

**MISSION AND DIALOGUE**  
**Approaches to a Communicative Understanding of Mission**



# MISSION AND DIALOGUE

Approaches to a Communicative Understanding of Mission



Edited by

Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth



**MISSION AND DIALOGUE (One World Theology, Volume 1)**  
**Approaches to a Communicative Understanding of Mission**

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## Preface

*Mission and Dialogue* is the programmatic title of the first volume in the new *One World Theology* series devoted to missiology and the universal Church. Instigated by *missio* in Aachen, this series is intended to serve as a universal Church forum. The volumes in the series will provide a platform for an exchange of ideas on theological issues in which representatives of the different continents are invited to present their views on specific topics. The forum aims to foster dialogue between the local churches and contribute to a dialogue among local churches on equal terms.

The distinguishing feature of *One World Theology* is that theological issues will be addressed not from a single perspective but from various angles. Hence a single anthology will comprise different points of view on the *quaestiones disputatae*, the contrast between them deriving not least from the context in which they are rooted. The hallmark of *One World Theology* is unity in diversity. It is specifically intended that the authors should present and accentuate their views in different ways and perhaps even contradict each other within a single volume. This will stimulate a lively debate that can extend the boundaries of theology, strengthen the Church as a learning community and contribute to its catholicity.

The first volume in the new *One World Theology* series consists of five chapters. In the opening chapter the authors offer systematic-theological reflections on the relationship between mission and dialogue. The initial contribution distinguishes between inclusivist, exclusivist and pluralist approaches to dialogue. The concept of dialogue is subsequently considered in systematic terms and with respect to the Bible, following which consequences are drawn for mission undertaken on the basis of dialogue. The debate then commences with José María Vigil's article *Mission is dialogue and*

*only dialogue*, which takes a critical look at exclusivist and inclusivist approaches. The author argues that they should be seen in their historical context and subjected to a critical analysis. Considering the relations between different religions from an Asian perspective, Joseph Nedumkallel points out that the religious experience and the spiritual dimension constitute a crucial bridge between religions. This can serve as a point of departure for inter-religious dialogue grounded in the realisation that all religions are essentially characterised by the elements that unite rather than separate them. In his examination of inter-faith dialogue from an African perspective Joseph Kato Bitole addresses the need for dialogue especially among people in Africa, a continent rent by divisions. He says that dialogue is a specific feature of the Jewish-Christian legacy, the Christian faith being distinguished, in particular, by the way in which Christians establish and nurture relations with those around them.

The authors contributing to the second chapter of this volume focus their attention on inter-religious dialogue. Looking at the topic through Asian eyes, Francis X. D'Sa draws attention to both the increase in secularisation and the emergence of a 'sacred secularity'. Drawing on Raimon Panikkar, he explains that the whole cosmos is a living reality and that secularisation should, therefore, not be seen as the opposite of religiousness. The issue is not one of confrontation or dissociation but rather of mutual understanding, respect and acceptance. Christian Troll continues with thoughts on the relationship between mission and dialogue in the context of encounters between Christians and Muslims. He emphasises that mission, dialogue and preaching are terms used to describe separate activities and that there is no reason why they should not exist side by side. He highlights the need in both the Christian and the Muslim world to reflect on the different interpretations of mission and *da'wah* in both inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue. Diego Irarrázaval, meanwhile, explores the relationship between the Christian faith and Latin American cultures. He argues that restrictive, exclusive approaches must be overcome, as must essentialist and dichotomous relations, if an integrative understanding between autochthonous and Christian concepts is to be reached. In his opinion, special importance attaches to popular religious belief, which has the status

of a theologumenon and reflects the *sensus fidei*. Approaching the subject from an African perspective, Frederic Ntedika Mvumbi states that belief in God is taken as a matter of course in traditional African religions. Faith is more the result of feeling than analysis; it is not so much a cognitive conception as a guiding principle in life. For Mvumbi the challenge is to effectuate a dialogue that can bring together these different approaches to the understanding of religion and establish a relationship between them.

The next chapter deals with the dialogue between the universal Church and the local churches. Alexander P. Zatyryka Pacheco begins by pointing out that the Church, like every other organisation, has to resolve the tension between the desire for identity and the need for adaptation. An organisation can only have a future if it succeeds in harnessing this tension and turning it into a source of strength and energy. Zatyryka sees both the universal Church and the local church as being servants of proclamation. He claims that the service they perform must be mystagogical and that the local churches have a special responsibility to develop mystagogies. Michael Amaladoss from India points out that the universal Church cannot simply be identified with the Church in Rome. Taking the liturgy as an example, he deals with what, from an Asian standpoint, are unsuccessful attempts to develop a lively dialogue and stresses that pluralism should not be equated with relativism. He proposes coordination and dialogue between the local church and the universal Church, instead of the development of a dominant centre, as points of departure for a “different kind of globalisation”. Ignace Ndongala Maduku looks at the development of basic ecclesiastical communities in the archdiocese of Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo). He feels that the main challenge for the Church hierarchy is to transform the basic communities into laboratories of prophetic activity so that the Church can “lay the ground for a humane society”. The article on *The universal Church as the network principle of the Church* focuses on the strained relationship between homogeneity and heterogeneity. Drawing on ecclesiological positions adopted by Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper, it links this ecclesiological dispute with the question of revealed theology, on which the understanding of contextualisation or a perennial principle in theology rests. In view of the need to reconcile these positions it is proposed that the universal Church should be seen to a greater extent

as a formal (less than a material-normative) communicative principle in the Church, to which the local churches owe their universal Church dimension.

In the fourth chapter theologians from different continents examine the state of dialogue between the local churches. Beginning with the missionary epistle of the German bishops *His Salvation to All Peoples*, Ludwig Schick goes on to portray the universal Church as a community of learning, solidarity and prayer. Referring to specific examples and experiences, he demonstrates the extent to which a vibrant dialogue between the local churches can help to enrich the universal Church. Orlando B. Quevedo from the Philippines recalls the Asian vision of lively local churches, which entails dialogue with the cultures of the people (inculturation), the different religious traditions (inter-religious dialogue) and the poor (integral liberation). He points to the lively history of dialogue in the FABC and, referring to the processes of dialogue within the Church in the Philippines, illustrates that the dialogue between the local churches can help to enrich both the local and the universal Church. Looking at the Church in a globalising world, Anselme Titianma Sanon advocates a dialogue between local churches that connects with a “dialogue with the cultures” in the local churches. In the final contribution in this chapter Michael Huhn outlines the genesis of the Latin American Episcopal Conference CELAM, which served as a model for the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences) and SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar). Referring to the example of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, he shows how local churches join hands and exercise mutual solidarity.

In the final chapter of this first volume in the *One World Theology* series the authors outline the pastoral consequences arising from a dialogical interpretation of mission. Recalling the approach taken by Adolf Exeler, a pastoral theologian from Muenster and the founder of comparative pastoral theology, Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst highlights some key elements of missionary pastoral work. Drawing on his practical experiences of the universal Church in the bishopric of Limburg, he illustrates the consequences for a diocese if it regards itself as a community of learning, prayer and solidarity within the universal

Church. Albert Peter Rethmann distinguishes between inculturation and related terms, such as adjustment, adaptation, accommodation, indigenisation, contextualisation, etc., and emphasises their correlation with the Christian belief in incarnation. He explains that the concept of inculturation is based on the integrative, critical and stimulating function of belief and suggests that the concept of inculturation should relate not just to the *missio ad extra*, but also and in equal measure to the *missio ad intra*. From an African perspective Pius Rutechura says that dialogue in missionary work must help Christians in Africa to rediscover the cultural values of the continent, hold these values in high esteem, promote community life and play an active part in overcoming the barriers between people. He regards the major challenges as the fundamental option for the poor, monitoring of secular leaders, the role of the Church in reconciliation, justice and peace, and ecumenical cooperation. Finally, Wendy M. Louis examines the pastoral consequences of a dialogical understanding of mission. In doing so, she pays tribute to the special importance of the Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum (OICA) and shows that small Christian communities have both a missionary charisma and the capacity to engage in dialogue.

The authors in this first volume of the *One World Theology* series – many of them are long-standing partners of *missio* – have agreed to participate in a universal Church dialogue, the vitality of which rests on the juxtaposition of diverse perspectives, the presentation of varying arguments and, in some cases, the emergence of differences in interpretation. This conceptual multiplicity is programmatic for the new series of books. *One World Theology* feels beholden, in the best sense of the word, to a universal Church catholicity that is characterised by a lively theological dialogue rooted in the two fundamental Pauline principles of all Christian catholicity. May the dialogue promote the building up of the Church and be guided by the very essence of our faith: Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, which must be at the heart of every Christian dialogue.

Special thanks go to the staff of *missio*, in particular Dr. Otmar Oehring, Dr. Marco Moerschbacher, Dr. Hadwig Müller and Prof. Dr. h.c. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, without whose conceptual advice this book would not have been produced. We should also like to

thank Michael Meyer for the careful compilation of the manuscripts. We sincerely hope that the first volume published in the One World Theology series will stimulate interest in this universal Church forum.

Klaus Krämer  
Klaus Vellguth

**Systematic-theological reflections on the  
relationship between mission and dialogue**



# Mission in dialogue

Klaus Krämer

## 1. On the relationship between mission and dialogue

Anyone attempting to determine the relationship between mission and dialogue will soon run into one basic difficulty: both concepts are extremely complex and their semantic content is far from unambiguous.<sup>1</sup> The first thing we have to do is distinguish between two different semantic planes. While mission and dialogue both indicate forms of communication, dialogue implies mutual recognition of the equal status of the communicators, while mission suggests the promotion of one particular point of view. On the second semantic plane both forms of communication express a certain basic attitude. Although both semantic planes are inseparably bound up with each other, they still have to be distinguished. Both concepts have their own history, “mission” being a genuinely Christian concept used as a technical term to refer to the Christian mission in a worldwide context, while “dialogue” is a concept derived from Greek philosophy that found its way into Christian theology via a multi-phase reception process.

Dialogue as a form of communication indicates a serious and meaningful conversation between two parties on a basis of equality. A dialogue derives its vitality from the mutual nature of assertion and response. It consists of an exchange of arguments, experiences and points of view. It is aimed at understanding, clarification and consensus. A dialogue can pursue different aims: It can help people get to know each other or it can be a helpful instrument for solving social problems in a pluralistic society. However it can also be used – as in the case of inter-faith dialogue – to mean an attempt to reconcile

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<sup>1</sup> On the relationship between mission and dialogue see Krämer, K., *Den Logos zur Sprache bringen. Untersuchungen zu einem dialogischen Verständnis von Mission*, Ostfildern, 2012. The present paper is intended to bring together the basic theses of this more comprehensive work as a contribution to the discussion.

different claims to truth by discussing them within the framework of a discourse. It is this last form of dialogue and its relationship to mission that we shall be looking at here.

Since the dawn of the modern era the concept of mission has been used as a technical term for the spreading of the Christian faith among non-Christians.<sup>2</sup> In this sense it can also be extended to comparable activities on the part of other religions. Such a phenomenological definition of the concept of mission can be reduced to five elements: (1) a planned, methodical and organised procedure; (2) an intent to win over the Other to one's own faith; (3) an attempt to persuade others to join one's own religious community; (4) a conviction of the truth of one's own faith; and (5) a conviction that acceptance is also in the objective interest of the person to be converted.

The theological discussion of the relationship between mission and dialogue began with the Second Vatican Council, which heralded a new approach to the whole concept of mission and the relationship of Christianity to other religions. The positive acknowledgement of everything that was "true and holy" in other religions<sup>3</sup> and the recognition of the basic possibility of salvation for non-Christians, too, laid the foundations for an inter-religious dialogue, thus creating the need for a new rationale of the Church's missionary activity.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, there was a growing conviction in the second half of the 20th century that peace among nations could be substantially promoted by an earnest dialogue between the world's religions.<sup>5</sup> This was because threats to world peace often emanated from fundamen-

<sup>2</sup> On the history of the term see Collet, G., "Zum Missionsverständnis der katholischen Kirche", in: Dahling-Sander, Ch., et al. (eds.), *Leitfaden ökumenische Missionstheologie*, Gütersloh, 2003, 130-135.

<sup>3</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Die Erklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zu den nichtchristlichen Religionen "Nostra aetate"* in Rahner, K./Vorglimmer, H., (eds.), *Kleines Konzilskompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums mit Einführungen und ausführlichem Sachregister*, Freiburg i. Br. 1982, 356, no. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rahner, K., "Anonymes Christentum und Missionsauftrag der Kirche", in: idem, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. IX, Einsiedeln, 1970, 498-515.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Küng, H., *Projekt Weltethos*, Munich, 1990. For a critical treatment see the survey in the research report of Hans Jürgen Münk, "Die Weltreligionen im globalen Ethikdialog über Menschheitsfragen" in: idem / Durst, M., *Christliche Theologie und Weltreligionen*, Freiburg (Switzerland), 2003, 160-238, es 202-212.

talist tendencies in all world religions. These tendencies were frequently characterised by intolerance and a propensity to violence, thus compromising the very purpose of mission. The question of the relationship between mission and dialogue gained new relevance in the discussion of a theology of religions, especially in the context of the pluralistic theory of religion.<sup>6</sup> The distinctions among an exclusivist, an inclusivist and a pluralistic model can help us in an initial attempt to schematise the relationship between mission and dialogue.

In the exclusivist model the interlocutor feels himself to be in “exclusive and unlimited possession of the absolute truth”. This subjective certainty is itself a strong motive for undertaking the mission. In this case mission is aimed at bringing the absolute truth to other fellow human beings in as pure a form as possible. Such an attitude largely precludes a dialogue – at least as far as the substance of the faith is concerned – as even the hypothetical possibility of a modification or correction of the proselytiser’s own position would be regarded as an unacceptable relativisation. A dialogue concerning the articles of faith might at most be considered a didactic method leading to a deeper insight.

In the inclusivist model the interlocutor also feels himself pledged to the absolute truth that concerns all mankind, this truth being represented by his own religion. But he expects that traces of this truth are also to be found in other religions and cultures and that he himself can penetrate much more deeply into the truth without necessarily compromising the priority of his own claim to it. Here, too, the necessity of the mission stems from the basic obligation to make the whole truth in all its complexity accessible to all men. At the same time one can have a dialogue in which the parties get to know and mutually enrich each other. It can help one to penetrate further into the truth without the risk of it being subjected to any fundamental reformulation.

The pluralistic model assumes that none of the parties to the dialogue can claim to be in possession of the whole truth. Everyone

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<sup>6</sup> On the basic positions regarding the pluralistic theory of religion see Schmidt-Leukel, P., *Gott ohne Grenzen – Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen*, Gütersloh, 2005.

has a provisional, historical and cultural share in it. Dialogue helps everyone to get closer to the truth. In a sense it takes the place of mission. In this model a deliberate intent to foist one's own position on others would be regarded as an unreflective or unenlightened attitude. Although everyone has his viewpoint to contribute and is entitled to seek support for it, open-ended dialogue is the proper way to get ever closer to the all-embracing, absolute truth.

Only the inclusivist approach seriously raises the question of the relationship between mission and dialogue. For the exclusivist this question is decided in favour of a more or less uncompromising mission, for the pluralist in favour of dialogue. The discussion of the pluralistic theory of religion has clearly shown that the basic positions are ultimately decided by the Christological question: Does the Christian tradition's theological understanding of the person and significance of Jesus Christ permit any positive acknowledgement of other religions at all? The answer to this question is summed up in the proposal to replace the traditional constitutive Christology by a representative one. Paul Knitter, for example, argues that although Jesus of Nazareth may continue to be regarded as a manifestation of the universal Logos, other historical forms of the revelation of the Logos can be recognised as equally valid.<sup>7</sup> However, this representative Christology approach has rightly been criticised for its willingness to give up the central tenet of the Christian faith in order to enter into a dialogue with other religions. Thus the basic Christological consensus among all Christian churches is that "the one and only God has manifested Himself in Jesus Christ only once in history, but quite conclusively and unreservedly"<sup>8</sup> It is, however, questionable whether the thesis put forward by representatives of the pluralistic theology of religion – namely that holding fast to the constitutive significance of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all mankind would preclude an unprejudiced dialogue with the non-Christian religions – is strictly accurate. We shall, therefore, now examine the question as to how far the striving for an honest and genuine dialogue is enshrined at the heart of the faith itself.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Knitter, P., "Religion und Befreiung. Soteriozentrik als Antwort an die Kritiker" in: Bernhardt, R., (ed.), *Horizontüberschreitungen*, Gütersloh, 1991, 203-219.

<sup>8</sup> Kasper, W., "Einzigkeit und Universalität Jesu Christi", in: Krämer, K. / Paus, A., (eds.), *Die Weite des Mysteriums. Christliche Identität in Dialog*, Freiburg, 2000, 146-157, 155.

## 2. Biblical and systematic foundations of a theological concept of dialogue

Our second step entails scrutinising the biblical scriptures in search of clues to a dialogical understanding of the relationship between man and God which might be crucial to communicating the faith. We shall thus be seeking a biblically well-founded and theologically sound concept of dialogue.

### **The narrative of Christian salvation seen as God's dialogue with man**

A glance at the biblical scriptures shows that man's relationship to God does indeed have a profoundly dialogical structure. God addresses man in a given life situation, calls him out of it and sets him very specific tasks. Man talks and argues with God. He calls upon Him in time of need and turns to Him with concrete requests.

The basic dialogical structure which determines the relationship of the people of Israel to their God is made particularly clear by the story of the Exodus. God appears here as the saviour of His people whose need He recognises and whom He frees from their Egyptian captivity by hearing their call for help and helping them escape across the Red Sea. The people of Israel respond to this experience of salvation by thanking God and keeping faith with Him. According to the thoroughgoing analyses by Claus Westermann, the interplay of communicative elements – the call for help, the heeding of the call and the response of the saved – make the historical event of the rescue into a dialogical happening.<sup>9</sup>

The basic dialogical structure of the Exodus event has paradigmatic significance not just for the Exodus narrative, but also for the history of Israel in general. It is a recurrent theme in the texts of the Old Testament, in which YHVH repeatedly turns out to be the saviour of Israel. He reacts to the given situation appropriately, thus revealing himself as the "God of the Fathers", who never leaves his people in the lurch. Yet at the same time he acts in a quite new and unexpected manner. Thus an element of discontinuity is added to the continuity of a constantly self-renewing experience of God. YHVH reacts other than expected, leading his people into ever new situations and repeatedly bursting

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Westermann, C., *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen*, Göttingen, 1978, 38.

the existing conceptual framework. The dialectic of the ever-recurring salvational acts of YHVH in the crises faced by the people of Israel and the response of the people, which always falls short of what the God of Israel expects in the way of an adequate reaction, constitutes the historicity of this dialogical relationship between YHVH and Israel and is the driving force behind the salvation narrative.

YHVH's dialogical relationship with Israel is continued and reaches its ultimate zenith in Jesus of Nazareth. The salvational acts of God through His son are His ultimate response to man's distress. The public acts of Jesus, especially the healing episodes and His concern for sinners and outcasts, follow a basic dialogical structure. His whole existence can be interpreted as God's dialogue with mankind. God reveals himself in His innermost essence in the Word of Jesus. Jesus not only imparts the Word of God, He *is* the Word of God in person: His whole existence and His fate thus become God's Word, which is addressed to all mankind, aims to elicit a response and invites a dialogue.

The whole Christ event can thus be interpreted as a comprehensive dialogue between God and man. In the incarnation of the Word God emptied Himself, expressed His essence without reservation, and gave all of Himself. By placing Himself on a level with man as His interlocutor, He takes him seriously and respects his freedom. He forgoes His divine powers in order to make His point. He does not take back the Word He has given once and for all – even a refusal to reply does not break off the dialogue! This principal feature of the relationship between God and man is illuminated in the manner in which Jesus makes His appearance and in His dealings with men, especially His disciples. He finds His final incarnation in His passion and death and in the resumption of dialogue with the Resurrection. This “dialogical” appearance of Jesus is thus an expression of His essence and His mission, in which God ultimately reveals Himself in His own innermost being.

### **God is in His essence dialogical**

Thus dialogue becomes the distinguishing mark of the biblically founded, personal understanding of God: God is in His essence dialogical! The question remains how this dialogue is to be understood

if it is to be an appropriate category for unlocking the inner essence of God. Dialogue among men is mainly remarkable for its discursiveness. The continuing interplay of question and answer, address and response, marks the dialogue as a communication which takes place under the conditions of space and time on the horizon of historicity. It is here that we see the greatest difference between human communication and divine essence. Walter Kasper has pointed out that personalistic categories can only be applied by analogy to the Trinity. This means that any similarity has a greater dissimilarity corresponding to it: "As in God not only the unity, but also the distinctness and hence the counterpart is greater than in interpersonal relations among men, the divine persons are not less dialogical, but infinitely more dialogical than human persons. The divine persons not only take part in dialogue, they are dialogue."<sup>10</sup>

Whereas the parties to a human dialogue encounter each other in a relationship based on mutuality and constantly exchange roles in the course of the dialogue, a relationship with the divine being cannot be thought of as a relationship between two separate persons who stand facing each other: The persons who constitute a divine being are identical with the relations.

Thus within the divine being relationships are not something superadded to a person, as is the case with human beings. The relationship is rather the person itself. In its nature the person only exists as relation. "Put more concretely, the first person does not generate in the sense that the act of generating a son is added to the complete person, but the person is the act of generating, of giving itself, of streaming itself forth. It is identical with this act of devotion. One could thus define the first person as self-donation in fruitful knowledge and love; it is not the one who gives himself, in whom the act of self-donation is found, but this self-donation, pure reality of act."<sup>11</sup>

If the divine persons are not primarily in dialogue with each other (as human persons are), but in a much more fundamental sense are

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<sup>10</sup> Kasper, W., *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Mainz, 1982, 353.

<sup>11</sup> Ratzinger, J., "Zum Personenverständnis in der Theologie", in: idem, *Dogma und Verkuendigung*, Munich/Freiburg i. Br., 1973, 205-233, 211.

the dialogue themselves, this means addressing the basic relationships that make any genuine dialogue possible in the first place. The father imparts His entire being to the son. His is thus the perfect devotion, the self-renunciation which imparts itself to the Other in its entirety without any reservations and of which it is the perfect expression. In the father's imparting of Himself to the son the act of revelation is already rooted in the divine being itself. The one divine being finds its perfect expression in the emergence of the inner Word. The son receives the divine being from the father; he owes his whole existence to the father: He is therefore the perfect reception, in which the imparted and the self-imparter are wholly accepted, included and understood. Thus the first basic movement of perfect devotion is matched by a second of perfect and unreserved openness to the Other. From this relationship between father and son the spirit emerges as personalised love: That which happens between father and son is more than giving and taking – it has an autonomous relational quality which goes beyond father and son and in which lies a deeply dynamic and also creative element (the dynamic of love).

### **3. Consequences of a dialogical understanding of mission**

This dialogical interpretation of intra-Trinitarian relations has far-reaching consequences. As the term "God" designates the ultimate foundation of reality, statements about the specific nature of this reality have direct relevance to the question as to how human existence can succeed at all. If this underlying foundation is dialogically formulated in the manner presented, the consummate absolute dialogue in the Trinitarian essence of God can be described in a sense as the "transcendental prerequisite" of any genuine, real dialogue.

#### **The basic structure of Trinitarian dialogue**

A genuine, real and fruitful dialogue between two persons can only take place if it corresponds to the basic Trinitarian relations. The prerequisite is that the speaker should express himself in full, adopt a position without reservations or dissimulation, and make the ultimate motives for his utterance transparent. Thus what is needed is personal credibility and authenticity, the readiness to recognise obstacles to communication which lie in his own person and might undermine his credibility and to overcome them if possible or at least

to admit to them so that they do not disturb the communicative flow. This expressive relation possesses an inner dynamic of devotion, a preparedness to submit or – ultimately – even surrender to the Other without inner reservations. Corresponding to this first basic relation is the fundamental readiness to accept and embrace the Other *in toto*. Unreserved acceptance in this context means letting the Other “be himself”, to accept his state of knowledge and development, not to lord it over him, but to recognise him as an equal, to respect him and take him seriously, even if his positions may not immediately evoke understanding and consensus. The third basic relation required for a genuine dialogue is the element of openness. Openness creates a space of freedom between the parties to the dialogue, which does not appropriate the Other or force or influence him to do anything which he is not – or not yet – ready to do of his own accord.

These basic conditions must be present for a dialogue to take place in which profound existential truths can be addressed. Such a dialogue achieves its greatest depth where the basis of reality itself can be consulted. The question which concerns us here is: what kind of dialogue do we have to have if the Logos itself is to become the Word, in which we are confronted with the claim to be the ultimate foundation of reality itself? This is where we run into a fundamental structural problem. In our previous remarks about dialogue it was naturally assumed that a dialogue is based on the fundamental equality of the parties to it, none of whom can claim a preordained superiority over the Other. On the other hand, the message of the faith, by invoking the ultimate foundation of reality, raises an unconditional claim which at first glance would appear to introduce an apparently unbridgeable gap into the relationship between the parties to the dialogue, a gap which could call in question the very possibility of conducting a genuine, open dialogue. The problem is not caused by the fact that a claim to validity is raised. That is part of the essence of a genuine dialogue that must assume the existence of clear points of view that are presented and defended by the parties, who are convinced of the rightness and claim to truth of their positions. The problem arises out of the unconditionality of a “claim to absolute validity” which by its very nature cannot be freely disposed of, as it is the ultimate foundation of reality itself that is asserted here – albeit in the form of human speech which is subject to the general rules of communication and therefore

would have to first prove the validity of the claims it raises within the framework of an ordered discourse.

### **Claim as witness**

The key to the solution of this fundamental problem lies in the special way in which the Christian faith is conveyed. In the relationship with the interlocutor the message of the faith is asserted not only in its substance and its claim to be unconditional, but also and above all in its existential significance for the person who introduced it to the dialogue. Unconditionality is thus not just a claim that the speaker asserts on his own behalf vis-à-vis his interlocutor. Instead, he reveals in the dialogue that he has bound himself to the unconditionality of this claim. The unique feature of the Christian inter-faith dialogue consists in the fact that the unconditional claim of the faith is introduced to the dialogue in witness mode.

But the characteristic feature of witness consists in the fact that the person bearing witness is not asserting his own claim, but the claim of another. He sees himself as legitimised by his special relationship with Jesus Christ, which has an auto-dialogical character. This means that it is not a “personal claim”, although it does have a “personal character”. It is not asserted “in isolation” from the person. It is not a “neutral” message that just has to be “delivered”. The disciple is not just a messenger who, as a person, can efface himself completely behind the message. He is rather a witness who personally stands by the message with his whole existence. In bearing witness the speaker makes what he himself has experienced transparent, what defines his innermost identity, what has touched him, what he thrives on, what his mission is, and what he recognises as the meaning of his life. Bearing witness means making a stand, uncovering the claim to which the witness has freely bound himself, revealing the reasons which moved him to do so and thus opening up to his interlocutor – in complete freedom – a space which he can enter in order to discover whether he can make these reasons his own.

By expressing everything he himself has received from his dialogical relationship with Jesus Christ, the witness in a sense takes the place of Christ – in him the person of Christ becomes transparent and hence present. What is important is that the Christ-like nature

of bearing witness is not an essential quality of the witness, but a real relationship in which he finds himself and which he expresses in perfect transparency to his interlocutor.

Crucial in this connection is the “free space” which the witness opens up between the two interlocutors. The addressee must not have his freedom restricted. The message is purely an offer which cannot be imposed from without. Only in the openness of this intermediate space of freedom can a real encounter with God take place, which essentially consists in the fact that, as a result of the dialogue, a direct relationship is forged between the interlocutor and Christ. This does not mean that the interlocutor “adopts” the faith in the sense of witness or that his relationship with Jesus Christ is permanently mediated via that of the witness. Instead he develops his own independent relationship with Christ through the mediation of the witness.

The consequence of this insight is a basic posture of openness which, although it does not place the basic decisions in question, does permit adjustments – even substantial and far-reaching ones. It is an attitude that expects new and deeper insights to be possible in dialogue with the Other, and that the dialogue itself can be extended. The openness required for a genuine dialogue also includes the readiness of the witness to take the witness of his counterpart so seriously and absorb it into his innermost self to such an extent that the dialogue can become a place of encountering Christ and deepening his understanding of his own faith too. Thus the mutuality of basic relationships fundamental to all dialogues acquires decisive significance here.

### **On the relationship between mission and dialogue**

As a result of the considerations assembled here we find that mission and dialogue do not stand in contradiction to each other. Rather dialogue is based on the salvific gesture of God towards us mortals. This means that the basic affirmation of dialogue is not a form of relativism that would surrender the Christian faith's claim to truth. It is true, however, that we are dealing here with ‘relatio’ in the sense of the relationship that God adopts to us mortals in the course of the narrative of Christian salvation. In a way this approach of God to man – whom He takes seriously as a free agent and addresses in the depths of his existence through His salvation-granting Word – is the model

for how the mission to the world is to be perceived. This means that we have every reason to speak not only of a dialogical understanding of mission, but even of a “mission to dialogue”.

A dialogically perceived mission must oppose any form of religious fundamentalism. Hostile aloofness from those with dissenting views is as little reconcilable with a basic dialogical attitude as aggressive missionary methods or the use of force to convert others. Despite all legitimate differences and the basic right of each individual to have his conviction of his religion’s higher claim to truth respected, there must be no destructive and disrespectful divisions between religions, no violence against dissenters, no one-sided exploitation of a *de facto* position of power vis-à-vis minorities, no underhand methods at the expense of other religions, and above all no improper instrumentalisation of religious feelings.

On the other hand, there is no contradiction between an honest dialogue and a basic desire to convince others of the rightness of one’s own faith. Here, too, the principle applies that, while one has to reckon with the “truth of other religions”, one is not obliged to assert that all religions are “equally true”. What is needed here is a frank recognition of the fact that we can only experience certainty in our existential rootedness in our own faith – without having to reject or disparage others out of hand. To take part in a dialogue we have to recognise the need to have our own point of view and arguments to back it up with. As a dialogue cannot be conducted on a meta-level, it is not possible to “stand above the fray” or adopt an a-religious standpoint. A fruitful dialogue can only come about if the parties confront each other on the basis of their respective existential roots in the absolute. However, the unconditionality of this rootedness does not mean denying the Other his relation to ultimate reality. “Absoluteness” can only ever refer to the individual’s submission of his own free will. It is expressed in faith as the total self-dedication to the absolute, all-determining reality which grants the Other the freedom to choose which faith he is going to submit to, while at the same time inviting and encouraging him to follow one’s own example.

## Mission is dialogue and only dialogue

José María Vigil

The concept of mission as dialogue is something we have heard a lot about in recent times. However, the notion that it is dialogue and *only* dialogue – even in the widest sense of the word – is something that is mentioned less frequently. In this article I will try to set out some arguments to substantiate this proposition.

Let us begin by defining our terms based on the old practice of the *status quaestionis*: what do we mean by mission?

The word “mission” has two main meanings in our context. The first meaning is “assignment”, “task” or “duty”. Mission means the task that someone has or the intention or objective for which something is done. The other meaning is to be sent out or called upon to carry out a task that has been entrusted to us. Deriving from the Latin verb *mittere*, to send, the sense of being sent out for a particular purpose, and of setting forth on a journey to fulfil it, is inextricably linked with the word “mission”.

In the past few centuries – this is what our generation learned as children – the word was primarily used in the plural, “the missions”. This referred to the activities of the Church, specifically of the missionaries, who were sent out with the aim (mission) of expanding the frontiers of the Church and establishing it in places where it was not yet present. Missions were, therefore, not a concrete realisation of the Church’s great mission, but rather a missionary or missional mission under the leadership of the missionaries. The missions themselves were to a certain extent of secondary importance. They did not impact on the Church’s main aims and responsibilities and did not concern everyone, but only specialised missionaries.

However, in recent decades the plural “missions” has largely given

way to the more elegant-sounding and powerful word “mission” in the singular, the (great) mission of the Church as a whole, its main calling. In the post-conciliar age, i.e. after the Second Vatican Council, the word “mission” has been used to refer to the Church in its entirety. In the new ecclesiology (we should not forget that the 20th century is described as the century of ecclesiology) this term has been revived and endowed with new meaning: mission is now seen as central to the Church’s being and its fundamental self-image. One of the most influential texts here is Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: the Church recognises its true calling and deepest identity in *evangelisation*, the preaching of the Gospel: “She exists in order to evangelise [...]».<sup>12</sup> This is its mission, the great mission of the Church, the global mission, the Christian mission – something more far-reaching and deeper than just the Church’s mission.

The missions or the missionary/missional mission are part of the great mission of the Church, but they are not co-terminous with it, and are not even its most important part. I mention this here in order to place the missions or missionary mission in theological terms within the context of post-conciliar ecclesiology, as set out in the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

When I speak of mission in this article I normally mean the missionary or missional mission; when I am referring to the Church’s fundamental mission, then I talk of the great mission.

After this introductory clarification let us turn to our topic.

### **Mission was not a dialogue**

In human terms it is understandable, albeit reprehensible, to forget one’s own mistakes, to actively erase them from one’s personal memory or the collective memory in order to gloss over recollections that are uncomfortable or entail the need for forgiveness. This form of behaviour is often adopted by religions, which form part and parcel of human life. Over the course of history Christianity and the Christian churches have been no exception in this respect.

<sup>12</sup> »*Evangelii Nuntiandi*« Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope Paul VI to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to all the Faithful of the Entire World, promulgated on 8 December 1975.

The more serious the error, the stronger and more subconscious is the desire to forget. We do not speak or think about the errors of the past and are no longer able to recognise our own collective modes of behaviour that we regret. We only talk of our new attitudes, as if they had not been preceded by very different, even opposite forms of behaviour. We tend to forget that we said and did the exact opposite only yesterday. We no longer look in the mirror and see our reflection.

The new interpretations of mission also suffer from this form of behaviour. Many of the new ideas of mission studies seem to be built on ahistorical foundations, without reference to a past which needs to be evaluated or put right. People talk freely of mission as a dialogue, speak and write elegantly and throw a veil over the things that mission has done over the centuries or millennia even.

What I wish to say is that mission has not been a dialogue; indeed it has set itself against dialogue. It has refused to engage in dialogue and imposed a religious monologue, in some cases by force even. In the light of the history of missionary work I do not believe it is right to conduct a missiology of dialogue as if nothing had happened, as if we were starting from scratch and can say whatever we like with impunity. In my opinion, honesty demands that we face squarely up to reality. And intellectual honesty means that one does not forget what one has – historically speaking – just said. I, for my part at least, wish to be honest and acknowledge our past.

Let me make it quite clear at this point that it is not a question of condemning anyone. I am well aware of the wonderful generosity of spirit and extreme self-sacrifice of many missionaries who have gone before us. I cannot imagine that we would have acted differently or better had we been in their historical and intellectual situation and lived with the theology and spirituality of their age. It is possible to acknowledge a dark past unambiguously without condemning anyone. It is common practice to try and find people who are personally responsible but it is not always right to do so. After conducting a historical survey of mission Reinhold Bernhardt comes to the conclusion that “in this criminal history of Christianity responsibility falls back on the overall theoretical structure, which was what made

this arrogance possible in the first place”<sup>13</sup> People were not evil, they were constrained by circumstances; they were the victims of their own ideas, their own philosophies and theories and, in this case, of their own theologies.

The theology of mission (its approach, justification and theoretical interpretation) was not dialogical – perhaps it could never be so; its inability to engage in dialogue shaped generations of Christians and missionaries.

What were the theoretical elements that prevented the missions from taking the form of a dialogue and led them instead to impose their ideas by force? It is important to identify and analyse these elements to ensure they no longer exist. If we forget them, as we tend to do with many parts of the Christian world view, we might well hold on to this non-dialogical approach for a long time – sub-consciously perhaps, as if it had been “swept under the carpet”, but still allowing it to influence real forms of behaviour in the world. We will therefore attempt to draw out these theoretical elements schematically and synthetically.

### Exclusivism

The first theoretical element that by definition forms the basis for the absence of dialogue in mission is exclusivism; the idea or, indeed, the conviction that one’s own religion is *the* true religion. Within Christianity this is symbolically represented by the famous saying of Fulgentius of Ruspe<sup>14</sup>: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Even if this saying is framed in a Christian context, it has a universal meaning. In ancient Egypt, which believed itself to be the centre of the world or the central setting for creation, it was widely believed that »*extra Aegiptum nulla est salus*«<sup>15</sup>. The potential sins of the Christian mission resulting from

<sup>13</sup> Bernhardt, R., *La pretensión de absolutz del cristianismo. Desde la Ilustración hasta la teología pluralista de la religión*, Bilbao 2000, 315-316.

<sup>14</sup> Although it is most commonly attributed to Fulgentius, St. Cyprian of Carthage appears to have been the first to formulate this statement, even though it was not apparently his intention to contribute anything to the theology of religion. He merely wished to draw attention to the danger (*nulla salus*) of attempting to build a congregation outside the Church (*extra Ecclesiam*).

<sup>15</sup> Donner, H., *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzuegen*,

exclusivism are by no means exclusive. Exclusivism is a mindset, a way of interpreting the world, which is characteristic of humanity's infancy. One could say that while all cultures – and religions are part of them – have gone through this phase of development some of them have not yet completed it. Just as all children are born self-centred and subconsciously enjoy being the focus of their family, so religions are egocentric when they emerge. They believe they offer the only means to salvation and have an innate superiority complex. This attitude naturally makes a genuine dialogue fairly unlikely. It was time, history, experience and the advancement of human knowledge that enabled Christianity to overcome its egocentricity. Christianity came to realise that it is not the centre of the world, that there are other equally valid reference points and that relations with them should be driven not by domination and antipathy but by dialogue.

Under these circumstances and with these theoretical underpinnings, vision and theology, mission was not a dialogue.

### **Greed and imperialism**

Religions do not exist in an ideal world far removed from misery and human evil but in the midst of this real world. Religions and cultures are the soul of a people and people are human, all too human in fact. Power struggles, wars and imperialism are routine features of our history, and religion was always bound to be caught in the middle, either promoting love and justice among the peoples or justifying wars and imperialism. It is worth remembering that all empires down to the present day have been religious. There were no atheist empires and no empires without religion. Because these empires were a human construction, they were religious, because people have always needed religion. Imperialism always had a religious component, which legitimated and sublimated it. Wars and empires flourish better in God's name, as the presumed will of God or protected by God's grace, than without this religious dimension.

The religion of an empire – itself imperialist – evidently suffers from the same superiority complex as we mentioned earlier. The

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Grundrisse zum Alten Testament, volume 4/1, Göttingen 1984, 24, in turn quoting E. Uphill, *The Nina Bows*, JEOL 6 (19) (1965/66) 393–420 (italics in the original).

religion of an empire can recognise the validity of other religions, but only on condition that these religions in turn recognise the supremacy of the empire that has been chosen by God to rule over other nations.

If we relate all of the above to Christianity, we should not forget that Christianity – and by this I do not mean the Jesus movement and what it set in motion – was organised by the Roman Empire and initiated by Constantine. Christianity is the offspring and true heir to the Roman Empire. The Christendom of Christianity configured itself as an empire and literally functioned as an empire for centuries. In this empire the Pope played the role of emperor; he was able to install and replace kings, mediate in disputes, draw frontiers and give away newly discovered lands. Even today Roman imperial law forms the structure and basis of the canon law of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is undoubtedly the last remaining absolute (imperial) monarchy in the West; the last of its kind which has not yet abdicated. It is self-evident that this imperialism, which is rooted in the genetic makeup, the DNA, of Christianity, was bound to have a negative view of other religions. Indeed, it regarded them as diabolical and refused to countenance any possibility of a dialogue. Moreover, Christianity has always maintained the religiousness of its own followers just as empires have consistently done with their religions: by holding the empire together through force if necessary, promoting the initiation of children into the official religion, compelling the people to take part in the religion, prohibiting freedom of worship and conscience, forbidding all criticism and dissidence, persecuting and executing heretics and increasing the number of believers by imposing the faith on conquered peoples.<sup>16</sup> Against the backdrop of this historical inheritance and as long as a religion does not liberate itself and explicitly disown this “genetic” imperialist approach, it will evidently not be enough to simply forget and no longer talk about it, as has already been discussed. Mission as dialogue will never be possible with an imperialistically-grounded theology and the violent suppression of other peoples and religions.

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<sup>16</sup> The Gospel text »*Compelle eos intrare*«, “Compel them to come in”, was used to justify the proselytising mission.

## Inclusivism

Given the growth in transport and communications, the globalisation of relations worldwide and the consequent appreciation of cultural and religious pluralism in the past century, exclusivism forfeited its plausibility in more culturally advanced circles. As humanity had advanced so far, accepting religious exclusivity proved virtually inconceivable. This gave rise to the option of inclusivism as an intellectual strategy, enabling the exclusivity of a religion to be pushed metaphysically into the background (even though it continued to be seen as willed by God and as the convergence of all other religions), while at the same time accepting the positive points and even the salvific relevance of other religions, although one's own religion was still regarded as being superior to all others.

While it is now recognised by most theologians, inclusivism is in effect a civilised and moderate form of exclusivism, which involves a partial acknowledgement of the other religions, but preserves the exclusive priority of one's own religion. Inclusivism is ultimately a form of exclusivism.

The same cultural situation which raises doubts about exclusivism also means that a mission relying on compulsion and disregarding dialogue loses all plausibility. Mission has to develop a civilised approach based on inter-religious dialogue. But a dialogue is impossible if inclusivism is unable to overcome the exclusivism inherent in it. Dialogue is not possible as long as the mission is based on exclusivism or inclusivism. Exclusivism rejects all types of dialogue and even anathematises it; anathema is preferable to dialogue. Inclusivism maintains the appearance of dialogue, but in principle the modes of behaviour and beliefs which make dialogue impossible are continued. A religion which (a) sees itself as the only true religion, (b) regards itself as destined by God to provide the final eschatological inclusion of other religions and (c) puts all this on the list of its irrefutable dogmas will never be able to engage in dialogue with another religion. This religion can only sit down politely at the discussion table and wait for the other religions to surrender to it.

Inclusivism, therefore, maintains the appearance of dialogue while making genuine dialogue impossible. Hence mission under the banner of inclusivism cannot involve a genuine dialogue either, if what

is meant by that is a dialogue of open-minded equals ready to listen to and learn from each other and willing to embrace change if necessary.

### **Mission as dialogue**

While it is not my intention here to justify pluralist theology, I wish to pursue a number of suppositions on how we might conceive of the relationship between mission and dialogue in all religions from a religiously pluralist viewpoint.

The pluralist vision does not tie salvation exclusively to a single religion. That rescues it from the fear of seeing the world as lost in damnation, since it no longer views the faithful of other religions as having been deserted by the hand of God. The pluralist vision gives the faithful of all religions a “soteriological optimism of eschatological salvation”, which frees them from the feeling of fear, the pressure to proselytise and the oppressive responsibility arising from the risk of damnation.<sup>17</sup>

If a religion overcomes exclusivism and inclusivism and turns towards pluralism, the original motivations of the mission change. They lose their frightening sense of urgency, their fanatical haste and their responsibility for the situation in the world which inhibited exclusivist and inclusivist believers. Trust is now placed in a positive plurality of paths to salvation. First of all, religions are freed from exclusivism’s incapacity for dialogue. If a religion no longer sees itself as being surrounded by false, inferior or diabolical religions, pluralist religions feel freed from the incapacity to engage in dialogue from which religions with an exclusivist attitude suffered. Given that salvation is possible beyond their own confines, religions can liberate themselves from their judgemental attitude towards other religions and thus adopt a positive attitude to dialogue.

Taking into account that there is no one religion determined by God to ensure the world is ruled by a chosen people, religions which take a pluralist approach cannot be imperialist. Imperialism appears as a negation of God’s universal will for justice and salvation. A pluralist religion offers no scope for political imperialism, just as it has no place for cultural, religious and imperialist attitudes. A

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<sup>17</sup> Casaldàliga, P./ Vigil, J.M., *Spirituality of Liberation*, Tunbridge Wells 1994, 171.

pluralist religion is more willing to criticise and to take a stand against the political, cultural and religious imperialism of its own people. A pluralist religion will develop greater sensitivity to cultural pluralism and be much less likely to be drawn into cultural aggression against other peoples. In their missionary work pluralist religions will not attempt to extend the influence of their own culture or the Church which supports this mission. Pluralist missionaries do not see it as their job to act as cultural agents or to promote nationalist feelings, as was the case in the colonial (or imperial) age.

Pluralistic religions allow for a plurality of autonomous paths to salvation. They regard God's universal will for salvation as undeniable and mysteriously omnipresent. This is reflected in religious variety or religious biodiversity. If God's mysterious presence can be found everywhere, then it is also conceivable that we encounter Him in religions, which can be seen as sacred sites of God's presence. That is the reason for religions to enter into inter-religious dialogue: a dialogue which manifestly does not seek to convert the other person and get him to renounce his faith, in order to incorporate him into one's own faith, but which offers the possibility of looking for God's presence where it is revealed – in all religions. Thanks to the differing world view inherent in the pluralistic paradigm, pluralistic religions are open to the idea of looking for God outside of themselves and in dialogue with other religions, which they regard from the outset as sacred places of God's revelation. A vibrant, pluralistic religion will attempt to broaden its inter-religious relations in order to experience God more and in a better way, to learn spiritually and find new aspects of God in all His different names.

The missionaries of the pluralistic religions base their mission on a pluralistic perspective. These missionaries do not want to standardise pluralism in any way, seeing it as a right, as something willed by God and a sign of His immeasurable abundance. As a result they do not lean towards proselytism or conversion. Nor do they teach, being bent on listening to the other religions, learning from their hidden riches and experiencing God in them. They are not just willing, as we would say nowadays, to inculturate themselves (instead of deculturating or acculturating people), but are also prepared to "inreligionise" themselves. In a nutshell, they are willing to incarnate themselves in the other's culture and religion and transfer the riches they find to

their own religions. They are also evidently prepared to share their own religious riches. Dialogue therefore means interaction, back and forth, give and take, I give you something and you give me something in return, I give of myself and accept you. Mission as exercised by pluralistic religions is a dialogue, an exchange, mutual learning, investigation without limits and mutual cross-fertilisation performed unselfishly, freely and sincerely. There is no pretence of a dialogue in order to prepare the ground for a proclamation of one's own religion as the only true one. There is no pretence of a dialogue to maintain modern appearances, without having any real interest in dialogue and only in order to smooth the path for potential new followers.

The mission therefore continues. It could not be any other way. But it has a different purpose and has been reborn, resurrected. The proselytising mission of the past, which largely involved attracting and converting believers from other faiths along with the dissemination of its own culture and its own faith in foreign countries, is now dead. The dedication of the missionaries who gave their lives to save others and convert them to the Christian faith, as St. Francis Xavier did, is worthy of admiration. He is regarded as the patron of all missions and the patron of the old kind of missionary work which, seen from a modern pluralist perspective, he might no longer even take part in himself. I could imagine that a saint of his stature would participate today in the new contemporary mission with the same dedication. He would be involved in dialogue, not in proselytism based solely on conversion, the conversion of ourselves and all others.

In summary we can say that dialogue is the new perspective for mission. Even more than that: mission is only dialogue. Hence everything that is not sincere dialogue or is opposed to dialogue cannot be part of the true mission. This is true, in principle, of all religions, but in particular of Christianity.

# Pluralist religious theology in Indian thought

Joseph Nedumkallel

## Pluralism and relativism in Indian religions<sup>18</sup>

“India appears to be a country – or rather a continent – in which the religious element is still very much alive, a culture whose soul continues to be shaped by religion. But is this shaping due to a diversity of religions or a universality of religion? Are they a unifying factor for Indian society, for the peoples of India, or are they a source of strife?”<sup>19</sup> National statistics reveal that the many religions, languages and traditions – not to mention a turbulent history – have given rise to a pluralism and relativism in Indian religious thought. Even Hinduism and its relations with other religions, such as Christianity, have not been spared, although the caste system still plays a major role, despite being banned by the Indian Constitution.<sup>20</sup> The 19th and 20th centuries saw the

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<sup>18</sup> Schmidt-Leukel cites a parable of Buddha’s to show why there are so many different religious doctrines: “A king arranged for some men, who had been born blind and came from a rural area where elephants were unknown, to be taken to an elephant. Each blind man had to touch the elephant at a different place and then describe what an elephant looked like. The man who touched the elephant’s ear said that an elephant was like a winnowing basket. The one that touched the tusk said it was like a ploughshare. The man who felt the leg compared it to a tree trunk, and the man who clasped its tail said an elephant was like a broom. Thereupon the blind men quarrelled violently among themselves, much to the king’s delight. This story relates explicitly to the dispute between those “who only see one part.” The all-seeing king, on the other hand, probably stands for Buddha and his comprehensive insight. The inclusivist-seeming parable may perhaps ... even be making an exclusivist point, as it is stated here that a fragmentary knowledge of other doctrines is not enough to point the way to redemption.” (Schmidt-Leukel, P., *Gott ohne Grenzen. Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen*, Gütersloh, 2005, 174.)

<sup>19</sup> Neuner, P., “Einführung und Moderation. Indische Religionen – Vielfalt oder Einheit?” in: Schubert, V., (ed.), *Religionen im Aufbruch? Identität – Konflikt – Toleranz*, Wissenschaft und Philosophie, Interdisziplinäre Studien, vol. 18, St. Ottilien, 1999, 181.

<sup>20</sup> This is guaranteed by the Fundamental Rights, especially Art.15 of the 1950 Consti-

emergence of Hindu reform movements which became influential vehicles of “Neo-Hinduism.”<sup>21</sup>

This period also witnessed an attempted renewal of the intellectual traditions of India by confronting Hinduism with Christianity and Modernism, whose representatives articulated the various religious paths. Ramakrishna is supposed to have had had a vision of the truth of the One with many names, having experienced God in a temple, a mosque and a church respectively, which inspired him to compare the different paths to God with different stairways leading to a single pond. Tagore, on the other hand, compared the various religions’ notions of God with light and asked why it should not be possible to let the various religions emanate their own particular light to suit the needs of the various kinds of souls. Gandhi also considered that different religions are different pathways to one and the same goal.<sup>22</sup> In order to achieve a correct understanding of the pluralism they describe, one must not only be prepared to recognise the existence of several kinds of faith, but also their equality of status and value. “Beyond all exclusivities and inclusivities, beyond all syncretic attempts at and lip service to pluralism, the inter-faith situation we are in today forces us to recognise that the plurality of religions is divinely ordained.”<sup>23</sup> For no nation, no language, no culture has privileged access to the one divinity.

Human life requires a new meaning and a new responsibility if God is experienced in all religions as the creating God. “The basic ethical attitude derived from this is expressed in trust (Judaism), love (Christianity), submission (Islam), devotion (Hinduism) and

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tution (Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth).

<sup>21</sup> They include the *Brahma Samaj* Society founded by Rammohan Roy, who is often described as the “Father of Modern India” (with which other well-known names of Reform Hinduism are linked, such as those of Rabindranath Tagore and Kesab Chandra Sen); the parallel *Arya Samaj* organisation founded by Swamy Dayananda Sarasvati; and the Ramakrishna Mission. The name of the latter refers to the Hindu mystic Ramakrishna and also to Rama and Krishna as two divine incarnations (avatars) worshipped as being central to Hinduism. (Cf. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *o cit.*, 402-403.)

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Mall, R., “Der Hinduismus als ein Ort der Ökumene von Religionen” in: Schubert, V., (ed.), *o cit.*, 192.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

compassion (Buddhism).”<sup>24</sup> The divine presence in the world is so intensely perceived as to alter the whole way of life.

