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The Review of the Faculty of Theology and the Theology Students' Association
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Faith and Reason: A Process View¹

*The Lord's Prayer to the One and Only God**

Santiago Sia

Introduction

For an Aquinas Lecture, it seems to me that a topic that was of particular concern to Thomas Aquinas; namely, the relationship between faith and reason is eminently appropriate. Moreover, the recent publication of the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, especially since it gives Aquinas special consideration, provides an added reason for this choice. In this lecture I shall first present my observations on the encyclical. I shall then offer another view of the relationship between faith and reason in the hope of furthering the discussion on this topic. I refer to this view as 'process' because it is based on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead.² It will also be evident that the term 'process' is used because the relationship between faith and reason that is envisaged is regarded as "in process."

"Fides et Ratio": Some Observations

Given the centrality accorded to philosophy in this encyclical and the acknowledged importance of philosophical thinking in matters of faith, it would be self-defeating, or at least ungrateful, for a philosopher, who earns his living from trying to convince others of the significance of "the examined life," to disagree with the focus of *Fides et Ratio*. Nevertheless, it is precisely because it calls for some kind of response that I want first to offer some reflections on this document as a way of setting the context for my development of the topic of the lecture.

1. This was the text of the Aquinas Lecture delivered at the University of Malta, March 11, 2003. I would like to thank the Faculty of Theology of the University for the invitation, the Archdiocesan Seminary for their hospitality, and the Theology Students' Association for organizing the event and my visit.
2. Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) taught mathematics and logic at Cambridge University and then became Dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of London. On his retirement he was hired as Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. It was at this time that he developed his systematic philosophy which he himself referred to as "the philosophy of organism". His metaphysical system has been called "process philosophy" because it regards becoming, relatedness and event as the fundamental categories to describe reality.

Let me first comment on a point that recurs throughout the encyclical, i.e. the need for philosophical thinking in our attempts not only to understand but also to live out our faith. It is always a temptation to ignore the demands to probe deeper into faith through the use of reason. After all, facing up to perplexing issues which demand a lot of thinking can be an onerous task. For some it may even seem like a useless exercise since it could lead nowhere; that is to say, it results in no clear-cut answers or any so-called significant conclusions. Worse, it doesn't have any "cashability" But the danger of unexamined assumptions or claims, including those in matters of faith, is that they have the greater tendency to lead us astray. Although the pursuit of truth, which is what the encyclical is all about, does not always lead to indisputable conclusions, we can at least be less unclear and inconsistent if we make the effort to reflect on our assumptions, especially those we value because of our faith.

But thinking through what we accept in faith has its risks too. It implies change, not all of which is welcome to some believers. We may discover that all along we have entertained beliefs which have to be discarded because they do not stand up under scrutiny or that given more information we may have to reshape our understanding of those beliefs. We may also continue to uphold them, but at least this time on more sustainable grounds. Whatever the outcome, however, we do need to take seriously the challenge to think through our presuppositions in faith. Too often we forget that like every other aspect of our life, there is a need to mature in the way we think about our faith. It is disappointing to come across people who have developed intellectually in other spheres but still cling to infantile religious beliefs. It is not surprising when they feel bound to abandon these beliefs which they cannot reconcile with their more developed ways of thinking. We are beginning to appreciate that education does not end with schooling, but we often ignore that this applies too to the way we think and live our faith. The encyclical rightly laments the separation of faith and reason, which came about from late Medieval times and is seen in the development of the most part of modern philosophy. The legitimate distinction between them which according to the encyclical had been noted by Aquinas himself, issued into a fateful separation. Chronicling the unfortunate consequences if this separation were to continue and citing its reasons³, the Pope issues an appeal that 'faith and philosophy

3. According to the Pope's encyclical, there were two reasons for this unfortunate situation: 1) exaggerated rationalism, 2) deeper mistrust of reason. He gives as examples of the first scenario this over-emphasis on reason: idealism which has transformed faith and its contents into mere rational structures; *atheistic humanism*, which regards faith as alienating and damaging to the development of a full rationality; and *scientific positivism*, which has abandoned the Christian vision and rejects every appeal to a metaphysical or moral vision. In the second scenario, name:

recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy.'

On the issue of the relationship between faith and reason itself, the encyclical traces and comments on Christianity's early encounter with philosophy and shows its acceptance of the positive role of reason in the development of the Christian faith. St. Paul, for instance, entered into discussion with certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. His action was an acknowledgment that it was possible to have natural knowledge of God. He also affirmed the belief that the voice of conscience is present in every human being. The Fathers of the Church on their part regarded the rational analysis provided by philosophical thinking as helpful in purifying the concept of divinity.

The Pope points out that to claim that the first Christians were not interested in philosophical thinking is therefore not true. Admittedly, their first and foremost concern was the proclamation of the good news. But they certainly did not ignore the task of deepening the understanding of faith and its motivations. He cites Justin, for whom Christianity is 'the only sure and profitable philosophy,' and Clement of Alexandria who regarded the Gospel as 'the true philosophy' and who turned to Greek philosophy for the defense of the Christian faith. An even more robust example that he mentions is St. Augustine. In Augustine's work one can see the first great synthesis of philosophy and theology, which the Pope describes as 'a great unity of knowledge, grounded in the thought of the Bible, confirmed and sustained by a depth of speculative thinking.' Furthermore, in the Pope's mind, the ways in which the Fathers engaged with philosophy was not limited to transposing the truths of faith into philosophical categories. Rather, their intensity in living the content of their faith led them to the deepest forms of speculation. Philosophy enabled them to disclose more completely what was merely implicit and preliminary in their faith. Moving ahead in time, the Pope then reminds us of Anselm's concept of *intellectus fidei*: faith is to be understood with the help of reason while reason at its summit acknowledges the significance of faith.

the extreme mistrust of reason that led to the separation between faith and reason, we have the case of *nihilism*. According to it, there is no possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth since everything is fleeting and provisional. Here the Pope regrets, and regrets deeply, this present state of affairs, including the marginalisation of the role of philosophy in our times. Rationality has been interpreted, misguidedly so in the Pope's view, in forms which are directed towards the promotion of utilitarian ends. As a consequence, the search for truth itself, the encyclical alleges, has been abandoned.

Considerable attention is given to what the Pope describes as ‘the enduring originality of Thomas Aquinas.’ In Aquinas there is harmony of faith and reason. Both are gifts from God, so there can be no contradiction between them. Aquinas is said to exemplify the Christian believer who seeks truth wherever it might be found, thus demonstrating its universality. Moreover, Aquinas saw how faith itself can enrich reason. He maintains that through the work of the Holy Spirit, knowledge matures into wisdom. This kind of wisdom is higher than philosophical wisdom, which is based upon the capacity of the intellect to explore reality. It is also distinct from theological wisdom, which has its source in Revelation and which explores the content of faith. The wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit is explained as presupposing faith but eventually formulating, with the use of reason, its right judgment on the basis of the truth of faith itself.

On further reflection, however, I find that the interpretation of the relationship between faith and reason adopted by the encyclical leaves one with a number of philosophical concerns because of a certain ambiguity in its development. Its understanding of faith is still rather too intellectualized and its interpretation of the function of reason in relation to faith, despite disclaimers and modifications, still gives reason a rather subservient role. Moreover, one could question the conception of truth that the document takes for granted. The document merges the understanding of truth set out in Vatican I (truth as eternal and timeless) with that of Vatican II (the historicity of truth), two understandings which are not, at first glance, compatible. In addition, any attempt to reconcile two distinct and autonomous realities and in this context faith and reason are so regarded—begs the question: what is it that enables us to harmonize them, is it faith or is it reason? The document gives faith priority yet interprets and justifies that status and the attempted reconciliation philosophically.

Another Look at the Relationship between Faith and Reason

As I had indicated previously, in the hope of furthering the discussion, I would like to suggest instead that one could view faith as an awareness of transcendence. It is an implicit human experience, not a separate one, that can be made explicit in various ways. A religious context is one such way. But it is the exercise of human reasoning that enables us to interpret it in a certain way whether religiously or not.

Let me try to develop this point a little further. The exercise of reason within the context of faith is actually a process which involves the stages of rejection,

recognition, re-adjustment, and response. By describing it in this way it is possible to liken our efforts to develop our faith, which is called for by the encyclical, to the work done by the early Christians. Furthermore, it means that this task is a continuous challenge and that the use of reason is not being restricted to the philosophical discipline.

An early stage in making explicit our experience of transcendence and in arriving at a satisfactory conceptuality or doctrine is the rejection of alternatives. To some extent, it may be a matter of being more clear as to what something is not, than of what something is. In the case of the first Christians they had the important challenge of formulating Christian doctrine which was faithful to what had been experienced by the believing community. At the same time they also had to weed out doctrines which could not be considered part of the Christian experience. The encyclical notes that adoption of philosophy by the early Church was cautious. Paul himself warned against esoteric speculation, while other writers, especially Ireneus and Tertulian resisted the temptation to subordinate Revelation to philosophy.⁴ Moreover, the early Christians rejected the customary belief in 'gods' since 'god' was used by the popular religious cults of the day. When these Christians spoke of their God, they did not want their concept of God to be associated with the gods of popular religion. Thus, rejecting something, even within the context of religious faith, does not necessarily mean 'being negative'. It could, in effect, be a genuine search for something better. The philosophical questions we ask about our faith, even if sometimes they lead to rejecting accepted beliefs, could be a healthy step towards a deeper understanding and appreciation of our faith.

The next stage in this process is that of *recognizing* or becoming aware of the value of a particular conceptualization. Here there is partial acceptance, and some similarities are noted. This stage in the process of describing God's reality, for example, reveals the reasons why the early Church opted in favour of a particular philosophical framework that of Stoic philosophy, in its attempts to conceptualize its faith-experience. The first Christians belonged to the Greco-Roman world and were concerned to speak to it. They wanted to convey the Christian message to their neighbours. Greek philosophy was an excellent medium then. Moreover, they wanted to show the reasonableness of Christianity and the ability of Christian teachings to withstand a thorough examination by philosophy. Philosophy,

4. Reflecting on our own time, the Pope adds that Christians today must likewise beware the widespread existence of various kinds of esoteric superstition. He also notes the lack of a proper critical sense among some believers.

understood as a search for truth, was critical of the mythical interpretation of reality. There was a parallel, therefore, between the philosophers' task and that of the first Christians. Both wanted to differentiate their beliefs from those of popular religions which they regarded as superstitious. The early Christians furthermore found that philosophical categories helped them understand Christian revelation even more deeply than had been possible with biblical images. Philosophy met the need to achieve greater clarification of terms and ideas. Aquinas found much in Aristotelian philosophy to help him clarify, deepen and defend Christian beliefs. On this point, however, one could ask whether a different conceptuality, compared to what the early Church and Aquinas found helpful, would not be better suited to meet the needs of our faith today. It is for this reason that I am suggesting that today we search for other conceptualities, such as that which has been developed by process philosophy.

One does not simply take over a favoured formulation. There is need for the third stage: that of *re-adjustment*. One has to reshape what one has recognized as helpful. Thus, there is adaptation prior to adoption, transformation before acceptance. Despite aligning itself with philosophy (thereby rejecting popular religion) the early Church did not completely identify its teachings with those of the philosophers either. For example, the philosophers' God, in spite of its acceptability as the ground of all being, did not have any religious significance. This God was absolute perfection and the culmination of one's intellectual pursuit but one could not pray to this God nor establish a personal relationship with this God. Thus, some transformation was called for. But one wonders how satisfactory was the early Church's transformation of philosophical ideas, particularly in its conception of God. One suspects that the present demand for more relevant and adequate concepts of God harks back to this period in Christian history.

The fourth stage, that of *response*, is the acceptance of the transformed conceptuality. It is really a further development. But it should not be regarded as a final stage if by that is meant no improvement can be expected. As time goes by, certain intellectual expressions or formulations of our faith can become irrelevant or even misleading. Thus, the search for newer formulations is in reality an attempt to recover what has been obscured. The dissatisfaction felt by some with the conceptuality worked out by the early Church has led to calls for more appropriate and contemporary expressions of the same Christian experience of the faith and of God.

In describing the relationship between faith and reason as a process that involves

a number of stages, I do not wish to imply that this way of looking at it is not vulnerable to a different set of questions. But that is why the encyclical rightly talks of the importance of this topic and challenges us to pursue it. I do wish to claim, however, that the task is not one of reconciling faith and reason but one of reconstructing the nature of their relationship.

Whitehead on Religion and Reason

Let me now turn to that task by examining the views of A.N. Whitehead, who is regarded as the leading representative of contemporary process philosophy. By doing so, I also hope to show how my description of the relationship between faith and reason is rooted in his ideas. I should point out that Whitehead uses the word 'religion' rather than 'faith' and it is in his references to the notion of religion that one will get an insight into his perspective on this topic. Whitehead maintains that Christianity is "a religion seeking a metaphysic"⁵ a phrase that will guide me in developing his thought.

Whitehead's account of religion is contained principally in his *Religion in the Making*. But this is complemented by shorter discussions in *Science in the Modern World*, *Adventures of Ideas* and other writings. Commenting on Whitehead's discussion of religion, John Cobb notes that Whitehead depended heavily on secondary sources with which he had limited familiarity. Nevertheless, he adds that Whitehead's discussion is valuable not only because it throws light on his philosophy but also because he develops his understanding of the relationship between philosophy and religion, a point that will be of particular interest to us here.⁶ Cobb also observes that Whitehead was not really preoccupied with religion, despite returning to this topic again and again. Whitehead's attention was more focused on what have become known as penultimate questions. But religion remains in the background, securing the importance of these questions; however, it is rarely itself at the centre of the stage.⁷

Religion, Whitehead writes, is 'what the individual does with his own

5. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, Cambridge: 1926, 50.

6. John Cobb, Jr., *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of A.N. Whitehead*, London: 1966, 216.

7. *Ibid.*, 223.

8. RM, 17; also, 47.

solitariness.⁸ He states that the essence of religion is to be discovered, not in public dogmas, practices, or institutions, but in confrontation with 'the awful ultimate fact, which is the human being, consciously alone with itself, for its own sake.'⁹ This association of religion with solitariness will no doubt strike many as highly suspect and therefore unlikely to be of much help to us after all. Indeed in an article developing this definition of religion, Donald Crosby observes that Whitehead's description of religion has been frequently quoted and usually disparaged. However, he argues—and I agree with him—that it is seldom understood in anything like the way Whitehead intended.¹⁰

One of the misconceptions of Whitehead's definition of religion is that he is championing an individualistic interpretation of religion, which seems to contradict the teaching of many an established religion. Admittedly, Whitehead does place great importance on individuality in so far as he maintains that religious consciousness does not arise until one has risen above what he calls 'communal religion,' that is, beyond the stage in one's development that is informed by the myths, collective rituals, emotions and beliefs of one's society. As Whitehead puts it, 'The moment of religious consciousness starts from self-valuation.'¹¹ One becomes 'religious' when one stands out as an individual, breaking out of the confines of the traditions and mores of inherited culture.¹² Only then will that individual be confronted with the concerns which are of utmost importance and depth. Only then will he or she become aware of the inadequacy of social custom and authority to answer the most fundamental of questions and be forced to turn elsewhere. Stripped of one's sense of belongingness, experiencing solitariness, one begins to ask: 'What, in the way of value, is the attainment of life?'¹³ One discovers then one's uniqueness rather than one's society as the focus and source of freedom and value. In Whitehead's view religiosity, it would seem, really stems from the exercise of one's uniqueness, particularly as experienced in solitariness.

It is important, however, to contextualise what Whitehead says regarding solitariness. Although Whitehead does stress that religion is primarily individual, the solitariness that one experiences is due to the detachment from one's immediate

9. *Ibid.*, 16.

10. Donald A. Crosby, 'Religion and Solitariness,' in: Lewis Ford & George Kline (eds.), *Exploration in Whitehead's Philosophy*, New York: 1983, 149.

11. *RM*, 59.

12. *Ibid.*, 39-40.

surroundings. This in turn leads one to search for something permanent and intelligible to throw light on one's immediate environment.¹⁴ Religion expresses, according to Whitehead, 'the longing of the spirit that the facts of existence should find their justification in the nature of existence.'¹⁵ The detachment or disconnection from immediate surroundings is thus a prerequisite for 'the emergence of a religious consciousness which is universal, as distinguished from tribal, or even social.'¹⁶ Whitehead in fact sees a close connection between solitariness and universality. Although the moment of religious consciousness starts from self-valuations 'it broadens into the concept of the world as a realm of adjusted values, mutually intensifying or mutually destructive.'¹⁷

Elsewhere Whitehead describes religion as 'the reaction of human nature to its search for God.'¹⁸ I will have to defer any development of Whitehead's conception of God here. But what is worth noting, by way of explaining the phrase 'reaction of human nature,' is that Whitehead does not believe that the religious sense is a separate function from human nature. Nor does he hold that religious truth is something other than the highest form of knowledge, which had been first acquired with our ordinary senses and then developed by our intellectual operations. As he puts it succinctly, 'religion starts from the generalisation of final truths first perceived as exemplified in particular instances.'¹⁹ What follows then is the amplification of these truths into a coherent system and the interpretation of life, which serves as the criterion for the success of these truths. Although in this manner religious truths can be judged like any other truth, they are peculiar in that they explicitly deal with values. By this claim Whitehead means that religious truths make us conscious of what he calls the permanent side of the universe which we can care for. In this way religion enables us to discover meaning in our own existence against the background of the meaning of the wider scheme of things.²⁰

Whitehead offers yet another definition of religion: a vision of that whose possession, although unattainable, is the final good.²¹ Religion is the attempt to see

13. *Ibid.*, 60.

14. *Ibid.*, 47.

15. *Ibid.*, 85.

16. *Ibid.*, 47.

17. *Ibid.*, 59.

18. A.N. Whitehead, *Science in the Modern World*, Cambadge: 1926, 266.

19. RM, 124.

20. *Ibid.*

beyond the ephemeral, and what one sees, although not too clearly, inspires a worshipful attitude. This vision has an effect on one's life. John Cobb makes the observation that Whitehead's own general mood in life was of quiet confidence in the worthwhileness of living. But this confidence was not derived from any assurance about history or about nature.²² Indeed, Whitehead maintains that the worship of God, which is the outcome of this vision, is 'not a rule of safety—it is an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable. The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure.'²³ He accepted that there is perpetual perishing, loss as well as gain, sorrow as well as joy. In rather poetic terms, he refers to human life as 'a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience.'²⁴ And yet, whatever may be its temporal outcome, what guarantees the worthwhileness of life for Whitehead, remarks Cobb, is the vision of God. When we respond positively to that vision, contributing our share to the world, then it is a vision that indeed can give meaning to life. 'The vision of God was for Whitehead,' as Cobb sums it up, 'the basis for all reality of meaning and all depth of feeling.'²⁵

Although Whitehead accepts that there are special occasions which can lead to religious consciousness, religion as far as he is concerned emerges from ordinary human experience.²⁶ He refers to 'the human search' or 'the longing of the spirit' for something which transcends everything, but the search or the longing for it is deeply rooted in mundane matters, in everyday experience. There is in human life what Whitehead calls 'a noble discontent,' which is 'the gradual emergence into prominence of a sense of criticism, founded upon appreciations of beauty, and of intellectual distinction, and of duty.'²⁷ Such a discontent distances us from particular experiences and inevitably prods us to seek conceptual expressions and rational support.²⁸ This search or longing results in solitariness in the sense that I have explained earlier.

21. SMW, 267-268.

22. Cobb, *Christian Natural Theology*, 218. 3 SMW, 276.

23. SMW, 276.

24. *Ibid.*, 275.

25. Cobb, *Christian Natural Theology*, 223.

26. According to Whitehead, 'experience' is one of the most deceitful words in philosophy. He provides a brief analysis of it in his *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*, Cambridge: 1928, 19-20. For a more extensive and technical discussion, see his *Process and Reality*, particularly Part III.

27. A.N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, New York: 1933, 12.

28. AI, 58. Whitehead sets this out for the purpose of understanding social institutions, but I have used it in this context because it also shows how he understands the process from experience to conceptualisation. He does add that this division must not be made too sharply.

Since religion is a response to solitariness, it means that solitariness itself is actually 'prereligious,' despite being a further stage in one's search for the transcendent. There has been an evolution in one's experience and not just a prolongation. In addition, there has been a development since there is an active element: religion after all is what one *does* with one's own solitariness. It is the response to one's search or longing. There is a purposeful consciousness in religion that is merely latent in solitariness but is developing as one becomes aware of one's individuality.

It is interesting that Whitehead should regard the human experience of longing and searching, which leads to solitariness, as the fundamental context in which religion can emerge. Some of the modern critics of religion had attacked it for preying, as it were, on such experiences.²⁹ For Whitehead, unless religion embarks on its journey with our everyday experiences, including emotional ones, as the place of departure, it can easily become so abstract as to be rendered irrelevant. Worse, it makes nonsense of many religious practices and customs, which have arisen in response to specific life-situations. Religion cannot ignore deep-felt hunger or yearning for 'something more' even if it is not always clear what that 'something more' is or even if the expression of this desire is simplistic or unreflective. Whitehead correctly underscores this point. His conception of religion rightly shows

29. Freud, tracing religion back to the need for emotional comfort, especially relief from disasters, accidents, sickness, and other natural evils that surround us, accused religion of perpetuating human immaturity through its teachings and practices. He regarded religion as an infantile neurosis that ought to be cured before we can grow into mature, healthy adults. Once cured of such a sickness, human beings, he alleged, can achieve maturity as a race. It will then no longer be necessary to invent fanciful beings personalised by religion for us to be able to face this impersonal and at times brutal world of ours. Marx criticized religion for enslaving people through its preaching of acceptance of one's miserable lot in life and its championing the virtues of patience, humility and self-denial. Religion, he claimed, misleads us in not recognizing the real causes of our alienation and suppresses our desire to improve the economic and political conditions of life. Both of these influential thinkers would hardly agree with Whitehead that true religion stems from the human experience of longing and searching. If anything, such an experience in their view is being misinterpreted and misled by religion.

But these experiences of life, as our prereflexive starting point, are part and parcel of human life itself. While agreeing with Freud that religion is based on emotional needs, Jung rightly criticised him for not taking into account that they are basic to human nature and that we cannot deny them without inducing neurosis. What is called for therefore is not the abandonment of religion as demanded by Freud. Rather, it is our response to those needs that is really in question. It will determine the kind of religion that we have in mind, as Whitehead clearly states. Our response to human longing or yearning for something more does not have to be, and should not be, in the form severely criticised by Freud and Marx.

that it is in the midst of everyday life, experienced in various fashions and expressed in concrete ways, that we begin to ask questions which take us beyond the particular situation that we find ourselves in and lead us to what he refers to as 'solitariness.' And our reaction, also part of human living, to that solitariness shapes religious thought.

With this conception of religion we begin to see a link with reason because of Whitehead's distinction between religion and mere sociability. Religion, he says, emerges from ritual, emotion, belief, and rationalisation. But it is only when belief and rationalisation are well established that solitariness itself is discernible as of essential religious importance.³⁰ Without these, religion is in decay and returns to mere sociability.³¹ Thus, religion as a human reaction is a conscious reaction. Furthermore, it is a conscious reaction to the world we find ourselves in. While religion appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions and emanates from what is special, it encompasses everything through conceptualisation.³² This is accomplished with the help of human reason. Progress in religious truth, Whitehead tells us, is 'mainly a progress in the framing of concepts, in discarding artificial abstractions or partial metaphors, and in evolving notions which strike more deeply into the root of reality.'³³

For this reason, Whitehead shares the tendency, rooted in Western philosophical tradition but criticised in some quarters, to connect religion with a metaphysics. It must be noted, however, that metaphysics for Whitehead is understood and developed differently from the dominant metaphysical schools of thought in the West. He describes metaphysics as 'the science which seeks to discover the general ideas which are indispensably relevant to the analysis of everything that happens.'³⁴ Whitehead argues that rational religion—and as we have already noted, rationality for Whitehead is an integral part of religion—must have recourse to metaphysics, a note likewise sounded in the encyclical.

Metaphysics enables religion to scrutinise itself. Whitehead regards the dispassionate criticism by metaphysics of religious beliefs to be of utmost necessity.

30. RM, 18-19.

31. *Ibid.*, 23. Also, AI, 207.

32. RM, 32.

33. *Ibid.*, 131.

34. *Ibid.*, 84. See also, 88-X9.

'Religion will not regain its old power' he points out, 'until it can face change in the same spirit as does science. Its principles may be eternal, but the expression of these principles requires continual development.'³⁵ He strongly insists that the foundations of dogma must be laid in a rational metaphysics which criticises meanings, and endeavours to express the most general concepts adequate for the all-inclusive universe.³⁶ Moreover, for Whitehead the dogmas of religion are 'clarifying modes of external expression,' signalling the return of individuals from solitariness to society. Since there is no absolute solitariness, everything taking place in an environment, religious dogmas as modes of expression are thus important. The interaction between religion and metaphysics is regarded by Whitehead as one great factor in promoting the development in religion of an increasing accuracy of expression, disengaged from adventitious imagery.³⁷

At the same time, however, metaphysics can benefit from its connection with religion by taking into account the evidence furnished by religion. While religion must reckon with metaphysics in formulating and developing its teachings, it makes its own contribution of immediate experience to that pool of knowledge.³⁸ In this way, metaphysical knowledge becomes truly all-inclusive. Thus, metaphysics and religion are not only related but also, and more importantly, mutually beneficial.

Rational thinking thus has a major contribution to religion. Situations in life have a way of pressing challenging questions on us, and for the sake of intellectual credibility in religion, these questions cannot remain ignored. While religion is not, and should not be, a purely rational enterprise, it does involve careful, deliberate and logical thinking. Whitehead frequently uses the phrase 'rational religion.' One area where metaphysics features in religion is in the development of religious doctrines.³⁹ We have seen that Whitehead maintains that progress in religious truth comes about 'in the framing of concepts, in discarding artificial abstractions or partial metaphors, and in evolving notions which strike more deeply into the root

35. SMW, 189.

36. RM, 83.

37. SMW, 266. Whitehead adds that the interaction between religion and science also promotes religion's development.

38. RM, 79.

39. There has been of course talk of the demise of metaphysics, particularly during the era of logical positivism. However, it is probably more accurate to speak of the decline of certain metaphysical ways of philosophising rather than of metaphysical thinking itself. It should be noted that Whitehead's notion of metaphysics and his metaphysical view of reality are quite distinctive. Cf. PR.

of reality,⁴⁰ all of which are achieved with the aid of metaphysics. But it is also useful to recall that for Whitehead religious truths are generalised truths, which originated in particular instances, expanded into a coherent system and *then applied to the interpretation of life*. The criterion for acceptance or rejection of these truths is their success in the interpretation of life.⁴¹ Whitehead's well-known metaphor to describe speculative philosophy as the flight of the aeroplane is equally applicable to the discovery and formulation of religious truths: after taking off from life's experiences and being borne aloft by rational thinking, religion must touch down in life's fields again.

Religious doctrines represent a further stage in the process of making more explicit what one has held implicitly or has experienced. Ideally, they should express faithfully these prereflexive experiences. If they do, then one's appreciation of religion becomes richer and possibly more profound. But sometimes the process of conceptualisation does not do justice to the earlier stage; hence the need to rethink and re-interpret doctrines.⁴² This is why the task of formulating religious doctrines is an on-going one. It is not surprising then that an urgent challenge today is to formulate religious doctrines which are not only based on concrete life but also, in an intellectual and systematised manner, express adequately the realities of life. What is called for therefore is the integration of religion with both human thought and life.⁴³

Despite some questions which will remain, Whitehead's conception of religion, in my view, offers a reconstruction of the relationship between faith and reason, one that brings out the continuity between these two. Furthermore, it establishes the connection with human life by showing how religion arises in the first place

40. RM, 131. Cf. my 'Process Thought as Conceptual Framework,' *Process Studies* 19/4 (Winter 1990) 248-255. For a very useful discussion, based on Whitehead's thought, on the relationship between doctrinal beliefs and experience see John B. Cobb Jr. in David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, Philadelphia: 1977, 30-40.

41. RM, 124

42. In a forthcoming book to be published by Peter Lang, *Religion, Reason and God*, I try to show how turning to the conceptuality worked out by Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne can aid us in this task.

