

- 7 *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer 1951, p 33. A splendid source of material from Christian and other traditions is provided by *Le Coeur*, Les Etudes Carmelitaines, 1950.
- 8 D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Penguin 1974) p 60.
- 9 Paul W. Pruyser, *Between Belief and Unbelief* 1974 pp 110-113. I am grateful to Wendy Robinson for alerting me to this passage. See also Buber's 'Distance and Relation' *Hibbert Journal* Jan. 1951.
- 10 This said, no theory of symbolism can stand on its own. One line of connexion may lie with Rahner's sketch of an ontological basis for the symbol apart from all notions of transfer, projection, substitution and identification noted earlier. He argues that since in the long run anything agrees in some way or another with everything else, it would be a false start for a theory of symbolism to start with similarities between different items. A basis is to be sought in the fact that beings are not only identities but also and simultaneously multiplicities, 'plural moments in the unity of a being'. Thus, it is only by expressing itself that a being can know itself and be known by others. It is the basic principle of an ontology of symbolism that 'all beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily express themselves in order to attain their own nature.' A symbol is not then something separate from the symbolized: 'symbolic reality is the self-realization of a being in the other, which is constitutive of its essence.' As he summarizes his position, carefully if complexly,
- '. . . the symbol is the reality, constituted by the thing symbolized as an inner moment of itself, which reveals and proclaims the thing symbolized, and is itself full of the thing symbolized, being its concrete form of existence.'
- Chapter 9 of 'The theology of the Symbol', *Theological Investigations* vol 4 1966. Cf. 'Poetry and the Christian' in vol 4 and 'Priest and Poet' vol 3.

## A Letter From Tanzania:

### "God has no favourites"

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January, in this part of Tanzania, is perhaps the most enchanting, spring-like month of the year. The November and December light rains have re-vitalized the soil and the planted seeds begin to rise from the ground. People are looking ahead to the heavy rains soon to come: with hope, for if the rain falls in due measure the harvest will be plentiful; also with anxiety, for angry storms might form which could devastate the promising crops.

January 1981 has, to me, this peculiarity that it happens to coincide with a comparable phase of transition unfolding in my own life. For the last five years, I have had the good fortune of being engaged in the pastoral ministry, in a village of North-West Tanzania. There, in unison with the peaceful rhythm of days and

seasons and in constant admiration before the beauty of nature, I rediscovered communion with the living God. In daily contacts with villagers whose simple faith finds no contradiction between zeal for the Kingdom and commitment to the betterment of their world, I saw my call in a new light and learned again to love the Church. Coming after the long dry season of a decade spent in daily company with libraries, admittedly rich in those theological treasures which the West has accumulated through the ages, yet arid in that knowledge of God's Word which can gather together peoples constantly confronted with trials evoking memories of the Exodus, those five years were like living through a spiritual spring.

It is with gratitude to the merciful Lord, that I remember some of those light rains which revived my existence and restored divine meaning to my vocation: that Sunday service which brought together the Catholic and Protestant youth in a common offering to Christ as well as those week-day meetings in which the acquisition of a maize-mill was planned; the fraternal collaboration of bishop, priests, sisters and laity in updating the parish-structures no less than the active participation of government leaders in projects designed to give a more human quality to the peasants' life.

I am now back in teaching, this time at Kipalapala Major Seminary, entrusted with a course on African Theology. And as I assemble notes on the progress made on the subject in recent years and begin to converse with my new brothers, Tanzanian priests and seminarians, I feel in my bones that a more unpredictable season is at hand and I am torn between alternate currents of optimism and pessimism. For January 1981 is also, at the broader level of the Church on this continent, suggestive of the lull which precedes the heavy rains. Since the close of the Second Vatican Council, many blessings have indeed been bestowed upon the new Churches of Africa for which thanks can be rendered to God. Most visible is the fact that gradually the ordained ministerial functions are being undertaken by Africans. There has also been cause for joy in witnessing the rapid expansion of religious congregations of sisters, in watching the beginnings of a theology that would be simultaneously African and Christian and in observing the decisive part played in the political orientations of the continent by prominent leaders whose faith in Christ is an inspiration for service. Less conspicuous perhaps, but no less important is the growing involvement of the laity in making their communities self-supporting and self-ministering.

There are, however, clouds in the sky and my guess is that the answer as to whether those clouds will dissolve into abundant yet life-giving rains or into brutal and destructive storms rests no less with the communities of European tradition than with the African

Christian. I was both startled and gladdened by an article of Karl Rahner which proposes the view that “the Second Vatican Council is, in a rudimentary form still groping for identity, the Church’s first official self-actualization as a world-Church . . . At the Council a Church appeared and became active that was no longer the Church of the West with its American spheres of influence and its export to Asia and Africa . . . Theologically speaking, there are three great epochs in Church history, of which the third has only begun and made itself observable officially at Vatican II. First, the short period of Jewish Christianity. Second, the period of the Church in a distinct cultural region, namely, that of Hellenism and of European culture and civilization. Third, the period in which the sphere of the Church’s life is in fact the whole world” (K Rahner: *Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II*. Theological Studies. December 1979, pp 717, 719,721).

