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Quaderni del Centro Studi Asiatico

I *Quaderni del CSA* ospitano articoli e studi che riflettano su alcuni fenomeni religiosi, socio-economici, politici, culturali e missionari di alcune Regioni Saveriane presenti in Asia. Essi si propongono anche di far conoscere eventi o esperienze che possano arricchire ed essere di aiuto ad altri missionari coinvolti nelle stesse attività.

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Il tempo che il tempo ci mette per finire

TIZIANO TOSOLINI

Nel suo commento esegetico-filosofico alla *Lettera ai Romani*, Giorgio Agamben affermava come una delle peculiarità del tempo messianico inaugurato dalla resurrezione di Cristo fosse quella della contrazione, dell'abbreviazione, dell'implosione del *chronos* «nel tempo di ora» (Rom 11,5) che si protrarrà fino alla *parousía*, cioè fino alla piena presenza del messia. Per Paolo, il tempo inaugurato dall'evento messianico non coincide né con quello apocalittico (che si situa nell'ultimo giorno e nel quale il tempo giunge a compimento), né con quello cronologico-profano (cioè nel tempo in cui siamo, il tempo che ci separa da noi e ci rende spettatori impotenti che guardano senza tempo il tempo che sfugge). Al contrario, il tempo messianico, pur non essendo parallelo, indipendente o supplementare a quello cronologico, introduce nel tempo una sconnessione, una cesura o una tensione finora sconosciute: il tempo messianico è il «tempo che si è fatto breve» (1Cor 7,29), il tempo che ha iniziato a finire e ad accorciarsi o, se vogliamo, il tempo messianico è quel tempo che resta tra il tempo e la sua fine. Secondo la lettura proposta da Agamben, Paolo interpreta questo tempo messianico come un tempo altamente operativo che urge nel tempo cronologico e lo lavora trasformandolo dall'interno: esso è il tempo in cui le parole dei profeti e dei visionari devono arrendersi alla loro inadeguatezza e insufficienza lasciando spazio e voce solo a quelle dell'apostolo.

Ogni volta che i profeti annunciano l'avvento del messia, l'annuncio riguarda sempre un tempo a venire, non ancora presente. In questo consiste la differenza fra il profeta e l'apostolo. L'apostolo parla a partire dalla venuta del messia. In quel punto la profezia deve tacere: essa è, ora, veramente compiuta... La parola passa all'apostolo, all'inviato del messia, il cui tempo non è più il futuro, ma il presente. Per questo l'espressione tecnica per l'evento messianico è in Paolo: *ho nyn kairós*, «il tempo di ora»; per questo Paolo è un apostolo, e non un profeta... Ma l'apostolo deve essere anche distinto da un'altra figura col quale viene spesso confuso... Non la profezia, che si rivolge al futuro, ma l'apocalissi, che contempla la fine del tempo, è il più insidioso fraintendimento messianico. L'apocalittico si situa nell'ultimo giorno, nel giorno della collera: egli vede compiersi la fine e descrive ciò che vede. Il tempo che l'apostolo vive non è invece l'*éschaton*, non è la fine del tempo... Se si volesse stringere in una formula la differenza tra messianismo e apocalissi, tra l'apostolo e il visionario, credo che si potrebbe dire... che il messianico non è la fine del tempo, ma *il tempo della fine*.¹

1. Agamben G., *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000, pp. 62-3.

Questo inter-mezzo, questo «tra» che indirizza il tempo verso la sua conclusione o ricapitolazione finale, non è affatto un tempo che tolleri passività, indolenza o rassegnazione. Al contrario, esso è il tempo che ci è dato per agire, è l'«occasione» che il tempo ci offre per operare il bene verso tutti, (Gal 6,10; Col 4,5), è l'unico (l'ultimo) momento opportuno per «comportarsi da uomini saggi profittando del tempo presente» (Ef 5,16). La condizione temporale della comunità messianica è dunque quella di vivere nel «tempo di ora» cogliendo, testimoniando ed annunciando in questa contrazione temporale una salvezza già attuata, ma *non ancora* riconducibile a quell'eternità ultima e finale che non conosce né passato né ripetizione.

Queste interessanti considerazioni sul tempo messianico e sul tempo dell'apostolo come inviato del messia, possono aiutarci anche a leggere i vari interventi presenti in questo numero della rivista. Lo scritto di Rocco ripercorre i concetti fondamentali e l'urgenza che hanno accompagnato la riflessione della Chiesa nel suo desiderio di intrattenere un dialogo fecondo e sincero con altri credi e spiritualità religiosi.

Il testo di Sergio ripercorre le tappe che hanno caratterizzato il rapporto della Chiesa con la comunità dei Rishi. Secondo l'autore, pare finalmente giunto il tempo affinché la Chiesa riconosca e promuova apertamente la piena dignità di queste persone e queste ultime non si vergognino (o approfittino) di appartenere alla comunità cristiana.

Il racconto di conversione riportato da Monica, descrive il silenzioso incontro di una persona con Cristo. Il tempo messianico si manifesta qui in tutto il suo splendore ed in tutta la sua evidenza, in quanto ogni esistenza trasformata dall'annuncio evangelico testimonia dell'irruzione nell'oggi della salvezza divina.

Renato ci introduce invece alla complessa situazione sociale giovanile del Giappone odierno. Giovani che si rifugiano nelle nuove tecnologie per sopperire alla loro innata timidezza, rapporti che vengono instaurati o distrutti attraverso anonimi impulsi digitali, instabilità ed incertezza sul proprio futuro che rendono il tempo sempre meno prezioso e la speranza sempre più inutile. Eppure, non è forse «nel tempo di ora» che l'annuncio di Cristo deve essere immesso in questa loro atmosfera virtuale che rende sfuggibile la loro fin troppo debole esistenza?

La recensione del libro *Mystical Journey* offertaci da Paulin narra di come l'autore inizi a conoscere Cristo, una conoscenza in cui la «scomparsa del sé» fa nascere quel «senso di una Presenza» che riempie la vita donandole un senso e significato. Il tempo messianico, il tempo che il tempo ci impiega per finire, diventa quindi anche l'unico tempo che ci resta — il solo tempo che abbiamo — per essere apostoli del suo amore e attenti testimoni di come Dio faccia il suo tempo e lo compia nell'anima di ogni persona.

Religioni e missione



Remembering the Forgotten
The Present Roman Catholic Perspective
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Remembering the Forgotten

The Present Roman Catholic Perspective on Interreligious Dialogue

ROCCO VIVIANO

The Second Vatican Council, which took place some 40 years ago, marked the starting point of some radical changes within the Roman Catholic Church. It certainly constituted a remarkable shift in perspective with regard to the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the other faiths, and it provided the opportunity for some surprising developments.

Far from pretending to answer all the questions it will raise, the purpose of this paper is to present the current position of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to other faiths and interfaith engagement, against the background of the Council and especially of the document *Nostra Aetate*. Since Vatican II, a revolution has occurred within Roman Catholic teaching and theology, which can be described as an act of recalling to mind something important that had been forgotten, namely that the Church can only be Church of dialogue, that such dialogue has theological foundations; and that the Church cannot exist but in dialogue with her «religious other».

This paper will present the more theological foundations of Roman Catholic interfaith engagement, as articulated in *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II's Declaration on the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church with the Non-Christian Religions. This will provide the necessary background to appreciate more deeply the subsequent developments and their latest articulation in the document *Dialogue and Proclamation*, published on 19th May 1991 as a joint endeavour of two of the organisms of the Roman See: the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of the People.

This will be followed by some conclusive reflections on the task of theology in today's religiously pluralistic world and the possibility of interfaith engagement as an ecumenical endeavour.

1. Vatican II and *Nostra Aetate*: a Revolution in Roman Catholic Attitude to Other Religions

In his message soon after his election (20 April 2005) Pope Benedict XVI stated:

In carrying out his ministry, the new Pope knows that his task is to make Christ's light shine out before the men and women of today: not his own light, but Christ's. Aware of this I address everyone, including the followers of other religions or those who are simply seeking an answer to the fundamental questions of life and have not yet found it. I address all with simplicity and affection, to assure them that the Church wants to continue to weave an open and sincere dialogue with them, in the search for the true good of the human being and of society... I will make every conscientious effort to continue the promising dialogue initiated by my Venerable Predecessors with the different civilizations, so that mutual understanding may create the conditions for a better future for all.¹

Benedict XVI's declared commitment to dialogue with the world at large and with religions in particular reflects not just personal taste, but a conviction that the Catholic Church has developed over the centuries and in particular since Vatican II.

a. *Nostra Aetate in Context: Historical Background*

Nostra Aetate was promulgated almost at the end of the Council. The *Declaratio de Ecclesiae Habitudine ad Religiones non-Christianas* is the shortest document of the Council and maybe the least expected and most surprising. Its revolutionary potential may not be obvious at a first reading, but becomes clearer if the Declaration is considered, firstly, within the historical context in which it came into existence and, secondly, within the theological framework of Vatican II.

According to Michael Barnes, the most remarkable feature of *Nostra Aetate* is not so much an exhaustive and systematic exposition of a Christian theology of religions, but the very fact that other religions are taken into such great consideration at all.² The «religious other,» which had been increasingly relegated to the margins of Christian self-understanding and reflection throughout the Church's history, was allowed «to return» and challenge the Church as she sought to answer the question at the heart of the Council: «Church what do you say of yourself?». Historians have described *Nostra Aetate* as the

1. Pope Benedict XVI, *First Message at the End of the Eucharistic Celebration in the Sistine Chapel*, Wednesday, 20 April 2005. Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20050420_missa-pro-ecclesia_en.html

2. Barnes M., *Religions in Conversation*. London: SPKC, 1989, p. 50. Cf. also Barnes M., *Theology and the Dialogue of the Religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 29-64.

authentic work of the Spirit within the Council.³ This is apparent from the history of the document itself. Although initially the issue of non-Christian religions was not expected to be on the agenda, it became one of the central concerns of the Council, to the extent that, besides *Nostra Aetate*, which addresses the topic directly, three other documents tackle the question of non-Christian religions, within their specific concerns: *Lumen Gentium* (on the Church) from an ecclesiological and pastoral point of view, *Ad Gentes* from the perspective of the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate, and *Dignitatis Humanae* from the standpoint of religious freedom of the individual and of communities of faith. Seven other documents also refer to non-Christian religions, although not with the same emphasis (*Gaudium et Spes*, *Optatam Totius*, *Christus Dominus*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *Dei Verbum*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*).

This is significant, as it means that *Nostra Aetate* is the expression of a broader reflection and concern on the part of the Council.

The scope of the final version of the document is quite far removed from the initial intention. *Nostra Aetate* started as a personal request from Pope John XXIII to Cardinal Augustine Bea, head of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, to draft a document addressing the «Jewish question» to be submitted to the Council.⁴

It must be recalled that the Council opened 15 years after the conclusion of World War II, when the memory of the extermination of six million Jews at the hand of the Nazi regime was still vivid. Challenged by the tragic significance of the *Shoah*, the Church started to examine herself and to become aware that, although not directly, Christianity had had some degree of responsibility in that unprecedented crime against God and humanity. The Church realised that by tolerating and at times supporting anti-Semitism with Christian roots (manifested by numerous episodes of Christian persecution against the Jewish people), she had contributed to the formation of anti-Jewish feelings, without which Hitler's «final solution» would have been a less viable option for the Nazi Regime. The latter itself born out of a culture deeply shaped by Christianity.