43. PR, 16.

43. In a book, titled *From Suffering to God*, London: 1994, we tried to illustrate how the experience of suffering leads to the question regarding what we can say about God.

43. RM, 18-19.

and how the same source also serves as the criterion for religious truths. At the same time his notion of religion underlies the need to transcend our experiential starting point through rational thinking and to integrate the doctrinal expression with concrete human life.

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The Catholic Church and Democracy¹

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1 Introduction

Writing during the Second World War, the renowned Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain stated that democracy “springs in its essentials from the inspiration of the Gospel and cannot subsist without it.”² Maritain was surely not the first to comment on the relationship between Christianity and democracy. In his 1797 Christmas sermon, Cardinal Chiaramonti, bishop of Imola and later Pope Pius VII, had stated that “Christian virtue makes men good democrats ... Equality is not an idea of philosophers but of Christ ... and do not believe that the Catholic religion is against democracy.”³ About half a century later, in the wake of the French February revolution of 1848, Frederick Ozanam,⁴ the founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society, hailed democracy as “the natural final stage of the development of political progress”, and believed “that God leads the world thither.”⁵

In the history of modern democracy⁶ it did take, however, over a century for the Catholic Church to come to look at democracy as an acceptable and eventually a desirable political system. Why did it take the Church so long? How did the Church come to eventually change her view?

1. Unless otherwise stated quotations from official Church documents are taken from the English translation available at the official Vatican website (www.vatican.va).

2. Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and democracy*, San Francisco/CA: 1986, 20.

3. Quoted in Thomas Bokenkotter, *Church and revolution. Catholics in the struggle for democracy and social justice*, New York: 1998, 32.

4. Pope John Paul II beatified Ozanam in August 1997.

5. Quoted in Bokenkotter, *Church and revolution*, 124.

6. It can be said that modern democracy emerged with the American and French revolutions of the latter quarter of the eighteenth century though, of course, the history of democracy can be traced back to sixth century BC Greece.

2 Before World War II

2.1 *The negative impact of the French Revolution*

The main reason behind the Church's reluctance to accept democracy was her experience during the French Revolution. While at the beginning of the Revolution various members of the Catholic clergy manifested democratic tendencies, conflict between the Church and the Revolution erupted when the National Assembly took it upon itself to unilaterally reorganise the Church.

The *Constitution of the Clergy* of 12 July 1790 among other things envisaged the election of bishops and pastors by the people and their subjection to the disciplinary control of the state, the severing of all jurisdictional links with the pope, as well as the reduction in the number of dioceses, making them correspond to the French departments. Within a few months the Catholic Church in France was split into two: the constitutional Church, led by the clergy who took the oath to uphold the constitution, and the so-called non-juring Church, led by the clergy who rejected the oath.⁷

The situation further deteriorated with the de-Christianisation campaign initiated by people like Jacques Hébert and Joseph Fouché. Priests were ordered to marry and some localities with religious names were renamed. On 5 October 1793 the old calendar that constantly reminded people of Christian religion by its Sundays, saints' days, and its Christmas and Easter cycles, was abolished and replaced by a new "more rational" calendar. Throughout the country there was a manifest attempt to replace Catholicism by the cult of Reason.⁸

Even though by 1801, through the concordat negotiated between Napoleon and the Holy See, the Roman Catholic religion was again recognised as "the religion of the great majority of Frenchmen", in the minds of many Catholics the ideals of the Revolution, democracy first and foremost, remained squarely irreconcilable with Catholicism. The nearly six years (1808–1814) Pius VII spent in humiliating captivity for political disagreement with the now Emperor Napoleon, only confirmed Catholic suspicion of anything that had to do with the Revolution.

7. See Bokenkotter, *Church and revolution*, 9–14.

8. See *ibid.*, 23–26.

2.2 The Lamennais debacle

The belief that Catholicism and democracy were irreconcilable was confirmed in 1832 when in response to a memorandum presented by the French priest Félicité Robert de Lamennais to Pope Gregory XVI, the latter issued the ultra-conservative encyclical *Mirari vos*.

Between October 1830 and November 1831, Lamennais together with another priest, Jean Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, and eventually also the layman Count Charles de Montalembert, had published *L'Avenir*, a paper with the slogan "God and Liberty." Their aim was that of Catholicising liberalism and increasing the Church's influence in a new liberal world. They believed that the Church could embrace the change that was taking place all over Europe as an opportunity rather than denounce it as an affliction.⁹ *L'Avenir* thus promoted as ultimately beneficial for the Church complete separation of Church and State, freedom of education, of the press, and of association, decentralisation, and universal male suffrage — virtually all the basic components of modern democracy.

Lamennais and his colleagues believed that eventually liberalism would find its best ally in the Catholic Church under the leadership of the pope, but *Mirari vos* soon cut their hopes short.¹⁰ Pope Gregory's encyclical declared that "it is obviously absurd and injurious to propose a certain 'restoration and regeneration' for her [the Church] as though necessary for her safety and growth."¹¹ Separation of Church and State was considered as an attack against the concord between the temporal and ecclesial authorities "which always was favourable and beneficial for the sacred and civil order."¹² The claim that liberty of conscience must be maintained for everyone is "absurd and erroneous" and "spreads ruin in sacred and civil affairs",¹³ Freedom of the press is "harmful and never sufficiently denounced",¹⁴ and good Christians should always show trust and submission to princes.¹⁵ Lamennais's appeal

9. See Peter Steinfels, "The failed encounter", in *Catholicism and liberalism. Contributions to American public philosophy*, edited by R. Bruce Douglass – David Hollenbach, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne: 1994, 32.

10. See Bokenkotter, *Church and revolution*, 39–60.

11. Pope Gregory XVI, Encyclical Letter *Mirari vos* (15 August 1832) 10: *Eternal World Television Network* (on-line) : <http://www.ewtn.com/library/encyc/g16mirar.htm> [8 May 2003].

12. *Ibid.*, 20.

13. *Ibid.*, 14.

14. *Ibid.*, 15.

15. See *ibid.*, 17–19.

to the Church to repeal its alliance with the throne and instead turn to the people had been turned upside down by the demand of *Mirari vos* for the people's practically unquestionable obedience to the Church and the throne.

2.3 Pope Pius IX and the *Syllabus of Errors*

In the decades following the Lamennais episode, attempts by Catholics in various countries to reconcile the ideals of modern democracy with Catholicism often met with opposition and condemnation by the hierarchy. In 1863, approaching the end of a political career during which he epitomised Catholic involvement in French politics, Count de Montalembert, Lamennais's former colleague in *L'Avenir*, in a congress of Belgian Catholics in Malines, outlined the advantages for the Church of universal suffrage, equality before the law, and freedom of teaching, of association, of the press, and of conscience. The speech earned Montalembert a quick reprimand by the Vatican and has been said to be one of the last straws moving Pius IX to publish the *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864.¹⁶ Enlisting the errors condemned in previous Church documents, Pius concluded the *Syllabus* by citing the allocution *Jamdudum cernimus* of 1861 where he had condemned the proposition that "the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization."¹⁷

2.4 A step forward

The more flexible and socially conscious Pope Leo XIII made an important step away from Catholic pro-monarchic political conservatism when in his 1885 encyclical *Immortale Dei* he declared that, as long as God is considered as the source of all authority, government may legitimately take different forms,¹⁸ and, in certain circumstances, participation of the people in government "may not only be of benefit to the citizens, but may even be of obligation."¹⁹ Pope Leo used ever clearer terms in his 1888 encyclical *Libertas*:

16. See Bokenkotter, *Church and revolution*, 77–79.

17. Pope Pius IX, *Syllabus of condemned errors* (8 December 1864) 80: *Eternal World Television Network* (on-line): <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P9SYLL.HTM> [8 May 2003].

18. See Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Immortale Dei* (1 November 1885) 4. 48.

19. *Ibid.*, 36.

... it is not of itself wrong to prefer a democratic form of government, if only the Catholic doctrine be maintained as to the origin and exercise of power. Of the various forms of government, the Church does not reject any that are fitted to procure the welfare of the subject; she wishes only — and this nature itself requires — that they should be constituted without involving wrong to any one, and especially without violating the rights of the Church.²⁰

In both encyclicals, Catholics were encouraged, insofar as the conditions in their country permitted, to involve themselves in local and national politics.²¹ However, the condemnation of freedom of conscience, of religion, and of the press, as well as of the separation of Church and State was reiterated.²²

2.5 Progress stalled

Notwithstanding his previous call for Catholic involvement in politics, in the 1901 encyclical *Graves de communi re*, Pope Leo, under pressure from reactionaries in the Roman curia, showed little enthusiasm to the political import of the emerging Christian democratic movements in various European countries. He stated that the term Christian democracy “must be employed without any political significance, so as to mean nothing else than ... beneficent Christian action on behalf of the people.”²³

Catholic conservative intransigents rejoiced when Giuseppe Sarto became Pope Pius X in 1903. His apprehension about modernism and anything associated with it meant a much difficult time for Catholic democrats. The politically active priest Romolo Murri had most of his work undone when in 1904 Pius dissolved the *Opera dei Congressi* through which he had worked to open the Church to modern social and cultural problems. Murri’s subsequent attempt to form a political party, the National Democratic League, was unsuccessful and he ended up excommunicated in 1909, a victim of the anti-modernist crusade.²⁴ In 1910 Pius X also suppressed

20. Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Libertas* (20 June 1888) 44.

21. Pope Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, 43–45; Id., *Libertas*, 45. Leo did nothing in practice, however, to lift the ban on the involvement of Italian Catholics in national politics imposed by the decree *Non expedit* issued by the Holy Penitentiary in 1868.

22. In regard to the separation of Church and State, Pope Leo, while still basically against it, later acknowledged that, amidst numerous inconveniences, it could have some advantages. See Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Au milieu des sollicitudes* (16 February 1892) 28.

23. Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Graves de communi re* (18 January 1901) 7.

24. See Bokenkotter, *Church and revolution*, 246–250.

the French Christian democratic movement *Le Sillon*, which under the leadership of Marc Saignier, heralded democracy as a superior form of government, promoted Catholic participation in French political life, and encouraged their collaboration, on the social and political levels, with members of other religions as well as with non-believers.²⁵

2.6 *The inter-war period*

Don Luigi Sturzo, the pioneer of Christian democracy in Italy, waited till the end of the First World War and the complete uplifting of the ban against Catholic participation in Italian national politics to extend to the national level the work that for about two decades he had been doing in his Sicilian hometown of Caltagirone.²⁶ Under Pope Benedict XV, it was now more feasible to launch successfully a national Christian democratic party.

Despite the remarkable success of Sturzo's Popular Party — just a few months old, the party garnered 20 percent of the votes in its first attempt at the polls in 1919 — it was soon to be dissolved, to an extent thanks to the Vatican's short-sighted preference for the autocratic regime of Benito Mussolini. Zealously opposed to any Catholic collaboration with the socialists, and with no sympathy toward the Christian democrats, the newly elected Pope Pius XI fell for Mussolini's rhetorical praise of the importance of Catholicism for the glory of Rome and his offer to settle the long standing Roman question.²⁷ Although Pius XI had no ideological preference for fascism,²⁸ for him and his entourage, a supposedly friendly authoritarian Italian government could in practice be better than a democratic system that had often

25. See Pope Pius X, Letter *To the bishops of France concerning the Sillonist movement* (25 August 1910) : *Eternal World Television Network* (on-line): <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P1010825.HTM> [31 July 2000]. Many of the democratic, social, and ecumenical ideals of the Sillonists criticised in this letter, half a century later, would be espoused by the Catholic Church in Vatican Council II. See also Paul E. Sigmund, "Catholicism and liberal democracy", in *Catholicism and liberalism*, 223–224.

26. Pius X in 1905 had lifted partially the *Non expedit* ban, allowing bishops to ask for dispensation from the ban in particular circumstances. Through this, Pius wanted to back the conservatives' endeavour to keep the socialists and the radicals at bay in national elections. See Pope Pius X, Encyclical Letter *Il fermo proposito* (11 June 1905) 18–19.

27. The so-called Roman question had been waiting for settlement since 1870 when the newly formed kingdom of Italy annexed the Papal States.

28. See Thomas Bokenkotter, *A concise history of the Catholic Church*, revised and expanded edition, New York: 1990, 348–349.

turned to power anti-clerical liberals and could even lend itself to fulfil the pursuit of the feared godless socialists. When in 1923 Mussolini wanted to pass a bill in parliament to abolish the proportional electoral system, Sturzo, uncompromisingly opposed to the bill, was ordered by the Vatican to resign from parliament and within some months he was advised by the Roman curia to leave Italy. Eventually, unwilling to compromise with the Fascists and disowned by the Vatican, the Popular Party — together with all the other parties except for Mussolini's — was dissolved by the government in 1926.²⁹

The Holy See's implicit support of Mussolini's regime was rewarded in 1929 with the Lateran Treaty. Although the treaty circumscribed the Holy See's initiative in seeking settlement of international temporal disputes, it recognised the Roman Catholic religion as the only state religion of Italy and achieved the settlement of the Roman question by establishing the Vatican City as a free and sovereign state under the jurisdiction of the Holy See.

About two years after the signing of the treaty, Mussolini's totalitarian government ordered Catholic Action organisations to be disbanded on the pretext that they were getting involved in politics — an order executed in various cases with violence. Pope Pius XI now seriously doubted “whether the former benevolences and favours were indeed actuated by a sincere love and zeal for religion, or whether they were not rather due to pure calculation and to an ultimate goal of domination.”³⁰ Although he refrained from condemning outright the Fascist government, Pius finally started to realise that he had been used by the Fascists whom he now calls “a regime based on an ideology which clearly resolves itself into a true, real pagan worship of the State.”³¹ Besides, Pius had just issued the social encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* wherein he formulated the principle of subsidiarity.³² In contrast with fascist totalitarianism and communist collectivism, this principle sees the concrete person as the point of departure for all social activity and indirectly affirms that man has basic rights with respect to the state.³³ Pius was advocating a principle that in effect would later be considered as basic to true democracy.

29. See Bokenkotter, *Church and revolution*, 284–293.

30. Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Non abbiamo bisogno* (29 June 1931) 17.

31. *Ibid.*, 44.

32. Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo anno* (15 May 1931) 79–80.

33. See Ad Leys, *Ecclesiological impacts of the principle of subsidiarity* (= *Kerk en Theologie in Context* 28), Kampen: 1995, 78–83.

The Italian experience was, however, not enough for the Vatican to refrain from entering another ill-fated agreement, in July 1933, this time with Hitler's German Reich. Hitler had only been Chancellor for only about six months, but some acquaintance with his racist and anti-democratic ideology should have cast serious doubts upon his trustworthiness. In fact, not long after, the Concordat was infringed by Hitler's Reich and in 1937 Pius XI himself declared that he had consented to Germany's proposals only "despite many and grave misgivings."³⁴ The tragedy at this point in time was that the Vatican continued to look narrowly at the particular rights and freedoms of the Catholic Church and was slow to realise that instead she should champion the rights and freedoms of all men and women, first of all for reasons emanating from the Gospels, but also for the long term interest of Catholics themselves.

2.7 Seeking to understand the Magisterium's position

In order to understand the Catholic Magisterium's position against many of the main principles of liberal democracy during the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth, in addition to the negative experience of the Church during the French Revolution,³⁵ one must keep in mind her repeatedly negative experience under many of the often actively anti-clerical liberal bourgeois regimes. Under such regimes, in the name of liberty, the Church saw much of her freedom curtailed. In effect, continental European liberalism generally "understood the separation of Church and State to imply the irrelevance of religion to the public order and the sole right of the state to control all aspects of public life,"³⁶ hence the Church's condemnation of this kind of separation. In this context, freedom of conscience and of religion amounted, in the view of the Magisterium, to the capitulation to relativism and religious indifferentism.

The theology of the Magisterium was, at this time, caught in the entanglements of the modern dualism that counterposed freedom and order, autonomy and creaturehood.

34. Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Mit brennender sorge* (14 March 1937) 3. In this encyclical, Pius protested against the Reich's violation of the Concordat and also attacked the perverse misappropriation of religious terminology by Nazi propaganda.

35. See paragraph 2.1 The negative impact of the French Revolution, *supra*.

36. Joseph A. Komonchak, "Vatican II and the encounter between Catholicism and liberalism", in *Catholicism and liberalism*, 86.

This led, on the one hand, to Feuerbach's famous cry, "To enrich man, one must impoverish God," and, on the other, to the not uncommon Catholic habit of counterposing "the rights of God" to "the rights of man." The result was the *cul-de-sac* in which the "Enlightenment" was considered by some to require the emancipation from religion, and modernity was thought by others to be nothing but "apostasy." The only way out of that dead-end was to start making distinctions which both sides had often been unwilling to make.³⁷

Unfortunately for the Church, the far-sighted distinctions already made by various Catholic liberals and Catholic democrats remained for long unheeded and too often condemned by the Magisterium.

3 Democracy in Catholic Magisterium since World War II

It had to be the harsh and devastating experience of the Second World War to decisively turn the Catholic Magisterium from a critic and an opponent of democracy to one of its strong supporters.

3.1 *The 1944 Christmas message on democracy*

Pius XII in his famous 1944 Christmas message acknowledged that in the present age "the democratic form of government appears to many as a postulate of nature imposed by reason itself."³⁸ Elaborating his vision of democracy, Pius distinguished between the masses, whose instincts and impressions are easily manipulated by dictators, and the true people made up of persons each of whom is conscious of one's own responsibility and of one's own views. The masses thus understood constitute the capital enemy of democracy while, on the other hand, the true people is its source.³⁹

The pope conceived of democracy in a broad sense, democracy that "can be realised in monarchies as well as in republics" and he acknowledged equality and liberty as its ideal.⁴⁰ He appealed for a democracy grounded upon Christian morality

37. *Ibid.*, 82.

38. POPE PIUS XII, broadcast message *Christmas 1944*, 19: *Eternal World Television Network* (on-line) : <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P12XMAS.HTM> [8 May 2003].

39. See *ibid.*, 21–34.

40. See *ibid.*, 16, 27.

to secure the desired “objectivity, impartiality, loyalty, generosity, and integrity” of the system.⁴¹ “If the future is to belong to democracy, an essential part in its achievement will have to belong to the religion of Christ and to the Church.”⁴²

3.2 *Pacem in terris*

A most important breakthrough in the official Vatican position regarding the necessary corollaries of democracy, that is the basic liberties of the individual, was made by Pope John XXIII in the 1963 encyclical *Pacem in terris*. In it he stated that each man is a person and as such “has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature” and which are “universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable.”⁴³ Among these rights Pope John enlists the rights so frequently negated in previous papal encyclicals like the right to “freedom of speech and publication”, and “to worship God in accordance with the right dictates of his own conscience.”⁴⁴ In accepting freedom of religion, *Pacem in terris* “swept away the single most important obstacle to the acceptance of democracy by the Vatican — its belief in the theoretical superiority of the union of Church and State.”⁴⁵

Although John XXIII says that “it is not possible to give a general ruling on the most suitable form of government” as this depends on the particular circumstances of place and time,⁴⁶ he declares that the right to active participation in public life and, more specifically, to take part in government is a natural consequence of man’s personal dignity.⁴⁷ Accordingly, the pope promotes frequent public consultation by authorities as well as regular succession of public officials, in effect advocating periodic elections.⁴⁸

3.3 *Vatican Council II*

Of all the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the two most relevant for our discussion here are the declaration on religious liberty, *Dignitatis humanae*, and the pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et spes*.

41. See *ibid.*, 37–41.

42. *Ibid.*, 82.

43. Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in terris* (11 April 1963) 9.

44. See *ibid.*, 12, 14.

45. Sigmund, 228.

46. See Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, 67–68.

47. See *ibid.*, 26, 73.

48. See *ibid.*, 74; Sigmund, 228.

In *Dignitatis humanae*, the council fathers reaffirmed “that the human person has a right to religious freedom,”⁴⁹ in view of the right to freedom of conscience.⁵⁰ In *Gaudium et spes* the right to “activity in accord with the upright norm of one’s own conscience,” and “rightful freedom even in matters religious” are listed among the things “necessary for leading a life truly human.”⁵¹ The abandonment of the medieval ideal of the confessional state is thus confirmed. In this regard, *Dignitatis humanae* clearly states that while civil authority should recognise the religious life of the citizens and show it favour, it would, however, “clearly transgress the limits set to its power, were it to presume to command or inhibit acts that are religious.”⁵² Furthermore, in *Gaudium et spes*, the council fathers asserted that the Church on her part

does not place her trust in the privileges offered by civil authority. She will even give up the exercise of certain rights which have been legitimately acquired, if it becomes clear that their use will cast doubt on the sincerity of her witness or that new ways of life demand new methods.⁵³

Although *Gaudium et spes* remained open to other forms of government, it paid tribute to democracy when it praised “those national procedures which allow the largest possible number of citizens to participate in public affairs with genuine freedom.”⁵⁴ Additionally, the citizens’ free and active participation in political life is described as being “in full conformity with human nature.”⁵⁵

3.4 After Vatican Council II

In the years after the Council the Church became progressively one of the foremost promoters of democracy. In Spain, where the Church had for long supported Franco’s dictatorial regime, the link between the hierarchy and the government began to loosen, especially through the new vision espoused by the younger clergy and bishops.⁵⁶ In Latin America, many military regimes found themselves unable to use the Church, now publicly endorsing democracy, as a

49. Vatican Council II, Declaration *Dignitatis humanae* (7 December 1965) 2.

50. See *ibid.*, 3.

51. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965) 26.

52. Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 3.

53. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, 76.

54. *Ibid.*, 31.

55. *Ibid.*, 75.

56. See Sigmund, 230.

source of legitimacy. Instead, in most Latin American countries the Church became a refuge for human rights groups and provided support to political opponents of the authoritarian regimes.⁵⁷

The Church also played an important role in the historical processes leading to the fall of communism in Eastern European countries. Pope John Paul II, hailing from Poland — the most Catholic of the Eastern bloc countries — has been considered by many as a chief catalyst in bringing about the fall of communism and the advent of democracy in Eastern Europe.⁵⁸ In *Centesimus annus*, the pope himself recognised and gave thanks to God for the role played by the Church in recent years in furthering the world's democratisation:

An important, even decisive, contribution was made by the Church's commitment to defend and promote human rights. In situations strongly influenced by ideology, in which polarisation obscured the awareness of a human dignity common to all, the Church affirmed clearly and forcefully that every individual — whatever his or her personal convictions — bears the image of God and therefore deserves respect. Often, the vast majority of people identified themselves with this kind of affirmation, and this led to a search for forms of protest and for political solutions more respectful of the dignity of the person. From this historical process new forms of democracy have emerged which offer a hope for change in fragile political and social structures weighed down by a painful series of injustices and resentments, as well as by a heavily damaged economy and serious social conflicts.⁵⁹

The resulting quasi-universal consensus with regard to the value of democracy has been considered by John Paul II in *Evangelium vitae* as “a positive sign of the times.” “But,” he continued, “the value of democracy stands or falls with the values

57. See *ibid.*, 231.

58. An unequivocal pronouncement by John Paul II in favour of democratisation can be found, for example, in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*: “[Some] nations need to reform certain unjust structures, and in particular their political institutions, in order to replace corrupt, dictatorial and authoritarian forms of government by democratic and participatory ones. This is a process which we hope will spread and grow stronger. For the health of a political community — as expressed in the free and responsible participation of all citizens in public affairs, in the rule of law and in respect for the promotion of human rights — is the necessary condition and sure guarantee of the development of the whole individual and of all people.” Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (30 December 1987) 44.

59. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (1 May 1991) 22.

which it embodies and promotes.”⁶⁰ Thus, a recurring concern in the recent teaching of the Magisterium on democracy is that it should be built on the values and rights that emanate from true respect to the dignity of the human person, and which are *per se* above the dictates of majority rule. Human rights are indeed the subject of much rhetoric in democratic societies, but such rhetoric should be accompanied in practice by their protection and promotion in public life.⁶¹ When a basic human right “ceases to be such, because it is no longer firmly founded on the inviolable dignity of the person, but is made subject to the will of the stronger part,” then “the democratic ideal, which is only truly such when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person, is betrayed in its very foundations.”⁶²

In *Centesimus annus*, John Paul II insisted that democracies need a coherent vision of the common good, which involves the assessment and integration of particular interests “on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values.” The tendency in many democracies to consider certain questions on the basis of the electoral or financial power of the lobbying group rather than according to the criteria of justice and morality, sows the seeds of distrust and apathy in the general public, thus undermining democracy itself.⁶³

4 Conclusion

As I have shown in this article, the process by which the Church came to terms with democracy, accepted it as a legitimate form of government and eventually started to promote it as a form of government particularly suited to the dignity of the human person, has been a long one, not without serious setbacks. Today, however, the Church has a clear understanding of the essence of democracy and as Pius XII foresaw in 1944 she has had and still has an important part to play in the achievements of democracy in the world.

The Church has today undertaken the important task of pointing out that democracy is not simply a procedural system that can be employed to reach peaceful agreement on political action. Democracy is not just a mechanism devised to allow popular majorities to rule. Democracy is much more than this. It is a vision based on the fundamental values of freedom and equality. It implies and at the same time fosters

60. POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* (25 March 1995) 70.

61. See *ibid.*, 18.

62. *Ibid.*, 20.

63. See Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 46–47.

the inviolability and the protection of the fundamental human rights based on the dignity of the human person.

In the words of Jacques Maritain, democracy “designates first and foremost a general philosophy of human and political life and a state of mind,”⁶⁴ which is identified by the following features:

inalienable rights of the person, equality, political rights of the people whose consent is implied by any political regime and whose rulers rule as vicars of the people, absolute primacy of the relations of justice and law at the base of society, and an ideal not of war, prestige or power, but of amelioration and emancipation of human life - the ideal of fraternity.⁶⁵

Democracy is primarily the vision “of a society in which all are respected as equals, in which difference is enriching not divisive, and in which human beings discover freedom and fulfilment.”⁶⁶ Of course, such a vision needs embodiment into a procedural system, but it transcends the system as such.

What pertains to the application of the democratic vision is in the end accidental and depends on the particular prevailing conditions. Particular procedures — like, for example, periodical elections, which is the first thing that comes to the mind of many people when they speak of democracy — are important, but their importance is only relative.⁶⁷ On the other hand, what pertains intrinsically to the democratic vision founded on the values of liberty and equality, like the protection of the fundamental human rights of all and the guarantee that those affected by a decision may participate in some way in the decision-making process, is essential.

It is, in my view, this understanding of democracy as a vision that, especially under the guidance of John Paul II, the Church is defending and promoting.

18, St Edward Street,
Birżebbuġa – MALTA.

64. Maritain, 25.

65. *Ibid.*, 57.

66. John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity and democracy. A theology for a just world order*, Cambridge: 1995, 274.

67. In effect, the classical Athenians, for example, looked down towards the selection of public officials by election as this procedure was deemed aristocratic — it naturally favours the well-born, the prominent, and the wealthy. Instead, they usually employed the more democratic procedure of the casting of lots. See John Dunn, “Conclusion”, in *Democracy: the unfinished journey*, 242.

Catholicism: The End of a 'World'?

Anthony M. Abela

Danièle Harvieu-Léger, 2003. *Catholicisme, la fin d'un monde*, Paris: Bayard, 2003, 336 pp.

During one of my most recent visits to Paris, whilst browsing the new acquisitions in a centrally located bookshop, I came across the latest work by Danièle Harvieu-Léger, a French sociologist of religion. Next to this publication stood a revised edition of a renowned book on Catholicism, this time on the social aspects of dogma, written about 60 years ago by the late Cardinal Henri de Lubac. I took an interest in both these works, first because of their subject matter, but also because I remember having entertained exchanges with both authors at different stages of my life-journey. In the mid-eighties, during my studies in Paris, I lived for two years in the same community where Cardinal de Lubac had his residence. My acquaintance with Danièle Harvieu-Léger is more recent. I came to know her at international sociological conferences and from her earlier sociological works. Harvieu-Léger's latest book, which was published for the first time this year, is already in its second reprint. What follows is a review of Harvieu-Léger's latest work for its contribution to a better understanding of an allegedly fading world of Catholicism in the emerging ultramodern culture. Unlike de Lubac's work, Harvieu-Léger's sociological study has no claim to advance any theological or dogmatic beliefs.

