an option but a must.

Unlike Latin America, in Asia the Church and the missionaries found very sophisticated philosophical systems and religions deeply rooted in the popular thought and culture. In Thailand, for instance, Buddhism had created a total identification between being Buddhist and being Thai. Indeed the missionaries who went to Thailand admired the religious practices, the high moral principles and the life in absolute poverty of the Buddhist monks; the missionaries even began to engage in a dialogue with them. The problem was that the dialogue was done from Europe, and from the theological convictions of Europe. For the missionaries it was obvious that Christianity and the Catholic Church were the only way to salvation. The identification between the missionary and the European mercenary, who used his military and economic power to make his rights and privileges prevail and also to protect the missionary, caused Thais to perceive the evangelical message as oppressive, arrogant and antisocial.

The three most remarkable characteristics of this type of conquest mission can be summarized in the following way: 1) the mission agents were missionary priests mostly belonging to religious orders, too involved in temporal business (something which Propaganda Fide wanted to put an end to in 1622, the year of its creation); 2) enclave structure of the mission, which *de facto* meant that the neophytes ceased being Thai and made a transition to a new legal and cultural situation in which they were not totally European citizens either; and 3) Portuguese and Spanish missionaries disputed whether to make the neophytes belong to Portugal or to Castille. This situation worsened with the union of the two Crowns in 1584. In not a few cases these disputes reached the point of carrying out the selective murder of leaders, particularly after the arrival of the French missionaries as of 1620. The Consequence of all this is that up to this day the Catholic Church in Thailand continues to be considered as foreign and an ally of the economic and military superpowers of the West. Thais still call Christian churches “*Watt Farang*” (foreign or French Church).

The Reformation brought a new movement in the Catholic Church. In this new process the Jesuits carried out a very important work, namely, the structuring of higher education in the universities. Against this background Matteo Ricci appeared (1552-1610) who tried to enter into dialogue with the culture and religions of China. Ricci was the one who introduced the Renaissance culture to China and by translating the nine canonical books of Confucianism into Latin introduced China to Europe. The great mentor of the *method of accommodation* of Matteo Ricci was Alessandro Valignano, General Visitor of the Jesuits for all the missions in Asia.

Valignano was certainly not a saint. In its youth he killed a companion for which he had to pay with seven years of prison. He spent some time in Japan but he did not leave many friends behind there either, neither among the Portuguese Jesuits nor among the Franciscans. Nevertheless, Valignano established the main lines of mission praxis that were more in synchrony with the changing ideas of Europe. Valignano demanded that missionaries learn the local languages.<sup>12</sup> He also demanded that the Jesuits open seminaries for the formation of the local clergy.<sup>13</sup> In China, Valignano and Ricci affirmed that the Confucian moral was compatible with Christian moral teachings, and that both religions could work together to eradicate superstitious religions such as Buddhism, Taoism and Shamanism.

For the personal profile of a missionary arriving in China, Valignano and Ricci affirmed the necessity of an excellent intellectual preparation in all fields of knowledge, mainly mathematics, astronomy, geography, watch making, etc., because these were the areas of knowledge in which the Chinese were mostly interested. They were convinced that the passage to the faith could only be made through scientific dialogue. In this context, Matteo Ricci accommodated

the Chinese world: he learned its language, at first he dressed like a Buddhist monk and shaved his head, but he soon realized that the Chinese officials held them in low esteem so Ricci decided to dress like the Chinese scholars of the time. Ricci engaged in dialogue with the Confucian, Buddhist and Tao leaders. He baptised some Chinese scholars and even allowed them to continue offering sacrifices to the ancestors and the statue of Confucius.

However, Ricci, a child of the Council of Trent which interpreted in a restrictive way the old patristic saying *extra ecclesia nulla salus*, never came to recognize in the religions with which he engaged in dialogue, the presence of God and that these religions too were a way leading to salvation. Ricci, who introduced the first world map into China and subtly criticized the Chinese for considering themselves to be the centre of the world (*Zhong Guo = Middle Kingdom*), was himself unable to escape from the concept that Rome was the centre of the world and Christianity the religion considered to be the true one. Nevertheless, compared with the method of conquest used in Thailand, mission with Ricci's pen constituted a qualitative change of unexpected consequences for the future of the mission of the Church in Korea during the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century of which I have already spoken above.

### Conclusion

I again return to the three sources of inspiration mentioned at the beginning of this article: Hoeberichts, who saw in Chapter XVI of the Rule of Saint Francis the mission method *par excellence*; Ellacuría who envisioned in that method the thrust for personal and social transformation that would lead to the creation of a new humanism capable of restoring dignity to the oppressed; and the kenotic method applied by the Korean Christian missionaries, who in dialogue with their own Confucian culture found in the appeal of the Gospel the inspiration to move into a more radical praxis of mission in order to create the reality of the “earth and new heavens” (cf. Rv 21:1).

We are not short of challenges: globalization is, in fact, one more instrument of oppression of the masses, it makes the rich richer and smaller in number, while the poor who are more numerous have less and less. The irony is that the neo-liberal economic model that sustains globalization started from nations that claim to be Christian and violently impose their model in the world. It is the new *conquista* carried out with the fallacy of making the world stick to what we call the values of “the Christian West”. Manuel Castells, in his trilogy “Network Society”, “The Power of Identity” and “End of Millennium” makes a detailed analysis of the globalization phenomenon. These globalizing and global policies are throwing millions of emigrants onto our streets, with the well known consequences of a generalization of poverty, high criminality, and cultural tensions to mention but a few. Economic globalization and the interests that sustain it have already destroyed the natural resources and the wealth of the planet to the point of no-return. Globalization has ruined democracy, because now we are governed by economic and military institutions — with the logistical support of the great companies of mass media — whose unelected leaders are not known to us and yet control everything. We live in a world of terror, in which State terrorism is baptized as defence of the legitimate principles of the State (forgetting that most of the States in the Western world have been built on terror, war, and the demonization of difference) while violent opposition to the established order is baptized as cheap and reactionary terrorism.

International Organizations such as the UN have been totally disarmed of their persuasion capacity, because they have been forced to act in the interests of the great superpowers. A single culture is wanted, a single language: in short, a return to the construction of the tower of Babel. Anything that is out of this scheme is blatantly called terrorism. To this it is necessary to add the voices of millions of people anywhere in the world who demand the acceptance, or at least not outright condemnation, of alternative styles and the re-definition of the place of the woman in



society and in the Church. We could continue to make the picture ever darker.

These are some of the questions that come to my mind. Ellacuría would ask us the following: who, as a Catholic University with much power in our hands and the capability to influence society, are we serving? From the image of Jesus washing the feet of his Disciples, an image dear to Francis of Assisi, and also to the nascent Korean Christian community, we could outline three attitudes for our missionary praxis:

### ***Kenosis as Exodus***

This means to leave the structures of power. If we cannot do it, then Ellacuría would challenge us to put our power at the service of the oppressed. For the Korean Christians, *kenosis* as exodus meant to use their intellectual formation, personal prestige, social status and their economic assets in the service of the oppressed and the poorest of the poor. Their faith in the absolute Lordship of God over the authority of the king compelled them to live a consistent life-style following the life of the historical Jesus. They resisted the temptation to make use of political pressure and chose instead to commit themselves body and soul to the service of the oppressed. The public manifestations against the political authorities when these pass laws that can be seen as “morally” unacceptable often reveal our clinging to power and our capacity of manipulation that can hardly be seen in the One who washes the feet of the disciples.

### ***Kenosis as incarnation-inculturation***

This means, *inter alia* that one lives, and coexists with the world and its surroundings as a given moment of grace and opportunity. When Francis went among the Saracens, he shared his life with them: neither criticizing, nor judging them, nor cornering anyone, nor speaking evil of anyone: but simply living together and being able to recognize the good God *does and speaks* in the here and now of a given historical moment. For the Korean Christians, incarnation meant to dialogue with their national culture: a dialogue carried out not from theological or teological superiority, but from a genuine willingness and desire that the oppressed may live better lives, where the people of the poorer classes can have dignity. The incarnation must occur within a culture, learning the language of the people (and not teaching Latin to people to turn them to Christianity later) and living and sharing their joys, hopes and sorrows. Never should a sacred text of any religion nor the linguistic and artistic culture or its expressions be demonized.

### ***Kenosis as personal and social transformation***

All the above demands personal and social transformation, a change, *metanoia*, which needs to be translated into social, political and economic structures, policies, also in passing just laws and religious attitudes that redeem the oppressed from their daily martyrdom. The fact that almost 60 per cent of the faithful of the Catholic Church have to subsist on less than one euro per day, or that half of the faithful are women who as yet have not been given any role of leadership within the Church, or the fact that millions of Christians do not have access to the Sunday Eucharistic (a necessary sacrament for a Christian community to be considered church) because there are no ordained ministers, or the fact that there are many ethnic groups within the Church that will never be able to produce a single priest because he cannot attain the required intellectual formation the seminary system demands of candidates, added to the reality of multiple and different religions, are some of the pending tasks in which personal and social transformation is urgent.

The lay church that the Korean Christians established at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in which they even dared to ordain ministers to celebrate the Eucharist, their willingness and readiness to dialogue with the cultural and social surroundings, the call of Jesus they felt in their guts urging them — by the compassion of Jesus — to transform the lives of the most unfortunate and oppressed in their society can still be for us today the way to carry out our missionary praxis.

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### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> This does not imply diminishing or denigrating the meaning of mission as proclamation of Jesus' Good News to all people. For more detailed information on the University as well as on the personality of Ignacio Ellacuría, see Charles J. Beirne, S.J., *Jesuit Education and Social Change in El Salvador*, New York/London: Garland, 1996. Jon

Sobrinho, *The Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrinho, *Fé y justicia*. Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1999, 50-51.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Father Kolvenbach to the Whole Society of Jesus on 24 January 2000, quoting from the “Normas Complementarias”, n. 245, 1 and 2 (my translation).

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Amaladoss, S.J., “Le royaume, but de la mission”, in *Spiritus* 36, 1995, 291-304.

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Egiguren Iraola, OFM, *True Confucians, Bold Christians: Korean Missionary Experience. A Model for the Third Millennium*, Rodopi 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Lamin Sanneh, “Theology of mission”, in David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians*, 555.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

<sup>8</sup> In this article I am not going to enter into the analysis that I do in the thesis, on the ideological transformation which took place around the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the Confucian reformer Chu His — as it was interpreted by the Korean scholars — who thwarted the original notion of the classic Confucian concept of obedience to the Sky — which allowed the individual to give priority to his personal conscience — with the almost total identification of Heaven with the will of the ruler. This subtle transformation meant the abolition of the personal conscience as the place for making moral decisions and the absolute rule of the monarch who exercised his power through very well structured State administrators called *yangban*.

<sup>9</sup> That is to say, a strong authority, the Pope, who once chosen from among the wisest and morally irreproachable men, exerted absolute moral authority, who as he did not have descendants, being celibate, did not leave behind conflicts of interests frequent among the descendants of kings who dispute on how to distribute the goods and power.

<sup>10</sup> Such as *The Life of Our Lord* written by Julio Alleni; *The 15 Mysteries of the Rosary* by Gaspar Ferreira; *Dissertation On the Substance of the Soul* by Nicholas Longobardi (the one who succeeded Matteo Ricci as the Superior of the Jesuits in China); *The Seven Virtues* by Diego de Pantoja; *Spiritual Admonitions of Saint Theresa* by Jacques Rho; *Beginning and Development of the Christian Faith* by Adam Schall; *On the Way of Good Governance of a Family* by Alfonso Vagnoni, and so an endless list of publications of all sorts, without forgetting the first world map by Matteo Ricci (looking at it many Chinese were utterly flabbergasted, because they hardly had news of the great discoveries that took place after 1500), the new mathematical theorems, the latest methods to calculate the occurring of solar and lunar eclipses, the measurement of the globe, etc. All this cultural wealth of the Renaissance was introduced into China and through it to Korea.

<sup>11</sup> Year in which Yi Seung-hun Peter, the first of the group of intellectuals, was baptised in Beijing’s Northern Church. Yi Seung-hun, after returning to Seoul, baptised his colleagues. He also appointed the first group of “priests” with the mandate to celebrate the Eucharist and preside over liturgical celebrations. In the same year the Portuguese Franciscan Tertiary Alexander de Gauvea — a great astronomer and mathematician and member of the Real Academy of Sciences of Lisbon — was appointed Bishop of Beijing.

<sup>12</sup> Then something not very frequent, since missionaries often would teach their European languages to the neophytes. This was indeed the enclave mentality which I have mentioned earlier.

<sup>13</sup> The Jesuits soon had Japanese and Chinese priests, a lesson which it took other religious orders several centuries to learn.