That a European theologian of such standing should interpret the present stage of Church history in such a way that the late-comers are not only accommodated but given the right to feel at home in the Church is itself an event which qualifies as possibly the most encouraging good news to have come from European theology in a long time. That good news, however, cannot fail to heighten the expectations of those who have for so long been politely seated in the entrance-hall, just as it is bound to disturb the habits of the first occupants used to consider the Church as their personal property. After the initial stage of uneasiness, stands will be taken on both sides and the outcome can equally be conflict or communion, as Karl Rahner himself remarks: “This, then, is the issue: either the Church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a world Church and with a Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II” (*ibidem*. p 724).

From the tiny point of observation on which I stand, I can detect that expectations no longer consist of pure trust in the other party’s good will. A sizable amount of acrimony at the grass-roots is already vitiating the relationship with the historical centre of the Church and the time is fast coming when confident requests for understanding will give way to firm claims for acknowledgement of rights. Western Church leaders, theologians and lawyers must be aware that the questions raised here, at what is at times condescendingly called the periphery, are increasingly questions about fundamentals and they will have to decide what those essentials are to which no additional burden should be imposed (cf Acts 15:28).

For one should not lure himself into thinking that the Africanization of the ministry will be an accomplished fact on completion of the operation by which Africans will have replaced Europeans at the various rungs of the ministerial ladder slowly edified through twenty centuries of European Christianity. It is the very form of the ministry which will require re-assessment. Bishops out here are neither Lords nor Excellencies, they are simply called *Baba* (Father) and I suspect that this apparently inconsequential switch in terminology corresponds to a difference in attitude which, on careful inspection, will call for adjustments in the office of episcopacy. The choosing of a bishop, for instance, is not merely a problem of management settled in the Church's higher spheres of administration, the faithful will demand a say in deciding who the father in the community should be. Priests, likewise, are less and less revered for being sacred persons set apart from the people to move in a spiritual zone of their own from which they go out to attend to the spiritual needs of their flock; they are respected in so far as they assume leadership of the Christian communities with which they live and work, a leadership which, before it can be ritually acknowledged at the altar, must be experienced as resembling Moses' action in delivering his people from bondage and Christ's practice of his messianic role. And there is a whole spectrum of lay ministries which are gradually taking shape in response to situations reminiscent of the one which, in the early community, gave rise to the institution of the Seven.

Will the central government of the Church react with panic to such an Africanization of the ministry and decide to draw the line before the structures it knows are threatened? Or will the voice of Gamaliel (cf Acts 5:34-39), as I find it aptly translated for our time of ecumenism in these words of John Mckensie, have a chance to be heard: "Pluriform structure is general in the New Testament . . . This does not imply that development beyond the New Testament is impossible or undesirable; it does imply that such a development, when it occurred, was based on other than biblical reasons. To the degree to which these reasons were historical other structures can be suggested by other historical reasons ... Celibate ministry is nowhere recommended in the New Testament. The problem of the Roman Catholic Church is to explain why celibacy was ever attached to the ministry. There is no more need to explain the marriage of clergy than there is need to explain the marriage of laity" (J. Mckenzie: *Ministerial Structures in the New Testament*. Concilium, April 1972, p 21).

The re-shaping in depth of the ministry is but one of the challenges confronting the Church if it is truly to become a world-wide community in which no group is *more equal than others*. Another

example is the call for an inculturation of worship which will go beyond the translation of European liturgical prayers into vernacular languages with slight occasional modifications of received rites. The theoretical statement that the sacraments must be meaningful signs of God's salvific action before they can efficaciously actualize that action among His People is not likely to cause a liturgist to raise his eyebrows. The practical, and to my mind, logical proposal of substituting for imported grape wine and hardly available wheat flour, local elements that are daily experienced by African Christians as food and drink might nonetheless provoke a high degree of alarm, at least in such circles as those which produced the 1980 Instruction *Inaestimabile Donum*. Yet, the proposal is now openly made and it is made not as a tentative suggestion hankering after sympathy but as an actual possibility which only narrow-mindedness can prevent from materialising: "Africa should become an ecclesiastical region capable of developing its own liturgical rite . . . For the eucharistic memorial, effort should be made to select common regional elements capable of comparing well with the original elements used by Jesus. We have chosen millet and palm wine because they seem to respond best to African regional authenticity while at the same time possessing the capacity of comparing well with the existing Church discipline" (Eugene Uzukwu: *Food and Drink in Africa and the Christian Eucharist*, AFER, December 1980, p 383).