Danièle Harvieu-Léger's book comes after many years of intense sociological investigation. Building on her earlier elaboration of sociological models to explain religious change in contemporary society, Danièle Harvieu-Léger arrives at a well-thought out position. In her view, Catholicism has ceased to form part of people's cultural universe. The values of Catholicism, its representations and its personnel have left or are in the course of leaving the social world. Although Harvieu-Léger's position refers to the situation of Catholicism in France, it can nevertheless be extended to other similar European societies. The question arises as to what extent, if at all, this applies to a country like Malta. Of course, there is no easy and clear answer to this question. Any empirically oriented sociologist would be very cautious before arriving at a definite conclusion.

Running thread

The hypothesis, constituting the running thread of Harvieu-Léger's book is that the current radical transformation in culture is likely to drain off Catholicism from within. The author advances her thesis by an extensive review of the sociological literature; an account of historical events, reference to her earlier works on religion, and the secondary analysis of select data from the European Values Study [EVS].

Danièle Harvieu-Léger starts off her argument by a statement and a question. On the one hand, the author attests the historical dominance of the Catholic Church in the political, economical, social and cultural domains. On the other hand, she asks whether the same Church and its members are currently being discredited. She observes how contemporary authors and the media, not least because of reported cases of paedophile priests and their mishandling by church authorities, are disqualifying the institutional Church and devaluing Christianity. Although the Catholic Church is still a powerful presence in the collective memory, it appears to be an aging and increasingly weakened institution. The apparent visibility of Catholicism in the public domain is countered by a demoralisation of its members. In this situation described as "atonie", Catholics avoid making any reference to a world of beliefs, practices and values as these are seen to have definitely slid into cultural insignificance. Paradoxically, this demoralisation is taking place at a time when the leaders of the Catholic Church are undertaking a serious effort to present an image of the Church that conforms to authentic Christian values, adopt greater discretion in its contribution to the public domain and retreat from any direct political intervention.

Sociological literature

A review of the literature gives evidence of how French Catholicism has always been in a permanent state of crisis. Sociologists have observed how after the Second World War, France has turned into a mission country (Godin et Daniel 1943). Yves Lambert (1985) traces the external erosion of Catholicism as exemplified in his study of a remote village. More recently, Simon (1999) has posited France as a pagan country, and Rouet (2001) examined the fragility of Christianity.

Harvieu-Léger finds an internal rapture within Catholicism itself. An example can be found in the changing architecture of cathedral churches. Whereas medieval cathedrals were built at the centre and summit of a town as signs of triumphant dominance, protection, identity and orientation, new cathedrals and churches are

mystifying spaces whose meaning is open to the various expectations and searches of those who enter them on their own free will.

In late modernity or 'ultramodernity', as Harvieu-Léger calls it, the subjective dimension of religion as exemplified by the pilgrim and the convert, takes on a central importance. Religion becomes incorporated into a global culture of the individual, making self-realisation the dominant and universal imperative.

Individualisation

Harvieu-Léger makes use of select data from the European Values Study (Bréchon éd. 2000) to support her theory on the displacement of traditional catholic culture by the primacy of individual self-realisation and the rise of relational family values. The old world of an unhappy pleasure-repressing Catholicism is giving way to a new world of spirituality and an individualised ultramodern culture of total human self-realisation. The sin culture of Catholicism, so much associated with sexuality, no longer holds. In the late nineties people aspired to live well, entertain good social relations and safeguard the independence of their private life. In the process, however, the ultramodern consumerist culture of immediate satisfaction of all desires has displaced the catholic vision of ultimate eschatological and enduring happiness.

The horizontal family

The revolution of the family that has taken place over the past thirty years has left an impact on the Catholic Church. The emergence of the horizontal model of the family with its imposing values and practices from and at the basis of society impinges on traditional catholic familial culture. Harvieu-Léger argues that this process has a three-fold impact on the Church. First, there occurs a widening gap between the Church's teachings on the family, in particular on relationships and sexuality, and lived experience. Second, it affects the application of the model of the family, so much popular after Vatican II, to the ecclesial community. Third, the ultramodern autonomous 'religion of love' between equal partners is at loggerheads with the Church's understanding of the externally-driven 'mystery of love' of the formerly dominant vertical model of the family. In many ways, the horizontal family competes with institutional religion and displaces Catholicism as the main identity-giving institution. As a consequence, the observed departure of religion from the political sphere now extends into the private sphere.

Exculturation

We are told that over the past thirty years, the world of French culture has uprooted its institutional roots, however much formerly modelled by the Church. In the current French situation, the Catholic Church can still participate and even contest the world of culture, but it is no longer in a position to offer a global alternative to the dominant culture. Harvieu-Léger observes that this is nothing short of a reversal of the previous cultural triumph of Catholicism whereby the spiritual and moral inspiration of Christianity had become the common heritage of democratic societies. Catholicism has been ex-cultured, removed from mainline [French] culture.

The former process whereby the Catholic Church was successful to influence society and impinge a catholic institutionalism on French secular culture has now been ruptured and is being reversed. Accordingly, the current process is identified as exculturation.

The author's diagnosis of what she terms 'exculturation', however, does not lead to the end of the world, nor to the end of the Catholic Church, but to 'the end of a world', that is the end of a particular and historical catholic culture, commonly known as 'Catholicism'.

EU Constitution

A case in point is the debate on the place of religion in the Constitution of the European Union. The proposal by predominantly catholic countries for mention of God and the Christian heritage is strongly opposed by representatives from ultramodern cultures like France. On this issue Harvieu-Léger augurs for a middle way solution that would acknowledge the religious heritage without an explicit reference to God. In this way the constitution would recognise the Christian patrimony without associating it to any profession of faith (see pp 269-270).

Pilgrim model

Studies on the current geography of catholic institutions observe how the alarming decline of traditional church organisations is accompanied by continuing catholic sociability. Catholics are present everywhere, but in sma

and sometimes very small numbers. On the one hand, parishes, associations and congregations are being deserted. On the other hand, there is an increasing visible, mobile and dynamic spiritual, communitarian and pilgrim activity. This is what Harvieu-Léger calls the pilgrim model of the church. It is characterised by a plastic religiosity wherein mobile pilgrims seek "strong moments" and "high places". In the process, the church is being radically reshaped from below. At the same time, however, institutional Catholicism becomes irrelevant in mainline ultramodern culture.

Unintelligibility

What gives legitimacy to authority and what the faithful are disposed to do shifts towards what people expect, aspire and experience in the world. They simply participate and socialise in a culture founded on cooperation and the continuous negotiation of what regulates their life together. For example, over the years, the image of the priest has shifted from the person responsible, towards the animator and eventually the one who accompanies. On many issues, not least the unequal treatment of women, the refusal of ordination to women and married men, the official position of the Catholic Church is becoming increasingly intolerable, implausible and unintelligible. This is because, according to Harvieu-Léger, the Church holds on to an identity that is no longer anchored in a common culture.

Shifting institutionalism

In her concluding chapter, Harvieu-Léger reiterates her main thesis on the exculturation of Catholicism from French culture. This process involves the decline of a general identity-giving institutional regime, common to all institutions with a religious matrix, including the Church, and its replacement by fragile service-giving institutionalism.

Although Harvieu-Léger does not offer an equally detailed description of current catholic sociability, she nevertheless suggests that the new catholic service-oriented institutions are a response to the differentiated aspirations, interests and expectations of individuals. It seems that the multiple activities of church communities, ranging from new spiritualities to the opening of church buildings to immigrants without documents, give evidence of how today's fragile catholicism is working out a new enculturation in our ultramodern fragmented world.

Discussion

Harvieu-Léger's study is a good contribution to an understanding of the cultural secularisation of Catholicism or what she terms the Church's exculturation from contemporary ultramodern society. Her work rests on an extensive literature review supported by quotations from her earlier empirical studies and the secondary analysis of select data from the European Values study on French society.

In this respect, Harvieu-Léger's thesis would have achieved greater validity by reference to more relevant results from comparative EVS data on religion in France and other European societies, than the ones employed. Thus, for example, untapped EVS results show how very few in France (11.4%), similar to the European average (19.3%), and in contrast to a high percentage in Malta (49.6%), report having great confidence in the Church. Similarly, very few in France (27.8%) compared to a higher European average (42.7%), but in contrast to a very high percentage in Malta (75%) think that the Church is giving adequate answers to problems of family life. The majority of the French (55.4%), however, similar to the European average (67.6%) even if much lower than the percentage in Malta (85.5%), find adequate the Church's response to people's spiritual needs. Accordingly, more detailed comparative statistical analyses of EVS (2001) data on similar issues can contribute to a better appraisal of Harvieu-Léger's thesis on Catholicism. Although the publication has well documented footnotes, an inclusion of a list of references and an index of main terms and authors, would improve its scientific value.

In a nutshell, Harvieu-Léger's is neither advocating the end of Catholicism nor the end of the Catholic Church, but the end of an institutional identity-giving regime or a traditional world, historically rooted in a catholic culture but which has since assumed a world of its own. The end of this regime, however, contributes to the observed diminishing relevance of Catholicism and the Catholic Church in contemporary society.

The reader cannot fail to observe how contrary to the situation in France, Catholicism has still a hold over Maltese culture. For example, active members of the Church, and priests in particular, still occupy key positions in identity-giving institutions, such as governmental and non-governmental commissions, educational bodies and the media. Local bishops have come to hold formal and informal consultation meetings with leaders of political parties. Moreover, the expansion of

parish feasts and the relative success of Church authorities to regulate the participation of band clubs, now to be extended to fireworks' organisations, is an example of the impact of Maltese Catholicism and the Catholic Church on popular culture. In line with world Catholicism, however, the most recent local synod has displaced the traditional top-bottom representation of the church by a horizontal 'sister and service' model. It would take much longer, however, for whole generations who have been socialised in an identity-giving institutional regime to leave behind their authoritarian personality, relinquish their privileged positions and join ranks in a service-oriented society.

On a final note, although Harvieu-Léger's study adopts neither a comparative approach, nor does it claim universality, the findings can easily be extended to a general theory of global Catholicism and serve as a starting point for comparative studies. Having convincingly traced the decline of the impact of traditional Catholicism in current French society, the task ahead is to examine the workings of an emerging post-traditional catholicism, however much fragile and multi-dimensional, in contemporary pluralist non-confessional, global and ultramodern society.

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La Spiritualità Interconfessionale per la Bibbia e per la gente: passione, competenza, indipendenza¹

Giovanni Bachelet and Carlo Buzzetti*

1. La comune spiritualità dei laici cattolici (in particolare in Italia).

Oggi le situazioni dei laici cattolici sono varie, ampiamente diverse. A grandi linee, si va dalle associazioni laicali storiche ai numerosi movimenti (che si sono moltiplicati dopo il concilio Vaticano II). Qui, come premessa al tema centrale di queste pagine, tracciamo un quadro di considerazioni generali. Oltre il rischio di qualche semplificazione riduttiva ci può essere un vantaggio: fornire una solida base al tema della consistenza della "spiritualità interconfessionale".

Anche in Italia la maggioranza dei cattolici vive una situazione di fondamentale indipendenza dal clero. Soprattutto per le attività non esplicitamente religiose: la famiglia, il lavoro, l'economia, la cura della salute propria e altrui, il divertimento, la scienza, la politica. In teoria il fenomeno non coglie di sorpresa la chiesa cattolica. Ne ha parlato lucidamente, prevedendo pericoli e opportunità, lo stesso Concilio Vaticano II (finito nel 1965).

1. Le pagine del primo e dell'ultimo capitoletto di questo saggio sono presentate in carattere tipografico distinto – corsivo – poiché si riferiscono ampiamente alla situazione italiana (mentre in altri paesi probabilmente la situazione è per qualche aspetto diversa) e, oltre il loro tono descrittivo, sono anche quasi un'esortazione. Le altre pagine hanno rilevanza internazionale.

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- Univ. Pont. Salesiana (Roma); Pont. Ist. Biblico (Roma).

- traduzioni bibliche interconfessionali: guidato da Carlo M. Martini, dal 1971 collabora con UBS/ABU in Europa. E' "Translation Consultant" di UBS/ABU soprattutto per varie imprese interconfessionali, in: Italia, Paesi Baschi, Asturie, Francia-Khmer, Slovenia, Corsica, Slovacchia, Polonia, Albania, Portogallo.

- apostolato biblico, Italia: cattolico (Cei, Settore Apostolato B.) e interconfessionale (Soc. Biblica).

In pratica nella comunità cattolica convivono atteggiamenti vecchi e nuovi. Da una parte vi sono nostalgie di una cristianità perduta. Dall'altra vi sono spinte verso una nuova maturità cristiana, da vivere con gioia e speranza in mezzo a tutti gli uomini. Tuttavia, in questo contesto, la stessa definizione di laici cattolici non pare univoca. Chi sono?

Quelli che scelgono l'insegnamento della religione cattolica a scuola o optano per la chiesa cattolica al momento di pagare le tasse? Allora sono oltre il novanta per cento della società italiana. Questi laici cattolici hanno però rari e sporadici rapporti con la chiesa (matrimoni, funerali...) e hanno poca o nessuna familiarità con la Bibbia. Essi utilizzano preti e religiosi, considerandoli rappresentanti di una casta ecclesiastica da rispettare in quanto gestisce una centrale di servizi pregiati. Essi chiedono al clero soltanto di continuare a garantire lo svolgimento di una serie di funzioni che, ai loro occhi, assicurano decoro, rispettabilità o eleganza morale a certi atti importanti della vita. Amano dichiararsi credenti ma precisano subito di essere poco e irregolarmente praticanti, evitando ogni richiesta che vada oltre gli adempimenti formali o materiali: nella vita quotidiana, essi non intendono l'essere cristiani come una fonte d'impegno e responsabilità. Però non rinunciano alla loro posizione di cattolici; anzi, a volte, la riaffermano e la difendono come un'identità che è fonte innegabile di diritti. In sintesi, non si possono considerare avversari della vita cristiana ecclesiale, ma neppure sostenitori.

Oppure laici cattolici sono gli adulti che frequentano con qualche regolarità una parrocchia? Allora sono attorno al venti per cento della società italiana. Per loro essere cristiani significa avere un rapporto personale con la chiesa e la parola di Dio (almeno nella liturgia). L'eventuale scarsa adesione a qualche esortazione della chiesa nasce da una certa freddezza complessiva, da una fondamentale difficoltà a riconoscersi in alcune grandi battaglie della chiesa; il che ad alcuni impedisce di assumere responsabilità e impegni cristiani al di là della pratica religiosa, nel timore di doversi sottoporre a direttive delle quali essi non sono pienamente persuasi. Ma nel complesso questo gruppo non ha abbandonato la fede, anzi, guarda alla chiesa e alla parola di Dio con sincera attenzione. In presenza di proposte adeguate, questi laici potrebbero sprigionare un notevole potenziale d'impegno e di rinnovamento.

Oppure i laici cattolici in Italia sono quelli che appartengono alle organizzazioni cattoliche? La chiesa locale o nazionale fa molto affidamento su di loro, soprattutto per quelle che abbiamo chiamato attività esplicitamente religiose. In quest'ambito i laici sono in genere vistosamente collegati alle persone del clero, alle loro

esperienze e alle forme della loro concreta autorità. Con il clero essi collaborano direttamente ed esplicitamente, svolgendo attività molto varie: ora modeste, ora anche di alta responsabilità. Prevale un clima di netta dipendenza. I laici ricevono, accolgono e mettono in pratica direttive che vengono dal clero, e la loro responsabilità si colloca entro i limiti, in genere piuttosto ben definiti, di una qualche delega. Non poche volte questi laici vivono una spiritualità cristiana davvero evoluta e generosa. Ma non tutti sono nelle medesime condizioni. Alcuni si trovano a loro agio in un clima di dipendenza e scarsa responsabilizzazione. Altri, invece, collaborano con impegno e attendono con pazienza che il nuovo stile promosso dal Concilio Vaticano II diventi patrimonio di tutta la chiesa.

Con inevitabile semplificazione, si può dire che i laici cattolici italiani rientrano in una di queste tre categorie: l'estraneità, la pratica religiosa e l'impegno diretto (quest'ultimo soprattutto nelle strutture parrocchiali). L'esperienza post-conciliare, però, suggerisce che, anche nella terza categoria, non sempre i vari gruppi o movimenti sono capaci di armonizzarsi tra loro, attorno alla medesima fede, dentro la chiesa comune, per raggiungere insieme delle decisioni. Chi ha avuto esperienza del movimento ecumenico e biblico si meraviglia di questa incomunicabilità e diffidenza fra diverse famiglie della stessa chiesa. Forse un po' di lavoro ecumenico e biblico, oltre al valore intrinseco, avrebbe anche un chiaro valore pedagogico, come scuola di conoscenza reciproca, saldamente ancorata alla parola di Dio, fra gruppi cristiani dotati di tradizioni e di sensibilità diverse; e come metodo sicuro per fondare l'unità su ciò che davvero conta e unisce, e valorizzare, senza drammatizzarle, specificità e differenze.

2. L'esperienza UBS/ABU: soprattutto a partire da laici.

Se cerchiamo le radici storiche delle Società Bibliche e oggi consideriamo i comportamenti di delle persone coinvolte nelle *United Bible Societies* (UBS), possiamo notare un fenomeno: l'emergere e il prevalere di uno stile che è sintomatico di una spiritualità laicale.

*Le origini.*² Se vogliamo comprendere le caratteristiche delle UBS come

2. Per un quadro delle fase iniziale delle SB si può attingere a un'ampia storia delle UBS (ROBERTSON E.D., *Taking the Word to the World, 50 years of the UBS*, Nashville: Nelson, 1996) o, più agevolmente, a un saggio contenuto nel grande catalogo di una mostra (MEURER S., *Il movimento biblico europeo nel XIX e nel XX secolo*, in: CATALOGO DELLA MOSTRA UBS 2000, *La Parola che cambia il mondo*, Roma: Alleanza Biblica Universale, 2000, pp. 27-31).

fenomeno spirituale, sembra corretto e opportuno procedere così: tenere come sfondo e come punto di partenza il vasto movimento di conoscenza della Bibbia che, specialmente nei tempi moderni, si manifesta in Europa. Sul versante dell'impegno quel movimento presenta soprattutto lo sviluppo di un semplice proposito fondamentale: fare il possibile per rendere sempre più largamente accessibile il testo scritto della Bibbia. E, notoriamente, in proposito gli episodi maggiori sono spesso legati a vicende tipiche di ambienti e contesti dove domina il clima sviluppatosi in seguito alla Riforma protestante. Circa la diffusione della Bibbia, lì i fatti più famosi sono specialmente tre. Anzitutto, la traduzione biblica di Martin Lutero. Subito dopo, il formidabile appoggio che la sua diffusione riceve dall'allora nuovissima risorsa costituita dalla stampa mediante i caratteri mobili. In seguito, la creazione di specifiche organizzazioni che nascono con l'esplicito scopo primario di favorire la diffusione del testo biblico. Di fatto a partire dal sec. XVI si realizza un fenomeno innegabile: si distribuiscono tante copie della Bibbia quante mai erano state diffuse prima di allora. Ora, di quei tre fatti famosi quello forse meno noto ai nostri lettori è il terzo. Per cui qui si dedica spazio a illustrarlo un poco.

Agli inizi del sec. XVIII sorge una iniziativa che forse è il maggiore precedente delle moderne Società Bibliche (= SB). Perciò all'interno delle SB essa è abitualmente considerata come un loro antenato o una loro radice. Nel 1710, ad Halle (Germania), il barone von Canstein, un cristiano di area protestante evangelica luterana, fonda un istituto biblico allo scopo di favorire il contatto tra la Bibbia e la gente povera. In un secolo, quell'organizzazione permette di distribuire oltre tre milioni di copie dell'intera Bibbia o del Nuovo Testamento. Per quell'epoca, quel tedesco prototipo di società biblica ottiene dei risultati innegabilmente eccezionali. Ma il suo influsso diretto rimane limitato alla sola Germania.

Quasi cento anni dopo, e in maniera indipendente, nasce in Inghilterra un'altra organizzazione, una Società Biblica che possiede già in partenza un vasto orizzonte d'azione (e per questo suo proposito risulta molto simile alle moderne SB): la "British and Foreign Bible Society" (= BFBS). I suoi inizi vengono raccontati così. Un giorno del 1804, a Londra, in una locanda, si incontra un vasto gruppo laici. Sono commercianti, ufficiali, funzionari amministrativi, parlamentari e diplomatici. Tra loro non si trovano pastori o preti per il semplice fatto che questi non sono stati invitati. Il che è accaduto forse a motivo dello scopo principale di quelle persone: commentare la situazione delle comunità ecclesiali. Forse hanno pensato che senza pastori sarebbe stato più facile farlo agevolmente e con piena schiettezza. Quei laici osservano: purtroppo, le persone dirigenti delle loro chiese inglesi (cioè quelle

del clero) sono spesso impegnate a combattersi sul piano delle idee religiose; e lo fanno volentieri anche nelle edizioni della Bibbia. Troppe volte le annotazioni a margine o in calce, più che aiutare i lettori a intendere bene la Bibbia, sembrano preparate per criticare le opinioni altrui e per difendere le proprie. Quindi i laici di quel gruppo dicono: “La situazione delle nostre comunità cristiane è insostenibile. Deve cambiare!”

Poi qualcuno dei presenti racconta la vicenda di Mary Jones: una ragazza gallese che voleva possedere una copia della Bibbia tutta per sé, scritta nella sua lingua... Ma non la trovava. Le hanno detto che forse il parroco di un villaggio ne ha alcune copie... Ma per arrivarci Mary ha dovuto affrontare un cammino faticoso e avventuroso. Le è stato necessario attraversare molti villaggi e monti, persino a piedi nudi. Ha avuto bisogno di una lunga e penosa pazienza. E quando alla fine ha trovato la sua tanto desiderata copia della Bibbia, ha scoperto che per averla doveva spendere molto più di quanto pensava e poteva... Le persone riunite nella locanda londinese trovano che quella storia è davvero molto triste, commovente e scandalosa; troppo.

Allora reagiscono. Sono convinti che bisogna fare qualcosa. Alcuni forse pensano di suggerire al clero qualche intervento efficace. Ma i più non sono convinti. A chi rivolgersi? come? quando? Prevale l'idea che devono e possono fare qualcosa loro stessi, in prima persona. Capiscono che loro potrebbero affrontare tutta la situazione. Potrebbero assumerla loro e gestire loro direttamente l'impresa di arrivare ad alcune soluzioni davvero efficaci. Probabilmente pensano e dicono: “In fondo, è soprattutto questione di preparare, produrre, distribuire e vendere...; tutte cose cioè che noi sappiamo fare bene, anche senza i pastori e magari meglio di loro; perché è il nostro mestiere. Se noi mettiamo insieme le nostre varie competenze, possiamo raggiungere dei buoni risultati più facilmente di qualunque organizzazione soltanto ecclesiastica”. Quindi, con pratica coerenza, quei trecento laici scelgono di organizzarsi. Anzitutto si danno un programma che alla base è molto semplice: bisogna curare – urgentemente e bene – la traduzione, la produzione e la distribuzione di molte copie della Bibbia, in modo da poter aiutare tutte le persone che hanno troppa difficoltà a trovarne una la quale sia veramente accessibile e buona per loro. Fondamentalmente, quelle copie della Bibbia devono possedere soprattutto due caratteristiche: essere scritta in una lingua comprensibile e avere un prezzo abbordabile.

Come si vede, alla radice di quella famosa decisione c'è una scelta che potrebbe

essere detta spirituale: servire - molto praticamente - la Parola di Dio scritta e il popolo dei credenti. Così nasce la BFBS. E molto presto essa si espande anche fuori dell'Inghilterra. In Europa e oltre, stabilisce una rete di suoi agenti. E poco dopo nascono delle altre SB: in Olanda (1814), negli Stati Uniti (1816), in Russia (1821). Dopo molteplici tentativi e varie tappe di organizzazione o integrazione internazionale, nel 1946 alcune grandi SB si uniscono in una struttura di tipo piuttosto federale: "United Bible Societies" (UBS o ABU, Alliance Biblique Universelle). E in breve tempo questa si allarga sempre più.³ Ogni singola SB rimane indipendente e primariamente responsabile della sua attività nel proprio paese, ma molto spesso i suoi legami con l'associazione mondiale risultano forti e piuttosto decisivi.

E ancora oggi, abitualmente. Il clima originario – cioè quello di un gruppo di laici che si assumono in prima persona una responsabilità della quale essi sono competenti – continua anche oggi. I capi di UBS/ABU sono spesso dei laici. In linea di principio, tutti loro possono essere dei laici; l'appartenere al clero non è mai una condizione richiesta. E' vero che di fatto oggi non poche delle persone coinvolte, anche tra i dirigenti, appartengono al clero di qualche chiesa cristiana. Ma in proposito è importante una serie di osservazioni. All'inizio delle SB i membri del clero non potevano nemmeno far parte di una SB. E' vero che in seguito, visti i buoni rapporti con le chiese, molte SB hanno ammesso la presenza anche attiva di molti singoli individui appartenenti al clero. Ma questi non sono mai anzitutto o soltanto dei delegati che le chiese mandano in una *loro* associazione. Invece, sono personalmente cooptati o eletti da ABU/UBS. In altre parole: benché di fatto essi esprimano un'autorevole rappresentanza *della* loro chiesa, non sono formalmente investiti *dalla* loro chiesa.

Ancor oggi, nessun ruolo dirigente è ufficialmente assegnato da una qualche autorità ecclesiastica. Poiché molto spesso sono in notevole ed esplicita armonia e concordia con le realtà ecclesiali, le SB vedono impegnati al loro interno anche alcuni dirigenti delle chiese. Tuttavia le SB non dipendono mai da quelle persone come dai loro superiori; cosicché l'insieme della struttura UBS/ABU offre un esempio molto concreto di spiritualità cristiana essenzialmente laicale, autonoma, ricca di rapporti fecondi con le comunità ecclesiali, eppure del tutto indipendente e quindi non confessionale a priori.

Questa formula è particolarmente felice. Trae la sua origine da una pluralità di

3. Nel 2000 l'organizzazione delle UBS coordina attività che ormai si estendono in oltre 200 paesi.

denominazioni e confessioni cristiane, di peso anche molto diverso, che forse, in presenza di una delega formale, avrebbero maggiori difficoltà a raggiungere delle decisioni comuni. Naturalmente le SB di UBS/ABU rendono un prezioso servizio non solo ai cristiani ma alla comunità cristiana nel suo insieme, quindi alle chiese. Ma si tratta di un'iniziativa svolta sotto la responsabilità dei promotori, non alle dipendenze di una o più chiese.

Circa il rapporto con le chiese, all'interno di UBS/UBU si possono incontrare soprattutto due o tre modelli. Uno, di ispirazione fondamentalmente anglosassone, è preoccupato di sottolineare una forte neutralità confessionale per poter liberamente servire tutte le chiese. In questo caso le SB non stabiliscono nessun legame formale con le chiese costituite e i loro comitati possono tranquillamente comprendere cristiani di tutte le denominazioni. Questi, oltre che in base al loro amore per la Bibbia e per le persone, sono designati in base alle loro competenze, ai loro interessi prevalenti, alle loro relazioni.

Un altro modello di rapporto tra una SB e le chiese locali è tipico soprattutto di paesi del nord europeo dove esistono delle chiese di stato. Esso comporta che in un comitato di controllo della SB ci siano dei rappresentanti ecclesiastici, ufficiali. Ma anche in questo caso essi non sono scelti né 'imposti' dall'esterno. Una chiesa maggioritaria può soltanto designare i suoi, quindi non può avere il monopolio delle presenze nella SB. Specialmente in tempi recenti, per un influsso internazionale di UBS/ABU, anche in quelle situazioni i comitati di controllo si sono largamente aperti a membri non appartenenti alla chiesa dominante.

Un terzo modello, sviluppato soprattutto in ambienti nord-americani, prevede la costituzione di un consiglio di consulenza - che non si riunisce spesso, ad es. solo una volta l'anno - al quale la SB invita le chiese ufficialmente disposte ad appoggiare la sua attività; ad esse la SB chiede di inviare dei rappresentanti da consultare. A volte questo modello si realizza mediante la costituzione di più consigli di consulenza, piccoli ed agili.