**Terence Farias, SJ**

## ***Our Ministry and Interreligious Dialogue***

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### **Introduction**

**O**n 12 March 2000, the Holy Father, John Paul II, in a public function at the Vatican, in a dramatic gesture of humility, asked pardon from the world, and from God, for the sins of the Church during the past millennium. This gesture was part of the celebrations of the Jubilee Year. Among the sins he mentioned, one regarded the relationship of the Church with the believers of other religions. He acknowledged that the Church had not always acted in a just manner with them during the last millennium.

When one is sorry for one's sins it shows that one wants to change one's ways for the better. So when the Church is sorry for the way she sometimes treated people of other faiths in the past, it means that she wants to change her ways, and bring them more in line with the values of the Gospel and the example of Jesus. This gesture of the Pope perhaps would not have been there if it were not for the special grace which the Church received at Vatican II – the grace of inter-religious dialogue, in which the Church realized that people of other faiths are not competitors with Christians, rather they are collaborators, both called to work together towards building up the Kingdom of God. It may not be wrong to say that this grace has not yet been sufficiently understood and appropriated by the members of the Church.

### **Religious Plurality in the World**

Religious plurality is a fact in the modern world, which is brought to our notice more and more. Of the about six billion people in this world, Christians form about 33%. Of that figure, Catholics count for 18 % and other Christians 15%. Muslims number 17%, Hindus 13%, Buddhists 7% and Jews 0.5%. There are also others who follow Traditional Religions, like Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Baha'ism, and Shintoism. What meaning and what opportunity does this rich ethnic cultural and religious pluralism that characterizes God's world today have for our lives and for our mission of evangelization? And how do we respond to the racism, cultural prejudice, religious fundamentalism and intolerance that mark so much of today's world?

### **The Church and Interreligious Dialogue**

The Church, in Vatican II, encourages all to move beyond prejudice and bias, whether historical, cultural, social or theological, in order to cooperate wholeheartedly with all men and women of good will in promoting peace, justice, harmony, human rights and respect for all of God's Creation. This is to be done especially through dialogue with those inspired by religious commitment, or who share a sense of transcendence that opens them to universal values. "The Church, therefore, urges her sons (and daughters) to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture" (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 2). Speaking of our relations with the Muslims the Council said: "Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, (and women) let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values" (*ibid.*, n. 3).

Pope John Paul II, both in his teaching and personal example, promoted interreligious dialogue in an eminent way. He insisted that dialogue is not a tactical move of self-interest, but "is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills" (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 56). Due to this activity of the Spirit, other religions "constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and to acknowledge

the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all" (*ibid.*, n. 56). In his Pastoral Visits to different countries, he made it a point to meet and address the leaders of other religions and thus established a rapport with them and built a fund of good will.

### **Meaning of Interreligious Dialogue**

It is a fact that in history, sometimes religions, including Christianity, have played divisive, exploitative and conflictual roles. In this context, dialogue seeks to develop the unifying and liberating potential of all religions, thus showing the relevance of religion to human well-being, justice and world peace. Because of modern communications, travel facilities and migration, our world has become a global village and so we need to relate to people of other religions positively, because they have become our neighbours. The common elements of our religious heritages and our human concerns force us to establish ever closer ties based on universally accepted ethical values. Dialogue is a positive activity in its own right, having its own requirements and dignity and is never to be made a strategy to elicit conversions. In today's world to be religious is to be interreligious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement after Vatican II, in a world of religious pluralism.

Our contact and interaction in dialogue with believers of other religions help us to respect the plurality of religions as the human response to God's salvific work in peoples and cultures. It makes us realize that God, who wants all people to be saved, leads believers of all religions to the harmony of the Reign of God in ways known to him alone. His spirit is in continuous dialogue with them. "Interreligious dialogue at its deepest level is always a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity".<sup>1</sup> Interreligious dialogue therefore is our cooperation with God's ongoing dialogue with humanity by which we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God Himself. It is therefore a work desired by God, an integral element of the Church's evangelizing mission, which finds expression in our ministry.

Further, dialogue helps us to be conscious of the plurality of spiritual experiences in diverse religions. It helps us to recognize that these religions are graced with an authentic experience of the self-communication of the divine Word and of the saving presence of the divine Spirit. With love and conviction we share our experience of Jesus Christ, the uniquely concrete revelation of the divine Word and the universally significant outpouring of the divine Spirit, with our sisters and brothers of other religions, for "we are all pilgrims setting out to find God in human hearts".<sup>2</sup>

We are very much aware that the world, in which we live and work, is a world in which the problems of injustice, exploitation and destruction of the environment have taken on global dimensions. Unfortunately religions have also been responsible for these sinful elements. Hence our commitment to promote justice, peace, human rights and the protection of the environment has to be made in collaboration with the believers of other religions. We believe that, just as religions can be misused for negative purposes, so also because of their liberating potential, they can and indeed should be used, through interreligious collaboration, for positive purposes to create a more humane world. Jesus focused on the human person as the centre of religious beliefs and practices. Hence commitment to integral human liberation, especially of the poor, becomes the meeting point of world religions in interreligious dialogue. "Christians will join hands with all men and women of good will and work together in order to bring about a more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served".<sup>3</sup>

### **Basis for Interreligious Dialogue**

For any dialogue, for any collaboration with people of other faiths, we need a common basis, something that will bring us together and motivate us to cooperate in a common venture. What is it? The common values that we have, the common vision for the world which different religions have form this firm basis. In the past unfortunately we have focused our attention on what separated us and what divided us from the believers of other religions. But now, Vatican II exhorts us to focus our attention on what is common to us and what unites us, of course without denying the fact that we do have differences.

The Council points out the fact that all men and women have the same origin and destiny,

and thus form but one community, and also have the same questions in their minds regarding the meaning of life, and this fact forms a strong basis for interreligious dialogue: “All men (and women) form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share in a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men (and women)....

Men (and women) look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men (and women) are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behaviour, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?” (*Nostra Aetate*, n. 1).

“We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men (and women) are created in God’s image. Man’s (and woman’s) relation to God the Father and their relation to their fellowmen (and fellow-women), are so dependent on each other that the Scripture says ‘he who does not love, does not know God’” (*ibid.*, n. 5).

Vatican II itself, in this spirit, points out to some of the values we Christians have in common with some of the World Religions:

*Hinduism*: “In Hinduism men (and women) explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love” (*ibid.*, n. 2).

*Buddhism*: “Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which men can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help” (*ibid.*, n. 2).

*Islam*: “The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men (women). They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they worship Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the Day of Judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting” (*ibid.*, n. 3).

*Judaism*: “Sounding the depths of the mystery which is the Church, this sacred Council remembers the spiritual ties which link the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham.... The Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by Way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant”.

“Likewise, the Church keeps ever before her mind the words of the Apostle Paul about his kinsmen: ‘they are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ’ (Rom 9:4-5) the son of the Virgin Mary. She is mindful, moreover, that the Apostles, the pillars on which the Church stands, are of Jewish descent, as are any of those early disciples who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world” (*ibid.*, n. 4).

John Paul II, in his ministry, stressed the fact that dialogue is based on the common paternity of God as well as on the universal presence of the Spirit.

In his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, he invited the attention of the Church to the person of God the Father, by whom Jesus Christ was sent and to whom he has returned. The Church has to broaden the horizons of believers, so that the whole of Christian life may be seen as a great pilgrimage to the house of the Father, a journey of faith which “takes place in the heart of each person, extends to the believing community and then reaches to the whole humanity” (n. 49).

On 19 May, 1999 the Holy Father in his General Audience said: “The universal fatherhood of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, spurs us also to dialogue with religions outside Abraham’s stock. This dialogue offers a wealth of themes and challenges, when we think, for example, of Asian cultures deeply imbued with the religious spirit, or of African traditional religions, which are a source of

wisdom and life for so many people. At the root of the Church's encounter with world religions there is a discernment of their specific features, that is, of the way they approach the mystery of God the Saviour, the ultimate Reality of human life. Every religion, in fact, presents itself as a search for salvation and offers ways to attain it. Dialogue presupposes the certitude that man, created in the God's image, is also the privileged 'place' of his saving presence".<sup>4</sup>

In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II points out that the mission of the Church is God's work, the work of the Spirit. The presence and activity of the Spirit is "universal and is not limited by space and time"... The Spirit offers men and women, the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God alone.... The Spirit affects not only the individual, but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. It is this universal presence and activity of the Spirit that makes the Church to respect other religions, for every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit. This universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the Church. Through dialogue, the Spirit enables the Church to discover in other religions, his gifts, foster them and receive them" (*cf. Redemptoris Missio*, nn. 28, 29).

In the words of the Kyoto Conference on Religion and Peace, where different world religions were represented: "We discovered that the things which unite us are more important than the things which divide us. We found that in common we possessed: (1) A conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family, of the equality and dignity of all human beings. (2) A feeling for the inviolability of the individual and his conscience. (3) A feeling for the value of the human community. (4) A recognition that might does not make right, that human power is not sufficient unto itself and is not absolute. (5) The belief that love, compassion, selflessness and the power of the Spirit and of inner sincerity ultimately have greater power than hate, enmity and self interest. (6) A feeling of obligation to stand on the side of the poor and the oppressed against the rich and the oppressor. (7) A deep hope that ultimately good will be victorious".<sup>5</sup>

### **Attitudes and Prerequisites for Dialogue**

In order to enter into fruitful dialogue with members of other religions, certain human and spiritual attitudes and abilities are required. The following are among the most important of them:

- A prayerful attitude, because interreligious dialogue is the work of the Spirit active in all the participants.
- A deep commitment to one's own faith and a desire to seek ever better expressions of it, in short, a willingness to change.
- Dialogue requires a great sense of honesty and truthfulness. We cannot meet at the level of the heart if our minds hide secret intentions or our tongues express our thoughts equivocally.
- There must be a pervading atmosphere of a deep love for God and love for the other partners in the dialogue.
- No less than the other partners of dialogue the Christian must be humble. Nobody has a monopoly of truth. We know that though graced with the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, we are not perfect. We also realize that the Spirit of God can speak to us through any of our brothers or sisters professing whatever religion.
- We need to go to dialogue in a spirit of repentance, seeking and offering forgiveness. Repentance for the past injustices we may have committed against people of other religions, and forgiveness for what we may have suffered from others.
- Openness to others is another obvious requirement of dialogue. This means an ability to tune in and listen to different wave-lengths in the approach to God and to Reality.

### **Dangers to be avoided in Dialogue**

Unwillingness to accept the other as different, an unjustified imputation of wrong motives to them and an attitude of suspicion, polemical spirit, the desire to score a point over the other in order to prove him or her inferior, syncretism and a false desire for leveling all religious differences, are some of the dangers to be avoided. In no circumstances should dialogue be a threat to real faith. This could happen if the ambiguity of our language and attitudes were such that it would lead less instructed fellow Christians to bewilderment and doubt about the value of their faith. This could also happen if people take part in it who are not spiritually or doctrinally prepared. In interreligious dialogue, we should of course "always have our answer



ready for people who ask us the reason for the hope that we all have”, but we will do this “with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience” (cf. I Pt 3:14-16).

### Forms of Dialogue

From the time of the Vatican II, the Church has been practicing interreligious dialogue. Here certain forms of dialogue could be distinguished. In general, we could identify what might be called “interior dialogue” and “exterior dialogue”. The former is the activity of an individual or community of a particular religion, sharing somehow in the religious treasures of other religions. In the words of Vatican II, it is “to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions whose seeds were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the Gospel” (*Ad Gentes*, n. 18). The “exterior dialogue” consists in the actual meeting with people of other religions and working towards a common cause of human concern, based on the common religious values. It is obvious that the two forms are complementary and the one naturally leads to the other.

In “interior dialogue” we first instruct Christians in the religious values and categories of other religions, for without knowledge there can be no love and collaboration; and secondly the appropriation of such values in prayer.

Religion is not only a creed and is not learned by mere information, it is also an experience. Vatican II demands that in the measure of our possibilities and according to the degree of our spiritual maturity we make our own their religious experience through personal reflection and prayer. Hence an initiation into religious dialogue will demand that Christians, specially those who are well instructed and more mature, make use of such religious treasures and values in their prayer life.

“Exterior dialogue” with members of other religions can take place at different levels and in many ways. However, the following four forms of these seem to be the prominent ones: *Dialogue of life*, where people of different religions strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. They know at least basically the religions practiced by their neighbours, and their celebrations, and appreciate whatever is good in them. They make it a point to greet their neighbours of other religions on their feast days and celebrations.

In *dialogue of action*, Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. They collaborate to fight evils such as injustice, exploitation of the poor and the powerless, discrimination based on gender, hunger, illiteracy, disease or anything else which lessens human dignity. They strive collectively to promote human development. Their collaboration is based on the common values of their respective religions.

The *dialogue of theological exchange*, takes place when specialists from different religions meet and seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values. These specialists put themselves at the service of their respective religious communities in order to help them engage in dialogue.