The Pope's request came in September 1960. John XXIII had been deeply affected by his experience of Apostolic Delegate in Turkey during the years of the Nazi regime, when he helped many Jews to escape the shadow of Auschwitz. He was encouraged by a

3. Nicholl D., *Other Religions (Nostra Aetate)*. A. Hastings, *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*. London: SPCK, 1991, p. 126.

4. For an accurate history of *Nostra Aetate*, see Oesterreicher J., *Nostra Aetate*. H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*. Vol. III. London: Burns and Oates, 1969, pp. 1-154. A shorter but equally clarifying contribution is Lurentin R. and Neuner J., *The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions*. Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1966.

series of other events — inside and outside the Catholic Church — to speak on behalf of the Church with regard to her relationship with the Jewish people.

Various people worked on the draft over the following years, so that it was transformed considerably from the initial *Decretum de Judaeis* into the *Declaration on the Church's Attitude Towards non-Christian Religions*. The approval came after five years, but was virtually unanimous.

b. The Theology of Nostra Aetate and Vatican II on Other Religions

An exhaustive commentary is beyond the scope of this paper, however some crucial elements of *Nostra Aetate* must be recalled, as they provide the foundation for all successive developments in Roman Catholic teaching on interfaith dialogue.

1. The Church of Vatican II looks at how the world is changing, barriers are falling, and there is increasing interaction among peoples of different cultures and religions. *Nostra Aetate* is the Church's response to a specific stage of history: showing that she is capable of letting herself be challenged and changed by the current climate (NAe 1). «In our time»: the initial words set the tone. *Nostra Aetate* reflects the spirit of the Council's positive vision of and openness to the World, which underlies *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. The world is not the «domain of the devil» as opposed to the Kingdom of God, but the locus of the activity of God, through the action of the Spirit, even before the incarnation of the Logos (AG 4) in the person of Jesus Christ (AG 4). Barnes has defined the Council's vision of the world as «contemplative» and «sacramental».⁵

2. The Council focuses on what all people have in common: origin and end, namely God, «whose providence, manifestation of goodness and plan of salvation» are extended to all (NAe 1). According to Barnes, *Nostra Aetate* shares the theology of revelation inaugurated by *Dei Verbum*, the Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Revelation*: Christ is the only source of God's revelation, as in him is the fulfilment of the ongoing dialogue that God has established with humanity since the beginning; a dialogue witnessed by the multiple covenants recorded in the Scriptures, and a dialogue with all humanity. More care is shown not to limit God's revelation within the sphere of the familiar. The Church cannot presume to know whether and how God has made himself known to others, however, she must acknowledge that among the peoples there is a perception of the

5. Cf. Barnes M., *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, cit., pp. 55-7.

transcendent reality (NAe 2), which we know as the God of Jesus Christ, proving the fact that God has made himself known by them. And certainly all self-revelation of God entails an offer of salvation. The Church realises that she must speak of what she knows faith to be true and remain silent before the mystery of what she does not know, so as not to put arbitrary limits on God's salvific action.

3. Religions have *a* value, as men and women expect from them the answers to the «obscure riddles of the human condition» (NAe1). Moreover, the Church recognises that elements of truth and holiness are to be found among the followers of other religions, reflections of the rays of the truth, signs of the presence of God's action among them. The Council remains silent, or is not concerned with, the question of whether or not other religions have salvific value. The question is very delicate because admitting that religions have salvific value would imply that they are independent ways of salvation, which is untenable from the Christian point of view, whereby all salvation is in Christ. *Nostra Aetate*, however, recognises that religions have *some* value — not salvific value — for the spiritual life of their followers. It is not said that religions provide the answers to the questions of human condition: this must be left open, as belonging to the domain of mystery about which the Church cannot speak. However, the Declaration recognises and reaffirms with unambiguous clarity the presence of *elements of truth and holiness*, the traces of the presence and action of God among them. This is less a discovery than the retrieval of an ancient teaching, re-echoing Justin's doctrine of the seed of the Word developed from the Joannine prologue. In this regard *Nostra Aetate* has parallels in other documents of the Council: LG 16, 17; AG 9 (quoting LG 17); AG 11.

4. «The Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions» (NAe 2). Not only she does not reject these elements, but she respects them and calls all her children «to recognise, to preserve and to promote» them, through «dialogues and collaboration», «in prudence and charity», «with respect and love» towards the followers of other faiths. Not everything can be *a priori* accepted as true and holy, as — like human nature — they are a mixture of grace and sin, however, this new vision rules out any interpretation of the religions as the creation of the devil, as has happened before. Rather, the existence of good things, signifies a secret presence of God which each Catholic — but in principle it may well apply to any Christian — is called to acknowledge. This is not enough: it is part of the duty of each faithful also to preserve and promote such values. This implies that every Catholic would be exercising fully his/her Christian mission by engaging in promoting certain values — recognisable as traces of God — among people of other faiths, even when explicit proclamation of the gospel and invitation to become

members of the Church is not possible. From this perspective, interfaith dialogue has a value in itself as one way of realising the mission entrusted by Christ to the Church.

5. «The Church preaches and is bound to preach» (NAe 2) Christ, the only Saviour of the world, in which all grace of God finds its fulfilment. In no way does Vatican II's «contemplative and sacramental» vision of the world question the Church's missionary mandate. For the Council — and *Nostra Aetate* in particular — recognition of the active presence of God and his offer of grace beyond the boundaries of the Church must always be accompanied by the faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. Not surprisingly the Decree *Ad Gentes*, on the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate, refers to non-Christian Religions several times, insisting on the necessity of proclamation for the other religious beliefs to be rid of their «less positive» elements.

6. «As she reflects on her own mystery...» (NAe 4). According to *Nostra Aetate*, it is as she pursues a deeper understanding of her own identity that the Church encounters the Jewish people. Precisely as she returns to her own origins the Church remembers something crucial, namely that her roots are in an «other» experience of faith, something that, if not forgotten, had been most often overlooked. The Jews are the people with whom «God deigned to establish an “ancient Covenant”», which has never been revoked, and are «still very dear to God», because the gifts of God are irrevocable. «New people of God» means «people of the new covenant» (NAe 4); that the «new» fulfils the «old» does not imply any supersessionism, i.e. that the «old» has not been invalidated or replaced by the «new». This poses the question of how Christians are to understand the radical novelty of Christ while at the same time affirming that God's ancient covenant is irrevocable, and the consequences of such affirmation.

At its own roots the «new people of God» encounters its first religious other, the Jewish people, which reminds them that the being «new» does not automatically entitle them to regard themselves as the exclusive receivers of God's grace. Moreover, as the Church encounters the Jews and allows for the Jewish story to be told, she becomes aware of other forgotten voices carrying other stories of faith, which demand to be heard and no longer be pushed to the edges of a very reductive vision of the world. Once the Church opens to the Jews she opens to all, and is reminded of her deepest secret: she exists for the others, and can understand her *raison d'être* only at the encounter with the others.

Dialogue therefore does not simply constitute as an answer to practical questions — questions of good relationships and politeness — but is an essential element of the process whereby the Church is being guided by the Spirit to the whole knowledge of the Truth, which is Christ. To use Rahner's image, the Church of the «third epoch» — a genuinely

World Church⁶ — can no longer theologise and live but with the assistance of the other?⁷

Nostra Aetate reflects a theological shift: with regard to non-Christians, the old question about their salvation is surpassed; for Vatican II there is no doubt that non-Christians can be saved. From now on the question is rather whether their religions have a role in their achievement of the salvation given them by God in Christ, and if so, what such role is. Another issue concerns the role of the Church and the nature of her mission in this new context; which poses in turn another question: how to strike the balance between the two «vocations» of proclamation and dialogue.

2. Twenty-Five Years after *Nostra Aetate*: Dialogue and Proclamation⁸

It is important to dwell so extensively on *Nostra Aetate* and the Vatican II position on other religions because the current teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is the result of a process that was set in motion by the «reawakening» of the Church that took place at Vatican II.⁹

The latest and most complete exposition of Catholic teaching on interreligious dialogue is the 1991 document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (henceforth *DP*) published jointly by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of the People. *Nostra Aetate* fades in comparison with the greater theological precision of *DP*, but it is evident that every statement of the former is founded on the theology of the Council. *DP* would not have been possible without *Nostra Aetate*. The introduction of the document provides important clarifications on language, specifically on the terms dialogue, proclamation, evangelisation and conversion.

DP understands evangelisation in a broad sense, to indicate the mission of the Church in its complexity, while proclamation is defined as «the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realised by God for all in Jesus Christ by the Spirit» and «an invitation to entry through baptism into the community of believers which is the Church» (*DP* 10). As such proclamation is only one element of evangelisa-

6. Rahner K., Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II. *Theological Studies*, 40:716-27.

7. Barnes M., *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, cit., pp. 53-4.

8. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples. *Dialogue and Proclamation*. Rome, 19th May 1991. For a commentary see Dupuis J., Dialogue and Proclamation. J. Dupuis and W. Burrow. *Redemption and Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991, pp.93-158.

9. McDade J., *Nostra Aetate* and Interreligious Dialogue. *The Pastoral Review* (January 2006). Available at http://www.thepastoralreview.org/cgi-bin/archive_db.cgi?priestsppl-00113, accessed 20th February 2006.

tion, together with «a variety of activities» (DP 8) it nevertheless holds a special place as «the foundation, centre and summit of evangelisation» (DP 9; ref. EN 27). Dialogue is «all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment» (DP 9). Finally conversion, according to the context, may refer to «a general movement towards God», or specifically to «a change of religious adherence» (DP 11).

a. A Christian Approach to Religious Traditions (DP 14-32)

The first section of DP focuses on dialogue, the second on proclamation and the third on their relationship within the mission of the Church. Five subsections compose the part on interreligious dialogue: the first two deal with the more theological aspects while the others are more practical in scope.

As Jacques Dupuis explains, «DP believes that the attitude of Christians toward the members of other religions will depend on their appraisal of those traditions. An open attitude in interreligious dialogue can only be based on a positive evaluation of the religions themselves».¹⁰ Such positive assessment is presented by recalling the teachings of Vatican II (15-18), biblical data from the Old Testament, with particular attention to God's covenants (19-20) and the New, with Jesus' attitude towards people outside the covenant of Israel, and the attitude of the apostolic Church towards the gentiles (21-23).

Then DP refers to the post-biblical tradition of the Early Fathers (24-25): Justine, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria are explicitly mentioned as the initiators of a theology of history whereby «history becomes salvation history inasmuch as through it God progressively manifests Himself and communicates with humankind» (DP 25). The teaching of John Paul II is then presented, with a particular emphasis on the theme of the Holy Spirit¹¹ (DP 28). This is an important development of DP. Explicit reference to the Holy Spirit is absent from *Nostra Aetate*, but is to be found in *Gaudium et Spes*, which recognises that salvation is made available to non-Christians because the Spirit unites them to the Paschal Mystery.

The following paragraph contains a very important point, which brings the theology of dialogue of DP beyond Vatican II. While Vatican II it remained silent on the role of such religions in the salvation of their members, DP 29 acknowledges that

10. Dupuis J., *Dialogue and Proclamation*, cit., p. 132.

11. For a synthesis of John Paul II teaching on dialogue see Dupuis J., *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001, pp. 173-79.

it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognise or acknowledge him as their saviour (*DP* 29).