Il tipo di rapporto che esiste tra una concreta SB e le chiese del suo ambiente varia soprattutto in funzione di un fattore. Se di fatto la SB sceglie di stabilire dei rapporti soltanto con una chiesa del posto - quella maggioritaria o quasi unica - oppure se decide di servire davvero tutta una vasta varietà di comunità ecclesiali (e così stabilisce di dialogare con tutte loro). Nel primo caso i legami possono essere stretti ed efficienti, ma possono risultare un po' mortificanti o pericolosi. Nel secondo

caso la SB può alimentare e diffondere un concretissimo ed edificante respiro interconfessionale, e grazie ad esso può aprire la strada a delle vistose conseguenze anche sul piano dei rapporti ecumenici.⁴

3. *Due grandi passioni.*

Alla base del programma di azione delle SB troviamo un duplice atteggiamento che è facile individuare già all'origine della BFBS: sia il riconoscimento della grande importanza - per ogni persona cristiana - del contatto con la Parola di Dio scritta; sia la decisione di dare una precisa concretezza alla sollecitudine - che ogni cristiano deve avere - per il bene delle persone che compongono il Popolo di Dio.

Amare davvero la Parola di Dio scritta. La descrizione della situazione a partire dalla quale ha avuto origine la BFBS permette di cogliere senza ambiguità un fatto dominante: quelle persone sono state animate dalla convinzione che la Parola di Dio scritta è un tesoro di altissimo valore. Devono aver pensato: "Affinché la realtà di quel tesoro possa apparire in chiaro risalto, anche nella nostra situazione è necessario ripresentarlo in tutta la sua purezza". Quindi hanno ritenuto che la Parola di Dio scritta doveva urgentemente essere liberata dal quel materiale secondario che un po' troppo spesso la circondava sin quasi a soffocarla (cioè dal materiale contenente le varie dispute e polemiche di persone e di gruppi che a quei tempi tendevano a fare della Parola di Dio non soltanto la base del nutrimento della loro vita di credenti ma forse anche l'occasione o il pretesto per le loro discussioni e i loro contrasti).

Certamente la percezione di quella diversità d'importanza - tra la Parola di Dio e le parole di commento - non costituisce certo un'acquisizione teologica inedita: anche già in precedenza tutti i teologi tradizionali l'avevano sempre affermata; di certo anche moltissimi teologi conservatori di allora continuavano ad affermarla come un grande principio. Piuttosto originale invece pare la ferma decisione con cui quei fondatori hanno avvertito di dover far sì che tale principio fosse applicato ad alcune pratiche conseguenze. Devono aver pensato: "Se è vero che la Parola di Dio scritta è infinitamente più importante delle parole umane utilizzate per alimentare

4. Come già accennato, è stato proprio il legame internazionale che si realizza nell' UBS/ABU a spingere negli ultimi decenni le SB di questo tipo ad aprirsi gradualmente ad un'ampia pluralità di denominazioni, anche quando in un certo territorio queste rappresentavano una minoranza molto esigua.

le dispute teologiche, bisogna fare in modo che quella differenza sia resa evidente. E se la prassi corrente risulta non capace di assicurare abbastanza la sua espressione, vuol dire che la prassi deve essere modificata.”

Di fatto sono principalmente due le pratiche conseguenze che in quella situazione sono sembrate meglio garantire l'espressione della natura della Parola di Dio scritta. Prima, la produzione di pubblicazioni della Bibbia avrebbe dovuto essere sganciata dai gruppi specialmente coinvolti nelle dispute teologiche. A quel tempo, se la Bibbia era diffusa da uno di quei gruppi, troppo spesso e quasi inevitabilmente i destinatari erano portati ad identificare la Bibbia stessa con questo o quel gruppo, magari con una persona leader, con le sue idee e forse con le sue parzialità. Allora diventava notevolmente arduo individuare in maniera distinta: da una parte il messaggio della Bibbia, dall'altra quello di una persona o di un gruppo⁵. Perciò a loro è sembrato opportuno fare in modo che la Bibbia fosse prodotta da persone che non erano portavoce di una qualche fazione. Seconda conseguenza: le notazioni, soprattutto quelle ampie, avrebbero dovuto essere abolite. Poiché la prassi mostrava come le note di commento costituissero l'area preferita dalle persone desiderose di diffondere la loro personale comprensione della Bibbia anche a costo di penose polemiche,⁶ e poiché così il loro effetto risultava spesso gravemente inquinante, è parso saggio eliminare alla base quella possibilità.

In proposito una doppia osservazione sembra doverosa. Nell'atteggiamento di fondo di quei laici fondatori, specialmente chi è alimentato da teologia cristiana cattolica può facilmente avvertire una qualche ingenuità e un pericolo. Primo, una ingenuità. È noto come molte e autorevoli riflessioni ermeneutiche, soprattutto moderne, insegnino quanto sia illusorio pensare che la Bibbia possa avere una sua esistenza del tutto autonoma rispetto a qualsiasi gruppo e a qualsiasi teologia. Come per ogni opera scritta, solamente la conoscenza del suo contesto di origine e di uso permette di identificare il suo effettivo significato. Se, al contrario, la Bibbia è sganciata da ogni contesto di origine e di uso, i suoi significati diventano piuttosto vaghi, inafferrabili, ambigui. Secondo, un pericolo. Innegabilmente la zelante

5. Cf. un prezioso lucido saggio di Burke David G., *TEXT AND CONTEXT. The relevance and viability of the Bible society movement's fundamental principle— "without doctrinal note and comment" — past, present and future*, March 21, 2000, letto durante il Triennial Translation Workshop UBS, Malaga 19-30 giugno 2000 e pubblicato in Philip A. Noss (ed.), *Current Trends in Scripture Translation. Bulletin* 194/195 (2002) 299-332.
6. Cf. Burke, saggio cit.

preoccupazione di purificare il più possibile tutto quel che circonda la Parola di Dio, è in se stessa ammirevole. Tuttavia può anche essere espressione di un pregiudizio di tipo piuttosto unilaterale – in questo caso, soltanto protestante – in base al quale si tende a considerare come ingerenza corruttrice ogni presenza accanto alla Parola, compresa quella di qualsiasi comunità ecclesiale. Allora si tende a sostenere che nessun tipo di presenza ecclesiale può mai risultare un vero servizio alla Parola, nemmeno alla sua forma scritta; nulla è necessario né opportuno. E in tal caso una zelante preoccupazione, invece che mettere in moto una purificazione dell'intervento ecclesiale, sembra avere l'effetto drastico di mortificarlo, o di metterlo da parte o persino di abolirlo.

A quella doppia osservazione è possibile presentare una duplice risposta, fondata sulla convinzione che il problema fondamentale sia soprattutto una questione di gradi. E' vero che un'eventuale prospettiva 'ingenua' può essere soggiacente all'iniziativa di mettere in risalto la Bibbia isolandola più di prima, e che una sua affermazione in grado estremo può risultare non accettabile da parte di alcune comunità cristiane. Ma una sua affermazione non estrema - cioè limitata a sostenere che la Parola di Dio scritta deve essere presentata in modo che siano evidenti la sua precedenza e la sua superiorità rispetto a qualsiasi altra parola che la commenta - non pare affatto ingenua, non può essere detta soltanto "protestante". Anche i teologi piuttosto conservatori d'ogni tempo e di ogni confessione cristiana affermano serenamente che la Parola di Dio scritta deve poter essere colta nella sua posizione distinta e superiore rispetto alla posizione di qualsiasi altra parola di commento; nessun buon teologo sostiene mai che sarebbe migliore una situazione dove non fosse agevole cogliere la natura e la posizione proprie della parola di Dio scritta. Su quella linea, anche la prassi comune delle autorità ecclesiastiche cattoliche non favorisce di certo la diffusione generalizzata di edizioni della Bibbia dove la fisionomia della forma della Parola di Dio scritta appare presentata in maniera piuttosto confusa.

È vero che una posizione esclusiva – del tipo “diffondiamo soltanto delle Bibbie che non hanno nessuna nota” – risulta problematica e per tanti cristiani non è accettabile (almeno nelle sue forme rigide). In quella direzione le direttive delle autorità ecclesiastiche cattoliche non ammettono la possibilità di edizioni della Bibbia che non siano “corredate di note necessarie e veramente sufficienti” (*Dei Verbum* 25). Tuttavia è innegabile che quella drastica opposizione alle note espressa dalle prime SB poi ha condotto i più a distinguere tra note confessionali e note di tipo storico-letterario-culturale; come risulta nei più recenti documenti di

collaborazione interconfessionale,⁷ oggi queste sono serenamente accolte anche da UBS/ABU. Coerentemente, se una edizione biblica contiene alcune note o altro materiale supplementare, ogni chiesa e comunità ecclesiale ammette che essa sia utilizzata nel proprio ambito soltanto se il suo materiale supplementare è in chiara armonia con la propria confessione. E in modo analogo, in genere le SB di UBS/ABU fanno in modo che le loro edizioni della Bibbia siano adatte a continuare il loro impegno fondamentale: quello di servire le persone di varie confessioni cristiane, anche diverse; sempre volendo essere fedeli al medesimo scopo, in un primo momento le SB hanno scelto la via del “senza note” e in seguito la via del “senza note confessionali”.

Prendersi cura del Popolo di Dio. Logicamente derivata dalla prima, è la seconda passione: quella di prendersi cura delle persone che dovrebbero – ed eventualmente vorrebbero – avere un contatto diretto con la Parola di Dio scritta. Su questa linea le SB si impegnano ad operare per diminuire il più possibile le difficoltà che le persone incontrano sulla via verso quell’obiettivo. Quindi le SB fanno in modo di poter mettere a disposizione un numero sufficiente di edizioni bibliche (a tale scopo traducono, stampano, distribuiscono, ...) e fanno in modo di poter offrire strumenti che sostengono la loro lettura (a tale scopo preparano e diffondono opportuni sussidi...)⁸. Chiaramente significativo è il fatto che le SB conservino e tramandino come episodio simbolico la vicenda di Mary Jones;⁹ continuano a vedere quella ragazza come rappresentante di tutte le persone che vorrebbero incontrare la Bibbia. Le SB hanno deciso di mettersi a servizio di persone come lei e di lavorare per aiutarle a raggiungere la meta di quel loro desiderio.

In prospettiva geografica, all’interno di ABU/UBS viene spesso ricordata un’affermazione già dei primi tempi: “Se lo facciamo per il Galles, perché non farlo per il mondo?”¹⁰ In prospettiva culturale varia, le SB continuano a preparare e diffondere sia edizioni di livello letterario, sia traduzioni in lingua corrente, sia traduzioni per principianti, sia edizioni per ragazzi, ecc. ...

7. Cf. Burke, saggio cit.; cf. soprattutto “*Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible*”, Roma: 1987 (firmati proprio in Vaticano, al Segretariato per l’Unità dei Cristiani).

8. Notiamo che questo secondo aspetto è esplicitamente espresso soltanto in tempi recenti. Ma lo è in maniera sicura e solenne: l’Assemblea mondiale di UBS/ABU del 2000, tenuta a Midrand, ha indicato così il compito delle SB: “raggiungere la diffusione massima, effettiva e significativa di Sacre Scritture” e “aiutare la gente ad interagire con la Parola di Dio”.

9. Cf. in queste pagine il cap. 2.2.

10. Cf. MACDONALD F., *Alleanza Biblica Universale... dal passato al futuro*, in: CATALOGO DELLA MOSTRA UBS 2000, *La Parola che cambia il mondo*, Roma: ABU, 2000, 45.

In prospettiva di studio, sorgono alcune edizioni fornite di ampi sussidi (introduzioni, note, glossari, appendici, carte geografiche, tabelle, ecc.). In prospettiva scientifica, le SB curano la preparazione di varie edizioni critiche: testi nelle lingue originali, sinossi, concordanze, dizionari, grammatiche, atlanti, interlineari, poliglote, testi di traduttologia biblica, svariati sussidi per traduttori, ecc.).

In prospettiva interconfessionale si promuove la collaborazione di cristiani appartenenti a confessioni cristiane e insieme si distribuiscono i risultati raggiunti insieme. In prospettiva didattica e pastorale, le SB preparano e distribuiscono mostre bibliche e porzioni di Bibbia per situazioni od occasioni particolari (scuole, grandi eventi religiosi o sportivi, emergenze di vario genere, ospedali, carceri, grandi anniversari pubblici, ...).

In prospettiva multimediale, si preparano edizioni della Bibbia che vengono realizzate su supporti diversi dalla carta: Braille, e-books, CDROM, cassette, video, ecc.¹¹ In prospettiva tecnologica, le SB promuovono la qualità della traduzione, della produzione e della distribuzione facendo regolare ricorso alle risorse tecnologiche più avanzate che sono offerte negli ambienti dove esse operano.

Le SB manifestano la loro concreta sollecitudine verso le persone curando che i loro prodotti siano caratterizzati o accompagnati da tre aspetti:

- *la disponibilità, davvero effettiva.* Se una edizione della Bibbia esiste, ma Mary Jones non la trova nel suo villaggio o nella città vicina, per lei è quasi come se non esistesse. Quindi le SB si impegnano a fare in modo che i testi biblici e i loro sussidi siano davvero a disposizione delle persone. Non basta idearli e prepararli, occorre anche produrli in molte copie. E non basta produrli, occorre anche distribuirli sino a raggiungere i reali destinatari. Le SB si impegnano ad organizzare gruppi di preparazione, stabilimenti di produzione, strutture di trasporto, mezzi e luoghi di diffusione, occasioni di incontro, ...

- *la lingua, davvero familiare.* Se una edizione della Bibbia esiste, ma Mary Jones non riesce a comprenderla, per lei è come se non esistesse. Quindi le varie edizioni della Bibbia preparate dalla SB sono espresse nel maggior numero possibile di

11. Cf soprattutto Sogaard Viggo (ed.), *Communicating Scriptures*, Reading: 2001.

lingue diverse. Le lingue oggi esistenti nel mondo sono circa settemila. E agli inizi del terzo millennio il bilancio delle SB dice: almeno un libro completo della Bibbia è stato tradotto in oltre duemila lingue; il Nuovo Testamento in quasi mille; la Bibbia completa in quasi quattrocento. Molto resta ancora da fare.

- *il prezzo, davvero abbordabile.* Se una edizione della Bibbia è stata prodotta ed è stata portata lì vicino, ma il suo prezzo supera nettamente le possibilità economiche di Mary Jones così che quella persona non riesce a comperarla, per lei è come se quella Bibbia non esistesse. Quindi le SB fanno in modo che ogni edizione biblica abbia un prezzo corrispondente al salario di un giorno o di qualche ora di lavoro di un lavoratore dipendente nell'ambiente dove essa è distribuita. Inoltre, un sistema internazionale di sussidi fraterni, consistenti ed efficaci, permette di intervenire mantenendo dei prezzi abbordabili per i destinatari quando questo obiettivo può risultare problematico per una particolare SB o area geografica. Quindi ogni SB è impegnata anche in programmi di *Fund Raising* per sostenere la diffusione della Bibbia nei paesi dove maggiori sono le difficoltà economiche.

4. Competenza, indipendenza e spiritualità.

Anche nelle UBS si può osservare un misto di elementi che facilmente si incontra in molte organizzazioni più o meno analoghe: un impegno di produzione che non ha un preciso scopo di lucro; un continuo desiderio di migliorare la qualità dei propri prodotti; la decisa volontà di non compromettere la propria libertà fondamentale. In altri termini: una necessità di agire; una volontà di agire bene, con competenza, producendo frutti di buona qualità; una continua persuasione di non dover rinunciare alla propria indipendenza. Qui consideriamo da vicino come gli aspetti di competenza, indipendenza e spiritualità si manifestano in alcuni ambiti principali: la traduzione, la produzione-diffusione, i rapporti con le chiese. E nel medesimo contesto sembra opportuno collocare una precisazione, spesso richiesta, circa il rapporto che esiste tra qualità ecumenica e qualità interconfessionale della cooperazione dei cristiani.

Traduzione. Sia che scelgano di riprodurre la Bibbia su carta stampata, sia che scelgano di adottare altri supporti, sempre le SB mettono al primo posto dei loro impegni la traduzione dei testi biblici a partire dalle forme linguistiche originarie. Ora, se il tradurre è anche una tecnica, in ogni caso esso presuppone alcune competenze da studioso: soprattutto la critica testuale applicata ai manoscritti biblici

e l'esegesi dei testi biblici. In seguito viene il tradurre vero e proprio; e questo non si può mai considerare esaurito una volta per tutte: ogni qualche decennio è da riprendere sempre di nuovo, soprattutto poiché sono in continua evoluzione le lingue dei nuovi destinatari. Ma anche perché progredisce la conoscenza delle lingue originarie e in genere le conoscenze di tipo storico-letterario. Per poter tradurre bene la Bibbia sono richieste le varie competenze dei buoni traduttori: quelle specifiche descritte dalla traduttologia o scienza del tradurre e quelle alimentate da ulteriori abilità connesse alla linguistica, alla gestione della letteratura scritta, alla scienza della comunicazione. Inoltre, com'è noto, nel tradurre la Bibbia è necessario compiere alcune scelte le quali possono essere sostenute soltanto da chi possiede chiare competenze in ambito di pastorale, di sociologia e di psicologia religiosa.

In genere una singola SB non può possedere da sola tutte le competenze necessarie per svolgere un progetto di traduzione della Bibbia; perciò la struttura UBS/ABU ha preparato e mette a disposizione due tipi di sostegni. Da una parte, una serie di strumenti: edizioni critiche da adottare, vari sussidi da utilizzare, alcuni esempi di traduzioni bibliche precedenti che possono essere assunte come modelli. Dall'altra, una rete internazionale di persone: degli esperti professionisti - i "consulenti di traduzione biblica"¹² - che sono preparati e disponibili per accompagnare le persone coinvolte, prima per aiutare a pianificare un intero progetto, poi per guidare e aiutare durante la sua realizzazione. Una singola SB è sempre all'origine di ogni progetto e, dopo la sua conclusione, rimane unica responsabile della destinazione del suo prodotto finale; gli esperti TC delle UBS si limitano ad assistere il progetto in ogni sua tappa.

Produzione e diffusione. A questo livello le competenze presupposte sono prevalentemente di natura tecnica e perciò le SB dispongono di persone che sono tecnici esperti in un ambito specifico. Le loro competenze corrispondono a quelle classiche di ogni organizzazione produttiva: pianificazione, Fund Raising, grafica editoria, didattica, psicologia, comunicazione e informazione, distribuzione logistica, amministrazione, ecc.

Anche in questo ambito spesso una SB locale non è in grado di fare tutto da sola. Perciò essa fa ricorso alle risorse comuni e centralizzate che l'insieme delle SB mette a disposizione per la realizzazione di ogni singolo progetto promosso da

12. Oppure TC (" translation consultants ").

una SB. In tal caso tra centro e periferia si verifica nuovamente una certa tensione dialettica: mentre ogni singolo progetto è e rimane di una SB, la sua assistenza da parte di esperti esterni può essere più o meno vasta e profonda.

Inoltre, particolarmente a questo livello sono percepibili due tipi di importantissime conclusioni. Primo, risulta sommamente varia la gamma delle competenze che possono essere convocate: da quella di chi sa organizzare una spedizione, a quella di chi sa gestire una campagna di raccolta delle donazioni, a quella di chi sa condurre un mezzo di trasporto, a quella di chi è in grado di gestire i registri contabili, a quella di chi sa tenere i contatti con le tipografie, ecc. Secondo, pare evidente che la spiritualità delle SB è aperta a tutte quelle varie attività; infatti, tutte possono essere alimentate specialmente dalle “due grandi passioni” sopra descritte: il forte amore per la Parola di Dio scritta, e la forte sollecitudine verso il Popolo di Dio. Quindi tutte le persone che operano nelle SB debbono e possono essere veramente sostenute soprattutto da quelle passioni: sia le persone che compiono azioni modestamente materiali (da un imballaggio a una serie di telefonate) sia le persone che svolgono impegni più sofisticati (dalla revisione stilistica di una bozza di traduzione, all’animazione di un gruppo biblico che inizia a usare una nuova traduzione, alla guida in una mostra biblica).¹³

Un’osservazione circa la natura degli esperti che a vario titolo collaborano con le SB, risulta illuminante per intendere sia la natura delle competenze raccolte e messe in atto sia il tipo di coinvolgimento che la collaborazione rappresenta. Infatti, sono relativamente poche le persone che trovano all’interno delle SB un’occupazione stabile e a tempo pieno. Ad ogni livello, invece, sono molto più numerose le persone coinvolte in maniera saltuaria e a tempo parziale. Il che dice: la collaborazione con le SB non implica necessariamente una vocazione impegnativa in senso totalizzante né tanto meno una vocazione globale di tipo quasi monacale; le persone esperte che offrono la loro competenza possono avere già, e continuare a svolgere, anche altri impegni; quindi una collaborazione con le SB è pienamente rivolta anche a persone cristiane laiche già variamente impegnate.

13. Cf. una lucidissima affermazione del primo dei due documenti “The Identity and Ethos of UBS” (“Identità e carattere dell’Alleanza Biblica Universale”) diffusi al termine della già citata Assemblea Mondiale UBS di Midrand (ottobre 2000): “Le Società Bibliche sono un’espressione della comunione del popolo di Dio che condivide i propri doni. Questi includono, per esempio, doni spirituali, conoscenza, denaro, tempo, talenti e tecnologia.”

Rapporti con le chiese. E' tuttora diffuso il sospetto che spesso le SB non abbiano un atteggiamento molto amichevole nei confronti delle Chiese, soprattutto nel senso che non ne riconoscono esplicitamente l'esistenza, non cercano di collaborare con loro e ancor meno di aiutarle. Si tratta di un sospetto piuttosto antiquato, che oggi non trova molte conferme né a livello formale né a livello pastorale.¹⁴ Per la prassi possono agevolmente essere consultate le testimonianze dirette;¹⁵ per i programmi ufficiali e le intenzioni esplicite vanno letti i testi dei documenti più autorevoli.

L'Assemblea Mondiale UBS/ABU di Midrand (ottobre 2000) ha prodotto il già citato documento *"Identità e carattere dell'Alleanza Biblica Universale"*, breve e prezioso, nel quale si offre una autorevolissima e rinnovata autodefinizione.¹⁶ Lì una delle osservazioni iniziali dichiara molto esplicitamente: "Le Società Bibliche portano avanti il loro compito in accordo e cooperazione con tutte le Chiese cristiane e con le organizzazioni collegate con le Chiese". E sotto il suo paragrafo *"Società*

14. Ad es. oggi non le ha circa la Chiesa Cattolica. Per i rapporti ufficiali tra persone, vedi i numerosi incontri con il papa e le parole scambiate in tali occasioni (14.4.1969; 27.11.1976; 30.9.1985; 16.11.1987; 26.10.1989; 3.10.1991; 16.3.1995; 26.11.2001): il papa ha più volte invocato la benedizione di Dio sul "nobile lavoro" di UBS/ABU, ha indicato il loro impegno "infaticabile" e zelo "diligente" come un importante servizio reso all'apostolato biblico (1995); da parte del papa anche le pesanti polemiche del passato sono ormai sepolte; oggi egli loda e benedice le Società Bibliche; sembra ammirare e lodare la stessa spiritualità delle SB. Per i documenti-accordi vedi i già citati "Guidelines for interconfessional cooperation in translating the Bible" (1987), un documento preziosissimo e molto pratico che è stato firmato proprio in Vaticano. Per le iniziative pastorali in Italia vedi ad es. il Giubileo 2000; lì ha avuto luogo un episodio clamoroso: a Roma, il 19 agosto 2000, nella XV Giornata Mondiale della Gioventù, il papa distribuisce ai giovani il vangelo di Marco; e, su esplicita richiesta cattolica, quel libro viene preparato dalla SB Italiana.

Per la cooperazione interconfessionale cf. tante collaborazioni: quella, già lunghissima, della Soc. Biblica in Italia (SBI) con le case editrici cattoliche (la Bibbia in lingua corrente - TILC - è sempre una co-edizione LDC-ABU); quella con l'Ufficio Scuola del Vicariato di Roma (preparando e diffondendo il fascicolo "Il Codice Bibbia"); quella con il Settore Apostolato Biblico della Cei (i vari scambi); quella con la diocesi di Roma (aiutando la pastorale verso i cristiani latino-americani); quella con gli operatori in ambito sanitario e carcerario; quella con le parrocchie e le scuole (per le mostre bibliche e le giornate della Bibbia); ecc. Ancora in Italia, per alcune iniziative (il vangelo secondo Luca per gli alberghi; Giovanni, Matteo e Marco per persone colte) la Soc. Biblica ha coinvolto anche la Chiesa Ortodossa e molte comunità cristiane di area protestante.

15. Ad es. quella dei due autori di queste pagine.

16. Quel testo è stato un riferimento maggiore già nelle pagine precedenti. Un secondo documento della medesima Assemblea ("The Direction from Midrand") indica in maniera sintetica la prospettiva scelta. Ora, circa il tema del rapporto delle SB con le Chiese, pare opportuno citarli esplicitamente. (Il testo originale di entrambi è in lingua inglese; qui del primo citiamo la versione italiana apparsa sul bollettino della Società Biblica in Italia - *La Parola*, anno XVI n. 1, gennaio-aprile 2001 - mentre la traduzione del secondo è nostra).

Bibliche: chi siamo” si legge: “Le Società Bibliche considerano le Chiese come i responsabili principali della missione di Dio nel mondo. Le Società Bibliche servono le Chiese e le organizzazioni loro affiancate come una risorsa [cui fare riferimento], ma non usurpano la missione delle Chiese. In alcune situazioni però, le Società Bibliche possono aiutare al meglio le chiese facendo da catalizzatori e pionieri nella prima linea della missione, aprendo nuove aree alla testimonianza cristiana. Le Società Bibliche affermano che le Sacre Scritture appartengono a tutte le Chiese, e riconoscono che le interpretazioni dottrinali delle Scritture spettano alle Chiese.”

Sotto un altro paragrafo (“*Società Bibliche: come lavoriamo insieme*”) si legge: “Le Società Bibliche lavorano con una cooperazione nella quale si cerca di essere al servizio l’uno l’altro, e insieme di servire le Chiese nello spirito con il quale Cristo serve noi.” Inoltre, il secondo dei due documenti di Midrand 2000 ribadisce molto nettamente la prospettiva interconfessionale. Dice: “Noi siamo impegnati a servire le chiese di ogni confessione cristiana e a cercare di collaborare con le organizzazioni collegate alle chiese.”¹⁷ Il che permette senza dubbio di concludere: quando qualcuno delle Chiese cristiane incontra le SB, si trova di fronte a persone che condividono la medesima fede e per qualche aspetto il medesimo impegno; in altre parole, incontra gente che si dichiara felicemente consapevole di aver ricevuto un dono e un compito, da svolgere a servizio della chiesa, per il quale le forze umane non sono sufficienti: “UBS/ABU esiste per servire il Signore Gesù Cristo e la Sua chiesa fornendo la Sacra Scrittura alla gente del mondo e promuovendola per loro. Noi siamo lieti di questa vocazione e riconosciamo che per compierla noi dipendiamo dalla forza e dalla guida dello Spirito Santo.”¹⁸ La volontà di stabilire contatti con le chiese è, almeno in linea di principio, chiaramente affermata: “[...] noi ci sforziamo di [...] cercare la collaborazione con chiese e organismi cristiani, là dove le nostre rispettive missioni si sovrappongono, per meglio compiere il nostro compito.”¹⁹

In particolare, specialmente nell’ambito del tema dei rapporti con le chiese, pare degno di ripresa e di sottolineatura particolare un elemento della fisionomia di ABU / UBS: la decisa e stretta mistura di aspetti religioso-spirituali e aspetti tecnico-materiali. La chiara comprensione di quell’elemento permette di capire correttamente

17. “Direction from Midrand”, nel paragrafo “Noi siamo ‘una associazione mondiale’.”

18. “Il testo di Midrand 2000. Identità e carattere dell’Alleanza Biblica Universale”, all’inizio.