The *dialogue of religious experience* happens when people of different religions, though rooted in their own religious traditions, come together for common prayer contemplation or spiritual retreats and thus have a common religious experience. This type of dialogue is more prevalent in the East.

### Some Guidelines

Though interreligious dialogue is very much part of our mission, yet its practice will depend upon the local circumstances. Each religion has its own peculiarities in doctrine, spirituality, practices, and world perspective; hence each religion is a challenge. So no universally valid guidelines can be given for the dialogue itself. What is important is that we grow in openness to the divine Spirit, so that we are able to relate positively to the people of other religions, and walk as pilgrims towards the same goal which God has set for us. However, the following guidelines could offer an orientation to develop a culture of dialogue in our lives and ministry.

Our spirituality should be characterized by a “deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills” (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 56). Consequently we must be alert to recognize and appreciate goodness and truth found in other religions, and in the people professing those religions. We will seek to be enriched by the values, theological perspectives and other spiritual treasures found in other religions.

Interreligious dialogue demands that we deepen our own faith and commitment, because dialogue

can take place only between people who are committed and maintain their identity. For this purpose we need a good grounding in Christian theology. We also need to know the documents of Vatican II, the papal documents, and statements of Episcopal Conferences on the value of dialogue.

In our formation, knowledge of beliefs and practices of religions is to be given through special courses and actual involvement in a pluralistic situation. Since the core of any religion is God experience, in our formation, we need to deepen our own Christian mystical experience. What Vatican II says about the formation of seminarians holds good also for religious, both men and women: "They should also be introduced to a knowledge of whatever other religions are most commonly encountered in this or that region, so that they may recognize more clearly how much goodness and truth they possess through the Providence of God" (*Optatam Totius*, n. 16).

Our proclamation of the Gospel must not be triumphalistic and hurting, but rather be sensitive to the social, religious, cultural and political background of those to whom it is addressed and also attentive to the signs of the times through which the Spirit of God is speaking, teaching and guiding. Such sensitivity, developed through discernment and theological reflection on the place in God's plan for the different religious traditions and the experience of those who find in them their spiritual nourishment, is developed through a spirituality of dialogue.

In our commitment to justice and social action, we work with believers of other religions in creating basic human communities founded on truth and love. In this our collaboration is based on the values found in our respective religions which lead us to work towards a world of justice, peace and harmony.

Our educational institutions will instill in their students a basic understanding of and respect for different religions found in the local society. While strengthening their own faith response to God, they will conscientize them on the value of interreligious collaboration.

Our pastoral service will prepare our Christians for dialogue, and to be concerned with people beyond the limits of our own community. It will make them understand that the Church is a community on pilgrimage journeying with peoples of other faiths towards the Kingdom that is to come.

In the Church we do have experts who have studied a particular religion in depth, and thus are a help to promote the ministry of dialogue. These not only engage in honest, respectful dialogue with experts in other religious traditions, but also communicate the fruit of this dialogue to the Christian community. They testify that in this process their faith has not only deepened, but also their respect for the spirituality of other religions has grown. However, given the task ahead, their number is inadequate.

## Conclusion

Dialogue fosters a spirituality of its own. It is a way of living our dialogue with God by being in dialogue with his children. Such spirituality is based on a deep faith experience of God whose ways are hidden from the understanding of the human eye and yet are always forms of salvation. It requires a great love of our neighbour such as Jesus demands from his disciples, not only a love of our family or friends, but also of the most distant stranger who in some way crosses our path. The dialogue of spirituality is also a pilgrimage of hope – hope that the dream of Jesus for God's Kingdom can be realized slowly as history marches on; and hope that this history will culminate in a new form of existence wherein the meaning and significance of each religion will be revealed and all will find their fulfillment in the ultimate vision of the Divine Mystery when God will be everything to everyone.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, "Address to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue", 13 November 1992. Cf. *Bulletin of the Council*, n. 82, (1993) p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, "Address at the Eucharist Congress", Bombay, 12 March, 1964; *AAS* 57 (1965) pp. 124-126.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Message to the People of Asia*, Manila, 2 March 1981. See *Bulletin of the Secretariat for Non-Christians*, 46 (1981), p. 14

<sup>4</sup> *Pro Dialogo*, 103 2000/1, p. 308.

<sup>5</sup> Jack, Homer A (ed): *Religion for Peace — Proceedings of the Kyoto Conference on Religion and Peace*, New Delhi, 1973, p. ix.

**Henri de la Hougue\***

## **L'estime de la foi des autres, comme témoignage du dynamisme de la foi Chrétienne**

Si l'on considérait la foi uniquement sous l'angle des énoncés dogmatiques, il est clair que les chrétiens devraient marquer leur distance vis-à-vis de la foi des membres d'autres religions. Mais dans le contexte pluri-religieux actuel, la nécessité de mieux saisir l'originalité de la foi chrétienne oblige sans doute à envisager la nature même de cette foi et son rapport avec les autres religions, de manière plus large que la seule comparaison des énoncés.

Alors qu'au Concile Vatican I, le contexte du rationalisme avait poussé les Pères à insister sur l'objectivité du contenu de la foi, le Concile Vatican II évoque la foi d'une manière beaucoup plus large, où *foi énoncée, foi vécue et foi célébrée* apparaissent comme trois dimensions indissociables. La foi chrétienne a bien un objet (*fides quae*), la révélation faite en Jésus-Christ, mais cet objet débordé les énoncés de la foi et s'exprime dans une manière d'être et de célébrer en Église. La vérité, qui est le Christ, n'est donc pas une entité circonscrite à laquelle soit on adhère, soit on n'adhère pas ; elle est une réalité vivante dans laquelle le chrétien est pris et à laquelle il essaie d'être fidèle. Dans cette perspective, le rapport à la vérité, même s'il se réfère de manière incontournable à l'énoncé de foi, ne se limite pas à une réception positive de cet énoncé. Quant à l'attitude de foi (*fides qua*), elle est en même temps la recherche humaine de la vérité et l'accueil de la grâce. Dès lors, le lien entre la nature de la foi chrétienne et la nature de la foi des membres d'autres religions ne peut plus être mesuré, comme lors du Concile Vatican I, à la seule lumière du contenu des énoncés, séparant de manière radicale la vérité catholique reçue dans la grâce, "des fausses religions conduites uniquement par des opinions humaines".<sup>1</sup>

### **Foi chrétienne et Foi des autres croyants**

Quel lien peut-on alors établir entre la vérité révélée en Jésus-Christ dans la foi chrétienne et la foi des autres ?

Dès avant le Concile Vatican II, la possibilité individuelle de salut des membres de religions non chrétiennes est largement admise.<sup>2</sup> Cette possibilité est réaffirmée au concile : "*L'Esprit Saint offre à tous d'être associés au mystère pascal d'une façon que Dieu connaît*" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22,5).

Cependant la déclaration conciliaire *Nostra Aetate* a soulevé une question nouvelle en obligeant à penser non seulement la possibilité de salut, mais les relations structurelles qui existent entre l'Église catholique et les autres religions. Bien que la réflexion théologique de cette époque porte plus directement sur la possibilité de reconnaître des valeurs salvifiques aux religions non chrétiennes, les deux lignes de pensée dominante au moment du Concile nous donnent quelques éléments déterminants pour penser ce lien entre la foi chrétienne et la foi des autres.

- Celle soutenue par Daniélou et de Lubac, davantage centrée sur la *fides quae*, opposant la révélation "naturelle" faite dans les autres religions à la révélation "surnaturelle", que Dieu leur a faite en Jésus-Christ, oblige la foi chrétienne à rendre compte, devant l'humanité en recherche de Dieu, de sa crédibilité ; et elle ne peut être crédible, aux yeux des autres, que si elle s'appuie sur la vérité du Christ présente en germe dans la foi des autres.

- Celle soutenue par Rahner, davantage centrée sur la *fides qua*, soulignant le lien structurel qui existe entre la révélation apportée par le Christ et "*le témoignage incessant sur lui-même que Dieu donne aux hommes dans les choses créées*"<sup>3</sup> a deux conséquences : premièrement, elle permet d'affirmer que la spécificité de la foi chrétienne n'est pas de l'ordre de l'exclusivité, mais se veut au contraire révélatrice de ce qui est au cœur de l'humain. Deuxièmement, elle rappelle que la foi des non-chrétiens, si elle se rapporte au mystère de Dieu engagé dans la création, n'est pas sans lien avec la vérité de la foi chrétienne.

### **L'estime de la foi des autres**

Puisque la foi des autres n'est pas sans lien avec la foi chrétienne, tant dans la démarche que dans son objet, ce lien doit marquer le regard que le chrétien porte sur le non-chrétien. Il implique premièrement de respecter les critères herméneutiques propres à la foi chrétienne pour regarder la foi des autres. De la même manière que la foi chrétienne est articulée autour de trois dimensions indissociables : *foi confessée, foi vécue, et foi célébrée*, la foi des autres doit être, elle aussi, regardée

et analysée selon cette articulation. Deuxièmement, s'il est clairement établi que l'Esprit du Christ est présent et actif dans les autres religions, qu'il y suscite des aspirations qui peuvent trouver en Christ leur accomplissement, bien que ces religions ne soient pas, de fait, dans leurs structures, orientées vers le christianisme, il semble nécessaire de voir dans ces structures des éléments qui, bien que différents de ceux que l'on trouve dans le christianisme, portent réellement des fruits spirituels. En conséquence de quoi, la foi des autres n'a pas à être soupçonnée de porter atteinte à la foi chrétienne, mais elle doit au contraire être vue comme une démarche authentique. Elle permet aux fidèles de ces religions de vivre une relation à Dieu et aux hommes qui, bien qu'elle ne se réfère qu'implicitement au Christ, est fondamentalement orientée vers lui. Le chrétien doit donc, dans son regard sur l'autre, lui faire crédit, du meilleur de ce qu'il confesse, du meilleur de ce qu'il célèbre et du meilleur de ce qu'il vit. Cela ne l'empêche pas évidemment d'exercer un discernement dans son jugement sur la foi des autres, à la lumière de sa foi chrétienne. C'est au contraire parce que le chrétien est convaincu que son rapport au Père par le Christ dans l'Esprit Saint est normatif de tout rapport humain à Dieu, qu'il peut regarder la foi de l'autre en y voyant et en y soulignant le meilleur de ce que l'autre confesse, célèbre et vit.

L'édition de l'ensemble des textes de l'enseignement officiel de l'Église catholique depuis le Concile<sup>4</sup> est, de ce point de vue, très instructive : on y découvre d'abord la haute estime de prière comme élément de rassemblement entre toutes les religions. Non seulement la prière des autres n'est pas perçue comme idolâtre, mais la qualité de la relation à Dieu qu'elle induit est soulignée. Plusieurs éléments forcent le respect dans la prière des membres d'autres religions : d'abord l'effort suprême d'hommes et de femmes pour chercher Dieu, leur attitude devant la divinité (leur désir de se soumettre totalement à Dieu et de se reconnaître pauvre devant lui) et, de ce fait, la place qu'ils laissent, sans pouvoir l'explicitier, à l'Esprit du Christ qui, en eux, s'adresse au Père.

### Frères et Sœurs dans la foi

À propos de ce que confessent les autres, les textes de Paul VI et Jean-Paul II laissent étonnamment apparaître la conviction que plus les hommes et les femmes sont engagés dans leur religion, plus ils peuvent acquérir cette ouverture et cette aspiration que Dieu veut leur faire découvrir et qu'au terme de leur cheminement seul Jésus-Christ pourra totalement combler. Les expressions "*aube de foi*", ou "*une certaine foi*", témoignent de ce lien entre la foi chrétienne et la démarche authentique des membres des religions non chrétiennes. En ce

qui concerne les juifs et les musulmans, la manière de se référer au Dieu unique, de célébrer et de vivre cette relation à Dieu, a invité le Magistère à considérer qu'avec eux les chrétiens sont "*au vrai sens des mots frères et sœurs dans la foi en le seul Dieu*".<sup>5</sup> La spécificité de la foi chrétienne n'est pas reniée pour autant. La place centrale de Jésus-Christ pour les chrétiens y est souvent affirmée. C'est même précisément parce que Jésus-Christ est au cœur de l'œuvre créatrice, révélatrice et salvatrice du monde, que les chrétiens peuvent accepter de regarder avec une haute estime l'unicité de Dieu sur laquelle insistent la foi juive et la foi musulmane : le Dieu unique qui entretient avec les juifs et les musulmans une relation personnelle est précisément celui qui s'est révélé en plénitude dans la personne de Jésus-Christ.