By stating so, the Church is teaching not only that followers of other religions are saved through Christ (the traditional doctrine), but also clarifies that there are saved not «in spite of» their faith but precisely in it and through the practice of those elements which are good and holy (cf. *Nostra Aetate*) in their religion, in ways «known to God» (*Gaudium et Spes* 22). This amounts to taking a step forward, moving from the traditional concern for the salvation of the individual, granted by his/her obedience to «the dictates of conscience», to a broader theological horizon that sees the person as a member of a community of faith and acknowledges its value. The underlying idea is that «there is no religious life which is not expressed in a tradition; nor does a religious tradition exist outside the persons and the community that uphold it and practice it».¹²

Two conclusive paragraphs point out that dialogue must not overlook contradictions. Balance must be kept so that, when engaging in interfaith dialogue «with an open mind», «Christians might have to challenge the other in a peaceful spirit with regard to the content of their belief», and at the same time let themselves be questioned by the faith of the other, as «the way Christians sometimes understand their religion and practice may be in need of purification» (*DP* 32).

b. Church, Kingdom and the «Others». Dialogue and the Church's Mission (DP 33-41)

DP recalls the sacramental ecclesiology of Vatican II (the Church is seen as the sacrament of the Kingdom) in order to consider the relationship of followers of other religions respectively with Church and the Kingdom. According to Dupuis, *DP* concludes that «while the Kingdom in its historical becoming is in some way present beyond the boundaries of the Church, it is nevertheless, already present in the Church in a distinct and privileged manner».¹³ However the presence of the Kingdom outside the Church is «inchoate», and therefore «needs to find completion through being related to the Kingdom of Christ already present in the Church yet fully realised in the world to come» (*DP* 35).

In this regard those who respond positively to God's calling, and therefore are saved in Christ, «already share in some way in the reality which is signified by the Kingdom» (*DP* 35).

12. Dupuis J., *Dialogue and Proclamation*, cit., p. 136.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Without expounding the quality of such a link, *DP* allows for the possibility that people who do not belong to the Church may already «belong» to the Kingdom, and as such, they are «oriented» to the Church (*LG* 16). According to Dupuis

The «orientation» of the others to the Church, of which *DP* 35 speaks, is to be understood in terms of the completion which their real but incomplete belonging to the kingdom of God may receive in the Church where the Kingdom is already present in a privileged manner.¹⁴

The recognition that «insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth» (cf. *UR* 6) the Church is «constantly in need of renewal and reform» (*DP* 36), she is «always on pilgrimage» towards the fullness of the truth (*DP* 37). If we consider what the document *Dialogue and Mission* (1984) stated¹⁵, i.e. that in interreligious dialogue «Christians meet the followers of other religions in order to walk together towards the truth» (*DM* 13), it is possible to see Christians and other believers as co-pilgrims towards the truth.¹⁶

For *DP* the foundation of Dialogue is «primarily theological» and is to be found in God's dialogue of salvation with humanity (*DP* 38) and because «dialogue finds its place within the Church's salvific mission» it is a «dialogue of salvation» (*DP* 39).

DP 40-41 explain the aim of interreligious dialogue. This is another aspect in which the document takes Vatican II a step forward. *Nostra Aetate* recommended mutual understanding and friendly relations between Christians and other believers; *DP* explains that when interreligious dialogue reaches the deeper level of the spirit, it becomes a «mutual witness to one's beliefs and a common exploration of one's respective religious convictions», where all are «invited to deepen their religious commitment...» (*DP* 40). The ultimate aim of dialogue is «a deeper conversion of all towards God», although the decision to change one's religious allegiance is not *a priori* excluded. This concludes *DP*'s more theological approach to dialogue. Sub-sections C, D, and E are concerned with the praxis of dialogue, providing detailed practical indications which, after 25 years of journey, are far more developed than in *Nostra Aetate*. These concern the forms (*DP* 42-46), attitudes (47-49), fruits of dialogue (50) and the obstacles (51-54).

14. Ibid.

15. Secretariat for Non-Christians, The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission. Rome, 10th May 1984, n. 13. In Gioia F., *Interreligious Dialogue. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997, pp. 566-79.

16. Dupuis observes that this formulation was approved by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue assembly but disappeared from the final text. Dupuis J., *Dialogue and Proclamation*, cit., p. 139.

c. The Relationship between Dialogue and Proclamation (DP 77-86)

The second Section of the document deals with proclamation, following an outline similar to that of Section I. For our purpose we need now to turn to the final section, which contains the overarching theological position of the entire document: i.e. the recognition that both dialogue and proclamation are «authentic», «legitimate» and «necessary» elements of the Church's mission. They are «related but not interchangeable» (DP 77), they have value in themselves, are complementary and cannot simply replace each other.

Nostra Aetate had already identified a «binomial» that cannot be reduced further: recognition of God's grace at work in others and proclamation of Christ as the only Saviour of all must be kept in tension if the Church is to remain faithful to her missionary mandate. Every time one aspect is allowed to gain pre-eminence over the other, the understanding (and the practice) of mission is distorted. By leaving the tension unsolved (in the line of *Nostra Aetate*) *Dialogue and Proclamation* points to the essential question of interreligious dialogue, which is not the solution of a theological riddle but the pursuit of an equilibrium at the level of Christian experience. It seems that the word «and» in the title of the document is as important as the other two¹⁷: interreligious dialogue challenges the Christian to marry the unambiguous proclamation of Jesus Christ as Saviour with that openness that stems from the contemplative and sacramental vision of the world. While it is a world where salvation is available to all, this does not necessarily mean that all are automatically saved. For this reason interfaith engagement requires the capacity to adapt to particular circumstances (DP 78) and above all a «spirituality of dialogue».¹⁸

Reaffirming more explicitly what *Nostra Aetate* already said, DP 82 states that, like proclamation interreligious dialogue is for all Christians, not just for specialists, and each will do it according to the circumstances and personal capacity.

Interreligious dialogue remains «oriented towards proclamation» (DP 82), which is the climax of the Church's mission. It nevertheless retains a value of its own, which means that in circumstances in which explicit proclamation is not possible, interreligious dialogue can be the way of fulfilling the Church's mission. This is especially true because «insofar as the Church and Christians have a deep love for the Lord Jesus, the desire to share him with others is motivated not merely by obedience to the Lord's command, but by this love itself¹⁹. The tension that seems impossible to solve at the theological level, ceases to be a problem where Christian experience is authentic. Here theology is called

17. Cf. Barnes M., *Discernere l'istinto cattolico. Ad Gentes* 5, 2001/1, pp. 9-23.

18. Dupuis J., *Dialogue and Proclamation*, cit., p. 146.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 148

to revive continually its relationship with the practice of faith, and especially as far as interreligious dialogue is concerned, to begin with the actual encounter between people of different faiths who come together to search for the truth. This amounts to a shift from a theology *of* dialogue rather than a theology *for* dialogue.²⁰

3. Some Conclusive Reflections

a. Theology in the «Third Epoch» of the Church: the Necessity of the «Other»

Without underestimating the contribution of subsequent Magisterium, an appreciation of Roman Catholic thought on interreligious dialogue must refer first of all to *Nostra Aetate*. In a 1979 lecture, Karl Rahner defined the Second Vatican Council as «the first major official event in which the Church actualised itself precisely as a World Church».²¹ Referring to Rahner's argument, Barnes observes that

the significance of *Nostra Aetate* is not in any novel theology, but in the way it marks Rahner's second shift, reminding the Church as a whole of its first and fateful move towards the wider non-Jewish world.

The first shift was that from a Jewish Church to the church of the gentiles, when the apostolic Church understood herself as called to broaden the scope of God's covenant with Israel to include others. The second shift, marked by Vatican II and particularly by *Nostra Aetate* is from a Hellenistic Western Church to a World Church. At Vatican II the Catholic Church realised that for centuries she had developed and hung on to a Church-centred vision of history and of the world, therefore forgetting not only all other believers but also her primary religious other, Judaism, the custodian of her own roots. The novelty of *Nostra Aetate* is that, through a process of remembrance it «succeeds in bringing to light “other stories” which challenge the theologian not just to reimagine history but to question the premises upon which a Christian theological history of religions must be based.»²² By remembering the Jewish «religious other» and by acknowledging that the ancient link still remains a valid aspect of the identity of the Church, *Nostra Aetate* throws the doors of the Church open to *all* religious otherness, and realises for the first time the

20. Barnes M., *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, cit., pp. 54-5.

21. Rahner K., *Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II*, cit., p. 717.

22. Barnes M., *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, cit., p. 36.

deep meaning of its «catholicity».²³ This irreversible opening was possible because the Church let herself be questioned by Judaism first, and later (during the Council) by Islam, and less visibly by the voices of Hinduism and Buddhism brought to Rome by Christians committed to dialogue like Dr. Louis Massignon and Fr. Jules Monchenin.²⁴

Nostra Aetate uncovers the new context in which theology is called to reshape itself: a context no longer «undisturbed» by difference, but woven by religious otherness, where theology must seek the assistance of the other, if it is to understand the presence and the ways of God in a pluralistic world. «The great strength of *Nostra Aetate*,» says Barnes, is that «it engages with the dual responsibility of a world Church — to be able to speak of the relationship between same and other in a way which neither compromises the integrity of the former nor ignores the freedom of the other.»²⁵ The proclamation of what the Church knows in faith to be true must go together with the ethical responsibility of «letting the other be other», without turning it into a version/reflection of the same.

The focus of theology in the third epoch is not on the development of great systems, but on «how to take up the mind of Christ» in a world of many religions.²⁶ The goal is to learn to discern the voice of God that is no longer spoken from one single source: the Church of the third epoch realises that «the Church is — and has always been — a community charged with listening for the echoes of a word spoken and disseminated not from some single controllable site but within the irreducible context of otherness.»²⁷

Vatican II marks the reawakening of the Church to the existence of the other that she had forgotten; it is the «restoration of a lost equilibrium», and the rediscovery of the way to be a more authentic community of the followers of Christ, by «avoiding premature closure» and allowing God to be God, without arbitrarily limiting the scope of his gift of grace; while remaining certain that the Church has been given, by God himself, a special role in the unfolding of the mystery of Salvation that she cannot control.

b. Interfaith Encounter and Ecumenism

An important aspect of Catholic teaching relevant to this discussion is a clear distinction between ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. When the reflection started, which flowed into the *Declaration on non-Christians*, the Catholic Church was not yet well equipped

23. Ibid., pp. 29-30.

24. Nicholl D., *Other Religions (Nostra Aetate)*, cit., p. 126.

25. Barnes M., *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, cit., p. 45.

26. Ibid., p. 49.

27. Ibid., p. 60.

for the task. We might be surprised today to discover that John XIII entrusted the decree on the Jews to a Secretariat whose area of competence was ecumenical relations. Soon, however, there would be an important change: in May 1964 — three months before the publication of *Ecclesiam Suam*, the encyclical letter on the dialogues of the Church, Paul VI established the Secretariat for Non-Christians.

This step should be understood as a development both of the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* and of the theological vision of the world of *Ad Gentes*, *Nostra Aetate* and *Gaudium et Spes*. The Church of Vatican II learns to distinguish «others». It is as if before the world were ideally divided between Roman Catholics and «the others»: whoever was not a Catholic belonged to the world of the other, without distinctions. The proposal draft of the *Decree of the Jews* reached the Council's floor for the first time in October 1963, as the fourth Chapter of the Schema on Ecumenism which would become *Unitatis Redintegratio* (the fifth being what would develop into *Dignitatis Humanae*). However during the first debate (October 1963), various points were raised which would become important in the development of *Nostra Aetate*. One was that the question of Judaism and other religions was not to be lumped together with the question of ecumenism, because the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian communities is qualitatively different from her relationship with other religions. The crucial difference is the faith in Jesus Christ that is common to all Christian denominations, which makes us one. Given this realisation of «various degrees of difference», it is not surprising that the Council gave us an entire document on ecumenism, and that *LG* 8 broke a traditional assumption by implying that the Church of Christ may be found also outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church within other Christian communities of faith. In short, as the Church turns to other religions, she discovers that what divides us Christians much less than what we have in common.