19. “Il testo di Midrand ...” nel paragrafo “Noi siamo ‘Popolo di Dio che condivide le risorse’.”

in quali termini si può porre una qualsiasi collaborazione. Come sappiamo, in ambienti cristiani un tale fenomeno non è affatto nuovo; già in molti episodi del passato alcune persone cristiane si sono mostrate capaci di combinare una esplicita spiritualità e qualche innegabile abilità; e in questo senso nei casi migliori le SB si collocano sulla linea delle grandi imprese cristiane di ogni tempo. La consapevolezza di essere investiti di una tale vocazione complessa trova una bella espressione in parole di questo genere: “Come Società Bibliche riunite insieme per consultazione, reciproco aiuto e collaborazione, noi ci impegniamo a mettere in pratica la *koinonìa* cristiana condividendo in modo creativo le nostre risorse di persone, di denaro e di conoscenza durante l’assolvimento del nostro comune compito.”²⁰

“*Interconfessionale = ecumenico?*” Un punto specialmente urgente nel contesto dei rapporti con le chiese è quello circa la natura ecumenica o meno di UBS/ABU. Ad es., nelle pagine più volte citate leggiamo: “Come associazione mondiale noi ci assumiamo l’impegno di [...] rinvigorire la natura interconfessionale della nostra fraternità nel servizio a tutte le chiese, nella nostra Società Biblica, nel nostro modo di dirigere e nel nostro scegliere il personale di UBS.”²¹ Si può vedere che qui, come accade spesso e di preferenza nelle SB, viene usato il termine “interconfessionale” e non il termine “ecumenico”. Non sono rare le domande di questo tipo: “Ma *interconfessionale* vuol dire ancora *ecumenico*?”; e: “se no, che differenza c’è?” oppure: “le SB hanno sempre parlato così?” E’ possibile dare una risposta-precisazione semplice e chiara che certamente può aiutare a meglio comprendere la fisionomia delle SB.

Ecumenismo e attività interconfessionale non sono sempre la stessa cosa. L’ecumenismo rimanda all’unità che i cristiani debbono ancora raggiungere, e la promuove. Invece, l’attività interconfessionale parte dal grado d’unità che di fatto già esiste tra i cristiani, e promuove iniziative di cooperazione tra loro. In questo senso le SB sono “interconfessionali”, cioè si mettono a servizio di tutte le chiese così come esse sono, senza lavorare direttamente per cambiarle. Tuttavia un fatto è innegabile: l’azione interconfessionale favorisce in modo molto reale e molto concreto lo stesso movimento ecumenico; quelli che imparano a lavorare insieme imparano anche a capirsi e alimentano il desiderio di essere più uniti...

20. “Il testo di Midrand ...” nel paragrafo “Noi siamo ‘Popolo di Dio che condivide le risorse’ ”; cf. anche le parole qui riferite già in una nota precedente (n. 8).

21. “Direction from Midrand”, nel paragrafo “Noi siamo ‘una associazione mondiale’”

Per le SB di UBS/ABU la dimensione interconfessionale è una costante originaria: infatti, sin dai primi inizi il movimento delle SB riunisce Anglicani, Luterani, Riformati, Ortodossi (Russia, Grecia) e Cattolici (Malta, Russia, Germania).²² Ma tale clima dura poco: nel 1826 alcuni Protestanti decidono di preparare sempre edizioni della Bibbia senza i libri “Deuterocanonici” (detti “Apocrifi” dai Protestanti), ma non per questa loro decisione essi sono invitati a separarsi dalla famiglia delle SB. E a partire da allora si moltiplicano i malintesi: ad es. sempre più forti sorgono alcune autorevoli voci cattoliche a denunciare le SB come strumenti di polemico proselitismo protestante e come fonte della diffusione di edizioni corrotte della Bibbia (in proposito, dal 1816 al 1897 vi sono anche alcune condanne papali molto dure²³). Di conseguenza, da allora le SB appaiono e sono quasi unicamente protestanti.

Schematicamente, ecco la storia. All’inizio le SB raccolgono soprattutto persone appartenenti a comunità ecclesiali di area protestante, spesso in notevole e penosa tensione tra loro. Poi anche alcuni Cattolici e Ortodossi. Ma presto questi si ritirano, in quanto non approvano la politica del “senza note” né accettano le scelte di pubblicare la Bibbia “senza i libri Deuterocanonici” dell’AT. Così, in pratica l’originaria apertura quasi sparisce. Pertanto le SB restano quasi soltanto protestanti; ma è interessante notare che in origine esse non avrebbero voluto essere così. In seguito, coerentemente all’ispirazione originaria grazie all’evolversi positivo dei rapporti tra le chiese, la situazione confessionale delle SB cambia moltissimo. Tanto che oggi è ormai evidente come all’interno di UBS/ABU, ai vari livelli di funzione e di autorità, sempre più ci sia posto anche per persone di confessione ortodossa o cattolica.²⁴

Infine una questione è sempre critica nel rapporto con le chiese: le persone attive nelle SB sono soltanto laici o anche membri del clero? I 300 fondatori originari della citata prima SB inglese erano tutti laici: commercianti, ufficiali, funzionari amministrativi, parlamentari e diplomatici; e la loro famosa riunione non si è tenuta in una chiesa, ma in una locanda. A quella iniziativa le persone del clero non hanno parte; anzi non sono nemmeno state coinvolte in modo diretto; i fondatori hanno scelto di fare così proprio per poter meglio agire a favore della cooperazione tra

22. E a quel tempo una vera cooperazione è possibile anche perché, proprio allo scopo di non dare spazio a eventuali contrasti, le SB decidono di distribuire la Bibbia senza note né commenti.

23. Ad es. nel Sillabo di Pio IX una condanna accomuna società socialiste, massoniche e bibliche.

24. In proposito i due autori di queste pagine possono fornirne una testimonianza personale.

realtà ecclesiali diverse che spesso erano polemicamente separate. (E anche in seguito, fino ad oggi, le SB, mondialmente organizzate come UBS, in maniera diretta non dipendono da nessuna autorità ecclesiale). Alle origini delle SB, i membri del clero non possono nemmeno farne parte; poi, in molte SB si ammette la presenza anche attiva di molti singoli individui appartenenti al clero; tuttavia, essi non sono mai soltanto nominati da una chiesa; sono presenti soprattutto perché chiamati dalle UBS, quindi a titolo personale e non come dei formali delegati. Ancor oggi, nessun ruolo dirigente è assegnato da una qualche autorità ecclesiastica.

5. In contesto interconfessionale.

Ora vengono descritte le caratteristiche dell'operare in collaborazione interconfessionale, cioè in un contesto o clima che per UBS/ABU non è mai come eccezionale. Può risultare non difficile avvertire che alcuni degli aspetti indicati riprendono dei punti già visti. Tuttavia notiamo che qui sono riconsiderati in prospettiva un po' diversa: non soltanto quella dell'operare e dell'operare insieme, ma quella dell'operare insieme tra persone che provengono da confessioni e tradizioni cristiane differenti.

Rapporti interconfessionali tra persone. Circa i rapporti di UBS/ABU con le varie chiese - e in particolare circa la generale distinzione tra "ecumenico" e "interconfessionale" - molto è già stato detto qui sopra.²⁵ Ora notiamo come si può compiere non tanto la collaborazione con le chiese, ma quella che si realizza tra persone le quali, pur continuando ad appartenere a chiese diverse, operano davvero insieme. Notiamo anzitutto come quella collaborazione abbia soprattutto un fondamento: l'essere tutti dei cristiani. E' quanto viene detto molto chiaramente nel testo che contiene la più pregevole e autorevole auto-definizione di UBS/ABU, al paragrafo "Come lavoriamo insieme": "Le Società Bibliche lavorano con una cooperazione nella quale si cerca di essere al servizio gli uni degli altri, e insieme di servire le Chiese nello spirito con il quale Cristo serve noi. Paolo descrive questo mutuo servizio nella sua lettera ai Filippesi «i vostri rapporti reciproci siano fondati sul fatto che siete uniti a Cristo Gesù» (Flp 2,3-5)."²⁶

25. Cf. qui il paragrafo dedicato a descrivere i rapporti con le chiese.

26. "Il testo di Midrand 2000..." al paragrafo: "Società Bibliche: come lavoriamo insieme".

Lo stile della collaborazione è caratterizzato da tre aspetti: a) la trasparenza, per cui nessuno tende a nascondere o mettere tra parentesi la propria identità confessionale; b) la dipendenza reciproca, vale a dire la messa in atto della responsabilità di ciascuno verso gli altri, per cui i ruoli di controllo e dipendenza non sono reattivi alle qualifiche confessionali; c) l'impiego responsabile delle risorse di tutti, intese come doni ricevuti da Dio i quali debbono essere fatti fruttare per il bene comune ("Lavorando insieme, le Società Bibliche si impegnano ad avere relazioni trasparenti, mutuo rendiconto, e uso responsabile dei doni di Dio"²⁷).

Il clima piuttosto familiare che abitualmente si sperimenta negli ambienti UBS/ABU non è soltanto un esito spontaneo o un atteggiamento di sapore piuttosto romantico. Invece è anche e soprattutto un serio proposito originario il quale trova la sua possibilità nella consapevolezza circa la situazione interconfessionale dei cristiani. Esso si radica nella certezza che le reali distinzioni e differenze non annullano la realissima unità di fondo, in forza della quale i cristiani che hanno doni diversi possono e devono metterli in comune ("Le Società Bibliche hanno fin dall'inizio lavorato insieme come una famiglia. Provenendo da ambienti diversi e dotate di doni spirituali differenti, esse hanno messo in comune progetti e forze per ampliare il loro lavoro comune"²⁸).

Capacità di collaborare. All'interno di UBS/ABU tale abilità non è vista soltanto come il semplice riuscire a stare insieme o convivere grazie ad un allenamento circa la reciproca sopportazione. Ben più positivamente, essa è intesa come il riuscire anche a manifestare dei comuni interessi, a individuare dei problemi - propri o altrui - che veramente preoccupano tutti, a ideare e programmare insieme delle soluzioni per superarli, a unire le forze e le iniziative per mettere in atto un'effettiva ed efficace realizzazione di quei programmi, ad aiutarsi in ogni genere di difficoltà, a sostenersi nei vari momenti di crisi.

Molto genericamente, si può dire che anche in ambienti o situazioni molto anteriori e ulteriori rispetto a UBS/ABU, e per lo più in prospettiva piuttosto psicologica o sociologica, si pone attenzione alle condizioni affinché un cooperare sia davvero possibile ed efficiente. Così, come accade all'interno di varie organizzazioni dove operano insieme molte persone, anche in UBS/ABU è notevole

27. *ibid.*

28. *ibid.*

quest'attenzione.²⁹ In particolare e ad esempio: il già citato e pregiatissimo documento "Direttive per la cooperazione interconfessionale nella traduzione della Bibbia" (Roma 1987)³⁰ circa il gruppo dei traduttori dice quali caratteristiche sono considerate necessarie: "a) qualifiche professionali compatibili; b) competenze complementari; c) reciproco rispetto; d) capacità di lavorare insieme". L'ultimo punto - "capacità di lavorare insieme" - è indicato al termine della lista forse per dire che esso, ovviamente poco programmabile, può e deve essere preparato e sostenuto dai punti precedenti i quali invece sono piuttosto programmabili.

Personae gratae. E' stato già detto che le persone attive in queste imprese interconfessionali non sono primariamente, né totalmente né esclusivamente, incaricate da una chiesa.³¹ Tuttavia è molto opportuno osservare come in ogni caso UBS/ABU chieda ad esse di avere e mantenere dei buoni rapporti con le loro comunità ecclesiali. Il che deriva non soltanto da un banale desiderio di tranquillità, né soltanto da un'astuta e discutibile strategia di serenità; neppure nasce da una globale predilezione per uno stile di relazioni non aggressive oppure dalla volontà di evitare ogni penosa situazione polemica o conflittuale. Piuttosto è la conseguenza logica di un fatto semplice e fondamentale: le iniziative di UBS/ABU sono rivolte prevalentemente a gente comune, quindi a gente che molto spesso (anche se non sempre) si colloca all'interno di qualche comunità ecclesiale. Costoro hanno il diritto di incontrare la Bibbia non solo in una forma linguisticamente agevole e a condizioni economiche accessibili, ma anche in un contesto religioso amichevole; infatti molti di loro difficilmente potrebbero accettare una Bibbia che fosse preparata da persone le quali non hanno buone relazioni con le chiese. Quindi un rapporto negativo con le chiese è da evitare in quanto risulterebbe a svantaggio dei destinatari e rischierebbe di compromettere la presenza della Bibbia stessa.

Almeno per alcune delle persone attive in UBS/ABU la condizione di *personae gratae* alle chiese può avere anche una motivazione più profonda: essa dice che la Bibbia, pur potendo essere tradotta e diffusa grazie ad iniziative piuttosto

29. In tal senso risulta degno di nota il fatto che da vari anni sia ampiamente attivo all'interno di UBS/ABU un programma direttamente rivolto alle persone: "Human Resources Development".

30. "Guidelines for interconfessional cooperation in translating the Bible", Roma: 1987, 2.3.1.: "translation team"

31. Nei casi di relazioni strette e molto armoniche, le chiese indicano le persone e UBS/ABU le assume; oppure le chiese le assumono ma per renderle subito disponibili ad assumere un impegno interconfessionale per il quale esse ricevono da UBS/ABU prima un invito e poi un incarico.

indipendenti dalle autorità ecclesiastiche, in radice rimane legata alle chiese.³² Ovviamente questa motivazione risulta varia, perché varia è l'affermazione della rilevanza del fattore ecclesiale nella definizione stessa della fede. Ma proprio in tale varietà di prospettive diventa possibile la collaborazione interconfessionale.

Comunque, competenza. Anche a livello interconfessionale in UBS/ABU il possesso di una effettiva competenza è considerato una condizione di principio, irrinunciabile. Il significato di tale principio si riflette e si applica a vari livelli. Primo, significa che il contesto interconfessionale non può mai diventare una sorta di alibi per coprire un prevalente diletterantismo, nemmeno quello di persone eventualmente molto pie. Secondo, significa che per la cooperazione interconfessionale non è sufficiente un appello alla generica buona volontà delle persone coinvolte. Terzo, significa che le SB continuano a fondare il loro servizio sulla capacità di agire con sicura competenza; il loro spirito di autonomia deriva non tanto da una volontà di indipendenza che forse potrebbe essere un po' discutibile, ma anche e prima di tutto dalla evidente solidità delle competenze attive al loro interno. Sin dall'origine delle SB tali competenze sono molto evidenti e non richiedono altri sostegni autorevoli.

Le competenze richieste sono soprattutto quelle di traduttori, esegeti e revisori. Infatti essi devono possedere: una solida conoscenza dell'interpretazione delle lingue originarie dei testi biblici originari; una sicura conoscenza delle risorse e del contesto letterario della lingua attuale che per i nuovi destinatari è quella più familiare; una vasta conoscenza della Bibbia e della sua rilevanza, sia specificamente cristiana sia genericamente umana; una conoscenza sia teorica sia pratica dei maggiori temi della scienza del tradurre e delle varie possibilità che il tradurre può mettere in atto. Inoltre ogni SB di UBS/ABU fa in modo che siano assicurate anche altre competenze le quali pure sono ritenute indispensabili alla gestione globale delle sue attività: quelle di direzione, di governo e di amministrazione. In proposito

32. Un po' su questa linea può forse intendersi almeno in parte un punto della più volte citata dichiarazione "Identità e carattere dell'Alleanza Biblica Universale", Midrand 2000: "Le Società Bibliche affermano che le Sacre Scritture appartengono a tutte le Chiese, e riconoscono che le interpretazioni dottrinali delle Scritture spettano alle Chiese".

il documento di Midrand 2000 le indica molto esplicitamente come “tre funzioni tra loro correlate”³³.

Infine sembra di poter dire che quello spirito di generale solida competenza è indicato anche - e forse in maniera speciale - in un'affermazione che si legge nel medesimo documento: “Le Società Bibliche operano con principi di sana e corretta amministrazione in modo da ottenere la massima efficacia ed efficienza nel loro servizio”. Ed è importantissima la precisazione che subito l'accompagna: “... lo scopo ultimo della loro attività rimane comunque il compimento del Grande Mandato Missionario” (cioè quello di Mt 28,18).

6. Il modello UBS/ABU può essere proposto anche a molti altri laici.

Le caratteristiche della spiritualità interconfessionale sono quelle più volte già indicate. Qui le riprendiamo ancora, non più per descriverle, ma piuttosto per esaminare se e in quale misura possano essere assunte e applicate nel contesto italiano.

Prima caratteristica è l'apertura alla cooperazione interconfessionale. Bisogna ammettere che in proposito le situazioni appaiono molto diverse al variare delle regioni. In alcune zone d'Italia la presenza di persone cristiane appartenenti a confessioni diverse risulta ampiamente nota nel senso che è molto familiare e forse addirittura tradizionale; in altre zone, al contrario, quella presenza è minima e quindi sostanzialmente ignorata dai più. Ad esempio, in alcune città è diffusa da generazioni l'esperienza di incontrare un insegnante o un medico o un commerciante o un collega o un compagno di scuola... il quale è sì cristiano ma

33. *Direzione.* Questa ispira e incoraggia ad adempiere i proponimenti espressi, stabilisce le strategie, collega persone e concetti, reagisce alle sfide e ai pericoli che si presentano. Tutto ciò è compito dei Comitati UBS/ABU, dei Comitati delle SB e del Global Senior Management Team.

Governo. Gli organi di governo stabiliscono la strategia politica, determinano la dislocazione delle risorse, e controllano il rendimento delle attività secondo i criteri operativi dell'Alleanza. Questa funzione è portata avanti da gruppi rappresentativi, eletti dalle Società membro di UBS/ABU per agire per loro conto come Comitati, in linea con le direttive strategiche decise dalle Società membro riunite nell'Assemblea mondiale.

Amministrazione. Il compito di amministrazione riguarda i servizi amministrativi e tecnici per le (e in favore delle) Società membro. Sono sostenuti dalle Società membro e dai Centri Servizio di UBS/ABU. Questi servizi includono anche il lavoro amministrativo nei paesi in cui non è stabilita una Società Biblica la quale è membro UBS/ABU.

non cattolico; anzi, non poche volte esistono persino degli edifici – per tutti visibili nel panorama quotidiano – che sono noti ad es. come “tempio” o “chiesa dei Protestanti”. D'altra parte, specialmente in alcune cittadine minori, esistono ambienti dove quelle esperienze non accadono e di conseguenza gli abitanti possono non aver mai ricevuto alcuno stimolo verso una sensibilità interconfessionale. Così che di fronte ad essa le persone, anche se non sono affatto contrarie, risultano insensibili o comunque molto immature. A questo contribuisce a volte il fatto che, pur non muovendo da sentimenti o pregiudizi negativi, nello stesso clero cattolico risulti ancora notevole la carenza d'informazione sulle chiese cristiane non cattoliche, sia in Italia che nel mondo.

Ancor più drammatica può essere la situazione di chi ha respirato sì il tema della convivenza di persone cristiane appartenenti a confessioni diverse, ma dal proprio ambiente ha appreso a intenderla in maniera pesantemente negativa, polemica. Poiché, tradizionalmente e a lungo, cattolici e altri cristiani sono rimasti su posizioni di reciproco contrasto, la forza dei giudizi precostituiti può costituire un grandissimo ostacolo per l'assunzione di una vera spiritualità interconfessionale. In precedenza abbiamo ribadito e precisato come questa non s'identifichi con la spiritualità ecumenica, cioè con l'atteggiamento di chi ha maturato la convinzione che tutti i cristiani debbono - e quindi possono - convergere verso l'unità voluta da Cristo. Come abbiamo indicato, la sua base è ancora precedente; è costituita anzitutto dalla convinzione che i cristiani, oltre le loro innegabili diversità e divisioni, siano capaci di operare insieme per la comprensione, traduzione, stampa e diffusione della Bibbia. Ma, logicamente, quella base include una minima, serena persuasione positiva rispetto a tutti gli “altri” cristiani: nessuno di loro è, in quanto protestante o ortodosso o cattolico, incapace di operare per una buona diffusione della Bibbia. Quelle eventuali capacità o incapacità vanno naturalmente verificate (come avviene in UBS/ABU); ma lo sono sul piano delle competenze, e non mai su quello delle appartenenze confessionali. Se dunque è vero che può assumere una spiritualità interconfessionale soltanto chi possiede una chiara apertura interconfessionale, è anche vero che la pratica assunzione di qualche impegno in ambito interconfessionale non richiede una maturità raffinata; per cominciare basta un generico atteggiamento di apertura; poi la stessa esperienza del vivere all'interno di UBS/ABU risulta un'ottima scuola per maturare quell'atteggiamento. Sembra di poter dire che, in proposito, la grande maggioranza dei laici cattolici italiani è in una condizione sufficiente.

Un'altra caratteristica consiste nel forte amore per la Parola di Dio scritta. È

la seconda condizione necessaria per chi chiede di poter far propria una spiritualità interconfessionale. In quanto tale, essa può certo realizzarsi anche in ambiti diversi da quello biblico. Infatti esistono esperienze di tipo interconfessionale attuate in altri contesti; e non soltanto quelli tecnico-pratici dove la componente cristiana può rimanere marginale, ma anche quelli costituiti da contesti umani nei quali la colorazione cristiana dell'impegno può risultare particolarmente significativa: ad esempio la cura di persone malate, l'educazione di giovani generazioni, in alcune città o nazioni anche l'impegno politico. Tuttavia, innegabilmente, è la Bibbia la base più solida della spiritualità interconfessionale. E comunque, in queste pagine noi ci siamo concentrati soprattutto sulla spiritualità interconfessionale di UBS/ABU: lì la Bibbia non è uno dei centri d'interesse delle persone, ma il centro fondamentale. Dal punto di vista dell'amore per la Parola di Dio scritta, gran parte dei laici cattolici italiani sembrano avere ormai le carte in regola.

Soprattutto dopo il concilio Vaticano II, non pochi tra i laici cattolici italiani hanno maturato un forte interesse per la Bibbia e per tutti i temi direttamente connessi ad essa. Lo dimostrano la grande diffusione della Bibbia (specialmente negli ambienti legati all'impegno diretto nella Chiesa), l'accostamento diretto della Bibbia (anche oltre la liturgia), le Scuole della Parola, la familiarità con la "Lectio Divina", i gruppi biblici, i corsi biblici, l'apostolato biblico, ecc. I cattolici già impegnati in questo senso sono naturalmente candidati a compiere concreti passi di avvicinamento verso la comunità delle persone raccolte in UBS/ABU. L'esperienza di chi – come gli autori di queste pagine – da anni conosce questa comunità dal suo interno, può assicurare che essi potrebbero trovarvi un contesto molto congeniale. Ma anche oltre i confini dei gruppi specialmente appassionati del mondo della Bibbia, il fondamentale amore per la Parola di Dio scritta qualifica almeno alcuni dei cattolici italiani (se non altro, quelli praticanti e organizzati), come adatti ad assumere la spiritualità di UBS/ABU.³⁴

34. È onesto ricordare che non soltanto UBS/ABU vive l'amore per la Parola di Dio scritta in maniera attiva e in uno stile interconfessionale; nel mondo esistono anche altre realtà - associazioni o movimenti - più o meno analoghe (ad es. l'associazione italiana "Biblia" che si dichiara "laica" ed è aperta a persone di tutte le confessioni). Inoltre: soprattutto in tempi recenti, UBS/ABU sviluppa forte sensibilità e seria attenzione per le forme non-scritte (i vari 'media' audio-video) dove la Bibbia si è incarnata e si incarna. Coerentemente, lì la passione fondamentale è l'amore verso la Parola di Dio, la quale ha nella forma scritta la sua manifestazione principale, ma non unica.

Terza grande caratteristica è un deciso desiderio di favorire l'incontro tra il Popolo di Dio e la Bibbia. Si tratta ovviamente di amore per il popolo dei credenti in Cristo, ma non soltanto di un amore generico. Specificamente, chi intende assumere una spiritualità interconfessionale deve possedere una precisa volontà di agire per aiutare quell'aspetto del bene del popolo di Dio che è costituito dalla sua familiarità con la Parola di Dio scritta. Il che si concretizza e si manifesta nel duplice impegno di rendere il testo accessibile e di mettere le persone in condizione di affrontare un testo scritto; per questo l'attività di UBS/ABU è spesso molto intrecciata con i temi della comunicazione efficace e della alfabetizzazione;³⁵ quindi sia con la scienza e la tecnica del tradurre, sia con la riflessione e la produzione di versioni audiovisive che il più possibile siano da considerare degli equivalenti fedeli ed efficaci. Anche circa questa caratteristica spirituale i laici cattolici italiani sono da considerare

adatti: almeno in chi partecipa più o meno assiduamente alla vita della Chiesa c'è in genere una buona predisposizione al servizio e al bene del popolo di Dio.

Quarta caratteristica fondamentale per le persone che intendono assumere e sviluppare una spiritualità di tipo interconfessionale è la decisione di mantenere rapporti di sicura armonia con la loro comunità ecclesiale, di alimentare un'evidente amicizia con le persone che la dirigono o più la rappresentano. Questo atteggiamento le rende fra l'altro pienamente credibili e meglio capaci di servire in maniera genuina tutti i loro destinatari, che sono soprattutto dei credenti praticanti. Non essendo separate dalle Chiese, le varie forme della Bibbia che esse producono, presentano e diffondono possono essere viste dagli altri come realtà affidabili, non imprevedibili né settarie in senso problematico-negativo. Di fatto, come abbiamo già notato, è vero che le persone attive in UBS/ABU non si presentano mai come mandate da una o più comunità ecclesiali; tuttavia si fanno conoscere come persone fedelmente connesse con qualcuna di esse. In altre parole, come s'è ampiamente indicato in precedenza, UBS/ABU non può essere considerata come una sorta di altra chiesa; invece, è una comunità di cristiani radicati ciascuno nella propria chiesa, che si mettono a disposizione delle persone di tutte le chiese per quanto riguarda il collegamento con la Bibbia. I laici cattolici italiani - quelli

35. Oggi l'attività di UBS/ABU si concentra ampiamente anche nella comunicazione oltre il medium della stampa, per favorire sia le persone che non sono in grado di leggere (i moltissimi analfabeti del mondo) sia le persone che non sanno o non vogliono fare un uso ampio e regolare della loro condizione di persone alfabetizzate (i molti e moderni non-lettori).

praticanti e organizzati - come si collocano in proposito? Forse una difficoltà è costituita dal fatto che spesso per loro risulta poco tradizionale, e quindi poco facile da accogliere, l'idea stessa di un'attività religiosa non regolamentata dalle autorità del clero. Ma sicuramente non è estranea alle loro preoccupazioni tradizionali la volontà di stabilire e mantenere dei rapporti di armonia con la loro comunità ecclesiale. Così che in genere essi non dovrebbero avere difficoltà ad assicurare questa caratteristica spirituale.

A livello ampio - ad es. europeo - una spiritualità di tipo interconfessionale potrebbe essere offerta, più di quanto avvenga ora, anche a persone che formalmente non appartengono alle comunità ecclesiali. A condizione che siano sinceramente interessate alla Bibbia, intesa come grande codice della cultura mondiale e come prezioso punto di riferimento per ogni buona spiritualità umana. Questo rappresenterebbe un contributo anche verso una nuova apertura globale alla ricchezza e alla varietà delle diverse tradizioni esistenti all'interno del cristianesimo europeo.

Nell'ambiente italiano, comunque, è già verificato che alcuni laici possano assumere un impegno biblico interconfessionale, autonomo e competente, attraverso il quale promuovere un'agevole ed efficace presenza della Bibbia in vari luoghi e momenti della vita comune. Ne è esempio proprio l'esperienza della Società Biblica in Italia, che, nonostante le dimensioni numeriche, finora abbastanza modeste (non arriva a un migliaio di soci), ha ottenuto alcuni straordinari risultati negli ultimi decenni.³⁶ Oltre al valore proprio, questi risultati, ottenuti nella "terra del papa", assumono un valore simbolico, che è di sprone ad altri paesi a maggioranza cattolica, nei quali a volte il lavoro biblico interconfessionale fatica a decollare. A di là di questo servizio verso il mondo intero, oltre i grandi eventi e i rapporti di vertice con le organizzazioni religiose e civili, è possibile in Italia fare ancora di più, consolidando una rete di iniziative ed attività diffuse e continuative?