L'enseignement officiel de l'Église souligne à de nombreuses reprises la qualité des œuvres que les membres d'autres religions produisent au nom de leur foi.<sup>6</sup> L'invitation à travailler en partenariat avec les autres religions ne signifie ni une relativisation de la spécificité chrétienne, ni une remise en cause de sa prétention à être le lieu où les aspirations religieuses de l'humanité pourront trouver leur accomplissement. Elle témoigne, au contraire, de la capacité de la foi chrétienne à être au cœur des aspirations du monde et à pouvoir y apporter, avec d'autres, des réponses. Les chrétiens, en acceptant, au nom de leur foi, ce partenariat dans les œuvres avec les autres religions, témoignent de la crédibilité de l'Église dans sa volonté d'être le signe par excellence de l'unité du genre humain voulu par Dieu.

### Notes

\* *Pss Institut Catholique de Paris.*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Dei Filius* ch3, FC 96/Dz 3014.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. La condamnation de la thèse janséniste : "Hors de l'Église, en il n'y a pas de grâce" en 1713 (Dz 2429), l'encyclique *Quando conficiamur moerore* de 1863, la lettre du Saint-Office à l'archevêque de Boston en 1949 pour condamner l'interprétation littérale de "Hors de l'Église point de salut".

<sup>3</sup> Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, n. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Conseil Pontifical pour le dialogue interreligieux, *le dialogue interreligieux dans l'enseignement officiel de l'Église catholique* (1963-2005) (Documents rassemblés par Francesco Gioia), aux Éditions de Solesmes, deuxième édition de 1963-2005, publiée en 2006 (1700 p.).

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Paul II, en s'adressant aux communautés de tat de Kaduna (Nigeria) et en particulier à la population musulmane, le 14 février 1982.

<sup>6</sup> La lettre de Jacques souligne le lien nécessaire entre la foi et les œuvres. Cf. Jc 2, 14-26.

**Piotr Krakowczyk, CMF**

## ***The World Seems to be Falling Apart: Violence, Injustice and Ecological Degradation***

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**O**f all the topics in the present Religious Life Week, I have found this one the most intimidating. It could be a good title for yet another apocalyptic sermon about the beginning of Armageddon. Since violence, injustice, and ecological degradation have been the traits of human history since its beginning, one can question the title's suggestion that suddenly, at the beginning of our century, "the world seems to be falling apart". But granted that it is true, can one indicate possible causes within our complex reality that are responsible for making our world fall apart?

In order to avoid the pitfall of apocalyptic sermonizing, I will try to place this paper within the framework of political theology by applying its principle of solidarity with the victims of "dominative power" against the principles of profit and brute force of our contemporary "royal" theology. In this discussion, I will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the present situation of our world?
2. What are the main factors contributing to our present reality?
3. Where do religious tend to situate themselves within the reality of our world?

### **I. Our World Today - "Five minutes to midnight"**

Among the prophetic books in the Bible, there is one that has recently gained my attention. This short book — it has only three chapters — bears the name of a little known prophet, Habakkuk. The book begins with a powerful complaint, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save" (Hab 1:2-3)? The prophet was a man who could not understand how God whose "eyes are too pure to behold evil, and . . . cannot look on wrongdoing" (Hab 1:13), tolerated evil. The world, Habakkuk lived in, was marked by "destruction and violence" (Hab 1:3); it was a world where "justice never prevails" (Hab 1:4), and where ruthless Chaldeans, worshiping their weapons, were destroying other nations without mercy (Hab 1:15-17).

More than two and half thousand years have gone by since that little book was written, but apparently not much has changed since then. Our world is also marked by violence and injustice. The only difference is that, unlike in Habakkuk's time, we are now capable of annihilating ourselves and putting an end to our planet.

#### **1. Violence**

On 9 July 1955 Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein issued an extraordinary appeal to the people of the world: "Here, then, is the problem which we present to you, stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?". As we all know, we have not renounced war. Quite the contrary. The twenty-first century has begun with two new wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. The estimated death toll of the war in Iraq varies depending on the agency. According to Iraq Body Count, the project founded by volunteers from U.S. and U.K., since the war began in 2003, there have been around 90.000 violent deaths among civilians documented (IBC, 2007). However, the Lancet Medical Journal put the estimated death toll at 655.000 (Boseley, 2006) and the recent study published by the British polling agency, Opinion Research Business, put the figure at over one million (ORB, 2007). As can be easily understood,

these staggering figures are contested by the benevolent Western World (Dardagan, Sloboda, Dougherty, 2006).

The Russell-Einstein Manifesto was pleading to leave behind the category of “them *versus* us” and learn to realize that war spells disaster to all parties involved. However, we have not learned this lesson. We continue to believe that the way to peace is to be fully armed and ready to strike when necessary. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) “world military expenditure in 2006 is estimated to have reached \$1,204 billion in current dollars” (Stalenheim, Perdomo, Skons, 2007: Summary). The biggest spender is, of course, the only world superpower. From September 2001 till June 2006, the U.S. has been spending annually \$432 billion on its global war on terror. What is even more striking that despite all the calls and promises for withdrawal from Iraq, the U.S. is counting the overall cost of its involvement in Iraq till the year 2016 with the estimates of \$2,267 billion (Stalenheim, Perdomo, Skons, 2007). At present in Baghdad, the U.S. is constructing its biggest embassy in the world, symbolically nicknamed ‘Fortress Baghdad’ (Dinmore, 2007).

In the Oscar winning movie of Spielberg, *Schindler’s List*, we hear an extremely symbolic conversation between Oscar Schindler and his wife:

Schindler: ... there was always something missing. In every business I tried, I can see now, it wasn’t me that failed. Something was missing... And it makes all the difference in the world between success and failure.

Wife: Luck!

Schindler: War!

War is an extremely profitable business. Since 2002 the arms sales have increased by 18% and the profit was estimated at \$290 billion in 2005. Among the top 100 companies, 63% of the whole profit went to 40 U.S. based companies, 29% to 32 West European firms, 2% to 9 Russian companies, and the remaining 6% was split between Japan, Israel, and India based firms (Skons and Surry, 2007; China was not included). As can be seen, the arms trade is dominated by the Western world. Even more outrageous is the fact that the profit is the outcome of unjustified and unlawful wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. Skons and Surry clearly state: “Parts of the U.S. arms industry have benefited substantially from the U.S.A.’s post-September 2001 policies, particularly the increased demand for new equipment generated by the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq” (Summary).

I have previously indicated that there are other forms of violence present in our world apart from war (Krakowczyk, 2004). I am focusing on this single issue, because it is really alarming. We are living in the world where the *Coalition of the Willing*, under the questionable principle of fighting the war on terror, is disregarding all international laws, moral principles, and the will of people. The war against Iraq was a clear violation of the United Nations Charter (Chomsky, 2007b) and it went ahead despite mass protests. It appears that the only principle that matters is brute force and an end that justifies all possible means. (By now, we know that the Taliban were not responsible for the September 11 attack and that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq). Even more frightening is the fact that there seems to be no end to this vicious cycle. Yesterday, the axis of evil was in Afghanistan and Iraq; today, it is in Iran. Which country will qualify tomorrow?

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (2007) has set the Doomsday Clock at 5 minutes to midnight, which clearly indicates that we humans are very close to obliterating ourselves. One of the reasons cited in the Board Statement is the presence of 27,000 nuclear warheads of which some 26,000 are in hands of the U.S. and Russia. And the present row between these two countries over the plan of the U.S. to put the missile shield in the Czech Republic and Poland is a clear indicator of how close we are to such a possibility (“Q and A: US Missile Defense”, 2007). The *Bulletin* states: “2007 — The world stands at the brink of a second nuclear age. The United States and Russia remain ready to stage a nuclear attack within minutes, North Korea conducts a nuclear test, and many in the international community worry that Iran plans to acquire the Bomb”.

## 2. Injustice

Violence is not the only problem that bedevils our world. The energy company Chevron announced its profits for the year 2005 worth of \$14 billion. In October 2006, Chevron’s janitors

went on strike demanding a salary raise from \$5.30 to \$8.50 per hour and health care benefits. The strike ended after a month with a compromise. The janitors — mostly Latino women — were promised a raise up to \$7.75 within two years time and partial health benefits (“Justice for Janitors”, 2006). A year later, across the Pacific, in the Philippines, 55 Higaonon Farmers walked for nearly two months, covering the distance of 1,700 kilometers, from Bukidnon to Metro Manila in protest of the Government decision that allowed San Miguel Foods Inc., a subsidiary of San Miguel Corp., to transform the farmers’ land into an agri-industrial zone (Aning, 2007). San Miguel Corp. is the largest beverage and food group in Southeast Asia. Its profit in 2006 reached nearly P10 billion or \$240 million (“San Miguel”, 2007). The farmers were flown home without any decision being made. These two examples bring me to the next major problem present in our world: injustice.

At the end of every year, the corporate world publishes its gains. The figures are mind-boggling. It is not just millions, but billions of dollars. At the same time, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening: 10 million children die each year from preventable illnesses, over half a million women die in childbirth, and about 100 million children are unable to attend school at the primary level (“World Development Indicators”, 2007). But, all is well. According to Newsweek, “things have never been better” for the global economy (Sheridan and Gross, 2007:16). The number of billionaires is on the rise, 946 as of March 2007, and the corporations are enjoying unprecedented profit. The only problem is the fact that the preachers of this ‘good news’ are not reporting the mass protests of the poor taking place for example in India and China, or the questionable way some of those billionaires and corporations have acquired their wealth in just a few years (Petras, 2007).

H. Balzac once stated that “behind every great fortune is a great crime”. The fact that 946 individuals estimate their wealth at \$3.5 trillion, while “nearly half of the world’s 2.8 billion workers are unable to earn enough to lift themselves and their family members above the U.S. \$2 a day poverty line” (International Labour Organization) is hard to comprehend. Even more scandalous is Petras’ conclusion that “the growth of billionaires is hardly a sign of ‘general prosperity’ resulting from the ‘free market’ as the editors of *Forbes Magazine* claim. In fact it is the product of the illicit seizure of lucrative *public resources*, built up by the work and struggle of millions of workers, in Russia and China under Communism and in Latin America during populist-nationalist and democratic-socialist governments. Many billionaires have *inherited wealth* and used their *political ties* to expand and extend their empires — it has little to do with entrepreneurial skills”.

Is this kind of world justifiable? I am appalled by the inequalities created by the free market economy and privatization. Private schools and hospitals for the tiny wealthy class; overcrowded and poorly equipped schools and hospitals for the poor majority; transport, energy, water supplies in the hands of corporations charging exuberant fees for their services; the vast pieces of land in the hands of a few, while so many others have not even a decent place to live. What is wrong with agrarian reform and nationalization of the basic services, so that the majority of the people may benefit and not just the few wealthy ones? Yet, everything seems to be wrong with suggesting such solutions. According to May (2007), it is “preposterous” to indicate that the resources of our world should be shared more equally and that there should be a cap on wealth (Gardner, 2007), which would not allow the few to get ridiculously rich while billions are unable to make ends meet. It would violate the “vile maxim of the masters of mankind: . . . All for ourselves, and nothing for other people” (Adam Smith, quoted in Chomsky, 2007a:5).

### 3. Ecological Crisis

As if violence and injustice were not enough, another major problem has been added recently: global warming. It is extremely educating to follow the discussion in the Western media on this issue. The “guru” of Newsweek, Zakaria (2007) gives the world a wonderful piece of advice, that, since global warming cannot be stopped, we should get used to it. Following the same line, Stampf (2007) claims that climate change will have its winners and losers. Germany will be among the winners by planting palm trees and turning the Baltic Sea into a new tourist spot, and Russia and Canada looking forward to better harvests. Somehow, the losers were not clearly indicated and the fear of the sea level rising is unfounded. I wonder what my friends from the Pacific Islands would have to say to yet another piece of good news for the already privileged West.

Unfortunately to Zakaria and Stampf, things look rather bleak. The recent Human Development Report 2007/2008 states: “Climate change is now a scientifically established

fact. The exact impact of greenhouse gas emission is not easy to forecast and there is a lot of uncertainty in the science when it comes to predictive capability. But we now know enough to recognize that there are large risks, potentially catastrophic ones, including the melting of ice-sheets on Greenland and the West Antarctic (which would place many countries under water) and changes in the course of the Gulf Stream that would bring about drastic climatic changes” (p. 3). According to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* “global warming poses a dire threat to human civilization that is second only to nuclear weapons”. The flooding of New Orleans, the fires in Greece, the drought in many African countries, the desertification of some parts of China, and the already rising sea level experienced by the people of the Pacific Islands are clear indications that something is going wrong.

Aside from burning our Mother Earth with fossil fuels — coal, oil, and gas, we also rape her of all the natural resources. The mountains of East Timor are left with few trees, the Indonesian rain forest is cut down to give way to palm trees, our oceans are being emptied of fish, and many species are at the verge of extinction. According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), each year the earth loses 36 million acres of natural forests and “at least 75 per cent of the world’s fisheries are already fully exploited or overfished”.