Without wanting to «Catholicise» others, the Catholic Church sees Christians as being «on the same side» when it comes to dialogue with other religions.

I would suggest that maybe, because of the Council's somewhat more ecumenical sensitivity, the theology of dialogue proposed *Nostra Aetate* and following *Magisterium*, may be somehow taken into consideration also by other Christian perspectives, at least in its strong biblical foundations.

I would want to argue — from personal experience — that interreligious dialogue should be taken up as an interconfessional Christian endeavour as a joint response to the question that the present pluralistic context poses to all Christian communities: «How are you Christian churches going to witness to the God of Jesus Christ without losing

the integrity of your faith while at the same time not overlooking the signs of God's grace that are to be found in the world and particularly in the religious experience of individuals and communities of faith?».

I would assert that this common challenge may be a sign of the times, through which God might be offering us a chance for unity. This being the case, a joint commitment to interfaith relations would be a response to a calling from God.

The challenge ahead is quite demanding, because I believe that a joint commitment to interfaith dialogue will require a convergence not so much on the acknowledgement of pastoral necessity but on the theological presuppositions. In other words, only a convergence of the theological foundations of dialogue and the recognition of dialogue as a legitimate and essential dimension of the mission of Christianity in the world will be able to motivate and support collaboration. It is my strong conviction that working together for dialogue with people of other religions, members of different Christians churches may reach a deeper mutual knowledge and experience the beauty of being one in witnessing to the love of God. That love which we — together — are to discover continuously at work in the world and to bring to the ends of the earth.²⁸

28. This paper was delivered at the 2nd Asian Theological Forum (23-24 February 2006) a joint initiative of the Asian Theological Seminary and the Union Church of Manila. Both institution comprise and minister to Christians of various denominations other than the Roman Catholic Church. It is therefore meant to address an audience mostly unfamiliar with Catholic teaching. Published in: Asian Theological Seminary, *Naming the Unknown God*, Manila: OMF Literature Inc., 2006, pp. 60-77.

The Rishi People and the Catholic Church

An Historical Perspective

SERGIO TARGA

I feel honoured to have the chance to talk about the Rishi people of Bangladesh. As a matter of fact, I am proud that most of my close Bangladeshi friends are Rishi. I do believe that the Rishi, who are depreciatively known in Bangladesh as Muchi, are an extraordinary people who managed to survive despite centuries if not millennia of oppression and slavery. A minority within a minority, the Rishi remain a marginalised group in today's Bangladesh as well. Identified as an untouchable group because of their traditional dealings with dead cows and their hides, the Rishi people belong to the fifth caste, the one which does not exist, according to the *Manava Dharma Shastra*.¹ And in fact their existence has been denied and ostracised. Their being human beings have been consistently hidden beneath the hypocrisy of a caste system thought out and conceived of as a divine institution. The *Manava Dharma Shastra* speaks of all so called untouchable groups, in the following way:

But the dwellings of «Fierce» Untouchables and «Dog-cookers» should be outside the village; they must use discarded bowls, and dogs and donkeys should be their wealth. Their clothing should be the clothes of the dead, and their food should be in broken dishes; their ornaments should be made of black iron, and they should wander constantly. A man who carries out his duties should not seek contact with them; they should do business with one another and marry with those who are like them. Their food, dependent upon others, should be given to them in a broken dish, and they should not walk about in villages and cities at night. They may move about by day to do their work, recognizable by distinctive marks in accordance with the king's decrees; and they should carry out the corpses of people who have no relatives...²

Reading these words, Rishi, Kaora, Dom, Methor³ etc. should not feel ashamed. We are

1. See Doniger W. with Smith B. K. (tr.), *The Laws of Manu*. London: Penguin Books, 1991, 10,4.

2. Ibid., 10,51-55.

3. Rishi are leather workers, Kaora raise pigs, Dom deal with corpses in the cremation ground, Methor are

the ones who should! Be as it may, in the last two centuries or so the Rishi people have gone through a series of major socio-economic transformations mainly due to their encounter with Christianity. And this is the argument of the present paper. But before entering the intricacies of such an encounter I wish to clarify that what I will be saying refers mainly to the Rishi population located in present day Khulna division in its relationship with that particular brand of Christianity represented by the Catholic Church. Rishi people, maybe with different names,⁴ are to be found all over Bangladesh, even though perhaps their highest concentration is located in the districts of Jessore and Khulna. The paper will attempt, summarily, a reading of the past and present of such a relationship. A relationship which I like to interpret with a metaphor Cosimo Zene reported in his book on the Rishi of Bangladesh. Asking a Rishi person what Christianity was for him, he answered: «We are like a snake which holds in its mouth a juicy frog, too big to be swallowed, but too good to let go.»⁵ This metaphor gives us right from the beginning the sense of a complex relationship between Rishi people and Christianity, a relationship centred on both attraction and repulsion in the context of a difficult dialogue. We will come back to this later on.

I do not know if during the first wave of evangelisation carried out by the Portuguese in Bengal (1517-1834) Rishi people in Dhaka, Chittagong and other costal areas were missionised or not.⁶ What we do know is that a consistent attempt by the Catholic Church in contacting the Rishi started during the second wave of evangelisation in the second half of the 19th century in the southwestern areas of today's Bangladesh. Fr. Marietti arrived in the then Central Bengal Mission in 1856 as the pioneer and herald of a new Italian missionary institute, what later on took on the name of PIME. The PIME fathers soon realised that Muslims and Hindus were not interested in the new religion. They thus directed their attention to the Rishi population of the area around Jessore and Shimulia and to the Namasudras of Khulna and the Sundarban. The Rishi were, and largely still are, people of very low caste who are despised by all for their traditional work with leather and for this cursed with the mark of untouchability as already mentioned above. The PIME fathers worked among them until 1927, the year in which they decided to leave the mis-

sweepers.

4. In Mymensingh district, for instance, the Rishi word is not known. They themselves give their name as Rubidas. They are however all the same identified as Muchi by Muslim and Hindu neighbours.

5. Zene C., *The Rishi of Bangladesh*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002, p. XV.

6. In Di Costa J., *Bangladeshe Catholic Mondoli*. Dhaka: Protibeshi Prokashoni, 1988, p.16 it is said that large numbers of low caste people were converted to Christianity. Who this people were and what their caste belonging was, it is not said.

sion among the Rishi and move to the North of Bengal where tribal populations were apparently promising a new and more rewarding field of evangelisation. Fr. Costa, the last PIME father to leave the mission of Shimulia, summed up in one of his letters the feeling of dismay and of failure of the PIME Rishi mission: «I really do need to go back home for a while to boost my morale; I had too many disillusionments during these years among these Christians of mine, and I do feel really tired.»⁷

The PIME mission among the Rishi had been marked by disillusionment and dissatisfaction. Missionaries often complained about the Rishi being too «hypocritical, selfish and sensual to accept Catholicism for pure motives.»⁸ They often regretted that the Rishi people were ready to become Christian only «for money's sake.»⁹ Unfaithfulness was apparently the characteristic of these people, who were ready to become Christians for a piece of bread and move back to Hinduism when bread was no longer on offer. Salesian fathers took up the Rishi mission in the area of Jessore and Shimulia up until 1952. Their brief experience, however, did not change the fate of the mission very much. The Salesians started up where the PIME had left off. They gave importance to education and religious instruction in particular. Perhaps they accentuated the spiritual line in their dealings with the Rishi and this did not help the Rishi gain confidence. Apparently, the Rishi were responsive to Christianity only when the missionary was responsive to their request for help and human dignity. The comments made by Mgr. Scuderi, the Apostolic Administrator, on the occasion of his pastoral visit to the Shimulia mission in 1937, are quite telling: «I think we should be more interested in the social and civil life of the people. The contact with the Father in matters not pertaining to religion is lacking. If I am not wrong, I see the need for us to be interested in them, their difficulties, quarrels, cleanliness, illnesses etc.»¹⁰ The Salesian fathers were eventually relieved of their work by the Xaverian fathers, another young Italian missionary institute.

Around the same time of the PIME and Salesian missionary enterprises, the Jesuits were trying their luck with the Rishi of Satkhira and Borodol. These places depended canonically on the Calcutta Catholic diocese, while Jessore and Shimulia were juridically linked to the diocese of Krishnanagar. The Jesuit mission went through difficult phases. In 1925 first, and definitely in 1930, it actually collapsed and started up again only in 1937. Without entering the details of the Jesuits' 34 year experience among the Rishi

7. Quoted in Zene C., *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, cit., p. 122.

8. Fr. Marietti quoted in Zene C., *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, cit., p. 110.

9. Ibid., p. 110.

10. Ibid., p. 128.

(1918-1952), I will simply attempt a short description of the relationship between Rishi people and Jesuit fathers. The mission was weak from an organisational point of view. It suffered from the outset from scarcity of missionary personnel. Two Jesuit fathers at most were present at any one time in the vast territory of Satkhira-Borodol. Most of the time, however, there was only one missionary. Besides, the zeal of the missionary in the field was not supported by the Church authorities back in Calcutta, who were quite sceptical about the possibility of a successful mission among the Rishi.¹¹ The mission's logistics were also weak. In the first period (1918-1930), the fathers followed the new mission going to and fro from Calcutta. It was only in the second period (from 1937 onwards) that a stable Jesuit presence was established in Satkhira. This, of course, would greatly contribute to the positive survival of the second mission. The pattern of Jesuit missionary activity reflected the theology of the time and the practical situation of the people. Usually, Jesuits visited Rishi villages that wished to become Christian. These requests were always linked to some problems that the Rishi hoped to solve with the help of the missionary. In this respect, the example of Borodol is quite enlightening. In April 1937, a delegation of Rishi from Borodol visited the Jesuits in Calcutta and told them that the whole village wished to become Christian. The Rishi of Borodol were oppressed by the local *zamindar* (i.e. big land owner) and the police. About ten of them were already in jail and the rest spent their days in fear. The positive answer of the Jesuits signalled the second start of the Satkhira mission.¹² Perhaps, unlike other missionaries working in other areas, the Jesuits were not taken aback by the apparent disinterest of the Rishi in religious matters *per se*.¹³

Quite soon, the Jesuits understood that Rishi people were looking for security and protection, and they were quite prepared to provide it as far as they could.¹⁴ This, of course, did not prevent Rishi villages from being unfaithful to their new religion. The diaries of Satkhira mission are full of such instances. Sometimes it was because of an unlawful marriage, other times it was because the father refused to build a school or a tank or,

11. «Fr. Wanters had been insisting with the superior to put a man in the spot. Monsignor was prejudiced against the Muchis. In 1925, when the collapse of the Mission came, Fr. Wanters went to announce to the Superior of the Mission (Fr. M. Veys) the "good news" that the Muchi mission was gone; Fr. Veys asked him: "Why do you call it good news?", to which Fr. Wanters answered: "You must be happy that no man is needed there".» In Germano A., (ed.), *Satkhira Mission: The Starting of the Mission in the Diaries of the Jesuit Fathers*. Vol. II: 1925-1939. Khulna: 1998. Unpublished manuscript, p. 2.

