

Ecology: the contributions of various spiritualities

Among Us

Entre Nosotros

Entre Nous



Dialogue and Cooperation

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***Ecology: the contributions
of various spiritualities***

The Teachers' Teams are made up of Christian teachers who work in the public education system of their country. Alongside other colleagues they strive to promote:

- * Schools of high standard for all and where differences of culture, race and religion are viewed positively.
- * An education system based on democratic values, respect for Human Rights and the Rights of the Child.
- * A Church ever more faithful to the freedom of the Gospel, where the Good News is announced to the poor and through them to all Humanity.

The members of the Teachers' Teams are convinced that the God of Jesus Christ is present with them in their struggles. Wherever they meet, in their communities and discussion groups, they try to recognise God and witness to Him.

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EDITORIAL

Reflections on ecology: contributions of various spiritualities : such is the topic of the present issue, an invitation to take a tour of the world ! It will be a short one since the Teachers' Teams are deployed in some 40 countries all over our 5 continents.

As Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si'*, « *Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it.* »

In this issue, following *Among Us* n° 85, you will be able to get an overview of the life of the Teams and the Church in these different corners of the world, thanks to the continental delegates' reports. You will also find testimonies about traditional religions in Africa (p. 16), spiritualities in India (p. 17), Amazonia (p. 19), and Buddhism (p. 21).

As the encyclical *Laudato Si'* reminds us, let us remember that « *Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also "macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones* ».

The different spiritualities mentioned earlier all highlight a common feature: seeking and practising harmony

- between individuals and their fellows, the whole humanity,
- with animals and plants,
- with Nature in its whole.

We should all be humbled to feel that we have to live by it in our daily lives!

“*One of the first steps in our ecological commitment is to rediscover how we are inter-connected with nature, and how we can live in harmony with it. We should never lose sight of the cosmic context of our lives*”, our friends from India say.

And to conclude, a testimony from Indigenous people from Gueviare in Colombia, Latin America, at the borders of Brazil and Peru: “*The earth has been watered with blood and it bleeds; multinational corporations have cut the veins of our Mother Earth. We want our Native clamour to be heard all over the world.*”

This is why we ask for the light and power of the Holy Spirit, creator of all!

*Monique Judenne, Christmas 2019
trans. Mireille Nicault*



GEOPOLITICAL

CONVERGENCES

This is what has been dealt with as Convergences:

- Our planet
- Migrations
- Economy
- Governments: laws, democracy at risk, corruption, the media's place.

The planet

Many problems have appeared because of the change of climate. Demonstrations for the climate are being organized in many parts of the world.

The protection of life and environment is present in Latin America. However, many serious failings are to be regretted as regards environment, like pollution and the destruction of natural resources, all of which damaging environment.

The people want information from their government about the use of economical resources which are disappearing.

In Africa, the lack of respect for our planet is a disaster which causes the loss of human lives, of cattle, harvests, houses and other infrastructures. Research for projects should be a priority, to enable a sustainable development. Sustainable productions of cassava, of bread made from local products, are examples which should be developed.

In France, the increase of taxes on diesel fuel was meant to help fight against pollution.

Migrations

Populations migrate to other countries, seeking better living conditions. It is difficult to make out whether people migrate for political or economical reasons. People fight to go elsewhere so as to have a better life.

European countries don't want any migrants. However solidarity with them exists. Some citizens fight for welcoming persons in distress...

Some migrants are welcomed in Latin America villages. The Teachers' Teams members provide them with food and clothes. Columbia has received hundreds of migrants. Many people migrate to Chile, Brazil, the Dominican Republic. Some of them go to the United States, Canada and France.

This year, migrants coming from various countries: Honduras, Guatemala and Africa, have been going

through Mexico. They travel in big groups, and take more than six months to reach their destination.

The dream of migrants is to come to the USA, then go to Canada. They eat little, travel by all sorts of means of transport, and then walk to the towns.

Some Africans come to Latin America, among which many doctors who have left their country.

But it must be noted that migrations have also contributed to economical growth.

Economy

Everywhere economy is mistreated.

In Asia, the external debt is increasing. Public and private investments are declining; corruption, subordination, nepotism, clientelism, influence peddling and misappropriation of funds strain the countries economies.

The privatization of services restricts the rights of citizens in many countries in the world. A reduction of the purchasing power of the populations can be observed. The increase of inequalities endangers economical growth. The public debt remains a deep concern.

In Africa, the population, as a whole, lives under the poverty line.

In Asia, a renewal in the people's expense can be noted. In India, in spite of a most efficient economy, an important part of the people lives under the poverty level. Yet India is one of the greatest exporting countries for computer services. Their digital economy is one of the most effective in the world.

In spite of the increase of developed countries, social divisions keep growing. To survive, many Burundians have to seek a second job. The economy of Congo, which depends on the benefits obtained by hydrocarbons, suffers by the fall of the price of oil. The labour market is under-developed in Guinea. The influence of China grows; it has become one of the first economical partners in Congo.

Developing countries have put forward a small economical growth and have launched programs which aim at improving their economy. Malaysia seeks to extend its commercial exchanges and its investments in other countries. But African economies remain precarious and find it difficult to take off. Burkina must face great socio-economic challenges.

Despite growth, in developed countries social differences go on increasing. Some governments lead very questionable economic politics.

In Europe, each country is but a dwarf on the world scale on the economical level, and a majority of people expect nothing good any more. In many countries, demonstrations with acts of vandalism have a very bad impact on economic activity.

However, we can see positive developments amongst the countries in the different continents.

Democracy

Democracy is repeatedly weakened or questioned in many countries. We can only regret the rise of populism, of anti-Semitism and racism. This divide seems greater and greater, not only between the peoples of ex-Eastern Europe: Poland, Hungary, but inside the countries themselves. It is rare to hear politicians defending Europe. They criticize it because they lack funds, but they don't mention the actual productions they have achieved owing to European funds.

The governments are often bureaucratic and macho-cultured. Corruption prevails. There is a breach inside democracy. Moreover, neo liberal governments fall into line with the United States. Governments have changed part of their constitutions to get re-elected. Some governments are completely regardless of the laws.

In the Philippines, the government leads a policy meant to restore order, and strictly controls the media. For instance the Act on Digital Security is considered as a violation in freedom of speech and of thought. Censure is applied in Malaysia.

In Africa, there is an obvious will of the Heads of State to stay at the head of the country forever, by changing the fundamental laws. Populations are no longer taken in by the promises of the Heads of State that run for the elections, win them, and unfortunately carry out nothing. In Africa, the suffering of their peoples is not part of their concern.

In the matter of constitutions, very few democratic changes have been enacted. It is a well-known fact that social dialogue is most often absent. Endless dishonourable behaviour and all sorts of scandals are committed; some political persons are allied with organized crime. Sometimes in Africa, the opposition is prevented from taking part in general elections.

In many countries of Latin America, changes of government shift from left to right. In Brazil, the ultra-right has been elected by the people.

Facing all that, the peoples react, organizing citizen marches, marches against corruption and to defend women. Demonstrations take place in most of the countries. The women have shown resistance, they have fought for their rights and have taken an active part in women's struggles.

Human rights defenders have fought for a better life and for justice.

Some positive points can be noted:

- The participation of Métis and Natives in governments in Latin America.
- Justice asking the ministers for explanations about their actions.
- The « new look » composition of the political class in Senegal, and the calm, peaceful election, without any major incidents.
- General elections
- Political alternative
- Some governments create links for an inclusive society
- Teachers get into action to develop citizenship and promote a democratic culture
- Death penalty has been abolished in Burkina Faso
- A political alternative has been achieved in Madagascar and Senegal
- The Democratic Republic of Congo has had a political alternative, without any fighting.
- Many countries in Africa have had general elections, or a presidential election.

But the joy of the people who win an election doesn't last long. The Heads of the States, for various reasons, do not perform their tasks and don't apply democracy and social justice. They don't give any opportunity to women to participate. All the peoples' hopes gradually vanish, others don't trust political persons any more as in Bolivia, Mexico, Salvador and other countries... after having rejoiced in the change of their governments.

Problems of insecurity plague African countries and prevent the people from living peacefully. Extremists kill in the name of their religion.

In the Church, some take care of the poor; others kill them because of their religion. Anti-religions extremists cause many deaths. Terrorist attacks are repeated and committed.