“Only when we cut the last tree and catch the last fish, will we realize that money cannot be eaten”, has the saying of the natives of Tonga. Apparently, we have not been able to realize the truth of this proverb yet, so we continue to pillage and plunder the Earth. Since the earth’s resources are limited and unevenly distributed, therefore in order to have free access to them, we quarrel over them (Underhill, 2005), we claim them for our nations (Gramling, 2007), and some dare to attack sovereign nations. And as the scarcity of our resources becomes more evident, we can expect more quarreling and wars in the future.

The recent Bali Conference on Climate Change ended without any concrete plan of action. The Bush II Administration has again succeeded in thwarting all the efforts to address our ecological crisis seriously. And it is again the same story, namely, that it is “unrealistic” and “unhelpful” to demand that the rich nations cut the greenhouse gas emissions (Bello, 2007). It is hard to understand the reasons behind such an attitude, when one takes into consideration the impressive words of the outgoing President of the U.S. who carries the commitment in his soul to combat poverty in the world (Chomsky, 2007a). But perhaps, Monbiot’s (2007) comment can shed a little light on the issue: “America will keep on wrecking climate talks as long as those with vested interests in oil and gas fund its political system”. This statement brings me to the second part of my discussion.

## II. The Main Factors — “What we say goes”

I have previously discussed the fact that many put the blame for the present state of affairs of the world on globalization (Krakowczyk). The process, which apparently eludes a clear definition, is seen as responsible for many evils befalling our world, specifically for the growing gap between the rich and the poor and the enormous profit of the multinational corporations. Garcia Paredes (1987) puts the blame on the *Enlightenment*, which sought to create a new image of human beings as individual subjects, free from the tutelage of religion and the Church, independent and self-sufficient, with reason as their only authority. This, according to him, has led to the divisions in society and the establishment of an *élite*, a class of bourgeois, concerned only with their own interest. Since the *Enlightenment*, society has moved in two directions, namely, individualism of existentialism creating an atomized society, and collectivism of K. Marx, creating a collective mass, where individual subjects do not count. Finally, there is also Girard’s theory (1977) stating that “sacred violence” was always part of our cultural existence. It appears that we need scapegoats who can be blamed for all the problems we are experiencing in our society: during the time of the Soviet Bloc, a greedy capitalist was responsible for delays in achieving the promised prosperity; for the Western media, Marxists trained by the Jesuits are the ones preventing the prosperity of the free market economy to reach the poor; and for the U.S., the Islamic fundamentalists are the worst enemies of a peaceful world (before were the communists). No matter how insightful these explanations may be, they still leave us wondering over the fact that despite all our efforts to make the world a better place the world continues to be a ‘valley of tears’ for the majority of us. Perhaps, it has something to do with



Smith's maxim of the masters of mankind: "all for ourselves, and nothing for other people".

In 1948 George Kennan, a State Department planner, wrote the famous Policy Planning Study 23 in which one can find this revelatory statement:

"we [the U.S.] have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction".

I am not sure whether the U.S. was "the object of envy and resentment" by the people of Asia in 1948. It is, however, clear that at the end of World War II, the new world order had been established. Whereas other nations ended up devastated and had to focus on rebuilding themselves from the ravages of war, the U.S. emerged as the wealthiest nation and assumed the role of defending the world capitalist system against the threat of communism. It led to the Cold War, the arms race, and nearly nuclear conflict in the 1960s over the famous Cuban Missile Crisis. I am, however, appalled by the statement that "our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security". To suggest such a thing is simply immoral, to act on a crime. Yet, that was what apparently happened. "A pattern of relationship", which has led to the present gap between the rich North and the poor South, was devised. Chomsky (1999) says: "In secret postwar planning, each part of the world was assigned its specific role. Thus the 'major function' of Southeast Asia was to provide raw material for the industrial powers. Africa was to be 'exploited' by Europe for its own recovery. And so on, through the world" (p. 22). Profit at all costs has become the main principle of this new global order.

Today, the world capitalist system seems to be well defended and, with some concessions given to Europe and a few Asian countries, Kennan's objectives have been achieved. The threat of communism is gone; Russia has embraced the capitalist way and other communist nations are following suit; the Western-based corporations report their profits in billions of dollars; and the military hegemony of the U.S. is going to remain unchallenged for years. Only recently, the Economist assessed that "America is the richest country and the most sophisticated high-tech military power in the world, and is spending more on defense in real terms than at any time since the end of the Second World War" ("The Hobbled Hegemon", p. 25). Yes. There is always a danger that those who do not benefit from the capitalist way — a majority of the world's population — would one day demand their rights to a decent standard of living.

Whether we like it or not, we live in a world in which the international and domestic policy is being set by the corporate world and financial institutions. It goes without saying that the majority of them have their headquarters in the West. Having money and power, they guard and protect their interests all over the world with the help of their respective Governments. Perhaps, nothing would be wrong with such an arrangement if they would afford "the luxury of altruism and world benefaction". Unfortunately, this is not the case. On 2 February 1991 G. Bush, on the eve of the first Iraq war, perhaps unaware of the implications of his words, said: "When we win, and we will, we will have taught a dangerous dictator [Saddam Hussein], and any tyrant tempted to follow in his footsteps, that the U.S. has a new credibility, and that what we say goes" (cited in Chomsky, 2007b:208). One does not need to be specially gifted to realize that "a new credibility" obviously means a credibility of brute force and that "what we say goes" means disregarding the U.N. and the will of people across the globe. One, however, needs a special talent to comprehend a discovery that such a state of affairs is often justified by Christian thinkers. I am particularly referring here to Nieburh's "Christian realism", which gave justification to American imperial policy in the world, with the 'just war' theory and development of nuclear weapons. And, of course, there is no need to consider the sentiments of the people. According to Nieburh, the average person should be fed with "necessary illusions" and "emotionally potent oversimplifications" than the truth (Chomsky, 1989).

On 11 April 1963, at the height of the Cold War, John XXIII wrote that political leaders,

acting in their country's name and interests, "are still bound by the natural law, which is the rule that governs all moral conduct, and they have no authority to depart from its slightest precepts" (*Pacem in Terris*, n. 81), and whenever a clash of interests arises among the nations, it "must be settled in a truly human way, not by armed force nor by deceit or trickery" (*Pacem in Terris*, n. 93). Well. At the beginning of the twenty-first century a human way is not considered to be a viable option for sorting out difference among nations. Our leaders prefer armed force, deceit, and trickery, and go as far as talking about World War III (Bush, 2007).

That brings this part to a conclusion. Things are the way they are, because they are being carefully planned by a group of people with extreme power vested in them. They are not afraid to make decisions without considering the thoughts and feelings of an ordinary person and even against the will of the people who elected them. Decisions are made behind closed doors and stamped 'top secret', so the public will not be aware of what is going to happen, and they are being motivated by profit and national security concerns. "A truly human way" is seldom taken into consideration. A new world order seems to be taking place in front of our eyes in which whatever the mighty and the powerful say goes.

### III. Religious today – Are we prophetic?

In May 1989, together with other students, I was standing in front of special police forces; we were demanding political change for my country. When the commanding officer gave orders to attack, we all ran for our lives; we barricaded ourselves inside our university buildings. Frightened and readying ourselves for the worst, we gained strength and courage from being together and from knowing that other students and workers were also protesting. The end of that memorable year was marked by the end of 46 years of communism in Poland.

The picture of the world being presented looks bleak and gloomy. Fortunately, there is something about the human spirit that makes us say "no" to the reality as it is. We long for an alternative world. This longing is often turned into action and suddenly we become a vehicle of change. Let me just recall a few examples: Black people claiming their rights in the U.S. and South Africa, people's power in the Philippines, solidarity movement of Poland, theology of liberation in Latin America, Islamic revolution in Iran, and independence of East Timor. There were many others. Some apparently failed: Tienanmen Square, worldwide protest against the war in Iraq, or monks' revolution in Myanmar. Yet, all those movements, successful or not, have left their mark on the world. Moreover, although many of these movements tend to be associated with individual people, N. Mandela, L. Walesa, G. Gutiérrez, or X. Guzman for example, their origin, strength, and growth lie in the activism of millions of unknown ordinary men and women.

This brings me to the "tiny minority" within our Church known as religious. Where do we position ourselves in front of our world bedeviled by violence, injustice, and ecological degradation? Being honest, we have to acknowledge that there are instances of violence and injustice taking place inside our convents. Arbuckle (2002) speaks about the bullying culture of our world finding its way into our communities. As a 'superior nation' can bully an 'inferior nation' and get away with it, so a 'superior' member or a group can bully an 'inferior' member or a group of a community and justify it with having authority on his/ her/their side. We are also familiar with some Western and Eastern congregations desperately searching for vocations – or should I rather say helpers — for their empty convents. Since everything is about numbers (Arbuckle, 2007), small acts of injustice may be excused. In 2006, I personally met two Chinese women, candidates of a Taiwanese congregation based in the Philippines, who recalled an unbelievable story of their ordeal before they finally decided to leave. Their correspondence was opened and read by their superior; the superior also read and personally sent their letters to their families; the food was rationed; and outside visits were strictly limited. As far as I know, that congregation continues to accept and form candidates from different Asian countries.

Some of us also tend to side with the rich and the mighty. Perhaps, the worst well-known example is that of R. Vekemans, an infamous Belgian Jesuit, who was getting funding from Catholic Aid Agencies in the West and from the CIA, to sponsor right-wing activists against the movement of liberation theology in Latin America. However, there are other examples on

a smaller scale: religious priests celebrating the Eucharist inside the houses of rich benefactors or congregations accepting donations, be it money or property, from business people who do not pay just wages and benefits to their own workers.

Finally, there is the issue of the environmental crisis. In November 2004, the Union of Superiors General of religious women and men organized the “Congress on Consecrated Life”. Neither in the *Instrumentum Laboris* nor in the *Final Document* one can find a section dedicated to the serious ecological situation our world is facing at present (“Passion for Christ”, 2005). The two leading journals in the English-speaking world dedicated to religious life do not fare better. From the year 2000 till the last issue of the year 2007, *Review For Religious*, published in the U.S., had only one article dedicated to the ecological crisis by Cullinan (2006). For the same period of time, *Religious Life Review*, a Dominican journal being published in England, has not come with a single article that would solely focus on the crisis. Things look better in the East. In 2000, *Religious Life Asia* dedicated its third issue (July – September) to the topic “Ecology and Consecrated Life”. Perhaps, we have other pressing issues. After all we can get used to the effects of global warming and the disaster is not imminent.

However, there are many men and women religious who also long for an alternative world and transform this longing into action. One finds them in the slums of our cities, among poor farmers, and at the educational centres. They establish orphanages, rural clinics, and alternative education for the poor; they use the pen to voice the concerns of the poor and expose violence and injustice; their teaching and preaching offer an alternative vision of reality; they often go where no one else dares to go, bringing hope and change. I met many of them in the Philippines, Indonesia, East Timor, Myanmar, Vietnam, and China. I had the great privilege of working with some of them. Their names, unknown to the world, are known and cherished by those whom they helped. They take Jesus and His teaching seriously — which is a very dangerous thing and a major crime in the eyes of the mighty of this world — and try to apply its principles to the reality of our world.

The prophetic phenomenon of Israel can be divided into two forms: the individual prophetic vocation of such great figures as Isaiah and Jeremiah and the institutionalized form of prophetic groups centred around royal sanctuaries. History, however, recognized only those individual figures as genuine prophets. The others were denounced as “false prophets” for trying to please the kings, instead of speaking for God (Amos 7:10-13; II Chronicles 18:1-27). Perhaps, one can apply this insight to our talk about being prophetic (Garcia Paredes, 2007). There are many “false prophets” among us and many of our institutions, convents, and communities are anything but prophetic. Yet, there are also genuine prophets in our midst. They can be recognized by certain characteristics, which do not allow them to compromise their conviction that God has meant this world to be equally shared among all people.

I would like to end this section with insights gained from Abraham Heschel’s book (1962), *The Prophets*. Among the many characteristics of a prophet, I single out only three, which I consider vital if we are serious about our prophetic role in the Church and society: sensitivity to evil, the importance of trivialities, and the highest good. Like the prophets of old, we need to be scandalized by the amount of evil present in the world. The only solution to our complacency and indifference is a hysterical cry that sees a single act of injustice as “a catastrophe, a threat to the world” (Heschel, p. 4). Second, we are familiar with the famous Talmudic phrase, “whoever saves one life, saves the world entire”. It is time that we step down from contemplating eternal ideas and attend to the matters of history. We need to assess that human affairs are worth considering and that our God does not neglect small matters (Heschel, p. 5). Finally, against our infatuation with knowledge, wealth, and might, we need to heed Jeremiah’s advice: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord Who practice kindness, justice, and righteousness on the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord” (Jer 9:22-24). That is the highest good: making God’s delight ours by doing kindness, justice, and righteousness on the earth.