12. See Germano A., (ed.), *Satkhira Mission*, cit., Vol. II, p. 13.

13. Fr. Koster wrote in January 1942: «It will take very long to make this people religious minded. They do not care for God nor for religion.» In Germano A., (ed.), *Satkhira Mission*, cit., Vol. III, p. 41.

14. Fr. Deman writes in June 1937: «Where help and protection will come from, there will they go.» In Germano A., (ed.), *Satkhira Mission*, cit., Vol. II, p. 14.

again, sometimes the refusal to protect a criminal in a court of law led a village previously Christianised to revert back to Hinduism. There was also a conversion in missionary attitudes. In the first period up to 1930, Jesuits working in the area of Satkhira-Borodol used the stick more than the carrot. Rishi who reverted to Hinduism were abandoned and denied assistance when in need.¹⁵ Threats were sometimes employed to discourage apostasy and security in money was demanded in order to guarantee the stability of conversions.¹⁶ The attitude of the fathers seems to have changed in the second period of the mission (from 1937). Fr. Koster wrote in March 1942: «(sic) Policy is to keep there (sic) catechist even if all leave. Stick to the post!»¹⁷ The context surrounding these words was the news that the Christians of Assassuni had left the Christian fold. Apparently, from a conception of conversion intended as event the Jesuits little by little sided towards a conception of conversion intended more and more as a process.

Both Jesuit and Salesian fathers were relieved in 1952 by a young Italian missionary institute, the Xaverians. In fact, the departure of the British in 1947 and the separation of Pakistan from what used to be British India led to the redrawing of political maps. Parts of what used to be the Krishnanagar Catholic Diocese (Shimulia and Jessore areas) had fallen now within the new entity of East Pakistan. The same happened to what used to be the most eastern parts of the Calcutta Catholic Diocese (Satkhira and Borodol areas). On 3 January 1952 the pope Pius XII erected the new diocese of Jessore which comprised the afore mentioned territories. After the refusal of Jesuits, Salesians and other missionary institutes to take charge of the new jurisdiction, the Xaverian Dante Battaglierin was appointed as the first Apostolic Administrator of Jessore Diocese on 19 January 1952. Ever since the Xaverian Missionaries have been working in what then became the Khulna Catholic Diocese (from 1956).

Despite a difficult beginning the Xaverians took on with great zeal the task given them. Soon enough, as much as their predecessors, they realised that the Rishi people were the only ones open to evangelisation, not so the Caste Hindus and the Muslims. At the same time they also realised the difficulties connected to working with Rishi people. Often fathers working in Borodol, Satkhira and Shimulia lamented the lack of religious interest among their people, too aware of the fact that Rishi people were attracted to them more to fulfil their material needs than their spiritual ones. Equipped with a theology

15. In June 1923 Fr. Dessa writes: «Many of those who have left us come for medicine, but of course I refuse.» In Germano A., (ed.), *Satkhira Mission*, cit., Vol. I, p. 23.

16. Ibid., pp. 20-1; 26-7.

17. In Germano A., (ed.), *Satkhira Mission*, cit., Vol. III, p. 42.

which in those days saw in conversion the only positive outcome of any missionary presence, those early missionaries often felt disheartened and on the brink of giving up. Fr. Bernacchi, for instance, in 1969 when asked to delay his departure in order to get his re-entry visa to East Pakistan abruptly refused, adding: «I wonder how you can ask me to remember Pakistan... I too have the right to save my soul,»¹⁸ such had been his disillusionment and bitterness after 2-3 years in which he had been parish priest in Satkhira. Continuous quarrels, irregularities in marriages, power struggles between the matobbers (i.e. village elders) and the fathers, endemic poverty of the people and their begging attitude were what wore down little by little even the more determined among Xaverians. On top of this the all too easy policy of shifting fathers from one place to another within short spans of time did not contribute to stabilise the Rishi Christians who more than anything else were looking for security and protection.

Things started to change after the celebration of the Second Vatican Council in the mid sixties. The theological conception of mission was being changed and conversion, although remaining a possible outcome, was no longer considered as the sole outcome of any missionary endeavour. Individual Xaverians started taking into serious consideration the socio-economic plight of their people, being convinced that before talking about religion the search for daily rice was to be addressed first. Suffice here to mention perhaps the biggest attempt at socio-economic development ever attempted by Xaverians. In 1967 Fr. Mario Veronesi, the then parish priest, was joined in Shimulia by Fr. Valeriano Cobbe. Together they revolutionised the Christian community in Shimulia by starting cooperatives, credit unions and a very ambitious irrigation project aimed at freeing the small farmers of the area, Christian, Hindu and Muslims alike, from the greed and the dominance of big landowners. Unfortunately, both these fathers encountered a tragic end few years later. In 1971 Fr. Veronesi was killed by Pakistani soldiers while trying to protect his Christians in Jessore. Two years later, Fr. Cobbe was shot at by unknown assailants, likely enough, paid for by those same people who could not stand the economic independence gained by the poor of Shimulia.

The two decades following the war of independence saw a great deal of discussion among Xaverians, that this time on a communitarian bases started to think about the Rishi and about new ways of being present among them. The Xaverians, as a community, positively chose the Rishi as a privileged target of their mission in Bangladesh. As a result of this new thinking new ways of presence were devised. Fr. Paggi Luigi and Pierluigi

18. Quoted in Zene C., *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, cit., p. 239.

Lupi started their presence in Chuknagar towards the end of the 70s with the explicit project to bring salvation to the Rishi through education. Conversion was not contemplated at this point. But it was not just a question of starting new activities, it was the task of renewing old ones as well. Fr. Germano Antonio, appointed parish priest in Borodol in 1978 first with Fr. Colombara and then with Fr. Torresani started an aggressive social campaign against the poisoning of cows and the eating of carrion. It was believed in fact that without discarding these traditional habits, the Christians of Borodol would never be able to discard their Muchi label particularly in front of the surrounding non-Christian society.

The last 20 years or so have witnessed the growth of the Catholic Church in Khulna with local priestly ordinations even among Christians coming from Rishi background. This of course has been a matter of great pride for all of them and for us Xaverians as well. Together with the growth of local clergy these last two decades have also witnessed a sort of restructuring of the Xaverian presence. This in practice has meant a withdrawal from places of responsibilities, and regrettably, from the actual field of mission. The Rishi mission although still in theory remaining high in the Xaverian priorities in the last years has suffered quite a lot for lack of interest and personnel. Fr. Germano is right now the only Xaverian working among the Rishi. His life time commitment to the Rishi cause is undoubtedly praise worthy.

Conclusion

The above sketchy depiction of the history of the complex relationship between Catholic Church and Rishi people can also be read as the history of two intertwined stories. The first, the most obvious one, the story of Rishi conversion to Christianity, and the second, the less obvious one, the story of the Catholic Church's conversion to the Rishi cause. If it is true that in the intention of the Rishi respondent's, the snake of the metaphor mentioned above was the Rishi group and the frog represented instead the Church, it is also true that the metaphor can be read the other way round: the Church may represent the snake and the Rishi group, the frog. Often missionaries had lamented the lack of a pure religious intentionality in the Rishi approach to Christianity. But what about the missionaries, is it not true that the missionaries as well had a not so hidden agenda as far as Rishi were concerned? The Church did not make a positive choice of the Rishi until quite recently.

The encounter in the beginning was casually determined by the realisation that

Rishi people were open to the Gospel. Nobody, apparently, cared to ask the why of such openness. If another group had been open to it, the missionaries would have directed their care towards them. The Rishi simply took advantage of the opportunity. It was the missionary which until recently could not understand the profound need of human recognition the Rishi were looking for in their movement towards Christianity. Pure intentions were lacking also on the Church's side. Because of a narrow concept of evangelisation, all that the missionaries were looking for was institutional aggregation to the established Church. The Rishi knew it, and intelligently took advantage of it.

The beginnings were thus difficult: the Rishi's quest for earthly salvation were met or not met by the missionaries' offer of an eternal, over worldly one. The Church-snake could not let go the Rishi-frog, because at the end of the day it was the only frog it could get; on the other hand the Rishi-snake could not let go the Church-frog because it was the only one which could do something for them. Indeed, the Rishi were supposedly right in their approaching the Church. At first, their quest for human fulfilment was met by the caring and paternalistic hand of the fathers. Human promotion had then the characteristic of alms giving, a pietistic task which was to be carried out on an individual bases, outside of any socio-cultural and political reflection. The fathers often lamented that the Rishi Christians were confined to a sort of ghetto. But it was them who had contributed much to the building of that ghetto.

It was only from the 70s onwards that the Church started looking at the Rishi with different eyes and thus began to think of their integration. At the same time it was in those years in which fathers commenced to understand that evangelisation was not all about church aggregation. Christianity is actually about bringing out the fullness of humanity hidden in any human being. It is eventually to point at Christ as to the ideal fulfilled man. It is liberation from any sort of slavery which must start right here and now. In this the Rishi were right. Father Luigi's experience in Chuknagar has been about evangelisation of this sort: the attempt to constitute a people with a restored human dignity without asking anything in exchange. Grace or gratuitousness has been his operative tool in his nearly 25 years spent with the Rishi people. Yes, the Church in his missionaries has converted, but so has the Rishi.

It is interesting to notice how old Christians of Rishi background try hard to hide their origins. At the time of conversion most of their forefathers changed their surname to disguise their roots. Today's Christians of Rishi origin, not only keep their surname, but are no longer afraid to declare their Rishi origins. What is more, they are proud of their being Rishi. Why should they be ashamed of their history? They are the victims. It

is us, the victimisers, who should be ashamed of our history. But are we? If often Rishi people experience a sort of inferiority complex, we, on the other hand, experience a superiority one in our dealings with them. Perhaps very few know that up until 1959 in the village of Anondobash under Bhabarpara parish, there existed two church buildings: one for the Christians of Rishi origins, the other for the rest. It was Fr. Alberton that pulled down one building and forced all the Christians to partake in the same liturgical services. The church became one for all the Christians, but at least up until 1996 the division between the two groups was all too evident. I do not know of similar arrangements in other Khulna churches. What I do know is that even today many Christians feel bad about having to mix up with fellow believers coming from a Rishi background. Marriages overcoming caste barriers are still too rare to allow us to speak of a full integration of Rishi Christians within the wider Catholic community. Even the Rishi priestly component of the local clergy does not seem often at ease with priests coming from different communities. And last but not least, the Church in Khulna in its globality does not seem to show too much interest in the Rishi cause. Often the Rishi issue has been pushed forward only by the church's foreign element. But even this latter, as of late, has diminished both interest in and work among the Rishi people. Certainly, Rishi people still need conversion, but so does the Church in all of its components.

The relationship between Rishi people and Church is not yet accomplished. The complex dialogue between snake and frog is in its continuous unfolding. Problems are still there. But it is important to acknowledge that the Rishi are a people of God and their response to God's call may assume different faces, not necessarily the face of the Church. The Church in its own right must remain an instrument of Rishi's redemption, worldly first, over worldly later. In its service to the suffering humanity, it must continuously remind the Rishi of God's gratuitous love.¹⁹

19. This paper first appeared in Bengali in the November-December 2006 issue of the *Mongolbarta*, a bi-monthly publication of the National Training Centre, Jessore, Bangladesh. The views expressed in this paper are however solely of his author.

Storia di conversione: la maestra Giulia

MONICA MONGODI

Presentiamo l'esperienza di una volontaria missionaria, l'incontro e l'amicizia con una insegnante di lingua, che ha in qualche modo favorito il suo cammino di conversione. Per la dovuta discrezione, alcuni dati materiali sono stati cambiati.