### **Diversity and unity in Hinduism**

Hinduism is devoid of any founder, historical revelation or dogmas, but the “sum of the religious experiences of countless sages, saints and philosophers. Though God is transcendent, He is not outside the world, but realises Himself in individual souls and the empirical world; He is unique but assumes different forms as manifested to the gods of the Hindu Pantheon; many paths lead to Him, which is why all world religions must be seen as relatively true.”<sup>25</sup> Just as the world image of India is shaped by the many different cultures, ethnic groupings and languages that make it up, so the hidden Divinity (Brahma) manifests itself in a diversity of forms, such as gods, human beings, animals, indeed in all beings and phenomena of this world. Because the beginnings of the gods and the world are shrouded in darkness, even the gods – as the early Vedic scriptures tell us – do not know the secret of the beginnings of the cosmos; “a primal ‘it’ evolved into the endless diversity of the phenomenological world. In the pluralism of the cults and traditions of worship the seeker of enlightenment is able to relativise such coexisting inessentials and see through to the hidden One within.”<sup>26</sup> The wisdom of India has sought the hidden One in diversity, and the many myths of India have repeatedly told of the change of the hidden One in diversity.<sup>27</sup>

The Constitution of India also upholds diversity and does not favour any particular religion. It manages to dispense with references to God and “professes an indifference to religion as such and the equal standing of all religions”.<sup>28</sup> Although the modern state desires diversity

<sup>24</sup> Painadath, S., *Der Geist reißt Mauern nieder. Die Erneuerung unseres Glaubens durch interreligiösen Dialog*, Munich, 2002, 38.

<sup>25</sup> Regamay, C., “Hinduismus” in: *Lexikon fuer Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 5, Freiburg i. Br., Basle, Vienna, 1986, 372.

<sup>26</sup> Bürkle, H., “Die Entdeckung religiöser Alternativen in asiatischen Traditionen” in: Müller, G.L./ Serretti, M., (eds.), *Einzigkeit und Universalität Jesu Christi*, Einsiedeln, 2001, 56-57.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Wessler, H.W., “Indiens Einheit in Vielfalt. Zwischen traditionellem Multikultur-

in principle, it still seeks ways of encouraging the many minorities to identify with the state.<sup>29</sup>

In recent decades the thesis of the unity of Hinduism has become an open question and an interpretation of Hinduism is being promoted that treats it as a unified group of different religions. “According to this view Vishnuism, Shivaism, Shaktism, etc. are religions in their own right and not just different traditions that have grown up within one and the same religion and, although they are in a state of intensive interaction with the other Hindu religions, they, like the individual Abrahamic religions, have preserved a clearly distinct identity.”<sup>30</sup>

### **All religions unified by spirituality**

Although there is great diversity in the forms of religious expression, the diverse Indian religions are also linked by a deep spiritual unity. All religions ultimately derive from a divine origin: the one divine spirit is in the hearts of all human beings, and the *one* divine love binds them together. For although there are many possible ways of bestowing the gift of salvation, all religions are concerned with making man whole. Religion is the symbolic expression of, and the form assumed by, spirituality – spirituality being the depth dimension of religion, in which the transpersonal spirit is experienced as a personal God with name, forms and shapes. In the spirituality of all world religions we find three dimensions or basic ways of encountering God (albeit with different emphases, concepts and symbols): God as ineffable mystery; God as personal being and loving person; and God as all-pervading and healing spirit.<sup>31</sup>

A dialogue can take place wherever respect is shown for singularities and differences. The basis for a successful inter-faith dialogue is to be

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alism und modernem Nationalismus” in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 131 (2006) issue 10, 669. He explains this as follows: “Behind this is the neo-Hinduist theory that not only all Hindu school traditions, but basically all historical religions constitute different paths to the one truth – a theory that is highly controversial even within Hinduism” (*ibid*).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 675.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 670. The author concludes: “It is correct that internal Hindu ecumenism – the community of denominations within Hinduism – consists of a multiplicity of theologically diverse schools of thought” (*ibid*).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Painadath, S., *loc. cit.*, 38.

found in the aforementioned dimensions of universal spirituality. Key symbols, persons, cases of healing, stories and narratives provide the faithful with access to their religion. Exchanging spiritual experiences with others can strengthen one's own faith and also make us realise the manifold workings of the divine spirit.

Christians find access to this experience of salvation in Jesus Christ, as for them he is the path to truth, the light in which Christians understand history and interpret scriptures. Not that faith in Jesus Christ can justify a judgement on – and certainly not a condemnation of – Buddha or Shiva, Torah or Koran. “Those of other faiths are our sister and brother pilgrims; we all find ourselves on the road to that destination God is preparing for us” (John Paul II, Assisi, 1986). It is not by dissociating oneself from other people, but by associating with them that our own identity is strengthened and realised.<sup>32</sup>

Hinduism has a polytheistic or pantheistic conception of gods, in which countless lesser gods exist alongside the main ones. Many households and families, even whole regions, worship their own deities. Hinduism has precise notions of what the gods look like. There are many pictorial and other representations of every deity. The Hindus also believe that their deities are reborn and have already been on earth in all sorts of forms. The three main groupings in Hinduism are: Shivaism (in which the central role is played by Shiva, the destroyer of the world, which was created by Brahma and preserved by Vishnu); Vishnuism (the God Vishnu is the preserver of the world); and Shaktism (in which mainly female deities are worshipped). Because of the many gods and kinds of faith in Hinduism there are no fixed religious doctrines or any church, though there are many temples and thousands of places of pilgrimage.

The significance of the individual gods in Hinduism is, however, seen in relative terms and it is said that the One appears under many names without prejudice to its essential unity. “Sat – being, truth – is one, and the sages give the One different names” (Rig Veda).<sup>33</sup> Although the relativisation of human notions of the various gods results in a certain tolerance of other views, the history of Hinduism

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 38–40.

<sup>33</sup> Rig Veda 1, 164, 46.

has seen superiority assigned to certain specific forms of religion. Everyone believes that anyone who appeals to God under another name is really appealing to the God that they appeal to, only the other person is doing so in a way that is not quite correct.

A similar sentiment is to be found in the Bhagavadgita, one of the holy scriptures of Hinduism:

„21. yo yo yam yam tanum bhaktah  
 sraddhayarcitum icchati  
 tasya tasyacalam sraddham  
 tam eva vidadhamy aham

“Whatever the form in which a pious devotee  
 wishes to worship faithfully,  
 I shall fortify this his faith.”<sup>34</sup>

“Hinduism thus assumes the basic experience of the unity of reality. Multiplicity is not meaningless, but the result of the playful creative powers of God (called purple): the One plays in the Many. Ultimately, however, diversity is dissolved in unity, when the true or ultimate nature of the world is recognised.”<sup>35</sup> More recent Hindu writers, such as Radhakrishnan, emphasise that the different religions are only partial truths or stages.

### Christianity and Hinduism

Tradition has it that Christianity was brought to India in the first century A.D. by the Apostle Thomas, who preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jewish and other non-Christian religious communities settled along the southern coast of India. He is said to have met a

<sup>34</sup> Radhakrishnan, S., *Die Bhagavadgita. Sanskrittext mit Einleitung und Kommentar*, Baden-Baden, 1958, 254. The commentary states: “The highest God strengthens the faith of everyone and grants the rewards that the individual yearns for. However far the soul has fought its way up, so far God stoops down to it. Even such contemplative seers as Buddha and S. do not dismiss the common people’s faith in the gods. They were just as aware of the ineffability of the highest godhead as of the endless number of possible manifestations. Each surface owes its firm base to the depths below it, just as each shadow reflects the nature of the object that casts it. Moreover each act of veneration ennobles. It matters not what we venerate. If our veneration is earnest enough, it helps us progress” (*ibid.*).

<sup>35</sup> Brück, M. v., “Indische Religionen – Vielfalt oder Einheit?” in: Schubert, V., (ed.), *o cit.*, 203.

violent end in India. Today's Saint Thomas Christians trace their beginnings and their name back to the work of the Apostle. Early Christianity in southern India was able to develop without any major confrontation with the native religions. They also adapted at some point to their Hindu environment and often had friendly contacts with the Hindus. At the beginning of the modern period Portuguese Catholics came to the country, followed by Protestant missionaries in the wake of the British, Dutch and French East Indian Companies. In addition to their mission of spreading the Gospel, today's Christians and their missionaries promote the cause of more social and legal equality and pursue an active educational policy. Thus, although they live their Christian faith in a society shaped by many religions, they make a positive contribution to the development of modern India.<sup>36</sup>

A few comparisons may show how fundamental are the differences between the Christian and Hindu traditions as regards their notions of God, man and the world.

In the Hindu tradition the whole world is in a state of perdition that renders people incapable of understanding reality. Only the light of true cognition will banish the darkness of bedazzlement. In the Christian tradition, by contrast, man is the centre of everything. Christianity speaks of the salvation and perdition of man, salvation having to do with love. Because God is love, only love can make man godlike.

In the Hindu tradition worldliness (Samsara), cosmic history (Karma) and cognition are the basic elements of human existence. In the Christian tradition freedom, responsibility and history are seen as essential features.

Both traditions have a different understanding of history based on their understanding of truth. In the Hindu tradition man is bound up in the cycle of rebirths (in the state of Samsara). He is "dazzled" by it and therefore unable to acquire a proper understanding of truth. The Vedic revelation (Shruti, "what is heard") states that the understanding of truth is of an ontological nature and refers to the highest mystery,

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Schmidt-Leukel, P., *o cit.*, 397-402.

the highest reality. “What is true is what is immutable and enduring.” To the Christian tradition historicity is an important criterion of truth: if it really happened, then it’s true.

For the Hindu tradition the truth can only be attained in the final stage; Karmic history<sup>37</sup> plays a negative role. For the Christian tradition truth is a characteristic of reality; the anthropocentric perspective plays a positive role here.

In Hindu tradition cognition is salvation; in the Christian tradition it is love. Redemption occurs through love: one is touched by love, one is genuinely liberated, freed from the “obsession with self” (Indian = Ahamkara) and free for the “whole” (Indian = Sarvam).<sup>38</sup>

Hans Küng shows in the answers of Christianity and the Hindu religions two more points of agreement in the striving for redemption. These were intended as practical paths and not just as theoretical answers:

Both the Christian and Hindu religions recognise alienation, worldliness, and the world’s need for redemption.<sup>39</sup>

Both religions hope for redemption through an Absolute.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Raimon Panikkar explains what he means by Karmic history and a Karmic world view: “All modes of understanding share the conviction that there is a link between action and effect. Karma means the undivided, non-dualistic view of reality, in which the action is not separated from its effect. The Karmic world view assumes an understanding of history that stresses the ontal aspect, while the understanding of history of the anthropic world vKatoiew emphasises the theoretical, cognitive aspect. Although Karmic history (‘what happened to you when you did it’) is related to the history that we write, it is more comprehensive than anthropic history (‘what they did’) and hence inexhaustible” (The Law of Karma and the Historical Dimension of Man, 30f).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. D’Sa, F.X., “Die verschiedenen Glaubenswelten der Religionen am Beispiel von Christentum und Hinduismus” in Bernhard Nitsche (ed.): *Gottesdenken in interreligiöser Perspektive. Raimon Panikkars Trinitätstheologie in der Diskussion*, Paderborn, 2005, 66-74, 71f.

<sup>39</sup> Hans Küng explains this as follows: “Both know in some kind of way about the ignorance and bedazzlement, loneliness and transience of man, about his base instincts, apathy and fear: in short his colossal self-centredness. Both are distressed at the unspeakable suffering caused by man’s own deeds and their effects, but also at all the misery in this miserable world of ours.” (Küng, H., “Eine christliche Antwort”, in: idem, Ess, J.v., Stietenron, H.v./ Bechert, H., *Christentum und Weltreligionen. Hinführung zum Dialog mit Islam, Hinduismus und Buddhismus*, Munich, 1984, 329.)

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibid.* Redemption by an Absolute is presented as follows: “Both yearn for the

Different paths of salvation leading to redemption may be identified in greatly simplified form in Hinduism and the three main Christian denominations. Three such paths – expressed in stereotypical terms – may be mentioned here:

*“Karma-Marga:* the path of action, deeds, works – whether in the sense of ascetic or cultic-ritual observances – might be called the Roman Catholic path.

*Jnana-Marga:* the path of knowledge, cognition, *gnosis* – here again very much in the sense of existential experience and often combined with a demand for elitism and asceticism – might be compared with the Graeco-Alexandrian path; and

*Bhakti-Marga:* the path of unconditional devotion (bhakti = allocation and participation), of trust, of faith, of love might – despite all the differences – prove analogous with the Augustinian-Lutheran-Reformed path, which does not wish to rely wholly on works or on knowledge.”<sup>41</sup>

Some decades ago large numbers of people, including many young Europeans, flocked to Asia, especially India, in search of answers to

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cognition, transformation, enlightenment, liberation and redemption of man and his world. Both hope to achieve this by entering a final, unconditional, highest state: the ultimate reality, whatever it is called and however it is understood. Both know that this ultimate reality, however close it may be, is concealed, that the Ultimate is not immediately objectifiable, accessible, available, that the Absolute itself must convey enlightenment, revelation, abolition of suffering” (*ibid.*).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 329-330. Küng goes on to mention two *basic attitudes* in the striving for redemption: – the *cat’s path*: “As a kitten lets itself be carried by its mother, man should let himself be carried by unconditional trust in his God. In Christianity the justification is not based on pious deeds, but on trusting faith alone. Thus passivity comes before activity!” (*ibid.*, 330). Heinrich von Strietencron comments as follows: “The cat’s path includes the love of God. But just as the kittens also become active in time, the love of God does not remain passive either.” (Strietencron, H.v., “Hinduistische Perspektiven”, in: Küng, H., Ess. J.v., idem / Bechert, H., *o cit.*, 319). – And on the *monkey’s path*: “Just as the little monkey actively applies its own powers, the just man should also confirm his Christian faith through works of love. Thus activity arises out of passivity!” (Küng, H., *loc. cit.*, 331). Here, too, Heinrich von Strietencron provides an explanation: “For the Hindus the monkey’s path includes asceticism, the path of the deed (above all the fulfilment of one’s own duties, making sacrifices to one’s ancestors and gods and providing succour with gifts and ‘good works’) and the path of knowledge, which also includes Yoga.” (idem, “Hinduistische Perspektiven”, in *loc. cit.*, 319.)

their questions. It may have been the spirit of adventure and the lure of the unknown that made them flee from established society. But many were driven, deep down, by a need to discover the meaning of life. This led to an interest in Asian religions, doctrines of rebirth and the alternative messages of Indian religions and deities. Not infrequently revelations were torn from their religious context and adapted to private desires and a secular way of life. The doctrine of rebirth deprived death of its sting. Man remained the master of his fate even beyond the grave. Death had lost its finality: what one had neglected in this life could be caught up with in the next.

Another reason for seeking answers to the meaning of life in the alternative notions of Asian religions may have been that people had lost touch with the message of their own Christian faith and were unable to understand it. But the Asian religions cannot just be used selectively as a substitute for lost Christian faith. Thus the answer was not infrequently stitched together from the tenets of many religions without reference to their religious context, although Christians were not really allowed to engage in this relativisation of religions, especially Christianity, which stresses the uniqueness of Christ as revealed truth. People are still looking for answers in Asian or Indian religions even today, perhaps to an even greater extent.<sup>42</sup> They are thus “meeting the need to extend the non-committal surfing among the many meanings of life on offer nowadays to include religions as well.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Inter-faith dialogue in India**

In the *inter-faith dialogue* it is not acceptable for specific tenets of a given religion to be reduced to the same level as all others just for the sake of harmony. What would be gained if Christians, under the influence of Hellenism and contrary to the faith they profess, were to reinterpret the incarnation of the divine Word, Jesus Christ, as a general “religious significance of Jesus and if they were to bring Mohammed, Buddha and Gandhi, acting as catalysts and mediators of a religiosity directed at the beyond, into this hermeneutic framework,

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Bürkle, H., “Die Entdeckung religiöser Alternativen in asiatischen Traditionen” in: Müller, G.L. / Serretti, M., (eds.), *o cit.*, 58 –59, 68.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

which is congruent neither with Islam nor with Buddhism?”<sup>44</sup> Thus the first thing to do, before turning to the situation in India, is to see what inter-faith dialogue is and what it is not.

*Inter-faith dialogue* does *not* refer to any of the following relations between diversity and unity. It does not mean unity *and* diversity (for that would presuppose a non-existent point outside them both). Nor does it mean unity or diversity (for that would presuppose an equally non-existent choice between diversity and unity). One cannot say it means *neither* unity *nor* diversity (for that would presuppose the existence of another possibility). And finally one must dismiss the thesis that it means *both* unity *and* diversity (for that would make it unclear what was actually meant).<sup>45</sup>

*Interreligiosity* must *not* mean: eclectic, patchwork religion; comparative religion; theoretical scientific or analytical reduction, or any reduction of the claim to truth.<sup>46</sup>

Put in positive terms, *inter-faith dialogue* is the name given to an enduring conviction that the one divine Truth is expressed in many religions. This entails the rejection of a Hegelian claim to absolute knowledge (the resolution of differences to produce a single doctrinal concept); the discovery of mutually enriching convergences (e.g. in the fields covered by the terms “religion”, “God”, “redemption”, “revelation”, “sin”); and opening the door to a deeper understanding of our own identity by reading religious history as a history of salvation.<sup>47</sup>

### Unity and diversity of religions

A large number of religious denominations in India are engaged in talks with one another, their diversity resembling the diversity of languages. If at the same time Asian religions could exist within one another, it would be possible for someone to be Buddhist and

<sup>44</sup> Müller, G.L., *Mit der Kirche denken. Bausteine und Skizzen zu einer Ekklesiologie der Gegenwart*, Würzburg 2002, 268.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Mall, R.A., “Der Hinduismus als ein Ort der Ökumene von Religionen” in: Schubert, V., (ed.), *o cit.*, 197-198.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 195.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 196.

Confucian, Buddhist and Shintoist simultaneously.<sup>48</sup> The mystical attitude is characteristic of Buddha as well as of Hindu thinkers, such as Shankara on the one hand and Ramanuja on the other. In many different forms mysticism forms the uniform background of the higher forms of Asian religion. “Such mysticism is characterised by the experience of identity. The mystic loses himself in the ocean of the All-One, whether this is depicted in emphatic *theologia negativa* as ‘nothing’ or positively as ‘everything’. In the last stage of such an experience the ‘mystic’ will no longer say to his God ‘I am Thine’, but ‘I am Thou.’”<sup>49</sup>

Monotheism in India is associated with mysticism. It is open to monism and is the product of evolution. That is why the gods were never overthrown. Instead there has been a peaceful compromise between God and the gods, between monotheism and polytheism.<sup>50</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger refers to Hans Bürkle<sup>51</sup> in order to emphasise that the concept of the person is indispensable for the Indian image of man. Hans Bürkle notes that “the Upanishadic experience of identity of the ‘tat tvam asi’<sup>52</sup> is unable to substantiate the residual validity and dignity of the individual uniqueness of each individual person. It cannot be reconciled with the notion that this life is only a transitional phase in a series of succeeding stages of rebirth. The intrinsic value of the person and their dignity cannot be defined as a transitional phase and hence subject to change.”<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, J., *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg i. Br., Basle, Vienna, 2003, 22.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Bürkle, H., *Der Mensch auf der Suche nach Gott – die Frage der Religionen*, AMATECA, vol. 3, Paderborn, 1996, 130f.

<sup>52</sup> “Tat tvam asi”, a term from one of the Five Vedas of the Holy Scriptures of Hinduism, of the Samaveda (Chandogya Upanishad, 6 Prapathaka), which in Vedanta philosophy describes the spiritual path of man in search of himself and means “That is You”. (Cf. Deussen, P., *Sechzig Upanishad's des Veda*, Darmstadt, 1963, 157f.)

<sup>53</sup> Bürkle, H., *loc. cit.*, 130. He continues: “The reforms of Hinduism in the Modern Age therefore essentially revolve around the issue of human dignity. The Christian view of the person is adopted by them in a general Hindu context without their being rooted in any understanding of God” (*ibid.*, 130).

## Dialogue among religions

Despite the many religions and forms of faith there are in India, they do try to co-exist in an atmosphere of tolerance and dialogue, with regular meetings, study groups and conferences. But given the size of the country and the large number of religious groups and philosophies within the various denominations, it is in fact impossible, not to say inconceivable, that representatives of all religious groupings should find common ground, the search for which is often the greatest obstacle to conducting the dialogue. Yet the dialogue must go on, partly so that each can understand the others better and partly so that each can get to know themselves a little better.

One person who is considered a pioneer of the inter-faith dialogue is Raimon Panikkar, not least on account of his unusual biography.<sup>54</sup> In pluralist theology circles he is mentioned in the same breath as Hick and Knitter. His career has been a journey between cultures. His focus in the inter-faith dialogue between Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism has been on the binding factor (the ‘*Laut*’) between the three religions. In his later works he speaks of a mutual “fulfilment” or “fertilisation”. His new pluralist way of looking at the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism lies in Christology.<sup>55</sup> Put more precisely, in the interrelationship between God, man and world, (‘cosmotheandric’<sup>56</sup> is the expression he has coined) which Panikkar

<sup>54</sup> Raimon Panikkar, born 1918 in Barcelona to a deeply religious Spanish Catholic mother and a father of the high Hindu nobility; ordained as a priest in 1946; in India from 1950 to 1960; doctorates in Philosophy, Chemistry and Theology; professorship at Santa Barbara, California; and member of faculty at several universities in India, Europe and America. He is one of the “outstanding Catholic protagonists of inter-faith and intercultural dialogue in the 20th and early 21st centuries. Coming from such a parental home, Raimon Panikkar was predestined to take part in the dialogue between the religious systems of Christianity and Hinduism. The intellectual confrontation with agnosticism and atheism and the encounter with Buddhism came later.” (Nitsche, B., “Begegnungen mit Raimon Panikkar. Chancen der interkulturellen und interreligiösen Forschung” in: idem (ed.): *Gottesdenken in interreligiöser Perspektive. Raimon Panikkars Trinitätstheologie in der Diskussion*, Paderborn, 2005, 13.)

<sup>55</sup> See also: Menke, K.-H., *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn. Denkformen und Brennpunkte der Christologie*, Regensburg, 2008, 437-439.

<sup>56</sup> Nitsche, B., *o cit.*, 13. This portmanteau word focuses attention on the trinity of God (*theos*), world (*kosmos*) and man (*anthropos*). “... in this triad men lead their lives in quest of meaning and that truth which is attested to in the religions as divine mystery and guidance in life” (*ibid.*, 13).

in Christian terminology calls 'Christ' and the concrete person of Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>57</sup>

Panikkar distinguishes between two kinds of dialogue. On the one hand, there is the "dialectic dialogue" consisting of analysis, discussions and methodology, which is important for mutual information and correctives. On the other hand, there is the "dialogical dialogue", which refers to the witness of faith and may have a transformational quality. Because the inter-faith dialogue is concerned with personal, intercultural and pluralist questions, it is a dialogue between subjects (about their faith experiences and witnesses to the faith).<sup>58</sup> As Panikkar sees it, inter-faith dialogue should neither bring together the many world religions in a universal religion (the rich diversity of religions should on no account be reduced to a single tradition), nor should total agreement between religions be sought. The ideal aim of inter-faith dialogue is the improvement of relations and discussions between religions and cultures. The chasm of ignorance and misunderstanding can only be bridged if everyone speaks their own language and can share their own faith experience with others.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps – Panikkar hopes – a point can then be reached at which mutual fertilisation is possible. "Christianity is not a one-sided fulfilment of Hinduism; rather a mutual self-fertilisation could take place between Hinduism and Christianity."<sup>60</sup>

The inter-faith dialogue is also necessary because the problems besetting today's globalised world in the fields of justice, environment, peace and human rights cannot be solved without mutual understanding between religions. History teaches us that Christianity "has its roots in Judaism and in the Greek, Roman, Irish and Germanic

<sup>57</sup> Schmidt-Leukel, P., *o cit.*, 417.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Mendonca, C., "Panikkars Beitrag zu einer interreligiösen und interkulturellen Hermeneutik aus indischer Sicht" in Bernhard Nitsche (ed.), *Gottesdenken in interreligiöser Perspektive. Raimon Panikkars Trinitätstheologie in der Diskussion*, Paderborn, 2005, 83.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 84.

<sup>60</sup> Thus Panikkar after Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *o cit.*, 415. And further: "Christ is just the Christian name for the mystical unity of world, God and man. For this reality was discovered by Christians in and through Jesus and is therefore, for Christians, expressed in the combination of the words Jesus and Christ. Yet the same mystical unity can also be found in other religions, in which case it will be expressed differently. In Hinduism, for example, it is Rama, Krishna, Isvara or Purusa" (*ibid.*, 415).

traditions. Hinduism, too, has its roots in many other religions of the Indian subcontinent.”<sup>61</sup>

The necessity of a dialogue between religions is seen at three different levels: firstly, on the personal level (man is not just a single individual, but is capable of entering into a relationship and dialogue with others; dialogue and faith make a man a man); secondly, at the level of religious traditions (people meet members of the other traditional faiths in their daily lives, in schools, offices, even in the Internet; thus questions are raised which may enrich, but also alarm; the traditional religions cannot evade the mounting problems of today’s world and must assume tasks in an open dialogue: “either they open themselves to dialogue or they will fall into decay.”); and finally on the level of history (genuine religiosity is also historically minded and concerns itself not only with history and the fate of men, but also with history and the fate of the world: “Without a dialogue between religions the world might collapse.”)<sup>62</sup>

Another representative of the inter-faith dialogue in India and an advocate of a pluralist position is *Stanley Samartha*.<sup>63</sup> In his opinion, the Christian Christology for India and Asia must be revised.<sup>64</sup> It is understandable that Christians all over the world believe that Jesus is the Son of God, which he does not dispute. But what about the people of other religions? Do Christians sincerely believe that they too have something to say? That they too have stories which are of great significance, such as those of Buddha, Rama and Krishna? That they have questions to which no answers can be obtained? For Samartha,

<sup>61</sup> Mendonca, C., *o cit.*, 85.

<sup>62</sup> Panikkar in: Mendonca, C., *o cit.*, 86.

<sup>63</sup> He belongs to the Church of Southern India and for a long time headed the Dialogue Department of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and was the first Director of the WCC’s “Dialogue Programme”.

<sup>64</sup> According to Samartha this “revised” Christology rejects the universality of the Christ event as unfounded. The originality of Christianity does not consist in the statement that Jesus Christ is God, “[...] elevating Jesus to the rank of God or restricting Christ to Jesus of Nazareth are both temptations that must be resisted. The first entails the risk of leading to an impoverished ‘Jesology’, the second of becoming a narrow ‘form of Christomonism’. A theocentric Christology helps avoid those two dangers.” (Stanley Samartha, *One Christ – Many Religions. Toward a Revised Christology*, Maryknoll, 1991, quoted in: Amato, A., “Einzigkeit und Universalität des Heilmysteriums Jesu Christ.”).

however, they have a special significance and message of salvation: “the proclamation of liberation and enlightenment by Buddha, the promise of liberating, divine grace from Rama and Krishna”.<sup>65</sup> For Christians he sees in Jesus the promise and conveyance of God’s presence, but not in the sense of an exclusive uniqueness.<sup>66</sup> Modern Hindu thinkers not only see the cults of Indian gods as conditional and provisional, but also apply this relativisation to every religion. Thus Jesus Christ appears as an, admittedly, outstanding figure, in whom the direct merging of the mystic with the Divine is revealed. When the Bible speaks of Jesus as the Son of God, of His sacrificial death, His resurrection and His return, these topoi are seen as later misunderstandings and superficial reinterpretations of His role as teacher (guru).<sup>67</sup> In this “Hindu relativisation of the nature of (Christian) revelation the representatives of the Indian doctrine of enlightenment see a reason for mutual tolerance between religions”.<sup>68</sup>

### The encyclical *Fides et ratio* on the cultural tradition of India

In the encyclical *Fides et ratio* <sup>69</sup> John Paul II talks of the relationship between the Christian faith and pre-Christian cultures. He mentions yardsticks that have to be applied when the Faith encounters these cultures and takes Indian culture as an example, as it is so rich in very old philosophical traditions. He points out that “a magnificent

<sup>65</sup> Samatha, S., *o cit.*, quoted in: Schmidt-Leukel, P., *loc. cit.*, 422.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Amato, A., *o cit.*, 102. “... M. Thomas Thangaraj also considers the claim of absolute salvation in Jesus to be untenable in any universal sense. It would only be acceptable if it were made clear that “Christ was unique and absolute only for Christians”. He bestows upon Jesus the title of *guru* (master) and comments: “Jesus should be regarded as one of many *gurus* and not as the one and only *guru*.” (Stanley Samartha, *o cit.*, 124) These and other authors assume that the various non-Christian religious traditions in all their diversity should be regarded as equal and complementary and that each forms an equal part of God’s plan of salvation. The aim is to overcome the assertion of the exclusive uniqueness of the salvation event of Christ, which appears to show a lack of concern for the experience of the adherents of other religions who worship other redeemers” (Amato, A., *loc. cit.*, 102-103).

<sup>68</sup> Bürkle, H., “Die Entdeckung religiöser Alternativen in asiatischen Traditionen” in: Müller, G.L./ Serretti, M. (eds.), *loc. cit.*, 57.

<sup>69</sup> John Paul II, *Enzyklika FIDES ET RATIO von Johannes Paul II an die Bischöfe der katholischen Kirche über das Verhältnis von Glaube und Vernunft*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 135, Bonn, 1998

spiritual upsurge leads Indian thought to search for an experience having the value of an absolute in that it liberates the spirit from the conditionalities imposed by time and space. In the dynamism of this search for liberation grand metaphysical systems are to be found.<sup>70</sup> Joseph Ratzinger interprets this passage as a clear indication of the universalist tendency of great cultures, of their transcendence of space and time, of their attempts at defining the purpose of human life. This is where Ratzinger sees an indication of the ability of cultures to hold dialogues among themselves, in this case between the cultures of India and those that have grown out of the Christian faith.<sup>71</sup> The encyclical speaks of dimensions which can open up to Christianity. While the basic needs of man as a transcendent being are identical in all cultures, the encyclical also stresses that the Church must not abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Graeco-Latin thought. This applies especially when the Church enters into contact with great and previously unknown cultures. If the Church avoids such contacts, she is acting against God's plan of salvation as He leads His Church in time and history. Finally, the encyclical recognises as legitimate the claim of Indian thought to be special and original. However, this cannot be allowed to mean that a cultural tradition in all its diversity can shut itself off from other traditions in order to assert its identity in terms of its opposition to others, since this is in contradiction to the essence of the human spirit.<sup>72</sup>

It is to be hoped that, while the second millennium was still characterised by denominational conflicts and the absence or decline of dialogue, the third millennium will promote and expand the worldwide dialogue between religions and lead to a positive outcome. Religions must not disappear in the process. Many people seek an inner spirituality, an access to the experience of the divine spirit without worrying too much about the external appearances of religions. "We are living in a completely new age of the spirit, a mystical age. A new, global spiritual consciousness is slowly dawning. Perceiving this upsurge of the spirit and promoting it is at the very heart of the dialogue culture."<sup>73</sup> We keep

<sup>70</sup> John Paul II, *o cit.*, 74.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, J., *o cit.*, 159.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *o cit.*

<sup>73</sup> Painadath, S., *o cit.*, 41.

asserting that our task today is to concentrate more on what religions have in common rather than on what separates them. In 1986, John Paul II said at an ecumenical prayer meeting in Assisi that the differences between the religions appear secondary in comparison with the unity between them, which is radical, fundamental and decisive. We may be sure he did not mean relativisation on matters of substance.<sup>74</sup> But because all religious experiences ultimately proceed from one single divine source and convey the healing presence of God, it is necessary for the faithful of every religion to read the scriptures of others with an open mind and seek to understand the symbols of others with genuine respect. How can I love my neighbour if I am not prepared to respect my neighbour's God? Surely today's global world shows us that the Holy Scriptures of all religions are the legacy of all humankind. Does this not mean that the diversity of religions is part of God's plan of salvation?<sup>75</sup>

There is no contradiction between the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and His Church and the inter-faith dialogue, which we hope and feel to be necessary in relation to the Asian religions, especially here in my Indian homeland. The one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church sees itself as a sacrament in the service of "the Others", not as an "island of truth" nor as an "island of the chosen". The catholicity of the Church betrays itself if it suppresses, ignores or even extinguishes the otherness of the others. The apostolicity of the church betrays itself if it combines ethnic, cultural, national or political representations with the representation of Christ. And the Church's attributes of unity and holiness will be perverted into their opposite if they are not lived in the sense of the inclusion of the Christians in the representation of Him who was Crucified.

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<sup>74</sup> This point was made explicitly by John Paul II in an address to a group of Indian bishops of the Latin Rite on the occasion of his "Ad Limina visit" in 2003, when he said that he well understood that they were confronted on their Indian subcontinent with cultures rich in religious and philosophical traditions. "The inter-faith dialogue is not a substitute for the meaningful proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God incarnate. It would be an even greater falsification of our faith if relativism were to lead to syncretism" ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2003/july/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20030703\\_ad-limina-india\\_ge.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2003/july/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20030703_ad-limina-india_ge.html), 21.11.2011).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Painadath, S., *o cit.*, 38-40.

# Reflections on inter-religious dialogue: an African pastoral perspective

Joseph Kato Bitole

Recent social cultural factors and magisterial documents especially after the Second Vatican Council indicate that issues of inter-religious dialogue and mission are practical burning concerns in Africa and worldwide. This discourse will focus on inter-religious dialogue from an African-Pastoral theological perspective.

## Factors that Warrant Dialogue

The following factors warrant an urgent dialogue and a collaborative solidarity from all faith based organisations, communities and cultural groups. For churches especially the Catholic Church dialogue is a mission, an imperative and a mandate after the Second Vatican Council and post Vatican Council several documents, as we shall later indicate in this paper. Some of the factors are the following:

- The perceived dechristianisation of some nations which were for centuries considered to be the origin and hub of Christianity, its inspiration, human and material resources for missionary activities in Africa and worldwide.
- The general decreasing religious sense in society for several reasons, such as: absolute or extreme materialism, socialism, egoistic individualism and hedonistic tendencies.<sup>76</sup> The alarming share of ignorance of Judeo Christian principles and values in African local Christian communities whose population is demographically increasing but lacking in deep Christian conviction and commitment, judging from the recent conflicts in Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Northern Uganda, Kenya, etc.

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<sup>76</sup> Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, nos. 10, 35, 100, 122; *Pastores Dobo Vobis*, no. 30; G. Phillips, *The Role of the Laity in the Church*, The Mercies Press, Cork, 1955, 104.

- The ideology of absolute human freedom that divinises a created human being to the extent that those who embrace it ignore and devalue the rights of the community, senselessly exploit nature including fellow human beings; or the conviction that God does not intervene in human history.<sup>77</sup>

Some of these factors can be described as century old issues. However, they are compounded by modern ones which the current world is characterised, to point out a few.

- The profound rapid changes of every type, such as the growth of the world population; the phenomenal means of transport on land, sea and air; and communication facilities, the technological and scientific knowledge and inventions that keep on expanding and growing even here in Africa; the material abundance or increase in some countries and continents; the expansion and multiplication of educational institutions that are visible all over the globe; the religious pluralism and multiplication of denominations sects religious movements propagating their convictions on radio, TV stations, internet, etc.

### **Genuine Concerns and Opportunities**

While some of these changes do cause genuine concerns and apprehension, in so far as, they can bring about the destruction of positive achievements of the human race, such as, cherished cultural and social products: the sanctity of the family and human person, the Africa ethical principles and value of extended family and its assistance in the crucial stages of human growth and development, etc. Some of these seemingly negative factors can be changed into opportunities for society and the Church's mission. Examples are radio stations, TV channels, internet, mobile phones, even positive globalisation which can be described as another name for catholicity and solidarity of the entire human race, regardless of colour, race and ethnicity. Dialogue is one of the means to promote the Gospel of human brotherliness and love.

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<sup>77</sup> Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*. no. 35.

## Meaning of Dialogue

In this paper, the concept of dialogue implies a conversation or an attempt to construct a bridge between two people or two communities with the aim of coming to mutual understanding, respect, reconciliation, peaceful co-existence, and collaborative action for mutual growth in all aspects of human life.

Dialogue connotes an exchange of opinions, assumptions, convictions, experiences, principles, beliefs between two representatives of different cultures, customs, traditions academic disciplines religious beliefs, etc.

“Diversity constitutes (enrichment) and not a reason for struggle and in addition we are aware of the fact that the breath and plurality epistemologies impede any claim to dominance or exclusivity or absoluteness by any kind of research”<sup>78</sup> or search for co-existence among different communities and nations.

## Combining Mission and Purpose for Dialogue

Mission is the purpose for which an organisation or a community was created, chosen, elected such as the Church to do or the reason why it exists. The church for example has a mission from Jesus Christ to bring the light of the gospel to all humanity without exception.<sup>79</sup>

This mission is carried out through the tripartite ministry of Jesus Christ and His Church, that is, the prophetic, liturgical or sacramental and shepherding or deaconia or witnessing to Gospel values and law of love of God and neighbour.

It is through the last ministry of love that dialogue comes into play; loving not only brothers, sisters and neighbours but strangers, opponents, true enemies or those we merely perceive to be against our cherished interests. In this context; Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, animists, members of Christian sects, extreme secularists, materialists, people with hedonistic tendencies, all are co-partners with us in the

<sup>78</sup> Zimowski, Z., “Science and Faith: A Life Choice” in *Dolentium Hominum*, no. 75 year XXV, 2010, 10; Kato Bitole, J., *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic Pastoral Perspective* in *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together* CUEA, Nairobi, 2009, 58-65.

<sup>79</sup> Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, nos. 92-95; Mt. 16:16-17, Mt. 28:18-20; Lk. 24:47.

dialogical journey and process. The reason for dialogue is that there are several people who are born, grow up and educated in cultural contexts that completely disregard or ignore the idea or reality of God, the transcendental dimension, to mention a few:

The old classic absolute secularists who find it difficult to imagine the existence of God.

The agnostics who purposely or intentionally refuse to decide whether to believe or not in God.

The *positivists* who take pride in rejecting any reality that cannot be scientifically tested, measured and verified through laboratory gadgetry or bodily senses.

The extreme humanists who divinise the human being as having absolute capacity to control and know every reality through scientific and technical know how; thus giving him or her, the unlimited power and freedom to do anything in his or her favour and pleasure. The process of dialogue does not exclude any person in these categories.

### Reason for Dialogue

We have already mentioned the theological reasons why Christians have a mandate and an imperative to dialogue. In this section I intend to indicate that dialogue gives a bonus to the well being of the subjects of dialogue:

We dialogue because there is a natural desire, propensity or inclination in all human beings to seek and search for the truth, harmony and companionship in order to grow and develop as humans. For Christians, truth harmony and unity are biblical imperatives; they are closely linked with the law of love – *caritas*.<sup>80</sup>

This law of love must be expressed and lived in concrete actions, in sharing with others not only material resources but also social, cultural, intellectual, religious, psychological products and aspirations.<sup>81</sup>

We need dialogue because we all inhabit the same planet and we are

<sup>80</sup> Jn. 13:35; Thess. 4:9.

<sup>81</sup> Lk. 4:16-19; Mt. 25:35-46; James 2:14-16; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44; *Populorum Progressio*, nos. 13, 16, 26.

travelling almost the same life stages of conception, birth, childhood, youth, adulthood, old age and death. Birth and death are equalisers for all human beings, regardless of race, country, religious convictions, economic and educational standards.

We dialogue because this earthly globe and its environment is our common habitat.

This implies in my view, joint exploration of our different religious beliefs, ideologies, assumptions on life, prejudices – old and new ones. The process of dialogue helps and challenges those involved in it to grow in several ways: Dialogue helps to discover how we can better express our real ideas, assumptions, convictions, mission, vision, feelings.

It assists us to outgrow and overcome our negative narrow thinking and bigotry leading us to peaceful co-existence with others different from our way of thinking, living, behaving.

For Christians, we have to dialogue because our Jewish Christian heritage is defined not only by our dogmatic beliefs and magisterial pronouncements, but by the way we relate to people around our neighbourhood including those we consider to be our enemies.<sup>82</sup>

Dialogue has a mysterious ways of mitigating misunderstanding, quarrelling and divisions arising from all type of contexts.

### **Divisions to Overcome in Africa**

Africans are divided by a multitude of factors which cannot be enlisted in a paper of this size. We can only point out the following:

The African continent was repeatedly invaded by colonial powers from other continents; North and East. This resulted in senseless demarcation and splitting of African nations, kingdoms, tribes and families. People were mingled with groups or communities of other cultural, religious, beliefs and customs. Today this is clearly noticeable in Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.

In the first glance one can argue that the colonial invasions were, in so far as they brought to Africa positive cultural, religious pluralism

<sup>82</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995). No. 49; Tarton Tins, "Why Should church have Dialogue," in: *United Methods New service*, June 2, 2009. [http://umnssumc.org/02/june\\_271.htm](http://umnssumc.org/02/june_271.htm)

outside the continent; and that this was the beginning of a liberating globalisation. It was the breaking up of narrow and ghetto cultures typical of racism, tribalism and clannish communities in Africa.

However, and in the second instance, the legacy of old and new colonial activities are clearly the root causes of present day refugees, killings, fighting, gun trafficking, exploitation of natural resources in and around the Great Lakes region and beyond.<sup>83</sup> Dialogue challenges communities in Africa to change the above situation described above and to transform negative actions and relationships into mutual ethnic and tribal respect, concern, tolerance, assistance, co-existence and practical charity.<sup>84</sup>

### The Way Forward

We should be committed to the promotion of genuine dialogue in accordance to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and recent magisterial policies after the same Council.<sup>85</sup>

“The Church stands forth as a sign of brotherliness which allows dialogue and invigorates it. Such a mission requires in the first place that we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony through the lawful recognition of lawful diversity.”<sup>86</sup>

With this magisterial teaching we can confidently engage in a dialogue taken as a conversation in which there is an exchange of human, intellectual, cultural and spiritual values, convictions and insights with the aim of mutual sharing of things we happen to treasure, and without arrogance or superiority complex.

We believe that dialogue is prompted within the Church by God’s desire who created humanity to enter into brotherly/sisterly and natural relationships within the Church and beyond.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Bitole Kato, J., “A Pastoral approach to the Plight of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: Special Focus on the Great Lakes Region” in: *Theological Response to the Tragedy of Refugees and Internally Displaced persons in Africa*, 124-147.

<sup>84</sup> Jn. 13:35, Eph. 2:16; *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 79, 109, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in: AAS 5 no. 80 (1988) 556.

<sup>85</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 92; *Humanae Personae Dignitatem* in: AA 60 (1968), 692-704.

<sup>86</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 92.

<sup>87</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 70.

In theological terms Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God through whom God the Father entered into dialogue with the whole of humanity is the original basic model of dialogue.

Dialogue is consequently conditioned by our willingness to enter into conversation with the other person because he/she is simply a human being; and we do this on an horizontal level because all of us, we believe that we are God's creatures. It is thus incumbent on all human beings, regardless of diversity of faith affiliation to initiate positive relationships with others who happen to be different from us, have contrary belief positions, convictions, and cultural value systems from ours.<sup>88</sup>

Christian dialogue is based on the firm Catholic conviction that every person created in God's image is worthy of care, respect, attention, concern, love even when we fundamentally disagree, for some reason with that person.<sup>89</sup> This is our Christian mission, imperative and mandate from Christ, the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church.

We have to admit as indicated earlier in this paper that there are multiple obstacles to dialogue, we in Africa face. Some of these are human made road blocks that we place in our path as we mature in Christian discipleship.

Difference of culture, language, race, tribe, social and economic status, educational standards. Geographical origins, political ideologies; philosophical training customary up-bringing shaped by religious, tribal ethos.

All these and many others tend to drive us in self-absorption, self-centredness and bigotry. When this happens we see other people's convictions and behaviour as strange, wrong, bad and unrealistic even dangerous; we become judgemental. Our mission is to change this within Africa and beyond.

Our mission is to discourage all cultural signs or manifestations of divisions, hatred and positively: to create a new way of living as a single global human family in the service of the common good of

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<sup>88</sup> *Ecclesium Suam*, nos. 26, 72.

<sup>89</sup> *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 28.

our nations and continents.<sup>90</sup> And finally, we suggest that the practical thing to do to promote dialogue are:

Find schools and institutions with a vision and mandate to promote dialogue, tolerance, and inter-religious collaborative development projects.<sup>91</sup>

Combat customs and attitudes of contention, unnecessary dissent, and negative controversy by exchanging visits, gifts between peoples and groups known to be enemies to each other.

Be committed and courageous to remain talking in situations of fighting, misunderstandings, ridicule, and fear of failure.

Be convinced that dialogue is often a difficult process that takes time and energy from the subjects or its promoters; and that its positive results may not be immediately achieved. However, we should maintain, as experience shows, that those with a mission to dialogue grow and develop clarity of ideas. It leads them to achieve well considered compromises on the non-essentials of faith-beliefs and customs. Dialogue brings peace, reconciliation in society and to religions, diverse communities and churches togetherness.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Gen. 1:26-27; *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 94.

<sup>91</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 102-103.

<sup>92</sup> Mahony, R., "The Spirit of Dialogue in the church Today" Archdiocese of Colorado, Springs Colorado, 16/10/1998.

## Inter-religious dialogue



## Inter-religious reflections

Francis X. D'Sa

In the world of religions today a new phase is gradually emerging. The newness of this phase refers to aspects like the following: Awareness of the existence of religions other than our own. Such awareness is mostly accompanied by a certain suspicion of the “other” religions. At the same time, serious study of religions is also picking up. An important question about how to go about a religion that is not one’s own is also becoming increasingly thematic. Awareness of the existence of religions other than our own.

Existence of religions other than our own is a truth that we have had to accept grudgingly. During the colonial period the “other” religions have had to keep a low profile. As nation after nation in the developing world became politically independent their religions began to discover their voices. Two major voices have been louder than the rest: Islam and Hinduism. To make things worse both found to their dismay (1) extremist tendencies becoming uncontrollable in their own backyards and (2) hijacking their religion for political ends.<sup>93</sup> Both have become a source of embarrassment to their belief-communities.

The middle of the twentieth century witnessed a strange phenomenon, namely, indifference towards (if not outright rejection of) religion appeared to be a widespread phenomenon. Perhaps the perception and analysis were erroneous. The latter half of the last century has been showing a tendency towards fundamentalism in almost all religious traditions coupled with aggressiveness vis à vis other religions. This has influenced even the moderates in these traditions

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<sup>93</sup> The present Minister for Home Affairs in India’s Central cabinet Mr. Chidambaram coined the phrase “saffron terror” (because of the colour employed by the *Hindu* right-wing terrorists).

who have been rendered unsure and insecure. Understandably openness to dialogue has taken a backseat.

But interestingly there is a plethora of publications on religions. That is to say, there is also a group of scholars and writers who is interested in writing and researching religions and who believe that there is a group who is interested in reading and studying such material. This confirms the conclusion that there still are publishers who take the risk of publishing books in this field.

This observation, a methodological one, is specific to our age which over the years has been losing its hermeneutic innocence bit by bit as it were. In an earlier age a question like this would not have arisen, so great was the concern at that time with the *cognitive* dimension of religion. Today we seem to have gone beyond this. Our preoccupation is with the *religious* nature of religion. This is not surprising in an interreligious world where interreligious situations are on the rise. Allegedly abuse of religion and misuse of religious authority are leading some people to give up their allegiance to their traditional religions. At the same time it is making others who are serious about their religiosity to inquire more deeply into the religious character of religion.<sup>94</sup> Doctrines and doctrinal systems do not appear to be their cup of tea.

## The Background

To understand all this, the background needs to be articulated. Unlike in Europe where institutionalised religions are no more “in”, the Asian subcontinent is witnessing a phase where religions are being instrumentalised for political and commercial ends. Thinking persons detect a serious deterioration in the religious character of established religions; and persons who are really seeking the path of peace and happiness are no more as gullible as they used to be. They have become, I believe, more discerning. Perhaps that is one reason why the visibility of Gurus on the socio-religious horizon is on the wane.

However, interreligious situations do not necessarily mean a positive or pleasant situation. Where historically religious allergies

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<sup>94</sup> Where the Church in certain countries has lost credibility because of its lack of seriousness in tackling the problem of paedophile priests a fresh concern for reform in the life of the Church and the hierarchy is very evident in our age.

and prejudices have become rampant one encounters not infrequently zero tolerance for tolerance. Appearances to the contrary such situations are really not religious, in spite of some veneer of religion. Unfortunately there is a tendency, generally speaking, to make things worse by attributing these sentiments to all followers of this or that religion in the mistaken notion that this is true of their respective religious tradition as such. But the time has come to be less emotional and more discerning in our judgements. Throwing out the baby with the bath water betrays lack of discernment. (By the way one of the positive signs of cultural and religious encounters is the general need of *discernment* felt in almost all serious traditions. Popularity is not always a sign of growing relevance!)

The time has now come for believers not only to distance themselves from every sign of antireligious behaviour but to make common cause with peaceful interpretations of our respective religions. Some Christians are realising that they have to distance themselves from antireligious ideas and behaviour of some Christians; similarly some Muslims are distancing themselves from antireligious ideas and behaviour of some Muslims; the same is to be said of Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, etc. As of now the common concern of all religious traditions is to distance themselves from antireligious ways of thinking and acting. What must be made crystal clear to the world is that “believers” (whichever religious tradition they may belong to) cannot and should not be divided for short-term benefits. True believers, because their life is built on the rock of hope and not on the sand of expectation, always project long-term goals and long-term alliances. This has to be a major factor uniting religions in the face of signs of inhumanity, injustice and all kinds of violence. If religion, every religion, has to regain its credibility then issues of justice, compassion, love, peace etc. have to constitute benchmarks in public and political life, not just in the private practice of religion.

This is not an argument against the private practice of religion. The practice of religion has neither office hours nor special areas. Like the air we breathe in and breathe out religion and its practice have to be all-pervasive spatially and without intermission temporally.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See John Paul II's Encyclical (1990) *Redemptoris missio* §28: “The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time.”

There can be no religion-free hours or days in much the same way that being human has no religion-free hours or days.

### **A New Face of Religion<sup>96</sup>: Sacred Secularity**

What is urgently needed is a new face for all our religions, a face that exudes credibility and evokes confidence. It has to be like a website where different faith-traditions are sympathetically and empathetically presented. Each person, more specifically, each believer is a mosaic stone in the mosaic projection of a religion, as also in the general mosaic of all religions. However, it is unfortunate that the mosaic face of most of our religions is dominated by religious leaders (who seldom witness to the internal liberation which is the hallmark of authentic religion) and by terrorists who claim to be saviours of their respective religion but who in fact are the worst enemies of religion, indeed of all religion.<sup>97</sup>

The new face that I am referring to has to show not only awareness of the condition of the needy and the helpless. More importantly, it has to recognise and understand the questions of our time which in a deeper analysis are the cause of such a situation. The primary task of religions has to be its ability to interpret courageously and relevantly the signs of our time so that it responds to today's search for meaning – interreligiously and interculturally.

Gone are the days when religions tended their own flock. It can no more be the case given the kind of interreligious and intercultural interactions that are taking place. Today what a religion is, does and speaks becomes almost instantly an item on the agenda of public argument and discourse. At once it gets transmogrified in unimaginable ways among all kinds of people – whether believers or non-believers in their respective cultures.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> See Phan, P.C., "Jesus the Christ with an Asian face", in: *Theological Studies*, September 1, 1996.

<sup>97</sup> MacLachlan, M., London/Pakistan (in: *UCANews*. Asia's most trusted independent Catholic news source, March 8, 2011) reports: Fears about extremists using the blasphemy laws as cover for terrorism. Worried Pakistani Christians have stepped up security following the assassination of minorities minister Shab haz Bhatti last week, according to Archbishop Lawrence Saldanha of Lahore.

<sup>98</sup> A good illustration of this is Benedict XVI's Lecture at the Regensburg University, Germany, 2006.

Religion surely has to be political, but not party-political. “Political” in my sense of the word refers to all that is required to become a responsible citizen in today’s world, not just in our own nation-state!

Our contemporary world is witness to major problems like the objectification of every one and everything, the extreme individualism that bedevils our age and the increasing irrelevance of institutionalised religious traditions.