### Conclusion

This reflection was an attempt to make sense out of our present reality. Whether our world seems to be falling apart is difficult to assess. However, the future, with nuclear and ecological threats and the widening gap between rich and poor, looks bleak. It is the first time in the entire history of humanity that

we are capable of destroying ourselves and our planet. Moreover, the main responsibility for such a state of affairs lies with our leaders, business communities, and contemporary preachers of the anti-human values of profit above anything else and brute force.

As religious, claiming to exercise a prophetic role within the Christian community, we cannot remain silent, complacent or indifferent to what is happening in front of our eyes. We have to make a stand against all forms of violence by proclaiming that Christ is “our peace” (Eph 2:14), and we need to remind the world that profit has its limits, namely when it causes the misery of other human being and rapes the earth of its resources. It is by God’s spirit that the world can be saved from destruction and “not by might, nor by power” (Zech 4:6); an alternative world can only be built on kindness, justice, and righteousness.

As I began this paper with Habakkuk’s complaint to God about destruction and violence, I want to end it with his call for trust. According to Heschel, there were two things that kept the prophets from despair: “their messianic vision and the idea of man’s capacity for repentance” (p. 185). Like them, we hope and believe that God will not allow us to destroy His beautiful world; like them, we believe that in every person there is a great capacity for goodness and compassion. Therefore, I make Habakkuk’s prayer my own:

Thought the fig tree does not blossom,  
and no fruit is on the vines;  
though the produce of the olive fails  
and the fields yield no food;  
though the flock is cut off from the fold,  
and there is no herd in the stalls.  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;  
I will exult in the God of my salvation (Hab 3:17-18).

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## **God's Dream for Humanity and Creation: One Earth – One People**

*"God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Gn 1:31)*

### **Introduction**

Welcome to the annual celebration of consecrated life. Welcome to this year's "Consecrated Life Week 2008". The theme of this year's celebration is "Healing the Earth: Our Response to Violence, Injustice and Ecological Crisis". The task given me this morning is to talk about "God's Dream for Humanity and Creation: One Earth – One People".

We shall develop the topic by *picturing* God as we answer the question, "Who is this God who has a dream for humanity and the world?". We shall do this by having recourse to some of the religions in the world and by presenting their notion of God. We do so because we Christians "do not possess a comprehensive image of God".<sup>1</sup> Hence, we are going to do a "cross-traditional study" to demonstrate that we are "gradually, yet steadily, moving into a new era in which we can legitimately draw from the spiritual resources of any tradition of the world and find a living way to incorporate it into our own actual being".<sup>2</sup> "This cross-traditional" study could shed the light that we need to understand revelation better".<sup>3</sup>

Second, we shall take a look at God's dream for humanity and for Creation. We shall discuss this "dream for humanity and Creation" along the same lines – that is, we shall have recourse to the other religions and discover this *dream* as implied in their notion of God. In doing so, we hope that hearing other religious traditions conversing with each other will revitalize our own interest in the way these traditions present God's dream for Creation and humanity. Listening to what they are saying might spark our faith afresh.<sup>4</sup>

Third, we will attempt to answer the question, "What does one Earth mean?". Or, "What does one Creation mean?". We do this by listening to the "voices about the Earth" so that we can rethink our relationship with planet Earth. Environmentalists are challenging us to call into question our fundamental moral, political, and religious values and beliefs. We have to challenge our long cherished conviction about: our notion of economic growth as endless; our right to exploit the Earth for our own purposes, and the legitimacy of our superiority and, therefore, dominion over Nature. Again, we have recourse to what the other religious traditions are saying about the Earth or Creation. They have "good news" for us.

Finally, we will attempt to answer the question, "What do we mean by the expression one people?". Or, "What does humanity mean?". The discoveries of Darwin and Freud caused a revolution in the understanding of humanity that we are still assimilating.<sup>5</sup> It is claimed that humanity has "come of age". Humanity is able to deal with all its problems apart from God.<sup>6</sup> Today, there is intense interest in what it means to be human. In a time of rapid social change, what it means to be human needs to be addressed. Again, we have recourse to the other religious traditions. We listen to what they are saying. Perhaps this will spark a new sense of hope for humanity "to live in the midst of globalization that has many implications for the world as a biophysical planet"<sup>7</sup> and for "this life that is to be lived under conditions of both finite time and space"<sup>8</sup> in accordance with God's will.

This talk is premised on the belief that God is one. This means that God, in the strict and true sense, is not plural. God by essence is one.<sup>9</sup>

### **1. Picturing God**

*Who is God? What is he like? What are his qualities?*

Our images and concepts of God are human discoveries and products. We do not have a single

positive and authentic concept of God.<sup>10</sup> It follows then that we have to know the sociogenesis or the social process of the formation of our concepts of God. This then should lead us to investigate the way in which concepts about God came into being in a former social and cultural situation where they functioned well, and how they now relate to changed social and cultural contexts.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, we take heed of the advice that “the first thing we can learn about religions in the East is that it is a matter of direct experience” not “instruction in catechism or a set of correct answers to chosen questions”.<sup>12</sup> Hence, we have to remember that the Easterner would ask, “*What is your experience?*” while the Westerner would ask, “*What do you believe?*”.<sup>13</sup> The Easterner is interested in *experience*, while the Westerner is interested in *theory*. These two modes of approaching the question must be borne in mind. It will facilitate our “cross-traditional portrayal” of who God is.

**Buddhism:** In the *Buddhist* worldview the *Ultimate Reality* is generally not personalized as a God, much less as a single God. It is seen in more impersonal terms as a *state* to be attained or realized: *nirvâna*. According to Bruteau, “Buddhists wouldn’t say ‘God’ but they would agree that the whole thing is a matter of experience, not of theory”.<sup>14</sup>

All schools of Buddhism accept a range of gods. They are divine beings who have attained heavenly rebirths due to their good deeds. But sooner or later they will die and be reborn. Among the higher gods are the *Great Brahmâs*. Such glorious beings also come to an end. After an *eon*, they re-appear, and a being is reborn, from a high heaven, as a *Great Brahmâ*. When some of these glorious beings eventually die and are reborn as humans, they develop the power to remember their previous life, and consequently teach that *Great Brahmâ* is the *eternal creator of all beings*.<sup>16</sup>

For Buddhists, nirvana is truly profound and mysterious. It is not so much to be talked about as experienced, so more is said on how to attain it than the experience itself.<sup>17</sup> Nirvâna is the end of all *dukkha*: of all that is suffering, unsatisfactory, limited, and imperfect. Thus, it is truly worthy of realization.<sup>18</sup>

**Hinduism:** The *Hindu* tradition is replete with a wide variety of images of the *Divine*. The *Supreme, Ultimate Reality* is conceptualized in many different ways. God is personal and impersonal, transcendent but immanent within each person and in all Creation. He has concrete and abstract qualities. God is the first cause of the universe.<sup>19</sup> The One who is affirmed through many names and forms – both masculine and *feminine*.<sup>20</sup>

*Brahmâ* is the creator and lord of the world and all creatures. He is the cause and source of all creation.<sup>21</sup> He is seen as the principle of the world. *Atman* is the self of the person. *Brahman* and *Atman* are not two but one.<sup>22</sup> Although he is the creator, *Brahmâ* occupies a less prominent place when it comes to worship. Unlike *Visnu* and *Siva* he has no devotees.<sup>23</sup> *Visnu* is the preserver and sustainer of the world. In iconography he is shown seated or reclining on a seven-headed snake, floating in the middle of an ocean, signifying a complete absorption before creation.<sup>24</sup> *Visnu* has a thousand names. Devotees chant his name to purify and awaken their spiritual consciousness.

*Siva* is portrayed as father-god, lord of animals and ascetic. *Siva* holds together all opposites, tensions and contradictions in a variety of ways. Although he is primarily the destroyer of evil, he is also portrayed as creator, preserver and destroyer of evil.<sup>25</sup> He has a dual nature: serenity and dynamism. *Siva* retains and releases his energy for the benefit of the world.<sup>26</sup>

*Siva* is also depicted as half-female and half-male, symbolizing the union of feminine and masculine. *Siva* assumed this form to help *Brahmâ* complete the task of creation. Without the activating power of the feminine principle creation would remain incomplete.<sup>27</sup>

**Islam:** In *Islamic* tradition, Muslims picture God *conceptually*, not artistically or visually. Muslim theology paints “word pictures” to describe the nature of the divine being, or reality. Islamic mysticism has produced beautiful and eloquent poetry, full of metaphors that vividly portray the mystics’ understanding and experience of God, and of the soul’s search for, and final absorption into, the divine unity or *tanhîd*.<sup>28</sup> God is indivisibly One, neither he, nor his power, can be compared with anything (*surah*, 112).<sup>29</sup>

The God of the Qur’an — *Allah* — is described by so many images that ninety-nine names are traditionally derived from its text.<sup>30</sup> The most frequently used names for God in the Qur’an refer to his Mercy: he is

**a-rahmân, a-rahîm**, ‘*The Merciful Lord of Mercy*’.<sup>31</sup> He is generous and just. He sees that justice is upheld in society to safeguard the poor, the widow and the orphan. ‘He is Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds’ (*surah* 7:54).

‘He is the *First*, the *Last*. He is the Transcendent, the Immanent. He is the possessor of all

knowledge. He is the knower of all things' (*surah* 57). The metaphysical description of God is the Cosmic, uncreated Intellect. Manifesting many qualities, God's outward plurality of attributes does not compromise his internal oneness. God is one, not many.<sup>32</sup>

Surah 2:115 says: "Everywhere you turn; there is the face of God". A stone, or a tree, or even a human being, shares a few of God's qualities. This illustrates the doctrine of divine presences: a complex word picture not only of God, but of the interrelatedness of everything that exists, a total cosmology, which conceives of five different dimensions, or degrees, of reality.<sup>33</sup>

Muslims do not picture God visually. But they have created their own rich tradition of literary and metaphysical descriptions. If a Muslim wants to look at God, he/she needs only to look at the world. Its beauty, its laws of physics and of motion, the fixture of the stars in the firmament, all contain God yet God is beyond what is seen, for God is the unseen cause, the invisible ground of all being. *Muslims picture God by picturing creation.*<sup>34</sup>

**Chinese Religions:** Looking at the *Chinese* religions, we notice that by the time of the Yin (i.e., the Shang Dynasty: 17,65-1,123 BCE) the idea of a supreme God was already in existence. In the beginning He was called *Ti* ('Lord', 'Sovereign'), and later on *Shang-ti* ('above', 'high', and 'first'). Then during the transitional period from the Shang to the Chou (1122-221 BCE), He was called *T'ien* ('Heaven'). From the Oracle Text, we can know that the Yin people believed in a *Supreme Being* as a personal God who could issue orders and had the sense of good and evil. ... This is perfectly similar to the God of ancient Israel (Kuo Mo-jo, a leading historian and archeologist).<sup>35</sup>

The Chinese ideas and worldview were already in evidence during the Shang Dynasty: cult of ancestors, which resulted in a highly organized sacrificial and mortuary ritual, the belief in a Supreme Being who presides over a hierarchical structure in the spiritual world which was intimately related to man's life and destiny ... and the belief that the main purpose of religion was to maintain a harmonious relationship between heaven, earth and man.<sup>36</sup>

*Shang-ti* was symbolized by a flower. The flower implies the zenith of growth and shows the plant's greatest beauty and glory. From this understanding originated the Shang people's concept of the Supreme God – "the origin of life, the potency of fertility, the power of eternity, regeneration, and the majestic glory of the universe".<sup>37</sup>

The importance of *Shang-ti* gradually diminished and his role was overshadowed by the Chou's own God, *T'ien* ('Heaven', 'Lord of Heaven'). But *Shang-ti* and *T'ien* are essentially the same. They are not two separate gods but two names or titles for the same Lord of the universe.<sup>38</sup> *T'ien* was described as creator of the universe and human beings. "*T'ien* gives birth to the multitudes of the people" (Book of Poetry). He was also described as a supreme power and ruler. One of his most significant features is his morality and universality.<sup>39</sup>

Amaladoss notes that "in the Confucian tradition, the supreme God, known as Heaven, is the guarantor of Nature and its Law that governs the universe. It is the *Tao* or the way. This principle is further developed by Taoism which, together with Buddhism, provides a religious dimension to Chinese culture".<sup>40</sup>

**Samoan Traditional Religion:** Let us now focus on the Samoan *traditional religion*. Samoa is the native name of the group of volcanic islands in central Polynesia long known as the "Navigators Islands" (in the South Pacific). Bougainville, the French navigator, seeing the natives' constant use of canoes, gave the group the name of "isles of the navigators".<sup>41</sup> In the ancient Samoan worldview (*manu*), the ultimate head is the Absolute, God or *Tagaloaalagi*. He resides in the tenth heaven. The tenth heaven represents the absolute which is the preserve of God. In the Samoan indigenous reference, God is *Progenitor*, not creator. God married and issued man and so man is a genealogical child of God.<sup>42</sup> Man as a genealogical issue of God and the community as a family of God are reference points from which human rights, at least according to the indigenous reference of the ancient Samoans, derive.<sup>43</sup>

In *sum*: We have thus "pictured God" but it remains true that "God would not be confined within our definitions. It would mean to think of God as the Other who never could be defined by our thought".<sup>44</sup> Hence, Christian tradition must not regard plurality and difference as a threat.<sup>45</sup> If we are to set out on a journey into the unknown, it would mean to follow in "the traces of the *Other*". To think of God in this way means to find, not only similarities or differences, but our "similarities-in-differences".<sup>46</sup> In other words, Christians do not have a comprehensive image of God. On account of this, Christians have to face one of the challenges in our time – that is, to meet with the others in order to think about God. Christians, however,



must be ready to meet all religious traditions with a view of learning more about God.<sup>47</sup>

It is clear that the question about the same God must be answered in the affirmative, even if the perceptions are different.<sup>48</sup> Plainly said, the *Divine Mystery* has many faces. God has also many names and many attributes. We cannot fully know who or what God is. Plainly said, we cannot comprehend God's essence. Like it or not, "God is free and cannot be caught in human language".<sup>49</sup> The *thinking* and *talking* about God, however, must continue.