Much work remains to do, in all continents, to fight corruption, develop citizenship, respect human rights and democratic culture, and restore the power of the people.

In Latin America, some children have been sexually abused by priests, and reports have come to the Vatican. The Pope has asked forgiveness for that.

In society, we can see great violence in the towns, violence also from the demonstrators and from the police. The, closure of public services and the cancellation of a part of the tax on wealthy people are considered as unjust decisions.

*International Bureau 2019
trans. Jacqueline Méaux*

EDUCATION

In **The Ivory Coast**, the academic year 2018-2019 started on Monday 10th September throughout the territory. The theme which has been chosen for this school year in primary, secondary, technical and professional schools is: “*Citizenship and commitment for all in high-quality schools for all*”. School is compulsory for children from 5 to 16 years old. Like other years, the State has given out school kits to the state primary schools pupils.

We must say that the second term of this school year has been marked by a strike of the teachers who demanded better wages (increase of housing allowances, no classes on Wednesdays for primary schools, and career profile).

In the **Republic of Guinea**, the academic year 2018-2019 has been disrupted once more, like the past 2017-2018 year, by a strike of the pre-university teachers (primary and secondary levels). This strike lasted from October 3rd 2018 to January 10th 2019. Consequently, class has taken place without a stop until part of June. Exams took place from 4th to 6th July 2019 for admittance into the 7th year, from 8th to 13th July for the middle school final exam and from 15th to 19th July for the end of high school levels.

In **Senegal** the 2018-2019 school year started well in October, with no major disturbance until now. Lessons take place as usual. In certain places, one can note signs of discontent, mostly among the students of the Cheikh Anta Diop University. It has been possible for all the exams to take place at the fixed dates. The « *Concours Général* » (a prestigious competition), which allows rewarding the best pupils in Years 11 and 12, has been organized, as well as the prize-giving to all the winners.

In **Togo**, 2018-2019, there have been no strike movements in Education, a draft agreement having been signed the year before, committing the State to apply the teachers’ specific status.

Two major projects are just being achieved by the State: school canteens and health insurance for the pupils. Some NGOs are also making valuable efforts for the registering of birth-dates for the children who had none. We must note that the huge numbers of pupils in each class are a very heavy task for the teachers, particularly in the towns.

The Teachers’ Teams movement is active and structured in Ivory Coast, the Republic of Guinea, Togo, Senegal, the Republic of Congo, Burundi, Central African Republic and Burkina Faso but some countries remain silent and the secretariat only maintains contact with individual team members.

The Teachers’ Teams in **Senegal** have held their national session from the 5th to the 13th of August 2018, on the theme: « *Catholic Teachers, following Christ with the others, to become builders of Justice and of Peace.* » 45 team-members, men and women, came from 7 dioceses in Senegal and took part in this meeting.

After a month of rest, the National Bureau has met to work out the guidance theme chosen for the directive letter: “*Teachers, educators, with others, how to be actors in the safeguarding of our common home (Laudato Si’)*”, inspired by the general theme of the International Bureau.

During the year, the National Bureau has met every month and led activities around the theme: « *Laudato Si’, what appeals for the Teacher’s Teams member?* ». The National Council has taken place in the diocese of Kolda (Casamance) with mainly a lecture on the theme: « *Part and responsibility of the Teachers’ Teams member in the Safeguarding of our Common Home* », and a reforestation morning.

Besides, the National Bureau has achieved missions of reinforcement at Palmarin, in the diocese of Dakar, and at Kolda. To find funds, the National Bureau has co organized, together with the local team of Rufisque, a friendly day, and has made calendars. It has supported the Team members of the 29 teams in the country morally and/or financially, on events in their lives.

However, many things remain difficult: auto-financing of the movement, communication between local teams and the National Bureau (no response from local teams), updating of the team members files, lethargy of some local teams particularly in the archdiocese of Dakar, implication of some of the team members in several activities...

In **the Ivory Coast**, 20 Teachers’ Teams meet regularly and have various activities.

In **Togo**, the national session has been accommodated by the diocese of Kara from the 31st July to the 5th August 2019, on the following theme: “*What education to change a child, make him/her conscious and responsible towards the problems of environment?*”. The subject choice took into account the directions given by the Pan-African Coordination and the International Secretariat.

The Teachers' Teams in Togo are now growing. The diocese of Sokodé has achieved a notable work of awareness to gain new members. They have organized rounds in the many parishes (among which BAFILO and TCHAMBA). The other dioceses are equally active. Recollections have taken place in some parishes during Lent. However contributions are not paid, even though monthly meetings are regular.

In the Republic of Congo, the essential focus is actually on EDUCATION TO PEACE. The Teachers' Teams in Congo are members of the World Union of Catholic Teachers (UMEC), which publishes the actions of the teams. The contact between « GETTING OUT OF VIOLENCE » and Pax Christi France is permanent and we hope to advance further. Following an invitation from the Teachers' Teams in Congo, the « University of Peace in Africa » (UPA) has held its 2019 UPA campus at Pointe Noire from the 7th to the 26th July in 2019.

The national team has organized training sessions on Active Evangelical Non-Violence, on group dynamics, and on cooperative pedagogy. And so they have been able to promote the dynamics of the paradigm: « *to be-to do – to have- to share* » to introduce the Teachers' Teams in the action of the groups of « Training for Peace » (GEP) They have developed groups in Pointe Noire, Ouesso, Dolisie, Brazzaville and Impfundo.

The Teachers' Teams, Caritas and Justice and Peace from the Cathedral Parish St Pierre Claver have organized three sessions of work on the culture of peace. The Teams have produced culture of peace textbooks with the help of the World Union of Catholic Teachers.

« *Radiance* », a contact-paper, is edited once a month, a broadcast, « *The Good Shepherd* », is on the programs at Radio Maria.

Diocese of Pointe Noire: the diocesan coordinator has organized a talk-and-debate on the theme of « *The call towards holiness in the school world* » with 250 teachers present. During that period, a few activities have been undertaken by the Teams: regular meetings, health operation with rubbish collectors setting out, reorganisation of the school Red Cross brigade, cultural activities (traditional ballet), care of the natural surroundings (flowerbeds), planting flowers along the classrooms, starting a school garden, cultural activities in primary school as well as in Year 6, creation of the school choir. A Mass is celebrated every 1st Friday of the month with the Popular Scholas.

Diocese of Ouesso: The team-members have set up a programme of educational activities, and supervise the children every Saturday. So they have

been able to create a Red Cross brigade, an Aids prevention club, a small polyphonic choir, a journalists' club, a theatre club, a Peace and non-violence group, and a poems and tales club. More than 150 children from private and state schools take part in those activities. The team members have had a two-day workshop: one about Pope Francis's pastoral letter on Peace Day, which took place on 1st January 2019, and another to share the pastoral letter about youth from the Bishops of Congo.

Brazzaville, Dolisie and Impfundo: Just beginning, the Teachers' Teams movement in these three dioceses remains at the training level, so as to interiorise well the specificity of the Teachers' Teams. They regularly communicate with the national team, who goes on helping them.

The Teachers' Teams in **the Republic of Guinea** actively prepare the Pan African Session, which is to take place in the second half of the month of August 2020. The theme proposed for this meeting is: « *Environment Protection in Each of our Countries: Successes or achievements, challenges or problems, prospects or nearing solutions (the role of school, of local communities, of the Church)* ».

THE CHURCH

On religious grounds, the Church in **Senegal**, whilst rejoicing in the nomination of His Lordship Martin Boucar TINE as pastor of the diocese of Kaolak, is still awaiting the nomination of a bishop for Tanibacounda. Moreover, Senegal has organized the international World Youth Days from April 5th to 07th 2019 on the theme: « *Here is the servant of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy Word* ». 15000 young people have taken part to these days, coming from the seven dioceses of Senegal, from Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Ivory Coast, Cape Verde and Mali.

The **Togo** Bishops Conference, in its pastoral letter of 21st June 2019, has renewed its action in mobilizing Catholic Action to fight poverty, violence and injustice. The theme of the session was: « *Optimal Resources Management on the basis of self-responsibility* ». The subject was to meditate mainly on how to face the challenges of self-management, evangelisation and development by which the Church is confronted. Moreover the bishops encouraged the faithful and the priests to place the Eucharist at the centre of their lives, and to show more responsibility, maturity and clear-sightedness towards the political issues of today.