But there is a silver lining too. In contrast to the process that objectifies Man and World, (ignoring the depth-dimension that is at work in every being everywhere,) a new consciousness is emerging<sup>99</sup> that is discovering a new relationship between Man and World (in movements like Green Peace), between human beings themselves (in movements like Amnesty International), between women and men (in the women’s movements,) and above all, between Man and the Divine (in the emergence of new sects and new reforms in religions).<sup>100</sup>

It is a challenge that every generation has to respond to. Pope John XXIII insightfully called it “aggiornamento” when he convoked the Second Vatican Council. Aggiornamento is not to be misunderstood as keeping up with the times and assimilating the *Zeitgeist*. It refers to the signs of the times scrutinised through the reading glasses of “discernment”.

Earlier the trend was to separate religion from the rest of our life. Religion as pursuit of the Sacred was confined to the “Sunday” of our life as it were. The rest of the week had to carry the burden of the profane. Perhaps this may have contributed in some measure to the attitude that considers the world and all that is connected with it as

<sup>99</sup> Panikkar, R., Ch.VIII “The Emerging Mythos”, *The Rhythm of Being*. The Gifford Lectures (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), 368-404.

<sup>100</sup> The Christian version of this is found in John Paul II’s Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* §28: “The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: ‘The Spirit of God with marvellous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth.’ The risen Christ ‘is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit, not only instilling a desire for the world to come but also thereby animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end.”

not being sacred. But this has not worked. Indeed this may even have been one of the factors that has made institutionalised religion look more irrelevant than it really is.

It was Raimon Panikkar who coined the felicitous phrase “sacred secularity”: “One of the mature traits of our so rightly criticised epoch is the acute awareness of what I call *sacred secularity*. This world (saeculum) is sacred and our secular moves have transcendent repercussions.”<sup>101</sup> Panikkar insists that the whole Cosmos is a living reality. The saeculum as both time and space, is our world of space and time. “The traditional insight sees the entire universe, and not the earth alone, as a living organism that constitutes a Whole of which human life is the root metaphor [...] all is Life, or rather, that *the All is alive*.”<sup>102</sup> But there is an important distinction between singular life (*bios*) and Life (*zōē*).<sup>103</sup> “Singular life, *bios*, has an end. Life as such, *zōē*, does not (need to) have an end.”<sup>104</sup> More interestingly:

“Many traditions have not limited Life to Men, animals, plants, and things. The earth is a living being; the universe is a living being, the whole cosmos is alive; it has an inner dynamism, a *nexus*, a movement, and perhaps even its own growth. There may also be superior sorts of living beings, and even a supreme Being, the bearer of pure Life. Or, as the *Gitā* says: ‘my superior nature enfolds into life by which this universe is sustained.’[VII,5.] In short, reality is alive. Life is coextensive with Being, with reality.

<sup>101</sup> See Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being*, 350.

And again 370-371: “The kosmos is the body of God, say some religions. Christianity likewise claims that the kosmos is the body of Christ, and qualifies this by saying that this body is still in pangs of birth and on the way to an *eschaton* that will be reached by every realised (liberated) person. This cosmotheandric kosmology is the religious novelty of our times that I have called *sacred secularity*.”

“Kosmology tries to understand and interpret, more or less profoundly, whatever enters the field of our consciousness. Cosmology only admits what has passed the scientific examination, what has passed through the assessment of our analytical cognition.”

<sup>102</sup> Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being*, 270.

<sup>103</sup> Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being*, 272.

<sup>104</sup> Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being*, 272. Panikkar here quotes Chāndogya Upanishad VI,II,3: “It is by this subtle principle (essence) that the whole universe is enlivened; this is the real (the truth); this is the *ātman*; this art thou.” Here Panikkar adds helpfully: “This are we, living beings, Life. This is our ultimate identity, the experience of Being, the experience of Life.”

Life is not a mere quality of some beings, it is another name for Being, for the whole of reality.”<sup>105</sup>

The lengthy quote is intended both to paraphrase Panikkar’s sacred secularity and at the same time to show the sweep of the Sacred. Secularity in this phrase is far, very far indeed, from its controversial political nuance. It includes the whole of reality, transcending the cosmology of the scientists and opening up to the kosmology of the faith traditions of the world.<sup>106</sup>

### Religions in an Age of Pluralism and Dialogue

Against this panorama of Reality, Being and Life every religion has the homework of articulating its self-understanding. More specifically today religions can no more take it lying down. They have [to learn] to spell out their beliefs in such a way that their alleged relevance becomes tangibly meaningful in a *pluralistic context*. Religions have to learn to understand and speak the language of the other religions. It is here that Panikkar’s efforts can facilitate this process. The framework he has been suggesting for a long time is the framework of the cosmotheandric intuition<sup>107</sup>, (in which the interpenetration of the cosmic, the human and the divine dimensions constitutes reality) with the help of diatopical hermeneutics<sup>108</sup>. On this background discovering homeomorphic or functional equivalents<sup>109</sup> are great helps on the path of intercultural and interreligious encounters.

<sup>105</sup> Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being*, 274.

<sup>106</sup> See the section on Cosmology and Kosmology in: Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being*, 368-378.

<sup>107</sup> See Panikkar’s latest (perhaps last) formulation of his cosmotheandric (or theanthropomorphic) intuition, “The Triple Interdependence: The Cosmotheandric Intuition”, in: *The Rhythm of Being*, 276-318.

<sup>108</sup> See Panikkar’s *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1978), 9-10.

<sup>109</sup> See Panikkar, “The Rules of the Game in the Religious Encounter” in: *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, Revised edition 1999), 67: “Homeomorphism means rather that the notions play equivalent roles, that they occupy homologous places within their respective systems. Homeomorphism is perhaps a kind of existential-functional analogy.” And 68: “It is quite clearly false, for instance, to equate the upaniṣadic concept of *Brahman* with the biblical notion of *Yahweh*. Nevertheless it is equally unsatisfactory to say that these concepts have nothing whatever in common. True, their context and contents are utterly different; they are not mutually translatable, nor do they have a direct relationship. But they are homologous; each plays a similar role, albeit in different cultural settings. They both refer to a highest value and an absolute term.”

The dialogue of cultures and religions is not at all an easy enterprise. But it is the need of the hour. Good will alone, though a major component of such dialogue, is not enough. But it is an important presupposition.

At the base of pluralism we find not a pluralistic system but a pluralistic attitude.<sup>110</sup> However a pluralistic attitude does not fall in the lap. Theologically it is a grace. Philosophically it is an insight. Sociologically it is openness to the other, the other person, the other culture, the other religion and their respective worlds. Spiritually it is the expression of the freedom of the Spirit who alone in the last analysis makes us free, free to be.

Accordingly the pluralistic attitude is not just the product of reason and debate. Its inspiration derives much more from the sole agent of all inspiration - which is the Holy Spirit. The pluralistic attitude does not state that everybody is right but that everybody has the right to confess and proclaim her beliefs. For Christians this should not be a problem. John Paul II's Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (=RM) §56 states:

“Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the Spirit. Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and 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.”

These statements embody a sense of mission that is at once interreligious and interactive, a mission in which “The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man.” RM §29.

Finally in an article such as this, the charge of the “dictatorship of relativism” needs to be answered. Panikkar's view does not succumb to this. Indeed Panikkar calls his stance relativity because for him the truth of a belief is relative to its belief-world.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, in: Prabhu, J., (Ed.), *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Orbis: 1996), 257.

<sup>111</sup> Cultural relativity means the “insight that any perception, experience, or knowledge

For the Christ, the symbol of the cosmic, the human and the divine Dimensions, is the Mystery through whom everything was made. This of course is the Christian name. Other religions have their own experience of and their own name for this Mystery. The Christic experience (expressing this the Christian way) will evidently be different in different cultures and religions. (I read this in RM §56: “to discover and acknowledge the *signs of Christ’s presence* and of the *working of the Spirit*” in the other religions! My highlighting.)

For Christians, everything was created through Him (the Christ), in Him and for Him. The other religions express their beliefs differently because they experience this Mystery differently. The beliefs of each religion are valid only within their belief-world where they originally emerged. A belief from one belief-world will not make sense in another belief-world. Thus the Incarnation will not make sense in the Hindu belief-world in much the same way that the *Avatāra* will not make sense in the Christian belief-world.

The purpose of dialogue is not to give up our respective religions but to make our belief-expressions interculturally and interreligiously more intelligible and more significant. Through dialogue and faith-sharing the diverse religions can learn mutually to correct and complement their belief-expressions according to culture and historical age. And the reward will be great: The revelation in other cultures and religions of the “other” faces of the Christ! This will always remain on the one hand an unending and unfinished task because no religion and no culture can ever exhaust the richness of the Mystery of the Christ, but on the other it will be the beginning of the eschatological feast of Pentecost where every one will understand the other in her own mother tongue!

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is related to the horizon and dependent on the myth which makes the perception, the experience, or the knowledge possible.” See Panikkar’s, *Indra’s Cunning*, 112-113 (Forthcoming). Cultural relativity means the “insight that any perception, experience, or knowledge is related to the horizon and dependent on the myth which makes the perception, the experience, or the knowledge possible”. Again *Indra’s Cunning*, 112-113.



# Mission and dialogue in the context of Christian-Muslim relations

Christian W. Troll

The terms 'dialogue' and 'mission', and what they seem to denote, are perceived to be, if not in outright contradiction, then at least in tension with each other. Mission is associated with an absolute claim to the truth and with an exclusivist theological point of view that excludes others because they are different. It therefore appears rather aggressive, profoundly non-dialogical and, in fact, potentially threatening to peace. Dialogue, in contrast, is usually perceived as an essentially non-hierarchical discourse rooted in a fundamentally democratic attitude that emphasises the equality of all people as a matter of principle. Dialogue is also thought to include an attitude of mutuality, of give-and-take, and a willingness not only to give but also to learn. Religion and belief are no exception in this respect. Dialogue is seen not only as respecting the dignity and truth of others, but also as finally giving up the divisive claim to possession of the truth, thus demonstrating its freedom from fundamentalist tendencies.

In conclusion, a good many people nowadays are noticing, to their relief, that dialogue is at long last putting an end to the era of mission. Truth in the sphere of religion is seen as manifesting itself, if it at all, wherever people relinquish all absolute claims to the truth, where they respect and as far as possible accept other people's religious and cultural way of life and convictions, and thus can at the same time devote themselves impartially to building a just society and preserving peace. It is thought, however, that ultimately peace can only be achieved if religions give up missionary efforts on a religious and theological level and renounce their respective absolute claims to the truth.

## **The legacy of the history of Muslim-Christian interaction**

It is not possible here to give an overview of the development and the various facets of the understanding and practice of mission. Hugh

Goddard offers a good short survey in his book *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*.<sup>112</sup> Particular note should be taken of his account of the relationship between mission and colonialism. Goddard quotes and agrees with the mission historian Stephen Neill: “Even if many of them [the missionaries] tended towards what we now call ‘cultural imperialism’, not all missionaries were imperialists.”<sup>113</sup> In 1961, shortly before the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic mission historian Thomas Ohm summed up the legacy of Christian missionary thought and missionary practice towards Muslims briefly – and therefore of course in a simplified way – as follows: “[...] From the seventh to the twentieth century, most Catholics saw in Islam an enemy and an opponent, even a deadly enemy and a highly dangerous opponent, and they thought about battles and ‘crusades’ against the Muslims. Fear, dread and even hatred ruled their souls.”<sup>114</sup> Nowadays, he went on, people no longer believed in “overpowering”: “Christians and Muslims have been partners for a long time in the realms of economics, politics and culture [...] Islam and Christianity still have an enormous urge to develop. Muslims and Christians are still seeking to outstrip each other in the race to win over the heathens. We would still like to make Muslims into Christians, and Muslims are still trying to recruit us to their faith.”<sup>115</sup>

### **The epoch-making breakthrough of a new missiological way of thinking**

In the course of the past half century there has certainly been an epoch-making and lasting upheaval, validated as it were by the Second Vatican Council, in thinking about mission in general and, not least, in thinking about Muslim-Christian relations. In terms of Catholic-Muslim relations, this upheaval has been described as ‘a Copernican revolution’. In his comprehensive work *Machet zu Jüngern alle Völker. Theorie der Mission*, which was also published just before the Second Vatican Council began, Thomas Ohm devotes the whole of the first chapter to defining the term ‘mission’. He closes his detailed discussion

<sup>112</sup> See Goddard, H., *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, Edinburgh, 2000.

<sup>113</sup> Goddard, H., loc. cit., 135. Cf. also: Daniel, N., *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image*, Oxford, 1993, 23.

<sup>114</sup> Ohm, Th., *Machet zu Jüngern alle Völker. Theorie der Mission*. Freiburg, 1962, 24.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 28.

with the words St. Matthew puts into the mouth of the Risen Christ, which are familiar to large numbers of Christians as the 'Great Commission': "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time." (Matthew 28:18-20<sup>116</sup>). "To be more precise," Ohm continues, "mission is for us, firstly, the sending out of Christian heralds of the faith to non-Christians; secondly, the activity corresponding to this sending out, i.e. 'the making of disciples (for Christ)', 'the making of Christians', the Christianising of non-Christian people and nations, initiated or carried out by God's heralds; thirdly, the result of this activity, becoming disciples; and fourthly, the non-Christian world."<sup>117</sup>

Let us compare with this the definition given by the German bishops in their 2004 text, *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche [His Salvation to all Nations. The Mission of the Universal Church]*, immediately next to the same quotation from St Matthew's Gospel: "Universal mission means transcending the boundaries that separate us from others and, while respecting their otherness, bearing witness to and proclaiming the Gospel so credibly that they feel invited to follow Jesus and to accept His Gospel."<sup>118</sup> The difference between Ohm's understanding of mission in 1961 and the German bishops' understanding in 2004 is evident. Ohm speaks, for instance, of "non-Christians", "sending out Christian heralds of the faith", "making disciples (for Christ)" and "Christianising non-Christian people", terms which are missing from the German bishops' work in 2004. They in turn speak of "others", "respect for their otherness", "bearing witness" "credibly" "to the Gospel", "preaching", and "feeling they are invited to follow Jesus and to accept His Gospel." The paradigm shift in the understanding of mission that has taken place in the past half century can be sensed from a comparison of these two texts.

<sup>116</sup> The New Jerusalem Bible, 1985.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>118</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (ed.), *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no.76, Bonn 2004, 37.

## Our theses

In light of the developments indicated above, and in conjunction with the official documents mentioned, I have formulated the following theses:

- Mission, understood as sending out to bear witness to the Good News (= the Gospel of Jesus Christ) of the coming of God amongst us, which is irreversible and culminates in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, and calling for a return from godlessness and sin to a new communion with God, includes inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue as one of its fundamental elements.
- Dialogue is an activity which has its own kind of “reasons, requirements and dignity”; it must never be turned into a strategy for producing conversions.<sup>119</sup> To be religious today means to be inter-religious in the sense that, in a world characterised by religious pluralism, a positive relationship with believers in other religions is a basic necessity. In the light of the statement in *Nostra Aetate* 3, “the Church also regards with esteem also the Moslems”, this applies in particular to the Church’s relations with Muslims.<sup>120</sup>
- Mission – and thus the entire missionary task of the Church, taken to mean a process of evangelisation – reaches its pinnacle and fulfilment in the public proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and in the liturgical celebration of His presence among humankind throughout the world.
- There is a necessary condition for the possibility of positive and fruitful relations between Islam and Christianity, both of which assert a claim to universality and each in its own way considers itself to be witness to the truth revealed by God; that condition is an effective recognition and integral practice of

<sup>119</sup> John Paul II; *Enzyklika Redemptoris missio Seiner Heiligkeit Papst Johannes II. Über die fortdauernde Gültigkeit des missionarischen Auftrages*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 100, Bonn 1990, 57, no. 56.

<sup>120</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Die Erklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zu den nichtchristlichen Religionen ‘Nostra Aetate’*, in: Rahner, K./ Vorgrimler, H., (eds.) Kleines Konzilskompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums mit Einführungen und ausführlichem Sachregister, Freiburg im Breisgau 1982, 357, no. 3.

religious freedom as well as a genuine acceptance of a social system and system of government based on fundamental human rights and a correct understanding of the separation of state and religions.

- Muslims and Christians alike recognise God as the creator and provider of guidance to all mankind and both alike know they are personally responsible before God, who is the judge of all mankind. They acknowledge before God that they are commissioned by Him to safeguard and care for creation. Muslims and Christians know they are called in faith to support justice and the fulfilment of the common good with regard to health care, education and the eradication of poverty. Should not both communities, as witnesses to God and with His help, be striving on all levels to promote love, in justice and compassion, and so to serve peace? Is there not in that sense a common responsibility and task as well as a common 'mission' for Christians and Muslims?

### **The understanding of mission**

How can the mission of the Church be understood in a way that goes hand in hand with what we understand by dialogue and the honest openness that dialogue requires? The conviction of the Christian faith that the abundance of revelation is presented to the Church in Christ does not release it from the obligation to listen and learn. Christians, and the Church as a whole, must bear in mind that they/she do/does not possess a monopoly on truth; they/she should rather be prepared for the truth increasingly to take possession of them – and this also applies to the Church community. Even if the partner in dialogue has not yet heard anything about the revelation in which God communicated Himself through Jesus Christ, it is still possible, through the power of Christ's spirit which enlightens the hearts of all mankind with the rays of truth, that he/she is already profoundly seized by that truth which he/she is still seeking.<sup>121</sup> Christians and others do in fact strive together through dialogue towards the truth.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup> See Zweites Vatikanisches Konzil, loc. cit., 356-357, no. 2.

<sup>122</sup> See Sekretariat für die Nichtchristen, 'Dialog und Mission' in: *Lebendiges Zeugnis* 41 (1986) vol. 2, 7, no. 10; Päpstlicher Rat für den Interreligiösen Dialog / Kongregation für die

Evangelisation, in Vatican Council and post-Council thinking, denotes the ways in which the Church presents and proclaims God's love. Evangelisation is a single but complex reality which develops in various ways: in all forms of Christian life and witness: in proclamation, conversion, inculturation, the formation of local churches, in dialogue and the promotion of the justice that God wills. As far back as the early 1970s a few Asian bishops were clearly pointing out that the Church's evangelising mission includes as an integral component not only the fight for justice and liberation but also inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. John Paul II took up this aspect from the very beginning of his pontificate (1978). In his first encyclical *Redemptoris Hominis* (1979) he called for recognition of the active presence of God's spirit in believers of other religions and cited the theological foundation for the importance of dialogue in the mission of the Church.<sup>123</sup> His aim was certainly to show the inner connection between evangelisation and inter-religious dialogue. That occurred for the first time in the document mentioned above, published by the then Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions*. This states with regard to the Church's mission: "The task is one but comes to be exercised in different ways according to the conditions in which mission unfolds."<sup>124</sup>

### The understanding of dialogue

Dialogue is a valid part of the Church's mission. It cannot and must not be reduced to an external, supplementary element of that mission, nor can or may it be regarded or treated merely as a useful means of proclaiming the Gospel. It is not simply an additional means to an end, but is actually an end in itself, because it is in itself good. In order to understand this, and to understand in which ways dialogue

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Evangelisierung der Völker, *Dialog und Verkündigung. Überlegungen und Orientierungen zum Interreligiösen Dialog und zur Verkündigung des Evangeliums Jesu Christi*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 102, Bonn 1991, 25-26, no. 49-50, 41, no. 80.

<sup>123</sup> See John Paul II *Enzyklika Redemptoris Hominis Seiner Heiligkeit Papst Johannes Paul II. An die verehrten Mitbrüder im Bischofsamt, die Priester und Ordensleute, die Söhne und Töchter der Kirche und an alle Menschen guten Willens zum Beginn seines päpstlichen Amtes*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls no. 6, Bonn, 1979, 13-14, no. 6, 16-19, no. 11-12.

<sup>124</sup> Sekretariat für die Nichtchristen, o cit. 7, no. 11.

still remains open to the proclamation of the Gospel, its meaning and intentions must be clearly understood.

Dialogue demands balance from the partners involved. The sincerity of inter-religious dialogue requires that “each enters into it with the integrity of his or her own faith. At the same time, while remaining firm in their belief that in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim 2:4-6), the fullness of revelation has been given to them, Christians must remember that God has also manifested himself in some way to the followers of other religious traditions. Consequently, it is with receptive minds that they approach the convictions and values of others.”<sup>125</sup>

Ultimately Christians know “that truth is not a thing we possess, but a person by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed. This is an unending process. While keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions. Through dialogue they may be moved to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes to allow the understanding of their faith to be purified.”<sup>126</sup>

### **Understanding proclamation**

The aim of proclamation is to communicate to others an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and of what God has done through Him for the salvation of the world. Therefore, it wishes to invite people to become disciples of Jesus and to enter into the visible Christian community. Thus in proclamation the Church is fulfilling a prophetic function. It proclaims Christ as the source of the secret of salvation, in which the partners in dialogue already share, and it invites those who up to this point have taken part in the secret without being able to make out its origin and name its originator to acknowledge this secret.

Dialogue and proclamation thus represent different ways of carrying out the Church's one missionary assignment. They have different aims. While inter-religious dialogue cannot be regarded simply as a means of proclaiming the Gospel, it does at the same time

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<sup>125</sup> Päpstlicher Rat für den Interreligiösen Dialog, o cit. 25, no. 48-

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 25, no. 49.

remain open to that possibility. In fact, the missionary assignment is a dynamic process which – even if it is not often concluded – culminates in the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ and reaches its destination.<sup>127</sup>

### **Pluralism and religious freedom**

In few countries, the case is that Christians and Muslims constitute two numerically and politically equal partners. Usually there are majorities and minorities. Can the religious minorities, out of a genuinely defensible understanding of their own faith's teaching and tradition, accept a public order that is conceived on the basis of the obligations and rights of all citizens as such? Which social system and system of government can best ensure that a Muslim does not have fewer rights than a Christian and vice versa; and ensure that Muslims and Christians can meet freely and on an equal footing, particularly as faithful individuals and communities committed to their own missionary task? "It is the secularity of the legal system that guarantees the fundamental legal equality of citizens of different religions – in contrast to the Christian *ordo* of the Middle Ages and also unlike the situation in parts of the Islamic world, where the lesser legal status of Jews and Christians as 'protected citizens' still persists even today."<sup>128</sup> In such a system it is not religious affiliation but the secular legal system that defines a person's legal status.

What this means in practice was illustrated recently by Franz Magis-Suseno, using the example of Indonesia. The constitution there was amended in 1999 with the adoption of Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In subsequent discussions the Christians vehemently refused to accept a declaration on the part of the Suharto government, according to which missionary activity would not be allowed in respect of people who already had a religion (i.e. who belonged to one of the religious communities officially recognised in Indonesia). The Muslims, for their part, accused the Christians of proselytism. These positions still exist, but remarkable progress has taken place as a result of the patient dialogue among

<sup>127</sup> See *ibid.* 42-43, no. 82.

<sup>128</sup> Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, *Christen und Muslime in Deutschland*, Arbeitshilfen no.172, Bonn 2003, 162, no. 312 (italics in the original).

intellectuals (of Christian and Muslim provenance). Meanwhile, the major Christian churches (apart from a few Evangelical groups) have accepted that proselytism is an abuse of religious freedom, while yet more conservative Muslims would accept that – if someone, after careful consideration and without any external pressure, were to come to the conclusion that God was calling him or her to a different religion – this ought to be accepted (albeit with deep pain). Suseno notes: “Thus the main issue, as far as religious freedom is concerned, is the freedom to convert, and this freedom will be acceptable, provided no unfair means are involved.”

The co-existence of two religions with a claim to universality, which are by their very nature missionary in character, calls for a jointly formulated ‘code of conduct’ and eventually for some kind of watchdog committee, comprised of representatives of both religions, to share in regulating developments and events that cause annoyance and indignation on one side or the other, impair the religious climate and make common monotheistic witness implausible in the eyes of the world.<sup>129</sup> The fundamental question is which ‘means’ are appropriate / legitimate or inappropriate / illegitimate in the efforts made by either of the two religions to acquire greater influence for the values it advocates. The decree of the Second Vatican Council on the mission activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, also states clearly and unequivocally: “The Church strictly forbids forcing anyone to embrace the Faith, or alluring or enticing people by worrisome wiles. By the same token, she also strongly insists on this right, that no one be frightened away from the Faith by unjust vexations on the part of others. In accord with the Church’s ancient custom, the convert’s motives should be looked into, and if necessary, purified.”<sup>130</sup>

This certainly includes the constant efforts of Muslim parties and movements to link non-Muslim residents in an Islamic state into the structures of the Sharia and the refusal to acknowledge a religiously neutral sphere of state life for plural societies (and what societies are not plural nowadays?) Wherever it is advisable, all legitimate means must be used to insist on the protection and promotion of individual,

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India / Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue, *Guidelines for inter-religious dialogue*, New Delhi, 1989.

<sup>130</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Das Dekret über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche “Ad Gentes”*, in: Rahner, K./Vorgrimler, H.(eds.) o cit. 623, no. 13.

legally enforceable human rights, including the right to choose one's religion freely, to change one's religion, to opt out of belonging to any religious community, to disseminate religious convictions peacefully, and to bring up children in their parents' religion.

It is exactly at this point that considerable scope opens up for dialogue between all groups that constitute present-day society, on a national and global level, not least between Muslims and Christians. The aim of such a dialogue should be, on the one hand, to constantly define those parameters of a public order which seem to be indispensable to its development and maintenance and should be approved and defended by all participants in the community. On the other hand, the various religious and ideological groupings that make up today's plural society should be motivated to lend active support to the common good (understood in the broad sense) of plural civic society on the basis of their specific religious convictions.

### **Common responsibility and mission**

In the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of 1965 the Second Vatican Council admonishes everyone to "work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom." In many addresses in subsequent years, Popes have called on Muslims and Christians to stand up together for the preservation and promotion of spiritual and religious values. Paul VI wrote in 1967 in a *Letter to the Catholic Hierarchy and All the Nations of Africa* that he was praying "that in social life, too, where Muslims and Christians meet as neighbours and partners, mutual respect and a shared commitment to the acknowledgement and protection of fundamental human rights may reign."<sup>131</sup>

The first conference of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, held in Rome from 4 to 6 November 2008, went a step further and seemed to have in mind a notion of common witness when it said in its closing statement: "As Catholic and Muslim believers, we are aware of the summons and imperative to bear witness to the transcendent dimension of

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<sup>131</sup> CIBEDO e.V. (ed.) *Die offiziellen Dokumente der katholischen Kirche zum Dialog mit dem Islam*, Regensburg 2009, no. 2105.

life, through a spirituality nourished by prayer, in a world which is becoming more and more secularised and materialistic.”<sup>132</sup>

Benedict XVI's address to the closing session of that conference speaks forcefully and clearly of the common responsibility and vocation of Christians and Muslims: “God calls us to work together on behalf of the victims of disease, hunger, poverty, injustice and violence. For Christians, the love of God is inseparably bound to the love of our brothers and sisters, of all men and women, without distinction of race and culture. [...] The Muslim tradition is also quite clear in encouraging practical commitment in serving the most needy, and readily recalls the “Golden Rule” in its own version: your faith will not be perfect, unless you do unto others that which you wish for yourselves. We should thus work together in promoting genuine respect for the dignity of the human person and fundamental human rights, even though our anthropological visions and our theologies justify this in different ways. There is a great and vast field in which we can act together in defending and promoting the moral values which are part of our common heritage.”<sup>133</sup>

### Closing remarks

On both sides, Christian and Muslim, there is a broad range of widely varying interpretations of mission or da'wah and consequently there are very different ways of planning them and carrying them out. Every Muslim group and movement holds its own position on da'wah and dialogue and each one is, of course, based on a different interpretation of the relevant written sources. The Christian churches, free churches and movements (for example, the Pentecostals, Adventists and Mormons) are also differentiated, not least by a distinct conception and practice of mission and dialogue. On the one hand, the Orthodox and Protestant churches represented in the World Council of Churches and, on the

<sup>132</sup> Closing statement of the Catholic-Muslim Forum in *CIBEDO-Beiträge 4* (2008), 38.

<sup>133</sup> Benedict XVI, *Overcoming Past Prejudices. Address by Pope Benedict XVI to participants in the Catholic-Muslim Forum, Rome, 6 November 2008*, in *CIBEDO-Beiträge 4* (2008), 35-36. The closing statement of the Catholic-Muslim Forum of 6 November 2008 says at no. 14: “We intend to look into the possibility of convening a permanent Catholic-Muslim Committee, to discuss responses to conflicts and other emergencies” (ibid, 38). Given the non-implementation of such statements, the question arises as to how serious the signatories are about putting their own proposals into practice.

other hand, the churches that belong to the Lausanne Movement, have certainly moved closer to our field of discussion in their respective basic positions. The stance of the membership of the World Council of Churches is probably closest to the Catholic position as set out in the theses described above and in the accompanying commentary. In order to ascertain the exact situation specific exploratory talks are necessary in each case.

For all Muslims and Christians who care deeply about building constructive Christian-Muslim relationships as a contribution to peace the priority should be to make a constant effort to conduct serious and continuing intra-Muslim and intra-Christian talks about mission or da'wah, and their respective relationship with dialogue. Unless there is a basic consensus – intra-Christian and intra-Muslim as well as Christian-Muslim – on issues of mission / da'wah and dialogue, mistrust and irritation will keep on growing. In addition, without that mutual effort, a negative image of Christianity and Islam will become more deeply entrenched among followers of non-monotheistic religions and people of no religion. The God of Abraham deserves a credible community.

## “Tinkuy”: a theologoumenon between Latin American cultures

Diego Irarrázaval

*Do not forsake us, oh God, who art in heaven and earth,  
Heart of Heaven, Heart of Earth...  
May the people have peace, much peace, and may they be happy;  
and give us good life and useful existence!*<sup>134</sup>

This is how the *Popol Vuh* evokes the cordial, cosmic coexistence of human beings, which has an effective foundation in the sacred. The everyday happiness of peoples has its basis in interaction with the divinity of heaven and earth.

This article is inspired by a beautiful, combative folk dance of the Quechua and Aymara population.<sup>135</sup> Incorporating music, dance and social confrontation, *tinkuy* offers a model of exchange between different groups and is often defined as a form of interculturality. It has many components: art, social ties, historical disputes,

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<sup>134</sup> *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiché Maya*, trans. Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley from the Spanish translation of Adrián Recinos (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950) 173. The *Popol Vuh* or “Book of Counsel” survived in a 17th century transcription by Dominican Fr. Francisco Ximénez.

<sup>135</sup> The term *Tinku* designates a tradition of dance and music from Potosí and Oruro, Laimis and Jucumanis. As metaphor, it stands for a model of encounter between people. It is a form of ritual contest between communities from different districts; a kind of a game, an expression of love; it is also a reflection of social conflict and male supremacy. Furthermore, it is a feature of patronal festivals and other such occasions. See Miranda, E., *La danza folklórica y popular en Bolivia* (La Paz: The Author, 2007); Paredes-Candia, A., *La danza folklórica en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Editorial Gisbert y Cia, 1984); Romero, R., (ed.), *Música, danzas y máscaras en Los Andes* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú: Instituto Riva-Aguero, Proyecto de Preservación de la Música Tradicional Andina, 1998); Fernandez, G., “Tinku y Taypi,” in: *Anthropologica* 11 (1994), 51–78; Marquez, J.C., and Vargas, O., “Tinku: espacio de encuentro y desencuentro,” in: *Anales de Etnología* (La Paz), 2005; Luis Millones, “El encuentro o tinkuy en textos coloniales andinos” at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~icop/luismillones.html> (retrieved 8.8 2012). Other great intercultural metaphors are provided by the *Minga* of the Quechua regions and the *Mutirão* of Brazil, forms of collective organisation and labour that like *Tinku* conjoin diverse elements.

affective frameworks and forms of celebration. It seems to me that the activity and wisdom of the *tinkuy* serve the Quechua as a prism for understanding the intercultural, and I hope that this essay grounded in a small corner of Latin America may help prompt new interpretations of events of this kind in other parts of the world.

The indigenous and mestizo populations, who are disdained in Latin America, are in fact minor masters who make their sources of vitality available to humanity as a whole. They have distinctive ways of attuning to life and of elaborating intercultural mediations. With globalisation, questions of identity and encounter/non-encounter are again coming to the fore, and in this context these peoples have a wisdom of their own to offer.

I am not speaking here of folkloric curios for a post-modern elite, but of an inward and outward wisdom. In this connection, I would like to express my thanks to the many people and institutions in Bolivia and Peru who have helped over the decades to develop my awareness of the themes I am about to present.<sup>136</sup>

Intercultural questions have become increasingly important in recent times. Within the Church, the messages of Jesus and Paul about the diversity of cultures have been rediscovered. The attitude of freedom in service has been emphasised, as by the great Paul of Tarsus: "So though I was not a slave to any human being, I put myself in slavery to all people [...] I made myself weak [...] All this I do for the sake of the gospel [...]" (1 Cor 9,19-23). When we travel across ethical, spiritual and economic frontiers (thus following in the footsteps of Paul and of Peter), we are better able to apprehend the salvation that is in Christ, a salvation that accords not with omnipotence, but with human fragility. In addition, faithfulness to Jesus and his Spirit brings with it unity between different beings. We are one body with different members and diverse gifts of the Spirit. All is for the benefit of each, for the benefit of all humanity.

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<sup>136</sup> The following remarks are indebted to discussions I had between 1979 and 2004 in the context of programmes of the IPA (Instituto de Pastoral Andina) and the IDEA (Instituto de Estudios Aymaras) in Southern Peru, of the Centro Cultural Semilla and the OLASEM (Oficina Latinoamericana al Servicio de la Misión) in Cochabamba, and of the Cultural Department of the Bolivian Episcopal Conference and of the ISEAT (Instituto Superior Ecueménico Andino de Teología) in La Paz.

We shall look, then, at modes of human and spiritual interaction in Latin America in an attempt to understand God's self-revelation in our conflicts, in human exchanges and in our relationship to the environment.

The approach we bring to our theme is autochthonous in origin and is today predominantly associated with the mestizo population. It is an approach that opens our hearts and minds to the source of life. We shall first look at the inter-relation of socio-cultural and spiritual forms; then at the theological dimension of popular Catholic experience, raising questions about the lived here-and-now on the basis of iconic New Testament images. There exists, then, an intercultural structure to theological work that emerges in regions and communities characterised by difference.

### **The conjunction of the socio-cultural and the spiritual**

We begin our examination of the subject with a consideration of *tinkuy* as metaphor in the sense of a mode of symbolic behaviour that incorporates a religious wisdom. This indigenous/mestizo practice has not only been studied and discussed; knowledge and awareness of it have also been disseminated through virtual networks.<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, it can also be seen as a theologoumenon (that is, a way of understanding and teaching the faith) developed within Andean Christianity.

*Tinku* as a dance (a substantive) and *tinkuy* as interaction (a verbal form) connote both conflict and celebration. Within public space (transformed by the *fiesta*) people circle about in a crouching attitude, dancing a combative display to the rhythm of the band behind the dancers. Masculine and feminine elements conflict with and complement each other, married and unmarried women being distinguished by the colour of their clothes and the ribbons in their hair.

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<sup>137</sup> There are outstanding studies on this subject (see Raúl Romero, Gerardo Fernandez, Antonio Paredes Candia, Edmundo Miranda et al. cited in footnote 2 above) and it has also been made more widely known and appreciated through folklore studies, education and media programmes. There are also a number of discussions on the Web. Of *tinku* poetry, for example, it is said that it "neither dissolves nor transcends difference in a more universal 'third term,' but by hindering diffusion or confusion gives time for each to enjoy the other in its difference" ([www.tinkus.net/lapoetica.php](http://www.tinkus.net/lapoetica.php)).

The behaviour of the Andean people in the *tinkuy* context gives expression to the most important aspects of human existence: the dimension of space above and below; the temporal dimension of the yearly cycle, of days and times of celebration; the cosmic dimension of the relationship to Mother Earth; the aesthetic dimension; the sexual signals in the dance; patriarchal male supremacy and subordination of women; references to outbreaks of war between communities, etc. In these and other matters there are varying degrees of both confrontation and conjunction. There are also spiritual energies and references to Christianity. The dances often form part of religious events (especially the celebrations of Catholic saints' days).

These observations allow us to go beyond restrictive interpretations, whether in the form of an essentialist and dichotomous reading (sacred/profane, good/evil, peace/war, work/holiday) or a pluralistic approach that commonly favours the status quo (as between indigenous and mestizo, tradition and modernity), or even counterposing autochthonous to Christian elements. In my opinion, a historical reading that tends to the empowerment of marginalised populations and an interdisciplinary reading in which theology engages in dialogue with the human sciences are most fruitful.

In the conjunction of differing elements the vital energies of the people of Latin America are made manifest. In all fields of human life and the environment we find signs of transcendence. To all these we attend, taking as our criterion of discernment the most essential. By this I mean the Christian principle of the love of God, given expression in love of our neighbour. The first commandment is inseparable from the second: without solidarity with the poor, one cannot be faithful to Jesus (Mark 12:28-34; Matt. 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28; and the criterion of final judgement in Matt. 25:31-46). Solidarity with people in need is a sacramental sign of the presence of Christ. Graced by God, suffering humanity finds the Lord through "horizontal" compassion.

Thanks to *sensus fidei*, human beings are capable of assuming their historical responsibility within history and to recognise God incarnate. And thanks to each inculturated and intercultural form of the faith they are able to understand and promulgate the divine revelation. Does the *tinkuy* then possess the characteristics of a theologoumenon? I believe so, for it is one of many wisdoms that generate faith from the

festive. This happens in the here and now, at the local and the global level.

This means facing up to everyday realities and global processes. An insatiable desire to consume things is inculcated by the markets. We, therefore, need to deal with this globalised exaltation of desire that leaves so many frustrated in the face of the fantasies and euphorias of consumption, paradoxically creating an inner emptiness. A public celebration does not revolve around the consumption of goods, but is rather a sharing of earthly joy and spirituality.

Put in positive terms, every celebration in its own way is committed to seeking the joyful justice of the Kingdom of God. In the light of this commitment, cultural elements have to be evaluated in terms of their economic context, differentiating between the emancipatory and the enslaving. A highly controversial question is the extent to which the totalitarian market encourages idolatry. But here I would emphasise the positive: to opt for an economy of solidarity, giving tangible expression to the justice, the equity, of the feast of the Kingdom of God.

We find ourselves, then, in the complex area of intercultural reflection, which comprehends interrelated social, political, economic and spiritual dimensions. This complexity is today accentuated by our globalised interdependency, but it is also the outcome of what happened in various historical periods: those characterised by an asymmetrical colonial Christianity; the different phases of scientific and technical progress (bringing the subordination of the majority to the centres of world power); and the current postmodernity characterised by fragmentation, instantaneous communication and spiritual search.

It is against this complex background that the people of Latin America are today rethinking their faith. In doing so, they draw on immemorial socio-spiritual norms ("popular religion"); there are forms of art and ceremony that cross social and geographical boundaries, the countless daily practices of trust between different people, as well as social initiatives that challenge the apoliticality of the postmodern. These and other rules coalesce in what I see as the most important Latin American theologoumenon: the religious wisdom that emerges in the festive. Not only does the time of the festival stand

out, but it gives personal and social existence a meaning and shapes the Christian wisdom of the people. Its theology sprouts and leads to a festival of faith. Nonetheless, one finds in it not only humanising coalescences but also harmful asymmetries.

These complex, intercultural realities call for a discernment without simplification. The community hears and understands “with the help of the Holy Spirit...the many voices of our age”.<sup>138</sup> In engagement with the social scientific and critical understanding of phenomena the Church confronts modern pseudo-absolutes, discerning them for what they are through the healthy relativism of the Gospel. Everything is relative – that is to say, everything is evaluated “in relation to”...the love of God, the only absolute!

In our day, one manifestation of the utopian is the Quechua notion of *sumak kawsay* (living well). It finds expression in (highly ambivalent) socio-cultural processes in Ecuador, Bolivia and other parts of the continent.<sup>139</sup> The age-old paradigm of living well together that today goes by the name of *sumak kawsay* is no relic, but rather a spur to transformative action. If only many parts of the world had programmes of intercultural dialogue that found expression in cultural change, in laws and new constitutions, social communications media and public administration!

As for the Church, we note with concern that what the Church encourages between cultures is sadly not as a rule encouraged between religions. From a unilateral pastoral attitude towards culture we have moved on to an evangelisation in and between symbolic processes. A more relaxed stance has on occasion been adopted, as in the Roman document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991). Others in turn, such as the declaration *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (2000), emphasise a kind of absolute truth, placing obstacles in the way of ecumenical and interreligious progress. We know that the encounter with Jesus, the Way and the Truth, is a universal gift not hedged about with barriers. The Church is its sacrament.

<sup>138</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* (EN) (1965), ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,’ no. 44, at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)

<sup>139</sup> See my article with bibliography, “Sumak Kawsay, Sum Sarnakaña, convivir/andar bien” (2011) at [www.amerindianlared.org](http://www.amerindianlared.org)

In this matter, a more realistic approach is to recognise in the spiritual trajectories of human beings the signs of God's revelation and his love. Amid the increasing symbolic exchanges and human polylogues, the Church must give reason for hope. Its fundamentals are: a) the practice of Jesus, oriented to the Reign of God and b) the ongoing Pentecost process in the different languages of love.<sup>140</sup> One might say that the intercultural strategy draws upon the following biblical-spiritual images: a) the joy of the Gospel, which on the basis of the feast of the Kingdom accommodates difference and warmly embraces the "Other". So it was with the widow of Zarephath, the leper from Syria, the Syrophenician and the Canaanite woman, the centurion, the Samaritan woman; and b) the Spirit of Pentecost, that makes its way everywhere, even if one wants to confine it to the socio-religious field. This image includes Jews, Greeks and all others who dwell on earth; each in his or her own way acknowledges God's miracles. One might say, then, that the human imagination of God always lies not only within and between but also beyond the varied modes of being human. It is therefore intra-, inter- and trans-cultural.

In every situation one can meditate on these images of the unbounded Kingdom of God and on the Pentecost event that joins all together in God's love. The practice of the *tinkuy* too can be interpreted in this sense (as can that of the *minka*, the *mutirao* and other signs of emancipation). These are metaphors for interaction between different persons (interculturality) and with the environment. Each of these is either open to the energy of God in human history (in equitable interaction) or closes itself off from it (in dehumanising asymmetry).

### **Catholic forms of encounter and non-encounter**

On our continent, where the vast majority describe themselves as Christian, and a good many of these as Catholic, these characteristics shape everyday realities (whether properly denominational in reference, or describing "a way of one's own of being Catholic" or having a more diffuse cultural character). Various kinds of syncretism,

<sup>140</sup> In the last twenty years, theological research in Latin America has rediscovered the significance of the Kingdom or Reign of God and of Pentecost. On this, see Sobrino, J., "The Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology", and Comblin, J., "The Holy Spirit," in: Ellacuría, I./Sobrino, J., eds, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

too, are on the increase.<sup>141</sup> Faced with the polysemy of Catholic experience, I shall limit myself here to considering the intercultural ritual of a Catholic carnival ceremony in Bolivia, spiritual therapies involving the cult of Santa Muerte (“Saint Death”), and the intra- and intercultural Catholicism manifest in the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe and in the account of its origin, the *Nican Mopohua*.

Before turning to these complex phenomena, we must straightforwardly acknowledge the intermixtures in every personal experience and every current figuring of God and the sacred. In all these, the true and the alienating, the absence and presence of the transcendent, the utilitarian and the gratuitous, personal responsibility and magical attitudes, works of faith and the sacralisation of power are all intermixed. Furthermore, these large-scale forms of Catholic expression neither belong to the Church as an institution, nor should they be idealised. Every single one has light and dark sides, various dynamics of harmony in heterogeneity, and a confrontation of opposed and antagonistic forces.

A good example of civic-Catholic ceremonial is afforded by the Carnival of Oruro (Bolivia) which coincides with the *fiesta* of the Virgin of Socavón. It represents a rich assemblage of scarcely complementary elements: there are many encounters and non-encounters, but these signify no mutual insult, given the prevailing codes of toleration.

Marcelo Lara describes it as follows: “[...] a religious festival, an opportunity to be happy and to enjoy oneself, a place to define what we are or what we claim to be, a means of setting economic policy, individually and collectively, a pretext for social critique, a site for the expression of conflict, a space in which to struggle for power”.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>141</sup> On this topic see Marzal, M., *El sincretismo iberoamericano*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1985), which examines syncretism in Central and South America, and also the Candomblé religion; and Sanchis, P., (ed.), *Fiestas e Ciudadanos, percursoros de sincretismo no Brasil*, (Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ, 2001), which looks at charisma, Afro-American religion, and religion and youth.

<sup>142</sup> Lara Barrientos, M., *Carnaval de Oruro: Visiones oficiales y alternativas* (Oruro, Bolivia: CEPBA; Latinas Editores, 2007), 115; cf. Lara Barrientos, M. and Córdova, X., *Fiesta urbana en los Andes*, Oruro 2011; Pauwels, G., (ed.), *La Virgen del Socavón y su Carnaval*, Oruro 1999 (this publication contains accounts of the Marian devotions).

There exist official versions of this national symbol (among the power elites and among representatives of the cult of the Virgin Mary as the protectress of mining) and a whole range of interpretations by the multitudes who treasure the carnival.

It seems to me that encounter/non-encounter happens at a number of levels. In the sacred narrative, Wari, the god of the Uro civilisation, is ousted by Ñusta, the heroine of the Incas, and later during the European colonisation by the Virgin Mary, who overcomes plagues of frogs, snakes and ants. As for today's practices, rural and urban forms and their respective dances and power-struggles are juxtaposed to each other and to the student celebration that has its own distinctive ritual. Folkloric competition, the commercial fairs all over the city, the liturgical celebrations and carnival licence all interweave while maintaining their own identity. In addition, there are also ethical dimensions: the ideas of material well-being thanks to assistance from the sacred; of the protection offered by the Virgin, the Mother of God; and of thanks to Life (through wholesome entertainment, lots of alcohol, argument, and the cultivation of friendships).

We move on now to another liminal terrain, that of the individual spiritual therapies associated with death. Present throughout the continent, these involve forms of belief and ritual relating to a number of sacred beings (including both the "official" and the "informal" saints that have a mass following). This complex cult of images of Death is well documented in Mexico,<sup>143</sup> Argentina and the Andean region. People seek in it an immediate solution to problems of social identity, of deprivation, and of relationship to death.

Those who practice this cult at home and at the barrio level describe themselves as Catholic and often combine images of saints together with the picture of a skeleton with a cape and other adornments. In Mexico this figure with its scythe is a major national symbol (called

<sup>143</sup> See Lomnitz-Adler, C., *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2005); Lara Mireles, M.C., *El culto de la Santa Muerte en el entramado simbólico de la sociedad de riesgo* (San Luis Potosí: Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, 2006); Perdigón, K., *La Santa Muerte, protectora de los hombres*, Mexico 2008; Gil Olmos, J., *La Santa Muerte: la Virgen de los Olvidados* (México, D.F.: Random House Mondadori, 2010). Gil explains: "At the beginning of... the new millennium, death is more present than ever in our country ... in the religious world of Mexico, and has entrenched itself outside the temples and the ecclesiastical hierarchies" (107).

the “Most Holy,” “dear skinny friend” or “White Virgin”) and death is venerated in many parts of the continent in the form of a skull.

In Mexico, one form of ritual concludes as follows: “Ninth day. Protective and Blessed Death. Through the power God has conferred on you, I ask you free me of all curses, dangers and diseases and grant me in their stead good luck, happiness and money. I ask that you be my friend and that you protect me from my enemies, and also cause [so-and-so] to come to me and humbly beg my forgiveness, gentle as a lamb, true to his/her word, and that s/he will be loving and biddable his/her whole life long. Amen. Three Our Fathers to be said”.<sup>144</sup>

Originating in animism and incorporating Catholic elements, these practices are seeing a revival among people who have little or no connection with the Church. They are on the increase, too, in regions where violence and social insecurity prevail. Paradoxically, it is death that protects and ensures well-being! Devotees are clients in search of a solution to an urgent problem; they move between this world and the beyond, and witchcraft, too, is on the rise in marginalised urban populations and also in certain circles of power and influence. So the flux of encounter and non-encounter does not occur just at the spiritual level, but above all in people’s painful everyday experience.

We look now at a good example of interaction: the experience and wisdom of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who expresses the racial mixture of Mexico and has served as a symbol for landmark political movements. How did it all begin? It was in the mid-16th century that Antonio Valeriano wrote the *Nican Mopohu*, an encounter between two worlds.

Miguel León Portilla sums it up as follows: on the Hill of Tepeyac there occurred “an exchange of ideas, metaphors and signs that originate in two different ways of thinking and feeling the mystery of human existence on earth... There is a Mother who stands beside the Giver of Life... the noble heavenly Lady in light blue is (for the Aztec Juan Diego) his compassionate Mother, she is Tonantzin Guadalupe”.<sup>145</sup> From that time until today, the Guadalupean vision has

<sup>144</sup> Gil Olmos, J., *La Santa Muerte*, 186.

<sup>145</sup> León Portilla, M., *Tonantzin Guadalupe, Pensamiento náhuatl y mensaje cristiano en*

shaped the identity and history of Mexico, giving rise to a whole series of political, cultural and mystical phenomena. The God of the Nahua and Marian Christianity came together and the sacred has masculine and feminine aspects. The ethical is many-sided: survival under domination, integration as a people, entrusting oneself to the Giver of Life and his compassionate Mother, forming a religious community independent of clerical norms, and celebrating the human and cosmic story together with Mary and Christ. The whole represents a Catholicism "within" and "between" cultures. There are also, however, fanatical features that are supportive of exploitative elites.

Speaking generally, we can say that there are different theologoumena: interreligious wisdom (as in the case of the vision on the Hill of Tepeyac) and the asymmetric Catholic festival (as in the Oruro Carnival). Both involve modes of encounter and non-encounter. We have also considered the individual therapeutic rite as an example of devotion to Santa Muerte. These kinds of language – with their tension between witness, myth, worship, politics, analysis and symbolism – mean that many fight shy of dealing with intercultural aspects in Christian reflection.

In my opinion, religious reality in all its many dimensions is inescapable. One cannot remain indifferent in the face of it. Rather it prompts a religious discernment whose evangelical foundation is the wisdom of love. In addition, we have major paradigms or images available to us. On the one hand, the intercultural accords with the message of the feast of the Kingdom of God. One of its great metaphors is the festive practice of the poor. On the other hand, cultural interaction is valued, thanks to the Pentecost event. This invites us to acknowledge different religious identities and to promote the alliance of cultures within salvation history. The ecclesial community venerates the purifying fire and the breath of the Spirit that blows where it pleases; for this reason it thinks not in mono-cultural chains, but in the clarity of the intercultural.

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*el Nican Mopohua* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional y el Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002), 90. An outstanding interpretation is offered by Siller, C., *Para comprender el mensaje de María de Guadalupe* (Buenos Aires, Editorial Guadalupe, 1989); for a more comprehensively Latin American perspective see Boff, C., *Mariología social, O significado da Virgem para a Sociedade* (São Paulo: Editora Paulus, 2006).

To summarise: in every context and cultural process the ecclesial community has the Good News as its standard. This goes for us all, not just those who occupy leadership positions. The *sensus fidei* of the people of God brings with it the ability to understand and communicate the faith. Every one of them has the nature of a theologoumenon. “Ordinary” people have extraordinary knowledge. They engage in symbolic interactions, practice different modes of living, and re-shape what it is to be Christian.

I have here highlighted lessons in the intercultural offered by the Andean *tinkuy* – the story of the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Catholic festival of Carnival, and the cult of Santa Muerte, although each of these has its own limitations and aberrations. They represent human historical realities, rather than experiences to be idolised; and they have been interrogated by the message of unconditional love.

Every theologoumenon is subject to biblical-doctrinal criteria. The Word and the Spirit mark the pilgrim journey of humanity and the theological creativity of human communities. In the communication of faith by the people, however, the signs of the Word incarnate predominate. To these must be added the signs of kenosis of the Spirit.<sup>146</sup> This humble yet transformative energy within humanity and within the universe shapes all Catholic experience. None of the Latin American cultures, nor any encounter between them, are sacralised on account of their Catholic characteristics, nor is what we call Catholic absolutised. Rather, life in fullness has to be attributed, as in the Mayan prayer, to the Heart of Heaven and Heart of Earth.

