

God's saving power was the key to every situation, and that the Exodus situation of human need and divine action was the standard one. Human fulfilment and satisfaction is found by effective response to God within the full human situation, whatever it might be, and this is the message of salvation. *One's own existing human community is the basic human situation, and the relationship with God comes alive in terms of this basic human situation of community, though in a complex and double way: the relationship with God both is discovered and expressed through the relationships formed with the other members of the community, and re-creates and transforms those relationships on the model of past but different experiences of God's initiative of saving love.* The Hebrew community of David's time is just one example of this, where the processes can be examined easily.

If this is somewhere near the heart of the matter it means that both scripture and tradition, as vehicles for collecting and transmitting experience, are secondary to the community. It also means that they are always servants of the community even when they are contributing to its development or when they are being used as controls to decide whether new developments are proceeding along acceptable lines. They focus previous human experience, so that truths are presented in terms of needs and situations which may be very different from the present ones. Under such circumstances the past experience has to be selected and translated with care before it can be related to the needs and situations of any later community: any attempt to apply it literally can only lead to fossilization. This is fairly obvious when we read and use the Old Testament. It is less obvious, perhaps, but all the more important when it comes to applying the New Testament, and the traditions of the Church, to the needs and situations of the present day.

Theology and Developing Countries

by Marcel Boivin, W.F.

The Unambiguous View of a Group of Priests in Zambia

I took advantage of updating sessions in Zambia last summer to put the following question to Zambian and missionary priests that I met: 'Has your training really prepared you for your ministry?'

The question was deliberately ambiguous; training could be interpreted as spiritual, pastoral or theological. The question was put to eighty-eight priests, and it is revealing that nearly all of them

singled out the theological side of their training for criticism. This criticism was certainly not ambiguous: forty regarded their theological formation as mostly irrelevant to their ministry, compared with eleven who considered it useful preparation; the other thirty-seven refrained from making any clear-cut statement, but suggested drastic modifications.

The quasi-unanimous reproach was that their theology had been one-sidedly academic and intellectual, aimed at furnishing their minds with answers to out-dated European questions, rather than at making them messengers of a living Gospel that would be Good News to the people they were sent to.

This sentiment of frustration is a symptom of a much wider problem. A young missionary or African priest, on the completion of a six- or seven-year course of study from which he rightly expected some sort of competence, complains that he has nothing effective to tell his community in his homily, no compelling News to announce to the school children in the period of Religion, no direction to offer to a people puzzled by a rapid social change, no contribution to make to the development of the country.

Perhaps the hermeneutics he studied was too far removed from his people's life. No wonder! Hermeneutics is the exact scientific interpretation of books written twenty or thirty centuries ago. And it may be that the theological treatises he was made to assimilate just cannot be Good News to the people he is called to minister to: he should not be surprised, for they are constructions of the past—there is a time gap; further, they are constructions of Western cultures, a factor which in Africa adds a spatial and cultural gap to the one we already feel so urgently ourselves.

God's Judgment on our Theology

As a man whose task has been, for the past six years, to teach theology first in Tanzania and now here at the Missionary Institute, I have often asked myself: 'Why is it that pastors in developing countries are in such a predicament?' I cannot help reasoning that God judges us, specialists of his word, and confounds our ways of mishandling it.

There definitely is a value in the amount of knowledge accumulated through the centuries about God and about his creative and salvific action in the world; no one would be so naïve as to brush aside as useless the reflections of the psalmists, the vision of St John on the meaning of the Son of God coming into the world, the adaptive works made by the Fathers of the Church and by the theologians of the Middle Ages.

Somewhere along the line of history, however, a deviation must have occurred which, in the long run, created a void between theological knowledge and the word of God; a void which the messengers of the Gospel, unilaterally formed as theologians, now

feel unable to bridge. I cannot now elaborate on the subject but, if I may sum up in a few words, I shall say that traditional theology has gradually robbed God's word of its living, compelling demands, by handing it over to theological laboratories for dissection. The specialists of God's word, escaping the troublesome duty of discerning that word in the 'signs of the times' and of proclaiming it to the men God wants to address, safely took refuge in the past, content in contemplating their accumulated treasures and repolishing them.