*Niowy Jean-Jacques Fall, continental coordinator
trans. Jacqueline Méaux*

☞ LATIN AMERICA AND CARRIBEAN ☞

EDUCATION

Bolivia

A majority of teachers are resisting a law introduced about 10 years ago that they consider a loss of quality: teacher evaluation, various irregularities, and obsolete infrastructures. Unions are fighting against the bureaucratization of education and the lack of inclusion for students with learning difficulties.

The paradigms of "Living well" and "Pachamama" which underlie the programs are not uniformly shared by the teachers.

Brazil

Teachers are refusing to remove philosophy, sociology and arts education from the curriculum, and are refusing to teach the "School without party" program in public schools. This program smashes teachers' freedom and responsibility. The government is now destroying everything representing the social victories won through long, hard struggle.

However many teachers realize alternative activities with mentally handicapped children and young victims of human trafficking...

Columbia

In the Quindio region, a skills training program, "Teachers Learn from Teachers", has been set up; it's a peace and innovation education project along the themes of gender, diversity and rights.

Chile

Teachers across the country are forced to work in an education system that kills creativity, culture, teamwork, historical memory, arts development, advocacy and respect for nature. These imposed models are contrary to the needs of the people. Call to work for the development of a New Public Education of the XXI century.

Honduras

Despite serious government opposition, teachers (including Team members) are maintaining a cooperative Network between 452 colleagues, senior public school administrators and teachers' unions. They denounce the theft of teachers' savings, widespread layoffs, privatization of the school system, and the political repression of education and health workers.

Mexico

- Ecopedagogy Development in many schools (planting fruit trees and native plants) and experiences, actions in relation to nuisances (plastics, beach clean-ups...).
- Education reform: reorganization of various levels, universal free access, secularism, inclusion and gender equality, and effective recognition of a teacher's role.

Peru

At the ministry of Education: 5 ministers in 3 years, abuse, interference in schools and authoritarianism all weaken the system. Some members of Congress want to authorize people with no teaching qualifications (change programs authoritatively).

Dominican Republic

Due to the private sector's high interest in this area, the future quality of education is of serious concern. In order to guarantee high quality education for the poor, the will to strengthen the public school system is strong.

*Paulette Molinier, excerpts from articles
submitted by national coordinators
trans. N. Anderson*

THE CHURCH AND THE TEACHERS' TEAMS

Argentina

Teams exist, but there is no coordinator; they send regular reports of their activities to the coordinator of the Southern Region.

Bolivia

The Church in Bolivia was generally in opposition to Evo Morales, the former president. It has not yet digested the new constitution which has taken away part of her privileges. Although her work alongside the people and the poor is admirable, she must learn to live in a secular state.

Brazil

The Church still has a great number of priests and bishops from the conservative right who deny the legitimacy of Pope Francis and the new openings he has created; they have defended fascist policies. At the heart of the Laity National Council, there is a group of lay Christians who uphold and further the teachings of the Pope.

Many Team members are strongly involved in the Church, but also in stimulating social and political activities. A handicap: considering the financial problems concerning "travel" in the country and

across the continent prevents Teachers' Teams other meetings. On the spot, the events concerning the movement are closely paid attention to.

Chile

The Church is not committed to defending the right to Public Education, which is threatened by current politics. The discovery of sexual and power abuses by the clergy on children, young people, and women created a crisis of faith and distrust from all believers.

Chile Teachers' teams met in Vina del Mar from July 14th to 16th, 2019 with 2 objectives: reflect on the reality of Public Education in Chile, look for ways to help build a more democratic society.

Proposals concerning School, Society and the Church have been recorded.

Colombia

The Church organised events such as 'Church Spring-time' and the International Seminar of Reconciliation and Social Inclusion which Team members participated in. For them, the meetings are an opportunity for on-going learning from each other, offering support and sharing experiences, all of which strengthens us. Their other activities, very diverse, are also being distributed on social networks and the Internet (conferences, production of discussion papers, meetings, strike).

Cuba

The national meeting planned for April 2019 could not take place for various reasons (health, travel difficulties, etc). Team meetings at a national level are always difficult; electronic communication and the collaboration of priests help with the exchange of news. Aristides (Haiti) makes relations easier by sharing texts and sometimes an information journal on education.

Ecuador

In various dioceses, bishops reacted to the popular uprising and the coordinators of the Basic Ecclesial Communities of "La Casita" met and proclaimed a manifesto expressing their solidarity with the leaders of the uprising and the fact that it was particularly the natives and young people who demand their rights to a dignified life, better social justice and national sovereignty.

For its part, the Episcopal Conference launches 3 calls: "To peace, to justice and to dialogue".

Haiti

The bishops of Haiti have denounced violence and poverty. They have drawn attention to the difficulties caused by demonstrations against the government and the violence in the streets. No news from Haiti has reached any of our Latin American colleagues.

Living conditions and communication in Haiti are still extremely difficult.

Honduras

From 2009 to 2019 the Teams survived, remaining unobtrusive (because of the dictatorship). In October 2018 a national leadership committee was formed and international communication was established. The members of the committee meet every three months.

Mexico

Monthly meetings were held in different places (libraries, community halls, private homes). Some important achievements:

- Meetings to prepare the EDAL (for Latin America and the Caribbean) and participation in the event.
- 2019 National Meeting; the theme was "*Socio-Emotional Aptitude and Resilience*".
- More discussion on the issues of gender and the role of women in school, family and society; links to Liberation Theology.
- Workshops with street children and parents (in schools), etc.

In general, the Teams are very aware of the words, writings and gestures of the Pope.

Peru

As in most of the countries of Latin America, the Team members of Peru have had local, regional and national meetings. At the National Meeting in August 2019 these commitments were made: to continue our own lifelong learning and educate for citizenship in all areas of society, to analyse and denounce any manipulation of the means of communication, to recognise the environmental crisis and the seriousness of Amazonian deforestation, and unite with the movement to defend indigenous peoples and their environment, to continue to teach...about taking responsibility for the care of 'our common home'.

Dominican Republic

The Catholic Church is very focused on the issue of abortion, with all that entails. The issue is difficult to resolve, given the position of certain religious leaders. The Church has not shown much interest in equal rights and has not raised its voice in favour of the poor. It has turned a deaf ear to the appeals of Pope Francis. In the Teams we have been asking ourselves questions on the nature of our society; the poor are no longer seen as individual people but objects whose main purpose is to consume and become more competitive. Are we helping to build and reinforce this model or not?

Paulette Molinier, taken from texts sent in by national coordinators trans. Jonathan Ticher, 2019

SITUATION OF SCHOOLS

In Bangladesh, there was a substantial improvement in access to education. Statistics showed improved gross enrolment with 112.1 percent of children listed in primary education. Gender equality in both level of education was improved. But some 30% of the population 6 to 14 years or older still struggle to read and write, while only 33% of students master proficiencies in Mathematics. Only 25 percent of students obtain reading capabilities by the end of primary school.

Dropout rate remains an issue due to children's need to help with farming, poor teaching methods, crowded classrooms and unappealing educational surroundings. About 40% of secondary school-aged are out of school, vulnerable to violence and abuse, including child marriage, child labour, drug addiction, and physical and psychological violence.

In partnership with BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities), UNICEF supported the adaptation of the traditional Ustad-Sagred (Master-Learner) model of teaching and learning to include supervised informal apprenticeships. Students are further trained on trade and soft skills to prepare them for employment. The most disadvantaged and vulnerable out of school adolescents gained alternative opportunities for learning, were equipped with work-skills, and provided opportunities for employment and decent work.

A group of teachers and scholars of journalism and media studies have called upon the government to reconsider the "draconian" Digital Security Act. They fear that the law will curb free journalism, pave way for a mass harassment and will be used as an iron hand to suppress the social media users, writers and journalists. The Digital Security Act, 2018, aimed to ensure national digital security in Bangladesh along with preventing and prosecuting digital offences, but in practice, it poses significant threats to free expression.

In India, two out of three streams of school education are coordinated at the national level. The first, originally meant for children of government employees, they follow a common schedule so that students going from one school to the other on a particular day will hardly see any difference in what is being taught. Other children are also admitted if there are available seats.

The second central scheme is private schools which generally cater to children from wealthy families.