Ho conosciuto Giulia circa sette anni fa, durante il primo periodo di studio della lingua cinese a Taipei: è stata infatti una delle mie insegnanti. Uno dei primi ricordi che ho di lei è la sua passione nell'insegnare... non intendo solo la bravura dal punto di vista professionale, che non le mancava, ma proprio la gioia nel donarci tutto quello che poteva. Un giorno, durante una lezione, ci disse una cosa molto bella: «La mia felicità è vedere la vostra felicità quando riuscite ad imparare qualcosa». Trovava sempre modi nuovi per farci tirare fuori le poche parole che sapevamo, e quando sbagliavamo... ci correggeva senza scoraggiarci!

Ricordo quando un'altra volta chiese a ciascuno come esercizio di preparare una presentazione in cinese: chi siamo, da dove veniamo, perché stiamo studiando il cinese, quali sono i nostri interessi e così via. Ci diede un poco di tempo, e fissò un giorno per la presentazione... ecco, la vedo ancora lì seduta non soltanto come qualcuno che ti deve dire quali sono le parole più giuste, ma come qualcuno che anzitutto... ti ascolta! Uno si dimenticava l'esercizio, e gli venivano fuori anche quelle due o tre parole che non aveva messo in conto di dire!

Nella classe, eravamo circa nove studenti, c'erano velocità di apprendimento diverse, ma siccome Giulia sottolineava in ciascuno gli aspetti positivi, era come quando in una famiglia tutti i figli si sentono bene allo stesso modo. Forse per questo, dopo i primi tre mesi con lei, tutta la classe chiese la possibilità di continuare lo studio del testo con la stessa insegnante.

Qualche volta capitava che durante l'intervallo lei non tornasse nella sala degli insegnanti, e ci si fermava in aula o in corridoio a scambiare due parole. In una di queste

occasioni appresi che ormai da molti anni Giulia soffriva di una forma di artrite reumatoide piuttosto seria e dolorosa, per la quale doveva prendere delle medicine. Giulia era giovane, aveva 36 anni. Questo fatto, insieme al suo modo di insegnare, metteva sempre più in luce un aspetto molto bello della sua anima, cioè la capacità di donarsi mettendo da parte se stessa, proprio come fa una madre.

In tanti mesi di corso, riflettevo, chissà quante volte Giulia avrà avuto dolori alle ossa e alle giunture... ma sempre l'avevamo vista entrare in classe con il sorriso.

Anche attraverso questi brevi momenti dell'intervallo, diventava più profondo il rapporto fra noi. Veramente si sperimenta che Dio ci mette gli uni accanto agli altri perché possiamo essere un dono reciproco... anche mentre si studia la lingua! Ed in realtà si può dire che quasi non esista un prima e un dopo l'aver imparato il cinese (che, appunto, non si impara mai...), ma esistono piuttosto quei fratelli, quelle sorelle che Lui ti fa incontrare. Nella stessa scuola in quel periodo studiava anche un Saveriano, a cui un giorno presentai la maestra Giulia. Il dono dell'amicizia viene da Dio e produce cerchi che si allargano via via, perché non può restare fermo.

Dopo alcuni mesi, la scuola assegnò per la nuova parte dei corsi altri insegnanti. La mia nuova classe e quella in cui Giulia insegnava erano su due piani diversi, ma di tanto in tanto ci si incontrava «a metà scala», e così non ci si perdeva di vista!

Ricordo che un giorno incontrai Giulia, e mi parve di non vedere in lei la serenità solita. Questo accadde anche la volta successiva. Quando si vede un fratello che soffre, ci si accorge di essere come davanti a qualcosa di sacro... sai che lì Dio sta lavorando, e non vorresti per nulla al mondo «rovinare» l'opera di Dio.

Invitai Giulia a trovarci un pomeriggio dopo le lezioni e lei ne fu contenta. Sedute davanti a due granite passammo insieme qualche ora... un po' si parlava e un po' si stava in silenzio, e tutto era prezioso. Giulia ad un certo punto mi disse del momento difficile che stava passando: il progetto già piuttosto concreto di formare una famiglia con la persona amata, improvvisamente crollato perché questa persona l'aveva lasciata.

In quelle periodo trovammo varie occasioni per vederci. Nel cuore di Giulia tante domande... Che senso ha andare avanti? Per che cosa vivere? quasi fino a pensare che, appunto, non ne valesse la pena. Un giorno sentii di poterle dire che... doveva vivere! «Perché?»... «Perché tu sei importante per me, e ti voglio bene».

Non sono state le mie parole a cambiare la situazione... sono certa che con il passare del tempo Giulia avrebbe superato quel momento di difficoltà! Credo però che attraverso questa esperienza Dio abbia voluto farmi il dono di scoprire che davvero la mia maestra era importante, e che davvero le volevo bene.

Un giorno Giulia mi inviò a pranzo in un ristorante caratteristico vicino alla scuola. Lì mi raccontò di un'immagine che aveva spesso in mente quando era appena adolescente, ma alla quale da allora non aveva più pensato. Negli ultimi tempi, però, questa immagine era ritornata spesso alla sua memoria. Era un grande blocco di bellissima giada, dal quale doveva uscire una opera artistica. Mentre il blocco di giada veniva lavorato, lei vedeva dei pezzi di giada che cadevano in terra, e si domandava: «Chissà perché per fare un'opera d'arte si devono perdere tanti pezzi di giada, e perdere questi pezzetti fa un po' soffrire...». Un'immagine così l'aveva avuta un santo... mi sembrò normale che Giulia, essendo cinese, avesse avuto un pensiero simile usando la giada come materiale di lavorazione!

Mi era capitato di parlare con Giulia di Gesù, condividendo alcune esperienze passate, nelle quali come lei avevo sentito che i miei progetti crollavano. C'è sempre un po' di timore a parlare di queste cose, almeno per me... in quel periodo forse ancora di più, perché ricordo che nella vita spirituale stavo andando più indietro che avanti, e ti viene il pensiero: «Ma cosa vado a dire di Gesù?». Però: «Quando sono debole, è allora che sono forte».

Poi Giulia stessa per prima mi stava donando attraverso le sue domande e le sue parole la parte più profonda di sé, il suo spirito... e lo spirito risvegliò lo spirito!

La mattina prima di andare a scuola andavo di solito a Messa nella Parrocchia dove ci sono i Missionari Saveriani. Una volta Giulia mi disse che le sarebbe piaciuto venire. Ricordo che la sua impressione fu quella di una profonda pace. Dopo la Messa ci fermammo a prendere il caffè con i Padri. Giulia aveva portato dei biscotti per mangiarli insieme. Fu molto colpita per la semplicità dell'accoglienza.

Conobbe anche Teresa, una focolarina che allora lavorava presso i Gesuiti. Ricordo in particolare un pranzo durante il quale, per le doti umoristiche di Teresa, ridemmo di gusto e nacque un'amicizia che continuò.

Si avvicinava il febbraio del 1999, il termine dei corsi di lingua. Il mio programma era quello di ritornare qualche mese in Italia, e poi tornare per il terzo anno di studio.

Giulia aveva preso in esame l'offerta che annualmente il Ministero dell'Educazione fa agli insegnanti di cinese, nell'ambito della collaborazione con università straniere: era stata selezionata per andare in una università della California, a tenere alcuni corsi di lingua. Andavamo in due posti molto distanti, e in fondo al cuore sentivo ogni tanto queste domande: «Chissà come starà? Chissà cosa farà?». Ed una risposta: «Non preoccuparti».

Anche a distanza, fu possibile tenersi di tanto in tanto in contatto, attraverso qualche telefonata e con la posta elettronica. Lo stesso fecero anche gli amici di Taiwan.

Un giorno Giulia mi scrisse dicendomi che era andata in una chiesa della città, dove aveva saputo organizzavano dei corsi di studio del Vangelo. Lì era presente una comunità di cattolici cinesi seguita da un sacerdote, Fr.Nick.

Dai racconti di Giulia, a distanza, anche a me è parso di poter conoscere un poco questa comunità cristiana, che credo sia stata determinante per il suo cammino. Ricordo che mi raccontò di una persona ammalata gravemente, assistita e circondata dall'amore concreto di tutti... e tanti altri episodi, che mi facevano ringraziare Gesù per quella parte viva del suo corpo.

Giulia iniziò il cammino di catecumenato. Era un impegno notevole, da come potevo capire dalle sue lettere! Ogni settimana, sabato e domenica, e tutto in lingua inglese, eppure mi ricordo che un giorno al telefono mi disse: «È il momento della settimana che attendo con più gioia».

Mi disse anche che, più passava il tempo, più sentiva che le parole del Vangelo erano le uniche davvero interessanti: «Gli altri libri in confronto scompaiono...». Nelle foto del suo battesimo, nella Pasqua del 2000, Giulia era bellissima, così come gli altri numerosi catecumeni!

Aveva previsto di rinnovare per un secondo anno l'insegnamento del cinese all'estero, e prima dell'inizio del secondo anno ritornò a Taiwan per un breve periodo di vacanza. In quell'occasione (poiché non ci separavano troppi km!) Giulia propose di venire a trovarmi. Passammo insieme alcuni giorni, visitando località interessanti e parlando di tante cose! C'era davvero una grazia particolare in Giulia, una grazia che aiutava e spingeva anche me a «volare più in alto».

Vedevo una persona diversa. E, nello stesso tempo, era ritrovare bellezze già viste... facevo fatica a pensare a Giulia non cristiana e poi a Giulia cristiana... forse il prima e il dopo si unificavano in Giulia - Gesù.

Anche adesso, sempre nuovo!

Cultura e società



«E» Generation
Finestre sul Giappone di oggi...
e di domani
RENATO FILIPPINI

«E» Generation

Finestre sul Giappone di oggi... e di domani

RENATO FILIPPINI

Generazione «E»lettronica

Un paio di anni fa apparve sul giornale *Yomiuri* il risultato di un'inchiesta, il cui tema era il «cellulare». Alla domanda: «Possiedi un cellulare?», il 94% dei 20enni, l'82% dei 30enni, il 73% dei 40enni rispose affermativamente. In seguito, altri articoli usciti sullo stesso giornale analizzavano come l'uso del cellulare stia influenzando e addirittura creando nuovi comportamenti personali e sociali.

Ad esempio, riguardo al senso del tempo, i giovani non ritengono necessario stabilire in anticipo il luogo d'incontro. Basta una telefonata al momento, ci si guarda attorno e con un cenno della mano ci si fa riconoscere. Con questo modo di agire, i giovani stanno diventando sempre più approssimativi.

Altro aspetto legato al telefonino (anche perchè incorporata in esso) è la mail ed il suo uso. Pure qui sono emersi risultati interessanti. C'è chi manda più di cento mail al giorno, chi invece, non ricevendo una risposta immediata, si sente ignorato o senza amici. Quanto al contenuto del messaggio, la maggior parte semplicemente chiede: «Cosa stai facendo in questo momento?».

All'apparenza sembrano giovani espansivi e socievoli, ma in realtà questi atteggiamenti rivelano una profonda insicurezza personale. Avvalendosi della posta elettronica e del cellulare cercano di rafforzare la propria identità attraverso la quantità e frequenza di rapporti interpersonali

Tutto però si riduce a uno scambio di informazioni che fa mantenere la superficialità nei rapporti. Ci si illude di essere sempre in contatto con i propri amici, quando invece ciascuno non riesce ad esprimere le proprie emozioni. Ora ci sono i cellulari con la macchina fotografica incorporata. L'obiettivo è stato pensato a distanza di braccio perché uno possa farsi la foto e poi spedirla subito via mail.