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<sup>146</sup> See Luccetti Bingemer, M.C., “Die verborgene Liebe. Bemerkungen zur Kenose des Geistes in der westlichen Tradition,” in: *Concilium* 47/4 (2011), 384-394, which draws on the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

# In search of a common ground for a fruitful interreligious dialogue in Sub-Saharan Africa

Frederic Ntedika Mvumbi

African Traditional Religions have not disappeared and they do not seem to disappear from the life of many Africans, for they continue to influence their way of life. African Traditional Religions may not continue to exist in some forms or the way people used to identify them –e.g. popular activity or visits of shrines- but they remain a determinant force of many thoughts, evaluations and decisions of Africans; they play an important role in many phases of human meaning and values. Indeed, the present African world has a strong and different interest in African Traditional Religions and related issues are discussed in many spheres of life. Fortunately or unfortunately, the up-rising new religious movements in Africa particularly in towns and cities, does not seem to neglect their significant role in daily life. There is a different story in villages, for Africans carry on various dimensions of African Traditional Religions' spirituality.

All religions require serious understanding since they are to be lived for different reasons. So the way religions are lived and understood ought to be taken concomitantly for proper fitness. Thus, presenting and discussing new observations on African perceptions of God in African Traditional Religions or finding a new order of understanding is not a futile enterprise but an unavoidable project that shapes Africans, particularly as we attempt to create more opportunities for a fruitful interreligious dialogue in Africa. Here, old but scholarly statements made on God in African Traditional religions are comprehensively and critically examined in order to have a second view or a more cultured perspective out of what is taken for granted.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. Ferre, E., *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 11-22.

With the help of comparative study of Religious, we intend to give a new direction for a new questioning and a new understanding. However, we should not think at any time that what was previously said by eminent scholars in African Traditional Religions is reduced to nothing; instead it is given a new framework that considers the past, the present and the future of Africa as a whole since every person has a dream for a better life, a greater future. Africans dream for an improved African life and the Church in Africa looks forward to delight all Africans.

So as we think of the future of the Church in Africa, we choose to reflect again on African Traditional Religions as the ground of a healthier Africa. Charles Nyamiti, for instance, calls for a serious study of African social-cultural situation as a source of African theology in order to build Africa; he, therefore, demands that non-Christian content be studied in its three historical moments, namely its past, present, and even future dimensions.<sup>148</sup> Although Charles Nyamiti is more concerned with African theology, his advice stands as a general principle which also guides scholars in the study of African Traditional Religions because such studies build the ground for genuine interreligious dialogue. However, we limit ourselves to the study of God.

A study of God in African Traditional Religions is certainly an old topic but not obsolete as many people might assume. Of course, many eminent scholars in this area have dealt with it intensively but there are still some realities to discover or a new order to set maybe not in the general content of the subject but in the interest of the writer and the methodology used. Still for some others, it is an irrelevant subject because most of Africans have embraced Christianity or Islam. Indeed, it is an old topic but rendered here in a new order. I still believe that what scholars have presented should help us review our literature and build an image that could help us engage into interreligious dialogue. The followings headings are a few in the framework that we intend to present in this text.

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<sup>148</sup> Quoted by Wanjala, F., *Basics of African Theology: A cogent Mentor in Charles Nyamiti* (Rome: Litografia Lierit, 2008), 50.

### **Belief in God is taken for granted, what does it mean today?**

Once the Roman emperor Caesar said: “Men freely believe that which they desire” (De Bello Gallico, Bk. Iii, sec.18) as if desires precede beliefs or beliefs are made of people’s desires. This does not seem to be true in the context of African Traditional Religions where beliefs are considered as the pillars and sources of all that African traditional believers’ activities. John Mbiti says:

When we come across African beliefs, we are in fact dealing with African Religion, although religion is much more than its beliefs. The beliefs are handed down from generation to generation, sometimes with modifications. Without them no religion can inspire its followers.<sup>149</sup>

Actually these brief words of John Mbiti affirm the importance of beliefs and customs in each religion and invite, particularly, scholars in African Traditional Religions to consider African beliefs and customs as the primary sources of the whole “*Domus Africanis Religionis*”. Hence, these words appeal to all people who do not know something or much about African Traditional Religions (cf. The preface of the second edition of the same book) to study African belief repertoire with magnanimity because it encompasses a variety of related, nuanced and distinctive elements of the African religious heritage. We speak of a repertoire of African beliefs to assert that Africans have many traditional religious beliefs which shaped up their livelihood before the coming of missionary religions and continue to guide many Africans up-to-date. Perhaps the most important article of this African anthology is their belief in God which, I think, is simply “taken for granted”.

But this expression “taken for granted” should not be diluted or given a meaning that works against the validity of the belief in God in African Traditional Religions since it justifies the pre-eminence given to God in the hierarchy of beings and the widespread role of God in the mind of the traditional believers. Now let us examine what such expression could mean.

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<sup>149</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (second edition.), (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2003), 29.

### **Belief in God in African Traditional Religion is a fundamental truth**

We want to affirm here that belief in God in African Traditional Religion is a fundamental truth since it justifies all that is visible and invisible in African worldview. Already in 1885, Noel Baudin noted this fact but refused to accept its legitimacy when he wrote:

In these religious systems, the idea of God is fundamental: they believe in the existence of a supreme, primordial being, the lord of the universe, which is his work... and notwithstanding the abundant testimony of the existence of God, it is practically only a vast pantheism – a participation of all elements of the divine nature which is as it were diffused throughout them all.<sup>150</sup>

According to Noel Baudin, although the belief in God in African Traditional Religions is fundamental and cannot be denied, he doubts on its genuineness for it is not clear enough to certify its authenticity. Bolaji Idowu responded to Baudin's double stand and included all those who pretend to hold a clear understanding of God. He observed that

Those who take one look at other people's religion and assert glibly that such people have no clear concept of God, or no concept of God at all, should first look within themselves and face honestly the question, "How clear is the concept of God to me? How clear is it to my people, the generality of them and not the few leading thinkers among them?"<sup>151</sup>

In spite of Baudin's statement and other similar ones which we neither neglect nor reject, this belief remains fundamental and genuine in African Traditional Religions, for it elucidates the African traditional life as a whole: it explains the organisation of the community; it determines the standard moral life of the community; that is what is permitted as well what is prohibited. J. Mbiti states: "All African peoples believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the centre of African Religion and dominates all its other beliefs."<sup>152</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Cited by Idowu, B., *African Traditional Religion. A definition* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1973), 140.

<sup>151</sup> Idowu, B., *African Traditional Religion. A Definition* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1973), 143.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

Ignorance or neglect of this belief leads to the ignorance or neglect of other African Traditional tenets such as beliefs in Ancestors, the continuity of life after death... Indeed this could lead to the ignorance of the created world and all it contains, particularly the people. Jesse Mugambi and Nicodemus Kirima affirm it,

Each community has individuals who are believed to be wise, that is to know many things and to render advice to many people of different subjects. God is believed to excel above all wise men. Wise men know many things, but God knows all things. Even wise men draw their wisdom from God, and this is why in Traditional Africa a wise man has a religious function in the community.<sup>153</sup>

Those who are familiar with the organisation of life in African traditional societies and the importance of Wise Men, Diviners and all Healers in those societies will not hesitate to affirm that God is the source of all since He is even the source of the wisdom of Wise Men, Medicine Men, Diviners and Healers who are so venerated in Africa. John Mbiti says:

In many ways, religious leaders are the embodiment of what is the best in a given religion. They embody the presence of God among people and the faith or beliefs of the people, as well as their moral values. Without them African Religion would disintegrate into chaos and confusion. The religious leaders are the keepers of religious treasures and of religious knowledge. They are wise, intelligent and talented people, often with outstanding abilities and personalities.<sup>154</sup>

This truth is so fundamental in the life of Africans that many Africans often insist that the idea of Supreme Being (God) in African Traditional Religions is not of missionary origin.<sup>155</sup> African Traditional Religions are not a result of a revelation, but rather, a natural folk-religion, nevertheless lived with conviction (Achermann, 1993, p. 23). Furthermore, in his "Bantu Philosophy", particularly while

<sup>153</sup> Mugambi, J., & Kirima, N., *The African Religious Heritage. A Textbook based on syllabus 228 of the Kenya Certificate of Education* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 125.

<sup>154</sup> Mbiti, J., *op., cit.*, 153.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Onwubiko, O.A., *African Thought, Religion and Culture*, Enugu: Snaap Press LTD, 67.

presenting the hierarchy of beings among the Bantu, Placide Tempels shows with a remarkable clarity the profundity of this affirmation. He relates that, in Bantu philosophy, God is considered as a being above all other beings, for he is spirit and creator of all; he gives existence to all; he sustains all and he is the source of growth.<sup>156</sup> Laurenti Magesa observes that the supremacy of God above all created order is both the starting and the highest control authority of values and norms in Africa.<sup>157</sup>

Again, the possible explanations given by J. Mbiti concerning the origin of this belief in God in African Traditional Religions – People came to believe in God through reflecting on the universe, people realised their own limitations, people observed the forces of nature-<sup>158</sup> uphold its continuity up-to-date because they persist to challenge Africans.

Everything in African Traditional Religions begins with God, for God is believed to be the founder of the community and all that is in it. In many occasions while reflecting on the major characteristics of African Traditional Religions, M.Y Nabofa says:

African Traditional Religions permeate life. That is, the religion embraces the whole life of the people, and an adherent is involved in the religion from birth to afterlife. There is no clear distinction between religious and secular affairs. Consequently the government of every traditional African community is theocratic and gerontocratic. The people are governed by the priests and the elders who are regarded and revered as the physical and symbolic representatives of the divinities and the ancestors. It is believed that the well-being of the physical community very much depends upon the

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Tempels, P., *La Philosophie Bantoue* (Traduit du néerlandais par A. Rubbens, Lovania (Elisabethville) 1945. Texte intégral digitalisé et présenté par le Centre Aequatoria. «Comme il est des castes aux Indes, comme les Israélites distinguaient le « pur » de l'« impur », ainsi les êtres sont-ils répartis en logique bantoue par espèces et classes suivant leur puissance ou leur préséance vitales. Par-dessus toute force est Dieu, Esprit et Créateur, le *mwine bukomo bwandi*. Celui qui a la force, la puissance par lui-même. Il donne l'existence, la subsistance et l'accroissement aux autres forces. Vis-à-vis des autres forces, il est «Celui qui accroît la force» ».

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Magesa, L., *African Religion. The moral traditions of Abundant life* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008), 45.

<sup>158</sup> Mbiti, J., *Op. Cit.*, 45-46.

good-will of God, the divinities and the ancestors. The divinities and the ancestors constitute the spiritual tribunal governing the affairs of the community through God's delegation.<sup>159</sup>

All laws and all legitimacy of leaders are governed by God who is considered as the source of all. So our attempt to understand the African traditional belief in God makes us know that it is not an addendum but a fundamental truth.

### **The world manifests God**

Belief in God is taken for granted because the world is the manifestation of the God. Africans firmly believe that, although the world is not God or it is not identical to God or it is not equal to God, it expresses God's nature and attributes. By insisting that the world manifests God, African traditional adherents think of the sacredness of the world and all that is in it; each creature is an evidence of God's presence and life. Laurenti Magesa insists on this when he writes:

Yet, religious reverence must be accorded to the world and what is in it and around it. This is a moral requirement because the world is the manifestation of God, God's power and benevolence. Accordingly the big rock where people go to sacrifice is not just a big rock, but it incorporates, shows and for that reason is, in fact, some supernatural quality of the divine. The same can be said in different African societies of practically anything that inspires awe: mountains, trees, snakes, certain animals, and so on. While African Religion understands very well that these elements are of no means God but creatures, as we have emphasised, it also recognises that they have divinity in them because they exist by the will and through the power of the divinity. In a sense, therefore, they represent the divinity and surely demonstrate God's will and power to humanity.<sup>160</sup>

God that we cannot see is at least perceived through some powers in the world. This is not solely a cosmological statement but more importantly ethical and perhaps spiritual. Indeed, Laurenti

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<sup>159</sup> Nabofa, M.Y., Religious values and salvation in African Traditional Religion in *Training for Religious Dialogue* CBCN, IRDC Regional Seminar (Agbarho -Nigeria-, 23 -30-May 2003), 7-8.

<sup>160</sup> Magesa, L., *op.cit.*, 61.

Magesa's quotation is more about the morality than the cosmology of African Traditional adherents, for he directly talks about the ethical consciousness of Africans.

On the same line, Shorter explains how this manifestation of God in the world could be viewed when he asserts that in many African communities, the sun which is one of the most important creatures that manifests God's power, simply becomes the name of God. God is called Rua, Ijwa, Yuva...)<sup>161</sup> This may, of course, be argued against the belief in God in African Traditional Religions and cling to assign to it pantheism or even idolatry. Surely Adherents of African Traditional Religions know that the sun is not God and God is not the sun but the sun manifests God's attributes such as power, holiness, greatness... Charles Nyamiti maintains that certain objects "Hierophanies" manifest God's holiness. He says:

Everything unusual becomes a hierophany. There is always a correspondence between the mode of being of an object and the modality of sacred it reveals: a particular aspect of the sacred is revealed through the objects' specific mode of existence.<sup>162</sup>

In this quest of understanding how the world manifests God's being, Charles Nyamiti introduces the concept "modality" for precision and coherency. It seems clear to me that, on one hand, we argue that the world manifests God; on the other, we state that all modes of beings in the world do not manifest God unless they reveal the sacred. Thus, Laurenti Magesa concludes:

The world represents in various ways the being and the personality of the Divine Giver who always has the final claim on it. As all human beings are children of God, no one can claim to have a monopoly of ownership over those aspects of creation that are deemed to have been placed by God's will in public trust for the public good. Perhaps a good way to describe this understanding is to see goods and resources in terms of the image of the lender, the borrower and the article lent or borrowed. In African ethical thought, the universe has been lent by God to humanity through the ancestors and the living leaders to use on the condition that it

<sup>161</sup> Shorter quoted by Laurenti Magesa, *ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Charles Nyamiti quoted by Laurenti Magesa, *ibid.*

must be kept in good order and used by all for the promotion of life, good relationships and peace, at least within the clan or ethnic group. If those conditions are broken, humanity forfeits the right to it and often deserves chastisement if reparation in the form of sacrifice or offering are not offered.<sup>163</sup>

In his books “African religions and philosophy (1967) and “Concepts of God in Africa” (1970), John Mbiti speaks abundantly on the active attributes of God: God is the creator, God provides and sustains the universe; as king, lord and judge, he governs the universe. For instance, says John Mbiti:

The Fon believe that God has an assistant (Da) and together they sustain the world, coiled in spiral round the earth which they preserve from disintegration – if they slaked it would be the end of the world – and under the sky which they uphold, with the world of gods. This assistant is said to have set up four pillars to support the sky. Similarly, the Banyarwanda hold that God’s action is necessary to maintain the world, for without him it would not continue to exist. They do not consider God to intervene in the laws of nature as such, but his action is conceived rather as an underlying force which sustains the whole universe. The Bamburi show the same concept when they say that if God should die, the world would also collapse. They believe that the phenomena of the nature are dependent on God. For the Lozi, God’s sustenance of the universe is maintained through his not intervening in it.<sup>164</sup>

Moreover, all these above-mentioned comments testify loudly that the belief in God in African Traditional Religions is taken for granted since the world itself in which they live and move is simply the manifestation of God. Who could, therefore, ignore God and refuse to believe in him or doubt on his existence? This is what prompted Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia to state that “the question about God is not “who is God” since he always dwells among the people and all that one has and knows comes from God, such as descendants, cattle, harvest, etc. The question to be asked is how can one live without losing one’s union with God. One can say that the God of the Africans is not an

<sup>163</sup> Magesa, L., *op.cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>164</sup> Mbiti, J., *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: S.P.C.K, 1970), 63.

abstract concept, but a living and supernatural reality. God participates in the life of man through cosmic and mysterious events, but above all he is concerned with the happiness of his creatures.<sup>165</sup>

### **Belief in God in African Traditional Religion is embraced without demonstration**

The previous point – The world manifests God – presupposes the African idea of the belief in God that is embraced without justification or demonstration. We repeatedly say that God is invoked in many circumstances, he is named but it is difficult to have a discourse on God or write about God for fear of saying what he is not or stating too little who he is indeed. Africans believe that this could also lead to an adulterated perception of God's doing; and consequently they might have an erroneous view of all that surround them. Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia wrote:

No one can know anything without the presence of God, even if this presence is implicit and man is unaware of it. This makes it difficult to discourse the issue of God and one can understand why anything written about him is always insufficient. Thus the issue of God can only be of verbal nature, made up of dynamic expressions and the rest should be left for intuition, because any definition of God would impoverish the relationship between God and man and lead us astray from any perception of his life. The discussion on God belongs to the ontological and religious sphere, therefore as such there is no need of any justification or demonstration.<sup>166</sup>

Belief in God in African Traditional Religion is taken for granted given that it is embraced without demonstration. Indeed, the wisdom of Africans is far from challenging its pre-eminency, uniqueness as well as its transcendence. The world is his and Africans believe that, far or near, he controls it. Bolaji Idowu asserts:

Those who are studying African beliefs with carefulness, open-mindedness, and honesty are now coming to see that ideas like K. Little's of a world created, equipped, and set going with a

<sup>165</sup> Nkafu Nkemnkia, M., *African Vitality. A step forward in African thinking*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 144.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

self-changing and self-directing power is alien to African belief. Africans do not think or speak like this. In fact, they are rather anthropomorphic about their concept of God in this connection; they do not think or speak of a certain non-material kind of power or influence with which God has invested the world so that he could go and abide unmolested in the repose of eternity.<sup>167</sup>

Africans speak of God, celebrate his providential help, invoke his power in times of distress and praise his guidance. Furthermore, Isaac D. Osabutey-Aguedze says:

In like manner sculpture and painting grew out of the African's inherent love to adhere closely to nature. The former had its rise from imagination. Speculative, the African believers (and that belief is not puerile) that the divinity is unnameable, indescribable, and illimitable. It is blasphemous to say God is this or that. All objects and feelings are forms of his manifestation.<sup>168</sup>

Again Africans employ some anthropomorphic expressions while talking about him; this is a proof that they have some knowledge of God. Indeed, this belief is like something that gives meaning to all the manifold aspects of the life of Africans, and yet supersedes their scope of knowledge. Thus, this reality of God in African Traditional Religions, acknowledged by all African cultures, is felt more than analysed, lived more than thought. Pope Paul VI says:

A common and very important element of the spiritual concept is the idea of God as the first and the last cause of all things. This concept which felt more than analysed, lived more than thought is expressed in extremely diverse ways, according to the culture. In reality the presence of God permeates traditional African life as the presence of a superior being, both personal and mysterious. One has recourse to him in the solemn hours of life and its most crucial moments, when one considers useless the intercession of all other beings who could serve as intermediaries. Nearly the fear of his great power is overcome and God is invoked as Father. The prayers that one addresses to him, whether individual or

<sup>167</sup> Bolaji Idowu, E., *op. cit.*, 155.

<sup>168</sup> Osabutey-Aguedze, I.D., *The African Religion and Philosophy*, (Nairobi, Mailu Publishing house), 1990, 59.

collective, are spontaneous and sometimes touching, while among the forms of sacrifice the first fruit is notable for the purity of his symbolism.<sup>169</sup>

### **A binding truth that someone cannot afford to forget, deny or neglect**

Who can question the existence of God or who can afford to ignore, forget or neglect since belief in God is like an inbuilt fact in the African tradition? Certainly no African with sufficient knowledge of African culture and religion will, authoritatively and convincingly, deny the belief in God publicly. If he does in a closed door, it does not carry weight. Not even non-Africans who are conversant with African way of life will critically reject it with genuine reasons. Indeed, elders and parents hand it over to their children not perhaps in a formal way that necessitates classrooms or shrines but in their daily life. They also transmit the whole tradition as they rejoice over a joyful event or as they mourn over a sad experience. Writing on Kikuyu Traditional Culture in Kenya, Silvana Bottignole said:

Religion is interwoven with traditions and social customs of the people. Thus all members of the community are automatically considered to have acquired, during their childhood teachings, all that is necessary to know about religion and custom. The duty of imparting this knowledge to the children is entrusted to parents, who are looked upon as the official ministers of both religious ethics and social customs. Such traditional religious knowledge and belief hinge upon belief in: Ngai (God); the Ancestors; the spirits of God in the world of the living and of the unborn, in the animals, vegetables and inanimate world.<sup>170</sup>

We agree with Masumbuko Mununguri when he emphatically affirms that the majority of scholars in African religions find the idea of the nonexistence of God unthinkable and obsolete. He wrote:

Today it has become banal and almost chronic to repeat that “for Africans the nonexistence of God is unthinkable.” All the researches undertaken by the CERA from its foundation until the present time have

<sup>169</sup> Paul VI, *Africae Terrarum* Rome, 1067, no. 8.

<sup>170</sup> Bottignole, S., *Kikuyu Traditional culture and religion* (Lusaka: Heinemann Educational Bokks, 1984), 34.

done nothing more than conscientise and attract the attention of Africans and other citizens of the earth about this solid affirmation expressed above. We call it, this God of the Africans, “the God of our Ancestors” simply because the notion of Ancestor seems to us to correspond very well to the African mentality. The expression “God of our Ancestors” corresponds better to the idea Africans have regarding the role played by those who have preceded us in their relations with the Lord of life.<sup>171</sup>

It is important to note that, while talking about the closeness of God in African perspective, Masumbu begins his book by assuring the readers that no African will attempt to deny or maybe neglect the fact that God exists. It is commonplace that all Africans should believe in God before they believe in anything visible and invisible. It is a binding truth that no one affords to ignore. According to him, God has been journeying with African Ancestors and continues his journey with all Africans today through joyful as well as poignant events. He is of the opinion that the Incarnation of Jesus should find a fertile land in Africa; Africans should understand the Incarnation of Christ with fewer difficulties, for the same God of our Ancestors became man.

Masumbuko does not make a distinction between closeness and Incarnation as taught in the Catholic Church, for he says in the second chapter of the same book that

The Incarnation of the Word is not a mystery coming from outside, foreign to the traditional African religion in its conception of God. It is located within the African’s prolonged search for God. Our Ancestors, after having searched and groped for him, saw him irrupting into their history.<sup>172</sup>

It seems to me that it will be too ambitious to arrive to this conclusion because Incarnation remains a mystery that is foreign to the conception of God in Africa. It is also foreign to the Jews and the Muslims. Masumbuko will probably need a systematic teaching on the Trinity in order to avoid such “saut indu” and embrace true distinctions, particularly in this case. A God with a Son is foreign to the perception of God in Africa. He indeed developed two contra-

<sup>171</sup> Mununguri, M., *The Closeness of the God of Ancestors. An African approach to the Incarnation* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), 13.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

dicting ideas that could adulterate the understanding of God in African traditional religions when he stated in the following page that

The Christian novelty is to know that this God so great is near to us, one who speaks with us. Our Ancestors spoke of him, spoke to him, but never with him. In praying the Christians speak with God in a friendly dialogue.<sup>173</sup>

This novelty is very important and it needs to be well understood for the avoidance of confusion and the practice of “cut and paste”. In actual sense, this distances the conception of God in African Traditional Religions from Christianity. Both of them are unique; they should not be mixed. That is exactly what we are doing here in this chapter: to present the notion of God in African Traditional Religions with carefulness, critique and objectivity without comparing.

God in African Traditional Religions speaks to his people through Ancestors, Elders, Diviners, etc. He does not speak and would not speak directly with his people because he is supreme although he comes down to dwell in some places.<sup>174</sup> Africans believe that God is Spirit; he is invisible; Africans feel his effect through some natural things or forces such as wind. They witness his presence through events like death and other limitations<sup>175</sup> Again, the presence of God among people cannot be simply likened to Incarnation – as taught in the Catholic Church – although it can be taken as a new way or the perfect way of God’s presence in humanity. According to Africans, God has been ever present in humanity but not with the idea of becoming man.

Furthermore, the Church teaches that the Son brought us salvation which carries different meaning. In his conference on “salvation in African Traditional Religion”, Professor M.Y. Nabofa defines salvation as understood ATR. He says:

Salvation could be defined as: well-being won or held against disaster, assurance and realisation of blissful security in the hereafter. This refers to the salvation of soul: which, of course, presupposes belief in life after death; salvation is escape from suffering, pain, misery, sorrow, lust, enmity and stupidity that

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>174</sup> Bottignole, S., *op.cit.*, 34.

<sup>175</sup> Mbiti, J., *op.cit.*, 59.

inevitably entail suffering, however much they may induce transient delights or satisfaction; salvation is a state of sentient existence conceived as freed from suffering...it is getting rid of those things and conditions which man considers to be absolutely evil and also preservation from destruction, danger and calamity which he may meet in life...<sup>176</sup>

These few descriptions should not be simply identified with salvation that the Son brought (as understood in the Church). So God as the Son is really foreign to the perception of God in African Traditional Religions. In fact, Salvation as perceived in Christianity is not counted among the numerous works of God in African Traditional Religions: God is the creator; God is the sustainer of his creation; God is the provider; God is the ruler over the universe.<sup>177</sup> This could be likened to the Christian idea of salvation.

Thus, any attempt to understand Christianity and all its dogmas with African Traditional lenses is a difficult task; it is like treading on a very dangerous route. We limit our study to the God in African Traditional Religions or as Masumbuko put it, the God of our Ancestors.

### **New order and new challenges: a way to a fruitful interreligious dialogue**

One would be satisfied to get to know that belief in God in African Traditional Religions is neither a trend that started at any point of time nor a mentality that developed due to some circumstances but a known-unknown truth that is in the mind of Africans at their birth and continues until death. Thus, Africans who take part in interreligious dialogue, even when they have become Christians or Muslims, would begin with “what is taken for granted” and recognise the values that this expression “taken for granted” contains.

As explained above, this fundamental truth should be the basis of any kind of interreligious dialogue; it should instil in the mind of Africans the fundamentals of genuine dialogue with religions. The

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<sup>176</sup> N abofa, M.Y., Religious values and salvation in ATR in *Training for Interreligious dialogue. A CBCN, IRDC Regional Seminar* (Agbarbo: Dominican Publications, May 2003), 9-11.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Mbiti, J., *op.cit.*, 49-52.

belief in God in African Traditional Religions, felt more than analysed and lived more than thought of, should prompt Africans to find a new order where it is equally felt and analysed, equally lived and thought. This belief, therefore, requires more analysis and thought for it to bring out its real content. This could, perhaps, make it more practical and realistic for the benefit of interreligious dialogue in Africa.

Again, when we say that belief in God in African Traditional Religions is a binding truth that no one would afford to neglect or ignore, one would expect to build around it strong bonds or relations that go beyond religious traditions. Actually, this is the truth that binds all Africans together in spite of their differences. Such analysis would consider interreligious dialogue not as an option but as a compulsory activity.

Therefore, belief in God in African Traditional Religions should not be embraced without demonstration, for it is when it is demonstrated that it creates more opportunities for improvement, particularly as far as interreligious dialogue in Africa is concerned. This should challenge all Africans. Since goodness communicates, let this belief which is taken for granted communicate its real meaning and value.

## Conclusion

If the world (Africa) as we know it does not allow interreligious dialogue,<sup>178</sup> Africans should rejoice having a strong backup for dialogue of religions, for traditionally they are bound to foster their relations for the sake of their fundamental truth, a truth that unites them all: the belief in God is taken for granted. This expression “taken for granted” should not be taken for granted but it should challenge all Africans to measure up with this traditional belief. I know that this first traditional belief taken from African Traditional Religions still affect all in many ways.

Thus, this article invites Africans to commit more and more into activities of interreligious dialogue in Africa, for both the ground and the spirit are set for a fruitful one. The old principle but given a new order should equip Africans to face the problems and pitfalls related to interreligious dialogue with the same traditional spirit: belief in God in African Traditional Religions is taken for granted.

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<sup>178</sup> Cf. Knitter, P., *One earth many religions. Multifaith dialogue and global responsibility* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 85-86.

## **Dialogue between the universal Church and the local church**



## Christian mystagogy, the universal Church and the particular churches

Alexander P. Zatyрка Pacheco

Living organisms (and human institutions, which reflect similar life processes) always exhibit two opposing dynamics in permanent tension. One expresses the principle of identity (securing the organism's cohesion, ensuring the balance it needs if it is to develop the characteristics proper to it), the other is the principle of adaptation (allowing it to adjust to a changing environment). When the principle of identity is lacking, the organism loses inner cohesion and finally disintegrates. When the capacity for adaptation is missing, the inability to adjust to environmental change can lead to stagnation and death. Every living thing must maintain a healthy, dynamic tension between these two principles, and indeed the existence of a strong or active tension between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies may be taken as a good indicator of the organism's health.

Applying this understanding of real processes to the development of human institutions, we may observe that their activity is always constrained by a core of identity which may be termed "institutional", serving as a source of stability and coherence, but also by adaptive and creative tendencies which may be termed "charismatic," generating appropriate responses to an ever-changing world. Such organisations must maintain the tension between institution and charisma if they are to stay healthy. An over-emphasis on stability will diminish vitality and they will finally die, incapable of maintaining connection with an actively changing environment; excessive emphasis on adjustment to external changes can lead to loss of identity and disintegration.<sup>179</sup>

Both tendencies must be operational if life is to carry on in balance: they can never be treated as ends in themselves. Both tendencies work

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<sup>179</sup> See Melloni Ribas, J., *El Uno en lo Múltiple. Aproximación a la diversidad y unidad de las religiones* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2003), 97-122.

for life, they subserve the life of the organism. When activated, their role is to promote life rather than to promote themselves. For either to take itself as the sole criterion of viability would effectively be suicide, putting an end to life and thus to itself.<sup>180</sup>

The Church is no exception to this dynamics. One can see throughout its history the permanent tension between what can be called its institutional core of identity and its adaptive, charismatic energies. As already suggested, this tension is not necessarily negative. The Church has been able remain true to its identity and at the same time to embody the Good News of Jesus Christ in very different cultural environments. Centripetal forces thus predominate in the central leadership of the Church and centrifugal forces at the boundary, where Christian faith meets new cultural worlds.

### **The universal Church and the particular churches**

When one speaks of the universal Church, the phrase can mean different things. In principle, for our own Church, the universality is that of the Catholic communion under the pastoral authority of the successors of Peter and that of a joint vision of revelation as mediated by living tradition, dogma and teaching, sacramental-liturgical practice, ethical-moral principles, ecclesiastical organisation and so on. This universal Church is identified with the mystery that finds expression in our confession of faith, in which we confess to one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Certainly, elements of this mystery are to be found in the institutional structures of the Church, but it is obvious that there are also many other elements of its universality that are not covered by the current organisational state of the Church.

For the purposes of our discussion, then, a further clarification is necessary. The universal Church is commonly identified with its central leadership, which is with the Roman Curia. The latter, however, is properly to be understood as a kind of support for the Pontiff in office, who serves as guarantor that the deposit of the faith received by the universal Church is loyally preserved and rightly transmitted to new generations of believers. Certainly there are indispensable elements of

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<sup>180</sup> See Ellis, G., "Kenosis as a Unifying Theme and Cosmology" in: Polkinghorne, J., (ed.), *The Work of Love. Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 107-126.

organisation and hierarchy that fortify the ministry of the successor of Peter, called upon to strengthen the faith of his brothers and sisters, but in no way can the universal Church be identified with its central leadership. The role of the latter is not so much to enforce a particular expression of the faith but to guarantee the mutual enrichment of all the local churches, facilitating dialogue and exchange between them and authenticating their respective positions by common criteria for discerning the distinctive dynamics of the Spirit.<sup>181</sup> In this way the central leadership and the particular churches together serve the vitality of the universal Church.

Regional communities came to be called local or particular churches, subject to the pastoral authority of a bishop, whose jurisdiction is as a rule geographically defined (apart from certain prelatures such as military ordinariates). Put simply, the particular church corresponds to a diocese (a specific area under the authority of a bishop or prelate).<sup>182</sup> As a living and dynamic reality, the universal Church encompasses within its identity the many particularities of the local churches as well as the historical particularities of the central leadership that is called to the service of this community.<sup>183</sup>

Tensions between the “universal” and its particular expressions are to be found at the very beginnings of Christianity. A clear example of this are the arguments of Paul and Peter against certain Pharisees of Christian origin who sought to impose the Law of Moses on all the faithful.<sup>184</sup> For these Jewish-Christian missionaries compliance with the letter of the law was a crucial element of the process of salvation. They had not yet grasped the radical novelty of the Christian message, which implied the emergence of an inner dynamic that transforms the life of the believer, leading him or her to live in accordance with God’s

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. Luke 22:32.

<sup>182</sup> One problem with this territorial conception is that, while it simplifies pastoral administration and limits the possibility of a conflict of authority, it leaves out of account fundamental aspects of a local church with its own characteristics, such as belonging to a particular and distinctive culture.

<sup>183</sup> See the interesting discussion in “Unidad de la Iglesia y pluralismo cultural”, Chapter 3 of Part III of Tornos Cubillo, A., *Inculturación. Teología y método* (Madrid: Desclee de Brouwer, 2001), 251-292.

<sup>184</sup> See Acts 11:1-18 and 15:1-35.

will (i.e., under the “sovereignty” of God, in the deepest sense of the notion of God’s kingship).

One could say that the way in which this conflict was resolved ought to serve as the very model of how local churches should stand in relation to each other within the structure of the universal Church. As the outcome of an honest and sober dialogue between partners open to the establishment of general criteria and seeking to recognise the activity of the Holy Spirit, the first Christians concluded that faith was not necessarily tied to a particular culture and its religious expressions.<sup>185</sup> It is transcultural, which means that it can manifest itself in different forms, even in terms of ritual, without thereby losing its essence. It is by virtue of his or her relationship with Christ that a member of the Church becomes a Christian, and it is through Christ that one comes to God.<sup>186</sup> The appearance of particular gifts of the Spirit showed that this dynamics had also manifested itself in entirely Gentile contexts without any cultural (or religious) connection to Judaism. Everyone involved in the controversy accepted this criterion for the acceptance of Greco-Roman Christians, without insisting on any cultural change or the acceptance of Jewish religious practices on their part.

There are other important lessons we can learn from this historic moment. The Jerusalem congregation understood that its role as mother church, founded and fortified by the direct witness of the Apostles, did not entitle it to think of itself as the only road to belief in God. Their duty was rather to bear witness to Christ as the final message of God and, in docility to the Holy Spirit, to embody and to pass on the Good News in the different cultures that they encountered. No church, whether Jewish or Gentile in origin, should be overly concerned to impose its cultural patterns on others, but should rather ensure that its people come to know the Good News of God’s kingdom.

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<sup>185</sup> *Evangelii nuntiandi* (EN) (1975) ‘Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope Paul VI to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to All the Faithful of the Entire World’, no. 22, at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html); and also ‘Evangelisation in Latin America’s Present and Future’, final document of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate (Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico, 27 January - 13 February 1979), no. 407, in: Eagleson, J., and Scharper, P., eds., *Puebla and Beyond* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Snyder, G., *Inculturation of the Jesus Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 202-215.

The criterion for the authenticity of its apostolic labours would be the appearance of what Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit”: a correct attitude to those sons and daughters of God who live without Christ in them.<sup>187</sup> It is the ubiquity of the Good News and the Christian’s distinctive way of being, mirroring the behaviour of Christ, that make the Church universal. As also the grace to live this, granted us through his Spirit.<sup>188</sup> It is a matter of universality of conduct, of character, and of unitary cultural expression.

### **The universal Church and the universality of the kerygma**

For the purposes of this discussion it seems to me to be essential to explain exactly what I understand by the Christian kerygma, the essence of the Good News. The reason is simple. The Church (the universal Church and each local church) is called to safeguard the vitality of this core of belief and its proper transmission to new generations of believers. The most important criteria of these churches’ faithfulness to the mission entrusted to them by Jesus must be the indicators that they do in fact function as Good News for their congregations and for the society in which they find themselves.

At the heart of the Good News of Jesus Christ lies the experience of God that grounds our faith and without which it makes no sense, the encounter with the One who so forcefully presents himself as the last and final truth that in his presence everything else becomes relative. He thus changes people radically, engaging them in a life-giving dynamic that leads to a continuous process of transformation and growth. This allows humanity to experience what it means to be a son of God, living in synergy with the divine will as a citizen of God’s kingdom.

This particular experience of person-to-person encounter with God is rightly described as the “fundamental experience”. For all who undergo it, it grounds and gives meaning to their view of reality. This fundamental experience is felt as a kind of revelation, that is, as the sudden appearance of one who was apparently not there before, who

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<sup>187</sup> See Gal 2:19-20, and especially Gal 5:22-23, where the fruit of the Spirit is said to be “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

<sup>188</sup> “The Christian in the World”, Chapter 3 of “The Epistle to Diognetus”, in: *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Staniforth, M., and Louth, A., (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 144-145.

suddenly becomes visible and understandable as the ultimate point of reference. This encounter with supreme reality always brings with it a liberation, an escape from darkness into light, from chaos to cosmos, from meaninglessness to meaning and clarity.

For us as Christians this fundamental experience signifies an encounter with a person, Jesus of Nazareth. Here the concept of person is used in a theological sense, denoting a relational self-presence in the sense of the persons of the Trinity. Each individual's core identity is necessarily and inextricably tied up with their relationship to others. This relationship is, however, informed by the dynamics of surrender, of kenotic love: giving oneself up to the other, granting him the gift of life and at the same time receiving the gift of the love of others, as the source of life. When the divine enters into a relationship with us, it is revealed to us how we are constituted as persons. This is the essence of our likeness to God.<sup>189</sup>

As a rule, true kerygma is identified by virtue of a whole series of features, by the conceptual content that is to be learned and accepted. This narrow view of faith tends to turn Christianity into a kind of Gnosticism. Kerygma is something more than conceptual content: it is a personal experience that forms us. At the heart of such a kerygma stands the experience of God in Christ as the philanthropist par excellence, the ally of humanity, the one who loves mankind. I would sum this up in the words of the Gospel: "For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life".<sup>190</sup> For us to approach the fundamental experience of Christianity it is necessary to enter into a relationship with Christ, the concretisation of His gratuitous, boundless love for us. Christ's gift reveals to us the radicality of God's kenotic love, bringing us Good News. The encounter with the risen Christ as a person may be considered the fundamental experience of our faith, the core of the kerygma.

Jesus' earthly life was the manifestation of this revelation: whoever saw him saw the Father.<sup>191</sup> In other words, Jesus of Nazareth is God,

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. Gen 1:26.

<sup>190</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>191</sup> John 12:45.

who speaks to us as a man, in a language accessible to us. The way that the Lord followed as a man is the experience that he wished to communicate to his disciples: God loves us, so it is worth our putting our lives in his hands. This means to know how he behaves (love as pure gift, free and unconditional, in kenosis, in self-emptying, in self-abandonment), and to want to subordinate ourselves to this kenotic dynamics: to live faithful to his will, to live under the sovereignty (the Kingdom) of God and to love one another, as he has taught us.

Christ endeavoured to bring his followers' experience of God into accord with his own. In doing this, he was concerned neither to give a string of doctrinal explanations, nor to lay down moral prescriptions, but to bring them closer to the experience of encounter with his Father. He was clearly concerned about those who felt drawn by his message: they were not to be content to listen to him or to quote him by heart,<sup>192</sup> but to have the same fundamental experience, to come to know God as the Father of boundless, unconditional love. This was always the essence of his preaching and of his mysteries: the encounter with a personal God, who in becoming man reveals himself as intimate Creator, merciful, compassionate and loving, the teacher of what it means to be human.<sup>193</sup> This is the Good News that calls to be proclaimed universally.

### **Mystagogy: the problem of communicating the kerygma**

How can access to the experience of God the Father, who is the very essence of the kerygma, be ensured or at least facilitated? Since apostolic times, the process of initiation into the fundamental experience has been structured in forms of spiritual didactics known as mystagogies. These are intended to save a person from sin (understood as a false, untruthful inner dynamics, self-centred and predatory, the polar opposite of the kenotic love of God) and to show them that their vocation is to become fully human, to love as God loves.

The mystagogy is based on cultural references proper to the society to be evangelised. Every culture is a universe of signification, a

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<sup>192</sup> Cf. Matt 7:21: "It is not anyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' who will enter the kingdom of Heaven..."

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Sophrony, *Ver a Dios como Él es* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2002), 207-242.

kind of meta-language that we must attend to if we want our message to be understood. Although the goal is always the same – that is, access to the fundamental experience of Christian faith – mystagogies must differ, each being adapted to an individual culture.<sup>194</sup> These mystagogies begin with the blindness and error in which our fellow humans find themselves. Evil appears as a dynamics that runs counter to God's bounteous love, a view of oneself as inhabiting a world that is a battleground between enemies, in which happiness is thought to be the assurance of one's own satisfaction, a goal to be defended against all-comers. The biblical account of the Fall is paradigmatic. The serpent (Evil) persuades Adam and Eve that God, whom they knew as their good friend and companion, is in fact an enemy who exploits them. They stop living in openness and complementarity, becoming "egos": individuals for whom happiness seemingly consists of isolating oneself as far as possible in order to avoid harm but at the same time to dispose of all that is needed for one's own satisfaction. In the grip of this distorted vision, they are no longer in a position to see God's presence in creation. They see only objects, objects they consume and with which they satisfy their needs. They live in perpetual anxiety over their loss or frustration at not possessing them. The encounter with Christ is proposed as a way out of this situation of dehumanisation.<sup>195</sup>

The best epitome of Christian mystagogy ever vouchsafed to the Church is perhaps to be found at the end of Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God [the Father] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all".<sup>196</sup> In this blessing Paul asks that the Corinthian congregation should come to know the experience of the encounter with God, upon which their faith is based. The apostle evokes a distinctive mystagogical process in which the order of reference (Son → God [the Father] → Holy Spirit) is by no means an accident but rather describes an ordered process of experience, a kerygmatic dynamics: a mystagogy. The hermeneutic

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<sup>194</sup> Cf. Velasco, R., *La Iglesia de Jesús: Proceso histórico de la conciencia eclesial* (Estella, Navarra: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2011), 21-48.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart* (South Canaan, PA: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2006), 92-113.

<sup>196</sup> 2 Cor 13:13.

key lies in living Christ's surrender as an act of love for us as the profoundest revelation of the divine nature and as the model for so-called human nature.

The core of the kerygma is, then, the grace of Christ, utterly gratuitous, an unconditional gift, a love without conditions. Who so receives Christ, dropping their guard and allowing themselves to love, attains at last to the secret of eternal love, which has its source in the Father. Inclusion within the circle of Trinitarian love comes in the end through the experience of fellowship, mutual attachment and shared enjoyment of goods that is love's essence, personified in the Holy Spirit, in the spirit of Christ. When a soul truly encounters Christ, it in the end rediscovers itself in Him. In the face of the Lord I recognise how much of him is in me, and everything too that is foreign to my Creator. Under his loving gaze I discover what I have been called to be.

Since the very beginning of the Christian religion, the unflagging surrender that Christ himself teaches us through his love has stood as the sign of authentic Christian life. Whoever encounters the Servant of Yahweh, prepared for love's sake to give up his life so that others might live, is changed by the encounter and invited to become like him: poor blameless and free, a sacrificial offering, a gift. The Church, then, is called upon to make this mystagogy known to all. The presence of this attitude of kenotic love, as it is found in Jesus, is the fundamental criterion of faithfulness to the Gospel and to the Lord. Together with the central leadership of the Church, every particular church must constantly keep this aspect under review. That local church serves the universality of the Church to the extent that its structure, teaching, pastoral work and so on constitute an effective mystagogy that instills the dynamic characteristic of kenotic love.

The fundamental Christian experience can be passed on in many different ways, but to tie the Gospel of Christ to power, imposition, privilege and the accumulation of worldly goods is corrosive. Similarly corrosive is our behaviour when, as bearers of the Good News, we show concern for outward uniformity while showing no concern for the inequality and exclusion that result from the misuse of power and the misappropriation of wealth.

## Inculturation and universality: recommendations for a constructive dialogue

If Christian faith is to find a place for itself in new cultural contexts, correspondingly, appropriate mystagogies must be developed that give the latter access to what we have called the core of the Christian kerygma, the fundamental experience. This is applicable both to missionary lands as normally understood and to newly secularised and post-modern cultures.<sup>197</sup> The choice of the most appropriate methods for the development of these inculturated mystagogies belongs to the local churches. If we discern real changes in those addressed and the fruit of the Spirit becomes manifest in Christian communities, then they are fulfilling their mission and thus strengthening the universal Church. If we observe exactly the opposite, however, we must criticise their way of doing things, honestly and in the spirit of the Gospel. The criterion of success is a radical change of attitude brought about by the encounter,<sup>198</sup> a change that must be in some way verifiable. This criterion of validity is to be applied both to local churches and to the Church's central leadership. It should not be forgotten that we all serve a single universal Church.

We have recently seen conflicts between the pastoral options adopted by local churches and the decisions of certain departments

<sup>197</sup> See Fornet-Betancourt, R., *Interkulturalität und Religion. Zur interkulturellen Interpretation der gegenwärtigen Krise des Christentums*, Concordia Monograph no. 55, (Aachen: Verlag Mainz, 2011), 145-161.

<sup>198</sup> See *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 19; Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM), *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, Vol. VI (Bogota: General Secretariat of CELAM, 1970)*, no. 2,5; *ibid.*, 'Evangelisation in Latin America's Present and Future', no. 228; John Paul II., *Slavorum Apostoli* (EN) (1985), 'Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Pope John Paul II to the Bishops, Priests and Religious Families and to All the Christian Faithful in Commemoration of the Eleventh Centenary of the Evangelising Work of Saints Cyril and Methodius', no. 65; *Ecclesia in Africa* (EN) (1995), 'Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on the Church in Africa and its Evangelising Mission towards the Year 2000', no. 123, at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa_en.html); *Ecclesia in Oceania* (EN) (2001), 'Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Bishops Priests and Deacons, Men and Women in the Consecrated Life and All the Lay Faithful on Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania,' at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_20011122\\_ecclesia-in-oceania\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20011122_ecclesia-in-oceania_en.html).

of the Roman Curia, in which the latter were presented as indicators of the sense of the universal Church.<sup>199</sup> As already discussed, we are faced by different ministries within the universal Church. This tension should not dismay us: it is part of the healthy life of the Church. This tension, however, can be constructive – or destructive, seriously undermining the evangelisation process. The theoretical approach described here can help ensure that the tension serves as an energising function, promoting the growth of the Church as a whole. From this a number of observations follow:

1. The process itself has to take the form of a constructive dialogue, grounded in the dynamics underlying the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem, i.e. in a sincere striving after the will of God in accord with the movement of the Holy Spirit. For this to happen it requires a spirit of encounter and of mutual esteem. We cannot attain a universal community through *a priori* exercise of power, closing ourselves off to the experience of the other. It is important that we do not feel like members of two opposing parties, each seeking to assert its own position, but rather see each other as brothers and sisters who together strive after God's will.
2. We should never lose sight of the criterion of faithfulness to Christian belief, especially when it is a matter of living testimony to the values of the Gospel. This gives each participant in the dialogue a certain weight, a moral authority, a sensitivity to the here-and-now that is more interested in recognition than in authority of office. And the more institutional decision-making power a participant possesses, the more carefully it must reflect the attitude of the Lord whom it represents. In this, the manner in which one treats one's

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<sup>199</sup> Cf. "Carta sobre la ordenación de diáconos permanentes" (Letter on the Ordination of Permanent Deacons) of 26 October 2005, sent to the Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, by the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; "Carta a su santidad Bededicto XVI" (Letter to H. H. Benedict XVI) of 24 March 2005, from the parishes and the Diaconal Council of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico; "Iglesia autóctona y diaconado Permanente" (The Autochthonous Church and the Permanent Diaconate), a letter of 16 March 2006 from the bishops of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico; all these are to be found in *Revista Iberoamericana de Teología* 2:2 (2006), 97-109.

interlocutor is especially important. Today, inquisitorial proceedings are unacceptable.<sup>200</sup>

3. It would be a serious error to pay no heed to the evangelising vitality of the local churches in question, their faithfulness to the Gospel, their service and solidarity, their love of Christ and his Church.<sup>201</sup> Also important is the community's capacity to engender and to recognise ministerial vocations appropriate to the particular culture and in keeping with the life of the ministers. The presence of these signs would indicate that these churches are practiced in the inculturation of the Gospel. They have, in fact, been capable of developing distinctive mystagogies in their own cultural contexts, affording their members access to the fundamental experience of the Christian faith.
4. One should pay heed in particular to those local churches whose pastors or ministers have concurred in supporting the same pastoral options and these have proved successful in terms of the criteria of evaluation set forth.
5. One should avoid presenting cultural and contextual situations as fundamental and unchangeable features of the universal Church. Papal teaching has already indicated that the inculturation process is comprehensive, "includ[ing] the whole life of the church and the whole process of evangelisation. It includes theology, liturgy, the Church's life and structures."<sup>202</sup>

It has been our goal here to consider, from the perspective of Christian kerygma and mystagogy, certain elements of the particular churches and the institutions in the service of the Petrine Primate that make their own contributions to the universal Church, each helping to ensure that the energising tension between identity and adaptation is maintained. In the quest for God's will, all who participate are subject

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Schickendantz, C., *Cambio estructural de la Iglesia como tarea y oportunidad* (Córdoba, Argentina: Editorial de la Universidad Católica de Córdoba, 2005), 36-38, 150-160.

<sup>201</sup> This was in part the reason for the failure of the great missionary project of the first evangelisation of Latin America, the *Ecclesia Indiana* that the Franciscans called for in New Spain. For a detailed account see my article "The rise and fall of the *Ecclesia Indiana*", *Revista Iberoamericana de Teología* 2:3 (2006), 27-61.

<sup>202</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 62.

to conversion and growth. If they are to grow in faithfulness, it is important that they each recognise the other and allow themselves to be unmade and remade by the ways in which the Gospel manifests itself on each side in ways hitherto unknown. The specific form of Christian life in each culture, expressive in each case of the fruit of the Spirit, is part of the inheritance of the Spirit and enriches the catholicity of the universal Church. It is the responsibility of all the faithful to protect and strengthen it.



# Dialogue between the universal church and the local church

Michael Amaladoss

I have been asked to reflect on the dialogue between the universal church and the local church in the context of 'dialogue and mission'. Mission, dialogue and the church are related themes. But they are not always understood in the same way. So it is better to start clarifying to myself and my readers where I stand with regard to these themes as interrelated. Reflection is always done in a context. My context is Asia/India. The Asian churches, through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), have been doing a lot of reflection on these themes and their interrelation. That is where I would like to start. Otherwise my reflections on the church, local and universal, and the dialogue between them may tend to be abstract.

For the Asian churches, mission is dialogue. We would not speak of mission and dialogue, but of mission *as* dialogue or dialogical. This may not be evident to many. Some years ago the Congregation for the Evangelisation of People and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue jointly published a document on *Proclamation and Dialogue*. (May 19, 1991) Defined abstractly they are not the same. Mission is primarily proclamation. Dialogue then is seen as a step or means towards it. The Asians approach the issue in two different ways. Whatever may be our abstract theoretical clarity regarding concepts, praxis is more complicated. When I meet a believer of another religion s/he is not someone who has never experienced God. The Word of God has been enlightening everyone coming into the world. (Cf. Jn 1:9) John Paul II accepted in his encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer* that the Spirit of God is present and active in all cultures and religions. Earlier the Second Vatican Council had said that God is salvifically reaching out to everyone through the Spirit in ways known to God alone.<sup>203</sup> So before witnessing to my own God-experience,

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<sup>203</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

it is only fair that I listen to his/her God-experience and adapt my sharing accordingly. I am obviously engaging in a religious dialogue. My proclamation or mission to free humans can only be dialogical.<sup>204</sup>

Mission for the Asians also dialogue in another way. At its very first general assembly, the FABC, reflecting on the theme “Evangelisation in Asia Today”, described it as a threefold dialogue with the many poor, the rich cultures and the living religions of Asia.