The state schools belong to the third stream. Each state has three kinds of schools that follow the state curriculum: the government schools – fully funded by the government so the fees are low; the privately owned schools with their own land and buildings so the fees are high and teachers are paid by the management; and the government-aided schools receiving grant-in-aid from the government to enable poor families to send their children in school.

In India, preschool education is provided by the private schools and government ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) *Anganwadi* centres.

The right to education act (RTE) provided for free compulsory education for all children from ages 6 to 14. The average salary of teachers, established by the regions, depends on their level of qualification, their experience, their geographical location (the urban areas often make more than those in the rural areas). Private schools on the other hand are completely autonomous. They are able to set their own standards and requirements for teachers.

Founded in 1954, the All India Primary Teachers Association has more than 2.3 million members, in 24 states. It came to work effectively for defending and promoting teachers rights and interests and contributing towards achieving quality education for all. Today it continues leaving an impact to education in the country.

In the Philippines, continual reforms have sought to boost enrolment levels, graduation rates and mean years of schooling in elementary and secondary education. Along with the implementation of the K – 12 curriculums, is the integration of technology. The government allocations in education in 2018 increased by 1.7 percent making education the second largest item on the national budget.

For the tertiary education, a free tuition law in state schools and universities for academic year 2019-2020 is implemented through Republic Act No. 10931. The law provides that for the Filipino students to have universal access to tertiary education, to give opportunities for more Filipino students, particularly those coming from the poor families, to pursue their chosen career with government support. The Philippine education system now prioritises investing in human capital and considers it more urgent than investing in physical infrastructure, and in responding to problems of religious extremism and of human rights violation.

In this reform, schooling is free for public school students but there are other indirect costs which poor families find difficult to afford. However, despite these reported improvements, the drop-out rate has remained high, and shows that 39% of the workforce

– had not completed basic education. Problems with access and inequality still exist: only 53% of the poorest 20% of households sent their children to high school, while 81% of the wealthiest families did so. To address the problem, the government extends school feeding programmes and expands programmes under the Alternative Learning System (ALS), a “second chance” designed to ensure more Filipinos complete their basic education.

This school year 2019, salary increase was granted to teachers. However, the increase is minimal and not enough to cover expenses for basic needs and education of the children in an average Filipino family of 5 members. City schools received higher funding, but many schools in urban areas have insufficient and poor quality facilities and a shortage of teachers.

Teachers' difficulties come from overwork, low wages and lack of training in the new technologies that are invading classrooms. Young teachers are more comfortable with computer programs, but they need help using them in teaching.

The people in charge of school administration carry many tasks: finding solutions to the problems encountered in the school, being role models, building consensus, innovating... Not being able to fulfill these tasks alone, they call upon competent teachers, and team members are often chosen.

The Alliance of Concerned Teachers works for real social transformation, the economic well-being of teachers and people working in education. The Teaching Teams coordinate with this association.

Other Asian countries have laws and intervention to improve the institutional environment in which the school functions. Spending more in an education system that sets poor incentives will not improve student performance.

From the National Coordinators

EVOLUTION OF THE CHURCH

In Asia, the Catholic Churches are small minorities. Except in Philippines and in East Timor, Christians live and work within multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. It is in this context that Church in Asia, through the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC), in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, and in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters, join hands with other Asians of different faiths to transform and heal the brokenness in Asian culture and Asian realities.

In India, atrocities against weaker sections – women, children, tribal, dalits and minorities are experienced. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

(RSS) and Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) continuously attack the Church, vandalizing Church properties and desecrating places of worship. Dalit Christians are denied of their rights.

The Church faces two problems: clericalism and discrimination against Christians. There are few who dared to stand on their own and play a prophetic role. Some members of the Teachers' Teams in India belong to these few.

The main pastoral contribution of the Church is its investment in the fields of development, social action and education. The Catholic Church runs thousands of schools. The main objective is to enable the poor and the under-privileged to stand on their own and be oriented on the message of integral liberation proclaimed by the Church.

Philippines. Religious participation in civil society is an integral part of Philippine democratic processes. The Church in the Philippines lives within a situation where social privileges and deference are accorded to the rich and the powerful while a very great number of our people wallow in poverty. The Chief Executive's decisions and national policies were in conflict with the Catholic Church's beliefs on human life and dignity (extra-judicial killings, anti-mining campaign, death threats to human rights defenders, and intimidations to land and environmental activists among others).

The Teachers' teams members participate in local church activities to raise the awareness of the people on different human rights issues, environment concerns... They get involved in preparation of the liturgy. Groups or basic ecclesial communities meet in the parishes to facilitate reflections on events and situations affecting the life and dignity of the people.

One of the pastoral priorities of the Philippine Church is active presence and participation of the poor in the Church. A dialogue between the Church and sector groups (the farmers, fishermen, women, youth, the indigenous peoples and other workers) is set up and the Bishops listen to their life stories or accounts of work struggles and with them create conditions in which they are heard by the concerned agencies or government offices.

Poor among the poor and with the poor, Christians and their Bishops seek to liberate themselves from mentalities, values, behaviours and lifestyles that discriminate against the materially poor. Bishops, priests, religious and lay people work together to spread the Good News to others.

The Church is busy preparing for the 500th year celebration of the arrival of Christianity in the country in 2021.

In Bangladesh, this year, Catholics celebrate 500 years of Christianity. Despite persecutions, attacks, restrictions, and obstacles to Christian converts from the radical Islamic groups, expression of Christian's faith is flourishing. The Vatican made Chittagong the seat of East Bengal Vicariate in 1845. Then the Holy See created Chittagong Diocese and this was elevated to an archdiocese in 2017.

The Church provides education and social services for the poor and the needy. Aside from celebrating Holy Mass, and propagating faith, the bishops and priests organize interfaith gathering where Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists and Christians gather together understanding their commonalities as they seek the way to harmony and peace. Team members join in these activities.

Pakistan is a country with diverse religious beliefs, with Catholics making up less than one percent of the population. High level of religious tension remains in the country. Christians and other religious minorities complain of legal and social discrimination. There are missionaries - including priests and seminarians - working on the ground as pastoral leaders in different communities, and serving as intermediaries between the people and the government.

Amid Christian persecution, Archbishop of Karachi was nominated by Pope Francis as cardinal, a sign to acknowledge that there is a viable, visible and active Christian community. A three-day music festival was held in Karachi to raise funds for the renovation of one of the oldest. The Muslim community joined hands with Catholics from St Patrick's Parish for the event. Another blessing is the acquittal and release of Asia Bibi, the Christian mother who spent nine years on death row for a crime of blasphemy against the Muslim religion. She was proven not guilty. However, the Christian community has not yet managed to become a "strong force" for the life and safety of Pakistani Christians.

The President of the Bishops' Conference believes that the new generations "can promote the Gospel of peace through friendship and communion among young people belonging to various religions, ethnic groups and cultures". The Pakistani Bishops believe that "the key factor for the life of young people is education".

The Church in Pakistan will celebrate 2020 as the Year of the Youth. The aim of this celebration is to give and spread the evangelical values of love, hope, unity, peace and mutual respect, so that young people can easily cultivate unity, peace and harmony in our society, offering an example of coexistence among people of different faiths. This work of awareness rising in schools and in the educational path of young people on values of peace and justice is aimed for the

formation of the new generations. The Catholic Church in Pakistan is active in managing leading schools in the country, health and other social aspects of daily life in addition to its spiritual work.

From Asia Teachers Teams Coordinators

LIFE OF TEAMS

In Bangladesh, the base teams meet occasionally. On October 20-22, 2018, a national meeting of Catholic teachers was held in Dinajpur at Caritas Regional House. The theme of the gathering was: "*The right to education means the right to a qualified teacher.*" Well-trained and qualified teachers are the key factors in improving students' performance. This theme serves as eye opener that the right to education would not be realized without trained and qualified teachers.

Other teachers join groups which provide outreach to children working on the street and encourage them to avail of non-formal education and other services such as drop-in centers. Through these simple acts of teachers, they give hope to the learners, keep them in school and help create a school environment which makes them stay in school till the end of the term.

In India, the teams' meetings are rather irregular. Teachers' teams make use of the questionnaire that have been proposed to them during the national seminar and that are related to the theme of reflection and action that was taken up in the month of May for the next academic year. Their apostolic function has to do mainly with problems of education or social action (intervention in a prison, participation in relief, etc.).