L'esperienza della TILC, la cui diffusione nel primo decennio (1975-1985) coinvolse attivamente un'enorme fetta dell'associazionismo cattolico, suggerisce per analogia gli ingredienti di altre possibili azioni efficaci: (1) un progetto e una visione di un gruppo, anche piccolo, di cristiani motivati e competenti; (2) u

36. Ad esempio, come già richiamato altrove in questo articolo, la produzione e diffusione, nell'arco di 25 anni, di 5 milioni di copie della traduzione interconfessionale in lingua corrente (TILC), o milione di copie del vangelo di Marco in 5 lingue, distribuito dal Papa ai giovani della GMG n° 2000 (vedi nota 14). Anche altre associazioni bibliche di laici, come *Biblia* (www.biblia.org) o *Gideons* (www.gideons.org) hanno, ognuna secondo la propria specifica vocazione e le proprie possibilità, dato contributi notevoli.

“prodotto biblico” ben congegnato, che risponda ad esigenze reali e ben identificate; (3) la partnership con una realtà religiosa, culturale o anche commerciale capace di garantire, specialmente in caso di successo, una gestione efficace; (4) il sostegno di una struttura (come la SBI), con altissime competenze ed esperienza specifica in questo campo (quest’ingrediente è messo volutamente all’ultimo posto, perché, data la piccola dimensione e il già enorme impegno ordinario di simili strutture, non è sensato aspettarsi da loro un surplus di attività senza un adeguato apporto esterno).

In presenza di apporti esterni, però, i campi di possibile espansione dell’attività biblica dei laici sarebbero molteplici. Ad esempio, specialmente nelle famiglie, essa potrebbe riguardare la distribuzione di buone edizioni bibliche per bambini e per ragazzi,³⁷ oppure, specialmente nelle scuole, di sussidi che promuovano la conoscenza della Bibbia.³⁸ Edizioni bibliche adatte ed accessibili, per lingua e livello, potrebbero essere distribuite nell’ambiente dell’immigrazione,³⁹ in luoghi speciali come ospedali o carceri,⁴⁰ negli alberghi. I laici potrebbero impegnarsi anche nell’individuazione e nella promozione di avvenimenti pubblici artistici⁴¹ o culturali, come mostre e musei,⁴² nei quali la conoscenza del contesto e del contenuto della Bibbia venga proposta anche in forme audiovisive, oltre il libro stampato.



In sintesi, possiamo dire: l’attuale struttura SBI in Italia rappresenta un nucleo forte di esperienza e di risultati attorno al quale la spiritualità interconfessionale, a partire dal grande potenziale dei laici cattolici organizzati e praticanti, nella concretezza dell’impegno biblico potrebbe crescere e svilupparsi, estendendosi così da una élite di pionieri ad una frazione via via più significativa della chiesa italiana.

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37. In questo campo la SBI possiede già la pregevolissima edizione “*Chicchi di grano*”.

38. La SBI ha iniziato a distribuire un fascicolo che pare di grande utilità: “*Il Codice Bibbia*”.

39. Ad es. la SBI ha prodotto: una *diglotta* italiano-arabo del NT; un’edizione in spagnolo e in portoghese del Vangelo secondo *Marco*.

40. Su questa linea, la SBI ha già iniziato vari progetti che possono essere ulteriormente estesi.

41. Nel 2000 la SBI ha promosso una lettura del vangelo secondo *Marco*, in molte lingue diverse, all'interno degli antichi *Fori di Traiano* a Roma. Recentemente ha prodotto: l'edizione iper-interconfessionale di due vangeli (*Giovanni e Matteo*), a livello di lingua letteraria, con illustrazioni e commenti di tipo 'artistico'; un'edizione del NT con ricco apparato iconografico figurativo che attinge all'arte antica e moderna.
42. La SBI possiede già una *Mostra* itinerante molto richiesta e sta sviluppando dei progetti circa qualche mostra di tipo classico o di tipo elettronico.

Saint Augustine's Doctrine on Grace (3)*

Joseph Lupi

Justification

It is the central theme of the history of salvation, for justification implies the gift of salvation grace.

With Pelagius, Augustine admitted that men imitate Adam by sinning, and just men imitate Christ by leading a good life, but this is not all. At the beginning of his treatise on the remission of sins Augustine writes that all those who through disobedience break the commandments of God imitate Adam, but we must distinguish between a bad example which influences the will of a sinner, and the state in which those born in sin find themselves. Holy men imitate Christ by acting justly, but besides imitating Christ these holy people have the grace of God working in their souls illuminating and justifying them. This grace is also given to baptised infants, who quite evidently cannot imitate anyone. Therefore as Christ, in whom we all live, besides giving grace and justification to all those who imitate Him, also gives to the faithful the mysterious grace of his Holy Spirit, a grace which he infuses mysteriously also in infants, so also Adam, in whom we all die, besides giving a bad example to all those who imitate him by willingly breaking God's commandments, also left the stain of carnal concupiscence in all who are his descendant.⁸⁹ One should notice how much Augustine insists on the word *also*: not just imitation, but *also* something which penetrates deeply in man and precedes the action of free will. Justification therefore

*The first installments of this study appeared in the issues of *Melita Theologica* LIII (2002) 41–64 and LIII (2002) 175–184.

89. Imitantur quidem Adam, quotquot per inobedientiam transgrediuntur mandatum Dei; sed aliud est quod exemplum est voluntate peccantibus, aliud quod origo est cum peccato nascentibus. Nam et Christus imitantur sancti eius ad sequendam iustitiam ... sed praeter hanc imitationem gratia eius illuminationem iustificationemque nostram etiam intrinsecus operatur... Haec enim gratia baptizatos quoque parvulos suo inserit corpori, qui certe imitari aliquem nondum valent. Sicut ergo ille in quo omnes vivificantur, praeter quod se ad iustitiam exemplum imitantibus praebuit, dat etiam sui spiritus occultissima fidelibus gratiam, quam latentur infudit et parvulis, sic et ille in quo omnes moriuntur praeter quod eis qui praeceptum Domini voluntate transgrediuntur imitationis exemplum est, occulta etiam tabe carnalis concupiscentiae suae labificavit in se omnes de sua stirpe venturos (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1,8,10).

is not just imitation of Christ, but implies also the infusion of grace in man's souls. Augustine considers justification under its two aspects, the negative aspect (remission of sins), and the positive aspect (creation of the new man, restoration of God's image in man). We have already made references to remission of sins, and so we have now to speak about the positive aspect of justification, which is one of the most sublime themes in Augustinian anthropology.

Through sin the image of the Trinity in man was defaced, deformed, obscured, and through justification – the work of the Holy Spirit – the image of the Trinity from being a defaced image was changed into a beautiful one.⁹⁰ Some scholars have failed to notice this aspect of Augustine's doctrine, and have seen in Augustine's writings only references to external justification, perhaps misunderstanding Augustine's definition of original sin as concupiscence accompanied with guilt (*concupiscentia cum reatu*). The guilt (*reatus*) is removed by Baptism, while concupiscence remains. Augustine explains this idea of his with a reference to personal sins: personal sins, he says, once committed no longer remain actual (*ut actus*), but the guilt (*reatus*) remains until it is removed by contrition and confession; original sin, once remitted by Baptism, is no longer a guilt (*reatus*) but remains actual (*ut actus*). This explanation induced some scholars to conclude that remission is only external, a juridical act: sin remains but is no longer imputable. But this is not Augustine's opinion: the guilt (*reatus*) according to Augustine is completely taken away, abolished, cancelled, and this means that innocence has been restored: guilt is in opposition to innocence... God can give innocence back to man, by taking away his guilt.⁹¹ For Augustine to be without sin (*non habere peccatum*) means to be free from guilt (*reum non esse peccati*); before God there cannot be any sin if there is no guilt; one should never think that sin has not been abolished, but only hidden, and therefore still present and alive.⁹³

Probably Augustine has been misunderstood, because his distinction between concupiscence – sin and concupiscence – evil has been ignored. In the just, concupiscence is not a sin but an evil, and if Augustine sometimes calls it a sin, it is because he is using Biblical language, he is using metaphorical speech, as we have already remarked.

90. a deformi forma formosam transfertur in formam (*De Trinitate* 15,8,14).

91. reatus magnus malum innocentiae contrarium ... Deus autem potest hominem, reatu ablato, ad innocentiam revocare (*Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* 8,19).

92. *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1,26,29.

93. Nec sic intellegatis ... peccata cooperta sunt, quasi ibi sint et vivant (*Enarratio in Ps.* 31,2,9).

Although Augustine, because of his controversy with the Pelagians, insisted more on the negative aspect of justification, he did not ignore its positive aspect, which for him was much more important. In fact, when not writing controversial works, he speaks highly of the positive aspects of justification i.e. man's deification and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in man. Some might think that these themes are proper to the Greek Fathers, who insisted on man's deification and Christ's divinity (God became man so that men might become gods) against the Arians, and insisted on the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in man against the Macedonians who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Commenting on Psalm 82, Augustine says: "It is quite evident that God has called men gods, deified through his grace, not born of his substance... He who justifies is just in himself, not through others. He who justifies also deifies, for through justification we become God's children: 'He gave power to become children of God' (Jn 1,12). If we have become sons of God, we are also gods, but this through the grace of him who adopted us as his sons." Man's deification will attain its full perfection in the *eskaton* (*Sermo* 166,4).

Deification comes through participation in divine life and through love.

i. *Participation in divine life*: "as the soul is the life of the body, so God is the life of the soul,"⁹⁴ Augustine tells us. When the soul is justified, it participates in a life which is not its own, "which is not what she is."⁹⁵ Augustine clearly distinguishes divine life in itself from divine life in man: "Men are not gods through their existence, but become gods by participating in the life of Him who is the only one true God."⁹⁶

ii. *Love of God*, in Augustine, is at the centre of man's life, of man's history and of the history of salvation: "Adhering to the eternal Creator, we must of necessity be influenced by eternity."⁹⁷ This same idea is expressed elsewhere by Augustine in a popular way when he writes: "Everyone is similar to the love he has", then concludes: "Are you in love with the world? Then you are of the world. Are you in

94. Sicut vita corporis anima, sic vita animae Deus (*Enarratio in Ps.* 70,2,3).

95. Quod non est quod ipsa (*In Ioannis Evangelium tractatus* 9,11).

96. Homines non existendo sunt dii, sed fiunt participando illius qui verus est Deus (*Enarratio in Ps.* 118,16,1).

97. Aeterno enim Creatori adhaerentes et nos aeternitate afficiamur necesse est (*De vera religione* 10,19).

love with God, what should I say? would you be God? I dare not say it, but the Scriptures say it 'You are gods, sons of the Most High' (Ps 82,6).⁹⁸

For Augustine, man's deification is the effect of the Incarnation and he often repeats a saying so dear to the Greek Fathers: "He who was God and became man, will make gods those who were men."⁹⁹

Briefly, justification does not simply imply a remission of sins, but also something deeper: a spiritual renewal on the ontological and moral level which brings about man's deification.

This spiritual renewal implies also the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in man. In *Epist.* 187 (a treatise rather than a letter, on account of its great length) Augustine develops his ideas distinguishing the presence of God in creatures from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and giving reasons for this indwelling. Augustine's ideas are briefly the following:

- i. God is everywhere: *in seipso ubique totus*, as Creator of all things;
- ii. although everywhere as Creator, he is not everywhere through the grace of indwelling;
- iii. He is present through the grace of indwelling only in those he made his holy temple, freeing them from the powers of darkness and transferring them to the kingdom of his beloved Son, a kingdom which had its beginning in rebirth.¹⁰⁰

This presence is not the same in all the just, but depends on their disponibility (*pro suae capacitatis diversitate*).

v. God also dwells in baptised infants, secretly working in them so that they may become his temple, a temple which he perfects in those who persevere.

vi. God indwells in each just person in as many temples and indwells in all together (in the Church) as if in his temple, which in the present time is continually harassed by the tempests of the world, but will obtain stability in eternal life, in the *eskaton*. Augustine's anthropological vision of justification is always within his ecclesiological vision. Augustine always sees man's justification within his vision of the Church.

98. *In epistulam Ioannis tractatus* 2,14.

99. *Deus facturus qui homines erant, homo factus est qui Deus erat.*

100. *Epistula* 187,12,35.

Man's justification has three moments: (i) a total remission of sins in Baptism, followed by the conferment of the precious gifts of the Holy Spirit; (ii) a continuous renewal of the inner life, lasting through one's whole lifetime; (iii) perfect justice and immortality at the final resurrection.

Through Baptism, the remission of sins is complete and immediate, but no internal renewal, for concupiscence (the *infirmitas*) remains and this, so that we might fight the good fight and conquer our pride; concupiscence will remain for us to struggle against it (*ad agonem interea remanet*).

To the Pelagian objection that God could have also cured man from this *infirmitas*, from concupiscence, Augustine answered: "God acts on his own judgement and does not receive orders from those who labour under an infirmity."¹⁰¹ Augustine confirmed this answer by a reference to Saint Paul: Christ wanted him to be strong but, nevertheless he told him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12,9).

Because even the just are subject to concupiscence (the *infirmitas*), no man can be without sin (*impeccantia*) in this world. Augustine defends his thesis, starting from the Scriptures, from those texts which Coelestius had quoted in his *Definitiones*. He had drawn three long lists, one list containing those texts which speak about the universal vocation to perfection, a second list with texts showing how easy it is for man to observe the commandments, and a third list which insists on man's imperfections, and therefore texts which seem to contradict the two other lists. Coelestius never tried to find an explanation for the texts contradicting *impeccantia*, and so it was not a difficult matter for Augustine to refute Coelestius, telling him that, instead of solving the problem, he was aggravating it because he was making his hearers think that the Scriptures contradict themselves. There is no contradiction in the Scriptures, says Augustine, because one should distinguish between the Church of the future, the Church without blemish or wrinkle, as St Paul says (Eph 5, 27), and the Church now in this world: here on earth the Church is full of imperfections, only at the *eskaton* will she appear in all her brightness and perfection.

Another distinction to be made is between crimes worthy of condemnation (*crimina damnabilia*) and venial sins (*peccata venialia*). The just should be exempt from the *crimina damnabilia*, but while on earth they will never be free from the

101. Hoc utique agit ut sanet omnia, sed agit iudicio suo, nec ordinem sanandi ab aegroto.

smallest *peccata venialia*, the slightest imperfections. The just man on earth is both a just man and a sinner (*iustus et peccator*): There are just men on earth ... but they are not without sin ... all are great, all are just, all really worthy of praise, but none are without some sin ... they were just but they were not without sin.¹⁰² For without faults it is impossible to live on earth, one cannot live without sin in this world; only the Virgin was exempt from sin because of the Lord (*propter honorem Domini*).

The just man knows that he is not perfect and that he must continually strive for perfection in a perfect manner (*perfecte*), trying to avoid daily imperfections, which Augustine calls the *peccata quotidiana*. “This we should realise, that however much far have we gone forward on the road of perfection, we are not yet perfect.”¹⁰³ We go forward along the road of perfection (*perfecte currimus*) if we pray, fast and give alms; no other means are available in this world and because of the struggle between flesh and spirit in us on this earth we will never succeed in loving God with all our being, for, although we can control our disorderly passions, we can never be without them in this world. Briefly Augustine distinguishes between initial justification and complete justification: “Has not Baptism given us rebirth, adoption, redemption? and yet we still need rebirth, adoption, redemption, which will only be ours at the end of time, while NOW we have to wait patiently so that THEN, when the time comes, we will not be in any way children of the world. Those therefore who deprive Baptism of what it now gives us, are corrupting the faith, while those who attribute to Baptism now what we will only receive through Baptism then, are destroying all hope.”¹⁰⁴

The distinction helps Augustine in answering another Pelagian objection: If death is the consequence of sin, why does death remain once sins have been remitted? Augustine answered: “God could have exempted believers from death, so that their bodies would not be subjected to death, but if He did this, a kind of pleasure would have been given to the flesh, but the strength of faith would have been lessened. Men fear death so much that Christians would be considered blessed only because they could not die. But God has given a greater grace, for He gave something better to those who believe in Him. What greatness those who believed they would not

102. Sunt ergo in terra iusti sed ... non sunt sine peccato ... omnes sancti, omnes iusti, omnes veraciter laudabiles sunt, sed sine peccato aliquo non sunt ... et iusti fuerunt et sine peccato non fuerunt.

103. Quotquot perfecte currimus, hoc sapiamus quod nondum perfecti sumus (*De perfectione iustitiae hominis* 8,10).

104. *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* 3,3,5.

die would be theirs by believing this during their lifetime? How much greater, how much stronger, how much more worthy of praise would they be in believing that by dying they would obtain victory over death for all eternity."¹⁰⁵ Faith without hope is no faith at all: "faith is possible only when what is hoped for is not yet realised."¹⁰⁶

For Augustine man's progress towards complete justification is a progress towards freedom, which is attained through the impossibility of dying (*non posse mori*), through the impossibility of sinning (*non posse peccare*), which is the greater freedom (*libertas maior*), in contrast to the minor freedom (*libertas minor*) which our first parents enjoyed namely the possibility of not dying (*posse non mori*) and the possibility of not sinning (*posse non peccare*).

Justification is a gratuitous gift of God

Justification is not something we merit through our good deeds: grace is given to us not because of our good deeds, but is given to us so that we can perform good deeds.¹⁰⁷ Justification is through faith and therefore we have no reason to pride ourselves of our good deeds. To prove this Augustine makes use of Pauline texts: "What becomes of your boasting? It is excluded" (Rom 3,27) and "Let him he who boasts, boast of the Lord" (1 Cor 1,31): no one can boast of his merits before God, for he has none, or better still, the merits one has are evil and Augustine makes reference to Saint Paul saying that before his conversion his merits were many but were all evil.¹⁰⁸ Because we have been justified by the Blood of Christ, "if we boast, let us boast of the Lord" for then nothing is more sure, more certain.¹⁰⁹ "God's justice is ours because it is given to us, and it is called God's justice so that we might not think that we have justice through our own efforts. God's justice is grace given to us, and is called grace because it is gratuitous, and it is gratuitous because it has preceded our merits, God's gifts have preceded us."¹¹⁰

105. Poterat (Deus) ... hoc (exemptio a morte) donare credentibus, ut nec istius experirentur corporis mortem, sed si hoc fecisset, carni quaedam felicitas adderetur, minueretur autem fidei fortitudo. Sic enim homines mortem istam timent ut non ob aliud felices dicerent esse christianos, nisi quod mori omnino non possent. Sed Deus plus gratiae praestitit, plus fidelibus suis sine dubitatione donavit. Quid enim magnum erat vivendo non mori eos qui crederent credere se non moriturum? Quanto est maius, quanto fortius, quanto laudabilius ita credere ut se speret moriturus sine fine victurum (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2,31,50).

106. Tunc est fides quando expectatur in spe, quam in re nondum videtur (*De Civitate Dei* 13,4).

107. *De Spiritu et littera* 10, 16.

108. Merita eius erant magna, sed mala (*De gratia et libero arbitrio* 5,12).

109. Sigloriemur in Domino gloriemur (quia) nihil tutius, nihil securius (*Sermo* 160, 3).

110. *Erratio in Ps.* 30,3.

The gratuitousness of justification does not exclude merit. No merits are acquired before the gift of faith, before justification, but the just are not without merits. The just have become just gratuitously, because they have been justified, gratuitously through God's grace (Rom 3,24). Merit is so intimately connected with grace, that Augustine feels that he must insist that man's merits are gratuitous gifts, and therefore he concludes that God does not crown your merits as if they were yours, but because they are his¹¹¹ and so he invites his hearers to recognise these merits as God's gifts.¹¹²

Augustine also teaches that our hope for eternal reward is strengthened by this teaching: God who gave his gifts gratuitously, will not deny his promises¹¹³; for this reason the just man will speak to God in this manner: "Give us what you promised, for we have done what you have commanded, and you yourself have done this, for you help us in doing it."¹¹⁴

Gratia adiuvans

We need God's help to obtain justification and persevere in it. What is the nature of this help? Is this help necessary? Is it efficacious? Is it gratuitous? Augustine's answers to these questions were in contrast with the position taken by the Pelagians.

According to Augustine, Pelagius identified grace with free will, with God's law including the Gospels, with the remission of sins, and with Christ's good example.

i. Pelagius considered human nature created and adorned with free will as a grace of God. Augustine replied that this was true in a certain manner (*quadam non improbanda ratione*) for we can call grace what has been given to us at creation so that we might be human beings, but the grace we are speaking about is altogether different, something vastly superior. Deriding the Pelagians for admitting the grace of creation (*illam generalem gratiam qua creatus est homo*) and denying the grace by means of which we are Christians (*illam gratiam qua Christiani sumus*), he

111. Deus non coronat merita tua tamquam tua, sed tamquam dona sua (*Epistula* 194, 5,19).

112. Discute bene merita tua et videbis quia dona sunt mea (*Sermo* 131).

113. Non negabit debitum qui donavit indebitum (*Sermo* 297,5).

114. Redde quod promisisti, quia fecimus quod iussisti, et hoc tu fecisti quia laborantes iuvisti (*Enarratio in Ps.* 138,2).

calls their intelligence a brittle intelligence (*vitreum acumen*). The Pelagians, concludes Augustine, should also admit the grace by means of which we are Christians, and the reason for this is the fact that our nature, because of Adam's sin, needed a doctor: it asks for a doctor (*medicum imploret*). May the Pelagians seek this medicine (*gratia medicinalis quaeratur*) so that all controversies might come to an end (*controversia finiatur*).¹¹⁵

ii. The Pelagians considered God's law grace for it teaches us how to lead a good life; Augustine agreed for God's law is good, holy and useful, prohibits what is prohibited (*vetat quae vetanda sunt*) and commands what must be commanded (*iubet quae iubenda sunt*); but Augustine adds that to observe God's law, the love which the Holy Spirit diffuses in our hearts is necessary.

iii. Augustine agreed with the Pelagians that Christ's good example could be considered as a gift given to us by Christ himself; for Augustine the imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*) was the summit of all religion (*religionis summa*); but the *imitatio Christi* is not Christian grace; Christian grace is the *caritas* we need to imitate Christ, to observe God's law, to obtain remission of our sins. What is, according to Augustine, the nature of this grace, the nature of the *gratia adiuvans*?

From the Scriptures Augustine develops three themes:

i. "Help us to do what your order, and order what you will". This is a prayer coming out of the depths of Augustine's heart which finds its echo in several texts from *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* and from *De spiritu et littera*; as an example we can mention this text: "God himself helps our conversion: when he orders us: 'Turn unto me and I will turn unto you;' we say to him: 'Turn unto us, God of our salvation' and 'Restore us, o Lord', what else are we saying except 'Help us to do what you order?' And when he orders us saying 'Do not follow your evil desires' and we answer 'We know that no one can be continent without God's help' what else are we saying but: 'Order what you will'?"¹¹⁷

115. *De natura et gratia* 54,63.

116. Da quod iubet, et iube quod vis (*Confessiones* 10,29,400).

117. Uf convertamus, ipse (Deus) adiuvat... Cum ergo nobis iubet: Convertimi ad me et ego convertar ad vos, nosque illi dicimus: Convertite nos Deus sanitatum nostrarum, et: Deus virtutum convertite nos, quid aliud dicimus quam: Da quod iubet?... Cum iubet dicendo: Post concupiscentias tuas non eas, nosque dicimus: Scimus nemo esse potest cotinens nisi Deus dat, quid aliud dicimus: Da quod iubet? (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2,5,5).

ii. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (Jn 6,44). Quoting these words of St. John, together with the words John wrote further on in the same chapter: “No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father” (Jn 6,65), Augustine says: “This is the grace which Pelagius ought to admit if he really wants to be a Christian and not a Christian in name only.”¹¹⁸

Augustine quotes other Scripture texts; worthy of note is this quotation: “Pride has so closed the ears of their heart that they are unable to hear: ‘What have you that you did not receive?’ (1 Cor 4,7); they do not hear: ‘Love is of God’ (1 Jn 4,7); they do not hear: ‘Each according to the measure of faith that God assigned to him’ (Rom 12,3); they do not hear: ‘No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father’ (Jn 6,65); they do not hear ... what the Spirit says through Jeremiah: ‘I will put the fear of me in their hearts that they may not turn from me’ Jer 32,40) ... and especially what has been said through Ezechiel”. Here Augustine gives a long quotation from the prophet foretelling the work of the Spirit (Ez 30, 22-37) “...a new heart I will give you and a new spirit ... I will put within you ... and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances...”¹¹⁹

iii. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts” (Rom 5,5). Augustine summarises his ideas in these words of St. Paul (Augustine usually did this in many of his controversies, choosing a Scriptural text which summarised the various Biblical texts he quoted in support of his thesis). Augustine used this text numberless times during the Pelagian controversy from its beginning: as an example we can mention what he says in *De Spiritu et littera*: after explaining the terms of the problem, he says:

“From what I will prove it would certainly appear more evident that to lead a good life is a gift of God not only because God gave man freedom of will, without which one can neither lead a good or a bad life, not only because God gave man a commandment telling him how he ought to live, but because God’s love has been poured through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those whom he foreknew to predestinate them, in those whom he predestinated to call them, in those whom he

118. Hanc debet Pelagius gratiam confiteri, si vult non solum vocari, verum etiam esse Christianum (*De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1,10,110).

119. *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* 14,6,14.

called to justify them, in those whom he justified to glorify them."¹²⁰

Augustine also draws an argument against the Pelagians from Liturgy; with regard to original sin his argument from Liturgy was the Baptism of infants; his argument now is from prayer, for prayer is a clear proof of the necessity of God's grace to help us (*gratia adiuvans*): if we do not need such a grace why pray for it? "Is there anything more foolish than praying for something which is in your power?"¹²¹ When one says: "Lead us not into temptation" one does not pray to be a man for he is so by nature; nor does one pray for free will for he has received it when his nature was created; nor does he ask for the remission of sins as this has been asked for in the preceding petition: "Forgive us our trespasses"; nor does he pray for knowledge of the commandments, but to be able to obey them... Who prays thus, prays not to sin." Augustine then concludes; "Prayer itself is the clearest witness of the necessity of grace."¹²²

Augustine also quotes the Fathers, especially Saint Ambrose who for Pelagius was among the Latin writers, a flower of great beauty, whose faith, whose interpretation of the Scriptures no one dared doubting, not even an enemy¹²³; because of this regard Pelagius had for Ambrose, Augustine quotes a number of texts against Pelagius five of which from Ambrose's commentary on Luke with reference to grace, and one from the commentary on Isaiah with reference to the *impeccantia*. Augustine also quotes Cyprian's treatise on the Lord's prayer because Cyprian explains the various petitions of the *Pater noster* by insisting on the necessity of prayer.

Finally Augustine concludes his argument saying (i) that we must admit "a help to do good added to our nature and to the instruction in doctrine we have received"¹²⁴; (ii) this help is something marvellous and ineffable: "In this we see difference

120. Quod cum ostendero, profecto manifestius apparebit bene vivere donum esse divinum non tantum quia homini Deus dedit liberum arbitrium, sine quo nec male nec bene vivitur, non tantum quia praeceptum dedit, quod doceat quemadmodum sit vivendum, sed quia per Spiritum sanctum diffundit caritatem in cordibus eorum quos praescivit ut praedestinaret, praedestinavit ut vocaret, vocavit ut iustificaret, iustificavit ut glorificaret (*De spiritu et littera*).

121. Quid stultius quam orare ut facias quod in potestate habes (*De natura et gratia* 18,20).

122. *Epistula* 177,4.

123. *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1,42,47.