The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life – realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own.<sup>205</sup>

Usually, when we speak of dialogue in the context of mission, we refer to interreligious dialogue. Here the Asian Bishops are speaking of dialogue as a way of mission. And what is interesting for us is that the goal of this dialogue is seen as the founding of the local church. So we see here the link between mission, dialogue and the local church. The local church emerges out of a dialogue of the gospel with the local realities of Asia, which is characterised by the poor, the cultures and the religions.

The local church is further particularised by the cultures of Asia. This is elaborated by the Office of Theological Concerns of the FABC: “The concrete shape of the local Church will be, on the one hand, conditioned by the culture, and on the other hand, the culture will be evangelised by the life and witness of the local Church.”<sup>206</sup>

The FABC focused specially on the role of local church in mission in the International Mission Congress held in Manila in 1979. That Congress clearly affirmed: “Every local church is ‘sent’ by Christ and the Father to bring the Gospel to its surrounding milieux, and to bear

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<sup>204</sup> See Amaladoss, M., “Evangelisation as Dialogue”, *Indian Theological Studies* 48 (2011) 34-49.

<sup>205</sup> Rosales, G.B. and Arevalo, C.G., (eds), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Vol.1. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 14.

<sup>206</sup> *Theses on the Local Church*. FABC Papers 60 (Hong Kong: FABC, 1991), 18.

it also into all the world.”<sup>207</sup> While strongly aware of its own identity as a local church, Asia becomes also aware of the universal church as a communion of local churches: “Since the context of the local church differs from another, every local church enjoys a legitimate autonomy, while maintaining the universal communion, to shape creatively its own life, structures and fulfil its God-given mission in its cultural environment”<sup>208</sup> Having clarified my starting point let me now take up the dialogue between the local church and the universal church. What makes a church local? Without going into elaborate theological argument I can say that the ‘locus’ of church is determined by community, geography and culture. A Basic Christian Community gathered round the Eucharist can be a local church. Going up from there we can think of a parish, a diocese, a national conference of Bishops and a regional conference like the FABC as local churches. A diocese with a bishop, having the fullness of Episcopal ministry, does have a special status. But from a missionary point of view it need not be exclusively emphasised. I also think that culture has a particular role in identifying a local church, because a culture supposes a language, a system of symbols, a way of life and a social structure.

It is not easy to say what the ‘universal church’ is. All would agree that the church is universal and catholic. Most would say that this universal church is a communion of local churches. Is there a church outside and beyond the many local churches? There is no such reality physically. The local churches are not divisions of a universal church. The universal church is not simply an association of local churches. Some however think that there is a universal church prior to the local church. But its a theological, not a phenomenological, priority.

There is a college of Bishops. The Pope is head of the college. He is also the head of the local church of Rome. But the church of Rome is not the head of the local churches. It is not the universal church. The Pope as the head of the college of Bishops has a universal role. When the representatives of all the local churches are gathered in an ecumenical council, it represents the universal church. The Pope as the head of the college is a symbol of this communion of churches. He is not the universal church. He has a group of people to help him

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<sup>207</sup> *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Vol. 1, 130.

<sup>208</sup> *Theses on the Local Church*, 28.

to fulfil his role as the head of the college. They do not make up a church. The Pope may claim to represent the universal church in so far as he claims universal jurisdiction. But this is a disputed point in ecumenical circles. I do not wish to base my reflection on this point. A local church can dialogue with other local churches. The representative of a local church can dialogue with the representatives of the universal church gathered in council. Otherwise how does a local church dialogue with the universal church?

Whatever the theological difficulties, in practice today the Pope, through the Holy See, claims to represent the universal church. Therefore, in practice, we can say that the dialogue between the local and the universal church happens between the local churches and the Holy See. This is a reality we are living, whether we want it or not, whether it is theologically correct or not. So I shall focus my reflections on this relationship, because it is important to mission. Rather than enter into abstract argument I shall choose the field of liturgy to illustrate what is happening. After this I shall refer to other areas.

### **An Example: Inculturation of the Liturgy**

The *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* elaborates on the relation between the Gospel and cultures.

The Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances and has utilised the resources of different cultures in its preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ, to examine and understand it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and in various aspects of the life of the faithful. Nevertheless, the Church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern. The Church is faithful to its traditions and is at the same time conscious of its universal mission; it can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, *thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves*. (58) – (italics mine)

This issue receives a specific focus in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. First of all, the ground work is laid before spelling out the concrete norms.

The liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time, if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable.<sup>209</sup> (22)

The goal and the criterion for reform are then clearly laid down: “The Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand them with ease and take part in them fully, actively and as a community.” (22) The *Constitution* continues to lay down the openings and the limits.

Provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is preserved, provision shall be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples, especially in mission countries. (38)

This opening, however, is further widened, going beyond the Roman rite, in the opinion of commentators. “In some places and circumstances, however, an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed, and this entails greater difficulties.” (40) The initiative is left to local Bishops’ Conferences, helped by experts and experimented by special groups. (40,1-3) The grounds for such an opening beyond the Roman rite had been laid earlier in the *Constitution*: “Holy Mother Church holds all lawfully recognised rites to be of equal right and dignity.” (4) An expert, Pierre-Marie Gy, present at the Council, says: “In the prepared text the Council has simply modified in number 4 ‘lawfully existing’ into ‘lawfully recognised’, which leaves the door open to future development of new particular rites.”<sup>210</sup>

The Indian Church took this opening seriously. As a first step it proposed twelve points in the celebration of the Eucharist that touched the externals like postures, gestures, materials used: squatting by the

<sup>209</sup> My doctoral work was on this issue. See Amaladoss, M., *Do Sacraments Change? Variable and Invariable Elements in Sacramental Rites*. (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1979).

<sup>210</sup> Gy, P.M., “Situation historique de la Constitution”, in *La Liturgie après Vatican II*, Ed. By J.- Jossua and Y. Congar (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 116. (The translation is mine) See also A.G. Martimort, “Adaptation Liturgique”, *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 79 (1965) 7; J.-A. Jungmann, “Konstitution über die Heilige Liturgie: Einleitung und Kommentar”, *Lexikon für die Theologie und die Kirche*, Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, Teil I (Freiburg, 1966), 43.

celebrant instead of standing, prostrations, use of a shawl instead of the usual vestments, oil lamps instead of candles, waving flowers, incense and light, etc. These were approved by the Holy See.<sup>211</sup> An Indian Eucharistic prayer was prepared. Though it was passed by a two third majority in the assembly of Indian Bishops, the Holy See insisted that the majority must be with reference, not only to the Bishops present and voting, but to the whole Conference including those not present. A seminar on the Inspiration of Non-Biblical Scriptures concluded that they can be considered as part of a cosmic covenant preceding God's covenant with Moses and so analogically inspired.<sup>212</sup> It suggested the possibility of using them in the liturgy as a first reading to be followed by readings from the Old and New Testaments. Even before the proposal could go to the Bishops and then to the Holy See, Vatican wrote forbidding its practice. After that it was said that all liturgical experiments were over. The liturgical movement in India came to a standstill. After some years, the Indian Bishops sent another Eucharistic prayer for approval. It was not even considered and nothing at present is happening. On March 29, 1994 an Instruction "Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy: *Varietatis legitimæ*" was published. Though it refers to Nos 37-40 of the conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy in its title, it takes the 'unity of the Roman rite' as a given. Referring to the 'more radical adaptation of the liturgy' mentioned in No. 40, it is affirmed that "adaptations of this kind do not envisage a transformation of the Roman rite, but are made within the context of the Roman rite", ignoring Nos. 4 and 23. Even in these modifications, the Episcopal Conferences have no power to make decision. They have to make a proposal to the Holy See for experimentation and, after the Holy See's approval, conduct the experimentation. After which they have to report back to the Holy See which will make the final decision. (*Varietatis legitimæ*, 65-69)

Can this be considered a dialogue between the Holy See and the local churches? No wonder that the Japanese Bishops protested during the Asian Synod against the obligation to get Japanese translations of

<sup>211</sup> See D.S. Amalopavadass, *The 12 Points of Adaptation in the Liturgy and Their Commentaries*. Bangalore: NBCLC, 1981.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. D.S. Amalopavadass, *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*. Bangalore: NBCLC, 1974.

liturgical texts approved by the Holy See. The protest, of course, was ignored. Of course, John Paul II said in *Ecclesia in Asia*:

The various cultures, when refined and renewed in the light of the Gospel, can become true expressions of the one Christian faith... It is the task of the Pastors, in virtue of their charism, to guide this dialogue with discernment. Likewise, experts in sacred and secular disciplines have important roles to play in the process of inculturation. *But the process must involve the entire People of God*, since the life of the Church as a whole must show forth the faith which is being proclaimed and appropriated. (21) (italics mine)

As we can see, there is no dialogue but rather a monologue, where the local churches are told what they have to do, even while their responsibility is emphasised. The Holy See may claim to be 'universal' and culturally neutral. But as a matter of fact, by holding on to tradition, as it sees it, it is imposing a Greco-Roman-European framework, not respecting the cultural individuality and diversity of the local churches as the Second Vatican Council wanted to do.

### **Theology and Spirituality**

We can see the same thing happening in the area of theology and spirituality. In the area of theology the local churches seem to feel more free. However, the Holy See is sending out ambiguous messages. The Holy See is holding on to Scholastic theology which does not speak the language even of modern Europe, leave alone the rest of the world. John Paul II says in *Fides et Ratio*, 72:

In preaching the Gospel, Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded. Today, as the Gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds which once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation, which mean that our generation faces problems not unlike those faced by the Church in the first centuries. My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value.

But in a famous speech on “*Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections*” at the University of Regensburg, on September 12, 2006, Benedict XVI seems to say the opposite:

In the light of our experience with cultural pluralism, it is often said nowadays that the synthesis with Hellenism achieved in the early Church was a preliminary inculturation which ought not to be binding on other cultures. The later are said to have the right to return to the simple message of the New Testament prior to that inculturation, in order to inculturate it anew in their own particular milieux. *This thesis is not only false; it is coarse and lacking in precision.* The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which has already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed. True, there are elements in the evolution of the early Church which do not have to be integrated into all cultures. Nonetheless, the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between the faith and the use of human reason are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself. (italics mine)

This supposes that the Greeks have a monopoly on reason and their dialogue with faith is normative for all. It is surprising that Benedict XVI seems to make the inculturation of the faith in Greek culture a part of faith itself. This is obviously questionable. It is against the whole project of inculturation.<sup>213</sup> But in a presentation of St. Ephrem on November 28, 2007 he said:

Common opinion today supposes Christianity to be a European religion which subsequently exported the culture of this continent to other countries... Its expansion in the first centuries was both towards the West – towards the Greco-Latin world, where it later inspired European culture – and in the direction of the East, as far as Persia and India. Thus contributed to creating a specific culture in Semitic languages with an identity of its own.

However the creative theologians in Asia, Africa and Latin America have not felt bound by Scholastic theology. But the Latin American liberation theologians seem to have been successfully subdued. A number of Asian theologians have been sanctioned in various ways.

<sup>213</sup> See my book: *Beyond Inculturation. Can the Many be One?* Delhi: ISPCK, 2005.

The document *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000) is widely said to have been directed against Asian theologians. In recent years, the officials of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith have been dialoguing with the theologians in Africa and India. Hopefully, these consultations will lead to a greater understanding of the questions of the local churches.

In the area of spirituality, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith condemned Asian methods of prayer, without consulting any of the local churches. (*Christian Meditation*. Oct. 15, 1989) But *ashrams* in India and zen centres elsewhere continue to flourish. I suppose no one can tell people how to pray 'unofficially'. The whole field of physical and cosmic energy is ignored by the churches in general. That is why people flock to Pentecostal churches and oriental gurus.

Structures of dialogue, like Synods and commissions, are not absent. But they are either nominated or subtly manipulated. There is growing centralisation. Uniformity is mistaken for unity. The universal does not allow pluralism but becomes particular. Pluralism is suspected of being relativism. In recent years the Holy See seems to be organising directly, without involving the local churches, seminars to promote their pet interests like proclamation. How does this affect mission? In India, as elsewhere in Asia, the church is seen as foreign in its cultures and structures, in its financing and administration. So it loses its missionary impact dialoguing with the poor, the cultures and the religions. It is attacked in some places by fundamentalist groups. The Holy See, in fact, does not talk about an 'Indian church', but about the 'church in India', because the church is supposed to be universal. How is a dialogue between the 'universal church' and a local church possible in such a situation? What we have is really a controlling centre and branches.

But in a globalising world that is also seeing a lot of fragmentation and conflict, a coordinating and dialoguing, not a dominating, centre, can bring together the human, cultural and religious riches of all the nations and present them to the world as a viable alternative. This is actually the goal of mission: the gathering up of all things in the fullness of Christ so that God be all in all. (cf. Eph 1:3-10, Col 1:18-20; 1 Cor 15:28) But is the church itself a model of the wrong kind of globalisation?



# Religious socialisation and political involvement of Christians: The experience of basic ecclesial communities in Kinshasa

Ignace Ndongala Maduku

One of the major pastoral achievements of Cardinal Joseph-Albert Malula (1917–1989) in his role as bishop was to set up basic ecclesial communities in the diocese of Kinshasa. This visible frame of reference for inculturated pastoral care was not just a response to the opportuneness of the moment; it was also met the need to reawaken and breathe new life into the laity. In this respect the pastoral option taken by the diocese of Kinshasa clearly followed the declaration published by the bishops of Africa and Madagascar at the 1974 Synod on evangelisation (although it actually preceded the latter): “The paramount task of these communities, rooted and integrated as they are in the life of their peoples, is to spread the Gospel, set priorities in the provision of pastoral care, take the initiatives needed to fulfil the mission of the Church, pick out the traditional elements in the faith that are to be preserved and draw the necessary boundaries so that the Gospel can penetrate all spheres of life and establish itself within them.”<sup>214</sup> This ambitious aim forms the starting point for a number of reflections on both the new form of social interaction that the basic ecclesial communities have brought with them and on the political involvement of the laity.

To this end I shall first look at the political effectiveness of Church activity. I will start by introducing Cardinal Malula’s ecclesial project in order to put the emergence of basic ecclesial communities in the diocese of Kinshasa in context. I shall then look at the impact of basic ecclesial communities on the religious socialisation of the people

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<sup>214</sup> « Promouvoir l'évangélisation dans la coresponsabilité », in: *Documentation catholique*, 1664, 17 November 1974, 995-996.

of Kinshasa.<sup>215</sup> After that I will deal with the adjustments that the democratisation process has inevitably brought about in the political involvement of Christians. I shall end my remarks by drawing a number of conclusions and making some proposals.

### **The origins of basic ecclesial communities in Kinshasa**

The phenomenon of ecclesial communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo is, of course, not entirely new.<sup>216</sup> The involvement of Christianity in a society in upheaval following independence was discussed in general terms at the sixth plenary assembly of the Congolese Bishops' Conference in 1961. This required the existence of vibrant Christian communities prepared to embrace new forms of social coexistence. The diocese of Kinshasa found itself confronted by new pastoral tasks and an array of challenges in a rapidly expanding city where social life was changing fast. To meet these challenges the diocese had to go to the places where the people of Kinshasa were living their lives. It also had to take into account the various groups the people belonged to and the large number of different networks within the city. By incorporating such issues as individualisation, geographical mobility, social differentiation and functional specialisation<sup>217</sup> in his pastoral considerations, the Bishop of Kinshasa succeeded in establishing links with the natural human networks in the city. Malula resolved to restructure the parishes<sup>218</sup> and found striking words to communicate his decision: "We must explode the existing parishes and break them up into small communities on a human scale."<sup>219</sup> This was a far from idealistic notion lacking any basis in reality. It was in line with the decentralisation of the Church advocated by the Second Vatican Council. Faithful to its spirit, the Bishop of Kinshasa planned

<sup>215</sup> Kinshasa is the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

<sup>216</sup> See the report of the 6th Plenary Assembly of the Congolese Bishops' Conference: *Actes de la VIème Assemblée plénière de l'épiscopat du Congo (20 novembre – 2 décembre 1961)*, Léopoldville 1961.

<sup>217</sup> For more information on the transformation of the urban area in Kinshasa and associated problems of pastoral adjustment see León de Saint Moulin, *Visage de Kinshasa et Problèmes de pastorale*, Kinshasa 1969.

<sup>218</sup> For the relevant reflections see *Mission de l'Eglise à Kinshasa*, Kinshasa, Archdiocese of Kinshasa 1970.

<sup>219</sup> Malula, J.-A., *L'Eglise à l'heure de l'africanité*, Kinshasa 1973, 11.

to open up pastoral care and adapt it to the social changes taking place in the city. In his own words, “To decentralise Church activities, work effectively and reflect natural social structures in the structures of the Church it is vital that we develop or set up basic communities to be run by the laity.”<sup>220</sup> The Bishop of Kinshasa evidently wished to foster brotherly cooperation between priests and lay people, each according to his calling, in order to take Christ’s message into people’s lives in a more modern way, i.e. primarily in the residential areas.<sup>221</sup>

The path chosen by Malula broke with the mission of the traditional parish as it had been inherited from the missionaries. As a geographical grouping of believers that attested to the reality of the body of Christ in its Sunday meetings and other spiritual activities, the parish did not permit the formation of a community. Giving the parish back its natural dynamism and support became a constant preoccupation of the new Bishop of Kinshasa. His pastoral mission was governed by a clearly defined strategy in response to the calling of God’s Church, whose shepherd he had become: to establish a fraternal communion. This was an effective and verifiable calling underpinned by a participatory model rooted in the social and cultural reality of Kinshasa. It brought about such significant restructuring that it is justifiable to talk of a genuine ecclesial renewal. This restructuring included reorganising the parish, the laity, the liturgy and the ministries.

Let us start with the liturgy. It is an established fact that the new vision of the Church that emerged in Kinshasa gave a new meaning to the Sunday gathering, which became the task of the basic ecclesial community. It decided to establish a link between *didascalía* (catechesis), *marturia* (witness of life), *diakonia* (taking care of the needy) and the liturgy. The inclusion of *diakonia* in the ritual of the Zairian mass is, in fact, an indicator of the fraternal organisation of the Church.<sup>222</sup> In its understanding of the Word of God the Eucharistic community is, indeed, a missionary community that bears witness to its communion with Jesus Christ through its welfare and social work

<sup>220</sup> Saint Moulin, L. d., *Œuvres complètes du cardinal Malula*, Volume 4, Kinshasa 1997, 40.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Ndongala, I., “L’Eglise de Dieu qui est à Kinshasa (1979–1989). Contribution à l’étude de l’image de l’Eglise-fraternité”, in: Cheza. M. / Spijker, G.v., (eds.), *Théologiens et théologiennes dans l’Afrique d’aujourd’hui*, Paris, Yaoundé 2007, 191-193.

in the world. The reclassification of this communion changed the face of the parish. Not only did the parish as the basic pastoral unit undergo restructuring but, as a result, one of its main activities – sacramentalisation – was repositioned as a new service to society.

Meetings were held in both the basic ecclesial communities and the parishes as part of this service for a better world. Subsequently, the plan to shape the collective ethos and social conduct of the Congolese, which was first and foremost the responsibility of the Christian social elites and Catholic works, was abandoned in order to give priority to training, organising and structuring a community of dedicated Christian lay adults.<sup>223</sup> In addition, training was organised for parish monitors and meetings were held for the *bayangeli* (those responsible for the basic ecclesial communities) and the members of the core team. Mention should also be made of the training organised for the Renewal in the Spirit leaders at the Catholic faculties in Kinshasa. In addition, new lay positions were introduced in Kinshasa: the parish *Mokambi* (lay person responsible for the parish), the parish assistant and the pastoral animator.<sup>224</sup> The positions of parish assistant and pastoral animator could also be held by women.<sup>225</sup>

### Basic ecclesial communities and religious socialisation

As we have seen, the basic ecclesial communities in Kinshasa were originally organised on a brotherly relationship model. Even today, the legitimising images that govern the organisation are taken from the imagery of brotherhood. By closely observing the basic ecclesial communities and studying the statements and practices of Kinshasa's Christians it can be seen that the concept of *ndeko* or brother continues to characterise relationships in the basic ecclesial communities. This term, commonly used in a context in which the integration of the

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Ngongala Maduku, I., "L'engagement des chrétiens dans la société congolaise (RDC). Evolution de la pensée et des pratiques à Kinshasa", in: *Spiritus*, 48 (2007) Issue 189, 445-453.

<sup>224</sup> See Santedi Kinkupu, L., (ed.), *L'avenir des ministères laïcs. Enjeux ecclésiologiques et perspectives pastorales. Actes du Colloque célébrant le 20ème anniversaire de l'Institution des Ministères laïcs à Kinshasa (du 19 au 24/11/1995)*, Kinshasa 1995.

<sup>225</sup> On this topic see my article "Femmes et Hommes partenaires égaux de l'Eglise-famille de Dieu dans la réalité ecclésiale de Kinshasa?", in: *Mission de l'Eglise* 80 (2006) issue 150, Jan-Mar 2006, 67-70.

members of a society is hierarchical, points to a shift in relations between the people of Kinshasa. *Ndeko* is not used exclusively to refer to the person reborn in Christ or a brother in faith, but also to any person who, created in God's image, bears a divine likeness, regardless of age, sex, race, religion, etc. The semantic extension of the term has a practical impact because its roots lie in the ethics of brotherhood. The values and standards inherent in Malula's pastoral option were taken on board by the Christians of Kinshasa to such an extent that they included them in their liturgical celebrations (slogans, songs and rites), institutional practices (clinics, centres for the disabled), gestures (greeting) and everyday expressions (naming). All these "Christian products" were adopted by the people of Kinshasa and other followers of the Catholic faith. We will come back to this later.

The term *lisanga* applied to these human-scale communities is in itself very significant.<sup>226</sup> It has more than just a descriptive and sociological meaning. Let us attempt to trace the ecclesiology contained in the term. *Lisanga* derives from the verb *kosangana* (to meet, gather or assemble,) and means meeting or assembly.<sup>227</sup> This term, which has since become common currency in Kinshasa, is used to refer to an assembly of Christians. In the religious context, the term "lisanga" takes on an expressive meaning that places it in the same context as terms used to express communion. It appears in this sense in the credo, where it means the communion of saints (*lisanga lya basantu*). Used in a broader sense the term refers to the Christians who receive Communion through the body and blood of Christ and who are united in the one body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. The *lisanga* created here through the Holy Spirit is consistent with the body of Christ. It is, therefore, the assembly called into being by the Father: the Church in the sense of *lisanga lya bana ba Nzambe* (gathering

<sup>226</sup> The name given to these communities in Kinshasa has varied. At first they were called "basic ecclesial communities" ("Communautés ecclésiales de base", CEB), later they were known as "living ecclesial communities" ("Communautés ecclésiales vivantes", CEV) and finally as "living basic ecclesial communities" ("Communautés ecclésiales vivantes de base", CEVB).

<sup>227</sup> In the political vocabulary of the DRC *lisanga* means assembly, association, party or parliament. See Tumbwe, K., "Le français, langue de la politique au Zaïre? Observation du langage politique depuis le début du processus de transition vers la démarche", in: D'Ans, A.-M., (ed.), *Langage et politique. Les mots de la démocratie dans les pays du Sud de l'espace francophone*, Paris 1995, 80.

of the children of God). The religious vocabulary of Catholics and the life of their communities create a link between these two entities (*lisanga*–basic ecclesial community and *lisanga*–Church).

The experience of the Church has shown the extent to which the *lisanga* is a place for learning and embracing a new form of social interaction. As such it serves to deepen and spread the faith and to integrate it into everyday life. It defines the basic ecclesial community as a place of evangelisation where a sense of responsibility for different Church affairs can be fostered. It is an agent of inculturation and a vehicle for integral human development – an expression of the Church as a “sign of the presence of Christ in the world”.<sup>228</sup> It should be added that the basic ecclesial communities play a part in, and even drive, social change.

As places of community development the basic ecclesial communities promote socialisation based on a number of values that contribute to the emergence of a new form of social coexistence: tolerance, brotherhood, hospitality, mutual support, solidarity and gratuitousness. This socialisation supports discussion, dialogue, participation and the election of leaders. It requires an ethic based on “differential brotherhood”, which promotes differences and combines them in brotherhood by bridging blood ties, language and ethnic barriers, social differences, political affiliations and religious denominations. One particular mechanism employed to cement this brotherhood is the ritual greeting used by Christians in Kinshasa.

The Christian greeting in Kinshasa consists of three parts that include the terms peace, brotherhood and joy. The arrangement of the terms in the form of a climax creates a reciprocal relationship between the speaker(s) and the person(s) they are greeting.<sup>229</sup> The social basis for this relationship is not simply a polite formula or

<sup>228</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Das Dekret über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche Ad Gentes*, in: Rahner, K./Vorgrimler, H.(ed.), *Kleines Konzilskompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums mit Einführungen und ausführlichem Sachregister*, Freiburg i. Br. 1982, 624-627, no. 15.

<sup>229</sup> The greeting builds to a climax as follows:

<i>1st speaker</i>	<i>2nd speaker</i>
Peace (boboto)	Brotherhood (bondeko)
Brotherhood (bondeko)	Joy (esengo)

random wish, but a responsibility that has its origins in baptism. As an expression of evangelical values, the greeting trilogy unites the Jewish greeting (peace) with the Greek greeting (joy). These two greetings embrace brotherhood as a positive salutation. Analysis shows that the greeting used by the Christians of Kinshasa, by combining the wish for brotherhood with the wish for peace and joy, actually declines conviviality by turning peacemaking into a requirement of Christian life. The three terms of the trilogy “peace, brotherhood, joy” deserve particular attention, since they are based on an implicit prior expectation, which is evidence of a thematic cohesion. It should be emphasised that the semantic presupposition of this trilogy accords brotherhood a central role. The creative expansion of the basic ecclesial communities has resulted in an extension of the trilogy to include love, work, justice and other concepts, depending on the circumstances.

Seen from the above perspective, the commonplace gesture of greeting acquires a pragmatic value in Kinshasa both in terms of identification and integration. It is an expression of a very special form of coexistence which could have an impact on today’s disintegrating social life. Here, the Church’s field of action intersects dynamics and structures that originate in politics, are dependent on the economy, and communicate values. For Cardinal J.-A. Malula, taking these dynamics and structures into account means seeing the fight for justice as one of the primary challenges of the Gospel and, therefore, of the Church’s mission. It is no coincidence that this approach to the Church’s mission emerged after the 1971 Synod on justice and the 1974 Synod on evangelisation. Indeed, it would seem that, in the wake of these two synods, Church–world dialogue and welfare work became an integral part of missionary activities. This is a useful perspective that confronts evangelisation with economic and political issues and obliges it to consider the ethical dimension. Faithful to this aspect of the mission, the Bishop of Kinshasa made the development of an intensive, pervasive reawakening of the laity a pastoral priority. To avoid any misunderstandings, let me make it quite clear that, despite the remarkable progress achieved by the Synod of the diocese of Kinshasa, the basic ecclesial communities, the parishes and the diocese were not the scene of any ecclesial social analysis or political involvement. Eschewing any activities with a political impact, the Christians in Kinshasa restricted themselves to

social and charitable work. In general, the basic ecclesial communities in Kinshasa remained mired in a non-political culture and had very little influence on political life in the DRC.

### **The transition from the social to the political sphere**

As numerous theologians have remarked, the communion ecclesiology of the last Council promised a new look at values which, set in a global context, would give due consideration to social, cultural, economic and political issues. It has already been pointed out that these values found an anchor in Kinshasa in the basic ecclesial communities. Nevertheless, these communities – apart from a few cautious attempts to open up to the outside world – have retained their ecclesiocentric character. This can be explained in part by the context in which they were created. When the basic ecclesial communities in Kinshasa first saw the light of day, the dictatorship was at its height and there was a return to “authenticité” in politics. The driving force behind the formation of the basic ecclesial communities was of a religious and cultural character. The integration of their members was planned and implemented by means of their participation in religious meetings and practices. This helps to explain why the basic ecclesial communities excelled in the practice of solidarity, concentrating in particular on alleviating material hardship. This is very much to their credit. Nevertheless, it must also be said that the basic ecclesial communities did not dare to address the causes of the social marginalisation of the population. They were conspicuous rather for their demobilising, apolitical stance, accompanied by a blinkered focus on charitable works. Could it have been any other way, given that the communities reproduced the structures and options of the parish? This is an important question, because the ethic of brotherhood that underpins religious socialisation, as it has been practised in the basic ecclesial communities, calls for a rediscovery of the political scope of the Christian message.

It is clear that in the initial stages of their development the basic ecclesial communities were imbued with a spirit of brotherhood that was expressed in various spontaneous, natural and formal demonstrations of solidarity (support for families in mourning, financial support for the poor, the needy and priests, support for widows, prisoners and children accused of witchcraft, etc.). As we shall see, these practices

created a sense of meaning and made it possible to address the social, economic and environmental challenges of the day. I shall restrict myself here to economic issues.

Thanks to the religious solidarity created by the new social links, the basic ecclesial communities were able to turn their attention to economic problems. The law of the market and a price explosion were in the process of demolishing social cohesion. This is something that should not be forgotten. The “realistic pricing” operation of 1978 provided a practical opportunity to demonstrate what a brotherhood can be when confronted with an economic problem. The establishment of a Christian community based on brotherhood enabled the basic ecclesial communities to reduce the large number of intermediaries and end speculation on the price of bread. The system set up in the basic ecclesial communities provided an alternative to a profit-based society. I will not go into the economic impact of the “realistic pricing” operation here, but from my point of view it was a radical act that proved an effective antidote to speculation and a utilitarian approach to social relationships. Beginning with the sale of bread, the operation quickly extended to other staple foods such as rice, cassava, beans, etc. and was eventually referred to as the “food bank”.<sup>230</sup>

Cardinal Malula also encouraged initiatives designed to free the local Church in Kinshasa from its dependence on the outside world. These initiatives, which stimulated practices of solidarity, also had an influence on the life of the basic ecclesial communities. Two of them, which arose from celebrations of the Eucharist and accorded a central role to brotherhood, deserve special mention: Pro Familia Dei and the Solidarity and Sharing Fund.<sup>231</sup> Finally, for the sake of completeness, reference should also be made to the numerous initiatives that sprang up in the name of brotherhood: the pastoral activity for the poor called *Ekolo ya Bondeko*, the nutrition and health centres, and the *Bondeko* villages (training and rehabilitation centres for the disabled).

Although the basic ecclesial communities evidently play a big part in the religious socialisation of the people of Kinshasa, it should be

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<sup>230</sup> For details of these projects see Kalonji Ngoyi, N., “Les communautés de base dans l’archidiocèse de Kinshasa”, in: *Spiritus* 37 (1996) issue 143, 132-136, especially 133.

<sup>231</sup> These two works were financed from special collections to meet certain needs of the priests and nuns in the diocese and to help the poor and needy.

remembered that this socialisation does not provide any incentive to engage in political activity. The lay movements and associations and the basic ecclesial communities are primarily active in the social sphere, without extending their work to the political arena. At their level, the basic ecclesial communities reflect the role of the institutional Church, which is to act as a tribune and provide relief. Since involvement in everyday political affairs is subject to decisions taken by the episcopate, the laity are absolved of any social responsibility of a political nature that could make the government face up to its responsibilities. Similarly, they are required to steer clear of any political involvement that would bring in the Church. The best evidence of this is the censorship by the episcopate of the prophetism of the “Christian marchers”.<sup>232</sup>

As pointed out above, the basic ecclesial communities therefore remain places of pastoral innovation and social welfare work. It is now time to see how they can develop into places that offer a message of liberation for society and can thus lay the foundations of a new social and political order.

### **Elements for a preparatory stage of political involvement**

According to a common belief, the primary mission of the Church is essentially religious in character. However, it should not be forgotten that this mission also has a socio-political dimension. I shall not get involved here in the discussion on “the Church keeps out of politics”. Suffice it to say that hiding behind the neutrality of the Church is nothing more than a thinly veiled abdication of responsibility inspired by the “demon of purity” and reinforced by the desire to “keep one’s hands clean”. This neutrality, which is merely a camouflage and an insult to reality, is detrimental to Jesus’ cause and benefits those who hold the sabre (the sceptre or the rod). An alliance is thus forged between altar and throne, to the great disappointment of those lost along the way, bowed down, battered and broken by social injustice. As R. Mehl observes, “[...] a Church that is, in effect, hand in glove

<sup>232</sup> It is generally felt that the bishops paid only lip service in their support for the victims of President Mobutu’s henchmen because they had not authorised the Christian march of 16 February 1992. The fact of the matter is that the march of hope did not give rise to a crisis between believers and the state, but rather to a crisis between believers and some bishops.

with those in power, whose value system it accepts at least, can never be a Church of the poor, the downtrodden and the outcasts. However much it declares its political neutrality at all the levels of its hierarchy – out of a conscious or unconscious desire to avoid embarrassing those in power – that neutrality in itself constitutes a political act of allegiance.”<sup>233</sup> The accuracy of this observation leads me to the conclusion that the Church’s professed neutrality ultimately prevents it from completing its mission.

In my view, there can be no doubt that in organising social relations based on the model of the family and brotherhood, the Church, which through its work attempts to anticipate the Kingdom of God heralded by Jesus, must not neglect the political dimension. Since the Church wishes to contribute to the construction of a humane and brotherly, divinely ordained world and therefore aims to achieve justice, liberty, peace and reconciliation in the here and now, it must regard itself as a prophet. The first African Synod moves in the direction of this prophetism in stating, “The Church [...] must continue to exercise her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless.”<sup>234</sup> How can such a requirement be fulfilled in today’s reality? How can it be reflected in day-to-day activities? What means are available to the Church in Kinshasa to put this requirement into practice? I shall attempt to answer these questions, which are clearly of particular interest for the welfare work of the Church.

As a part of a society in crisis, the Church in the DRC is currently affected by the convulsions of the country’s democratisation process. The basic ecclesial communities in Kinshasa, which primarily concentrate on prayer and social work, have become an institution for social integration that plays a key role in ensuring cohesion and a way of life that bears the seal of brotherhood. In doing so, they have subjected themselves to the status quo, adopting a relatively conservative position. Hence they have not become places of social

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<sup>233</sup> Mehl, R., “Les groupes informels dans l’Eglise. Un point de vue protestant”, in: Metz, R./Schlick, J., (eds.), *Les groupes informels dans l’Eglise. 2ème Colloque du Cerdic. Strasbourg: 13-15 mai 1971*, Strasbourg 1971, 237.

<sup>234</sup> *Post-synodal apostolic exhortation ECCLESIA IN AFRICA of the Holy Father John Paul II to the bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious, and all the lay faithful on the Church in Africa and its evangelising mission towards the year 2000*, Announcements of the Apostolic See, No. 123, Bonn 1995, 50, no. 70. (emphasis in original).

analysis where the problems and upheavals mentioned in the bishops' declaration are examined.<sup>235</sup> We can, therefore, say for certain that the religious foundation of the basic ecclesial communities does not lead to an institutional political involvement that could be described as protest or opposition. Here the following remarks made by Léon de Saint Moulin spring to mind: "[...] the role allocated to the basic ecclesial communities, which have mostly been organised as neighbourhood communities, undoubtedly exceeds their possibilities. They are a suitable instrument for dealing with neighbourhood problems, including the Christianisation of mourning and various aspects of education, but on their own they do not have the necessary strength to promote justice in the world or to fight against social structures that crush the poor."<sup>236</sup> These remarks are undeniably true. Nevertheless, one should not go so far as to absolve the members of the basic ecclesial communities of any responsibility for socio-political integration. In this respect I feel there is a need to review the way in which basic ecclesial communities are run.

First of all, it should be noted that the basic ecclesial communities in Kinshasa draw the same boundaries as the parishes. This applies, in particular, to the difficulty involved in a liberating recognition of the Gospel message and to the limited potential for innovation among the believers. The way the communities are run at the moment, which still retains some remnants of the paternalistic model of authority, rests on a few members in leadership positions. This is a regrettable inadequacy characteristic of the empirical approach to the establishment of the basic ecclesial communities. It reinforces the clericalisation of lay people in positions of responsibility and encourages the transformation of basic ecclesial communities into parishes.

Attention must also be drawn to the dependence of the basic ecclesial communities on the *Lisanga* newspaper.<sup>237</sup> This dependence prevents

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<sup>235</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>236</sup> Saint Moulin, L.d., "L'évangélisation en profondeur dans les écrits du Cardinal Malula. Pertinence pour la théologie africaine". The text will appear in *Mélanges L. Bertsch*.

<sup>237</sup> This newspaper is published by the Archdiocese's commission for basic ecclesial communities. It deals with its chosen topics using the "see, judge and act" method. Although *Lisanga* is recognised and appreciated in all parishes, I feel it is time for the current editorial team to be replaced. An interdisciplinary team with people from many

new interpretations of the Gospel and confines the communities to an orthodoxy for the purposes of controlled inculturation. Reinforcing the autonomy of the basic ecclesial communities in their choice of topics for coverage would certainly prove beneficial. It would transform the communities from an object into a subject capable of working for social change. In saying this, it is not my intention to ignore or diminish the claim to leadership currently asserted by lay persons in respect of the management and aspirations of the communities. I simply wish to point out the necessity of training the laity to become pioneers of change. In the provision of this training, however, due heed must be paid to raising awareness among Christians and transferring responsibility to them. At all events it is quite clear that the assumption of responsibility is indispensable at a time when the Church is helping to consolidate the democratic process in the DRC. The Church's involvement in civic and electoral education in recent years lends topicality and a certain sense of urgency to the participation of the basic ecclesial communities in establishing the rule of law. To develop this line of thinking, I would suggest turning the basic ecclesial communities into political matrices that can reactivate the missionary conscience of Christians, revive the prophetic drive of the baptised and remobilise the resources available within civil society. In short, basic ecclesial communities should be places of training in the political culture of citizenship, change and transformation. This multifaceted training is especially important, because it can contribute to a transition from the social to the political and, therefore, to the emergence of a civic sphere and ultimately to the reordering of the political system.

## Conclusions

For all its brevity I hope this presentation has succeeded in outlining the way in which Church activities must be extended to encompass political involvement in the current process of democratisation in the DRC. Hitherto, the basic ecclesial communities have concentrated on ecclesiocentric and ritual issues. In future, political issues will have to be included. Although the Church does not exercise any political

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different areas would provide a valuable service for the basic ecclesial communities. Its task would no longer be restricted to editing the newspaper, but could be extended to training members of the basic ecclesial communities in social analysis.

power, it must strengthen its internal mechanisms and acquire political weight with the help of the members of the basic ecclesial communities. By providing guiding principles on the practical conduct of Christians in line with the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church, the latter must help to transform Christians into social and political players in the public sphere. I have already said that I consider it the responsibility of the basic ecclesial communities to raise political awareness by moulding active Christians and political subjects who will be a part of tomorrow's civil society.

Past developments have shown that there is a need to improve the level of political education, training and knowledge of Christians. If the Church takes this task seriously, it will have to abandon the empiricism and instrumental perspective that are characteristic of the basic ecclesial community as an institution. More than 40 years after their creation, the basic ecclesial communities need to stop acting like one more cog in the bureaucratic machine of the diocese.<sup>238</sup> To tap their potential for innovation, they must be treated as more than just receptacles for ideas and programmes drawn up by specialists trapped in their own certainties. I believe it is time for the Church to recognise the potential of the basic ecclesial communities within its hierarchy. It would benefit from the transformation of the basic communities into more structured laboratories for prophetic action, which would enable them to develop into an alternative social body, into places for training in democratic culture and a different form of social interaction.<sup>239</sup>

Using these ecclesial cells as a basis, the Church can lay the ground for a humane society that is worthy of the name. Moreover, it must ensure the emergence in the basic ecclesial communities of a committed civil society that will resolutely develop new group structures that are open to practical involvement. A creative invention of this kind, which could contribute to the rebuilding of the DRC, requires Christians to undergo three innovative forms of training (in addition to prayer and the spreading of God's word): social analysis, ethical reflection and

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<sup>238</sup> See René Otayek, "L'Eglise catholique au Burkina Faso. Un contre-pouvoir à contre temps de l'histoire?", in: Constantin, F. / Coulon. Ch., *Religion et transition démocratique en Afrique*, Paris 1997, 227.

<sup>239</sup> On this point see Regan, J.E., *Catéchèse d'adultes le pourquoi et le comment*, Brussels, Montreal 2008.

action. This will require objective information on the social realities and the crisis in the DRC as well as a general change in attitudes. Would not such training be in line with the task assigned to the Church by the African bishops? Let us recall that this noble task was: “to work on transforming the city”<sup>240</sup>. This is undoubtedly also the mission of the basic ecclesial communities.

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<sup>240</sup> Closing message of the bishops at the first African Synod, in: Maurice Cheza, *Le synode africain. Histoire et textes*, Paris 1996, 226.



## The universal Church as the network principle of the local churches

Klaus Vellguth

What does the Church have in common with Starbucks? A comparison between the Church and the coffeehouse company is inevitably misleading, as indeed any comparison appears 'lopsided', depending on the individual perspective, because the use of analogies naturally refers to a single *tertium comparationis*. Be that as it may, the purpose of such a comparison at the beginning of this article is to serve as a provocation and a challenge in order to stimulate out-of-the-box thinking and encourage a new look at the role of the universal Church in its dialogue with the local churches.

People travelling to New York, Rio de Janeiro, Hamburg, Manila or Chiang Mai are bound to come across a Starbucks coffeehouse somewhere. It is one of the symbols of a globalising world, interpreted by some as evidence of American / European cultural imperialism and welcomed by others as a valued institution that is available internationally. Irrespective of the assessment arrived at, which will inevitably comprise a subjective element, the astonishing fact is that Starbucks customers can be sure of enjoying the same experience anywhere in the world. No matter whether they are in a Starbucks café in Europe, America, Asia or Australia, they will find an identical product presented in the same setting. Starbucks cafés always have the same look, the colour scheme in the rooms is similar, the furniture is identical, the uniform worn by the baristas is standardised, and even the background music sounds the same in Seattle as it does in Seoul. A multinational group, Starbucks is a successful global player similar to Coca Cola, Microsoft, McDonalds, etc.

Starbucks is seen as a symbol of globalisation. Given that the Catholic Church has been around as a global player for much longer than Starbucks and co., it should not feel upset by a comparison with this multinational company or being questioned as to a) whether it

might not itself benefit from a certain degree of uniformity in this age of globalisation; b) how much unity (which the Church asks for again and again in the second epiclesis of the Eucharistic prayer) in diversity is appropriate at the beginning of the third millennium; and c) how much unity can be established in diversity. Let me make it clear right away that we are not talking here about uniformity or separatism, but about viable cooperation, true to the spirit of the Gospel, between local churches that see themselves as comprising the one Catholic Church. In the age of globalisation, greater significance inevitably attaches to communication between local churches that are gaining steadily in self-confidence, in a positive sense. The issue is one of a lively exchange between the churches in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Australia and Oceania, North America and Europe. Fashioning unity in diversity within the Church ultimately means overcoming all forms of religious monadism in the local churches, not stewing in your own juice but looking beyond your own nose in order to find out more about matters of life and faith experienced by other men and women in different, but possibly comparable, cultural contexts.<sup>241</sup> It is also important to heighten awareness of the fact that the relationship between unity and diversity is all too often seen solely from an internal perspective. A Church that regards itself as having a mission, however, must also consider this relationship in terms of how, for all its potential heterogeneity, it can preserve the homogeneity it needs – and, indeed, can be perceived from outside as exhibiting a certain homogeneity. Uniformity / external discernibility, on the one hand, and the Church as a global learning community, on the other – that is what is needed to experience the universal Church today in an awareness of one's own Catholicism, which can be construed as generous and extensive. It is a question, therefore, of the relationship between the local church and the universal Church, of unity and diversity, of dissociation and distinction. Ultimately we are talking about nothing less than a viable, contemporary, ecclesiological understanding of Catholicism.

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<sup>241</sup> Shortly before his death Cardinal Franz König (1905-2004) said that intra-Church dialogue was essential for a successful dialogue between the Church and the world: "Dialogue between the Church and the world can only be successful if it is accompanied by an intra-Church dialogue. Regrettably, interest in this intra-Church dialogue appears to be waning nowadays." (quoted from: Waldenfels, H., "Dialog in Freundschaft", in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 137 (2012) issue 1, 1-2, 1.

The purpose of this contribution is to give some thought to how the relationship between local churches and the universal Church can be conceptualised. I shall, therefore, begin by examining Joseph Ratzinger's ecclesiology and then explore the theological discussion between Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper on this issue. Finally, proceeding from the 'missiological axiom' of contextuality, I shall contribute to the debate by making a proposal for a sustainable interpretation of the universal Church.

### **The Church as the Body of Christ in Joseph Ratzinger's ecclesiology**

In 1954, Joseph Ratzinger published the doctoral thesis he had submitted in Munich three years previously. Entitled *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*<sup>242</sup> (*The People and the House of God in Augustine's Doctrine of the Church*) it involved an inclusive use of the metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ. I refer to this early work by Ratzinger at this point by way of an introduction to the significance of the Body of Christ metaphor within the ecclesiology of the later Council theologian, since it reveals programmatic aspects of the ecclesiological work of the man who is now Pope Benedict XVI.<sup>243</sup>

In his doctoral thesis Ratzinger only touches on the image of the Church as the House of God, because he deems it to be nothing more than a means of visual illustration. By contrast, he examines in great detail the People of God concept in Augustine's doctrine, which he considers to be a central ecclesiological concept. However, Ratzinger does not regard the People of God metaphor as adequate to appropriately describe the multi-dimensional character of the Church. He says that the metaphor can only be properly understood if it is interpreted in the context of the Body of Christ metaphor. Still a young theologian at this time, he saw the Church as the People of God "only in and through the Body of Christ"<sup>244</sup>. He explains this interpretational reference by

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<sup>242</sup> Ratzinger, J., *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, St. Ottilien 1954. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens. Kirche als Communio*, Augsburg 2002, 68f.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. Heim, M.H., *Joseph Ratzinger – Kirchliche Existenz und existentielle Theologie. Ekklesiologische Grundlinien unter dem Anspruch von Lumen gentium*, Frankfurt 2004, 232ff.

<sup>244</sup> Ratzinger, J., *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, o cit. 14.

pointing out that the unity of the Church in Augustine ecclesiology is systematically derived from the Body of Christ mystery and not primarily from the constitution of the individual Church members and their fellowship.<sup>245</sup> Ratzinger stresses that in Augustine's deliberations on the Church as the People of God the sacramental nature of the Church is conceived as being beyond pure realism (which focuses on the constitution and realisation of the Church) and beyond pure idealism (which focuses on the ideal of the Church). While conceding that Augustine detaches the idealistic notion of the *ecclesia sancta* from the *ecclesia catholica*, Ratzinger refutes the accusation levelled against the *doctor ecclesiae* by Donatists and, in modern times, by liberal Protestant theologians that Augustine advocated a dual concept of the Church, because according to Augustine it is not up to the Church "to expel sinners, because it is not its task to cast off the fleshly body but the task of the Lord, who will bring them back to life and give them their true salvation figure."<sup>246</sup> Ratzinger also finds theological confirmation of this in the works of Augustine. Hence the Church is a *corpus permixtum* that cannot be clearly divided into the sinful and the holy. Nevertheless, he refutes the proposition that the Church is consequently a non-specific, ideal being. The Church is manifest in the *communio sanctorum* in the context of the Eucharist.

Traces that are crucial to an understanding of the Body of Christ ecclesiology can be found in Ratzinger's exposition on the interpretation of the Church as a sacramental community. He points out that Augustine concurs with the interpretation of the early Church, according to which the Church experiences sacramental union in the form of the Eucharist and thus itself becomes the Body of Christ. Accordingly, those who are associated with the Church in the Eucharistic communion are the members of the one Body of Christ.<sup>247</sup> He thus opposes any form of salvific individualism and defines the Church as a salvific communion<sup>248</sup>: "Hence the union of man with

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<sup>245</sup> Cf. Wenz, G., "Die große Gottesidee 'Kirche'. Joseph Ratzinger über Katholizismus, Orthodoxie und Reformation", in: *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 56 (2005), 450.

<sup>246</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *o cit.* 146.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 208.

<sup>248</sup> Ratzinger thus makes a clear distinction between Augustine's interpretation of salvation and the Lutheran interpretation, which reveals traces of salvific individualism.

Christ does not happen simply between the believer and God; the path to the Spirit of Christ is never a direct one, but can only ever be through entry into the body of Christ, into the Church. This is the real way in which man becomes one with Christ: by becoming one with the Church.”<sup>249</sup> This thesis is a recurrent feature of Ratzinger’s later work; the Church can only be understood in its sacramental dimension, since it represents the sacrament of the existence of God in the world. He takes up the understanding of the early Church here in that the contradiction between empiricism and idealism as an erroneous alternative is overcome, reference being made instead to sacramentality as the essential characteristic of the Church. Essentially, the Body of Christ ecclesiology is not about a form of mystical introspection<sup>250</sup> but the Church’s experience of faith; it is about celebrating in the Eucharist the sacramental presence, i.e. the experienced real presence of Christ.<sup>251</sup>

Ratzinger thus locates the Body of Christ experience in the conduct of the liturgy, in which the Church prays to Christ and with Him to God. “The Church service is where the essence of the Church assumes a real appearance; without that manifestation there can in reality be no talk of the essence of the Church.”<sup>252</sup> He thereby lays a foundation (and one that is critical with respect to the ecumenical dialogue) of his official theological understanding. As the Body of Christ, the People of God are bound to the sacramental structure of the apostolic succession, as this symbolises the unity of the Church. However, Ratzinger qualifies this by stating that “account again needs to be taken of a dual function: that of unity with the Roman successorship and that of the catholicity of the entire communication community.”<sup>253</sup> In doing so he points out

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<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.* 210.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. here the interpretation of mysticism / pietism, which does not see belonging to the Body of Christ in ecclesiological terms but rather as the mystical identification with the only-begotten Son or, going beyond that even, as included in God (because Christian mysticism in many respects just about accepts a Christological mediation but rejects an ecclesial-pneumatological mediation).

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Heim, M.H., *o cit.* 255.

<sup>252</sup> Wenz, G., *o cit.* 452.

<sup>253</sup> Ratzinger, J., *o cit.*, 319. Cf. the thoughts of George Augustin on the ecclesiocentricity of Christian theology. Responding to the deliberations of Hans Urs von Balthasar, according to which there is an inseparable practical, theoretical and ethical unity between Trinity, Christology and the Church, Augustin emphasises the dual relatedness of the Church:

that in the work of Augustine “in accordance with the overall situation, the call for unity with the entire *catholica* comes more to the fore than unity with Rome.”<sup>254</sup> Summing up his thoughts on the sacramental nature of the Church he notes: “As the communion of the sacrament it is tangible. However, its tangibility is not that of the empirical, but of the sacramental which, as the sign of the covenant, is always more than a mere fact, a mere thing. As the sacrament, the Church is never without an institutional form, but it can never be reduced to its tangible legal structure. To comprehend the nature of the Augustine *Civitas Dei* one needs to grasp the difference between the idealistic and the pneumatological, between the sacramental and the empirical. Only then can one approach the special reality, a description of which has been attempted here.”<sup>255</sup> Benedict XVI has repeatedly drawn attention to this distinction, most recently during his visit to Germany in 2011.

### **The relationship between the universal Church and local churches**

The ecclesiological foundation on which Joseph Ratzinger stands, expressed in the reflections formulated in his doctoral thesis, constitutes the basis for his later theological thoughts and activities. This is evident from his dispute with Walter Kasper about the relationship between the universal Church and the local churches as well as the status of the “divine idea of the Church”.

In June 1992, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the document *On Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communio, Communionis Notio* as a contribution to ecclesiological clarification. The background to this was the observation that, in the interpretation of the understanding of *communio*, there had been a foreshortening of the conciliar concept of *communio*, especially with

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“The question about the grounds for, and the nature of, the Church can only be answered by reference to Jesus Christ. On the one hand, there is the question of the relatedness, the relativity of the Church to Jesus and, on the other, the relatedness of Christ to the form of the Church. The true form of the Church only manifests itself when it is seen in its dual transcendence: in its unique relationship with the universal experience of mankind and its unique relationship with Christ.” (George Augustin, *Gott eint – trennt Christus? Die Einmaligkeit und Universalität Jesu Christi als Grundlage einer christlichen Theologie der Religionen ausgehend vom Ansatz Wolfhart Pannenberg*, Paderborn 1993, 359).