Some regions conduct a regional seminar, in order to organize a follow-up action locally, in the local language. The financial expenses incurred for the organization of these regional seminars are met entirely by the teams in the concerned region. The Teachers' Teams in India have now become self-sufficient financially.

Every year, in the month of May, members from our teams in different regions meet for a national seminar for four days to review the actions of the current year, reflect on them related to education or social action and plan their apostolic action for the coming year. We noticed that attendance at the national seminar is a powerful motivation for young teachers. Some initiatives have been taken, notably in Bangalore, Goa and Vishakapatnam, to motivate younger teachers to join us in the apostolate, to face, which can be seen also as a challenge, the fact that our membership is aging. Another problem faced by the teachers is work overload as well as the responsibilities entrusted to most of them. It is not easy for the members of our teams to attend meetings and join extra-curricular activities without neglecting their responsibilities at home.

In the North, the discrimination against the minorities affected the team members. Catholic teachers had to change their names in order to get employment in government schools.

Teachers' Teams contribution in the country which brought to the renewal of the society, the educational system and the life of the Church: challenge the corrupt practices going on, bringing relief to the poor, conducting awareness program environmental issues and about human rights, alternative methods of teaching, organizing recollections for the team members and for the children

In the Philippines, most team members are working in rural schools and multi-grade schools. Pupils enrolled in these multi-grade schools were mostly from indigenous peoples group. Only a few team members came from urban schools.

Team members are in direct contact with people's needs. They are joining forces with non-governmental organizations that work to raise the standard of living for people, provide access to medical services, educate children who cannot go to school, and teach emergency procedures when disaster strikes.

Others team members volunteered in the social action works organized by the parishes in their respective communities (In the village level medical missions, donate blood campaign, food for work, seminar-workshop on disaster reduction during calamities are some of the activities participated in by the team members...).

The core beliefs anchored on the Gospel values, way of reflecting, relating. Communicating, and acting on the concrete realities in the community and the team's methodology of SEE, JUDGE, ACT identifies the Teachers Team from other organizations.

The base teams meet regularly using the proposed topics for reflection for the whole year. This August 31st to September 1st 2019, the Teachers Teams held its national meeting. Thanks to the effort of the national team, finally a meeting attended by animators and team members was realized after three years. The meeting was held at Karmelo House, Brgy. Tongohin, Infanta, Quezon. The meeting was a culmination of the base teams' year-long reflection on the theme "Engaging with Culture". It was attended by thirty representatives from the four regions.

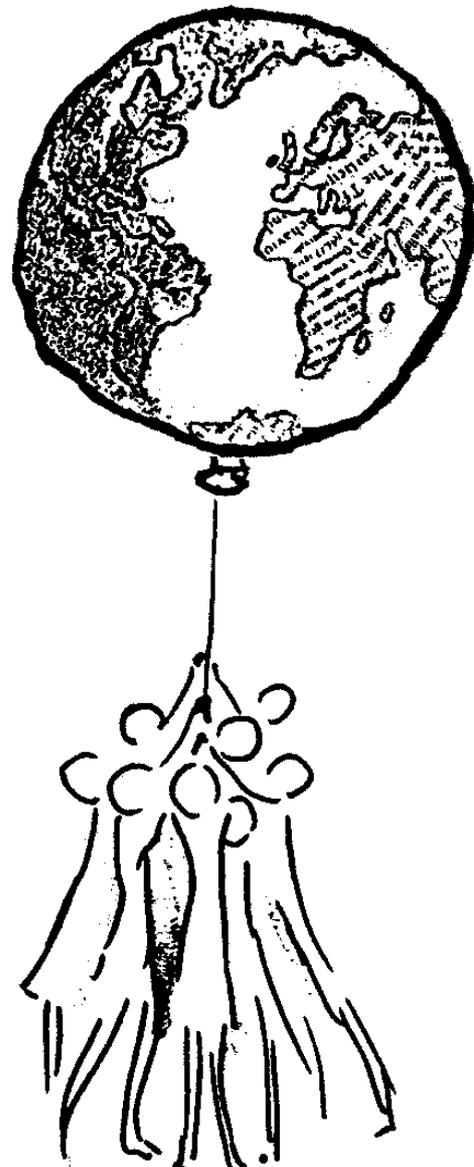
Fr. Francis Lucas talked about culture and its relevance to education. The continental coordinator made a comprehensive presentation of the teams' orientation, the structure of the organization and the main responsibilities of the National Team's leaders, the tasks of the regional animators, and the base teams'

animators. The participants were brainstorming on their perception of the teams' direction in the coming years.

The overall perception of the younger teachers was: the team is identified through the members' camaraderie and doing collective actions for the betterment of the community life and for raising the awareness of the community people.

In several Asian countries, the Teams are faced with the aging of their members and the problem of recruiting young teachers to associate them with activities and engage them alongside them. Many are unwilling to volunteer their time and fulfill regional or national responsibilities. They are not ready for a total commitment.

Rosalinda S. Francia, Asia



EUROPE

EDUCATION

Primary and middle schools

What the teachers and whole school system should do according to the Minister of Education:

Allow all students to master fundamental knowledge: reading, writing, counting, respecting others to build the School of Trust.

With the implementation of Year 1 and 2 assessments, adapt their pedagogy to the needs of students.

Better involve parents with the "Parents' kit" to build mutual trust

Come back to starting school with music.

Consider as priorities the inclusion of students with disabilities, and the fight against bullying.

Ban the use of mobile phones at primary school and middle school.

Reduce social and territorial inequalities, with a special focus on the rural sectors.

Deploy of reading and writing activities to strengthen vocabulary acquisition and understanding of texts from kindergarten (a guide is sent to the teachers).

Apply the new law (September 2019) making school compulsory from the age of 3, this requiring new classrooms and dormitories for the younger children rest in the afternoon.

Continue the fight against harassment and give priority to the principle of equality between girls and boys.

*Catherine, July 12, 2019
trans. Mireille Nicault*

High school

The past school year has seen in high schools the preparation for the reform due to be implemented from last September. This reform includes Years 10 and 11, then Year 12 for the next school year. The first session of the new *Baccalauréat* (A levels) will take place in June 2021.

This reform generates numerous concerns and questions, the main causes of them being:

- last-minute hurried work since this reform deals with two different levels during the same school year,

- a risk of job cuts especially through the subjects that disappear from the national core to become optional, and thus would be less selected by the students,
- students having to make their choice among different specialities without any proper knowledge of the University expectations,
- extra work, generated from the common tests of the assessment required in several subjects, twice a year in Year 11, and once a year in Year 12, these tests having to be anonymous.

In spite of this, the unions did not manage to give rise to a wide opposition commitment. Their last proposed action: refusing to surrender the *Baccalauréat* exam marks, was largely echoed in the papers, but in the end followed by very few teachers.

The Education minister remained deaf to all claims. And the parents and students followed him, at least apparently, as they showed themselves very little critical. The reform is thus now being implemented, and the teachers had to prepare their new lessons during their holidays. This new school year will be difficult: last June, in the staff room, we could hear "Next year will be tough, we will have to pull and stand together".

*Evelyne Couteux, July 12th
trans. Mireille Nicault*

TEACHERS' TEAMS – CHURCH

Meeting with the FEEC (SIESC) (European Federation of Christian Teachers): 12 countries were represented at Trier, Germany (Trèves in French) in July 2018. The general theme: "Law – Freedom - Responsibility". This topic was dealt with through various lectures about: The power of the State and individual freedom; biblical theology considerations about the relationship between faith and freedom in the Old and New testaments.

The countries input:

Germany: Truth and tolerance, selection through blood tests

Austria: Migration and integration through school, Violence at school

France: Learning in France in the 21st century, the Yellow Vests crisis

Italy: Employability and career guidance

Romania: Teaching information; Pope Francis in Romania: he walked in the midst of the people and discovered its ethnic diversity (among them the Roma who are rejected in European countries) as well as its multi-religious diversity: Latin rite Catholics, Hungarian Latin Catholics, Greek Catholics

Slovenia: Freedom of religion and state schools; Human fraternity: 800th anniversary of the meeting between Sultan Al-Kamil and St Francis of Assisi.