124. Adiutorium bene agendi adiunctum naturae atque doctrinae (*De gratia Christi et peccato originali* 1,36,38).

between the Old and New Testaments; the law was written on tables, now it is written in our hearts so that what filled us externally with fear now pleases us internally; then one became a prevaricator because of a law which killed, now one becomes a lover because of a spirit which gives life"¹²⁵; (iii) that this help (*adiutorium*) is essentially "the inspiration of a beautiful and bright love."¹²⁶

Augustine then asks what might be an obstacle to human actions, and answers that ignorance (*ignorantia*) and infirmity (*infirmitas*) are to blame: "Men refuse to do what is just either because what is just is hidden to them or because it does not please them. The more ardently we wish for something the more certain we are of its goodness and the more ardently will it please us. Ignorance and infirmity are therefore those vices which prevent the will from doing what is good or avoiding evil. God's grace is necessary to help man's will so that we might become aware of what is hidden to us and how sweet is what was not attracting us."¹²⁷ In other words *ignorantia* is the lack of knowledge of the goodness or the evilness of something, while the *infirmitas* makes what is good and just unpleasant to our nature. These obstacles are removed by certain knowledge (*certam scientiam*) and victorious pleasure (*victricem delectationem*) which the good God gives us. The *scientia certa* is not external knowledge, namely the knowledge of Christian doctrine, but it is above all the pleasure which God grants to the soul in the knowledge of the truth of faith. The *victrix delectatio* so badly misunderstood by the Jansenists, is the pleasure of love (*delectatio dilectioque*) of the supreme God, the pleasure in doing for the love of God what seems unpleasant to our nature.

The main obstacle is the *infirmitas*, which can only be overcome by a great love which does not depend on our free will, but is infused in us by the Holy Spirit.

125. Cum haec apparet distantia Veteris et Novi Testamenti, quod lex ibi in tabulis, hic in cordibus scribitur, ut quod ibi forinsecus terret, hic delectat intrinsecus, ibique fiet praevaricator per occidentem litteram, hic dilector per vivificantem spiritus (*De spiritu et littera* 35,42).
126. Inspiratio flagrantissimae et luminosissimae caritatis (*De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 1,35,38).
127. Nolunt homines facere quod iustum est sive quia latet an latum sit sive quia non delectat. Tanto enim quidque vehementius volumus, quanto certius quam bonum sit novimus eoque delectamur ardentius. Ignorantia igitur et infirmitas vitia sunt quae impediunt voluntatem ne moveatur ad faciendum opus bonum vel ab opere malo abstrahendum. Ut autem innotescat quod latebat et suave fiet quod non delectabat gratiae Dei est, qua hominum adiuvat voluntates (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2,17,26).

Necessity of the gratia adiuans

Grace is absolutely necessary. Augustine distinguishes two types of help (*auxilia*); certain *auxilia* are such that without them we cannot obtain what they help us to obtain, while other *auxilia* help us to obtain what we can obtain even without them. Grace belongs to the first type of *auxilia* and to show that no one can live justly without the help of God's grace (*nemo sine Dei gratia recte vivit*), Augustine gives several examples v.g. you cannot sail without a boat, you cannot speak without a voice, you cannot walk without feet, etc.

Pelagius held that with the help of grace man can more easily (*facilius*) do what their free will commands them to do. Refuting Pelagius' treatise on free will (*De libero arbitrio*), Augustine tells him to remove the word *facilius* and he would be in perfect agreement with him: "We can never do anything, great or small, without God's help for without his help we can do nothing."¹²⁸

What can man do without the *auxilium gratiae*; without the help of God's grace? The Pelagian answer was too optimistic (we can do anything, grace is necessary only to make things easier for us); the Jansenist and Lutheran answer was too pessimistic (we can do nothing).

Stated in the form given above, the problem is more philosophical than theological, but Augustine preferred discussing the problem expressed in a more theological form: What cannot we do without the *auxilium gratiae*? Misunderstanding Augustine, the Jansenists took a too pessimistic view of the problem.

Augustine's answer to the question can be briefly given in the following three points:

i. *Without grace man cannot avoid sin.* "Through grace," says Augustine," we not only obtain remission of our sins, but also help not to commit sins."¹²⁹ As usual Augustine sees the problem in relation to salvation history and, as we have already seen, he sees three moments in this history; between its beginning, between the possibility of not sinning (*posse non peccare*) which is a minor freedom (*libertas minor*), and its end, the impossibility of sinning (*non posse peccare*) which is the

128. Sive parum, sive multum, sine illo fieri non potest, sine quo nihil fieri potest.

129. Sanat ergo Deus non solum ut deleat quod peccavimus, sed ut praestet etiam ne peccemus (*De natura et gratia* 26,29).

greater freedom (*maior libertas*), there is a long period during which man is not free from sin (the *necessitas peccandi*), punishment for the abuse made with the *libertas minor*. The *necessitas peccandi* does not mean that all man's actions are sinful, that man sins with every action he does, but means that man is in a state of sin and so unable to avoid sin with his sole efforts.

ii. *Without grace man cannot lead a pious life, namely he cannot do good (non posse recte agere)*. Grace is necessary for each single act (*ad singulos actus*) man does, and is especially necessary for the first act of faith (*initium fidei*) and final perseverance (*perseverantia finalis*).

iii. *Without grace we cannot do any "truly" virtuous acts*. Augustine held, against Pelagius, that pagan virtues are not true virtues, and based this harsh opinion on two biblical texts: "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11,2); and "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom 14,23). An act is good not because its object is good but because of its end: "You should therefore realise that virtues are distinguished from vices not from one's actions but from the end for which an action is done."¹³⁰ An act is not truly virtuous unless it is referred to God; even if its aim is good, it cannot be really virtuous, for if an action is not for God (*ad Deum*) it must be for its own self (*ad se ipsas*) and so it would be an act of pride (*inflatae et superbae sunt*).

But what can human nature do without the help of grace, without the *auxilium gratiae*? To have a balanced view of Augustine's doctrine on the necessity of grace, we must also say that Augustine always held that the image of God impressed in man's soul could not be destroyed by sin: it was only darkened. To prove this Augustine quotes Rom 2,14: "Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires" because "what has been impressed by God's image at creation was not totally destroyed; what make man's soul rational certainly remained together with the natural faculty which makes a rational animal (man) feel and do."¹³¹

Even the most evil of men, continues Augustine, cannot live his whole life without doing some good deed, for in all men there is a natural goodness (*quandam*

130. Noveris itaque non officiis, sed finibus a vitiis discernendas esse virtutes (*Contra Iulianum* 4,3,21).

131. Gentes quae legem non habent naturaliter ea quae legis sunt faciunt (Rom 2,14). (Quia) non omnimodo deletum est quod ibi per imaginem Dei cum crearentur impressum est... remanserat utique id quod anima hominis nisi rationalis esse non potest: (in omnibus) illa naturae qua legitimum aliquid animal rationale et sentit et facit, (remansit) (*De spiritu et littera* 28,48).

sui generis probitatem), which is enough for the foundation and the progress of the city of the world: "We read and hear and know certain facts about such people", says Augustine, "facts which are according to justice and which we cannot blame, but we should justly and really praise: and yet if we were to examine these actions with reference to their end, we will notice that they are hardly worthy of praise and defence for their goodness."¹³² The reason for this is the fact that these people do not direct their actions to God (*ad Deum*): there is no true justification (*iustitia*) where there is no worship of the one true God.

Grace is given only to those who cooperate with it. "God, who is our helper," says Augustine, "cannot help us unless we willingly try to do something, for God works in us our salvation not as if we were insensible beings like stones or rocks, which he created without will or reason."¹³³ Elsewhere Augustine expressed the same idea with these words: "He is not one who helps us if we do nothing; he does not cooperate if we do not strive.... Be led, but you must run."¹³⁴ Again, in one of his letters he writes: "Free will is not taken away when help is given to us, but help is given to us because our free will is not taken away"¹³⁵ for free will has not been destroyed by Adam's sin. "The freedom which has been lost," says Augustine, "is the freedom from death and sin"; man has lost his *libertas minor*, 'minor freedom', the *posse non peccare* (the possibility of not sinning) after Adam's sin, it is impossible for man not to sin (*non posse non peccare*) as we have already explained, therefore no one is free to do good without God's help, for our captive free will is only capable of sinning.¹³⁶ We have already said in what way these statements should be understood: Augustine never meant that free will had been destroyed by sin, but that free will cannot help us to lead a virtuous life, if man's will is still enslaved by sin, and has not been liberated by God's grace.

132. Quaedam facta vel legimus vel novimus vel audivimus quae secundum iustitiae regulam non solum vituperare non possumus, verum etiam merito recteque laudamus, quamquam si discutiantur, quo fine fiant, vix inveniuntur quae iustitiae debitam laudem defensionemque mereantur.

133. Adiutor enim noster Deus, nec adiuvari potest nisi qui aliquid etiam sponte conatur, quia non sicut in lapidibus insensatis aut sicut in eis, in quorum natura rationem voluntatemque non condidit, salutem nostram Deus operatur in nobis (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 2,5,60).

134. Non enim adiutor est ille, si nihil agatis; non enim cooperatur est ille,...si nihil operamini. ... Ducimini, sed currite et vos (*Sermo* 196, 13).

135. Neque enim voluntatis arbitrium ideo tollitur quia iuvatur sed ideo iuvatur quia non tollitur (*Epistula* 157,2,100).

136. Non est liber ad agendum bonum sine adiutorio Dei (nam) liberum arbitrium captivatum non nisi ad peccandum valet.

All this shows the need of prayer

A clear proof of the need of prayer is the fact that the Church prays for God's help, and this fact helped Augustine to answer the objections of the Pelagians who continually insisted that God does not command the impossible and so they wrongly concluded that prayers of intercession are not necessary. The Church prays, for prayer is the general law of Christian life.

To the Pelagian objection, Augustine replied admitting the truth that God does not command the impossible: "God does not command the impossible, but when he commands us to do something he also tells us to do what we are able to do and ask for help when we are unable to do something with our efforts alone."¹³⁷ Augustine also adds: "Once we strongly believe that the good and just God does not command the impossible, we are told what to do when something easy is asked from us, and what to ask for, if something difficult is requested from us. Everything becomes easier through love, through which Christ's burden becomes light. ... This is why it has been said that his commandments are not difficult; but if to someone they might appear difficult let him consider the fact that God would not have said they were not difficult unless there was a loving heart for whom they would not be difficult and would ask for what he lacked, to do what was requested of him."¹³⁸ Then Augustine concludes: "Law has been given that grace might be sought, and grace has been given that law might be obeyed."¹³⁹

Grace is given us through prayer. God, writes Augustine,¹⁴⁰ wants us to fight the good fight with our prayers rather than with our own efforts, for the efforts we need in this world are given us by him to whom we pray. Fight against the world with

137. Non igitur Deus impossibilia iubet sed iubendo admonet et facere quod possis et petere quod non possis (*De natura et gratia* 43,50).

138. Eo ipso quo firmissime creditur Deum iustum et bonum impossibilia non potuisse praecipere hinc admonemur et in facilibus quid agamus et in difficilibus quid petamus. Omnia quippe fiunt facilia caritati, cui uni Christi sarcina levis est. Secundum hoc dictum est: praecepta eius graviora non sunt, ut cui graviora sunt, consideret non potuisse divinitus dici: Graviora non sunt, nisi qui potest esse cordis affectus cui graviora non sunt, et petat quo destituitur, ut impleat quod iubetur (*De natura et gratia* 69.8.30)

139. Lex ergo data est ut gratia quereretur, gratia data est ut lex impleretur (*De spiritu et littera* 19,34)

140. *Opus imperfectum* 6,15.

141. *Epistula* 130,16,29.

your prayers, Augustine wrote to Proba,¹⁴¹ pray with hope, pray with faith and with love, pray with perseverance and patience for whatever God's law commands is accomplished only if He who commands helps, inspires and give.¹⁴² Prayer is necessary for us as much as the grace we obtain through prayer; without prayer there is no salvation, as there is no salvation without grace. Prayer is especially necessary for final perseverance which we can never merit, but can always achieve through prayer.¹⁴³

Prayer is necessary for us to obtain grace, and grace is necessary for us to be able to pray. We know, says Augustine,¹⁴⁴ that God has some gifts which he gives even to those who do not pray, e.g. the *initium fidei*, and some gifts which he only gives to those who pray v.g. final perseverance. Besides the gift of the *initium fidei*, to those who do not pray, God also gives the grace of prayer.

Nature and Grace

We have already mentioned the Pelagian argument to prove that sin has not weakened human nature, that human nature was not changed by Adam's sin. Pelagius argued that sin is not a substance but an action: how could it therefore change and weaken human nature? We also mentioned that Augustine did not deny that sin was not a substance, but added that sin was an action which estranged us from God, and, depriving us of God has been our death:

"If you prefer a discussion there is no objection and it would also be worth while if a very strong faith precedes our discussion, that faith which make us not think that human nature cannot be vitiated by sin, that faith based on the authority of the Scriptures, which will help us to find out how it could have been possible for our nature to be vitiated by sin. We have learned that sin is not a substance, must we not also admit that eating is not a substance? But there is some connection ... for food is a substance; to abstain from food is not a substance but if one abstains totally from food, the substance-body languishes, loses its strength, and if it continues

142. Quidquid lex Dei iubet, non nisi eo qui iubet adiuvante, inspirante, donante, completur (*Opus imperfectum* 6,30).

143. Suppliciter mereri potest (*De dono perseverantiae* 5,19).

144. *De dono perseverantiae* 16,30.

to live in some way, it can hardly be asked to take that food, by abstaining from which, it has been weakened.”¹⁴⁵

Our nature is a fallen nature through a very serious act of pride; the seriousness of Adam’s sin is due to the fact that Adam enjoyed complete freedom and could therefore easily obey God’s commands; he disobeyed God through pride, and man’s disobedience to God brought disobedience within himself, for his passions rebelled against the dictates of reason as we have said before: man was punished for his disobedience to God, by disobedience within his own nature.

Man, once fallen, could never redeem himself. Through sin man lost the freedom he enjoyed in the garden of Eden, namely having full justice together with immortality.¹⁴⁶ Once lost, this freedom could not be given back except by the One who could give it.¹⁴⁷ The reason for this statement, says Augustine, is found in the Bible; to the proof from the Bible Augustine adds a metaphysical argument: “We are not helped by God to sin ... but to do good; to obey the commandment of justice in all its implications is not possible for us unless we have God’s help ... just as the eye of our body is not helped by light, if it is closed to this light and runs away from it; but to see the eye needs the help of light and will not see unless helped by light; we can say the same with regard to God who is the light of the soul: he helps the sight of our soul to do something good, which is according to his justice and not according to our nature.”¹⁴⁸ Briefly, (i) Adam through his sin lost his friendship with God, only God could give him back his friendship; (ii) Adam lost

145. Quia disputare vis non obest, immo etiam prodest, si firmissima procedat fides nec existimemus peccato humanam naturam non posse vitari, sed divinis credentes Scripturis peccato eam esse vitiatam quomodo id feri potuerit inquiramus. Quoniam peccatum iam didicimus non esse substantiam, nonne adtenditur... etiam non manducare non esse substantiam? A substantia quippe receditur... quoniam cibus substantia est; sed abstinere a cibo non est substantia, et tamen substantia corporis, si omnino abstinetur a cibo, ita languescit...ita exhauritur viribus... ut si aliquo modo perduret in vita, vix possit ad cum cibum revocari, unde abstinendo vitata est (*De natura et gratia* 20,22) (Cfr. note II).

146. Libertas quae in paradiso fuit, scilicet habendi plenam cum immortalitate iustitiam (*Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* 1,25).

147. Reddi non potest nisi a quo dari potuit (*De Civitate Dei* 14,11,1).

148. Ad peccandum...non adiuvarur a Deo; iuste autem agere vel iustitiae praeceptum omni ex parte implere non possumus, nisi adiuvemur a Deo... Sicut enim corporis oculus non adiuvarur a luce, ut ab eadem luce clausus aversumque discedat, ut autem videat adiuvarur ab eo neque hoc omnino, nisi illa adiuverit, potest, ita Deus cui lux est hominis interioris: adiuvat nostrae mentis obtutum ut non secundum nostram, sed secundum eius iustitiam boni aliquid operemur (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1,5,5).

his immortality, he became mortal, and therefore through his efforts, he could never conquer death; (iii) Adam became subject to disorders, for his passions were no longer controlled by reason: because of these disorders he could never enjoy interior stability. Adam therefore needed a Mediator to reconcile Him with God and so free him from the situation into which he had fallen through his sin.

Once these points are accepted, we will immediately convince ourselves that the whole problem is not about human nature itself, but about the need of salvation for human nature (*de sanandis, non de instituendis naturis agitur*) This is the thesis which Augustine develops in his *De natura et gratia* in answer to the *De natura* of Pelagius. The first question Augustine asks is: "Is our nature a fallen nature, or not? His answer is quite clear: "It is vitiated and needs a doctor" (*vitiata est, medicum imploret*); to clarify his idea, Augustine makes reference to the parable of the good Samaritan; this led medieval theologians, when discussing original sin, to state that through this sin man has been despoiled and wounded in his nature.¹⁴⁹ Augustine speaks of a *natura vitiata* and asks what *vitium* is. It is not sin or guilt, says Augustine, but an imperfection, a defect, an evil in the sense we say blindness (*caecitas*) is a *vitium oculorum*, a defect in the eyes. Applied to men, for Augustine the *vitium* is a *privatio bonorum*, a lack of something good.¹⁵⁰ For Augustine the *bona naturalia* (natural goods) are not only what belongs to the integrity of human nature but also all that is the object of our deepest desires, and therefore he considered death, disorderly concupiscence and separation from God as the *vitia*, the defects and evils which make human nature a *natura vitiata*.

Having said this, we can easily understand that Augustine's position vis-à-vis Manichaeism and Pelagianism was, what we may call, a middle way, the *veritatis medium*. The Pelagians, as we have seen, held that concupiscence in our present state, *ut nunc est*, is not an evil but a natural good, while the Manichees considered concupiscence and all the material world as something evil. Augustine took the middle way: concupiscence *ut nunc est* is a *vitium naturae*, a defect of fallen nature, and does not come from God but from the world (*non provenit a Patre sed a mundo*). Again the Pelagians held that men could do good through their own free will without God's help, while the Manichees held that our evil actions do not derive from our free will. Augustine replied telling the Manichees that God made man upright (Qoh 7,29) and telling the Pelagians: "If the Son makes you free, you are free indeed (Jn 8,36).

149. Spoliatus gratuitis vulneratus in naturalibus.

150. Vitia naturalium sunt privationes bonorum (*Enchiridion* 3,11).

We can now see the relation there is between nature and grace.

Human nature, says Augustine, is *capax Dei*, capable of having God, for man has been created to God's image and likeness, an image which has not been destroyed by sin but only darkened and defaced. Augustine, during his last years, was continually repeating what he wrote in his *Confessions*: O Lord, you have made us for you, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you,¹⁵¹ and what he wrote in *The City of God* that our soul will not lose its poverty unless it acquires blessedness, for there is nothing to satisfy it unless it is God himself.¹⁵²

We have several times repeated that concupiscence in our present state (*ut nunc est*) is a defect, a *vitium*, but this is not what God wanted human nature to be: immunity from disorderly concupiscence is something worthy of man's dignity, and this is what God had willed. The same thing can be said with regard to death which is of no good for anyone (*nulli boni est*). Fear of death is not an opinion but something natural,¹⁵³ for the human soul which is immortal and which of its nature is the *forma corporis* (the form of the body) postulates the immortality of the body.

These ideas of Augustine made Baius identify nature with grace; but Baius misunderstood Augustine, who clearly distinguished between nature and grace. Augustine wrote that God, in one and the same moment, created human nature and infused his grace in it,¹⁵⁴ and that it is natural for man to have faith as well as love, to have faith and to have love is a grace given to believers ... nature does not distinguish a man from another, but faith distinguishes a man who believes from a man who is an unbeliever.¹⁵⁵

Augustine not only affirms the distinction between nature and grace, but also insists on God's transcendence and on the gifts God gave to man at creation i.e. his friendship, and immunity from death and concupiscence. "God is the Being whom no man or angel can pretend to approach for he is the Subsistent Being.... Before this Being, what is man...? Who can ever hope to approach him? Who can ever

151. Fecisti nos, Domine, ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.

152. Nec expleat indigentiam suam nisi utique beata sit, eique explenda non sufficiat nisi Deus (*De Civitate Dei* 12, 13).

153. Mortem quippe horret non opinio sed natura (*Sermo* 172,1).

154. Simul in eis condens naturam et largiens gratiam (*Civitate Dei* 12,9,2).

155. Posse habere fidem sicut posse habere caritatem naturae est hominum; habere autem fidem quemadmodum habere caritatem gratiae est fidelium...illa utique natura...non discernit ab homine hominem; ipsa vero fides discernit ab infideli homine (*De praedestinatione sanctorum* 5,10).

presume to be in him?"¹⁵⁶ If God did not come down to man, man could not rise up to God: "I come to you, because you cannot come up to me."¹⁵⁷ Only the grace of divine adoption can bridge the gap between man and his Creator. Augustine continues to insist on this, speaking on God's image in man: because man is created to the image of God, man needs God, for each image tends towards its exemplar, on the other hand man is infinitely unlike God for he is far below, far away from Him, very different from him.¹⁵⁸

Once we admit this, we cannot admit that grace is something which belongs to the integrity of our nature but is something which has been given to us as a gratuitous gift of God, who to his eternal name (*nomen aeternitatis*) has added a merciful name (*nomen misericordiae*) by coming down to our lowliness to lift us up to his greatness. Not only is man's elevation a gift of God, but also immunity from death and concupiscence, is a gift from God. It is through a marvellous grace of God (*mirabili Dei gratia*) that man could not die, for man is mortal because of his animal body (*condicione corporis animalis*), but can be granted immortality as a gift from the Creator (*beneficio Conditoris*). In the garden of Eden man, adorned with grace (*vestitus gratia*) was not ashamed of his nakedness, but deprived of grace (*spoliatus gratia*) he felt ashamed and felt the need of covering his nakedness - God's grace is truly something great.¹⁵⁹

Predestination

Augustine discussed predestination towards the end of his life, and wrote three treatises *De corruptione et gratia*, *De praedestinatione sanctorum* and *De dono perseverantiae*. Augustine did not discuss predestination theoretically, but factually, from a historical point of view, *in concreto*, basing himself on the data of revelation. "God wants all men to be saved", says Augustine, "and acquire the full knowledge of truth, but not in such a way as to destroy their free will, on the good and bad use of which they will be justly judged. Infidels act against God's will when they do not believe the Gospel, but they do not overcome him; on the contrary they defraud themselves of the supreme good and subject themselves to great punishments,

156. *Enarratio in Ps.* 101,2,1.

157. *Ego descendo quia tu venire non potes (Enarratio in Ps.* 121,5).

158. *Longe intra, remotissimum, longe dissimillimum (Sermo 7,7).*

159. *Gratia quippe Dei magna erat (Contra Iulianum 18,82).*

submitting to his power in their torments, having refused the gifts of his mercy.”¹⁶⁰ In the order of intention, that is, considering divine wisdom in itself, God wills the salvation of all men and gives the means of salvation to all, but considering the actual fact – and this is what Augustine does – not all men are saved.

Speaking about predestination, Augustine does not refer simply to God’s foreknowledge but also to his will; nor does he refer to the pure order of intention, independently of the reality that from all eternity there will be the chosen and the damned. Augustine’s chief preoccupation is the gratuity of salvation and of the very merits which lead to it, which are all divine gifts given to whom God wills through his mercy (*per misericordiam*). And so Augustine defines predestination as the foreknowledge and preparation of God’s benefits by means of which all those who are liberated are certainly liberated.¹⁶¹ In Augustine’s definition only those who are certainly liberated (*certissime liberentur*) are mentioned; there is no mention of those who are not saved; with regard to the damned, Augustine says that their judgement is not gratuitously given or given without just cause; they are damned by a judgement (*per iudicium*).

Many of Augustine’s statements on predestination may cause great difficulties for us, if we forget that Augustine is speaking of predestination not theoretically but factually, *in concreto*. Another point we must constantly keep in mind is that Augustine continually insists on the gratuity of all the gifts God vouchsafes to men that they may be saved. All Augustine’s statements are based on these facts: (i) God’s gifts, and above all, final perseverance are gratuitous and are not in any way merited by us; (ii) God wants all men to be saved (*vult omnes homines salvos fieri*), and gives to all men the means for salvation, but in actual fact, not all are saved; (iii) God from all eternity knows who are these saved, and their number. On account of Adam’s sin all are a *massa damnata*, all have been redeemed by Christ, but some refuse salvation and are therefore damned.

160. Deus vult omnes homines salvos fieri et ad agnitionem veritatis venire, non sic tamen ut eis adimat liberum arbitrium quo vel bene vel male utentes iustissime iudicetur. Quod cum fit infideles quidem contra voluntatem Dei faciunt cum eius Evangelium non credunt; nec ideo tamen eum vincunt, verum seipos fraudent magno et summo bono magnisque poenalibus, experturi in supplicii potestatem eius cuius in donis misericordiam contempserunt (*De Spiritu et litera* 32,58).

161. Praescientia et praeparatio beneficiorum Dei quibus certissime liberentur quicumque liberantur (*De dono perseverantiae* 19,35).

It is in the light of the above statements, that we must understand the great many texts in which Augustine speaks of the identical situation of both the damned and the elect before the all-powerfulness of God's will: their cause is the same (*eadem causa, causa communis*), for sin has made all a mass of perdition (*massa perditionis*): even infants. Augustine is so logical in his arguments that he considers unbaptised children as damned, as we have already seen. He even says, with regard to an infant dying before baptism in spite of all the efforts made to have the infant baptised, that the infant died because God did not want Baptism to be given.¹⁶² Augustine's statements here should not be understood as meaning that God does not want some to be saved, as the words just quoted seem to imply. God wants all men to be saved (the antecedent will – *voluntas antecedens* of later theologians), but because of the lack of saving grace, for some (like the infant mentioned) God wills that they will not be saved (the consequent will, the *voluntas consequens* of later theologians). Augustine's statements appear categorical because he does not make this distinction explicitly, although it is found in his writings, which, on predestination, apparently contradict themselves; actually there is no contradiction, for Augustine sometimes speaks of the antecedent will of God who wants all men to be saved, and sometimes of the consequent will of God (the damnation of those who refuse salvation, and refuse it

162. Deo nolente quad detur baptismus (*De dono perseverantiae* 31).

163. Etiamsi nullus liberaretur, nemo potest Dei vituperare iustitiam (*Enchiridion* 99; *De dono perseverantiae* 18).

BOOK REVIEWS

Elizaveta Zolina (ed.), *The Venerable Icon of Our Lady of Philermos in Art, History and Religion*, Valletta: Progress Press, 2002, 64 pp.

If the Romans could conceive of books as having a life of their own, with ups and downs just like humans-habent sua fata libelli, says Terentianus Maurus in his work on Horace-surely this holds even more true of icons, where social context, art and religion coalesce; but perhaps of few more so than the icon of Our Lady of Philermos, whose vicissitudes have not been fully unravelled to this day. The story here told in succinct form shows once more how facts fascinate more than fiction, especially when all the aforementioned elements blend together harmoniously, a veritable harmony in discord! Thus, the homecoming of a copy of an icon long believed to be out in hiding has something memorable about it, especially ...

Considering the time, 25-26 January 2001, which, by the telling of one of the most prominent hierarchs in the Russian Metropolitan Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, himself Chairman of the Department for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, coincides with the most difficult period for ecumenism between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches since Vatican II (p.13).

Considering the place, Malta, known for its hospitality at the crossroads of culture, and where, in the words of the Russian Ambassador to Malta, Dr. Sergey Zotov, at whose request a replica of the Philermos icon was depicted by Montenegrin monks, Michail Gorbachev and George Bush chose to end the cold war itself (p. 10), and not just bury the hatchet, and so is arguably the ideal venue for such gatherings as may promote reconciliation between Catholics and Orthodox.

Considering the action, whereby an icon attributed by tradition to St Luke and supposed to have reached Rhodes from Jerusalem during the iconoclastic crisis (p.29) achieves unique fame in its new home but has to be smuggled to safety in Malta, until it attracts the eyes of piety and royalty alike, is donated like the jewel in the crown, escapes destruction as if by miracle during the Russian Revolution, only to surface recently after so much peregrination like a detective story approaching the end.

Considering the dramatis personae: Knights errant seeking refuge and Russians seeking allies against the Turk, finally settling for a deal which seemed to assure them a foothold in the Mediterranean, and the Maltese as go-between, now sovereign hosts of the reconciliation between past feelings and present realities, which bring together Knights and Russians, no longer as potential masters, but as welcome guests.