## 2. God's Dream for Humanity and Creation

*What is God's dream for humanity and Creation?*

To answer this question, I would like us to have recourse to the other religious traditions in the world. We can take another look at the way God is pictured by the different religious traditions and converse with them in order to revitalize our own interest in the way these traditions present God's dream for Creation and humanity.

**Buddhism:** The *Buddha* taught that each of us is in a relationship. We are all in one big network of relationships. We do not just *exist*, but we *exist with* (*anicca/anatta*). Or, better still, we do not just exist, but *pro-exist* and *inter-exist* with our fellow humans and other forms of life. What the Buddha taught is that humans can undergo a transformation from what they currently are – that is, from "selfish" to "selfless" or from "egoism" to "altruism".<sup>50</sup> Humans can lose their "ego" and be "empty" to redeem the world from its suffering.<sup>51</sup>

One of Buddhism's very important teachings is the denial of an "ego", which is always caught up in a network of relationships. Contemplating this network of relationships, Bhikku Buddhadasa of Thailand affirms that reality itself is *socialist*.<sup>52</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh puts it another way. For him, reality is *inter-being*. To be in this world is to *inter-be*.<sup>53</sup>

Implied in this teaching is God's dream for humanity and Creation — that is, **Inter-Being**. Humans and other forms of life comprise one big, beautiful network of relationships. We are one big family. On account of this, Ellis reminds us: "Because God loves humanity and his creation, this in turn implies that our lives should be tuned to the welfare of the others and of the world, as well as for the praise of God".<sup>54</sup>

**Hinduism:** For the *Hindus*, the physical world is *God's Body*.<sup>55</sup> The world is sacred. Hence, it should be treated with love and respect. The world and all that are in the world *emanated* from God. One theme that runs through Hinduism that sums up what is typical of this religion is the feeling of the inherent presence of the divine in every being. "Everywhere a Hindu looks, the devout Hindu sees God".<sup>56</sup>

Implied in this teaching is God's dream for humanity and Creation – that is, to acknowledge the **One without a second**, and to unite oneself with the *Atman* (Self) is the goal of life. Through the Self one is actually uniting oneself with the whole universe.<sup>57</sup> Humans and the varied forms of creation are merely different aspects of the same fundamental *Ultimate Reality*. Humans and other forms of life are like "waves on the ocean of being. They come and go like waves, but the vast ocean of eternal being remains".<sup>58</sup>

**Islam:** *Islam* offers a realistic optimism.<sup>59</sup> In a world that is beset with the problems of poverty, suffering, violence, and ecological degradation it teaches that the world is basically one, and humans are basically good and not alone. The affirmation of political equality leads to a sense of justice, which is ready to tax the rich and to have special concern for the widow and the orphan.<sup>60</sup>

Implied in this teaching is God's dream for humanity – that is, **Universal Community** or *theo*-democracy that is based on the sovereignty of God, not of the people.<sup>61</sup> *Allah* is with all humans. He is merciful and kind. He has spoken through prophets like Muhammad.<sup>62</sup> As the *Qur'anic* verse says, "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (*surah* 2:109).<sup>63</sup>

**Confucianism:** *Confucianism* is concerned with creating harmony in human society. This is done in accordance with an ancient Chinese cosmology. From this perspective, the cosmos is a sacred place and all aspects of it are interrelated. Thus, the ancient Chinese aimed to uphold the sacredness of life itself by maintaining harmony among humans and between humanity and Nature. The utopia of Confucianism is a vision of the world where every one and everything lives in harmony by following the law of Nature. Nature itself is dynamic, animated by the complementary principles of the *yang* (initiation) and the *yin* (completion).<sup>64</sup>

In this teaching, God's dream for humanity is implied – that is, **Harmonious Nature**. The ancient understanding of how the cosmos works is based on a notion that everything that exists – the heavens, earth, human beings, ancestral spirits and deities – is composed of a life force called *Ch'i*. *Ch'i* is manifested, mainly, in two opposite but complementary forces, *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* refers to that which is dark, moist, inert, turbid, cold, soft, and feminine. *Yang* corresponds to what is bright, dry, growing, light, warm, hard, and masculine.<sup>65</sup>

**Samoan Traditional Religion:** In the *Samoan* indigenous context, *Tagaloaalagi* is the Samoan indigenous reference for being, knowing and belonging. In the ancient times, Samoans believed that it was *Tagaloa* that gave them a designation and identity. As their transcendent reference, *Tagaloa* is their Progenitor.

Samoans live not as individuals but as beings integrally linked to their cosmos, sharing divinity with ancestors, land, sea and sky.<sup>66</sup> Implied in this ancient belief is God's dream for humanity and Creation – that is, man's **Divine Origin**. This claim gives humans their identity and sense of belonging and relationships with others, the cosmos, and God. Humans are children of God. Humans, the cosmos, and God form one family.

### 3. One Earth, One Creation

The achievements of science and technology in the first phase of the technological age gave rise to arguments for questioning the belief in Creation. The foundations of the beginning of the world and of man were shaken as the natural sciences emerged.<sup>67</sup> Hence, there are many discussions on Creation and debates between the understanding of Creation and the theory of evolution.

It is said that when scientists talk about the origin of the universe, they are referring to the earliest state of affairs the history of the closely packed mass 'big bang' theory. They describe the earliest the space-time-energy universe. But when the origin of the talking about its is, about why there neutrons or space-in the first place.<sup>68</sup> The therefore, is the word ambiguous because



they can describe in universe, such as the of neutrons in the are attempting to set of conditions in system of the theologians speak of universe, they are ultimate origin, that was a mass of time-energy system crux of the matter, *origin*. This term is it can mean the

*natural causes* that preceded a particular event or the *ultimate source* of an event.<sup>69</sup> One should keep a space open for the other, give the other time, and create possibilities of life for the other. According to Moltmann, “this is what the theological tradition called *creatio continua* and what differentiates the on-going creation from the *creatio originalis* in the beginning and from the *creatio nova* in the end”.<sup>70</sup>

“*Creation*” and “*complexity*” are the main concepts that stimulate these discussions and debates. ‘Creation’ is a word theologians are generally more comfortable with while ‘complexity’ is more common in scientific circles.<sup>71</sup> The problem with belief, both in science and religion, is the failure to recognize that human knowledge is not concrete, and eternally solid and reliable, valid in all times and places and passed down from one generation to the next in a cultural vacuum.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, what we see in front of our eyes depends substantially on what is behind them. Different people can look at the same view and see completely different things.<sup>73</sup> We assume then that “there is a pre-existing reality that sets limits to our speculations”.<sup>74</sup> It is an acknowledged fact that the whole world, not only the Bible, has something to say on Creator-Creation.<sup>75</sup> Traces of the divine in Creation are acknowledged (Rom 1:18-20). Acknowledging the divine in Creation is acknowledging primitive revelation. This explains knowledge of Creation among the peoples of the Earth. From this stimulating perspective, “myth” and “mythological” acquired a new understanding.<sup>76</sup> God's activity is experienced and witnessed by those who encounter God, who leads, saves and preserves.

Peoples from **traditional cultures** have developed and preserved attitudes towards the natural world that we can learn from. What is very common to them is the feeling of affinity between the human and the natural worlds. This is evidenced by the sense that all things belong together and work together. More importantly, there is a strong sense of the Earth as a Mother or maternal being to whom due reverence and respect must be given.<sup>77</sup> Human life is deeply interwoven into the meaning of the cosmos. Their activities are viewed as being connected with the life of Nature – with the sun, the seasons, the animals, and the plants. All are infused with a divine quality.<sup>78</sup> Such a view is affirmed by the Buddhist doctrine of compassion which rejects distinction between self and others.<sup>79</sup> Hinduism and Buddhism teach that all things flow endlessly into each other. Distinctions are illusory.

**Hindus and Buddhists** have an extraordinary religious sensitivity to Nature. The mysteriousness of Nature is ineffable. Nature, though mysterious, is animated.<sup>80</sup> The *Isa Upanishad* declares: “Behold the universe in the glory of God: and all that lives and moves on earth.... Who sees all being in his own Self and his own Self in all beings, loses all fear. When a sage sees this great Unity and his Self has become all beings, what delusion and what sorrow can ever be near him?”<sup>81</sup>

**Taoism** understands the processes of the natural and the human world in terms of the *Tao* or Way. *Tao* operates through the spontaneous and creative interaction of the opposite principles of *yin* and *yang*. Hence, the natural way for humans is to live in accordance with the flow or law of Nature, not to dominate or control it.<sup>82</sup> Humans need to cooperate with Nature, respect its inherent wisdom, and live in accordance with its ways or laws. There is essential unity between humanity and Creation.

**Islamic** tradition teaches the concept of God as creator who stands above and rules Nature. Submission to the will of *Allah* is every human being's obligation. Everyone who submits to the directive of Allah belongs to the community of the *umma*,<sup>83</sup> which is universal, transcending cultures and borders.<sup>84</sup>

God is found in Creation; the one drawn sees God in Creation.<sup>85</sup> The mystic view of Creation states that “the microcosm of the person finds a parallel in the macrocosm of the Creation, the heavens and the earth”.<sup>86</sup> Attendant upon the personal relationship with God, each Muslim is responsible for the shape of things and the care of brother and sister.<sup>87</sup>

#### 4. One People, One Humanity

Central to the discussion of humanity is that all peoples (men and women) are creatures of God. By creating humans in his image, God has given humans their human dignity. Hence, human beings have religious roots.<sup>88</sup> The “image” or “likeness” of God in human beings, their dignity and freedom spring from the declaration that God created them. What is proper to creatures, however, does not consist in its material and specific existence but in their relationship, in their belonging to a whole, and in their position before God, the Creator.<sup>89</sup>

Human beings are seen from many angles. In the *rational* sense, the human mind mirrors God. In the *moral* sense, humans share in God's dominion over Nature. In the *social* sense, humans participate in God's capacity for relationship. And, in the *creative* sense, humans are partners with God in the ongoing creative<sup>90</sup> processes. But the primary quality of human beings to be emphasized is this: “to be in the image of God is to be placed in a dynamic of relationships: first of all with other human beings and second with the created order”.<sup>91</sup> To be altruistic and ecologically sensitive are defining elements and features of creativity. “An instrumentalist attitude towards the world”, Gunton warns us, “results in a distancing, a disengagement from the world, which in turn develops into alienation”.<sup>92</sup>

In the history of humankind, many people denied or implied that only men, and not women, are created in the image of God. Men have denied women their humanity. Worse still, women are considered the property of men. Today, they have become *commodities* for human trafficking.<sup>93</sup> The issue is violence, not sex. The violence done to women is “a violation against women's bodies and souls, i.e., the violation of their persons”.<sup>94</sup>

In plain and simple language, this is a distortion of the image of God in humanity. The marginalization and oppression of women counteracts our struggle for full humanity. Therefore, our struggle against the oppression, degradation and marginalization of women is both religious and socio-political.

The struggle for “full humanity” embodies and enacts God's saving purposes in and beyond history.<sup>95</sup>

We have known that humans are essentially social and political beings. It is noted elsewhere that “we are created in large part by the social, economic and political structures in which we live. Therefore, life, its problematic character, and its fulfillment must always be understood in this social context”.<sup>96</sup> If we are serious about humanity, we must treat the social, political, economic, cultural, and religious context as essential to human life and God’s dream for humanity and Creation.