FRANCE – Christians in State schools (CdEP)

We work more and more in partnerships, among them a few examples:

- We are members of the **CCFD – Terre Solidaire** NGO (Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development); in the 2019 Lenten campaign, we were requested *to sow peace seeds, and organize peace education workshops.*
- Some TT members celebrated Christmas with the **Workers Mission**, and also had a workshop with them: *Where is happiness? Questions and Hopes about the social and environmental crisis.*
- With the **ACI (Apostolate of Independent Milieus, i.e middle and upper classes):** *Thinking about the human factor in these times of artificial intelligence-enhanced humanity.*
- Back-to-school masses with **catholic schools teachers.**
- **Schools and religions dialogue:** bearing witness that a full and accomplished life of spirituality and faith can be experienced in a secular environment.

Other issues discussed in the movement:

School: Challenges and assets of cultural diversity at school; formal schooling of the children of migrant families: foreigners' reception, citizen-based initiatives and civil disobedience; taking care of our planet; a project for school; how can we build a positive momentum in our teaching practice while deep changes are to take place or are already existing?; writing and celebrating the Acts of the teachers; education to dealing with communication and the media; what core values do we wish to equip young people with so they may build themselves and their future? ; can the knowledge of religions taught at school contribute to education in respect of others?

And from the serving teachers' seminar: from nursery school to university, teaching as a challenge; fitting into my job with my real self.

Faith: the individual, society, and the common good: significance and issues for Jesus-Christ's disciples; **how** to understand Christianity without first experiencing faith? Women in the Gospels; women as paths of Hope; "I came that they may have life"...; who is God for each one of us?

Communication, a way to engage with others: work on a public speaking charter; how good are our links?; social ties and fraternity.

The Lignes de Crêtes bulletin: food-for-thought topics: common culture and individual interests; which securities for which freedoms?; all together for the planet – a planet for all; religions, school and society.

The Catholic Church in turmoil: our press release about child sex abuse and Pope Francis's letter to the people of God did not receive the expected response from the French Conference of Bishops, but started a process of reflection with other groups. A lot of Teams took part in consultations proposed by national papers, or set up meetings: scandals today in the Church, what ways to overcome it?; for a Church free from clericalism and sex abuse.

Inside our country: following the yellow vests crisis, the Broad National Debate was an opportunity for a lot of sharing.

The Beatification ceremony of the '19 Algerian martyrs' was appreciated. Somebody said "*These Blessed French monks did love the Algerian people*" (as opposed to the colonial past of France in Algeria). Meetings between Christians and Muslims (such as 'Together with Marie') took place.

The ACAT NGO (= Action of Christians Against Torture) mobilized the Christians for a All night-prayer for the victims of torture, and to form a community of sentinels all over the world.

For the Teams, the biggest difficulty is to renew themselves. We work towards it with such actions as the Serving teachers seminar, the reflection theme 'Communication, a way to engage with others' of the 2019 National meeting.

*Gabrielle Gaspard
trans. Mireille Nicault*



REFLECTION

ECOLOGY AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

• Ecology is the study of the relations between humans considered as social beings and the socio-economic milieu in which they evolve, in other words, their environment.

• Traditional African relationships (RTA) are in essence the continuation of religions that pre-existed the imported Abrahamic religions including Christianity and Islam. They have points in common: belief in a God, the cult of ancestors, belief in reincarnation, an initiatory character...

Traditional African religions as practiced invoke the mediation of intermediate powers such as ancestors, genies, or spirits. Some ethnologists consider them as systems of relations between the visible world of men and the invisible world governed by the Creator, the Almighty, the Benevolent, and the benevolent One-and-Only.

Written material concerning traditional African religions has mostly been the work of Europeans, and, mainly, the Portuguese. They have considered these religions as inferior because they are not monotheistic. Other writers have maintained the contrary as the religions are characterized by belief in one supreme God, the creator of all things, and whose manifestations assume various forms. Spirits and non-human beings are often related to specific places, natural features or phenomena, substances, plants, or animals.

There are, for example, tribes in Togo and Benin whose totem is a snake: the royal python. Members of the tribe venerate it and must not harm it or kill it. The royal python is considered sacred and receives special treatment. It cohabits with the population, is fed, does not inspire fear, and even children are allowed to handle it.

As for forests or woods, they are considered places of worship, sanctuaries, and sacred creations of the unique and supreme God. They are place of contact between God and men. Wood must not be cut in any random manner. Some types such as baobab, iroko, okoumé, or ebony are sacred and protected. Cutting them requires special authorizations and sacrifices are required. Some clans and tribes have preserved till today trees hundreds or thousands of years old and which are the prides of present generations

(the palaver trees). Protected or sacred forests are even sometimes to be found within cities, though urbanization has destroyed some of these ecosystems. Certain mountains and rocks have also been preserved by some tribes and as places of worship. Visits to such places are reserved for the initiated, who are, generally, old priest-soothsayers and intermediaries between the visible world of men and the invisible realm of God the Creator.

Twins are, of course, are treated as humans, but also as sacred, thus having a dual nature. In traditional African religions, twins are perceived as beings endowed with supernatural powers, as genii. They have, accordingly, a special place in society. In their case, too, ceremonies are carried out involving the worship of objects from the natural world, animals from rivers and waterholes, such as various crabs and fish. The animals are totems dedicated to these places to pacify the spirits which inhabit them, render them beneficial and benevolent to the human group and their natural surroundings. In a word, twins are not born twins by chance or genetics, but are the incarnation of a spirit.

It should be noted that there is real interaction between humans and natural features and objects whence the expansion of totemism in African societies, and in TOGO, in particular. This situation was prevalent before the introduction of Judaism and Islam. It is estimated that, presently, there are more than 100 million followers of traditional religions, and, in Africa today, the coexistence of a number of religions, is resulting in the emergence of a particular type of religion with a significant number of Africans practicing religious syncretism, it being difficult for them to abandon the old practices and adopt others considered as imported and imposed.

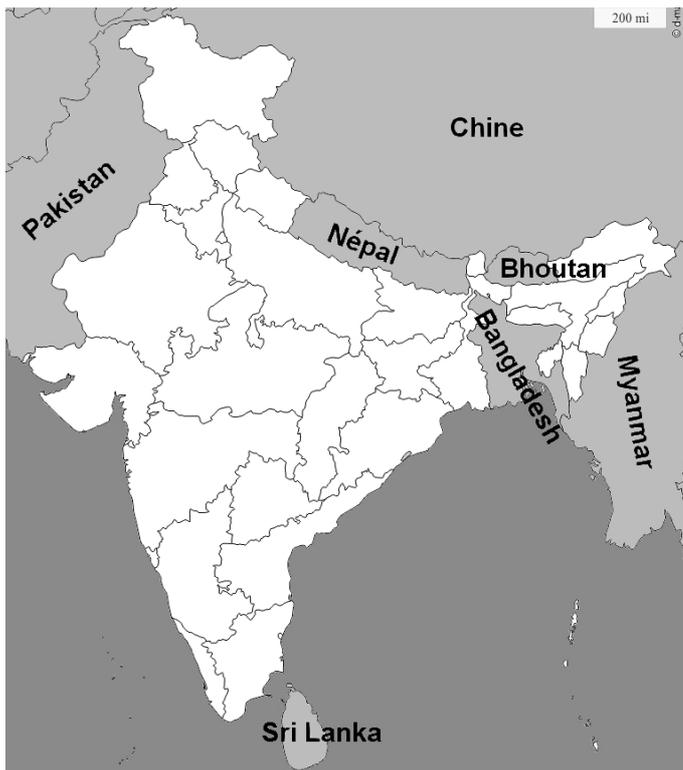
It is undeniable that a correlation exists between ecology and traditional relationships. It is also clear that, with time, a particular form of religion is present and spreading in Africa. This being so, what meaning should be given to this kind of phenomenon?

Sylvestre Kouma, Lomé, August 31, 2019
National Coordinator of the Teachers' Teams Togo
trans. Jerzy Riegl

TESTIMONIES

CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIAN AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITIES TO ECOLOGY

It would be presumptuous on my part to pretend that I can summarize in one page the tenets of Indian spirituality as well as the ones of Christian spirituality on ecology. I will rather limit myself to underlining a few principles of these spiritualities as expressed in the writings of Gandhi and Hildegard.