And now the story. A cliffhanger wooed out of suicide by the light touch of grace settles some ten kilometers away from the capital of Rhodes, Philermos (p.34). The place-name suggests love of solitude, but the presence of our icon soon attracted interminable pilgrims while the victory over the invading Turks in 1480 assured the Knights' perennial gratitude, for whom it was now the Nicopoieia, the Victorious, and became thus inextricably intertwined with the fortunes of their Order. However, when these, through treachery, were forced to leave Rhodes, it was the local community in the person of a Greek priest, Nicolaus Metaxi, who managed to smuggle it on the *nave grossa* of the Knights, whence it eventually found a haven in Malta. Here it was more of a Knights' icon than the people's, though the Knights themselves saw little of it (p.38), while an annual procession on September 8 assured its being nonetheless, though to a lesser degree, the People's Icon (pp.36-37). When Ferdinand von Hompesch had to leave the island, he managed to secure three items from Napoleon's greedy grasp: the right hand of the Baptist, a relic of the true crucifix and the icon of Philermos, denuded of its silver lamina (p.40). When subsequently the government of the Order passed, in an irregular election, from Hompesch, induced to resign, to Paul I of Russia (p.51), the relics found their way to the palace of the Czars in Gatchina. To celebrate the transfer from Malta to Gatchina in 1799 of these three most cherished possessions a feast was established in the Russian Orthodox Church on October 12 according to the old Calendar, corresponding to October 25 on our own. Mgr George Mifsud Montanaro translates here for the first time, from Old Church Slavonic, the Small Vespers of the feast (pp.44-49). In the sequel of the Russian Revolution the icon was first taken for safety to Estonia, then entrusted to the Czar's Mother Fyodorovna in Denmark and, after her death, to King Alexander of Yugoslavia; with the German invasion of Yugoslavia we lose track of the icon's exact whereabouts. Finally, through the recent upheavals on the international and ecclesiastical chess-board, the icon has been located in Montenegro.

Interest thrives on detail, and there is plenty of detail here. According to Prof. Mario Buhagiar, the history of the icon is shrouded in mist prior to 1396 (p. 34). The first building finished in Valletta, in 1566, was Our Lady of Victories, where the icon of

Philermos was venerated between 1571 and 1578, in which year it was moved to the Conventual Church of St John (p.36). Buhagiar himself refers us to Dr Giovannella Ferraris di Celle, who played a decisive role in identifying the icon which came to light in Cetinje, formerly political capital of Montenegro and now its cultural capital (p.29). She describes its iconographic type as *deesis*, with the Virgin and John the Baptist on both sides of the Saviour, on which typology Fr Gino Gauci affords a commentary (pp.41-43). The story of the identification itself is recounted by Ferraris di Celle in her "Discovering the true image of Our Lady of Philermos: The retrieval of the icon in Montenegro" (pp.29-33). Dr Elizaveta Zolina, director of the Russian Cultural Centre at Valletta, shows that Russia had an interest in Malta as early as Peter I (p.50), but plans of promoting union between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches became vivid with Paul I's Maltese adventure (p.51). Zolina's article in particular helps us realize how parochial the understanding of our own history is when following exclusively the usual lines of alternation of governments and elections while bracketing out the socio-cultural components, thus ignoring the large canvas of Mediterranean and European history.

But why so much fuss about a copy? Even freshmen, applying for a scholarship to learn a new language, know full well how to bring out the freshness of the original, often missing in translations, as their reason for wanting to learn that language. Still, there are things which prove useful precisely because of their inability to satisfy completely; like a street sign, which shows the way without following it, or hunger and even curiosity itself, they are precious for pointing beyond themselves, without absorbing all the attention (pp.43,52). As Fra John Critien put it, the occasion was not simply one of pomp and circumstance, it touched essentials (p.20). With President Guido de Marco we may say that it is not up to us to understand the mystery of the encounters, but rather to assist in the dialogue between cultures by exploiting the divine-human beauty of such icons (p.8). An icon is more than a signature tune, for it can be a harbinger of different universes of discourse about to exchange words; and the collaboration of so many authorities and experts augurs well for peaceful consultations. The Symposium held to commemorate the arrival among us of the Montenegrin copy of the icon of Our Lady of Philermos, as distinguished from the Russian replica, made in 1852, as well as the current publication, render a distinct service by underlying this hope.

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William Johnston, *"Arise, My Love ..."* *Mysticism for a New Era*, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll 2000.

William Johnston, *Mystical Theology*, London: Harper Collins, 1995.

The two books for review explain the experience of those saints who are mystics. Johnston, a Jesuit who has lived in Japan for forty years, is a prolific author. He has written nine other books.

Johnston has the optimistic view that all are called to first hand experience of God. It is worth remarking that religious experience, as well as being the ultimate kind of fulfilment, is a source of strength in that it helps people to cope with the situations they are in. So it is important from the pastoral point of view.

Johnston's scenario begins with routine performance of one's religious duties, in particular, one's prayers. In time, as a result of "effort aided by ordinary grace," they become a source of "consolation and joy." One prays with enthusiasm and finds it rewarding. Such prayers engage the affections: one's heart goes into them. Johnston gives this condition the name of "acquired contemplation."

Acquired contemplation is common. One regularly finds it in church services about two thirds of the way through, when the congregation has got into the spirit of it: fervour becomes widespread.

Prior to the next stage, is integration: One feels that one is in a state of harmony and peace. The next stage itself, which Johnston calls "infused contemplation" is "all gift." In this stage, we become aware of a "mysterious and loving presence" in ourselves. Svetlana Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter, in a homely image, said that God's presence came to her inwardly, "like a cherry." It is a kind of inner sweetness, and imparts a sweetness to character, which is detectable by other people.

At this stage, one comes to enjoy the Pauline fruits of the Spirit, which are love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It is worth noting, in view of the accusation of self-preoccupation which is sometimes levelled at those pursuing the spiritual life, that the last five of these are eminently social virtues which enrich social life.

"With contemplation," continues Johnston, "comes a new vision of reality. One becomes conscious of the spirit world." That makes the communion of saints a

reality, not just a belief.

The sense of loving awareness or contemplation to which voices may be an accompaniment, is not yet mysticism proper. That is an experience of light and fire: "the fire is love, the light is wisdom."

In *Mystical Theology*, Johnston elaborates on the final stage:

"At first the blind stirring of love is very gentle. As time goes on, one is filled with consolation and with the sense of being loved with an everlasting love. . . . Those who advance in the mystical life begin to experience the inner fire in a new and mysterious way. Now it rises up as a powerful fountain of energy that envelopes one's whole being..." [*Mystical Theology*, p. 237]

"This is spiritual fire, which penetrates the depths of the human person more fully than anything that touches the senses." [Op.cit. p. 239]

Johnston has something interesting to say about those who reach this stage. Once again, this is evidence, if that is needed, of the social usefulness of the experience.

"Individuals whose spirit is purified can naturally perceive - some more than others - the inclinations and talents of other persons and what lies in the heart of the interior spirit. They derive their knowledge through exterior indications (even though extremely slight) such as words and gestures and other signs" [*ibid.*, p. 311]

There is a word of caution. Prior to mysticism proper there may occur the dark night of the soul. Johnston writes that at the stage of infused contemplation, the mind is swept clean and becomes empty. When that happens, dark patches from the unconscious begin to surface. In another image, he writes that God is rising to the surface 'pushing up all the inner rubbish.

The dark night may be accompanied by insomnia and depression, in which case, advice would be helpful.

What Johnston has done, is show that beyond devout observance, there is another dimension.

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Philip A. Noss(ed), *Current Trends in Scripture Translation*. United Bible Societies Bulletin 194/195(2002).

Ever since 1981 the *United Bible Societies Bulletin* is taken over every three years by papers prepared by the consultants of this organization for a ten days jamboree assembled also every three years, the UBS Triennial Translation Workshop. The papers usually touch on several aspects and concerns of the Scripture translation ministry and often reflect debates that would be going on among scholars of various disciplines. The issue under review contains papers given at the TTW held in Malaga, Spain, during June 2000. As one would expect, the number of papers given at that workshop were much more numerous than the twenty one that are reproduced in this volume. These were probably chosen because they were deemed to be representative of trends in Bible translation praxis and hence may offer stimulus to discussion and debate in academia.

The collection's editor, Philip A. Noss, the Coordinator of Translation Services within UBS, wrote an introduction(pp.1-7) explaining the *raison d'être* of the volume, and distributed the contributions into six groupings each with its own rubric: "Approaches to Scripture Translation"(pp.11-80), "Language and Translation"(pp.83-118), "Text and Exegesis" (pp.121-188); "Translation and Media"(pp. 191-242); "Research"(pp.245-296), and "Bible Society Policy"(pp.299-332). The only extra service offered by the volume is a list of the abbreviations employed by the contributors (pp.333-334) though one has to add that most essays contain also a substantial bibliography annexed to the text. Each section jumbles together a number of independent writings though most are explicitly or implicitly related to the 'translation tradition' established in the mid-twentieth century by the United Bible Societies, and originally labeled by its formulators as the 'Dynamic Equivalent Approach' to Bible Translation(cf. Eugene A. Nida & Charles R. Taber *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: 1969) while today it is known as 'Functional Equivalence'(cf. Jan de Waard & Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another*. Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating, Reading: 1986).

In the remaining part of the review we shall briefly describe the various contribution in four of the six sub-sections, and describe in some more detail the articles in the first and fourth subsections and comment on the general issues that they raise. Three are the contributions under the rubric 'Language and Translation'(pp. 83-118): in his paper "Language Policy, the Vernacular and Translation: Spain and Peru in the 16th Century" (pp.83-96), William Mitchell examines how the Andean

vernacular languages in Peru slowly replaced the Castilian as the Church language in Peru; Dieudonné P. Aroga Bessong shows in "Bible Translation in an Environment of Linguistic Imbalance perceived as dangerous: Cameroon as a Case Study"(pp.97-106) how Bible translation can help saving a language which runs the danger of disappearing under pressure from others that are more aggressive. Anicia del Corro discusses the same issue, but with the Philippines in mind, in the next paper "Language Endangerment and Bible Translation: the Philippines"(pp.107-118).

The sub-section 'Text and Exegesis' clusters together five papers: Lynell Zogbo investigates how one's own ideology or that of one's own political and social context, may influence one's translation of the biblical text. She does this with respect to the translation of the key terms *Ruach Elohim* and *ruach YHHW* in her paper "Ideology and Translation: The case of *ruach Elohim* and *ruach YHHW* in the Old Testament"(pp.121-133). She pleads for limiting the influence of one's own world view as one carries out translation work. Philip A. Noss deals with the same subject in his paper "Translators' Words and Theological Readings"(pp.157-171). Jan de Waard in "Textual Analysis in Proverbs: an Exercise in Futility?" (pp.135-141) discusses what to do when one discovers that the text to be translated is found to be in various forms in different witnesses; he takes the example of Prov 26,17. In the next paper "Key terms in Paul's letters that shape theology"(pp.143-156), Roger L. Omanson argues that a number of key terms in the Pauline corpus is being understood in a different manner nowadays, and translation of these words and their contexts may have to change from how tradition has known them. The last paper in this section is that of Edesio Sánchez, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Methodology for teaching exegesis to Third World Translators." The title makes the contents of the article clear enough.

The rubric 'Research' (pp245-296) brings together three studies: the first is that of Carlo Buzzetti, "Young People's Bibles (YPB): Is it possible to make a good choice?"(pp.245-251); he describes his research project on how to prepare a Bible translation for young readers, which criteria to follow, and whether these criteria may be applied upon existing Bibles in order to see whether they are fit to be read by young people. The title of Manuel Jinbanchian's study tells what he writes about: "Reasons for Differences between the Masoretic Text and Septuagint"(pp.253-274)(some discrepancies in the subtitles to sub-section III, and IV(?), announced on p. 254 and on p.261 and 270 are probably due to the difference in time when the paper was drafted and finally given for publication). Reinier de Blois reports in his paper "A Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew"(pp. 275-296) on the possibility

of collating a dictionary of Biblical Hebrew based on semantic domains, similar to the one published for the NT by the United Bible Societies in 1988: Louw J.P. and Nida E. A., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. In the meantime there was the publication of de Blois's own dissertation *Towards A New Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew Based on Semantic Domains* (2002).

The last section entitled 'Bible Society Policy' contains only one paper, that of David Burke "Text and Context. The Relevance and Viability of the Bible Society Movement's foundational principle—'Without Doctrinal Note and Comment'—Past, Present and Future"(pp.299-332). A paper that merits to be read by all that are involved in Bible translation and publication.

The first contribution in the cluster under the rubric "Approaches to Scripture Translation" is that of Timothy Wilt "Constructing a Contemporary Framework for Bible Translation"(pp11-18); it is narrative in character. Wilt tells how a small committee of translation experts from UBS worked out whether UBS's translation policy should single out one 'translation tradition' (for this concept cf. Carlo Buzzetti, *Traduzione e Tradizione*, Padova: Edizioni Messaggero, 2001) as the only one to be adopted. The committee decided for a negative answer: "a translation approach is best decided in dialogue with community and organizational representatives, in view of the specific communication situation(s) in focus"(p.15). One has to add that the labours of this group of scholars gave birth to a 'handbook' on Bible translation: *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, Manchester: St Jerome Press, 2002. This policy could be seen enfolded in the project of a new translation into Dutch and carried out by the Netherlands Bible Society. Originally, the policy adopted was that the translation was to be the one described as the Dynamic and Functional Equivalence; but when the early drafts were being reviewed, the need was felt for a revision of the policy so that the final draft of the text had to reflect both the Dynamic and Functional Equivalence approach as well as the Formal approach. The saga of this revision is narrated by Kees F. de Blois and Tamara Mewe in the second article, "Functional Equivalence and the New Dutch Translation Project"(pp.19-30). Of course, this project worked within an ideal situation; very few translation projects can boast of such financial and resources support and hence what was achieved there cannot be taken as model for similar projects.

Philip H. Towner and Stephen Pattemore in two separate papers raise up the issue of translation of texts which are in intertextual relationships to other texts in Scripture. Towner's interesting paper, "Translating the whole meaning. Intertextuality and

meaning in two Pauline texts”(pp.31-42) is more direct. His study is based upon R.B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, and discusses Philippians 1,19 and Timothy 4,16-18. Usually scholars distinguish three types of intertextuality: explicit citation, allusion, and echo(p.32). He acknowledges “that any allegedly intentional OT allusion or echo is open to challenge—the subtler the echo, the greater the degree of uncertainty that an allusion was intended” (ibid.) And then he discusses these two texts where he finds intentional connections with OT passages and these connections are not “simply a case of using OT vocabulary” (p.40) what former hermeneutics practitioners would call *accomodatio*(Cf. *Institutiones Biblicae*, I, Roma: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1951, art IV:15). The question that he raises but does not answer to is how should the translator reproduce the same effects that Paul or some other biblical writer had created through language as he presumably indulged in intertextuality (p.42). I am afraid this is an impossible task for most NT writers especially because our translations are normally done from ‘the original languages’ while Paul and other NT writers were handling the OT through the LXX. In translation, ‘something’ is lost and the first to go are semantic subtleties that hang from particular fine uses of language.

Pattemore’s contribution, “Relevance Theory, Intertextuality and the Book of Revelation” (pp.43-60) is more theoretical and offers guidelines from the linguistic theory called ‘Relevance Theory’ for recognizing that an author is somehow making use of some text or texts as he builds his own.

Andrei S. Desnitsky and Simon Crisp, who both come from Russian Orthodox background, are the authors of the next two papers. The former, in the paper entitled “Bible Translation as Literary Translation”(pp.61-72), discusses the issue of finding an equivalent literary form in the receptor language when translating the Bible. He defines ‘literary equivalence’ as “the adequate representation of the literary structure of a source text in a receptor text on different levels, from phonology to genre. In fact this is nothing but an amplification of functional equivalence with more attention paid to the text as a whole or at least to the major portions of the text”(p.66). He acknowledges though that he knows of no Bible translation that achieved this; nor does he spell out whether there is any difference between a translation that pretends to find an equivalent literary form and a formal translation which usually attempts to reproduce as much as the receptor language and culture allow the formal characteristics of the source text. Robert Alter has attempted to take the second course in translating Genesis, with a certain amount of success, cf. *Genesis*:

Translation and Commentary, New York: Norton, 1996; and the review by Lénart J. de Regt “Meeting the Norm of Literary Equivalence in Robert Alter’s Translation of Genesis: Hebrew Syntactical Inversions, Politeness Strategies, and Other Nuances”, in Anthony Abela (ed.), *In Joyful and Serene Service of his Lord’s Word*, Melita Theology Supplementary Series, 5 Malta: 2003, 121–138. I would not say the same for Mary Phil Korsak, *At the Start. Genesis Made New*, New York: Doubleday, 1993. I have the impression that literary genres are culture specific and finding an equivalent genre in another culture is almost impossible, especially if the culture for which the translation is done differs sharply from the one wherein the Bible was written; all you can do is to adapt them to the receptor language and culture structures; literary opuses may not be cloned.

Simon Crisp takes very much the same stand. His paper, “Icon of the Ineffable? An Orthodox View of Language and its implications for Bible Translation” (pp. 73-80) was already published twice elsewhere. This not only because it is a well written paper wherein Crisp offers a succinct but a more or less balanced description of the debate upon the approach to translation founded by Eugene A. Nida and practiced by the United Bible Societies; but also because the Orthodox view of language that he purports to discuss in brief differs sharply from that of the Western World. “In Orthodox understanding the text of Scripture functions in a way more analogous to an icon, namely as a window onto another world, rather than as a source of propositionally expressed information” (p.77). “Orthodox tradition views language as an intrinsically inadequate tool for comprehending the holy, and therefore as performing verbally a symbolic role analogous to that enacted visually by icons. Just as the icon makes no claim to be a photographic- or even essentially pictorial- depiction of the scene or event it represents, but rather a window onto the timeless reality to which it testifies and a mysterious means mediating that reality to the worshipper, so the language of Scripture cannot be a series of logical propositions with a single intended meaning” (pp.77-78). He then cites Mary Sanford’s article “An Orthodox view of biblical criticism” *Sourozh* 26 (1986)25-32 where she says that for Orthodox tradition language is polyvalent, that is, it has “several intended meanings because what is being communicated is generally too complex to be communicated in clear and simple statements.”

I have the impression of hearing in this context echoes of a church document coming from another tradition, *Liturgiam Authenticam* of the Catholic Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (2001)! The consequences for translation here are serious indeed and they are spelled out by Crisp

himself(pp.78-79): it would seem that only a literal replica of the biblical text would be acceptable especially for liturgical use. However, the Old Testament of the Orthodox Tradition is a translation itself from Hebrew into Greek, and while the Septuagint is considered to be basically a literal rendering of the Hebrew text, this does not happen always. In this regard one should consult the contribution by Manuel Jinbachian "Reasons for Differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint" (pp.253-274). If it can be proved that the translators who gave us the Septuagint were 'dynamic' in their handling of the Hebrew text notwithstanding that they considered it 'inspired' (though this concept was to fully develop only later with Christianity(2Tim3, 10-17; 2Pt 1,16-21), one would find room for more than wooden literal translation. Besides, the iconic view of language should not forget that besides synchronicity a text has also diachronicity; we should also distinguish properly between the *Intentio Auctoris* from *Intentio Operis* which could be much wider from what the original author could have envisaged because it could have been enriched by subsequent readings in tradition. On these issues I would recommend Luis Alonso Schökel, *La Parola Ispirata*, Brescia: Paideia,²1987. All in all, I believe that the formal approach to Bible translation that would also pay attention to issues of understandability and naturalness would satisfy most needs, both liturgical and pastoral.

The fourth sub-section dedicated to Bible translation and the new media('new' in contradistinction to print media) clusters three papers: "Call for a New Translation: A Media-based Translation for Audio-Scriptures" by Julian Sundersingh (pp.191-214); "Seeing the Text: Using Biblical Metaphors as a Basis for Visualization of Scripture Texts" written by Kenneth J. Thomas(pp.215-230); and "Communicating the Bible in New Media" penned by Robert Hodgson, Jr. (pp.231-242).

Sundersingh had written a doctoral dissertation on Media-based Bible translation, a dissertation which was recently published as *Audio-based Translation*, by SAIACS, Bangalor & the United Bible Societies, New York: 2001. His article in *Current Trends* is a plea to work Bible translation for audio not print productions. As one would expect the target audience of his study is the Bible Societies population who normally undertakes Bible translation projects. He first outlines the differences between spoken and written language underlining the implications thereof for media-translation(pp.194-199): his thesis here being that "Scripture translations meant for audio media should revolve around a spoken realm with all the characteristics of spoken language because audio communication is for aural reception as much as spoken language is for aural reception" (p.199). This signifies that Bible translation

for audio production does not mean translating the Bible and simply reading it for audio media like radio, cassettes, etc. "In an audio Scripture program, appropriateness of the translated text to the receiving medium is an integral part of defining fidelity since a less appropriate use of the medium violates the very basis of communication"(p.212). "A verbatim and literal representation of the Scripture text in an audio media would be a descriptive use while a hyper-textual and aural representation of the same would be an interpretative use" (*ibid.*). In the second half of his study the author describes a field testing of a Media-based translation of a text of Scripture; in this field research carried out in his native land India, Sundersingh attempts to verify whether a media-based translation would be preferred to a literary text also read on media: his respondents by far preferred for understandability and communicability a biblical text that had been presented in drama form. And this leads him to the conclusion "that principles developed for translating Scriptures from one language to another are not adequate in handling issues that arise when Scriptures are transposed from one medium to another. We need new tools in understanding these issues and also new translations that will better suit an aural environment"(pp.193-194).

Can Scripture be faithfully reproduced or 'translated' into visual products like films or videos? This is the argument of Kenneth J. Thomas's study; he prefers the term/concept 'visual translation' for the other proposed by some scholars: 'transmediation' [p.215; for a discussion about which term fits better this operation cf. Carlo Buzzetti and Marek Lis, " 'Translating' from medium to medium—what terms are appropriate?" *Bible Translator*, 52/4(2001)441-445] that is, the passing of the Bible text from one medium to another but clings to this term. While in oral productions the medium is not after all far from what the original authors of the Bible intended their work to function since their work was generally intended to be read aloud within a community, in visualizing the Bible text we are faced with a completely new situation since "the video's characteristic is its use of multiple media. We have thus entered into an arena where we cannot assume that the original text functioned to provide some comparable impact upon its audience" (pp.215-216). But can we visualize the original text which is essentially contextualized? Thomas shows briefly the difficulties involved in trying to reproduce the visual aspects to which the text may refer (p.216). Instead he proposes that a pictorial representation of the texts of the Bible should first identify and then use 'controlling metaphors' and their related 'key metaphors' in the text. Controlling metaphors are those metaphors in a text that are basic for it and that 'structure the text discourse by providing an organizing principle for the whole and its parts'(p.217). Then

through the help of biblical exegetes and theologians Thomas exemplifies the use of controlling metaphors in Scriptures: he mentions the metaphor of 'Refuge in the Lord' in the psalter, 'Life as a divine Trial' in the Letter of James, and the metaphor of 'Diaspora' in 1Peter(pp.217-219). Probably he could have added the metaphor of pilgrimage in Exodus if we rely on Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, JSOT Supplement Series 239, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,1997.

Thomas then lists four principles suggested by biblical scholars about recourse to controlling metaphors in exegesis of biblical texts, as for instance, that of controlling metaphors as means for understanding the major theme and purpose of the whole text: 'They provide a unifying way to understand the various parts and subjects of the book'(p.219). Or "Controlling metaphors are dynamic in that they enable new aspects of the concepts presented by the authors to be understood"(p.220). The problem is not just identifying the controlling metaphor beneath a text but also in "determining their significance" for the target audience of the video representation of the text. For the controlling metaphors are often abstract in themselves and "require metaphorical definition" (Thomas, 216 citing George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *The Metaphors we live by*, Chigaco: University of Chicago Press, 1980). For "neither the specific metaphor nor its simplest visualization, in terms of its original context, may communicate to the present-day viewer"(p.220). We should rather focus "on using images that could create a recognizable conceptualization of the metaphor in modern-day terms" (*ibid.*).

Once one determines the controlling metaphors and their conceptual significance one may try starting to find 'functional equivalents' which would provide the viewers with a familiar 'frame of reference', unify the production, and serve as control on the other metaphors employed in the video being produced. The identification of the controlling metaphors within a text to be used as base for a video is usually achieved by identifying first 'key metaphors' within the text(p.221). "A key metaphor may provide the concept for a functionally equivalent image in visualizing a passage, but the visualization must be governed by understanding the function of the key metaphor within the larger whole. Visualization of a part should never make it more difficult to comprehend the whole but should allow clarity about the place of the part within the whole" (*ibid.*).

Thomas then focuses on the role biblical scholars have to play in such production, talking from personal experience with the American Bible Society as they sought to visualize a number of texts from Luke where the controlling metaphor has been

identified with the 'Kingdom of God' "to which the particular metaphors are related" (pp.221-225). He relates on work done on Luke 1,39-56; 2,1-21;10,25-37;15,11-32; 24,13-35. For Luke 15, 11-32 Thomas as the consultant of the team that produced the video presumed that it is 'a parable of the Kingdom of God' even though the Gospel writer himself does not make this explicit, since the subject matter of the other parables in the context is the Kingdom of God(p.224). This assumption though has to be ascertained by proper exegesis of the entire context. The last stage in the preparation of the exegetical work for the video production is choosing the functional equivalent for the controlling and key metaphors in the text. Thomas identifies three principles: the functional should represent the same concept as the biblical metaphor, it should be familiar in contemporary culture and have associations with the biblical controlling and key concepts, and it should be the primary visual image that occurs throughout the video.

This brief discussion leads to a critique of the products that the American Bible Society has made on the texts of Luke mentioned above(pp.226-228). Thomas concludes that "functional equivalent images for controlling and key metaphors in biblical books and passages would be appropriate to use as basis for visualization in video productions" (p.228). The main weaknesses in this proposal are: 1) that it is not always easy to identify the controlling and key metaphors in the source text; 2) that finding the equivalent metaphors in contemporary cultures is even more difficult as we do not always know well enough the historical and cultural contexts in which biblical texts were conceived; 3) that even when one identifies the equivalent metaphors or images "the significance of any image cannot be controlled, since images are multivalent" (p. 225) so that you do not know what messages will arrive to your intended audience.

Robert Hodgson Jr's paper is actually a progress report about the workings of the 'New Media Working Group' founded in 1997 within the United Bible Societies, that has been set up to study the theory and practice of communicating the Bible through media other than printing (p.231). The report is addressed mainly to translation consultants and is meant to show how they may serve on production teams working on films or videos based on Scripture. The proceeding of this working group had already appeared in two publications: P. Soukup SJ & R. Hodgson(eds.), *Fidelity and Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media*, New York: The American Bible Society & Franklin: Sheed & Ward,1999; and R. Hodgson & K.J. Thomas, "Report of the New Media Group", *The Bible Translator Technical Papers*, 49/1(1998)101-103. In the 1998 paper Hodgson and Thomas had suggested a five-

stage approach or framework for the work of the 'translators' [by the latter word they mean all the personnel involved in the production of the texts, from translation consultants to translators(p.231 note 2)]. In this report/paper Hodgson suggests another two stages or levels: they should actually collaborate at the level of product development and at the other of marketing(pp. 235-236). In the second part of the report Hodgson discusses some of the norms that should be followed at each level of the production of the film or video especially norms concerning the ethics of translation and producing Bible texts in different media(pp.236-241).

In this regard I think I would raise only two issues though there may be others. Producing films or videos the script for which is closely based upon the biblical text is not translation but creating a completely new product. The Bible text cannot be cloned. And the rules for fidelity for such products are different than those operative for bible translation. Secondly. In the interpretation of the 'film text' by the common reader there is the mediation of the performers who impersonate the biblical characters; these actors have their private life which often does not remain so private. And this will also influence the audiences who may mix up the mores of the actor with those of the biblical character the part of whom he plays. May be this is a minor issue. Perhaps it is not so minor as the Bible often intends to present 'reliable characters' to tradition [Cf. Paul J. Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History. Profiles of Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996 for this concept].

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