Concentrato su di uno schermo di cinque centimetri per cinque a scrivere messaggi, spedire mail, il soggetto è sempre ripiegato su se stesso, ignorando le persone e la realtà attorno a sé.

Alcuni sociologi e psicologi sono arrivati a dire che ormai si può parlare anche di «dipendenza dal cellulare» non solo come strumento che ha in memoria i numeri di telefono, l'ora, gli appuntamenti in agenda, ma ormai regola, anzi limita le relazioni interpersonali: pone una distanza con l'altro, senza la necessità di vedersi faccia a faccia. Aumentano sempre più le coppie la cui comunicazione quotidiana avviene attraverso il telefonino o la mail. Ed è proprio di questi giorni la pubblicità lanciata dalla AU, compagnia di cellulari, nella quale una bambina delle elementari dice sorridendo che grazie alla mail parla maggiormente con il padre e fa vedere compiaciuta il messaggio: «Scusa per ieri».

Dal telefonino passiamo al *blog*. Questo permette a chiunque sia in possesso di una connessione internet di creare facilmente un sito in cui pubblicare storie, informazioni e opinioni in completa autonomia. Il *blog* è un luogo dove si sta virtualmente insieme agli altri e dove in genere si può esprimere liberamente la propria opinione, spesso quasi una sorta di diario personale.

Interessante notare alcune caratteristiche degli utenti del *blog*: a) un *blog* è personale e pubblico allo stesso tempo: personale perché è gestito dal proprietario come meglio crede, pubblico nel senso che possono leggerlo tutti; b) su un *blog* si può pubblicare quello che pare; c) un *blog* permette di avere un'identità alternativa.

Queste caratteristiche vengono incontro al bisogno di comunicazione intesa come quantità immediatezza nelle relazioni e la necessità di avere sempre qualcuno che ascolti. In Giappone alla fine del marzo 2006, erano più di 8 milioni gli utenti di *blog*. Ogni secondo che passa viene creato un nuovo *blog*.

Generazione «E»straniata

Nel libro *Analisi psicologica dell'uomo cellulare*, lo psichiatra Okonogi Keigo descrive diverse situazioni comuni mostrando come la mentalità del cellulare abbia ormai influito, se non addirittura dato origine a una nuova modalità nelle relazioni umane. Grazie a internet, uno può connettersi e parlare in qualsiasi momento, dal vivo ed in tempo reale con persone che abitano dall'altro capo del mondo. Basta entrare in uno dei tanti siti di conversazione scelto a seconda dei propri interessi o situazione del momento. Ma ciò che sembra essere più interessante ed accattivante è il fatto che ciascuno si presenta con un *nickname*

a cui recentemente si è aggiunto anche l'*avatar*, cioè un'immagine o carattere scelto dal singolo che lo veste e cambia a piacimento.

In una *chat* (ed altri programmi) si può entrare ed uscire quando si vuole, anzi senza parteciparvi attivamente, uno può vedere chi sia in linea senza farsi vedere, cioè partecipa in maniera invisibile (così è chiamata tale funzione in Skype e MSN).

La partecipazione anonima o invisibile e l'interruzione a proprio piacimento stanno portando effetti allarmanti nelle relazioni interpersonali. L'anonimato indebolisce il senso di responsabilità per le proprie azioni. Di fronte a un impegno concordato da tempo, è sempre più frequente ricorrere ad una mail di giustificazione (spesso fittizia) per disdire l'appuntamento: tanto non ci si vede in faccia.

L'interruzione della *chat* o l'uscita dal *blog* a motivo di un confronto per differenza di idee ha portato conseguenze nel mondo delle relazioni reali e umane: l'incapacità di tollerare ed affrontare la diversità di opinione.

Questo modo di reagire ha dato origine all'espressione: *kireruko*, cioè quei giovani che timorosi, impacciati ed ormai incapaci nella relazione diretta, dal vivo, tagliano, rompono i rapporti con gli altri al minimo screzio, a cominciare dalla stessa famiglia.

Portato alle estreme conseguenze, alcuni sociologi vedono nell'influsso del cellulare e di internet una causa per cui i giovani cercano lavori non a lungo termine o addirittura a rifiutare il matrimonio come impegno per tutta la vita (vedi sotto agli «E» esempi di questa generazione).

Altra conseguenza del mondo virtuale su quello reale è la perdita del contatto con la natura. Seduti nella propria stanza, tutto è a portata di mano attraverso un click del mouse. Esperienze «primordiali» quali cadere e sbucciarsi un ginocchio, litigare durante il gioco, diventano situazioni sempre più rare e insopportabili. A causa di questa mancanza di interazione con gli altri, molti sono i giovani che si ritirano in se stessi e temono il contatto e la presenza fisica dell'altro. Si potrebbe definire questo stato di cose come una perdita del senso del reale.

Generazione in «E»stinzione

Telefonini che possono contenere fino a 10 mila suonerie, accesso internet 24 ore su 24, family restaurant con *buffet* dove puoi mangiare tutto quello che vuoi e quanto vuoi, contratti di cellulare che ti permettono di parlare quando vuoi, quanto vuoi, in qualsiasi parte del mondo: grazie alla tecnologia si è arrivati ad un uso e consumo illimitato delle cose.

Tuttavia, allo sviluppo sempre più in ascesa nel campo tecnologico e virtuale, non sembra corrisponderne uno nel campo umano. Il tasso di natalità (calcolato sulla media dei figli per donna in età fertile compresa fra i 15 ed i 50 anni) nel 1975 era di 2.0. Da allora è in continuo ribasso. Addirittura negli ultimi 2 anni per ben tre volte tale cifra è stata modificata, quella più recente (dicembre 2006) era di 1.26.

A favorire il basso tasso di natalità ha contribuito anche il continuo aumento del numero delle donne che non si sposano. Secondo una statistica del settembre 2003 il 60 per cento delle donne tra i 20 e 30 anni affermava la non necessità del matrimonio. Senza alcun dubbio le donne hanno un ruolo di primo piano nella nascita dei bambini, ma la situazione attuale non è da attribuire solo a loro, anche se qualcuno la pensa in tale maniera (a fine gennaio un ministro fece l'affermazione pubblica secondo la quale le donne tra i 15 e 50 anni sarebbero macchine per fare bambini).

Il problema del basso tasso di natalità non è assolutamente relegato alle donne. Infatti, pure gli uomini hanno la loro responsabilità. Secondo l'inchiesta del 2006 svolta dal ministero per gli affari generali, lo scorso anno, i giovani adulti maschi non sposati tra i 35 e 44 anni che vivevano con i genitori erano 160 mila superando la quota di un milione e 400 mila. Inoltre, la statistica del 2005 sul tema della popolazione riportava anche il dato secondo il quale il 70 per cento dei giovani maschi non sposati tra i 18 e 34 anni al momento presente non aveva una fidanzata.

Nel dicembre dello scorso anno è stata resa nota la stima della popolazione giapponese tra 50 anni. È stato valutato che nel 2055 la popolazione sarà di 80 milioni contro i 127 milioni di oggi, e che il 40 per cento di queste persone avranno un'età che supererà i 65 anni.

«E»sempi di questa generazione

a) *Hikikomori*

«Persona che si rifiuta di andare a scuola o al lavoro e resta chiusa in casa per oltre sei mesi». Questa è una definizione di *hikikomori* o «ritirato sociale». Nel 2003 il ministero della Sanità giapponese condusse un'inchiesta sui «ritirati sociali», pubblicando poi i risultati sul quotidiano *Yomiuri*.

Essa è un giovane che non ha praticamente alcun contatto con la società e dunque nessuna relazione. Trascorre tutto il tempo nella propria stanza, il nuovo partner diven-

ta il computer e internet. In moltissimi casi, occasione di tale ritiro dalla società è stato l'*ijime* — atti e parole inflitte all'individuo. Queste vanno dalla presa in giro, alle molestie verbali e corporali da parte dei compagni portando la vittima a ritirarsi in se stesso, ad avere un comportamento ossessivo. Il ritiro sociale avviene anche in età adulta, quando si registrano i primi insuccessi sul lavoro e sul piano delle relazioni umane.

Una persona su tre, dai trent'anni in su, è un ritirato sociale; una persona su quattro ha fatto tale esperienza per almeno un anno. Il fenomeno si sta diffondendo sempre più nelle fasce dell'età adulta. Nella maggior parte dei casi, esso tende a protrarsi per diversi anni. Attualmente ci sarebbero in Giappone un milione e 200 mila *hikikomori*.

b) *Furita*

Una reazione al sistema economico del posto di lavoro a vita è quella dei *furita*, cioè dei ragazzi/giovani fra i 15 e i 34 anni che non hanno un'occupazione fissa, ma saltuaria e mutevole. Secondo i dati del 2003, in Giappone ce ne erano più di due milioni. Recentemente poi si è sviluppato il fenomeno dei lavoratori a giornata. Questa è una scelta dell'individuo che desidera essere pagato in contanti nell'arco delle ventiquattrore.

Legato anche all'aumento vertiginoso dei *furita* è la diminuzione dei matrimoni e/o il suo spostamento in età avanzata (rispetto ai lavoratori regolari). Di conseguenza ne risente anche il tasso di natalità (vedi sopra: generazione in estinzione). Secondo la previsione degli esperti, nel 2050 metà della popolazione lavorativa giapponese sarà composta di *furita*.

c) *Niito*

Niito è che la fonetizzazione dell'inglese NEET (*Not in Education, Employment or Training*). Secondo il rapporto del 2003 fatto dal ministero del lavoro riguardo alla forza lavoro compresa tra i 15 e 34 anni, ben 520 mila erano *niito*. Nella puntata di *Close up gendai* del 7 novembre 2006 di quest'anno la cifra è stata aggiornata intorno alle 640 mila unità. In genere sono giovani che hanno interrotto la scuola media o superiore.

Il *niito*, a differenza del *furita*, non vuole cercare lavoro, neppure saltuario, non si registra all'ufficio di collocamento, non partecipa ai seminari per trovare lavoro e per imparare le *skills* basilari per lavori comuni.

Secondo l'indagine condotta dal quotidiano *Yomiuri* del 28 luglio 2006, le prime tre ragioni principali per cui i *niito* stanno aumentando sono: 1) i genitori troppo indulgenti;

2) mancanza del senso di responsabilità e di dovere; 3) incapacità di costruire relazioni umane. Questo fenomeno ha preso l'attenzione degli economisti e sociologi: in una società la cui popolazione invecchia ed aumenta sempre più, diminuisce, invece, la popolazione di coloro che lavorano e si dovranno prendersi carico delle spese per i servizi di assistenza sanitaria, ospedaliera e di pensionamento di questa grande fetta della popolazione generale giapponese.

d) *Makeinu*

Questa espressione è stata coniata dalla scrittrice Sakai Junko nel libro *Lululato del cane perdente*, dove affermava che per quanto bella o di carriera possa essere una donna, se rimane sola è paragonabile ad un cane perdente. Tre sono le condizioni che definiscono una donna *makeinu*: 1) essere 30enne; 2) non essere sposata; 3) non avere figli. Viene impiegata la figura del cane perché esso è considerato un animale socievole che riconosce come il padrone sia più forte di lui, gli obbedisce e non vi si oppone (da leggersi in analogia rapporto uomo/donna, marito/moglie). Tuttavia, l'espressione sembra aver ottenuto un effetto contrario. Ora è la moda del *makeinu*: attrici, cantanti e presentatrici televisive che personificano le tre condizioni descritte sopra ne sono divenute simbolo e modello per migliaia di donne che posseggono le stesse «tre condizioni».