True, Vatican II produced a decisive return to God's word. It was a healthy move and an encouraging one for the new generation. So far, however, this move has consisted mainly of a return to the Scriptures.

The written records of God's dealings with his people in the Old Testament and in the New Testament (this is what I regard the Scriptures to be), and the subsequent elaborations of theologians on these records (this is what I take traditional theology to be, at its best), still leave us rather far away from the word of God as spoken to the Zambians. We stubbornly go on digging into the past, unwilling to get out of our hole and face the elementary responsibility of our mission: delivering God's message to the people we are sent to, and holding out to them his promises for the future.

It is alarming that our attitude resembles that of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' time. Their attention had become focused on the Scriptures, on the study and interpretation of the Law and on the traditions of their fathers. They considered themselves familiar with God's word and masters of the word. Yet, when God spoke his Word in their very land and directly to them, they missed him—they did not recognize him. They could not. God spoke to them in the midst of their world, literally through a man sharing their life. They were expecting him to address them in their library, in their synagogue, in their temple; in a word, in that narrow sacralized world they had built up for themselves.

How We Have Mishandled God's Word

Our theology has wrongly situated the locus of God's word, and this can have none other than disastrous consequences. It has been thought, for instance, that the best way of forming the ministers of the Gospel is to equip them with such language as would contain all our treasures of doctrine, moral law and ritual, presuming that, with such Catholic equipment in his bag, a missionary would be able to face all men in all situations.

Incredible as it may seem, a missionary had to painfully assimilate the centuries-old traditions of the Church on original sin: recently, in order to get a better understanding of this doctrine, the multiple traditions of the Ancient East on the sources of evil have been added. But what did the missionary know about the traditions of the people to whom he was sent? He was, from the start, bringing them *our*

Gospel on sin; the Good News God had reserved for them on their own human and frail ways of conceiving evil and coping with it was never disclosed.

Or again, the missionary could master the whole history of salvation, the long pilgrimage followed by the Chosen People, yet he hardly knew anything about the salvation history of the people he was addressing, of their own discovery of God, of their own beliefs and ways of communicating with him.

And why should we have acted otherwise? We had the whole truth in our bags, and we had it for everybody everywhere, which meant that the others had only error and superstition for their lot. That could safely be discarded without elementary examination.

Our theology was perhaps good 'in se', but then, it was not much good to anyone. It is no wonder that the problem today for Christian faith is to avoid being pushed aside as foreign and irrelevant, or simply to avoid disintegrating together with the theological system to which it was fitted and imported. The depth and urgency of this issue is increasingly felt by missionaries. *The challenge is decisive. It amounts to no less than making faith in God through Jesus Christ a way of understanding the world which makes sense in terms of the multiform African vision of the workings of the universe and of society; and a way of living which is capable of proving its value and providing an alternative choice at a moment when the traditional ways of living are abandoned and the modern ones hesitatingly welcomed.* There is no hope of taking up the challenge unless we agree to disengage God's word from its past vehicles of importation.

God's Living Word, Primary Source of Theology

I now venture to present what I think could be a concept of theology which, while safeguarding the traditional values, would be immediately conducive to bringing a real and urgently needed contribution to the developing countries of Africa.

The basic source of theology remains the word of God. Nevertheless, this word is listened to in the environment and in the circumstances which converge to make up the social and personal life of the peoples of these countries. God has a word for these men and women, just as he had a word for the slaves of Egypt, for the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian threat, for the Jews of Galilee and Judea at the time of Christ. *This word is spoken within their present human experience. It is God's answer to their human problems.*

The situation of the African peoples does not coincide with that of the Jews. God speaks to them in the context of their actual condition, not in the context of a past one—of Isaiah, or even of Jesus of Nazareth. In both cases, the word spoken is unrepeatable and unique, just as the situation is unrepeatable and unique. Men of Africa cannot hear Isaiah proclaiming God's instructions to them.

They can neither see nor hear Jesus, for he is no longer visible, he is not a man among them, he is not God's revelation in their midst.