INDIAN SPIRITUALITY

In Indian spirituality, ecology cannot be seen as a mere survival issue. It is more than that. It is a way of relating to ourselves, to others and to the environment. This broad view is based on the principle that Indian spirituality seeks to restore the original harmony of the universe as God willed it to be. Living in harmony with the universe, or what we call today eco-spirituality, is very much part of Indian spirituality. The foundation of this spirituality is the experience of cosmic unity, full consciousness and silence. In other words, Indian spirituality reminds us that the various elements of the universe are inter-connected. In such a broad perspective, human beings are seen as organic parts of the cosmos, not as exploiters. That is what led Mahatma Gandhi to say: "There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need, but not for man's greed."

On the other hand, we human beings should not forget that we are endowed with a sense of morality. We can either nurture and enjoy this harmony with

the universe or selfishly grab nature's gifts, often spoiling them to a point of no return. For, as Gandhi said, "what we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another." When God created us, he intended us to discover the beauty of the universe, till the earth and take care of it. Nature in turn was to provide for the needs of all living beings. This peaceful co-existence continued for many centuries, until we began using sophisticated tools that pollute our environment. So, according to Indian spirituality, one of the first steps in our ecological commitment is to rediscover how we are inter-connected with nature, and how we can live in harmony with it.

We should never lose sight of the cosmic context of our lives. To become aware of it, we need to listen to the music of the seasons and dance to the rhythm of nature. We have only to look around in order to feel the presence of God palpating in and through his creation. As many Indian rishis (Hindu sages) keep on saying: God's love envelops us throughout the day in the purity of the air, the warmth of the sun, and the beauty of nature. Everything around us pulsates with life leading us all to the very Fount of Life itself.

So, Indian spirituality challenges us to see whether we can stop for a while and remain in alignment with nature's rhythm. We may prefer to continue our mad rush for prosperity by setting our habitat on fire, spilling dangerous chemicals around and destroying our cool green pastures upon which we depend so much. It is imperative that, when all life is one, any harm done to any of its parts is bound to have negative repercussions on the entire cosmos. The survival of every species, including that of human beings, is interdependent on the well-being of every other species. And when that happens we are able to exclaim with Tagore: "How often, great Earth, have I felt my being yearn to flow over you, sharing in the happiness of each green blade that raises its banner in answer to the beckoning blue of the sky! I feel as if I had belonged to you long before I was born".

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

According to Christian spirituality, women are more attuned than men to eco-spirituality. Great women mystics like Hildegard of Bingen speak of the uniquely feminine experience of the most intimate process of nature. Her poetry reflects a great love of the earth. It is vibrant and full of passion. She does not look at the earth as an area of chaos which humans must do battle with, in order to conquer. Nature evokes joy, wonder, praise, awe and especially the longing of the spirit. Hildegard wrote: "Like billowing clouds, like the incessant gurgle of the brook, the longing of the spirit can never be stilled."

Both women and nature reflect similar life cycles and processes. The cyclic rhythm of the seasons has a parallel in woman's body rhythms. Both the '*rape of the earth*' and the rape of women are rooted in the dominating exploitative relationships of man with woman. The earth is the womb. She feeds us not only in childhood, but all through life. She nourishes our minds and expands its horizons before our wondering eyes, unveiling the richness of creation, its beauty and harmony. In her we experience the irresistible drives of life as well as the calmness of a starlit night. Truly, she is not a supermarket to be purchased, but a mother to be cherished.

For us, members of the Teachers' Teams in India, living eco-spirituality is nothing but owning our Indian and Christian roots. It is to rediscover our relationship with the rest of creation. Cosmic spirituality fills us with the sense of awe, making us sensitive to the vibrancy of life bubbling around us. Instead of seeking fulfilment in domination and power over the universe, we are called to be enveloped by the mystery of life – a life interwoven and interdependent, a life of communion with the life-sustaining ecosystems and human relationships.

In her poetical style, Hildegard wrote: "I am the fiery life of the essence of God; I am the flame above the beauty in the fields; I shine in the waters; I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. And with the airy wind, I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life." These insights from Hildegard remind us about the vision that Teilhard de Chardin had of the universe.

Ecology, however, is not only about trees, animals and rivers. To create a home, that favours life, not polluted by poison, implies first of all creating a "healthy human environment", conducive to the harmonious growth of younger generations. Environmental pollution today also means distortion of the value system of our society. It is unrealistic to expect anyone to grow up to be a responsible citizen, if we are constantly exposed to a vitiating atmosphere of corruption, communalism, untruth and violence.

That is why Pope Francis underlined the need of change in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*: "*Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal*". (#202) We need a greater commitment to purify the environmental pollution prevailing everywhere and restore our country to its pristine culture of truth and non-violence.

In conclusion, we would do well to take the opportunity we have from time to time in our Teachers' Teams meetings to review our lives in the light of the insights we get from the Indian and the Christian spiritualities.

Hervé Morissette, csc



The Amazonian Synod: pitfalls and opportunities

Pope Francis convened the Synod of Amazonian bishops from the 6th to the 29th October 2019 in Rome. This article will attempt to analyse some of the issues, with the pitfalls to be avoided and positive opportunities to be seized.

Possible pitfalls

The first difficulty arises from the fact that many people, both inside and outside the church, do not know what a 'synod' is, do not know about Amazonia and have no idea that a Synod on Amazonia is taking place.

A synod is a gathering of bishops in Rome, called by the Pope, to discuss an issue of importance. The subject of the present synod is "*Amazonia: new paths for the Church and the environment*".

The Amazonian region is vast, covering 7½ million square kilometres; it has some 33 million inhabitants of whom about 3 million are of indigenous or African descent; they live in the forests, on the banks of the river and in towns like Manaus and Leticia. Amazonia is spread over nine countries: Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, French Guyana and above all, Brazil. The region comprises more than 380 different peoples or nationalities on top of the 140 indigenous groups who have identified themselves as People in Voluntary Isolation; around 240 different languages are spoken.

It is a mistake to think that this is a local land issue that does not concern the rest of humanity. Amazonia is one of the planet's greatest reserves of biodiversity and fresh water; it contains 30% -50% of the world's flora and fauna and 30% of the world's forests.

Many Amazonian people suffer from the effects of mining (some legal, some illegal), oil extraction by oil multinationals, logging, mega hydro-electric projects, toxic agro-chemicals, monocultures, etc, which are causing the destruction of the natural habitat and its biodiversity, and contributing to climate change. Drug-traffickers and armed groups operate in the region and there have been physical attacks on indigenous people and their culture. *Many people have been pushed out of their homelands and now live on the edges of towns where they become victims of persecution and murder.*

The governments which have conceded these lands to multinationals for economic gain feel threatened by the Synod and have launched campaigns against it, saying 'we must not over-exaggerate climate change,

we must promote development and progress, there is no utopia – we cannot go back to being forest- and cave-dwellers, the Church does not understand science and economics', etc.

Because of the Synod, the campaigns against Pope Francis have intensified; he has been called a communist, a heretic, naïve, nothing but a Third-World activist, etc. He is also accused of being more interested in reforming the Church in the wake of the sexual abuse scandals, and acting on his own without consulting others.

There is a risk of seeing Amazonian people as socially and economically deprived, without taking into account the immense richness of their languages, culture, spirituality and wisdom which predates Christianity by thousands of years. They represent an alternative to the modern world, which is destroying the earth and threatening the future of our 'common home'. *These people are not just 'the poor'; they have a different perspective.*

We need to recognise that *the Church has long been present in Amazonia, for good and ill.* For 500 years missionaries and nuns have been working to evangelise and maintain the faith of the people. The people's demand is now that the colonial mentality should be completely superseded and that a Church with an Amazonian face should emerge, with more ordained ministers to attend to the pastoral needs of the population, dispersed as it is.

One aim of the Synod is to guarantee access to the Eucharist for the catholic communities of the Amazon, and it will doubtless propose new forms of ordained ministry. This could create *tension between more traditional groups and those who are willing to address new needs boldly,* and seek new paths for the church.

We should beware of **the media focus turning from contentious ecological matters to internal church debates** on the ordination of married men and the ministry of women. A similar thing happened during the synod on the family; the media concentrated on whether divorced people who remarried would be able to take communion and left aside all other serious issues to do with the family.

The Synod must strive *to integrate ecology and the Church;* the two are intimately linked and the church must be concerned for every aspect of the life of Amazonian communities, be it social, cultural, environmental, spiritual or ecclesiastical.