<sup>254</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *loc. cit.*, 319.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII.

regard to the ecclesiastical concepts of the People of God, the Body of Christ and the sacrament.<sup>256</sup> It had also been ascertained that, not least in the interpretation of *Lumen Gentium* 23, numerous theologians had a tendency to advocate “self-sufficiency” on the part of the local churches and to see the universal Church merely as the product of the association of individual local churches. In its document the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith pointed to the “ontological and temporal transience” of the universal Church in its essential mystery prior to the particular churches<sup>257</sup>, which was regarded by many theologians as a misinterpretation of the statements made by the Council.<sup>258</sup>

The intention of the document, which was to counter any detheologisation of the concept of the Church, met with a fundamentally positive response. This applied not so much to the reflections of the ecclesologist himself as to the general understanding of the Church in the public perception. “Accordingly, the Church is seen primarily as a ‘provider of religious services’, to which certain religious, teaching and social skills are attributed, but whose theological mystery remains largely concealed and forgotten.”<sup>259</sup> To this the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith counterposes in Article 5f an understanding of the Church that cannot deny its theological origins – particularly with respect to the ecclesiological foundations already touched on in Ratzinger’s dissertation: “Ecclesial communion, in which each

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<sup>256</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, J., *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens. Kirche als Communio*, o cit., 69: “At this juncture the close connection that exists between the term *communio* and the understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ becomes apparent. Fitting into this same context are related images, such as that of Christ as the true vine. All these Biblical terms illuminate once again the origins of the Christian community of Christ. The ‘Christian community’ cannot be explained in a horizontal, essentially sociological manner. The relationship with the Lord, the origin in Him and the dependence on Him are the condition for its existence. Indeed, one might even say that the Church is by its very nature a relationship, one that is inspired by the love of Christ, which in turn establishes a new relationship among people.”

<sup>257</sup> The term ‘particular church’ is often used as a synonym for ‘local church’. Medard Kehl proposes that the term ‘particular church’ should be replaced by the term ‘individual church’, particularly in view of the relationship between the universal Church and the particular church. Cf. Kehl, M., “Der Disput der Kardinäle. Zum Verhältnis von Universalikirche und Ortskirchen”, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 128 (2003) issue. 5, 222.

<sup>258</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 219.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 222f.

individual is introduced by faith and by Baptism, has its root and centre in the Blessed Eucharist. Indeed, Baptism is an incorporation into a body that the risen Lord builds up and keeps alive through the Eucharist, so that this body can truly be called the Body of Christ. The Eucharist is the creative force and source of communion among the members of the Church, precisely because it unites each one of them with Christ himself. 'Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread' (1 Cor. 10,17). Hence, the Pauline expression *the Church is the Body of Christ* means that the Eucharist, in which the Lord gives us his Body and transforms us into one Body, is where the Church expresses herself permanently in most essential form. While present everywhere, she is yet only *one*, just as Christ is *one*.<sup>260</sup> This line of argument shows that the statement made by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith bears clear traces of the hand of Joseph Ratzinger.

### **A Church as the head of the churches?**

Elsewhere the document issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith deals with the relationship between the universal Church and particular churches and, in doing so, refers to the image of the Church as the Body of Christ.<sup>261</sup> The Deutero-Pauline interpre-

<sup>260</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as communion*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 107, Bonn 1992, 8-9, no. 5f.

<sup>261</sup> In the following dispute reference is made, in particular, to Article 9 of the document issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which reads: "In order to grasp the true meaning of the analogical application of the term *communion* to the particular Churches taken as a whole, one must bear in mind above all that the particular Churches, insofar as they are "part of the one Church of Christ", have a special relationship of "mutual inferiority" with the whole, that is, with the universal Church, because in every particular Church "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active". For this reason, "the universal Church cannot be conceived as the sum of the particular Churches, or as a federation of particular Churches". It is not the 'result' of the communion of the Churches, but, in its essential mystery, it is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular Church.

Indeed, according to the Fathers, ontologically, the Church-mystery, the Church that is one and unique, precedes creation, and gives birth to the particular Churches as her daughters. She expresses herself in them; she is the mother and not the product of the

tation of the image of the body and its members is taken up and the following explanation offered: “As the very idea of the Body of the Churches calls for the existence of a Church that is Head of the Churches, which is precisely the Church of Rome, “foremost in the universal communion of charity”, so too the unity of the Episcopate involves the existence of a Bishop who is Head of the Body or College of Bishops, namely the Roman Pontiff.”<sup>262</sup>

This formulation articulates the priority of the Church of Rome over the other churches, which is apparent in the choice of words. Yves Congar has established that in the history of the Church there are certain key terms used to describe the supremacy of the Church of Rome: “caput, mater, cardo, fons, fundamentum. They express the same thought: the Church of Rome is the head, whose members receive life and instruction from it; she is the mother and the others her daughters, who are raised by her (disciplina)”.<sup>263</sup>

Without wishing to question the primacy of the Bishop of Rome at the heart of the College of Bishops, Walter Kasper criticised the position taken by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith because it meant, firstly, that the biblical and patristic metaphor of the

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particular Churches. Furthermore, the Church is manifested, *temporally*, on the day of the Pentecost in the community of the one hundred and twenty gathered around Mary and the Twelve Apostles, the representatives of the one unique Church and the founders-to-be of the local Churches, who have a mission directed to the world: from the first the Church *speaks all languages*.

From the Church, which in its origins and its first manifestation is universal, have arisen the different local Churches, as particular expressions of the one unique Church of Jesus Christ. Arising within and out of the universal Church, they have their ecclesiality in it and from it. Hence the formula of the Second Vatican Council: *The Church in and formed out of the Churches (Ecclesia in et ex Ecclesiis)*, is inseparable from this other formula: *The Churches in and formed out of the Church (Ecclesiae in et ex Ecclesiis)*. Clearly the relationship between the universal Church and the particular Churches is a mystery, and cannot be compared to that which exists between the whole and the parts in a purely human group or society.” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *o cit.*, 10-11 [(italics in the original)]).

<sup>262</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as communion*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 107, Bonn 1992. (Italics in the original).

<sup>263</sup> Congar, Y., *Die Lehre von der Kirche. Von Augustinus bis zum abendländischen Schisma (HDG III, 3c)*, Freiburg 1971, 57f.

Church as the body and Christ as its head was being used<sup>264</sup> to draw structural and pragmatic consequences and, secondly, to identify the theological concept of the universal Church with the empirical Church of Rome.<sup>265</sup>

Ratzinger refutes Kasper's accusation, which indeed cannot be explicitly substantiated in the document issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (although it probably can implicitly by the use of metaphors coloured by theological history) and emphasises the "temporal and ontological precedence" of the universal Church over the particular churches.<sup>266</sup> He justifies this position by stating that the Early Fathers took up the rabbinical theology of the pre-existence of the Torah and transferred it to the Church, which did not come about by accident in the course of history but was part of God's plan of salvation. Responding to the objections levelled against such a precedence Ratzinger writes: "They strike me as only being possible if one no longer can or wishes to perceive the grand divine idea of the Church – perhaps out of sheer desperation at its inadequacy on earth. If that is the case, the Church appears to be a product of theological enthusiasm and all that remains is the empirical structure of the churches with their cooperation and conflicts. But that, in turn, means that the Church ceases to be a theological issue. If the Church can only be perceived in the form of human organisations, all that remains, indeed, is hopelessness."<sup>267</sup> Later Ratzinger will go on to state that in

<sup>264</sup> Kasper writes: "The formula ('the Church in and formed out of the Church') is altogether problematic if the one universal Church is implicitly identified with the Church of Rome, de facto with the Pope and the Curia. If that is the case, the letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith cannot be regarded as helpful in clarifying the communion ecclesiology, but must be interpreted rather as a farewell to it and an attempt to usher in a theological restoration of Roman centralism. This process does, indeed, appear to be under way. The relationship between the local church and the universal Church is out of balance." (Walter Kasper, "Zur Theologie und Praxis des bischöflichen Amtes", in: Schreier, W. / Steins, G., (eds.), *Auf neue Art Kirche sein. Wirklichkeiten – Herausforderungen – Wandlungen. Festschrift für Bischof Dr. Josef Homeyer*, Munich 1999, 44.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. McDonnell, K., "Walter Kasper on the Theology and the Praxis of the Bishop's Office", in: *Theological Studies* 63 (2002) 711–729. Kehl, M., *o cit.*, 226.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. the correspondence between Bishop Johannes Hanselmann and Joseph Ratzinger on the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as communion, published in: Ratzinger, J., *loc. cit.* 210–219.

<sup>267</sup> Quoted from: Kehl, M., *o cit.* 227.

the rejection of an inner priority of the divine idea of the Church over the particular churches he ultimately sees a reduction of ecclesiology to an abstract concept in which the universal Church is identified solely with the Pope and the Curia without any attempt to lend it more weight.<sup>268</sup> Kasper in fact agrees with Ratzinger that is possible to talk of a founding of the Church in God's eternal will for salvation. However, he queries whether any statements can be derived from that regarding the relationship between the universal Church and the local churches.<sup>269</sup> In a later reply Kasper takes the matter further by posing the fundamental question as to whether the whole issue (whether the pre-existence of the Church in the divine will for salvation applies only to the universal Church or to the local churches as well) is not a matter of speculation.<sup>270</sup> In principle, however, he recognises the theological premise of the "divine idea of the Church" emphasised by Ratzinger.

### Contextualisation versus perennial principle

Whenever the relationship between local churches and the universal Church is discussed, a problem of some complexity is likely to arise as soon as the nature of the relationship is equated with the question of a dichotomy between a sociological and theological understanding of the Church. This is not solely because a sociological examination, which is inclusive and therefore Catholic in the best sense, cannot run counter to a theological point of view, but because it adds a specific perspective to theological analysis. The main objection to a mixing of the theological with the sociological is that it distracts from the essential and ultimately core question of revelation theology that is crucial for an understanding of the universal Church and local churches: whether the Christian faith was incarnated and inculturated in a unique way

<sup>268</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, J., "The Local and The Universal Church", in: *America* vol. 185 no. 16 of 19 November 2001, 7-11.

<sup>269</sup> Kasper writes: "Who says that pre-existence can be understood solely from the universal Church and not also from the specific Church 'in and formed out of' local churches? Why should not the one Church pre-exist 'in and formed out of' local churches? This thesis of the pre-existence of the Church therefore offers no proof of the primacy of the universal Church." (Kasper Walter, "Das Verhältnis von Universalkirche und Ortskirche", in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 218 (2000) issue 12, 795).

<sup>270</sup> Kasper, W., "Leserbrief mit Bezug auf den Beitrag von Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Local and The Universal Church'", in: *America* vol. 185, no. 17 of 26 November 2001, 28f.

into a specific historical and cultural situation or whether the faith of the Church continues to reveal itself in a specific manner to this day in ever new contexts and life situations.

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council dealt with this issue in depth. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation they came to the following conclusion: "In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations."<sup>271</sup> Two emphases are crucial in this passage. Firstly, the Council Fathers stress that the revelation should serve the salvation of all nations. God's will for salvation cannot be reduced to a chosen people or denomination. Secondly, they point out that the purpose of revelation is that it should be handed on. In this section the Council Fathers move away from a legal and judicial understanding of the revelation, which links the revelation exclusively to the Church, and replace it with a historical and sacramental understanding.

The Council Fathers address the pneumatological dimension of the revelation a few sections later in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, where they write: "Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."<sup>272</sup> Earlier on the Council Fathers had stated that the Apostles were cognisant of the entire revelation: "Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God."<sup>273</sup> Ultimately, however, this is not intended to make any statement on whether the revelation of God does not also continue beyond the historical life of Jesus and the reception of the revelation in the early period of the Church. An intensive discussion took place in the Council Hall on whether this passage should contain a statement about material sufficiency. Material sufficiency means that the entire

<sup>271</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Die dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung "Dei Verbum"*, in: Rahner, K./Vorgrimler, H.(eds.), *Kleines Konzilskompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums mit Einführungen und ausführlichem Sachregister*, Freiburg i. Br. 1982, 370-371, no. 7.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 373-374, no. 11.

<sup>273</sup> Rahner, K./Vorgrimler, H.(eds.), *loc. cit.*, 371, no. 8.

divine revelation is contained in the Scripture. Although numerous Council Fathers were in favour of the traditional Church teaching on material sufficiency being included in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, the majority of the Council Fathers, following an exhaustive discussion, gained acceptance for their option that the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation should make no mention of material sufficiency. The understanding of revelation was thus freed from its exclusivity and reinterpreted in an inclusive sense. Needless to say, there was agreement among the Council Fathers that God reveals Himself in a special way in the biblical scriptures. However, this fact does not exclude God in His indescribable majesty from revealing himself beyond the biblical work in other scriptures or other religions. Karl Rahner has attempted to build a bridge between the traditional exclusive understanding of revelation and the inclusive understanding of revelation, which is reflected in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, by stating that the revelation in which God revealed himself as God was in itself completed, but that its completion was a “positive, not a negative statement”. Such a broadened understanding of revelation initially has consequences for the concept of faith and truth, which cannot be understood in the interpretation of a *philosophia perennis* or a *theologia perennis* as a fixed concept of faith or truth. Thus the “primary task that theology sets itself with respect to the mission [...] remains accommodation to our own contemporary spirit”<sup>274</sup>.

Accordingly, God incarnated himself into a very specific historical situation, and the faith of the Church, too, inculturated itself in a specific time and a specific context, that of Graeco-Roman antiquity. It was in this world that the Word became flesh and lived among us. However, the experience and revelation of God are not limited to the Church, whose dimensions are perhaps too limited for divine relations. Moreover, the Church, seen from the point of view of revelation theology, is naturally not a sociological factor; it cannot be restricted to either the constituted Church or a Church in a specific

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<sup>274</sup> Ratzinger, J., “Theologia perennis? Über Zeitgemäßheit und Zeitlosigkeit in der Theologie”, in: *Wort und Wahrheit* 15 (1960) 179-188, 187f. This statement on accommodation and/or inculturation of the faith establishes the requisite tension with the much-discussed call for “desecularisation”, which Benedict XVI referred to in an address given on 25 September 2011 in Freiburg at the end of his visit to Germany.

time. The Church would limit the understanding of its own faith if it were to undertake such a constriction.

The revelation of God is greater than the Church; the Church is greater than its sociological manifestation; the Church is greater than its individual local churches – and thus greater than the traditional local Church of Rome. Admittedly, the Church in Germany, in particular, can be grateful that a critical mirror is held up to it time and again by the Church of Rome, as was the case during the recent visit by the Pope. This often goes hand in hand with awkward questions, such as whether the Church in Germany does not live an altogether conformist life in middle-class mediocrity.

The essence of the universal Church must be worked out time and again in these theologically strained relationships and articulated in an appropriate manner. However, it is important, too, to determine not just the essence, but also the function of the universal Church, in particular. It is in the best sense an “extra nos”, but this “extra nos” is seen primarily in material terms. However, especially with regard to the relationship between the local churches and the relationship between the universal Church and the local churches it could be helpful to define the universal Church in more distinctly functional terms. The primary task of the universal Church would accordingly be to ensure that the local churches engage in dialogue with each other, to facilitate their discussions and to enable the experiences and reflections of the local churches and their Christian faith to fall on fertile ground. The universal Church would, therefore, be the communion principle of the Church that strives to take up and hand on the revelation of God at all times.

It is the synods that firstly reflect the modal principle of a universal Church interpreted in this way. They provide an opportunity for local churches to come together, engage in an exchange of views and enhance the unity of the Catholic Church by virtue of their distinctive characteristics. They reflect the richness of the universal Church. They can also articulate what has not yet been considered and discussed. The Second African Synod and the document “Africae munus”, published in 2011, have recently shown how fruitful this synodal principle is for the universal Church. In the light of an understanding of revelation that is not considered to be complete and of a resulting

universal Church principle conceived of in formal and modal terms, the primary task of the universal Church would be to initiate and facilitate active processes of communication in the universal Church and subsequently to document and comment on these processes in a manner that should also be critical of any zeitgeist, conformist middle-class tendencies or any overly confined, homespun system of meaning.



## **Dialogue among local churches**



## Learning from the universal Church – reflections on dialogue among local churches

Ludwig Schick

The missionary message of the German Bishops, *His Salvation for All Nations, The Mission of the Universal Church* starts with the words: “It is the mission of the Church to proclaim ‘the good news of the kingdom of God’ (Luke 4:43, NJB) to all the world. There is no better service that it can give to the world. When the Gospel is propagated among people, it causes the Kingdom of God to grow, an irreversible process which started with Jesus Christ. If, at the beginning of the third Christian millennium, the Church wishes to understand the signs of the time, then it faces a clear challenge in the face of increasing globalisation, which is to take the Gospel to the many nations of the earth and of course also to familiarise its own members with the Gospel.”<sup>275</sup>

The German Bishops’ Conference thus made it clear that it does not regard mission as something which has been completed and is now a chapter in Church history. Rather, mission is a central function of the Church in our time (and indeed at any time). What is more, it is in the very nature of this institution that “mission” should in fact be synonymous with “Church”. Mission has no expiry or use-by date and will continue until the Second Coming.<sup>276</sup>

Yet the specific form of this mission must be a matter of continuous and urgent endeavour within the Church. The background against which we are reflecting upon mission today is in fact determined by the globalisation of the economy, the media and culture. All these areas are becoming more and more densely networked on a global scale. Throughout the world local churches, too, are now becoming increasingly interconnected. Here in Europe we can learn more and

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<sup>275</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (eds.), *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 8.

<sup>276</sup> See also: Schick, L., Paulus, *In Christus – für Christus*, Bamberg 2008, 87.

more from the experiences of churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. At the same time, those local churches are continuing to depend on the valuable experiences of our “ancient churches” in Europe. Increasing importance attaches to dialogue among the local churches on the five continents if the Church wishes to bear credible witness within a globalised world.

It is a well-known fact that, for many years now, the Church in Germany has been very keen to seek dialogue with the universal Church. The activities of aid organisations are good examples, as indeed are the manifold contacts nurtured by dioceses, parishes, religious communities and Church organisations. The Church in Germany is undoubtedly extremely active and may even be the most active church in the world when it comes to contacts and partnerships with churches in the global south. We donate a lot and we enjoy giving. On the other hand, however, are we actually prepared to receive? Do we believe that other churches have anything valuable to say or give to us? Do we allow any genuine dialogue among local churches on an equal footing? If not, we may be missing a great opportunity and ignoring some major potential.

Given that we are currently facing certain changes within Germany’s church landscape, it is vital that our pastoral work should include an awareness of the universal Church. Such a new mindset will not come about merely as a result of reflection, however. It must be enriched by individuals meeting on a personal level and having fellowship with one another. In fact, dialogue among local churches is primarily carried out by means of interpersonal exchange. To add further depth to these thoughts, it is useful to take a look at the two essential mission-focused theological documents from the German Bishops – their missionary message *His Salvation for All Nations*, mentioned earlier, and a message intended to stimulate mission-focused pastoral work: *Time to Sow the Seed*.

### **The universal Church as a learning community**

When the German Bishops published *His Salvation for All Nations – the Mission of the Universal Church* in autumn 2004, it was primarily intended to underpin their theological position on mission. It was to be an episcopal message with a well substantiated theological answer

to two questions: What does mission mean today? And why should we ‘evangelise’ in our time? There was certainly a provocative element in it when the Bishops described mission as the best service that the Church can give to the world<sup>277</sup> – on the grounds that mission means pursuing a form of freedom and a truth<sup>278</sup> which the world itself is unable to give to itself. This is precisely what makes the Church’s mission so unique.

Mission is, of course, an essential part of Christianity.<sup>279</sup> Like in the earlier message, *Time to Sow the Seed*,<sup>280</sup> mission is seen as a task for every single Christian.<sup>281</sup> The reason why the Church is essentially missionary is because it shares in the Great Commission (Latin *missio*) that was given to it by the Lord Himself: “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you” (John 20:21, NJB). This sums up the entire theological rationale behind the Church’s missionary activities.<sup>282</sup> In order to be a sacrament of salvation and to demonstrate through its activities and its existence who the Father of Jesus Christ is and what He is like, the Church needs to proclaim its message of the Kingdom among all nations.<sup>283</sup> This is the mission of the Church. And although this understanding of mission is obviously the same as in *Time to Sow the Seed* (2000), the more recent episcopal message *His Salvation for All Nations* does present an important additional thought. The earlier document was exclusively about the pastoral situation in Germany,

<sup>277</sup> See also: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (eds.), *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004.

<sup>278</sup> The same point was emphasised by Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter REDEMPTORIS MISSIO, in which he pointed out the continued validity of the Church’s missionary mandate: REDEMPTORIS MISSIO *On the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate*, Announcements of the Apostolic See, no. 100, Bonn 1990, 39.

<sup>279</sup> See also: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Die dogmatische Konstitution über die Kirche “Lumen Gentium”*, in: Rahner, K./Vorgrimler, H., (eds.), *Kleines Konzilskompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums mit Einführungen und ausführlichem Sachregister*, Freiburg i. Br., 123-197.

<sup>280</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (eds.), “Zeit zur Aussaat”. *Missionarisch Kirche sein*, Die deutschen Bischöfe no. 68, Bonn 2000.

<sup>281</sup> See also: *ibid.*, 5 and 15ff. (Chapter III) See also: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (eds.), *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, o cit., 35f.

<sup>282</sup> See *ibid.*, 11 and 36.

<sup>283</sup> See also: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, o cit., 123, no. 1, Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (ed.), *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, o cit., 35f.

and the phrase “universal Church” was not used in it at all. *His Salvation for All Nations*, on the other hand, emphatically highlights this global aspect from the very beginning: “Missionary activities in our own country and in the international community can only grow if they work together, and they will derive mutual benefits through an exchange of experiences with other local churches, particularly those in the global south. The more we open our eyes, hearts and hands to the universal Church among the nations, the more we are enriched and strengthened, both as individuals and as local churches.”<sup>284</sup> And a little further down we read the following comment on Pentecost, when the Church was born: “From the very first moment of its existence, the Church has spoken all languages and yet it has always been one in the Spirit. The Church did not become universal by gradually spreading from one town to another or from one country to another. Rather, it has been universal from the very beginning – through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is either ‘Catholic’ or it is not.”<sup>285</sup>

The words “universal” and “missionary” represent two essential features of One Church. It lives and derives its energy from both these sources. Madeleine Delbr el once said: “If a church does not evangelise, it de-evangelises.” In the same way it is also true that a church which does not want to be universal will fizzle out in provincialism and reduce itself to a purely national church. This even prevents it from being missionary towards its own members. *His Salvation for All Nations* does not therefore seek to formulate a new missionary understanding. This kind of renewal had already been successfully achieved by *Time to Sow the Seed*. Rather, the more recent document reminds us of the close relationship between the missionary purpose of the Church and dialogue among local churches.

### **Forming an awareness of the missionary character of the universal Church**

*His Salvation for All Nations* has a chapter entitled “Ways and Methods of World Mission”, divided into three sections, in which the authors explain what it means to be the universal Church. “The mission of the universal Church needs a head, a heart and hands that must work

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

together in the same way as in the human body.”<sup>286</sup> As the universal Church, we are continually part of a community that learns together, prays together and provides mutual support. Moreover, it is important to set the right priorities: after all, we can really only pray for one other and give each other mutual support if we know who the others are and if we have actually met them. Unless we truly know each other’s situation, any help we offer, however well meant it may be, will remain useless and may even do more harm than good. It is only through intensive dialogue with the churches in the global south that we can genuinely begin to understand one another. Let me provide some examples.

The 7th German-African Bishops’ Meeting was held in Germany from March 28 to April 2, 2011. The meeting, which was attended by 20 bishops, focused on the issue of African migration to Europe. This meeting had already been established as a tradition, held for the first time in 1983. Since then it has taken place at different venues, in different forms and with different delegates. Yet the basic intention is still the same and has proved its worth: to deepen relationships among local churches in Africa and in Germany through regular meetings among bishops. Direct dialogue helps to foster mutual understanding for the challenges of the Church in the face of the urgent problems of our time. Such dialogue makes it possible for Church representatives from Germany and Africa to see themselves more profoundly as members of the “One Catholic” Church and, as such, to work throughout the world towards the growth of “the Kingdom of God” as “a matter of (...) the saving justice, the peace and the joy” (Romans 14:17, NJB) and also to engage in advocacy and support for the victims of today’s global conditions.

Prayer, too, is an area where it is somehow vital for us to know one another. A few months ago I had an opportunity to visit the Benedictine Convent of Keur Gailaye in Senegal. When I spoke to the sisters, I was asked quite a few questions about the situation of the Church in Germany. I realised that many of the things we took for granted were totally new to them. Finally, their Mother Superior thanked me for visiting them and said she would now pray differently about the worries and concerns of the Church in Germany.

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 55.

I feel the same. As I meet and talk to people at the local level, the life of each church begins to have a face which influences and accompanies my prayers. What I once said about individual Christians is also undoubtedly true of the universal Church: "A Christian today must have a Bible in one hand and a daily paper in the other and must bring the two together." A daily paper is 'instructive' for a Christian, as it teaches us about the joys and concerns of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Yet the depth and width of real life can only be experienced in its entirety when we go there ourselves and *learn* about people's lives in person. Again and again, we can see the proof that by being a learning community we add depth to our fellowship as a community of prayer and mutual support. But the same is also true the other way around: It is only by praying together that we can truly see the foundation of our Catholic community. It is through prayer that our "communion with Christ" is renewed and that our activities as a missionary universal Church can fulfil its meaning and purpose.

A learning community means knowing who the others are, and this is mutual. Such a community is already in evidence through numerous partnerships and meetings among different congregations and among dioceses. It is also realised through the wide-ranging educational work that is conducted by aid organisations and missionary societies in Germany. For instance, during Advent last year German Catholics learned quite a bit about the situation of the Church in Brazil through the *Adveniat* campaign. Children who took part in various carol singing initiatives now know more about child labour in Peru. And the *Misereor* campaign in 2011 taught us about the desperate lives of slum dwellers in mega cities in the global south. In each of these cases a learning process was triggered which led to a deeper level of awareness in Germany and to a wider understanding of what it means to be a Christian. However, such experiences only become tangible and specific through contacts with the universal Church – the kind of contacts that are forged year by year through the campaigns of aid organisations. The guests who are invited to the campaigns from the countries concerned are therefore very important. With their singing performances, film evenings and talks in local churches, schools and groups, they give us an idea of their local churches and what it means to live and work in those countries. We should therefore do our very best to broaden and deepen such contacts at all levels. These contacts

create genuine community within the One Church – a community that is marked by dialogue among local churches and by an awareness of the universal Church.

### **A learning community leads to an awareness of the universal Church**

In 2009, a delegation from the Universal Church Committee visited the Church in South Korea. The main purpose of the trip was to enter into dialogue about the pastoral concept of “Small Christian Communities” which is so widespread in South Korea. This idea was discussed in depth with bishops and other Church leaders in the Korean dioceses. However, what left a lasting impression on us were our visits to the Small Christian Communities themselves and meeting Church members in person, in their homes. We were deeply impressed by the religious vitality and missionary self-confidence of these Korean Catholics. Their Small Christian Communities are clearly contributing to the revival of congregations, enabling individual Catholics to share information about their faith in everyday life. Yet it became obvious to the delegation that the Korean experience could not be applied directly to the situation in Germany. Outside their original context, these communities cannot be set up as new pastoral structures in our own dioceses and parishes. Nevertheless, we learned something very valuable in Korea. First of all, we realised that increasing economic and technical developments within a country do not automatically lead to secularisation. South Korea is currently undergoing a process of dynamic modernisation, but at the same time also a religious revival. Secondly, and most importantly, we learned for our pastoral work in Germany that, just like in Korea, Christians must be encouraged to enter into dialogue about their own faith again. The starting point of all mission-focused pastoral work must be to enable Christians to tell others about their own faith. In Germany, too, Small Christian Communities might make a major contribution to overcoming the religious speechlessness of so many Catholics, although they are not the only way to produce proactive Catholics. Our meeting with Christians in Korea was certainly an encouragement for us to keep an eye open for opportunities as to how the German Church, too, might become more mission-focused at the grassroots level.

Particularly it is the churches in the global south – often minority churches with very few financial and human resources – that can

show us how to be a mission-focused church. The universal Church can enter our pastoral horizons – both new and old – in a variety of ways. However, what is so vital and indeed essential for survival, is that the universal Church should actually get there in the first place. As a Church we are called upon to evangelise and to have a ‘Catholic’ existence, as expressed in the decree *Ad Gentes* and the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, two major documents issued by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>287</sup> If we forget either of these aspects, our witness will become obscure. The path towards the universal Church necessarily leads via a learning community. It is the only way we can become a *communio* – i.e. community – of people who know about one another, pray with one another and take responsibility for each other. Personal contact among local churches is an essential component in forming an awareness of the universal Church. The importance of dialogue between local churches has been expressed very aptly by the Rt. Rev. Joachim Wanke, Bishop of Erfurt: “Anyone who has ever visited parishes in the so-called ‘Third World’ or indeed in Eastern Europe will have noticed a certain naturalness and matter-of-factness about being a Christian, something which is very rare in our country. (...) We can be genuinely ‘enriched’ by people who are often materially poor, yet totally real in their joy and simplicity. Having met such people, I feel far more clearly than I when I’m at my desk that we are missing out on something as Catholics in Germany.”<sup>288</sup> Again, this shows one thing very clearly: an awareness of the universal Church is formed through personal encounters with people in their own environments.

### Missionary spirituality

Meeting the universal Church can enable us to develop that missionary spirituality which is mentioned as a fundamental requirement for all missionary activities in *Time to Sow the Seed*.<sup>289</sup> A glimpse of the universal Church gives us “self-confidence with humility”: we

<sup>287</sup> See also: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, o cit. and Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Das Dekret über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche “Ad Gentes”*, in: o cit., 608, no. 2.

<sup>288</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (eds.), “Zeit zur Aussaat”. *Missionarisch Kirche sein*, ocit. 40.

<sup>289</sup> See: *ibid.*, 11.

experience a Church which is often small and poor but which lives out its faith with pride. We experience a Church in which, despite all adversity and failures, the Gospel has asserted itself and is alive. The Church is growing and, surprisingly, is spiritually professed in regions where it is neither powerful nor rich. Moreover, the very fact that a person belongs to one of the biggest religious communities in the world can make them self-confident.

A further aspect of missionary spirituality is serenity. “Peace and serenity, despite of all the inconsistencies of life, becomes a fundamental attitude enabling Christians to assume a critical distance from everything that is commonly believed and practised but which threatens to obstruct any wider and deeper view of life.”<sup>290</sup> This is precisely what an awareness of the universal Church can contribute, as it opens our eyes to the realities of other nations and congregations. By focusing on the universal Church, we experience a change of perspective that prevents any lack of realism. It gives us a clear view of things in an increasingly globalised world. Anyone who is aware of the concerns of their brothers and sisters in the global south can proclaim the Gospel with greater credibility, because it makes such a person a “believing yet critical prophet” with regard to the prevailing conditions in our society. Also, a universal Church perspective can lead to inner peace about the conditions of our own local church, so that – although we are still serious about problems – we do not become resigned or hopeless in addressing them.

Missionary spirituality receives depth through personal prayer. It is nourished by a living community of prayer and worship. Nowhere else is the universal community of prayer among Christians more evident than when we celebrate the Eucharist. This is when the entire Church gathers around the Lord’s Table to hear His Word and receive His Body. When we meet the universal Church, we become aware of the wealth and diversity of liturgical traditions, yet also of the unity and fellowship that characterises our one liturgy. This is where all the believers are gathered around the table, only to be sent out again: “Ite, missa est” – Go out, you are sent! We are sent by Christ to use this present time for sowing the Gospel so that all nations can partake of God’s salvation. As we allow ourselves to be seized and sent by Christ

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 14.

at the Eucharist, the celebration of Mass can be for us the “source and climax of all evangelisation”.<sup>291</sup> This is precisely how the Church becomes a sign and tool of salvation, and this is how the Eucharist – that place of most intimate connectedness with the Lord and of the greatest depth and serenity – becomes a place where we open up to our neighbour and we are sent out to reach the nations. The universal Church is always present when we celebrate the Eucharist with the Pope, the bishops, anyone who has been appointed for ministry within the Church and indeed with all His Redeemed.

The episcopal message *Time to Sow the Seed* reminded the Church in Germany that it must be a missionary Church. The twin document *His Salvation for All Nations* shows that this missionary focus rests on the foundation of the universal Church. To achieve this, it is indispensable to form an awareness of the missionary character of the universal Church – something which is only possible if we give space to dialogue among local churches worldwide and at all levels and if we – that is, all Catholics throughout the Church – see ourselves as a learning community. In this way we can lay the foundation for a renewal of missionary spirituality that will prompt us to contribute to evangelisation in missionary and developing countries and to use this new pastoral space fruitfully in our missionary activities for the purpose of re-evangelisation.

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<sup>291</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Das Dekret über Dienst und Leben der Priester* “*Presbyterorum ordinis*”, in: o cit., 568, no. 5.

# Dialogue among local churches: An Asian vision and Experience

Orlando B. Quevedo

Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law use the words “particular church” to refer to a diocese. The term describes a “section of the People of God entrusted to a bishop...so that it constitutes one particular church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active” [see *LG*, no.23, *Christus Dominus*, no. 11, CC 368 and 369. Pope John Paul II’s post-synodal exhortation, *Pastores Gregis*, on Bishops follows the same terminology, see, e.g., nos. 55-56, 63. But his pastoral exhortation after the Special Synod for Asia, *Ecclesia in Asia*, uses the terms “local church” and “particular church” interchangeably (e.g. nos 20, 24-25. At the Synod the Asian Bishop generally used the term “local church”].

On the other hand, in the understanding of Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), the term local church involves the contextualising of the particular church among a specific people with their culture(s). In this understanding, a “particular church” is not a “local church” simply by situating it in one “locality” or by entrusting a section of the People of God to a bishop. For a particular church to become “local” in a real sense it has to be *localised*; it has to go through a process of immersion, of being rooted in the local culture(s) of the people.

In this presentation that is the meaning of “local church.” As much as possible the testimony on the dialogue among local churches will come mostly from the Asian Bishops themselves.

## **An Asian Vision of the Local Church**

How did the FABC understanding of “Local Church” come about?

Christianity in Asia has long been considered by some as a “foreign religion,” brought to Asia by European colonisers. But Asian

history glosses over the fact that Christianity is truly Asian. It emerged from the message and life of Jesus the Christ whose very brief life and even briefer public ministry seem to have ended in failure, in his ignominious crucifixion. He was truly Asian, born and bred in Asia Minor. His obscure parents were Asians. His first disciples and missionaries were Asians. His brief life flashed like a brilliant meteor in Asian skies.

And yet the history of Christianity in a vast FABC territory that extends from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, with two thirds of the world's population, begs the questions:

How is the Church to evangelise in a way that would resonate with the Asian thirst for the divine?

How can the Church credibly and eloquently proclaim Jesus, whose words powerfully moved ordinary Asians of his time?

In a continent where only about 3% of more than four billion people are Christians?

In a continent that is rich with ancient cultures and religious traditions?

But with people most of whom are appallingly poor?

And where social and political awakening has been taking place due significantly to freedom movements among young people?

It was to confront such burning questions that Asian bishops from 14 episcopal conferences and 18 countries gathered in Taipei in 1974 for the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC. In dialogue with one another together they discerned the pastoral situation in Asia, "the signs of the times." Asia, they said, is a continent undergoing "profound social change." Modernisation, secularisation, industrialisation threaten centuries-old patterns of life and social relationships, meanings and values. They discovered among Asians a quest for new meaning and fuller freedom, a deep desire to create "more genuine communion" [see FABC I, Final Statement, nos. 4-5].

They declared that the ultimate answer to these profound human longings is in Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6) [*Ibid.* no. 7]. Therefore, with great urgency the Church needs to proclaim

Jesus in the Asian context, “to share with our peoples what is most precious in our hearts and in our lives, Jesus Christ and His Gospel, the unsurpassable riches of Christ” (cf. Eph 3:8) [*Ibid.* no. 8].

They then made a bold and extraordinary statement:

To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. *The primary task of evangelisation then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church* [no. 9]. *For the local church is the realisation and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time* [no. 10].

In almost lyrical style and tone, the Asian Bishops drew up a vision of the “Local Church” that would become the foundational insight guiding the pastoral ministry of many Asian bishops in the years to come:

The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry. – Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God’s Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition (save only for sin) so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in His paschal mystery [no. 12].

### **The Local Church – a Church of Dialogue**

The local church – a church “*in continuous humble and loving dialogue*” with all the life-realities of its peoples, their poverty, their cultures, and religious traditions: here lies the kernel of the “triple dialogue” of the Church in Asia. The Asian Bishops described the local Church as a Church in dynamic *triple dialogue*:

with the cultures of the people (inculturation)  
 with the different religious traditions (inter-religious dialogue)  
 and with the poor (integral liberation) [nos. 14-28].

The Bishops summarised their thoughts in the final three paragraphs of this section:

Indigenisation renders the local church truly present within the life and cultures of our peoples. Through it, all their human reality is assumed into the life of the Body of Christ, so that all of it may be purified and healed, perfected and fulfilled [no. 26].

Through the second task, the Asian religions are brought into living dialogue with the Gospel, so that the seeds of the Word in them may come to full flower and fruitfulness within the life of our peoples [no. 27].

Finally, through the “preaching of the good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18), Christ’s renewing life and the power of His paschal mystery is inserted into our peoples’ search for human development, for justice, brotherhood and peace [no.28].

Through the years the Asian Bishops consistently and insistently maintained this pastoral thematic in their major declarations. They held as non-negotiable the centrality of proclaiming Jesus and as the Lord and Saviour. But the basic mode of the mission of evangelisation is dialogue. Pope John Paul II himself recognised this Asian reality of dialogue when he wrote: “The actual celebration of the (Asian) Synod itself confirmed the importance of dialogue as a *characteristic mode of the Church’s life in Asia* [*Ecclesia in Asia*, 1999, no.3].

### **From Vision to Life – Becoming a Church of Dialogue through Dialogue with Other Local Churches**

#### **– at the Level of the FABC**

The Asian Bishops who participated in the Taipei groundbreaking event went back to their respective particular churches with the vision of a local church in their minds. Many were already doing inter-religious dialogue and works of development with the poor. The work of inculturation, however, has no step by step process. In subsequent meetings and discussions at the Episcopal conferences and at the level of the FABC, their dialogue with one another would make them realise that inculturation is a dialogue with the Spirit whose renewing action within the cultures of peoples had to be recognised.

Through the years the FABC plenary assemblies and the FABC Offices would be significantly instrumental in assisting Asian bishops to realise the vision of a Local Church. One can certainly state that the FABC provided the venue for Asian Bishops, shepherds of their local churches, to engage in *a process of dialogue between local churches*.

How did this take place? FABC Offices organised Bishops' institutes and seminars on evangelisation, family, laity, youth, women, social action, inter-religious dialogue (with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Confucians, Taoists), social communications, catechesis and education. Often there were priests, religious, lay faithful in the gatherings. Through these activities Asian Bishops gained knowledge and experience on various aspects of the Local Church-in-mission.

The building of parishes into a communion of communities through Basic Ecclesial Communities became increasingly a priority among many Asian Bishops. This pastoral thrust was promoted by a desk in the FABC Office of Laity. Its approach was developed through the collaborative efforts of two FABC Offices, the Office of Human Development and the Office of the Laity. They adapted the South African Lumko method of building BEC to the Asian cultural context and called the adaptation, *Asian Integral Pastoral Approach* (ASIPA). With trained country teams and Asian teams to facilitate the training of BEC trainers, BEC building in many parts of Asia became a fixture of the pastoral scenario.

The vision of a local church in triple dialogue through BEC building is becoming a reality. With certain justification, many Asian bishops are now saying that in Asia there is "*a new way of being Church*." This new way consists of a local church that is emerging at the level of Asian grassroots cultures with the following characteristics:

communities of discleship

*through the initiative of priests and Bishops*

a church that is a *communion of communities*

*a participatory Church* with trained and active lay leaders in communion with their Priests and Bishop

*a Church of the Poor* where rich and poor are in *fellowship, solidarity and communion, sharing with one another*

gathered to *pray and share the Word of God, and centred on the Eucharist.*

They call this a new way of being Church but it is certainly modeled after the first Christian community in Jerusalem [see summaries in Acts, chapters 2:44-47 and 4:32-36].

It is through these FABC seminars and institutes that dialogue among local churches takes place. As shepherd of their local churches, Asian Bishops together with religious, clergy and laity gather to dialogue with one another, sharing experiences, learning from one another, discerning the pastoral situation together, and drawing up effective responses to meet common pastoral problems. These dialogical encounters among local churches entail mutual enrichment, pastoral discernment, collegial pastoral response, in a spirit of friendship and mutual understanding that leads to interpersonal communion.

In so doing, *the dialogue is also a process towards self-realisation (i.e., becoming truly local church).* This can only take place because in Asia there is a common vision of local Church and a common pastoral priority of building BEC.

#### – at the Level of Episcopal Conferences

Becoming a local church in dialogue with other local churches is likewise facilitated by Episcopal Conferences. The example is the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

In 1990 the CBCP called for a Plenary Council of the Philippines. A year later from January 20 to February 17, 1991, the Bishops of the Philippines with a large gathering of Religious, Clergy, and Laity from every diocese of the Philippines came together in Manila. They spent a month together discerning, praying, reflecting, engaging in dialogue with one another. They built communion among themselves, made even deeper with the daily celebration of the sacrament of communion, the Holy Eucharist.

Although canonically only the Bishops had the right to vote, a free participation of all 489 participants in plenary assembly and in workshops was a characteristic feature of the whole Council.

They looked deeply into the national pastoral situation to find out why evangelisation did not seem to have succeeded despite 450 years of Christianity. They realised that Filipino Catholics are, indeed, a deeply religious and faith-driven people, proud of our Catholicism, and even sharing it with other peoples in other continents through our migrant Filipino workers.

Yet as Filipino Catholics we have what Fr. Jaime Bulatao, a famous Filipino psychologist, called “split level Christianity.” We observe the traditions, rituals, customs of our faith at one level but we live our political, economic, and social life at another level. Faith does not seem to permeate daily life. Faith is split and separated from life, a dichotomy of faith and life which *Gaudium et Spes* had called “one of the gravest errors of our time” [Vatican II, 1965, GS, no. 43]. One Filipino observed what one famous European prelate had said about their situation may be applied to us, “We are sacramentalised but we are not evangelised.”

PCP-II truly celebrated the whole process of discernment and dialogue among local churches such that at the end official voting on the final text and resolutions of the Council was enthusiastic and almost always unanimous. Subsequently the Philippine Bishops articulated PCP-II’s vision of Church on the road to renewal in the following way:

### **Vision**

Immersed in a society fragmented by divisive conflicts and afflicted by widespread poverty, yet deeply aspiring for fullness of life in God, we, as Church in the Philippines with total trust in God’s love, envision ourselves as a *community of disciples*, who firmly believe in the Lord Jesus and who joyfully live in *harmony and solidarity with one another, with creation, and with God.*

Following *the way of the Lord* we opt to be a *Church of the Poor* which demands

evangelical poverty of us all and harnesses the transformative power of the poor among us toward the justice and love of God in this world.

## Mission

To achieve this vision, under the leading of the Spirit of God and with Mary as our guide we shall embark on a *renewed evangelisation* and *witness to Jesus Christ's Gospel* of salvation and liberation through our words, deeds, and lives.

As Bishops, Priests, Religious, and Laity, we together commit ourselves *to implement the spirit and decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* in order to *inculturate Gospel values* in our milieu. By this shall “*kaayusan*” (order and harmony) be achieved through persons who are “*maka-Diyos, maka-tao, maka-bayan and maka-buhay.*”

Ours will then be a civilisation of life and love, a sign of the in-breaking of the Father's Kingdom.

Noteworthy are the key concepts in the vision of a Church-in-mission, on the road to renewal: *community of disciples; following the way of the Lord; solidarity with one another, with creation, and with God; Church of the Poor; renewed integral evangelisation; witnessing to the Lord's Gospel; inculturation.* As with the FABC these concepts are fundamental dimensions of becoming a Local Church in the Philippine context.

## Major Pastoral Priorities towards the Vision of Church

After 1991 most dioceses in the Philippines enthusiastically embarked on the journey of renewal – with mixed results. Dioceses in Mindanao continued their work of building Basic Ecclesial Communities. They had been doing so since the momentous gathering of local churches called the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) in the early 1970s. This dialogue among the local churches was sustained through regular sub-regional assemblies, assemblies of Mindanao-Sulu diocesan clergy, and meetings of pastoral programmes such as catechetics, youth, family life, indigenous peoples and social action, community-based health.

But elsewhere with no dialogue among local churches (such as those in Mindanao) to help them, a good number of dioceses lost momentum in the movement of church renewal and reverted to their safety zones of pastoral ministry.

Therefore 10 years after PCP-II all the Philippine dioceses represented by 369 delegates (Bishops, Religious, Clergy, and Laity) gathered together again in Manila to dialogue in a week long forum, the National Consultation on Church Renewal, January 22-27, 2001. The Consultation recalled the vision of Church drawn up by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, selecting three key concepts: *community of disciples*, *Church of the Poor*, *Renewed Integral Evangelisation*. Finally it synthesised the many pastoral thrusts of PCP-II for the Church in the Philippines into 9 major pastoral priorities in order to realise the vision-mission of PCP-II:

Integral *Faith* Formation

Empowerment of the *Laity* towards Social Transformation

Active Presence and Participation of the *Poor* in the Church

*Family* as the Focal Point of Evangelisation

Building and Strengthening of *Participatory Communities* that make up the Parish as a Community of Communities

Integral Renewal of *the Clergy and Religious*

Journeying with the *Youth*

*Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*

Animation and Formation for *Mission Ad Gentes*

Excerpts from the Consultation Message, “Behold I Make All Things New” (Rev. 21:5) indicate what some of the above pastoral priorities mean:

“(The laity) must be empowered to engage in greater dialogue and discernment with the clergy and religious concerning social, economic, political, and cultural issues, in order to take the leading role in the transformation of society.”

“(To be evangelically poor), we shall seek to liberate ourselves from mentalities, values, behaviours and lifestyles that discriminate against the materially poor.”

“We also recognise that the family is the origin of many cultural distortions that lie at the root of our problems as a people. We shall

therefore commit ourselves to a more intensive evangelisation of the family, so that the family might become not just object, but agent of proclaiming the Gospel.”

“We shall support the growth and strengthening of Basic Ecclesial Communities and other forms of faith-communities, such as lay associations and movements, as vehicles of renewal. We shall... seek to develop structures of coordination and participatory decision-making.”

“We shall therefore ensure deeper dialogue of life between the clergy and the poor, so that clerical lifestyle may truly witness to poverty after the manner of the poor Christ.”

“We shall engage in a dialogue of life, faith, prayer, and common action (with other ecclesial communities and religious traditions, especially the followers of Islam). As a way to healing, reconciliation and national unity, we shall encourage dialogue among all sectors of society.”

One observes from the above how *dialogue* is conceived by the Church in the Philippines as the operative process in the renewal of the local Church and society, or as the various sectors of the Church at the Consultation expressed it, “our journey to the new creation we so deeply desire.”

### **A Method of Pastoral Discernment in the Dialogue among Local Churches**

In the Church in Asia a method of pastoral discernment for pastoral decision and planning has been developed. It is used by diocesan pastoral assemblies in many local churches in Asia and by BECs. It is also used by the FABC in its various plenary assemblies and seminars conducted by its Offices. It is to be recalled that bishops, priests, religious and laity from different Asian local churches participate in these assemblies and seminars. One can therefore truly say that it is *a method used in the dialogue among local churches towards discernment, decision, and action.*

The method is a variation or elaboration of the classic “see-judge-act” method. It is called the Pastoral Spiral / Cycle:

**Situation** Analysis of the pastoral situation (social/cultural analysis) →→ **Reflection in Faith** (in the light of Sacred Scriptures and the Teachings of the Church) →→ **Pastoral Decision** regarding the situation →→ **Pastoral Planning** to implement the decision →→ **Implementation** →→ **Evaluation** →→ New pastoral situation →→...

Every step of the Pastoral Spiral is participatory by way dialogue. At every stage the goal is to reach a consensus rather than decide by voting. Therefore, maximum opportunities are provided for dialogue among members of local churches to discern and decide together. The method ensures that decisions achieved through dialogue are both rooted in pastoral realities and are also the results of faith-reflection.

### **Theological Principles in the Dialogue among Local Churches in Asia**

From the experience of dialogue among local churches in Asia, operative theological are clearly discernible. To be highlighted are the following:

#### **Communion**

FABC III in Bangkok, 1982, was devoted to the theme “The Church – a Community of Faith in Asia.” Its final statement declared that the “local church must be a community of communion rooted in the life of the Trinity, a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centred in the Eucharist.” The Trinitarian icon of communion, the contemplative and sacramental dimensions of communion are fundamental to understanding the very nature of local church. In addition the Christological image of the Body of Christ, already expressed in FABC I, Taiwan, 1974, no. 10, reflects the communion of local churches [see FABC Theological Advisory Commission (TAC), Thesis 1 on the Local Church].

FABCI described communion of all local churches as a communion in one faith, one Spirit and one sacramental life, a communion of “filial oneness” with the See of Peter: “(The local church) is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church one and catholic. Rather it seeks communion with all of them. With them it professes the one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life. In a special way it rejoices in its communion

and filial oneness with the See of Peter, which presides over the universal church in love [FABC I, Final Statement, no. 11].

But the dialogical aspect of the life of local churches in Asia is really one in seeking solidarity with cultures, various religious traditions, and Asian peoples, especially the poor in such a way that Christian communities in Asia would truly be “Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others” [Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church, Hong Kong, 1977, no. 14].

And so too with communion for mission. “The renewal of our sense of mission will mean...that the *acting subject of mission* is the *local church living and acting in communion with the universal church*. It is the local churches and communities which can discern and work out (*in dialogue with each other and other persons of good will*) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of the God’s Kingdom realised in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local churches” [FABC V, “Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium,” Bandung, 1990, no. 3.3.1].

At the Asian Synod the bishops spoke of communion for mission, mission of communion, communion of communities [EA, no. 25]. By so doing they confirmed and underscored their conviction in the Church as Communion and their vision of making *communion as a pervasive reality in the life of the Church in Asia*.

### **Discipleship**

The dialogue among local churches is facilitated through their shared discipleship of Christ. This is a point of departure as well as a faith reality that has to be deepened through dialogue. Spirituality is described in terms of discipleship. For the local churches in Asia, the effectiveness and credibility of proclaiming Jesus in the Asian context depends on lived spirituality. And spirituality is one of discipleship, “nothing more and nothing less than following Jesus-in-mission” [see FABC IV, Tokyo, 1986 and FABC V, Bandung, 1990].

*A new way of being Church* in Asia is realised by becoming a “communion of communities” – communities in communion with one another under the sign of Christian discipleship. FABC would state: “It is the Spirit of Jesus that creates the disciple community” [FABC VI, “Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life,” Manila, 1995, no. 14]. This is so because discipleship entails abiding and living in, walking with the Spirit of Jesus – being filled with the Spirit and driven by the Spirit.

[Luke’s Gospel is replete with the action of the Holy Spirit in Jesus].

### **Church of the Poor**

In a continent where “teeming millions” live in massive and abject poverty, the local churches in Asia deeply desire to be a Church of the Poor, in the manner of the poor Christ. The Son of God is the God-made-poor, born poor of parents from an obscure village. As a young itinerant preacher he called those who were poor to be his first disciples, announced the Reign of God to the poor, called the poor his friends, ate with them, taught them of His Father, did works of wonder for them. His “compassion for the multitudes” was profound and moved him to minister them.