Therefore, the first step in forming a relevant theology is discerning what God has to tell the Africans. This discernment cannot be made unless we are thoroughly familiar with the people, unless we have previously gotten 'within' their own outlook on life, their own vision of the universe and their own social structures; it necessitates that we live with them the events which happen in their land, for it is through these events that God addresses them.

This first step is, in a way, the most difficult one. We unconsciously escape the difficulty by having recourse to the written book rather than to the book of life. Written books—even sacred books—are, at this point, of little use. There is no other way of penetrating into a people's mentality and into the ways they have devised to cope with their world, than living with them, learning their traditions, reflecting on the events that affect their society—in the present case, reflecting in the presence of God, in the company of men whose sole purpose in Africa is to initiate a dialogue with God which passes through Jesus Christ.

To take an example: 'In what form is the word of God on Freedom spoken to the Zambians?' I suppose it is a form seen through the complex set of circumstances which has made freedom a vital problem in Zambia. Here is a people who, traditionally, have been divided into many tribes, each with its own code of religious and social laws, each with its own particular view of freedom and dependence. Here, simultaneously, is a nation which has achieved political independence and freedom from suzerainty to an empire. In the course of events leading to independence, the people were naturally brought to expect a land of their own where milk and honey would flow. The objects of their aspirations, however, are still, in one way or other, denied; the future of the country is not altogether in their hands, improvement of social conditions is slower than expected, and people do not feel free to do whatever they like, in the way they like. They resent still being dependent.

It is in that context that God addresses them on freedom. From their own experience of dependence and freedom, he wants to lead them to a better understanding of both. What are the causes of slavery? What do they need to be liberated from? What is the way to genuine freedom? To these real questions God has real answers. It belongs to God's prophets to transmit this word to them, to incarnate it in their behaviour, to express it in a form which is meaningful to the Zambians.

A second phase in this theology is the recourse to the past utterances of God's word on the same subject. It is at this point that Scripture and Tradition become useful. This looking to the past should not be done with the purpose of investigating the whole complex of doctrine accumulated throughout history. Its extent,

and the choice of the period of history returned to, should be determined by the present needs, i.e. by comparing the present situation, assessed from the viewpoint of God, to a past situation which, although not identical, bears a number of similarities with the one now obtaining.

To keep the same illustration: what is needed in Zambia at present, is not a definition of freedom, nor the whole history of the understanding of Christian freedom. I would imagine that the set of events most instructive to Zambians in search of freedom would be that of the liberation from Egypt, and of the journey to the Promised Land. To the Hebrews, these events of their history formed the point of departure for an experience of dependence and freedom, the understanding of which would grow through centuries of reflection (theology)—an understanding reaching a superior level by a new decisive experience: the liberating effect of the Son of God coming to save men from their ultimate slavery. The events by which the Zambians have been freed, and yet leave them with the painful awareness that they are not really free, will, in turn, lead them to the understanding of that one true freedom which God wants to offer them.

This conception of the sources of theology and of their elaboration may seem to be very simple. In a way, I suppose it is, and perhaps we could say 'Thank God for it!' But we should not think that it demands less work than before. I rather expect it requires much more.

We must first identify ourselves with a given community of men and share their life—the process of 'Incarnation' is in no way easier today than it was at the time when the Son of God became a man among men, a Jew among the Jews. This must be done without prejudice to competence in the history of God's dealings with his people, if one is to establish meaningful and instructive parallels. Flexibility has to be emphasized. Flexibility to men and events, however, is a much greater challenge than uniformity, which takes eternity for granted and corresponds to the definition of man rather than to real men. Theology should never be regarded as finished. It should evolve with life and be geared to change. At present it is considered done with after studies end, after files have been adequately filled in, and after exams have been successfully completed.

A Theology that can Contribute to the Gospel

Can theology be of any use to a country like Zambia? To my mind, theology has an irreplaceable contribution to make to the developing countries: it must contribute the Gospel by translating it from one system of thought to another, and by extracting it from one set of circumstances and events and inserting it into a new unique set of events existing here and now. We cannot present the Gospel as it stands in the written books. This was the Gospel to the men of the

first century. It needs to be reinterpreted in reference to a different people, within their thought forms and within their cultural patterns. This is, properly speaking, the function of theology. To be successful, the operation must start from the other end.