I primi sintomi di questo fenomeno sorsero agli inizi degli anni '80. In quel periodo avvenne un cambio di priorità nella scala dei valori delle donne: al posto del matrimonio prende rilevanza il lavoro, al posto della famiglia ciò che uno ritiene valga la pena di fare. Da allora sono aumentate sempre più le donne che hanno raggiunto stabilità ed indipendenza economica. Secondo un'inchiesta fatta a donne non sposate apparsa sul quotidiano *Yomiuri* del 9 settembre 2003 riguardante il matrimonio, il 65% delle ventenni intervistate ha risposto che «sono felice anche da sola» mentre il 60% delle 20 e 30enni ha risposto che «il matrimonio non è assolutamente necessario e che anche vivendo da sole possono sentirsi realizzate».

e) *Otaku*

Nel moderno *slang* giapponese un *otaku* è un fan ossessionato da un particolare tema o argomento. Tale parola può essere applicata letteralmente a qualunque cosa: ci possono essere *otaku* della musica, delle arti marziali, della cucina, dei treni... fino a diventare una mania.

Recentemente, inoltre, l'espressione indica sempre meno un'accezione fisica (essere rinchiuso, isolato in casa) e sempre più un tipo di condizione psicologica, uno stato d'essere dove uno non ha relazioni se non con i propri simili (*otaku* con gli stessi interessi), una mancanza di fiducia in se stesso, una trascuratezza del proprio look (alla Tv gli *otaku* compaiono indossando sempre occhiali grossi ed esibendo qualche pelo di barba incolta).

Diversi livelli e vari tipi di interazioni nel mondo virtuale da parte del singolo giovane, stanno provocando conseguenze sempre più serie e preoccupanti per la società intera e per il suo futuro. Forse sarebbe auspicabile che si trovasse al più presto un antivirus che possa proteggere e salvaguardare la realtà.

In
margine



Book Review

William Johnston

Mystical Journey: An Autobiography

PAULIN BATAIRWA KUBUYA

Book Review

William Johnston, *Mystical Journey: An Autobiography*

PAULIN BATAIRWA KUBUYA

Professor William Johnston was born in Walls Street Belfast in 1925, in the midst of IRA terror, where Catholics and Protestants were fighting for ascendancy. In 1943, during the Second World War and toward the end of his basic education in Liverpool, he decided to join the Society of Jesus. In 1951, he was destined to the Japanese Jesuit Province where he blossomed into a world known Christian mystic engaged into the cross-fertilization of Eastern and Western spiritualities and the advocacy for a global spirituality or Prayer movement aimed at promoting World Peace. Professor Johnston taught religious studies and spirituality at Sophia University and became director of its Institute of Oriental Religions. *Mystical Journey* is the last of a long list of publications Johnston consecrated to spirituality and mysticism beside, *Arise My Love*, *Mystical Theology*, *Letters to Friends*, *Being in Love*, etc.

In *Mystical Journey*, Professor William Johnston speaks in first person of the major struggles that baffled him through his eighty years of existence and the timely attempts to solve them, namely prayer, friendship and writing. He recalls major events that bore him to what he calls the «big thing» in his life. This has to do with a process and within it the awareness of his «death to the Ego» and «birth to the sense of a Presence.» This awareness generates meaning for his life and provides a clue to understand the existential yearning of human beings.

At the beginning of *Mystical Journey*, Johnston portrays the terror in Walls Street in Belfast, the stronghold of the IRA with whom his family, just like many other Catholics, were sympathetic. He grew up as mom's spoiled boy, a fact that not only helped him go through the staunch education of those days but also left him with a Freudian tendency. As a teenager, he experienced the tremor of the Second World War and suffered from scruples about his sexuality. But thanks to his silent prayer, he was still able to choose

1. Johnston W., *Mystical Journey: an Autobiography*. Maryknoll, NewYork: Orbis Books, 2006.

the Society of Jesus in 1943. How he wished the disciplinary and linear formation in the novitiate of Emo and Philosophy in Dublin would heal the growing brokenness he carried in his psychological luggage! It was not the case for clerical education of those days — the *Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* not being an exception — terribly affected by Heinrich Denzinger's book on the *Truth of the Catholic Church* (the outline of Pre-Vatican II theology). Johnston thinks that education was dualistic, anti-mystical, and conducted at the top level of consciousness.

His assignment to the Japanese mission in 1951 marks a turning point. He got opportunities to cater to the spiritual quest that had haunted him since his early age. He noticed the spirit of the Japanese who, though had survived two atomic bombs, were not vindictive but sought a religion for peace. He has since then fallen in love with the Japanese ambiance. Then, there was the discovery of Zen Buddhism, especially the breathing and mantra meditative methods. He deepened these helped by his Jesuit confrere Hugo M. Enomiya Lasalle, founder of the Christian Zen Movement, who also introduced him to a Buddhist Zen master. During that period, Johnston familiarized with the experiences of other Catholic champions of East-West interreligious dialogue: Bede Griffiths, Abhishiktananda, Thomas Merton and others.

Though the Japanese environment enriched the mantra prayer he secretly learned during his novitiate, it also created a tension which he felt compelled to balance by searching for mysticism in his Christian background. At first he had been attracted to Zen meditation because it differed from the mental exercise involving the three powers of the soul (memory, understanding and will) of the *Ignatian Spiritual Exercises* he had fought with since his novitiate; he found them too conscious centered, far away from the infused contemplation that babbled from within his belly. But now, Johnston was realizing that Zen Buddhism was not the alternative he looked for. While he would not drop the benefits of Zen, he still appalled a «Christian Zen» inclined to syncretism or upholding a double belonging attitude. He thus resolved to look for complementary responses in the Christian mystical tradition.

In the long run, the problematic reveals its other unattended dimensions: the remnant of Johnston psychic luggage. Johnston needed a largely integrative response. That's why in Johnston's final synthesis one finds insights from psychology (Jung), wisdom from the Christian mystical tradition (especially John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, and the Song of Songs), as well as techniques from Asian religious traditions, especially Zen Buddhism. Yet, the Christian tradition still serves as compass in that mystical synthesis.

Johnston does not refute the criticism of those who questioned the amount of Zen

present in his so called «Christian Zen.» «I love Buddhism; but I do not make to Buddhism the commitment I make to Jesus Christ,» he would answer. He thinks it necessary for everyone to be aware of his faith commitment and thus clarify his total commitment to Jesus. Moreover, he acknowledges the Buddhist influence in the methods of his centering prayer, (namely the sit up position, abdominal breathing, and eventually a Pure Land mantra recitation). While conducting meditation, he would suggest Christian participants to get in deep silence by reciting a mantra such as «Thank You Lord,» «Jesus Christ have mercy on me,» «God is Love.» The followers of other religions are advised to choose one from their respective traditions. Customarily, he would end with the celebration of the Eucharist.

Johnston's spiritual journey unfolds many mysterious experiences, all supposedly related to the breathing prayer: horrible dreams, sleepless nights, fainting, waking up to an ultra sound such as the one of an unseen bell or of an unseen guest knocking at the door, the sight of something like smoke descending from the ceiling, depression, agony, inner joy, etc. He sees the long process as a buzzing that starts with frightening and depressing manifestations before it bears a living flame bringing the joy of ecstasy or enlightenment. When looking for a scientific understanding of those phenomena, Johnston tested the wit end of Western philosophy, theology and positive science. But whether in the West or in the East, mystics understood. Eastern mystics alluded to it as the awakening of the Kundalini.

Kundalini is the Hindu Serpent's power said to lie dormant in the lower back of the spine. Its awakening is described as a spring of water that sizzles up striving to surface on the consciousness. From those allusions, Johnston has been interested in the Kundalini phenomenon, insinuating that it could be the Hindu term for the journey through the 'night of the soul.' Though prudent in referring to his spiritual journey in terms of the awakening of his Kundalini, still, he sees the need to attend to the awakening of that extraordinary energy as a matter of consequence. It is a constant found in every spiritual journey; when ignored it could bear terrible events. Much of the suffering daunting the human race comes from the non-integration of the different layers of consciousness and/or from a misguided awakening of the Kundalini. Most people, he says, live at the top level of consciousness where they fall victims to craving for money, power and lust. He alludes to Hitler's dream of the Aryan race, the starving for power and nuclear armaments as possible misguided awakenings of the Kundalini. How sad to think that such evil power could contaminate the collective Kundalini. He values the great religions on the ground that their mantra meditation or centering prayer can lead individuals and

communities to deeper levels of their consciousness and awake them to their true selves. In other words, the meditative traditions found in the great religions can save humanity from despair, violence and wars. As a result of his own integration, he would like to help more people to go through a similar process by practicing meditation and or silent prayer. Though an autobiography, *Mystical Journey* does not abide to a linear presentation of events, it evolves around certain themes, such as suffering and terror emanating from war, friendship, fidelity to one's call, the mystery of the unconscious, etc. The story sparkles with new insights whenever the author introduces another friend, most of whom he refers to as mystics.

Of the many friends mentioned, Endo Shusaku and Takashi Nagai are paradigmatic since they mirror stages in Johnston mystical quest. Shusaku's hunting for a Catholicism that fits Japan and Asia is similar to Johnston's quest for an Asian prayer method adequate to committed Christians. There is likewise an analogy between Johnston's goal for a global spirituality and the advocacy of Takashi Nagai's «no more Nagasaki, no more Hiroshima» Movement.

Johnston's comments on his Jesuit formation and especially on the Spiritual Exercises might mislead one to think that he abhors his own Society. Yet, one can immediately see that *Mystical Journey* is very much a story of Jesuit mystics; every page speaks of a great or small event occurring in the Jesuit world known to Johnston. His considerations on mysticism in the Spiritual Exercises might only aim at emphasizing that his own mysticism rose from an 'infused' contemplation and that this differs from the total renunciation — mentioned in *Arise my Love* (2000), p. 223 — culminating in the self-oblation; and which is presented as the culmination of the Spiritual Exercises in *Mystical Theology* (1995), p. 79-80. Were the Spiritual Exercises depleted of mysticism, then Johnston would find it hard to explain the inspiration of the many mystics he claims to have found in the Jesuit Society and whose presence have played a key role in his own spiritual journey. In fact in his eyes, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Pier Paolo del Campana, and La Salle are mystics. Others are mystics too. Fr. John Neary, his Master in Novitiate, said: «You will always need direction — if you are humble enough to take it.» Fr. Charles O'Connor, in Dublin, advised him to attend to the inner fire; his spiritual director Michel Ledrus, foretold the night of the soul he was heading to and introduced him to psychoanalysis and deep counseling. He further finds mysticism in Bernard Lonergan's theological system, and in Yves Raguin's conviction that a chaste friendship could heal and liberate celibate people from the anxieties caused by their mishandled affectivity. Johnston illustrates those considerations narrating his fascinating friendship with Sr. Amy Lim.

Compared with Johnston's previous publications, this book stands out in clarity and transparency. Here, Johnston freely unveils his secrets; he even gives details about topics many would view as forbidden, such as the fate of his confreres after leaving the Society. Some of the details shed a great light on the background and context that inspired his previous publications. For instance, one can know here that *Being in Love* was written as an autobiography of his spiritual journey. Even though *Mystical Journey* does not use the scholarly style of *Mystical Theology* and/or *Arise My Love*, it still touches and sheds light on the themes they discuss. Johnston might have meant this book as the official signature of all his previous publications.

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