Christ’s love of preference for the poor is what drives his Asian disciple-communities towards the vision of being a Church of the Poor. In this new way of being Church everyone, rich or poor, is committed to live the spirit of evangelical poverty, living simply, sharing and in solidarity with the poor, acting in their defense, promoting their dignity, devoid of the pomp of this world and its often immoral use of power. It is in this way that the poor become active agents of evangelisation, able to harness their resources for God’s Kingdom.

### **Co-Responsibility and Participation**

In the Asia of the 1970’s the terms co-responsibility and participation were theological buzzwords flowing from Vatican II. They entered the vocabulary of the local churches as well as of FABC plenary assemblies and seminars. The vocabulary was learned in parish pastoral councils, in clergy meetings and assemblies, in the on-going formation of religious, and in seminaries.

With the adoption of the BEC as a pastoral thrust and vehicle in becoming a new way of being Church, the vocabulary began to see concrete realisation at the grassroots level. The training of lay leaders for BECs to perform various tasks and ministries for the building up of the community, the faith formation of members, called for participatory learning experiences.

These processes meant lay and clergy “empowerment,” or the activation of charisms that are the special gifts of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Participation in pastoral discernment, pastoral decision-making, church activities, in the mission of the Church to evangelise, and in the task of social transformation – these were all fundamental to the pastoral thrust of church renewal. Such desiderata were highlighted by local churches in dialogue through assemblies and seminars.

The focus of the local churches in Asia regarding co-responsibility is not so much on the shared responsibility of local churches for the one common mission of the Church to evangelise. Their focus is the building of awareness among the laity that the whole Church is mission. The whole Church, namely bishops, clergy, religious and laity, shares in the one common mission to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ in Asia.

As FABC I said: “With large expectations, we turn to our lay people also, especially to our catechists.... More and more they must assume responsibility in the task of evangelisation.” [FABC I, Final Statement, no. 36]

With their “empowerment” trained lay leaders and members of grassroots communities are now participating actively in the renewal of the Church, dialoguing together with their Bishops, the clergy and religious on matters of pastoral governance and ministry, church support services, and the evangelising mission of the Church.

### **Proclamation, Renewed Integral Evangelisation, the Kingdom of God**

From FABC I in Taiwan to FABC IX in Manila the local churches of Asia in dialogue chose “renewed integral evangelisation” as their

mission, illumined by the mission of the Church to evangelise, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

In the Church in Asia there was never any hedging about proclaiming the Lord Jesus as central to mission. Considering the various cultures, religious traditions and the poverty of Asian peoples, the mode of evangelisation would be dialogue.

At the Asian Synod Pope John Paul II heard from the Asian Bishops the difficulties of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus in a continent that hardly heard of Jesus or much less accepted him. It was Pope John Paul II who wrote that “*the silent witness of life* still remains the only way of proclaiming God’s Kingdom in many places in Asia where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted” [EA, no. 23].

In the dialogue, the Asian Bishops at the Synod spoke of the complex cultural and multi-religious situation and the Asian cultural way of story-telling to drive home a point. Taking up the Bishops’ reflections, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the proclamation of Jesus has to be evocative, progressive and gradual, using stories as the Asian Jesus did, until such time, with the guidance of the Spirit, that hearers would be ready to fully appropriate the mystery of Jesus [*Ibid.*, no. 20].

In the social, economic, political, and cultural context of Asia, what is most needed is the task of social transformation. In many places and at various time, in FABC plenary assemblies and seminars, in gatherings of local churches to dialogue with one another, the laity’s leading role in social renewal would be mentioned and fostered.

The Gospel calls for social transformation. The realities of the Asian continent where “death-dealing forces” in a culture of death abound demand social transformation. Local churches in dialogue at the 1994 FABC Plenary Assembly in Korea had a comprehensive discernment of the Asian death dealing forces that threaten the Asian family. These ranged from economic and cultural globalisation, the feminisation of poverty, the phenomenon of a new slavery suffered by migrant workers, women and child-trafficking to the instability of families because of war and conflict, the degradation of the environment, and assaults on the Asian family by population control policies.

It is no wonder that, through the use of the pastoral spiral, local churches in Asia make pastoral decisions that integrate the social teachings of the church in announcing of the Good News of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. The multi-religious dimension of Asia also impels the local churches to emphasise the spread of Kingdom values, so that collaboration with, e.g., Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, in the task of social transformation would be possible.

### **Conclusion**

Much more could be said about other operative theological principles that surface in the dialogue among local churches in Asia as they, at the FABC level, pray, discern, reflect, and decide together on the dynamic interaction between Asian realities and our faith.

But the above would provide a glimpse of the dialogue of life and heart, of pastoral and theological exchange among the local churches in Asia.

The core basis of dialogue among local Churches lies in the depths of the Church's identity as Communion, a sacrament of Communion, a Communion of Communities, with a Mission for Communion. These are faith-realities that are "now and not yet."

## Relationships among local churches

Anselme Titianma Sanon

Like Anselm of Aosta who, in his youth, imagined that the greatest and biggest that the human mind could conceive was beyond the high peaks of the Alps, we all tend to see our neighbours as being very far away from us. However, the live footage and soundbites we receive in real time, whether pleasing or terrifying, do tell us about those neighbours – “our seven billion neighbours”.

There was a time when written news – and thus the history of the world and of our continent – would reach us much later: days, weeks, months or even years after an event. “Yet the world is becoming one and is aware of the fact” (Pius XI). Is today’s world becoming even more one now, and is it aware of it? Who are my neighbours? I know who they are, but do they know it? And if they do, what about myself?

Is this perhaps one of those fundamental questions? My neighbour – the person who is nearest to me and whom I face – is whoever I happen to meet. He or she may come from a different area, a different country or a different continent – one of the five continents on planet earth. This person enters my life. Yet unfortunately, unless we take the time to become aware of each other, we are often judged or evaluated before we meet in a face-to-face encounter. A beggar? A stranger?... How can we feel “oneness” in view of our differences and otherness?

### **An ecclesiology of conversion**

In any newly planted local church the faith that is preached and agreed upon is the faith that is created by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God as proclaimed within this church. Therefore the reasons for living as disciples of Jesus Christ, having faith and living a life of love are continually passed on in a new way. The ties that form between a new local church and its parent church are relationships which are based on

knowing and appreciating one another. This, in turn, expresses itself in mutual or reciprocal respect, with everyone bearing and sharing an ongoing concern about the development of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

A latent ecclesiology: an ecclesiology of convergence, not dominance: The messages which the Apostle Paul preached to the churches he had planted (1 Cor. 4:15, Gal. 4:19 and 1 Thess. 2:11) were presented to certain sociocultural entities – church fellowships – within a specific geographical context and at a specific point in time where they faced the same challenges and where, incidentally, they were often influenced by the same prevailing trends of the time. In this respect the history of Christian antiquity is quite instructive, as it shows that all those young churches were beset by the same problems: The Book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul form the beginning of the main chapter in this history, creating relationships between brothers and sisters and knitting them together in close fellowship. There is a clear focus on this awareness and the issues arising within a church or fellowship concerning the forms and practices of their emerging traditions – traditions which are still becoming established, which are alive and on fire and which come straight from the heart of Jesus and are based on the Word of the Apostles. The apostolic fatherhood of Peter as the primate is, of course, clearly reinforced, yet at the same time helpfulness and consideration are by no means set aside; and wherever a voice is raised it is for the sake of newly converted, born-again Christians out of a wish to spare them the burden of following the Jewish law (Acts 15:1-30 and Gal. 2:1-14). And we may want to ask ourselves what might be our modern equivalents of “Judaising”.

### **Historical comments**

The 2,000-year anniversary celebrations and other Christian events of the same significance and also celebrations initiated by various local and particular churches served to highlight the short and long-term historical dimension of redemption through the incarnation, both in the Catholic Church and indeed in all churches. It is true that our present age sometimes raises questions which are embarrassingly difficult to answer. In recent years they have included issues of peace,

the right of intervention, hunger, products made from genetically modified organisms and bio-ethics in relation to the family.

Does doctrine have all the answers or might it not be better to explore ways to guide people towards redemption through the incarnation by actually getting alongside them and meeting them where they are, and then leading them to God in this way? After all, the people we want to reach are no longer really listening to us or, if they do listen, they only pick out the words that meet their expectations.

### **Communion through mutual recognition**

Recognition here means a concept of communion and a spirit of forging increasingly stronger relationships while striving for convergence and nourishing feelings of mutual respect and regard for one another.

We have entered the time of the heirs. After this time, and sometimes even during it, the seed of the Gospel bears fruit and brings forth local churches. All these churches have been planted within an apostolic succession and are jointly accepting the challenge of evangelising the world – *urbis et orbis*. We need to understand *urbis et orbis* as the world of the cities, towns and villages, the world of ethnic groups, nations and continents with their social, economic, political and cultural traditions (i.e. religion, spirituality and mysticism), and we need to do so by looking at its circular relationship with its surrounding culture and with the predominating cultures – elements which undoubtedly influence the interpretation and practice of the Church at large.

If anyone believes that all revelation has come to an end, then the Second Vatican Council teaches in *Dei Verbum* that tradition continually develops and is enriched by new forms of catechesis and also by liturgical and pastoral practices within the churches, giving space for development, implementation and verification.<sup>292</sup>

### **Dialogue among local churches**

This is not about terminology or circumstances – i.e. local churches or particular churches – even though their status does determine the

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<sup>292</sup> See Eph. 1:1 ff.

type of relationship among them, both vertically and horizontally. With a few exceptions the Church, as seen from the vantage point of Christology, does indeed derive its existence from the top downwards, but it comes into existence from the bottom upwards. No matter how small local churches may be, if they have formed in the name of the risen Lord, they are part of the Church as the Family of God and thus of the mystical, sacramental and fraternal Body of Christ.

Bauer's book on 2,000 years of Christianity in Africa starts with a detailed overview of the emergence and strong growth of local missionary churches and of African churches. It then focuses on their relationships with the centre of their communion – i.e. Rome, on the one hand, but, on the other, also the cross-links that have developed between those churches under the aegis of one and the same centre: dioceses and church districts as well as national, international, regional and continental bishops' conferences. It concerns the entire organisation: building a lively and brotherly African Church of the Family of God requires the people who form part of it and the energy that drives us.

One initial hope is that we should be aware of the great challenges of our present day and also of the dangers that are threatening the continent of Black Africa which – unfairly – is often lagging behind at all levels. The fact that Africa has so far been denied any significance is part of a historical development imposed on us from outside, and this cannot remain without theological and soteriological consequences! As fellow citizens of this new Africa, which has been robbed of its own identity and which is trying to make humane progress on the levels of politics, business, finance and culture, despite numerous betrayals under the pretext of dubious values, we must take a pastoral look at the large local churches where messengers of the Gospel have been planting and watering, and we must identify a need for transverse relationships. Here are some important points:

The linguistic and cultural dynamics which are involved in imparting the Word of God;

The dynamics of African religions, spirituality and mysticism with a view to maximum appropriation of inculturation;

The dynamics of an internalised and globalised world and its

paradigms whose consequences and accompanying products subsequently impact our countries;

The issue of human rights as reformulated for the African continent by the African Union in its *Charter of Human Rights and Peoples' Rights*. If the Church and thus the Family of God takes heed of such clarification, this will greatly assist the advancement of the Gospel, as it will help us gain a better understanding of the current global situation, in which Africa is the greatest victim;

A right to interfere in the internal affairs of a country must be put firmly on the agenda! The arguments and modalities that are put forward differ considerably and are applied arbitrarily. What common line can there be for local or particular churches that might help to promote and strengthen neighbourly relations and shared missionary responsibilities?

When we consider that the commission to evangelise is an obligation to establish a relationship between the God of Creation and the people He seeks to redeem, as an alliance of all nations from one generation to the next, then this requires sending a group of disciples, following the practices we know from Biblical sources. This group of believers must work together and form a fellowship in the name of the risen Lord – the Lord and ruler of history. It is important that there should be such relationships between them, relationships between people who have been sent, and it is equally important that they should communicate with each other and do so as part of the commission they have received from their Redeemer. This never-ending commission of love continues between the sent and the recipients as they share the joint task and responsibility of carrying the Good News to the ends of the earth.

Everything speaks for such relationships both within and among the churches, which we may want to call solidarity and interdependence among local churches. Obviously there are also barriers and limits, and these are perceived as referring to the continent's structures of administration and its politics. Of course this also affects the organisation of the Church itself. As long as political, economic and financial strategies are employed in order to qualify these barriers and thus to widen one's own scope, it is not surprising that pastoral forces include the utopian dreams of unity and integration in their joint action plans for an organic pastoral approach at all levels.

## New perspectives

Dialogue and mission cover the missionary activities of mission-focused churches, the persuasive work of missionary expeditions and the ministry of spreading the Gospel which is available for those who want to hear what God has done for everyone and especially for them.

This context is new, because Western Christian hegemony has so far found it difficult to enter into any kind of dialogue of whatever kind – with the exception of people like St. Francis of Assisi, Matteo Ricci, Gregory XVI and Don Sarmiento.

The accepted method was apologetics, and any basis in ecclesiology, especially of a missionary kind, did not receive its theological clarification and structure until the Vatican Council.

Likewise, the concept and reality of mission and evangelisation – which is synonymous with the life and activities of the living Church – were very pronounced, but they came under the responsibility of specific bodies. As a result, it was almost impossible to develop any missionary ecclesiology that was not overloaded with categories of Western Christendom and its cultural concepts. Evangelisation and cultures only entered a new and exciting chapter with the Second Vatican Council when several resolute documents were published, such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Nostra Aetate*, *Ad Gentes* and the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* by Paul VI on dialogue. All this was set forth in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

As there can be no doubt about the essence of mission in the Church of the Apostles, every local church is a symbol and tool of its realisation. A local church owes its existence, growth and survival to mission. After all, regardless of whether a Christian church is old or new, unless it actively engages in missionary activities within itself – something which also radiates to the outside – it is in danger of going into decline and suffocating under various levels of encrustation.

When, after descending from the cross, the risen Lord entrusted his disciples with the Great Commission, He did so by breathing into them the Spirit of the Pentecost before they became permanently scattered throughout the world. Much of the Book of Acts is about the evangelistic activities of Peter after he himself was evangelised. He operates on the basis of his own Jewish traditions which are religious

and spiritual, social and cultural. The breath of the Spirit continues to move, first to Athens and later to Rome. Evangelising all of creation means all of mankind which has spread throughout the entire world. Spreading the Good News of the Gospel means taking the Word, the Eucharist and the Spirit to all nations (*Ad Gentes*) – both to the closest and to the most remote – first in Jerusalem and then to the ends of the earth, starting with the traditions and customs of the Apostles, through new forms of humanism which have continually caused a stir in every historical period, and eventually reaching up to seven billion neighbours. This is a sign of life, communion and a reconciled mankind which populates (*pervadit*: spreads throughout) the world.

### **Within, among and beyond**

It is a logical consequence of mission that we should enter into a calm dialogue with those outside, bearing witness to our faith and our profession of this faith. Yet even for the initiators of our faith, the concept of dialogue – that is, full communion among brothers and sisters within churches and fellowships of the risen Lord – is very much the fundamental yardstick of what we call loving one's neighbour and doing good works. This means that missionary evangelisation is a command that follows from the very existence and nature of the Church and from our love of the Church. For the Church it is a fundamental office instituted by the Lord Himself and it involves rights and duties for both officeholders and recipients. History – especially the history of young churches – is full of procrastination, suffering and tension which sometimes even led to rupture.

This is where the dynamics and strategy of dialogue must come into play, both within the Church itself and in the way it relates to the outside. Such dialogue should include, among other things:

- human, personal and brotherly dialogue with Jesus in His humanity – *homo ad hominem missus*;
- intercultural and interethnic dialogue;
- interreligious relations (including spirituality and mysticism);
- manifold international relations;
- and – most importantly – relations among the nations.

After all, our own convictions and ideas can only survive if they are shared with neighbours, if they are enriched through probing questions and if they genuinely withstand the test and bring about an experience of a genuinely sincere dialogue, conducted in a spirit of openness and tolerance.

If everyone understands the other person's position, then it is possible to enter into a dialogue that transcends all opposites and contradictions. The Church needs this concept of dialogue, both within itself and with those outside it.

### **Theology of impartation**

In today's globalisation the Church experiences the development of the world at a breathtaking speed, so that the world of today is quickly turning into the world of tomorrow. This means that churches, both on the wider level and locally, must pursue a pastoral policy of reading the signs of the times in every film and in every piece of music, a policy of understanding day by day that the Lord gives us clear signs of His saving grace. This must lead to collaboration between those who think deeply about the world, who write about it and who interpret the world in one way or another. They, too, are called upon to compile books, collections and libraries for the world, ensuring that Christian thinkers put the intellectual focus on what happens at major international world conferences and spreading the truth and light of the risen Lord.

## Becoming a local church in order to be a universal Church

Michael Huhn

138 years ago, Benedictine Father Pius Bonifatius Gams published the first comprehensive survey of all the dioceses of the Catholic Church, complete with statistics.<sup>293</sup> This handbook of Church studies remained without parallel until the twentieth century. It provides an overview of the Church in Latin America in 37 pages. In 1873, there were no more than 80 Latin American dioceses, 12 of them in Brazil and 68 in all the former Spanish colonies put together. It took Father Gams 72 pages, more than twice as many as he needed for the whole of Latin America, to describe the Church in “Germania”.<sup>294</sup> At the end of 2009, Latin America and the Caribbean counted 812 jurisdictions (including the exarchates and eparchies of the Orthodox Churches)<sup>295</sup>, a tenfold increase since 1873. Such an expansion brings with it a change in quality, not just in quantity. A dialogue among local churches requires, among other things, proximity: a neighbour must be within hailing distance if a dialogue is to take place. Outside the ports and the few major cities, however, it was not only the missionaries “on the edge of civilisation” who were living an almost insular existence in the midst of the continent, but also most of the bishops, parish priests and nuns in the Andes mountains, the great forests and the pampas (whose lonely expanse became proverbial).

Priests who had 50,000 believers to take care of in three dozen subsidiary churches and chapels (if you can call it ‘caring’ when the

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<sup>293</sup> Gams, P. B., *Series Episcoporum Ecclesiae Catholicae quotquot innotuerunt a beato Petro apostolo*, Regensburg 1873.

<sup>294</sup> It should be borne in mind that ‘Germania’ meant all the German-speaking countries: the German Empire (including Strasbourg and Metz), the Austrian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and the dioceses dominated by German-speaking populations, such as Riga and Reval (now Tallinn).

<sup>295</sup> See *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae 2009*, Città del Vaticano 2011, 35-38.

numbers were so huge!) were by no means exceptional. Sometimes they could only visit the outposts once a year, on the patron saint's day. Gradually, throughout the 20th century, the local churches in both the dioceses and the parishes increased in density in a process of institutional expansion brought about by dividing up larger parishes and founding new ones. The intensification of Church organisation in Latin America is the exact opposite of the extension process involving the closing of churches and linking of parishes that the Catholic Church in Germany has opted for, or had to opt to, in the past two decades, usually in response to declining numbers of believers and/or priests.

The Church network in Latin America has had a wide mesh for a long time. But there is another, even weightier reason why, until the 20th century, the Church there could be described as a "local church" only in a limited sense. It was "local" not just because it was in Latin America. From its conception, the Church in the New World continued to relate to the Old World for a very long time. For three centuries under Spanish rule, decisions in matters of Church governance were made by the King in Madrid, his "Indian Council" (Consejo de Indias) for the American colonies, and the viceroys, governors and authorities on the ground. Rome was the point of reference, principally (at times, almost exclusively) on theological issues. When South and Central America liberated themselves from Spain and Portugal 200 years ago, the only entity that was preserved was Brazil. The Spanish colonial possessions, by contrast, gradually disintegrated into 18 states. In whatever country, the sense of nationhood was uppermost. Nobody felt "Latin American" (apart from Simón Bolívar). Moreover, the Catholic Church felt besieged by the liberal bourgeoisie in almost all of the young states. The quest for support strengthened the Church's orientation towards Rome.

It is hardly surprising that the first "Plenary Council" in 1899, the first ever meeting of Latin American bishops, took place in Rome. This was not so much the result of their own initiative; with the invitation from Leo XIII, the agenda was set by the Holy See and the proceedings were of course in Latin, not Spanish.<sup>296</sup> The conference

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<sup>296</sup> See Pontifica Commissio pro America Latina – CAL (ed.) *Los últimos cien años de la Evangelización en América Latina. Simposio Histórico, Actas. Ciudad del Vaticano, 21-25 de junio de 1999*, Città del Vaticano 2000; Josep-Ignasi Saranyana, *Cien años de Teología*

venue was the Latin American College, the seminary founded in 1858 for priests studying in Rome, where most of the bishops had been trained and through which they remained allied. It is called Colegio Pío Latino-Americano in Spanish (Collegio Pio Latino Americano in Italian) and for a century and a half it has contributed a great deal to the slowly-emerging sense of unity in the Church of Latin America.<sup>297</sup>

A local church evolves through the forging of links, not through demarcation and a retreat to home ground. Horizontal links sit uneasily in hierarchical structures, however. For example, the Christmas collection in the Archdiocese of Cologne in 1954 was taken up for the Archdiocese of Tokyo and a partnership arose as a result; this was a “novissimum”. Innovations aroused distrust in many people in the Vatican Curia at that time. This was because mission, and contact with the Church in a non-Catholic country, was traditionally regarded as Rome’s prerogative. Direct relationships between one local church and another, instead of via Rome, “were unseemly”.<sup>298</sup>

### **The Latin American Episcopal Conference CELAM and its significance in the continental local church**

The Plenary Council of 1899 was the end of the matter for half a century. Figuratively speaking, the Church in Latin America during the first half of the 20th century saw itself more as a collection of railway tracks converging on and culminating in the Vatican than as a network. That situation came to an end in 1955, for the first time a conference was held “on home territory”. The 35th International Eucharistic Congress in Rio de Janeiro was followed by the first General Assembly of the Latin American Episcopate which took place thanks to the decisive involvement of Dom Helder Camara, Suffragan Bishop of Rio de Janeiro. More importantly, the conference was not the end of the story. It passed a milestone resolution not to continue having meetings as random occurrences but to give the Church in Latin

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*en América Latina (1899-2001)*, CELAM series, Colección Quinta Conferencia, Historia, Bogotá 2005.

<sup>297</sup> See Medina Ascensio, L., *Historia del Colegio Pío Latino Americano (Roma: 1858-1978)*, México D.F. 1979.

<sup>298</sup> Toscer, S., *Les Catholiques Allemands à la Conquête du Développement*, Paris 1997, 6-71.

America a structure and to ask the Holy Father to set up a Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM) with a secretariat in Rome. Pius XII agreed, albeit with one wise alteration: the headquarters was to be in Latin America. It was decided that this should be in the Colombian capital, Santa fé de Bogotá.

The quick succession of Bishops' Conferences held in the early 1950s paved the way for the founding of CELAM. Previously, bishops' conferences had existed in very few countries, such as Mexico (since 1900) and Colombia (since 1908), in other words where attacks on the Church by the state had required the episcopates to stand by each other. To paraphrase Hegel, it might actually be a cunning trick of historical reason that creates local churches. The Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB), the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, was founded in 1952, but the process had been set in motion in 1950 by Helder Camara and Prelate Giovanni Montini, who at that time was Substitute in the Vatican Secretariat of State. From then on, a deep lifelong friendship united Helder Camara and the later, great Pope Paul VI.

The formation of CELAM was certainly the work of Dom Helder Camara, but its emergence was also due to the untiring efforts of two other prominent figures: Bishop Manuel Larraín Errázuriz of Talca (Chile) and Archbishop Antonio Samoré, nuncio in Colombia since 1950. Getting the Church together in Latin America was a cause close to his heart. It irritated him that many bishops preferred to turn to the Holy See on pastoral issues rather than discussing them with their neighbouring bishops.

The founding of CELAM was both a local church and a Latin American event. Half a century later the then president of CELAM, Francisco Javier Cardinal Errázuriz Ossa, reminded people that CELAM was "one of the first inter-American amalgamations" of any kind.<sup>299</sup> It soon became evident that the founding of CELAM was also a major event for the universal Church. Not only did CELAM provide a model for future bishops' conferences in Africa (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, SECAM/

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<sup>299</sup> Errázuriz Ossa, F.J., "Welcoming address at the retirement of Prelate Dr. Dieter Spelthahn and the installation of the Rev. Bernd Klaschka as Managing Director of the Catholic welfare organisation Adveniat, Essen, 28 May 2004", MS, Adveniat archive.

SCEAM, founded in 1969), Asia (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, FABC, founded 1970) and Europe. Above all, CELAM plays an incomparably greater role for the Church in Latin America than SECAM and FABC do in their respective continents. CELAM consists of 22 Bishops' Conferences, 21 of which are national (19 of them Spanish-speaking) plus the Antilles Episcopal Conference, whose members are the bishops from the British, Dutch and French possessions in the Caribbean and their former colonies. Every four years CELAM draws up an action plan, which is always very detailed and is not a mere paper exercise. In a surprising number of the Spanish-speaking countries, the Bishops' Conferences base their own pastoral plan on CELAM's 'Plan Global'.

The situation in Brazil is different, which is due not so much to the language gap as to the special position of the CNBB, which has 444 bishops<sup>300</sup> and is thus the second-largest bishops' conference in the world after Italy. What CNBB can offer to forums for exchanges of experience, training courses, publications, etc. is no less comprehensive than what CELAM can provide. And in a good many fields of pastoral care CNBB sees itself – rightly or sometimes wrongly – as the vanguard for the whole of Latin America.

Haiti has frequently been “left behind” not just for linguistic reasons but also, in particular, because of the very limited working opportunities for the Conférence Épiscopale d’Haïti. This was the case even before the devastating earthquake in 12 January 2010. There are shortages of staff, infrastructure, and communication – in short, of everything.

CELAM's contribution and achievement consists in giving the many local churches' initiatives (in the sense of dioceses and/or bishops' conferences) a dimension of continental church breadth, so that each strengthens the other in the faith, as well as ideas and suggestions for the many tasks the Church has to address in the 21st century: building bridges between Latin American cultures and the European tradition (the key term here is indigenous theology), pastoral care in the mega-cities, the ecumenical movement with sister churches, and the debate with the neo-Pentecostal movement.

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<sup>300</sup> See *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae 2009*, Città del Vaticano 2011, 95.

Continental church activity of this kind is significant first and foremost on a practical level through the internal local church duties, i.e. the kind that CELAM performs for the bishops' conferences and the bishops' conferences for the dioceses – and vice versa; dioceses setting an example to a whole country in various fields of pastoral care: the Bible apostolate, pastoral care of young people, pastoral care of prisoners, pastoral care of migrants *inter alia* (this happens in Germany too) or initiatives by one bishops' conference that are then taken over by neighbouring ones (this very seldom happens in Europe). Continental church activity is also significant on a theological level, however. At their third general assembly in Puebla (Mexico) in 1979 the Latin American bishops decided, true to the pioneering second general assembly of 1968 in Medellín, Colombia, to adopt as their guideline for the Church's apostolate the "priority option for the poor": in the discipleship of Jesus the Church must not wash its hands in innocence when confronted with poverty and injustice, but must take action. In addition, though this is not public knowledge to the same extent, they committed themselves to four further options, including the "Option for the particular church"<sup>301</sup>, in launching a 'rediscovery'<sup>302</sup> of the Second Vatican Council. This had emphasised "cum Petro et sub Petro" the responsibility of every single bishop and every single local church: every single bishop and every single area church must walk *their* road of discipleship in the Spirit of God. They must not be content with implementing guidelines from Rome. This does not happen without conflicts ensuing. If, for example, a bishop is no longer living out the option for the poor in his diocese, to which his predecessor had committed his local church at Puebla, then the option for a particular church (as that bishop is exercising it) comes into opposition with the option for the poor (being the option of the continental local church). If the Latin American local church cannot cope with the strain of internal conflicts, things that start as local church conflicts are eventually taken to Rome. This is what happened with the battle over liberation theology.

<sup>301</sup> Boff, L., "Puebla aus der Sicht des unterdrückten Lateinamerika", in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 64 (1980) vol.3, 161-191, quote 170.

<sup>302</sup> Saviano, B., *Fraternidad und Adveniat – Grundlagen, Erfahrungen und Herausforderungen*, MS, 2003, Adveniat archive.

## Religious orders paving the way for a South-South exchange

The Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos (CLAR) – the Latin American Confederation of Religious Orders – has been more successful than some of the bishops' conferences in living out diversity in unity and unity in diversity. This is another reason why it is impossible to overestimate the role played by the orders in the formation of a Latin American church out of local churches. All along, the monks and nuns were the people who never thought within borders. The hurdle that was to prove the highest for some missionary orders originating in Europe and North America was the threshold of inculturation. By that I do not mean the threshold at which an individual missionary was absorbed into the culture in which he or she was working (most of them managed this), i.e. “outgoing inculturation”, but rather “incoming inculturation”: the threshold of willingness to admit people into one's own congregation. Cardinal Errázuriz illustrated this once by quoting something he had heard still being said when he was a student: If a community starts to let natives in, its decadence has begun.

More than half a millennium after the first Franciscans and Dominicans arrived in the New World the era of a constant influx of European monks and nuns seems to be coming to an end. A new movement has begun: monks and nuns from Latin America are active in Africa; it was Brazilians who made a start in Angola and Mozambique, united by a common language. Conversely, to name but a few examples from the Caribbean, there are monks and nuns from the Congo and the Philippines working in Haiti, from Nigeria in Trinidad and French Guyana (Guyane), and from India in Jamaica and St. Lucia, not to mention the inter-American exchange of Haitians in Brazil and Brazilians in Haiti.

Since the 1980s the religious orders have been leading the way in the South-South exchange. Conducted among and by the churches, the South-South exchange is both a facet and a consequence of globalisation. It is one of the most exciting developments in recent Church history in general. The churches in the continents of the South are not only enriching the churches in the North, but also – and above all – they are enriching each other (something we are only rarely aware of), be it personally or theologically, through their experiences of inculturation. Many roads lead to and via Rome. But in the meantime

many more roads unite the Christians of the southern hemisphere directly with each other.

The flourishing South-South exchange is not a domain of the Catholic Church; it just happened to start there earlier. Beyond the edges of Catholic perception, the Pentecostal movement is spreading with extraordinary dynamism among the southern continents by means of transcultural mission as well as to Europe as a result of migration from the southern hemisphere.

But to get back to Latin America, here are two concluding examples to show how local churches are becoming the Church of Christ by transcending borders and supporting each other.

### **Two local churches overcome the gulf of history and reservations**

While more than a million Dominicans were emigrating to the USA in the hope of a better life, almost as many Haitians were immigrating into the Dominican Republic. It is the destitution of their homeland and the struggle for sheer survival that drives them out. Since almost all of them are “illegal”, smuggled across the border by traffickers (*boukonn* in Creole, *buscones* in Spanish), they can be exploited in all kinds of ways. They are housed in wretched shanty settlements, called *bateyes*. Having no rights and no protection, they can hardly dare to rebel, but have to cower instead. In tandem with the ups and down of the economy, Haitians are smuggled in – or picked up in raids and “repatriated”, i.e. deported, overnight on a whim and without any kind of trial. Parents are left behind without children and children without parents, depending on who was the first to fall into the hands of the “security forces”. The number of raids multiplies before elections, when the parties compete to show who is the most zealous in dealing with the “intruders” and who is best at preserving the *limpeza de sangre*, the purity of the blood. Human dignity is infringed.<sup>303</sup>

Many bishops, priests and lay people find themselves split between fear of foreigners and the Catholicism of the universal Church (which comes very, very close to them in the Haitian brothers and sisters),

<sup>303</sup> A good, and impressive, insight into the situation of the Haitians in the Dominican Republic and the debates conducted in Haitian politics is given in Issue 144 (October-December 2004) of the journal *Estudios Sociales*, published in Santo Domingo.

between the commandment to love one's neighbour and the "national interest". It still happens that children are refused baptism so that the door to citizenship is not opened up by virtue of the baptism certificate. It is not all that long ago that a bishop approved of pregnant Haitian women being deported so that they could not gain the right to stay via their children.

Despite such bitter experiences, a growing flock of Catholics has started looking after the Haitians. In the dioceses on the border it is hard to imagine life without the *Pastoral Haitiana*, including rights counselling. Tireless admonishers in defence of human rights, even for Haitians, were the Flemish Fathers of the Congregatie van het Onbevelekt Hart van Maria (CICM) and the Jesuits. A major step in terms of both Dominican and Church history was the account taken of the Haitians living in the country at the First National Council in 2000<sup>304</sup>. The bishops' conference set up a committee for the *Pastoral Haitiana*, which expressed its carefully balanced view on the "Haitian question".<sup>305</sup> The fact that, after considerable initial reservations, the two bishops' conferences on the one island were prepared to hold joint conferences was a hopeful sign (and it was the Dominicans who had to make the greater effort). New links were established after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and thanks to the impressive aid that flowed in from the neighbouring country. It will remain a touchstone for the Church in the Dominican Republic whether it treats "its" Haitians as it treats Christ Himself.

### Engaging in partnership

Another encouraging sign is the growing number of examples of sharing in the churches of the South. In many campaigns, such as in Chile, attention is focussed on endeavouring to secure a greater amount of self-financing. After decades of abundant aid from the churches of the North there is a threat of crippling habituation. The then deputy head of Adveniat, Bernhard Steber, wrote self-critically:

<sup>304</sup> Conferencia del Episcopado Dominicano (ed.), *Primer Concilio Plenario Dominicano*, Santo Domingo 2000.

<sup>305</sup> See, for example, the explanation *La presencia de haitianos en República Dominicana. Ante la creciente inmigración haitiana*, printed in three parts in the daily *Listin Diario* (Santo Domingo), 3, 4 and 5 November 2005.

“We have come to a standstill at an early stage in our relations with local churches in Latin America. Our numerous projects help us to fulfil the wishes of the local church (in the manner of Christmas presents). This is tending to impede the process the Church in Latin America must undergo on its way to independence from us. Are we not generating dependence through our aid? It’s so easy to get aid from dear old *Adveniat!*”<sup>306</sup>

In other campaigns, such as the “Plan Compartir” in Argentina, the intention is also to practise the attitude of sharing, of becoming partners with each other. The word partner, going back to the Latin root, designates somebody with whom I share (**participate**), whether in a burden or a responsibility. Participation is different from dependence. There are two similar initiatives in Brazil, the “Campanha da Fraternidade” (Campaign of Brotherliness), a Lent campaign comparable to *Misereor*, and the *dízimo* movement (*dízimo* = tenth, which is not taken literally, but reminds believers that they must first give so that their church can pass on and give back).

In Brazil an annual nationwide collection for Amazonia has been included. The campaign for it confronts Brazilians with the crass differences in wealth and poverty within their own country. Quite apart from financial support, a large number of dioceses in the south of Brazil have “adopted” dioceses in the north of the country, which they support with aid in the form of staff, by sending priests and lay people.

The one thing that is taking time to develop is a cross-national, internal Latin American exchange. Although it has frequently been announced by CELAM, there is still no “Latin American *Adveniat!*”. However strong solidarity is within a particular country, the Catholicism of many local churches reaches its limits at the border. This experience is Catholic, too; even local Christians sometimes feel that charity begins at home. Until they begin to take notice and understand that too much local spirit is not good for a local church. After all, to repeat the point, we are Catholics too. Leafing through old Father Gams’ survey reminds us of that.

<sup>306</sup> Steber, B., “Unordentliche Gedanken” on *Adveniat*, MS 1995, *Adveniat* archive.

## Pastoral Consequences



## “Mutual exchange” – the Diocese of Limburg as an example of a pastoral paradigm within the universal Church

Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst

The Catholic Church is a universal Church.<sup>307</sup> Its awareness of a common bond is founded upon the unity of each local church with the Bishop of Rome and its manifold expression in the community of many local churches. This provides each local church with an attractive inner breadth.

The diocese of Limburg fosters intensive partner exchanges with a number of different sister churches. Its partnership with the diocese of Kumbo in Cameroon will serve to illustrate the ways in which local churches can derive inspiration from the universal Church.

The missionary dedication and activities of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (SAC), the Pallottines, have led to a special connection between the diocese and city of Limburg and the Catholic Church in Cameroon. The first Pallottines came to Cameroon as Catholic missionaries in 1890 and dedicated the country to Mary, the Mother of God. Heinrich Vieter SAC, the first Bishop of Cameroon, was subsequently consecrated bishop in the Cathedral of Limburg on 22 January 1905. The mission house for the Pallottines in Germany was built in the diocesan city at the same time. In the light of this historical connection it made sense to establish a close partnership that would focus attention on the vigour of other sister churches and pave the way for mutual learning.

Missionary work is undertaken not just in Cameroon, however. The same is true of Germany, a country in which transmission of the

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<sup>307</sup> Manuscript of a lecture, slightly edited for publication, delivered at the Université Catholique de l'Afrique Central (UCAC), Yaoundé (Cameroon), on 3 November 2009.

faith from one generation to the next and to non-believing fellow citizens is not (or no longer) a matter of course. With that in mind I should like to present a few thoughts on pastoral theology to encourage common reflection and learning within the one universal Church.

### Comparative pastoral theology

More than thirty years have passed since Adolf Exeler, a pastoral theologian from Münster, first projected the idea of a comparative methodology as a means of re-appraising conventional missiology. His initiative was inspired by the prospect of being able to “recognise the ecology of a theology related to a specific time and place.”<sup>308</sup> Exeler bases his argument on a vertical comparison that makes it possible to ascertain the succession of different theologies in the course of Church history. He argues that “the comparison with other Church situations has helped to question truths incorrectly deemed to be self-evident, enabled well-trodden paths to be abandoned and new connections and opportunities to be perceived.”<sup>309</sup> In a nutshell he says: “The realisation that there are alternatives breaks down the barriers of provincial narrowness and can open up new prospects in dead-end situations.”<sup>310</sup>

But while Exeler strongly recommends learning from other comparative disciplines in hermeneutical respects, he still gives priority to practical exploration. In this context, “learning from the universal Church” means both a subtly differentiated perception of one’s own starting point and that of others in dialogue with the Gospel and the witness of the Church. “Learning from the universal Church” does not function as an uncritical transfer of pastoral programmes, but only as a process of evangelising all those involved in the comparison. Within the hermeneutics of a comparative pastoral theology “learning from the universal Church” means a four-step process<sup>311</sup> involving

<sup>308</sup> Exeler, A., “Wege einer vergleichenden Pastoral”, in: *Theologie der Gegenwart* 23 (1980), 12-20, 13.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> Cf. Matthieu, M., “Interkonfessionell, interkulturell, interreligiös. Denkanstöße zur Wissenschaftstheorie einer vergleichenden Religionspädagogik”, in: Baumgartner, K., et al. (eds.), *Glauben lernen, leben lernen*, Sankt Ottilien 1985, 227-242, 236f.

the "description, interpretation, juxtaposition and comparison" of missionary initiatives. In the context of mutual exchange this approach provides a learning experience in which personal abilities are seen as both a gift and a task in dialogue with others that can lead to the emergence of something new.

The following questions make this four-step process tangible. With what eyes do I observe reality? With what faith and life experience do I perceive the world (description)? Why does reality appear as it is? What contexts influence my own interpretation (meaning)? What disturbs me about the interpretations of others? How does my observation touch on my own personal experience (juxtaposition)? What new thoughts present themselves to me? What conclusions do I draw from them? What kind of (shared) growth becomes possible (comparison)?

Such a sequence of missionary steps (along the path to faith) emerging within this inspirational learning environment as a Church-focused *tertium comparationis* in a pastoral comparison can be seen in Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*. The second chapter of that document speaks of five motives within the context of the "evangelisation of culture," which can motivate people to perform missionary pastoral care everywhere in the universal Church: "witness of life", "witness of the word", "genuine adherence", "entry into the community of the faithful" and "participation in the apostolate".<sup>312</sup>

As a community of learning, prayer and solidarity,<sup>313</sup> the universal Church absorbs and reflects the elements constituting the path taken by individuals towards the faith and interprets them as a comprehensive process of evangelisation. This "companionship" touches the whole person.

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<sup>312</sup> *Apostolisches Schreiben "Evangelii nuntiandi" Seiner Heiligkeit Papst Pauls VI. an den Episkopat, den Klerus und alle Gläubigen der Katholischen Kirche über die Evangelisierung in der Welt von heute*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 2, Bonn 1975, 15-16, no. 20.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (ed.), *Allen Völkern sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 55-60.

## Parameters of missionary pastoral care

Learning “missionary pastoral care” from the universal Church in practical and theological terms requires the development of specific comparison parameters on the basis of this sequence of steps. With an eye on the four basic functions of community life, I shall now present examples of such a learning perspective that are encountered within “the universal Church as a learning community.” They are intended to stimulate further examination and discussion.

### Diakonia

According to the missionary comparison parameters in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, the path to faith begins with “wordless witness”. The immediate experience of “solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good, (...) presence and sharing”, and thus also tangible personal efforts to help others in distress, creates immediate plausibility for the healing effect of the Gospel.<sup>314</sup>

Those who look after children with HIV/AIDS in the “Breakthrough Association” of our African sister church in Kumbo, for instance, who also take care of infected and sick adults and share the challenges of life with them, bear witness to the solidarity of God, who devotes himself to His people. Their efforts, supported and inspired by an attitude of love, are focused on individual human beings. This “wordless witness” is articulated in their dedication to the poorest of the poor.<sup>315</sup> This experience presents a common challenge. For all the cultural differences there may be, we in Germany also need to ask ourselves how best to bear witness to the active brotherly love born from a spirit of Christian responsibility and how we can stand up for the basic rights of people who have been marginalised. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40) The “witness of life” provides a direct experience of what Benedict XVI referred to in his encyclical *Deus caritas est*: “Those who work for the Church’s charitable organisations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Paul VI, *o cit.*, 16-17, no. 21.

<sup>315</sup> Another concrete example would be the community-based rehabilitation project for people with disabilities in the diocese of Ndola (Zambia).

dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity."<sup>316</sup>

## Martyria

Learning to believe is a fundamental challenge within the different life contexts of the universal Church; it entails recognising and confessing what is distinctively Christian in the social context.

Through contact and exchange with our sister churches in the universal Church, the Church in Germany has become acquainted with different forms of what is called "small Christian communities". This approach, which entails not only reading the Word of God but also experiencing in it God's call to us to "witness the word", touches everyone who is prepared to embrace it. Listening to God's Word focuses on the personal witness in the life of the individual; it moves Christians. Religious sensibility in Africa is distinctly community-based and is regarded, above all, as a community with God, the creator of humankind, with ancestors, fellow human beings and nature, as Professor Abeng of the Université Catholique de l'Afrique Central (UCAC) put it in a lecture. Bible sharing, which brings together the sharing of faith and life, has its roots in the human community, i.e. in the social habitat of human beings. Religious sensibility in Germany may be more individualistic than in other cultural areas, but this path can nonetheless help to deepen faith and contribute to a new proclamation of the Gospel.

## Liturgia

The complexity involved in learning from the universal Church is particularly tangible in the liturgy: in common prayer and in the celebration of the Eucharist. Humankind's new search for roots and continuity brings with it a new awareness of rituals that support and connect us. The realisation that faith requires form and an easily recognisable ritual is evident. Liturgy and mystagogy are of central importance for the experience and recognition of faith in the Christian Church. The World Youth Days with their great liturgical celebrations

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<sup>316</sup> Benedikt XVI, *Gott ist die Liebe. Die Enzyklika "Deus caritas est"*, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 2006, 71, no. 31<sup>a</sup>.

show how the universal Church can respond to this need. At the same time, the challenge of inculturation on all continents appears to be a task that turns the universal Church learning comparison into a real test.

In spiritual exchange and in the shared celebration of faith and life we can experience not only the closeness of the different local churches and individual human beings, but also sense and celebrate the closeness we share in our belief in the One God. Learning from the universal Church as an exploratory investigation of how unity in diversity can be successfully linked with diversity in unity thus remains a conciliar task which requires that we reflect upon the comparison parameters that are constitutive for the liturgy.

### **Koinonia**

According to *Evangelii nuntiandi*, *communio* and community formation are steps that follow from “genuine adherence” and “entrance into the sacramental community of the Church”. Just how closely gifts and tasks are interwoven is currently becoming clear to us here in Germany as we observe the pastoral processes of community formation in large areas. Although the missionary dimension is expressly included in all structural considerations, there can be no overlooking to the extent to which community formation is frequently perceived in terms of territorial provision rather than as the experience of sacramental gatherings in the form of a *communio*. “Learning by comparison” with our sister churches is only possible to a limited extent. At the same time, however, this *communio* becomes clear in the practise of “companionship”, which some congregations actively develop with partners from the universal Church and in dialogue with each other.

### **Intercultural and inter-church learning community**

“Rivers never cross” is a saying that has been handed down to us from Cameroon. Just as rivers come together and, merging their inseparable waters of life, flow towards their mouth and into the sea, so the mission-based dissemination of the Catholic faith evolved in Cameroon. The first missionaries travelled from Limburg to Cameroon. “For the love of Christ overwhelms us” (2 Corinthians 5:14) can be read on the

relief of the altar plinth of the Pallottine church in Nlongkak. It shows a crowd leaving St. Mary's Church in Limburg and heading for the church erected in Mvolye in 1906. This movement continues up to the present day and we are called upon to give common expression to this evangelising mission in the worldwide Catholic Church as a learning community.

The German bishops found a clear formulation for this in 2004: "The mission of the universal Church needs a head, heart and hands that must work together in the same way as in the human body. Hence the universal Church as a religious community is also a community of learning, a community of prayer and a community of solidarity. Since the universal Church finds its fulfilment in numerous local churches that are rooted in their respective cultures, it is becoming an intercultural and inter-church community of learning."<sup>317</sup>

This attitude lies at the roots of the prayer for partnership that is regularly said in the dioceses of Limburg and Kumbo. It is an expression of the fraternal union of our common faith:

God, our Father,  
 Father of all peoples in this world.  
 Many miles are between us,  
 The people of the diocese of Limburg  
 And the people of the diocese of Kumbo.  
 Far away from each other we live and love,  
 Work and pray.

We are different in colour, language,  
 Food, clothing and many other things.  
 By our faith in you, Father,  
 And in Jesus Christ,  
 Your son and our brother,  
 We are brothers and sisters  
 In the Holy Spirit.

Many things separate us,  
 But many more unite us

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<sup>317</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (ed.), *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 55.

And bring us together as one large family.  
We are together on our journey,  
To understand each other always better,  
To recognise each other as brothers and sisters,  
Who are close to and  
Available for each other.

Grant us, Father,  
That our longing will be fulfilled.  
Bless our work  
For the partnership between Limburg and Kumbo.  
Make us true witnesses of your love  
Which overcomes any separation.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord and Brother  
And in the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

## Mission and dialogue – being Christian in a plural society

Albert Peter Rethmann

Whenever Christians talk about mission, one aspect of it will in all likelihood be beyond dispute: Christians see themselves as members of a global family that is linked by mutual solidarity – or should be, at least. What distinguishes them from others is that their thinking does not follow narrow national borders. That is their personal aspiration, at least. Christians regard themselves as a global learning community, not as a Church whose boundaries are identical to those of a particular country. Consequently, for Christians there are no foreigners. In the Christian congregation and community, in the Church, there is – as Paul writes – no longer any division of people into Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men, males and females (Gal 3:28) and most certainly not in such a way that one group sets itself apart from the others and feels superior to them. In the Christian community, in the Church, these boundaries are to be abolished. This brings us to the egalitarian effect of the Gospel; for, as Paul says, “you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28 NJB) People derive a sense of dignity, uniqueness and strength from their union with Christ and from the knowledge of being created and really wanted by God. It is crucially important that the Church – if it wishes to remain faithful to its identity as the Church of Jesus Christ – should regard itself as a church that overcomes boundaries. The Church, by its very essence, *is* the universal Church.

### **The crisis in the concept of mission**

There was a time when the word ‘mission’ rolled a little easier off the tongue and we believed that those who had not been baptised would not find eternal salvation. There was also a time when Europeans felt it was their duty to bring culture and religion to people in other parts of the world. The reports of the first Italian missionaries in the Congo in the second half of the seventeenth century are very revealing in

this respect. They considered it their obligation to bring “order, truth and eternal standards” to this world of “bizarre customs and satanic traditions” so that the inhabitants might be raised from the level of animals to humans, taken from barbarity to civilised behaviour and, rid of the lies of sorcery and idolatry, shown the light of reason and belief.<sup>318</sup> Over the centuries, therefore, and in many parts of the world the history of missionary activity has been closely associated with the history of colonisation. Respect was not always shown for the freedom of every individual to accept or reject the belief in the God of Jesus Christ – and without that freedom there cannot be any true faith.

This brings us straight to the fundamental crisis in the concept of mission in modern times. We know that God’s grace cannot be limited to the Catholic Church alone.<sup>319</sup> It extends to people who, for whatever reason, have not – or not yet – experienced the God of Jesus Christ in any tangible form or one that is relevant to them. Moreover, we know – and have done at the very latest since the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on Religious Freedom “*Dignitatis humanae*” (DH) – that the essence of belief resides in the ability to say yes freely to the God of Jesus Christ. No one can be forced to accept or discard a certain belief.

Referring to the deliberations of the Council, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde talks of a “Copernican revolution, a move away from the right of the truth to the right of the individual”<sup>320</sup>; this came about, in particular, as a result of the declaration “*Dignitatis humanae*”. DH renounces neither the Christian religion’s claim to the truth nor the obligation of every individual to seek the truth. But what is new is that the worldly power is declared to be devoid of any competence in this matter, because an option for the faith is a personal matter, in other words individuals must be free to decide in accordance with

<sup>318</sup> Mbulamwanza, M.-B., *Testi e immagini. La missione del Congo nelle relazioni dei cappuccini italiani 1645–1700*, Thèse Lubumbashi 1977, cited in: Bühlmann, W., *Wenn Gott zu allen Menschen geht. Für eine neue Erfahrung der Auserwählung*, Freiburg 1981, 94.

<sup>319</sup> Cf. Johannes Paul II., *Enzyklika REDEMPTORIS MISSIO Seiner Heiligkeit Papst Johannes Paul II. über die fortdauernde Gültigkeit des missionarischen Auftrages*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 100, Bonn 1990, 10.

<sup>320</sup> Böckenförde, E.-W., “Religionsfreiheit als Aufgabe der Christen. Gedanken eines Juristen zu den Diskussionen auf dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil (1965)”, in: idem., *Kirchlicher Auftrag und politische Entscheidung*, Freiburg i. Br. 1973, 72f.

their inner conscience. It should be added from a theological point of view that, by its very nature, turning to God transcends the earthly and temporal order.<sup>321</sup> This statement marks the final renunciation of the notion of a Catholic or Christian state that enforces the interests of the Church with the powers it has at its disposal. Mission in the wake of colonisation is, therefore, no longer conceivable.

Today, the question facing religions with a claim to universality in the context of a plural society is whether they can affirm a plural society on inner – theological – grounds. Only religions that can do so will remain compatible in the long term with modern, liberal concepts of society and the state.

### Christianity and culture

From the very beginning, Christianity has been facing a singular tension. Its task is to proclaim in word and in life what is new and distinctive with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. In a process of *metanoia* or conversion, people are called upon in their lives to fully embrace the God of Jesus Christ, because life and salvation are to be found in Him. On the one hand, this message of Jesus Christ was understood from the very outset as being universal. In other words, it was directed to every individual in every culture at all times. It is not something of purely local or regional significance. This leads us almost automatically to the other pole in this field of tension. Conflicting with the universal claim of Jesus are the different individuals and, in particular, the culturally influenced life plans of people and nations in the world. These life plans include not only the individual's explicit religious belief in God, but also their different ethical culture. It is understandable, therefore, that the Pauline epistles and the New Testament Gospels show evidence of the intensive efforts made to find points of contact among the recipients of the message making it possible for them to comprehend and accept the message and person of Jesus and to fashion a life with Him on the basis of that message.

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<sup>321</sup> Cf., Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Die Erklärung über die Religionsfreiheit »Dignitatis humanae«*, in: Rahner, K./Vorglimmer, H.(eds.), *Kleines Konzilskompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums mit Einführungen und ausführlichem Sachregister*, Freiburg i.Br. 1982, 663-664, no. 3.