But there is a price to be paid. It is the price paid by Isaiah in his time, discerning God's word in the texture of the nation's life and proclaiming it both as a judging and saving word; the price paid by his disciples, reflecting upon this message and making it critically defensible in the situation. This was theology in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. The price is that paid by Christ, sharing the same life as the men of Judea and Galilee so as to effectively translate God's message to them; and it is the price paid by Paul, reflecting upon this message in respect to the Jews and Gentiles that he was ministering to, and, on account of the circumstances, developing a theology which made faith in Christ into the new criterion of belonging to God's people. This was theology in the first century. No one could remain indifferent to Jesus—in the end the crowd got rid of him. No one could remain indifferent to Paul's presence—he was expelled from city to city, and eventually died for his theology.

Today, as yesterday, the word of God must be Judgment as well as Good News. Its understanding as well as its application may demand much more reflection than in the past; the world we live in is presumably more sophisticated than the one in which Isaiah and Jesus lived. But in the end, if theology has nothing to say to men's lives, it has nothing to say at all. Its role is to make the one given Gospel meaningful and compelling to successive generations and to the diversity of nations around the world. If this fails, it can just as well be discarded as irrelevant and useless. If, on the other hand, theology becomes an honest enquiry into, and a studious reflection on, God's word presently spoken to real men, it has a most important role to play. For once again, through the channel of theology, God's word will be the Good News on how to bring about a social revolution and to set a people free. To the poor, it will be the Good News that, from now on, God offers the treasure of his friendship and is at work building a community in which they will get a just share of his creation. To the oppressed, it will be the Good News that God is near and that he has heard their groaning and that he is coming to save them. Provided that theology is well aware of the weapons of the modern Pharaohs, it will become the sword with which God's word will threaten to 'send the rich empty away', and will be the judgment on the 'powerful and proud-hearted', who keep God's People in slavery.

Of that theology, there is as yet little: prophecy has been overwhelmed by erudition, divine wisdom has succumbed to human wisdom. Were Christ's disciples to be more attentive to the Spirit he sent from the Father to teach them everything and remind them of what he had said (cfr. John, 14, 26), their message might regain

that challenging character of newness which once provoked both enthusiasm and persecution. But that indeed would be Good News to theology.

Military Repression in Brazil

Report of Fr Tito de Alencar Lima, O.P.

‘ . . . I persisted in denying, and they continued to give me electric shocks, kicks, blows with a rod and punches in the ribs.

Once Captain Albernaz had me open my mouth to “receive the sacrament of the eucharist”. They put in an electric wire. My mouth became completely swollen, preventing normal speech. They shouted accusations against the Church, saying that priests are homosexuals because they do not marry. At 2 p.m. they finished the session. They brought me to the cell where I lay stretched out on the floor.

At 6 p.m. they brought me something to eat but I could not swallow a thing since my mouth was one big wound. A few minutes afterwards, I was led to the interrogation room for an “explanation”. There I found the same team of Captain Albernaz. They asked me the same questions and repeated the same accusations. To explain my resistance to the torture, they concluded that I must be a guerilla and I was hiding my participation in attacks on banks.

The questioning began again, in order to make me confess my share in the attacks: electric shocks, kicks in the genital organs and in the stomach were repeated. I was beaten with small planks of wood, cigarette butts were snuffed out on my body. For five hours I was subjected to this dog treatment. Finally they had me walk the “Polish corridor” (a torture consisting in having the prisoner pass between a double file of soldiers who are beating him all the while until he falls unconscious). I was assured that this was just a sample of what would happen to the Dominicans. They had intended to have me hang all night on the “pau de arara”, but Captain Albernaz objected: “No, that’s not necessary. He’ll stay here with us for a few days. If he doesn’t talk he’ll be broken from within because we know how to do things without leaving visible traces. If he survives he’ll never forget the price of his boldness.”

In the cell I was unable to sleep. The pain was getting worse and worse, my head seemed three times the size of my body. I was in agony at the idea that the other brothers must be subjected to the same suffering as I. It was absolutely necessary to end all of this. I did not feel I had enough strength to endure any more suffering in the state I was in. There was only one solution for me: a self-administered death.