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PRESENT AGE OF MISSION: AN AFRICAN VIEWPOINT

Behind what was verbalized during the meeting of the drafting commission are a lot of presuppositions. I start by stating what I feel is the background of a few remarks made by the four Africans who took part in the work of the commission, then emphasizes which kept their attention.

1 - BACKGROUND: AFRICA'S NO

On the level of relating to other (invading) cultures, Africans must acknowledge their No to the type of violence lived and being lived as a result of the encounter. The wound is too deep; can it be healed? It is not only slavery, colonialism, religious imperialism (Moslem and Christian), economic exploitation, oppression of all types, that the African has been and is being subjected to, but worst of all he is subjected to anthropological poverty and on-going anthropological impoverishment. You are not just different because you are black but fundamentally your humanity is being questioned. So on the metaphysical level there is justification for the depth of violence involved in the encounter between Europe and black Africa. In my very blood as African I live mission!

a) I live mission as African.

African Spiritans must verbalize this primordial living of mission. Since contact with Europeans has effectively chased their true self into the subconscious or marginalized it through living the contradiction involved in defining the self in relation to, in reaction to, how the European has defined them, wholeness must be restored in the person. Missionary work (evangelization) would be meaningless so long as the African missionary has not been provoked by the gospel to reestablish unity in his torn personality. Living being-a-person in Africa is

living the intricate mediation of unity in plurality. Translated into the gospel it is living the freedom of being God's children in God's household, restoring the dignity of each of God's children (cf Heb 3.6; Gal 3.28). Sharing in the work of evangelization starts with self-evangelization and healing!

b) *I let Africa and Africans be!*

The Euro-American Spiritan must let the African be! Even if he cannot live the same situation as the African, he can at least be open to listen to other points of view in the reading of African history. The dualism characteristic of the Euro-American view of the world has worked its way into culture, religion, economics, politics, science from Plato-Aristotle down to our own day. A situation of either-or which led to a looking down on cultures and peoples distant or different from the Euro-American. For the African it has been dehumanization, reduction to the non-human. Euro-American Spiritans should re-read the history of slavery, colonialism, the present banding of the West to exploit Africa using some African stooges, the clear support for racism and so on; they should relate these to the violence in the missionary preaching which, to date, is controlled by establishing identity between African values and demonic forces to be toppled by the gospel.

2 - MEANING OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTIONS FOR AFRICAN SPIRITANS

Very few contributions were made by Africans in drafting the constitutions. This is not surprising, we are newcomers in the Spiritan family. The problems being raised and discussed are not African problems; our contributions are thus cosmetic in many ways. But there are certain emphases which would help the African Spiritan to understand participation in evangelization in the Spiritan missionary-religious family.

a) *Mission to the five continents.*

There is very strong emphasis on evangelization (nos. 4; 14ss); this signals that we no longer give a simple geographi-

cal definition of mission. The poor, the oppressed, individuals whose needs are greatest (no. 4) are found everywhere in the world. If we choose certain tasks, or work in a particular area, it is joining in the world mission of the Church to the five continents.

b) *The importance of the local Church (no. 8ss).*

Our vocation arises from, is addressed to, challenges and is challenged by, the local Church. We do not represent a super (universal) Church. Rather the *koinonia* between the local Churches produces the harmony which we call universal Church. Evangelization implies ongoing labour for this harmony. Whether we are working in local Churches where we are born, or in areas where we are guests, the task of evangelization is maintained: looking beyond immediate local needs to advert to, and be conscientized to, human (global) need.

c) *Labour in multicultural situations.*

Choosing to work where the need is greatest (no. 4) involves taking up tasks in multicultural or transcultural settings (subcultures are included) (nos. 3,4; 30-32). There is very much talk today about inculturation. We are still victims of western cultural imperialism. We can never exaggerate in our emphasis on culture; in life and study we must live true to our culture. Inculturation for Spiritans is a soul-searching activity:

- i) it involves a radical critique of the heavily culture-laden western Christianity; the norm is the gospel (which of course is a cultural product) and the living Church (in context);
- ii) it involves a deep listening to the receiving culture: the questions raised in the situation and models of answers, the question raised for enculturated gospel, the questions the gospel raises for the context;
- iii) there is always violence in encounters of this type (acceptance and rejection) but the violence must always be translated into dialogue; there is subversion in conversion, but the human must remain the criterion.

d) *In the Spiritan family.*

If Spiritans are of one family coming from diverse cultural backgrounds, the honest appraisal of our family life, and the effort we make to live together, constitute evangelization (healing) for a torn world (no. 41.1). This claim must be lived out in communion where teams of Spiritans work together, and in the relationship between provinces — not donor-receiver, not “he who pays the piper calling the tune”, but mutual collaboration and coresponsibility for tasks undertaken by the same family.

e) *Commitment to the poor and liberation.*

In the first place we must make an effort to see that our perception of the poor does not stop at just material (or even spiritual) poverty. The evil of material poverty must be fought and the structures generative of this evil exposed (no. 33ss). However, the struggle against structures of exploitation should start with the unveiling of those philosophical presuppositions which reduce the African (whether materially rich or poor) to a subhuman being, driving him to ape the western man. From this standpoint, the struggle for liberation becomes a mission to restore the dignity of oppressed (dehumanized) man wherever he is and whatever his condition.

f) *The new age (no. 5).*

Evangelization realizes and continues dreaming about the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. Spiritans coming from, and sent to, the four corners of the world embody this prophetic reality. The progress in technology in the modern world has been to the detriment of prioritizing the value of the human person. The new age proclaimed in a multicultural missionary-religious organization gives testimony to, and leadership towards, the realization of deep human life: witnessing to God who makes man in his own image and likeness.

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