The first steps are well known and reported in the Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew the message of God is introduced to a Jewish-influenced community and in the Gospel of John to a community which probably has no Jewish but Greek roots (deemed in the New Testament to be “heathen”) and is influenced by the thinking of Ancient Greece. The authors of the Gospels attempt to express their belief in the God of Jesus Christ in a manner compatible with the cognitive framework of the Jewish faith or of Greek philosophy. Paul adopts a similar approach with regard to the Christian ethos, which he interprets with the help of Stoic philosophy and presents to the people in the congregations he has founded and supervises. Evidence of this is provided by the ‘household codes,’ the catalogues of virtues and vices, which Paul took from the Stoic tradition and to which he gave a distinct Christian slant and orientation.

The Christian festivals, too, have pagan origins. Christmas, for instance, coincides with the winter solstice celebrations; for, according to Christian understanding, Jesus Christ is the real *sol invictus*, the sun god of the later Roman Empire.

In modern mission theology, the founder of the first chair of mission theology, Joseph Schmidlin – a missiologist from Münster – underlined the importance of conversion in the first half of the 20th century and of the preaching of the Gospel, which convinces people to convert and begin a new life in Christ.<sup>322</sup> In this respect he concurs with the Protestant missiologist Gustav Warneck. In contrast Pierre Charles, a Belgian Jesuit from Leuven, stresses the old mediaeval Church missionary doctrine of the planting of the Church (*plantatio ecclesiae*), the purpose of which was to ‘plant’ indigenous churches in the overseas colonies so as to give the new native Christians a chance to express their faith using their own cultural means.<sup>323</sup>

Taking this into account, the decree “Ad gentes” on the mission activity of the Church, issued by the Second Vatican Council, calls for the inculturation of the Gospel in all cultures, but also warns against syncretism and particularism. The basic idea conveyed throughout, albeit with different emphases, is that in the missionary endeavours

<sup>322</sup> See Schmidlin, J., *Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss*, Münster 1923.

<sup>323</sup> Cf. Colzani, G., *Teologia della missione*, Padova 1996, 43-45.

undertaken by the Church an encounter should take place between the Gospel and the diverse forms of real life.

All those who concern themselves with the issues arising from Christian mission theology agreed in principle that “As long as the spirit and the message of the Gospel, as laid down and developed in the (faith) tradition of the Church, are preserved, every culture should have the right to find the form and expression of the faith that are appropriate to it.”<sup>324</sup> A closer examination of the matter in theological terms, however, brings a number of problems and contradictions to the surface, exemplified not least by the almost Babylonian linguistic confusion to be found in this field. Behind each of the terms used lies an implicit or explicit theological concept. The different terms reveal an attempt to respond to the fact that Christianity is no longer a purely European phenomenon and that, as of the 20th century, “the majority of Christians live in the southern hemisphere and derive their identity from the histories of non-European cultures and in the context of non-Christian religions.”<sup>325</sup>

Concepts that reflect the process of extricating the Church from its entanglement with exclusivity involve the use of words such as adaptation and accommodation and – more recently – the terms indigenisation, contextualisation and the explicitly theological concept ‘incarnation’ of the faith in non-European cultures. In the interests of simplicity, however, I will stick to the term inculturation, even though I am aware it has a number of disadvantages, in particular the fact that, in contrast to other terms, it does not emphasise the process that is involved.

The term inculturation, probably coined by the missiologist Pierre Charles in 1953, has been in use for less than sixty years. Originally, ‘inculturation’ was not a term used in mission theology at all.<sup>326</sup> It goes back to the American cultural anthropologist Melville Herskovits. In his cultural theory Herskovits uses the term inculturation to describe

<sup>324</sup> Müller, K., “Inkulturation” in: *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe*, Berlin 1987, 107.

<sup>325</sup> Collet, G., “Inkulturation: I. Begriff und Problemstellung”, in: *Lexikon Theologie und Kirche*, 1996, 505.

<sup>326</sup> Rivinius, K.J., “Inkulturation“, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 212 (1994) 687–696.

the process a child undergoes in its conscious and unconscious response to the cultural manifestations of its environment. It learns the habits it observes in its surroundings – from language to clothing and food, which gives the child security and a sense of orientation when confronted with the unfamiliar. Herskovits calls this process (in American English) ‘enculturation.’ This term was taken up by Joseph Masson in 1962. Writing in the journal *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* he talked about ‘Catholicisme inculturé’<sup>327</sup> and stressed the need for a “diversely inculturated Catholicism – catholicisme inculturé d’une façon polymorphe.”<sup>328</sup>

In Asia, the term was used at the first Plenary Assembly of the Asian Bishops’ Conference in 1974 in Taipei, where there was a discussion for the first time about the ‘indigenous inculturated Church’: “The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its root deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry. Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did God’s Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition [...] so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in his Paschal mystery.”<sup>329</sup>

At this time the term ‘inculturation’ occurred in various Jesuit documents and became established in theological circles at the very latest in 1979 in the Apostolic Exhortation “*Catechesi Tradendae*” on Catechesis in our Time. This combines the theological principle of incarnation with the concept of acculturation found in social science. “The term acculturation, which is related to the ethnological term

<sup>327</sup> Masson, J., “L’Église ouverte sur le monde” in: *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 75 (1953) 15-32.

<sup>328</sup> Cf. Sievernich, M., *Die christliche Mission. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Darmstadt 2009, 150.

<sup>329</sup> FABCI, “Evangelisation in Modern Day Asia” (Taipei 1974), in: Rosales, G.B. / Arévalo, C., (eds.), *For all the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1, Maryknoll, Quezon City 1992, 14, no. 12.

‘enculturation’ commonly used in anthropology, where it means the cultural contacts of an individual, describes the acceptance by an individual or a group of foreign spiritual or cultural elements.”<sup>330</sup> Acculturation, however, encompasses an additional, decisive aspect, which is that of mutuality. An exchange takes place that stimulates both sides and, ideally, triggers a common stimulus.

In this connection the Second Vatican Council uses the Biblical image of the seed. Section 22 of the decree “Ad gentes” states in poetic, conciliar language: “The seed which is the word of God, watered by divine dew, sprouts from the good ground and draws from thence its moisture, which it transforms and assimilates into itself, and finally bears much fruit. In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance.”<sup>331</sup>

Here the principle of incarnation has been chosen as an image to illustrate what is to happen in the handing on of the faith, in the mission. The Son of God has united himself to human nature and become a physical human being. In his physical presence as Jesus of Nazareth, born in Palestine under Roman occupation at the time of Emperor Augustus, and as a faithful and erudite Jew, his concrete historical figure becomes – in word and in life – the revelation of God, which is not restricted to the period and Jewish surroundings in which the historical Jesus lived. Rather, the message of Jesus is to assume a different form at every time and in every place in every culture.

### **Culture as symbolic interpretation**

Culture is the term generally used to express the sum of the means by which a human being expresses himself as a person, as an individual (individual lifestyle) and in a community (culture of a people, of a religious community, etc.). A person refers to himself and expresses the way he sees himself and the relationship he has with his surroundings

<sup>330</sup> Reimann, S., “Inkulturation – Zwischen Ritenstreit und Befreiungstheologie”, in: [http://www.kueichstaett.de/Fakultaeten/RPF/professuren/gemeindegemeinschaften/reader/readerHIII/HF\\_sections/content/Inkulturation.pdf](http://www.kueichstaett.de/Fakultaeten/RPF/professuren/gemeindegemeinschaften/reader/readerHIII/HF_sections/content/Inkulturation.pdf)(25.1.2010), 4.

<sup>331</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Das Dekret über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche “Ad gentes”*, in: Rahner, K./Vorgrimler, H.(eds.), *o cit.*, 365, no. 22.

by means of symbols – and words. With the help of symbols – and, given the analytical, poetic and other functions that words have, they can be set alongside symbols – he classifies individual things as belonging to a larger whole in accordance with religious, aesthetic, philosophical or political points of view and thus gives them meaning. This is how people create what we call culture.

Furthermore, culture has an historical aspect (cultural heritage) and is at the same time a contemporaneous concept. In subjective terms, culture means the capacity to create and practise culture; in objective terms, culture manifests itself in cultural goods. Interpreted in this comprehensive sense, culture encompasses language, values, religion, art and much more besides. It is reflected in standards of thinking, feeling and behaviour.<sup>332</sup>

On the one hand, the term culture describes a permanent conditioning, a second reality for a person. On the other hand, it is also evident that culture is not simply a fate into which a person is born; while it is a given fact, it is also something he is called upon to fashion. In this respect, culture and the individual find themselves in a dialectical relationship.

A concept of culture framed in this way reminds us that human activity is not devoid of history, but comes face to face with the outcome of activities undertaken in the past. The cultural tradition encompasses the concrete, but also the noetic, i.e. conceptual principles, codes and standards. The cultural heritage is, in this sense, an incomplete aggregate sum. If cultural traditions are to survive, there must be anthologies and encyclopaedias, museums and books, memories and stores of all kinds. The most important storage medium is language, without which culture is inconceivable. Language plays a major role in cultural self-awareness and in appraising given cultural facts, their standards and codes.

For Christian theology, the principle by which the true Christian faith must abide is that it should not destroy any human culture. Quite the opposite, it can absorb elements of the prevailing culture

<sup>332</sup> Türk, H.J., "Kultur", in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (1997) 6, 514f, here: 515. Cf. Schwemmer, O., *Die kulturelle Existenz des Menschen*, Berlin, 1997; Moebius, S./Quadflieg, D., (eds.), *Kultur. Theorien der Gegenwart*, Wiesbaden 2006.

and yet leave a decisive mark on this culture by placing accentuations, shifting horizons and injecting meaning of its own. Anyone who has looked into the mission history of Christianity will know that this model was not always the primary concern driving Church activities, especially in the period of colonialism. Since the Second Vatican Council at the very latest, but also long before that in the many efforts made by Christian missionaries<sup>333</sup>, Christian theology and the Church's message have stressed that in the encounter between Christianity and practised culture the aim must be to ensure a real meeting between the Gospel and the expressions of meaning found in the specific culture. This statement takes on a special significance if we interpret it against the backdrop of today's plural and liberal societies.

When we talk of plural societies, we mean societies with an essentially unlimited number of groups, each of which fosters its internal group culture. This culture moulds and strengthens the group's own members, but it also has and exerts influence on society as a whole. The various groups cooperate with each other, although they also compete in certain areas. The state does not consider itself responsible for matters pertaining to proclamation of the faith. In questions of belief it does not make decisions on behalf of people living in the country.

The concept of mission must be reconsidered in view of life as it is lived in such liberal societies. Here the formulation contained in the policy paper adopted by the German Bishops' Conference "His Salvation for all Nations" (2004) points in the right direction. It states that mission means "transcending the boundaries that separate us from others and, while respecting their otherness, bearing witness to and proclaiming the Gospel so credibly that they feel invited to follow Jesus and to accept His Gospel."<sup>334</sup>

The French Bishops' Conference presented its thoughts on the proclamation of the Gospel under the heading "Proposer la foi –

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<sup>333</sup> See also, for example, the efforts made Matteo Ricci, a missionary to China; inter alia cf. Haub, R./Oberholzer, P., *Matteo Ricci und der Kaiser von China: Jesuitenmission im Reich der Mitte*, Würzburg 2010.

<sup>334</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (ed.), *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 37.

Offer the Faith, Let People Decide”<sup>335</sup> The message they wished to convey was that the task Christians face is to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ and the God of Jesus Christ so convincingly through their own way of life and ability to communicate that people feel invited to move down the path that Jesus walked and defined. This makes it clear that for people walking in the footsteps of Jesus there cannot be an either/or between the spreading of the Gospel and a commitment to social justice. The same is true when it comes to bearing witness for those still searching and to an involvement in a sincere inter-faith dialogue. All these are different manifestations of the Christian way of life.

### **Christian mission rests on dialogue**

The Christian message can only be embraced in freedom. However, that does not mean renouncing one’s own identity. Rather, the person who has come to believe in the God of Jesus Christ places his own identity in a larger context. The Christian belief is capable of inculturating itself in different environments. This is true of the major cultures in the world. Christians regard this as both an opportunity and a challenge in respect of the many sub-cultures and milieus in which they move in European societies. When we talk about inculturation, we do not mean just the culture of the elites. On the contrary, we cannot afford to lose sight of the cultures and sub-cultures of the marginalised, the excluded, the forgotten and the poor. We need to remember not just the many lifestyles which people the world over pursue to express the image they have of themselves and the way they interpret the world, but also the various strata, groups and milieus in Germany and other European societies.

In my view, what Alfons Auer has said about the relationship between faith and life, between world ethos and salvation ethos<sup>336</sup> can be transferred, *cum grano salis*, to the issues we are addressing here: the integrative, critical and stimulating role of faith with respect to culturally influenced life as it is lived.

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<sup>335</sup> Conférence Episcopale Française, *Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle. Lettre aux catholiques de France*, Paris 1999.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Auer, A., *Autonome Moral und christlicher Glaube*, Düsseldorf 1971.

- The belief in the God of Jesus Christ is an *integrative* factor within an existing culture. It is capable of absorbing aspects of that culture and placing them in the larger context of a belief in creation which assumes that everything has its origins in God and finds its fulfilment in Him. Culturally determined forms of coexistence are thus given a meaning and rendered amenable to the comprehensive reality of the Lord. For the believer they can be an expression of his faith in God.
- Secondly, the encounter between belief and an existing culture involves a dialogue that draws *critical* attention to aspects that are not reconcilable with belief in the God of Jesus Christ. In this context reference can be made, for example, to the importance of the individual who, in the course of European cultural history, has been strongly influenced by the Christian belief in creation and redemption. Acceptance of the significance of individual human dignity means there can be no toleration of slavery or the death sentence. In this respect, and in many other questions of human coexistence, the Christian faith has a *critical* impact on possible cultural realities.
- In the encounter with an existing culture, faith plays an integrative, critical and *stimulating* role by pointing the way forward and aspiring to initiate, inspire and impel a development that ultimately leads to a more humane world and a life more worthy of human beings.

“Our service to the faith”, says the 34th General Congregation of the Jesuits, “must not disregard the good forces in the cultures in which we work, nor must it impose anything foreign on them from outside. It strives to ensure that the driving forces at the heart of a culture move it towards the Kingdom of God.”<sup>337</sup>

With regards to its relations with the cultures and milieus in which people live today, the Christian message does not wish to formulate any fundamental opposition to a certain culture or to people’s life plans. It does not intend to establish an alternative world, but to be

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<sup>337</sup> 34th General Congregation (1995), in: Provinzialskonferenz der Zentraleuropäischen Assistenzen (ed.), *Dekrete der 31. bis 34. Generalkongregation der Gesellschaft Jesu*, Munich 1997, 421.

heard in the world in which people live. Here in Europe, Germany, in particular, it is becoming progressively more difficult to understand this world, because it is getting more complex and diverse. Recent studies have shown that the Christian churches often reach only very specific, limited milieus.<sup>338</sup> One reason for this might be because Christians sometimes pay too little attention to the fact that it is not simply a question of drawing a line between the right and convinced believers on the one hand and the ‘unbelievers’ on the other. “The dividing line between the Gospel and modern or post-modern culture runs right through the heart of each and every one of us. Everybody [...] encounters the temptation to yield to unbelief in themselves first of all. Only after we have learned to handle this conflict in ourselves can we talk to others of God.”<sup>339</sup>

One thing is quite clear, however. For Christians in Germany, being a missionary Church increasingly means they must become more interested, than in the past, in the many cultures and sub-cultures in which people live – and enable them to find a home in the Church that aspires to be a Church of all nations, strata and milieus. This requires a fundamental openness to the different lifestyles people choose nowadays. Ultimately this requires the courage to accept contemporary society in a secular world. “The service we provide for atheists and agnostics either takes the form of a meeting between partners engaging in dialogue on an equal footing who address questions together – or it remains an empty gesture. This dialogue will proceed from a common life, from a common active commitment to development and liberation, from commonly advocated values and common human experience.”<sup>340</sup>

### **Mission as the inculturation of faith**

If Christian faith cannot exist in any other way than in the varied forms that are characteristic features of the different cultures, then those who are offering others the Gospel must be critical about their own ways

<sup>338</sup> See Sellmann, M., “Theologisches Gestaltsehen. Die Sinusstudie über Kirche und Religion als eine Wahrnehmungsschule für Theologie und Pastoral”, in: *Pastoralblatt* 2/07, 41-49.

<sup>339</sup> 34th General Congregation (1995), in: o cit., 425f.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, 427

of expressing the faith. They must be aware of their cultural identity in order to avoid putting the Gospel they proclaim on par with the practices they have absorbed from the cultural contexts in which they live. This requirement is not simply a strategic or pragmatic necessity taken from the realm of communication sciences. It is the outcome of a fundamental theological consideration.

The relationship between the Gospel and culture is defined once and for all in the person of Jesus Christ. By becoming a human being, and therefore one of us, he embraced a specific culture and language, incarnated himself into the life of a people and shared its thoughts and feelings, values and attitudes. It was to this people that he proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom of God, which again is a culturally determined concept. Jesus Christ took the thinking, belief and life of this people as his starting point and extended this thinking, belief and feeling by pointing to the source of all meaning. He does not oppose the religious cult, for example, pointing out instead that the main thing is to serve God in truth and in love (Matthew 5:17 NJB). The core and the essence of everything that a person should experience is: He must love the Lord with all his heart and all his soul and his neighbour as himself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets, too (Matthew 22:37-40 NJB).

The aim of Christian mission is that all people should be reborn in the resurrection of the Lord. Inculturation means that the faith incarnates itself into history and implants in it – metaphorically speaking – the power to change and transform, which the Paschal power of love brings with it. The Council draws attention to the fact that it is the Spirit of the Lord that gives all people – in God's way – the possibility to share in this mystery of the resurrection.<sup>341</sup>

Hence, the inculturation of the faith does not contradict a certain culture. Rather the faith introduces into that culture the power of transformation that corresponds with the Spirit of Christ: the power

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<sup>341</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, *Pastorale Konstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute (Constitutio pastoralis de Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis) Gaudium et spes*», in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Teil III, Freiburg i. Br., Basle, Vienna 1968, 351-355, no. 22.

of the Sermon on the Mount<sup>342</sup> and of the Beatitudes,<sup>343</sup> the priority of service over rule, the defence of the small and the weak<sup>344</sup> and the desire and the willingness for universal reconciliation that is prepared to overcome apparently insurmountable barriers. This is where Christians in many places in the world, including in our plural societies, see their task.

### Ecumenical developments

The Protestant churches have been confronted by developments similar to those experienced by the Catholic Church in its critical appraisal of the connections between colonialism and missionary activity. A good example is provided by Albert Schweitzer, who explicitly regarded his service as a missionary doctor in Africa on behalf of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society as atonement and retribution for colonial injustice.<sup>345</sup>

The 1910 World Missionary Conference in the Scottish city of Edinburgh is seen as a milestone in the realignment of Protestant missionary activities. It was attended by over 1,200 delegates from various Protestant missionary societies and movements that wished to pool their resources and strove to bring about a more tightly-knit community and international cooperation. This first world missionary conference was followed by others, new ground being broken, in particular, at the conferences held after the two world wars. In Jerusalem (1928) the unity between mission and Western civilisation was called into question and the division of the world into Christian and non-Christian countries was renounced. At the suggestion of Karl Hartenstein, mission was seen as “*Missio Dei*”, as work originating in God. In 1961, the World Missionary Conference organised by the International Missionary Council was integrated into the World Council of Churches as the Committee for the “*Universal Church and Evangelisation*”.<sup>346</sup> An extension of the Protestant concept

<sup>342</sup> Matthew 5-7.

<sup>343</sup> Matthew 5:3-12.

<sup>344</sup> Mark 9,33-37.

<sup>345</sup> See Sievernich, M., *o cit.*, 102.

<sup>346</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

of mission can be found in the ecumenical declaration “Mission and Evangelism” (1982), in which the cause of evangelisation in all areas is stressed, especially with regard to the poor, believers in other faiths and missionary work on six continents. The key concept of mission as a reconciliation service was the main theme at the World Missionary Conference in 2005 in Athens.<sup>347</sup>

Missionary work is intended to help people to be open to the God of Jesus Christ. In the message of the Gospel and in the personal union with the God of Jesus Christ, the God of reconciliation, justice and love, the believer finds the freedom that makes him peaceable, non-violent and inwardly free for a sincere inter-faith dialogue.

### **Commitment to sincere inter-religious dialogue**

Dialogue with other religions and their traditions is not an option for Christians. There is no alternative to it. “The proclaiming of the Gospel is [...] inseparably bound up with inter-religious dialogue.”<sup>348</sup> The idea behind inter-religious dialogue is not to convert others to one’s own faith. Its purpose is to understand the reasons others have for their faith and to present to others the plausibility of, and reasons for, one’s own belief. The document “Proposer la foi” issued by the French Church states the following: Inter-faith dialogue, the dialogue with believers who profess different religious traditions, “makes it possible to learn how the quest for God and the relationship with God – for all the differences there may be – leave their mark on a person’s life.” (Part 1, II 3)<sup>349</sup> This takes place on the basis of the conviction that Christians can only offer and bear witness to their belief in the

<sup>347</sup> Cf. Günther, W., *Von Edinburgh nach Mexiko City. Die ekklesiologischen Bemühungen der Weltmissionskonferenzen (1910–1963)*, Stuttgart 1970; Sievernich, M., *o cit.*, 102f.

<sup>348</sup> Conférence Episcopale Française, *o cit.*, Part 1, II 3.

<sup>349</sup> See Paul VI., *Apostolisches Schreiben “Evangelii nuntiandi” Seiner Heiligkeit Papst Pauls VI. an den Episkopat, den Klerus und alle Gläubigen der Katholischen Kirche über die Evangelisierung in der Welt von heute*, Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls, no. 2, Bonn 1975, 53: “The Church respects and esteems these non Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul and vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to pray. They are all impregnated with innumerable “seeds of the Word”.

God of Jesus Christ and perhaps, up to a certain point at least, provide intellectual access to it. That is ultimately the task of theology. However, conversion is not the work of human beings. Christian theology is, therefore, well advised today not to talk of mission as an attempt at conversion in the sense that conversion is the work of those who bear witness to their faith in a missionary manner. Conversion is always the work of God, the work of His universal love.

According to John Paul II, dialogue is an activity which has “reasons, requirements and a dignity of its own”. The Federation of Asian Bishops says, in full agreement with this view, that dialogue must “never be turned into a strategy to produce conversions”.<sup>350</sup> In today’s closer-knit world, however, mutual understanding and the reduction of mutual prejudice are indispensable. Moreover, it is desirable that people should show greater kindness to one another, even if they belong to different religions and come from different religious cultures; for there is no meaningful alternative to shaping the world together and making it a just and peaceful place.

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<sup>350</sup> FABCI, *o cit.*, quoted in: 34. General Congregation (1995), in: *o cit.*, 432f.

# Considerations on the pastoral consequences of a dialogical understanding of mission

Pius Rutechura

## Preamble

Right from its conception, the Church was meant to be dialogical in accomplishing its mission. Jesus the Word of God made flesh, brought God's own life into our midst through dialogue (Lk 1:26-56; Jn 1:1-14). Before returning to the Father, Jesus sent the Church to continue the mission given him by the Father and empowered her with his Spirit: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21, *Lumen Gentium* No.1).

In the New Testament Jesus uses dialogue as a means of progressively revealing his divinity and the mysteries of the Kingdom. In the Gospel of John, this approach is evidenced in his dialogue with Nicodemus with regards to a new life from baptism in water and the Spirit (3:1-12); with the Samaritan woman with regards to Jesus as the source of living water for all nations (4:1-42); with regards to Jesus being the bread of life (6:26-69) and during the welfare discourse, when affirming being the way to the Father's House (13:36-14:11).

From Jesus' dialogical approach, Biblical scholars point out that for the Church, dialogue is not an alternative for evangelisation or a concept that is remotely separated from evangelisation. True evangelisation is accomplished by respecting and listening to one another. (See, *The African Bible*, Paulines Publications Africa, 1999, p. 1811). The Church, therefore, continues the mission of the Son and Holy Spirit by proclaiming to the ends of the earth the salvation Christ offers those who believe in him. We are faithful to the nature of the Church to the degree that we love and sincerely promote her missionary activity.

There are various schools of thought that tend to visualise dialogue and mission as conflicting and at times antagonistic in their approaches.

This paper focuses on Considerations on the Pastoral Consequences of a Dialogical Understanding of Mission drawing from experiences and inspirations mainly from the Eastern Africa region where I have had a privilege of serving as Secretary General for twelve consecutive years at National and Regional Catholic Bishops Conferences levels.

### **Prioritising the Ethics of Mutual Encounter**

Global and African Church perspectives point towards nurturing the ethics of Mutual Encounter as one of the priority pastoral considerations of our times. Within the actual global settings, social-cultural and religious systems interact more and more with each other opening up more avenues for mutual encounters. On one hand, encountering concrete faith must go hand in hand with the willingness to face up to the reality of conflicting religious systems. On the other hand, there is need for openness to mutual enrichment, growth and healthy interactions.

Authentic dialogue in mission has to go beyond vague notions of respect for varying forms of faith trends. It must avoid compromising faith messages. Dialogue in mission must be rooted in dynamic people of faith who seek to grow in self understanding while aiming at appreciating other faiths.

The way we extend Christ's free invitation to others differs according to local circumstances. Dialogue is the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission. Whether mission is envisaged in terms of witness, proclamation or service, dialogue is of utmost value.

From African cultural and social perspectives, dialogue has to be part and parcel of creating space for 'mutual being,' reaching out to the other in a spirit of mutual respect of each other's responsibilities and rights. True dialogue in mission calls for paying attention to values of concern, respect and creating room for the other person's identity.

When it comes to faith matters, mutual enrichment is expected in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. From that perspective, dialogue in mission calls for speaking and listening with the same intensity and sincerity. In this process, dialogue in mission must include: A forthright witnessing of one's own convictions while

nurturing honest sincerity in exploring others convictions. From a Christian perspective this calls for having a firm faith in the presence of God through the Word and the Spirit. It involves being guided by a firm belief in the presence of God's Spirit and respect to the human searching for answers to the deepest questions about life.

### **Refocusing Authenticity of Inculturation**

Dialogue is a manner of being, acting and relating. It is an attitude, a spirit which guides one's conduct. Dialogue has something to do with one's culture and faith.

As it was well put in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time (EN 20). In Africa, the whole dimension of inculturation of the Gospel into the lives of people cannot be envisaged as a one time accomplishment.

Right from the Second Vatican Council, the dynamic relationship between the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ and the various expressions of human culture in which the Gospel is planted has been among the priority preoccupations of the Church in Africa. (*Gaudium et Spes* 58).

On one hand, the Inculturation vocabulary permeates almost all levels of the Church in Africa. However, as a matter of fact, vivid manifestations of expressing Inculturation have been mainly limited to liturgical celebrations in terms of songs and dances. It should be noted that genuine inculturation of faith cannot be reduced to merely adopting the externals of a given culture. As revealed in the teachings of the Pope, true inculturation must be from within. It consists in a renewal of life under the influence of grace (cfr, African Traditional Religion, Popes Speak, <http://afrikaworld.net/afrel/atr-popes.htm>).

If at all we want to have authentic fruits of inculturation in Africa, it is necessary to refocus our understanding and approaches to inculturation and esteem of African cultural values. From the pastoral point of view, the rightful approach must be enriched by the teachings of St Paul to the Philippians 4:8 "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Everywhere, authentic

inculturation calls for respect of true values; primarily respect for the person who seeks to live these values at the same time enlightened by the light of the Gospel seeks to banish fear.

Within the past four decades, the pope have consistently invited the Church in Africa to refocus both the understanding and praxis of inculturation. It is basic that the power of the Gospel has to transform and regenerate the path of culture which is the path of man. The Gospel has to facilitate encounters with the one that embodies the values of all cultures and fully reveals the man of each culture to himself. A real aspiration as was well presented within the AMECEA region is the search to be fully Christian and fully African (See, John Paul II, DRC, 3rd May 1980; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 20; CT 53)

Africa needs mature reflections which seek to bring harmony among the Africans, in union with the universal Church and with the Holy See. Inculturation for all the people, can only be the fruit of a progressive maturity in the faith. Within African Church settings, efforts towards inculturation must be guided by theological lucidity, spiritual discernment, wisdom, prudence and time. The benchmark aim of local churches is to guide the faithful living through, with and in Christ. Inculturation must be a true reflection of the Incarnation of the Word, whereby cultures are transformed and regenerated by the Gospel leading to original expressions of Christian life in celebration and thought.

From the AMECEA Church point of view, inculturation must not remain a mere concept; it needs embodiment. The appropriate line approach was made clear by Pope John Paul II in 1980: "It is through respecting, preserving and fostering particular values and riches of African cultural heritages that Africans can be in position to lead a better understanding of the mystery of Christ which is lived in concrete daily experiences of African life." Refer: John Paul, *Visit to Kenya* 1980).

Thus, pastoral Inculturation initiatives must aim at bringing the message of salvation into the lives of the people. Africa needs a holistic approach to inculturation: liturgical expression, catechesis, theological formulation, ecclesial structures and ministries.

Hence, approaching Inculturation of the Gospel as a pastoral

priority calls for uplifting cultures of peoples, transforming and permeating them with Christ's original message of divine truth, without harming what is noble and dignified in them. The Gospel has to be brought into the heart of peoples and their cultures: brought forth from cultures original expressions of Christian life in celebration and thought.

In conclusion, pastoral orientation must aim at preserving carefully African roots, and values. Knowing and being proud of one's own cultural values: respect of life, family solidarity and support for relatives, respect for the elderly, hospitality, judicious preservation of traditions, taste for feasts and symbols, attachment to dialogue and palaver to settle differences (Ivory Coast 1980). It is through dialogue that Evangelisation can truly help cultures to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life in celebration and thought.

### **Communion of Life: The Relevance of Small Christian Communities**

The Church in her mission must make discernment with openness and objectivity on moral and religious values that aims at promoting communion of life. To succeed in this endeavour, these are some of the key African traditional values that must be enhanced:

The Spiritual view of life: Primacy of the idea of God as the first and ultimate cause of all things. This concept, perceived rather than analysed, lived rather than reflected on, is expressed in many cultures. The presence of God, the higher being who is personal and mysterious which permeates African life, must be highly promoted. Despite embracing Christianity, a good number of Africans continue to have recourse to God on solemn and more so during critical moments of life at times making intercession through other intermediary unavailing. More avenues need to be explored whereby the faithful can encounter and evoke the living God. Communion of life within the human society has to be linked primarily to this communion of life with God.

Respect for human dignity: this is conspicuously and consistently evidenced in traditional ways of educating within the family, in initiation of passage rites, in participation of traditional patterns

of social life. The respect and promotion of bonding with the living and the ancestors need to be refocused. Emphasis on respect for human dignity which takes roots from the family as the natural environment in which a person is born, thrives, finds protection and security through union with ancestors and continuity beyond earthly life.

Pastoral care has to create room for family life mode and imparting of values as part of catechesis and on going formation. Only when Christian families have been truly evangelised and are aware of their evangelising role, can we really talk about an effective evangelisation of culture, an effective encounter between the Gospel and culture.

Within the Eastern African Church perspectives, it is almost forty years since a pastoral option of being Church that is anchored on foundations of Small Christian Communities was made. These communities have contributed to enhancing communion of life not only among the faithful but to wider communities at large. Participation in the life of the community, considered as a precise duty and right of all, needs to be more nurtured. Initiation into community has to be part of forming character especially that of children and the youth. Values which have been handed down, ought to be respected as cultural legacy from the past, be given a new meaning and new expression.

### **Consolidating Solidarity in Action**

Beyond considerations of manners of acting and attitudes as expressed in treating people and cultures, dialogue in mission has bearing on solidarity in action. Sharing in faith and mutual enrichment are more and more becoming necessary modalities at various levels of the Church. Faith must lead to positive responses to joys and sufferings of humanity. Solidarity with others and faithfulness to the gospel demand that we respond to people's genuine needs and hungers, even those of which they may be unaware.

Thus, theological principles of unity and bonding have always affirmed human inter-dependence. Today bonding and being there for each other are complemented by fast growing realities of political, economic and environmental interdependence of the world as manifested in the whole range of international issues.

Through dialogue, the Church is called upon to respond to the anxiety of contemporary humanity. Divine love, which is her life, impels her to a true solidarity with everyone who suffers. Concrete manifestations of solidarity in action include presence to the oppression, working towards stabilising an atmosphere of peace and justice. In a human being, in a society, in the world, when one member suffers all suffer.

Dialogue in mission requires action. Jesus did not talk merely about freeing the poor from sin and other forms of oppression; he actually tread the way of humanity to save humanity, Jesus accompanied humanity to an extent of suffering and dying to alleviate their miseries and sufferings.

Increasingly, within realities of the Church in Africa, there is a paradigm shift towards enhancing pastoral solidarity in action. During the 16th Plenary Assembly in Lusaka Zambia mid 2008, the Bishops of AMECEA put emphasis on the need for consolidating regional solidarity in addressing issues of reconciliation, justice and peace. Being a prophetic Church in solidarity implied an invitation to be vigilant and proactive in mutually supporting each other to respond to issues of reconciliation, justice and peace in the region (See Proceedings of the 16th AMECEA Plenary Assembly, Lusaka Zambia 27th June – 7th July 2008, Nairobi, AMECEA Secretariat, 2008, 35-58). As a result of this commitment, there have been bold steps towards manifestations of solidarity in action. Three key ones included joint preparations for the Second Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops in 2009; joint AMECEA-USCBC Needs Assessment Workshop in Kampala Uganda June 2010 and SECAM-AMECEA Pastoral Solidarity Visit to Sudan in November 2010.

Consolidating solidarity in action requires paying attention to these key areas:

**Fundamental Option for the Poor:** In its openness to all, the Church's mission makes a special option for the poor and powerless. The special option for the poor, far from being a sign of paternalism, must aim at empowering the poor to raise their voices. This special option is deeply rooted in the mission of Jesus, who rejected no one but was especially sensitive to those who needed him most. The poor, destitute and powerless of the world help us see and

evaluate the evils of our society and the evils that one society or nation inflicts on another.

**Proactive Accompanying Secular Leadership:** Within actual settings in Africa, as it is emphasised in the deliberations of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, there is need for evangelising the political milieu and those who influence policy making. If the Gospel's call for conversion has to reach the hearts of political and policy makers, the Church has to rethink its approaches and shift paradigm from merely criticising of secular leaders to accompaniment and imparting of values based from the Gospel and the Social Teaching of the Church. In Proposition 25, the Synod Fathers made it clear that there is need for offering, to present and future leaders in political and economic life, a fitting doctrinal, pastoral and practical formation as well as spiritual support by setting up chaplaincies. The Bishops puts emphasis on the need for establishment of parliamentary liaison and faculties of political science in which values from the Social Teaching of the Church could be easily accessed and assimilated by secular leadership. I see in this line of thought which aims at formation of a social conscience at all levels, one of the major pastoral contributions that the Church can offer to modern secular leadership in Africa.

**The Church in Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace:** In the continuing presence of Jesus, disciples of all ages find the courage to follow him. To follow Jesus Christ implies continual conversion in one's own life as one seeks to act in ways which are consonant with the justice, forgiveness and love of God's reign. Discipleship reaches out to the ends of the earth and calls for reconciliation among all peoples so that God's purpose, "to be carried out in the fullness of time: namely, to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ's headship," (Eph 1: 10) will be fulfilled.

These principles affirm the dignity of the human person, the unity of the human family, the right of all to share in the goods of the earth, the need to pursue the international common good, and the imperative of distributive justice in a world ever more sharply divided between rich and poor.

**Ecumenical Cooperation:** We have to rejoice that Christians of

other churches share and participate in the mission of our Lord. John Paul II has urged that those who share Christ's mission "must show forth his unifying love in action."<sup>29</sup> Today the dangers from proselytising are real. Nevertheless, where there can be mutual respect among the different religious traditions, there are increasing opportunities in mission work for collaboration in prayer, good works, the use of media, community service and social action. Such collaboration is itself a witness to the reconciling spirit of God.

### **Conclusion**

A dialogical understanding of mission invites us to be deeply immersed and participate in the mission of the Triune God who created and sustains the world as an expression of love; God who sent Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit to save and reconcile humanity and the entire creation. Mission is not primarily an activity of geographical expansion but it is within the frontiers of belief, conviction and commitment. A dialogical understanding of mission must lead us to be more focused on facilitating the encounter of the people with the Good News within their cultural milieu so that they witness God's transforming presence and activity in society. Within the Church contexts in Africa, dialogue in mission must enable people to do the will of God, rediscover and appreciate their cultural values, promote communal life and pro actively get involved in restoring the wholeness of humanity.



## Considerations on the Pastoral Consequences of a Dialogical Understanding of Mission

Wendy M. Louis

The underlying justification for speaking about mission as dialogical is to be found in the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. There is a dialogical, existential reality in God and His self-revelation – there is an exchange of life within the very being of God among the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The pedagogy of God in His own self-revelation in the Old Testament is marked by stages, journeying, accompanying, teaching and celebrating in order to bring the people together, invite them into a relationship and to make them his own. A free response is evoked through this community experience of listening and relating to God. For the people of Israel there was a very gradual growth in understanding of the truth about God and neighbour and acceptance of God as the one and only Saviour. The same dialogical character is also imprinted in the human race and we grow via relationships, telling our stories and listening to the stories of others. Genesis proclaims that “God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27)

In the New Testament, we have the fullness of God’s self-revelation and He is called the Word – spoken into our hearts and lives. Central to our whole faith is a Person and not merely a set of teachings. If faith is to be lived through a Person – the Person of Christ - then our faith expression is fundamentally an exchange of love and life. Christ showed us the way to dialogue with the Father and finally gave us the Eucharist to communicate through Christ with the Father and each other. “His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature. By this revelation, then, the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends and moves among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company.” (Dei Verbum 2)

Jesus in the Gospels called together the twelve and made them his friends and apostles – walking with them, teaching from experience and witnessing. He often responded to questions or asked them. Of course Jesus also taught at length because the dialogical approach does not exclude proclamation and teaching especially when the people gather and thirst for the word.

To see more clearly the dialogical quality of the mission of Jesus, we can look at the story of the Samaritan Woman he met by the well. (John 4: 5-42) Before he revealed his own identity Jesus first restored to the woman her dignity. He rendered himself human and vulnerable and was ready to drink from the receptacle of a disreputable woman. He opened the dialogue with her by emptying himself of the greatness he bore as Son of God. He took her just where she was, in her particular situation and allowed her to discover the truth within a respectful dialogue. 'I am he'... the one you are looking for... Their conversation and her conversion would not have been possible without the interest Jesus took in her personally.

Look again at the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, the journey together, the sharing of hopes and disappointments; the explanation given in context and the presence of Jesus to his disciples. (Luke 24: 13-35)

Going back to the opening chapter of Luke's Gospel, let's take a look at the meeting of the two women of faith – Elizabeth and Mary. When Mary reaches out to Elizabeth, she is not only bringing words in speech but the person of Christ and the Holy Spirit into the exchange. There is deep joy. (Luke 1: 39-56)

When we speak about dialogue in faith we are not only referring to speech and ideas but the communication of the Person of Christ in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) We are communicating in the Spirit and God's Holy Spirit as the 'go between God' (John V. Taylor, 1972) who brings communion in dialogue and renders it fruitful.

### **The Pedagogy of Vatican II and the FABC**

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the renewed self-understanding of the Church and its mission took its inspiration

not only from a new look at the Scriptures and Tradition but also from the Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical movements developing before and during the Council towards a more dialogical understanding of mission. In the aftermath of the Council, dialogue became the attitude rather than avoidance and condemnation of difference due to fear of deviation.

### **RCIA – the mode for handing on the faith**

In the post-Vatican restoration of the catechumenate, (RCIA 1972), the guidelines strongly recommend that becoming a disciple and joining the Church community we need to learn from the witness of life of those already Baptised; we need to understand the faith within the context of our own lives and we need to be challenged to align our lives to the Gospel. The catechumenate journey is marked by stages with blessings and celebrations in the whole community. Sponsors / god parents play a very important part as companions on this journey of faith. The RCIA is a gradual and dialogical journey of apprenticeship, mentoring and witness. The Vatican Congregation for the Clergy in the General Directory of Catechesis 1993 has noted that all catechesis should take the mode of the RCIA. This means that wherever we intend to hand on the faith, formally or informally, or wherever we hope to evangelise, it is important to keep in mind that faith grows in stages – the preevangelised; enquirers; catechumens; elect and neophytes. Today we understand adults and youth as active agents of their own growth and as people who already have experiences of God who has been working in their lives and has been leading them to this point of conversion or re-conversion. When we work with young people we need to ask if they are ready for catechesis or if they are still in the earlier stages of enquiry. Bringing people to faith means that we have listened to their life's circumstances and questions and we assist them as they interpret these situations in the light of faith which gives meaning and fullness of life as they discover God who has been journeying with them.

### **Practicing Mission as Dialogue**

In many of the churches in Asia since Vatican II and with significant influence from the FABC, there has been a notable shift from a strictly hierarchical teaching Church to a Church of Dialogue and a church of Small Christian Communities where the laity together with the clergy

and religious share and try to live out their faith. Here faith deepening and growth comes through the agency of other baptised adults as well as the traditional source of bishops, clergy and religious. The FABC through its Office of Laity and Family since 1993 has promoted an adaptation for Asia of the Lumko method which was named AsIPA (The Asian Integral Pastoral Approach). AsIPA is a process for building awareness, providing opportunities of encounter with Christ through his word shared in the community and generating interest in the mission of the laity to be builders of the Kingdom of God. It is a process used to develop SCCs in parishes and is aimed at forging communion; encouraging laity to take up their mission and do away with dominating leadership in the Small Communities enabling all to participate equally under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the mission of Christ. It assures all that they are equally able to minister to neighbours and families - however poor or uneducated. There is no one who is incapable of loving and caring no matter how small the gesture. All are capable of hearing the word and sharing its meaning for their lives and living out the word. In the Small Communities and catechumen communities, those who share their faith for the benefit of all in the group learn a kind of 'self-emptying' which is crucial for growth. The word of God listened to and reflected upon brings Christ into the centre of the exchange. The word 'quasi-sacramental' sign means that Christ is present in his word. "I must decrease so Christ can increase". (John 3:30) Learning to see Christ in the other means that I empty myself of all prejudice or self-interest and share Christ. Here I can learn to love and act only because of my intense listening to the word. In the Singapore Pastoral Institute, from the 1980s, there was a strong conviction that the mission of the Church belonged to every member of the Church and until this time was very much monopolised, due to historical developments and a pre-Vatican understanding of the role of the Laity, by the clergy and religious. A very deliberate decision was made by the Institute leadership to align the understanding of the mission of the laity to the development of Small Christian Communities. In the early years of the growth of SCCs in the archdiocese, the teaching mode continued within the communities and was a place for priests, religious or other experts to give talks and lead the study of various kinds. Some groups bought video study kits and underwent long and demanding studies with

the help of an expert. The members of these communities grew in friendship with each other but continued to be passive receivers of the faith.

With the 1990 Bandung statement of the FABC Plenary Assembly there was a greater impetus to build a 'Communion of Communities' and this went hand in hand with the understanding that such a communion can only be built out of a more participatory and collaborative Church. In this "New Way of Being Church" the understanding of Mission was that it belonged to all the baptised and the role of the clergy included assisting the laity play their part more fully. With this in mind we set out to design all our Lenten, Advent and other formation materials raising the spirituality, skills and awareness of the laity to be able to share the Gospel, exchange faith and understand their mission. Through these humble neighbourhood communities the people learn to serve and reach out. (In Malaysia and the Philippines these communities are named "Basic Ecclesial Communities" which reflects their essential nature more accurately). These formation materials had four main features. Firstly, they did not require any expert to lead the group but a simply trained facilitator; secondly, to get any real benefit from the material it was necessary to have a community involved; thirdly, scripture texts were central to the experience and provided an opportunity for a prayerful encounter with Christ; lastly, the word led to action and pointed to the poor or marginalised. The whole process was essentially dialogical and relational. The catechetical office of the SPI also provided programmes that were aligned to a more dialogical approach. Parents were given much more support to journey with their children in sacramental preparation. Parent meetings were occasions for building up the faith of the adults through dialogue, conversations and discovering together how to hand on the faith to their children. Talks or presentations were kept to a necessary minimum.

In one parish in Singapore, the formation of young adults took the form of monthly 'network nights' where young working adults met over some snacks, exchanged on their questions and challenges and had a chance to talk to mentors or clergy who were present. Information was offered but talks were kept to 5 or 10 minutes at most. Another example of mission understood as dialogical comes from the experience of many churches who use the pastoral strategy of Exposure / Immersion and Dialogue as a process for bringing about transformation and change

in socio-economic and pastoral arenas. In the 1980s, the FABC Office of Human Development was aware that many bishops were focusing on the inner life of the church and the larger more pressing issues of poverty, human rights violations and refugees was not high on their list of priorities. In order to bring about change of heart and agenda, they organised programmes which included two or three days in which groups of bishops and pastoral leaders would share the home and circumstances of a poor family; or they would visit refugee camps and interact with the refugees; or they would visit the working places of people who were obviously being exploited and so on. This resulted in a large number of bishops who became champions of the poor and marginalised and led to much greater social awareness among the conferences of the FABC. We find the same effort is made by the German Bishops' Conference to help leaders in economics, politics and in the church to make policies and decisions that are friendly towards the less fortunate. The EDP approach is effective precisely because we want to make the world a better place not out of some idea of the numbers of poor but because we feel in our hearts the difficulties of the poor and they have a face and a name.

### **Implications & Consequences**

What is the impact on our pastoral approach when we discover in the foundations of our faith a communitarian God who speaks his Word in order to be known and loved? First we realise that mission and the communication of faith is personal. While the role of the priest presiding at Eucharist brings all present into the intimacy of the Body of Christ, the experience of the Body of Christ must be unpacked and lived for the rest of the week. The relationship with Christ cannot remain between me and the Christ I receive in Holy Communion, it must extend to the community but not in an abstract way. The question for the ministry of the priest will be always – how can these people meet Christ personally.

Recent research has shown that Gospel Sharing effectively carried out in SCCs brings people to an encounter with Christ which leads them also to personal prayer and prayer in the family. There are many other ways of bringing people into a relationship with Christ which can be explored elsewhere. The mission of the church belongs to everyone. The main difficulty here in our Asian context, is that

in the Catholic Church, the dependence on clergy for direction and teaching, continues to leave the laity in a passive mind set. Participation in the mission of Christ can very easily become 'doing what the priest tells me to do'. Ownership of mission and understanding the Gospel message to bring about the Reign of God are areas for a paradigm shift on the part of the laity and where pastoral approaches are needed that can create a more responsible laity.

As a priest in charge of a parish the consequence of this understanding of mission would push me to know my people personally – at least as many as possible. I would be convinced that in order to activate my people for mission I need to know and care about them first. Pastoral visits are a key to effective ministry. As I visit people in their homes and listen to their stories, share faith and show concern, I bring Christ to them and motivate them for mission to do the same. Secondly I would form a strong parish team of those who can share a vision and assist the Small Christian Communities as well as influencing every aspect of my ministry – whether journeying with catechumens or pastoral visits or catechesis of children and adults or preparing liturgy or designing social projects. Thirdly I would put a strong spiritual foundation on everything we do together so that each one grows in personal prayer and relationship with God. My whole pastoral ministry would be characterised by my 'listening stance'. This is so that my teaching, guiding, pastoral strategies would be speaking into the actual lives of people because I have heard so many of their life stories and I speak or act in response to their faith questions and challenges. This same 'listening stance' is taken by the people in the SCCs and they learn to share hope and their reasons for hoping with neighbours and friends.

The conviction that the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of Christ, now means for the lay person that he/she is able to 'be Christ' for others even when not able to utter a word about Jesus. The assurance is that the people I care about or move out to help can meet Christ in me. My dialogue of life and love is in action. This act of faith among the laity would enable them to be conscious on mission even when no verbal proclamation is possible. The insistence on ownership and expression of faith, through being church in a Small Christian Community, helps those who belong to it, understand that the Holy Spirit can inspire all who are baptised to carry out the

Mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. This does not mean that the Church does not have a role to teach and guide. It simply means that in the context of today the teaching and guiding modes need to activate the baptised to accept and own their discipleship and mission rather than keep them as passive receptors of doctrines.

### **The role and responsibility of the laity**

There are many who still believe that faith is mainly about knowledge – knowing the commandments and doctrines laid down by the Church. Mission in such a case is to preach and teach while others listen and learn the doctrines. Whether in visits to families, in SCCs, from the pulpit or on the journey of catechumens, the mode would be teaching & explaining – from one who knows to those who need to know. Faith thus is to be absorbed and remembered. Where this is the case, the clergy and laity tend to be very involved in programmes of study and the emphasis given is on correct catechesis and faithful carrying out of the rituals. The structures of a Church can be participatory in appearance but one finds a monologue in the manner of operating whether in Parish Pastoral Councils, Small Christian Communities or the Diocesan Pastoral Council. Over emphasis on the correct delivery of doctrine and intellectual assent to all Church teachings gives little opportunity for outreach and initiatives by the laity.

At the other end of the spectrum there are those who emphasise the community experience and the relationship aspects of faith almost to the exclusion of any knowledge of it. They favour the Small Christian Communities because friendship and community is all important and it would seem that the laity do not need much teaching or guiding. In this type of community the role of the priest may be reduced to only sacramental provision. Many churches find themselves somewhere along the spectrum with clergy and laity ranged on both sides. In some cases polarisation has occurred between the two forms of pastoral action and a hardening of positions. What is badly needed is a well integrated pastoral strategy in which the ordained play a crucial role to preside over the Eucharist and the Body of Christ, to teach and guide within the dialogical context of the SCCs and other professional groups and families. Those clergy who seem to be ‘successful’ are those who are able to work well in teams, able to join in training and seminars and are comfortable in the company of adults who may not always

agree with them. They are able to share the ambiguities and challenges facing the laity today and search together for wisdom and truth. With this type of dialogue and conversation between the clergy and laity many are greatly inspired to raise more questions in their efforts to integrate their faith with their lives more effectively. The triple dialogue of life, dialogue with the poor and with people of other faiths called for by the FABC takes place every day for many of the laity who go out to work or who relate with their neighbours. They learn the way to dialogue, to self-empty without losing their identity and to share Christ with the help of their Small Christian Communities. The work of pastoral leadership is to give continuous support and formation as the laity encounters opposition or difficulties externally or within the Christian communities. In communities where the dialogue has been rather inward looking for many years, the work of pastoral leadership is to lead by example in the way parish projects are designed. Liturgies and prayers of the faithful for example, should be highlighting the needs of the wider society and the priorities of the Church. Visitors or guests of the parish can be invited to share their lives with parishioners in various ways to widen their scope of concerns.

Capacity building among the SCCs to journey with the sick, to pray with the lonely, to care for the elderly, to connect with the youth etc. implies a bigger budget for training and less centralised parish organisations. The term 'ministry' may need to be broadened to include work done by communities or individuals with the poor, marginalised, families, housebound people and so on.

Subsidiarity is the principle that should govern the way ministries are organised in parishes. The intention of all parish based organisations should be to strengthen ministries and mission from within the SCCs and the neighbourhoods.

## **Conclusion**

Dialogue means that someone is speaking and someone is listening but the listener will soon become the speaker and the other will listen. Dialogue is rooted in a strong sense of the identity of the ones who are in the exchange. Mission today needs pastors who can inspire and enable their people to be listeners in a world that is so connected digitally but so isolated humanly speaking.

The God who listens also speaks but always God speaks into the heart of our lives to our reality. Understanding Mission as dialogical brings us into the heart of God who wills to befriend all people of all time. The temptation may be to look for big numbers and to try and generate great attendance in our churches. The work of the Spirit is personal and relational and this requires small groups and time for conversation and care of persons. We are challenged, in a society that counts as important the number of 'hits' you receive on your 'facebook' account or website, to be people who still dare to appear insignificant as we seek out the lost, lonely and confused to listen and to speak and to act from the heart of love.

## Appendix



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