### Conclusion

It is very obvious that the theme of this year’s celebration – “*Healing the Earth*” – and this morning’s first talk – “*God’s Dream for Humanity and Creation*” – suggest “the theological view of Nature as Creation, but that sees Creation as having departed from the original intention of the Creator”.<sup>97</sup>

According to Ronald Cole-Turner,<sup>98</sup> “The theme that persists from the Genesis 1-11 stories is that Creation is good and yet not precisely what God intends, and thus there is a general warrant for technology”.<sup>99</sup> There is, of course, another school of thought that develops the notion that “technology can be seen as co-creation, whereby human beings offer their technological innovations as expanding God’s creative activity”.<sup>100</sup>

But the future course of technology must be anticipated and guided. Hence, there is a need for a theology of technology that must include an assessment of the theological assessment of technology. An ongoing conversation is needed in the wide space between theological generality and technological detail. Only then can we begin to see if we have the theological imagination to surround technology with theological meaning. Otherwise, we can expect technology to remain unbounded and uncontrolled.<sup>101</sup>

It is voiced that “theology and Church can engage in criticism and reconstruction of the religious context of technology, by clarifying what is meant by creativity, especially technological creativity”. Moreover, “theology and Church can engage in criticism and reconstruction of the language of worship and prayer through which human beings, including technologists, are formed as moral and religious beings”.<sup>102</sup> As regards the destruction of the Earth, we can say that well before industrial technologies and economic markets were globalized, “humankind faced a globalized threat from the deadly self-destruction in the East-West conflict and from the global fall-out of regional ecological crises”.<sup>103</sup> Moltmann laments that “while globalization has overcome the East-West confrontation, it has not overcome the old confrontations between the rich and poor, and it has created new confrontations between humans and Nature”.<sup>104</sup>

The destruction of the environment will seriously jeopardize the survival of humanity. Life on earth is under threat. The human race could become extinct. The ecological crisis has become “an ecological catastrophe, at least for the weaker beings, that are the first to perish in this struggle”.<sup>105</sup>

What brought about this crisis? The Western scientific and technological civilization. The Western standard of living cannot be universalized. It can only be sustained at the expense of others: at the expense of the “Third World”, at the expense of the coming generations, and at the expense of the earth.<sup>106</sup>

Environmental problems, however, are not confined to the industrial countries in the West. The ecological catastrophes are intensifying the already existing economic and social problems of poor nations. “Poverty is the worst pollution” (Indira Gandhi). “The worst environmental pollution is not poverty as such; it is the corruption that causes poverty. It is a vicious circle leading to death: impoverishment leads everywhere to overpopulation, because children are the only security life has to offer” (Jürgen Moltmann).

While not ignoring the observations of Gandhi, with Moltmann we state that “the whole earth is a single cell, and we are all simply symbiotic particles, related to one another. There can be no ‘us’ and ‘them’. The global politics that flows (should flow) from this vision is truly a *bios* and a *logos*”.<sup>107</sup> Human existence is increasingly an ‘interdependent’ existence.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, we recall what Chief Seattle said in a letter, dated 1854, addressed to Franklin Pearce:

The white man “treats his mother the earth and his brother the sky as things to be bought and sold. His appetite will gobble up the earth and leave behind merely a desert. . . . What is happening to the earth will happen to the earth’s children. . . . Man cannot control the web of life. He is only a thread in this tapestry. What he does to the tapestry he will do to himself. . . . The air is precious to the red-

skinned people because all things share the same breath: animals, trees and humans.... The sap circulating in the trees carry the memory of the red-skinned people.... Our God is the same God. You may think now that he belongs to you, just as you wish to possess our land; but it is not possible. He is the God of all human beings, and his mercy is equal towards the red-skinned and the white. This earth is precious to him, and violating it is despising its Creator.... My words are fixed as the stars”.<sup>109</sup>

God’s dream for humanity is great. Let us heed what science is saying to us today. Let us also listen to what Chief Seattle is saying to us today. Let us heal the earth and stop the violence, injustice, and ecological crisis taking place in the world now. Time is of the essence!

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Werner G. Jeanrond, “Thinking about God Today,” in *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, Werner G. Jeanrond, eds. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Beatrice Bruteau, “What We can Learn from the East” (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Michael L. Fitzgerald, “Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism” by Fr. Jacques Dupuis, *Bulletin Pro Dialogo* 108, no. 3 (2003):334-341.

<sup>4</sup> Bruteau, “What We can Learn from the East”, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 133.

<sup>6</sup> See Harvey Cox, “The Secular City” (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 61 and 79.

<sup>7</sup> Max L. Stackhouse, “Introduction” in *Religion and the Powers of the Common Life, God and Globalization*, 1, Max L. Stackhouse with Peter J. Paris, eds. (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2000), 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Jesus of Nazareth”: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration, trans. from the German by Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 142.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 58.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Bruteau, “What We can Learn from the East”, 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Peter Harvey, “Buddhism” in *Picturing God*, John Holm with John Bowker, eds. (London: Pinter, 1994), 9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Sharada Sugirtharajah, “Hinduism” in *Picturing God*, John Holm with John Bowker, eds. (London: Pinter, 1994), 70.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Amaladoss, “The Utopia of the Human Family”, in *Globalization and its Victims*, Concilium 5, Jon Sobrino and Felix Wilfred, eds. (London: SCM Press, 2001), 83.

<sup>23</sup> Sugirtharajah, “Hinduism”, 79.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>28</sup> Clinton Bennett, “Islam” in *Picturing God*, John Holm with John Bowker, ed. (London: Pinter, 1994), 113.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 131. “These degrees are: (1) God’s Essence; (2) God as Divine Being; (3) the world of angels; (4) the subtle world; (5) the material, and human world. Each degree manifests God, radiates, or emanates out from God, and returns towards God”.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

- <sup>35</sup> Xinzhong Yao, "Chinese Religions" in *Picturing God*, John Holm with John Bowker, ed. (London: Pinter, 1994), 196.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-198.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.
- <sup>40</sup> Amaladoss, "The Utopia of the Human Family", 82.
- <sup>41</sup> George Turner, *Samoa: A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (London: London Missionary Society, 1884), 1-2.
- <sup>42</sup> Tui Atua Tamasese Taisi Efi, "Samoan Jurisprudence and the Samoan Lands and Titles Court: The Perspective of a Litigant". A public lecture at the University of Hawai'i (29 October 2007), 2-3.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>44</sup> Ola Sigurdson, "Is the Trinity a Practical Doctrine?" in *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*, Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 118.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 405-421.
- <sup>47</sup> Jeanrond, "Thinking about God Today", 90.
- <sup>48</sup> Fitzgerald, "Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism by Fr. Jacques Dupuis", 339.
- <sup>49</sup> Sigurdson, "Is the Trinity a Practical Doctrine?", 120.
- <sup>50</sup> See Brennan R. Hill, Paul Knitter and William Madges, *Faith, Religion and Theology: A Contemporary Introduction* (Mystic: Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1997), 229-230.
- <sup>51</sup> See T. Patrick Burke, *The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 72.
- <sup>52</sup> See Amaladoss, "The Utopia of the Human Family", 85.
- <sup>53</sup> "Inter-being is a new term, but I believe it will be in the dictionary soon because it is such an important word. When we see the nature of inter-being, barriers between ourselves and others are dissolved, and peace, love, and understanding are possible. Whenever there is understanding, compassion is born". Thich Nhat Hanh, "Living Buddha, Living Christ" (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 11.
- <sup>54</sup> George, F.R. Ellis, "Kenosis as a Unifying Theme for Life and Cosmology" in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, John Polkinghorne, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 109.
- <sup>55</sup> See Brennan, Knitter and Madges, *Faith, Religion and Theology*, 222.
- <sup>56</sup> Burke, *The Major Religions*, 15.
- <sup>57</sup> Amaladoss, "The Utopia of the Human Family", 83.
- <sup>58</sup> Burke, *The Major Religions*, 15.
- <sup>59</sup> See Brennan, Knitter and Madges, *Faith, Religion and Theology*, 242
- <sup>60</sup> Amaladoss, "The Utopia of the Human Family", 87.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.
- <sup>62</sup> Burke, "The Major Religions", 247.
- <sup>63</sup> See John Renard, *Understanding the Islamic Experience* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2002), 126.
- <sup>64</sup> Amaladoss, "The Utopia of the Human Family", 82-83.
- <sup>65</sup> Kathleen Nadeau, "Confucianism: Sacred or Secular?", *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42, no. 4 (2005):395.
- <sup>66</sup> Tui Atua Tamasese Taisi Efi, "Samoan Jurisprudence and the Samoan Lands and Titles Court", 4.
- <sup>67</sup> See Claus Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1974), 1-2.
- <sup>68</sup> Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 115.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>70</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World", in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, John Polkinghorne, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 149.
- <sup>71</sup> Christine Ledger and Stephen Pickard, "Introduction" in *Creation and Complexity: Interdisciplinary Issues in Science and Religion*, Christine Ledger and Stephen Pickard, eds. (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004), xi.
- <sup>72</sup> Carolyn M. King, "Models of Invisible Realities: The Common Thread in Science and Theology" in *Creation and Complexity: Interdisciplinary Issues in Science and Religion*, Christine Ledger and Stephen Pickard, eds. (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004), 19.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>74</sup> Ig Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 118 cited in King, "Models of Invisible Realities", 23.
- <sup>75</sup> Westermann, *Creation*, 8.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

- <sup>77</sup> J.J. Clarke, *Voices of the Earth: An Anthology of Ideas and Arguments* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), 17.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>81</sup> The Upanishads, trans. Juan Mascaro (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), 45 cited in Amaladoss, "The Utopia of the Human Family", 83.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> This refers to a second dimension of religious diversity. It means "religio-moral and socio-political community". Renard, *Understanding the Islamic Experience*, 80.
- <sup>84</sup> Amaladoss, "The Utopia of the Human Family", 86.
- <sup>85</sup> Renard, *Understanding the Islamic Experience*, 127.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.
- <sup>88</sup> See Westermann, *Creation*, 60.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.
- <sup>90</sup> Ted Peters, *God: The World's Future*, 2nd ed. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000), 153-155.
- <sup>91</sup> Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1992), 102.
- <sup>92</sup> Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 13-14.
- <sup>93</sup> See Mary Grey, "The Role of Women in Overcoming Violence", in *Religion as a Source of Violence*, Concilium 4, Wim Beuken and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds. (London: SCM Press, 1997), 65.
- <sup>94</sup> Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, "Excessive Violence against Women in the Name of Religion", in *Religion as a Source of Violence*, Concilium 4, Wim Beuken and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds. (London: SCM Press, 1997), 60.
- <sup>95</sup> See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972).
- <sup>96</sup> Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 140.
- <sup>97</sup> Ronald Cole-Turner, "Science, Technology and the Mission of Theology" in *The Spirit and the Modern Authorities, God and Globalization*, 2, Max L. Stackhouse with Don S. Browning, eds. (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2001), 164.
- <sup>98</sup> Ronald Cole-Turner is the H. Parker Sharp Professor of Theology and Ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, a position that relates theology and ethics to developments in science and technology. He is the author of *The New Genesis: Theology and the Genetic Revolution* (1993), co-author (with Brent Waters) of *Pastoral Genetics: Theology and Care at the Beginning of Life* (1996), editor of *Human Cloning: Religious Responses* (1997), and editor of *Beyond Cloning: Religion and the Remaking of Humanity* (2001).
- <sup>99</sup> Cole-Turner, "Science, Technology and the Mission of Theology", 164.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>103</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Destruction and Healing of the Earth" in *The Spirit and the Modern Authorities, God and Globalization* 2, Max L. Stackhouse with Don S. Browning, eds. (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2001), 166.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>107</sup> Julia Esquivel Velasquez, "Spirituality of the Earth", in *Ecology and Poverty*, Concilium 5, Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, eds. (London: SCM Press, 1995), 59.
- <sup>108</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 54.
- <sup>109</sup> Velasquez, "Spirituality of the Earth", 60.

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# Events

## **OCTOBER: ROUND TABLES**

### **Synod of Africa**

**SEDOS - USG/UISG — 10, 16, 24 October 2009**

**– Theology and Experiences –  
The Church in Africa  
in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace**

**Saturday 10: 9.00 to 12.00 a.m.**  
***Prophetic Role of the Church in African Society***

**Friday 16: 3.00 to 6.30 p.m.**  
***Role of Women in the Church of Africa***

**Saturday 24: 9.00 to 12.00 a.m.**  
***Religious Life in Africa Today: What is our Role?***

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## **NEXT SEDOS SEMINAR 2010**

**18–22 May**

***“The Prophetic Challenge of the African Churches”***

**- ARICCIA - “CASA DIVIN MAESTRO” -**

***Daily Sub-themes: (With emphasis on Formation)***

**Tuesday evening:**

*Over-all situation of Africa: Political, Social, Economical, Religious*

**Wednesday:**

*Kerigma: Evangelizing for Non-Violence*

**Thursday:**

*Koinonia: Building Communities in Justice and Peace*

**Friday:**

*Diakonia: Being Instruments of Reconciliation*

**Saturday:**

*Guidelines for Formation*