We should not shy away from the question of mission and evangelisation; we need deep inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, while being clear about proclaiming the Kingdom instituted by Jesus.

Positive opportunities

This synod has come at a critical time for the church and the world. Although it is being held in Rome there has been a huge effort to gather the opinions of Amazonian people so their voice can be heard. The presence of bishops, theologians and ordinary Amazonian people should guarantee that *the voice of Amazonia is heard loud and clear*.

This synod is an opportunity for the *doctrine of Pope Francis's encyclical Laudato Si to take root* in an emblematic and symbolic place, reflecting what is happening elsewhere in the world (Congo, Mesoamerica, Paraguay, South Asia, etc). The aim is to prevent environmental concerns becoming an abstract ideology; reality is more important than ideas.

We have the *opportunity to alert humanity to the gravity of the current situation*; our economic and cultural system is causing the marginalisation of the poor as well as destroying nature; we have heard the cry of the victims.

The Church *should make its prophetic voice heard and proclaim before the whole world the need for an ecological conversion*, if we are to avoid leaving a barren planet for future generations.

The opportunity is there to strengthen the ecclesiology of the Church embedded in one locality; *the Church should boldly seek new paths*, ordaining indigenous ministers and adopting an Amazonian theology. It needs to become a Church with an Amazonian face, a Church of grown-up communities with the ministers they need for an authentic Christian life; the Word and the Eucharist must always be at the service of others, in communion with the universal Church.

It is an opportunity to demonstrate the strong relationship between the Church and the Eucharist; without the Eucharist there is no Church and *we cannot let those far-flung and widely dispersed communities be deprived of the Eucharist for ever*.

It is an opportunity *to integrate the two dimensions of environment and pastoral care*. The first task of the shepherd is to protect the sheep from the wolf.

It is an opportunity to make known *the richness and wisdom of indigenous cultures and their harmony with nature*, in total contrast to our technological view which has led to a society of consumption and waste.

It is an opportunity *to go further into the green agenda which encompasses all other issues – social, economic, mental, environmental, spiritual – and propose a different life-style: 'living with less to be happier', in harmony with the whole of creation*.

It is an opportunity to *respond to the demands of the younger generation* who are worried about their future because of our current way of life, and who are critical of the ineffectiveness of environmental summits organised by politicians.

It is an opportunity to understand more fully the dimension of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus and put it into practice. The Spirit stimulates life in every dimension and surprises us by the richness of its gifts. The Church could become a multi-faceted community, moving forwards to the Kingdom with Easter hope and joy.

We should recognise that *all this is emanating from the periphery, from the poverty of people whose lives and culture are threatened*; this is a sign of the times for the renewal and reform of the Church and society.

Conclusion

Let us end with a witness statement from the indigenous people in the diocese of Guaviare (Colombia), on the border between Brazil and Peru: "The life-blood of the Earth is escaping; the multinationals have cut the veins of our Mother Earth. *We want our protest to be heard by the whole world.*"

We are convinced that *this Synod, although potentially divisive both inside and outside the Church, will be a moment of grace and hope for the Church and for society*; we call for the light and strength of the Holy Spirit, the Creator.

*Víctor Codina, Catalan Jesuit theologian.
He lived in Bolivia from 1982 to 2018,
where he taught theology and carried out
pastoral work among the people.
Published on the "Amerindia" website,
14th June 2019.*

*trad. Alain Durand for Dial
<http://www.alterinfos.org/spip.php?article8527>*

*Uploaded by Dial D 3506
Friday 27th September 2019
trans. Jonathan Ticher, 2020*



The Buddhist Community's Commitment to the Preservation and Protection of Life on Earth

Scientists have been sounding the alarm for many years: global warming, loss of biodiversity, reduced soil fertility and pollution, depletion of energy resources, ocean acidification...For all the ongoing studies and their increasingly disturbing conclusions, nothing has been able to check this destructive process. It is clear that we have crossed thresholds, destabilizing our environment to the point of risking irreparable upheaval if nothing is done today to stop future disasters.

All of these problems, related to climate, environment, energy, or economy, will only add to social injustice, which is already at an unacceptable level; the poorest people will be the first exposed to the new risks, even though they have contributed the least to the current situation. As we all know, major inequalities tend to weaken the stability of democratic systems and social cohesion, and favour authoritarian regimes and civil war.

From the Buddhist perspective, current and future suffering results from letting ignorance and negative emotions rule our minds. If led by a lack of wisdom, or by greed, egoism and pride, human beings have an insatiable drive to satisfy immediate desires while failing to consider the long term effects of their actions on themselves or others. Blind to the interdependent nature of all things, they create situations they cannot control which cause all kinds of suffering in the world.

Furthermore, Buddhists strive to know and better discipline their minds, to do no harm, and to do what they can for their own and others' benefit, by following the noble eightfold path. This path emphasizes the need for a more enlightened view of reality and true judgement which are evident through fair and ethical behaviour, actions and life styles. Aware that the current situation is so critical for the planet and all who live here, and therefore calls for

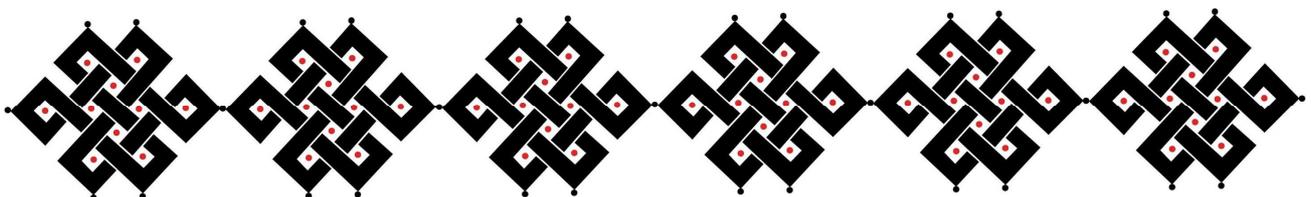
urgent action, many Buddhists are already stepping up to take responsibility, as individuals, for current and future generations. In a more collective way, some practice centres have shown their commitment to ecological transition by developing concrete and practical action plans: establishing permaculture gardens, protecting the diversity of plants and animals in their neighbourhoods, encouraging car sharing, promoting organic, mostly vegetarian diets, recycling and reducing waste, installing hives and solar panels, collecting rain water, installing water saving fixtures as well as water recovery systems, etc.

The French Buddhist Union is carrying this momentum to the national level with conviction and determination. They have created a new commission which will form an association of local initiatives, promote sharing of experiences and will explore ways to actively participate in the protection of our planet, based on the values advocated by Buddhism: doing no harm, mutual aid, solidarity, sobriety and respect for life in all its forms, and understanding the interconnectedness of things. Along with these collective initiatives, the French Buddhist Union encourages every Buddhist to translate their own personal meditation into actions, by limiting their ecological impact in daily life and by doing their part to face challenges.

There are many goals to pursue in the interest of the common good: promote resilience, solidarity and local cooperation, get involved in community transition projects, challenge local officials to put concrete and immediate measures in place to limit global warming and protect the environment, and raise awareness in those around you to the current risks. The FBU also encourages all Buddhist teachers, institutions and organizations to partner with other religious groups in dialogue and cooperative projects.

***As a mother in mortal danger watches over
and protects her only child,
So must we, with infinite spirit, cherish
every living thing***

*Metta Soutra, published Sunday, April 14, 2019
trans. Nan Anderson*



PRAYER

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Thou art our Creator

Hallowed be Thy Name by the whole of Creation.

*Thy Kingdom come,
Welcome our desire to respect
the air, the water, the earth, the trees, the plants and the animals,
and to allow every man to brighten up everywhere.*

Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

*Give us this day our daily bread,
good bread produced by a land cultivated with respect and love.*

*Forgive us our offences, bargaining and exploitation
all our lacks of consideration and love*

*As we forgive also those who trespassed against us,
by their wrong decisions, actions and organizations.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
Prevent us from falling into the temptations of great power and pride,
individualism, non- interference or the lack of hope.*

*Deliver us from evil, suffering, misery and the chaos
that we stirred up by senseless and or wrong choices.*

Father, we eagerly desire that, and we ask Thee with fervour...

Amen.

*Saint Pothin Immaculate Conception, Lyon (France)
trans. Hervé Morissette*