In the field of ethics, the emerging modes of conduct which result from deep ongoing clashes between the transitional codes of morality, the Christian Moral Theology — the old and new — brought in from Europe and the revolutionary ideologies that inspire much of the political thinking, are at times so arrestingly disparate as to make the ordinary pastor feel like a captain whose ship has lost its rudder. How do you convincingly explain to an African tempted by Marxism the Christian stands on justice, liberation and racial discrimination when he recalls that the Portugal-selected, Rome-supported Church hierarchies of Mozambique and Angola could for so many years rob the Christian communities of those countries from the Messianic Christ they were entitled to follow? Such tragic evidence of incongruity between faith and practice may in places have been forgiven, they have nowhere been forgotten and they give suspicious political teachers a handy argument in warning against the possible duplicity of a Church that found its way into Central Africa in the tracks of the colonialists.

The area of ethics in which the pastor's feeling of helplessness is most acutely experienced is probably the one surrounding marriage. Four years ago, in the pages of this periodical, I submitted the opinion that the new current practice of marrying first accord-

ing to customary law -- albeit with some alterations of tradition -- and of postponing Church-recognition of that marriage until such time as the conjugal union had proved stable, "is not necessarily deplorable, it might even be looked upon as a God-given opportunity to rescue Christ's programme on marriage from the strictures into which profane concerns had gradually forced it" (*Trial Marriage: An Alternative View*. (New Blackfriars, October 1977, p 452). In other terms, the time is ripe for ratifying the locally existing distinction between valid marriage and sacramental marriage, a step authorized by the Christian tradition on marriage, provided that tradition is purified from late accretions brought about by cultural and historical circumstances in Europe. The obstacle to taking that step is that "in practice the law must be followed as it is laid down in other quarters of the Church. Is it too much to hope that the memory of the First Council of Jerusalem will move some influential theologians and canonists to address themselves to this question?" (*ibidem* p 453). To my knowledge, as yet no response has been forthcoming. I am still waiting, and with me are waiting thousands of young people frowned upon by Mother Church as public sinners in concubinage, those rejected *little ones* unjustly barred by their superiority conscious big brothers from access to their Saviour.

Still in the context of marriage, there is this curiously tenacious belief, sometimes surreptitiously equated with dogma, according to which indissolubility of marriage means that the conjugal bond *cannot* rather than *ought not* to be severed. I must say that I was hurt no less than puzzled by comments made on that problem in a recent article of Fr Theodore Davey: "the argument that in Christian tradition there were two views on divorce, one that saw such a way of action as invalid, the other simply illicit, does not seem to have sufficient clarity and certitude to enable us to base a pastoral practice on it" (T. Davey. *Alternatives to Nullity Procedures. The Month*. November 1980, p 365). Leaving aside the questionable wisdom of identifying Christ's moral injunction not to divorce with the legalist category of liceity, may I ask what exactly is the source of that lack of clarity and certitude which supposedly disqualifies reform of pastoral practice? Does that lack proceed from objective obscurity in the history of the doctrine on Christian marriage and in the present evolution of theological thinking on the subject, or does it not rather stem from the canon-lawyers' inability to think straight once they are forced out of the narrow framework of law in which they have chosen to imprison themselves? That the latter possibility might well be the case is suggested by what Fr Davey writes earlier on: "For canonists today the writing of some theologians in this area becomes at times

incomprehensible". He then provides a quotation from such a piece of incomprehensible writing and goes on to draw an astounding conclusion which shows that, however incomprehensible he has presumed the writing to be, he has understood its implication only too clearly: "In which case, obviously, the marriage tribunal becomes redundant" (*ibidem*). For a canon-lawyer, that would understandably be the ultimate disaster. Must it necessarily be so for the whole Church? It is at least tempting to retort that Christ is unlikely to have instituted the sacrament of marriage with a view to granting everlasting prosperity to the theological tribunal. Might this be an instance of human institutions getting the upper hand over the *weightier matters of justice and mercy*?

It is my sentiment that the answer to that question as well as the solution to the issues raised above must ultimately come from a believing heart rather than from recourse to libraries. Western Christians, like the early Jewish believers, can be "astonished that the Holy Spirit be poured out on the pagans too" (Acts 10:45). If they are truly moved by faith in Christ as Peter was, they cannot withdraw baptism from the African communities asking for full membership in the Church: not a truncated baptism conveniently made to purify individual souls only, but a generous baptism which bypasses the likes of circumcision and welcomes those communities in the Church as they are, with their apparently odd customs and cultural traits. In the end, if our faith is in God the Father of all men, we shall come to realize the truth that "God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him." (Acts 10:34-35).

Let me conclude this letter with a call made by a Tanzanian priest friend of mine, a call which translates the deepest yearnings of the African Christian and yet meets the genuine faith of the Western believer, a call which might thus unite all of us because it supersedes all differences of race, culture and philosophical conceptions: that is, *the call to be allowed to meet Christ* without being obstructed by the mass of inherited theological and legal traditions and – I add, by those divinised man-made barriers equivalent to what circumcision was to the first Christians to have come from the Gentility: 'Is Christian faith an accommodation of dogmatic formulations? Is this not Gnosticism: salvation through knowledge? For Christians there is only one theology: "Go out and proclaim the Good News to all nations". And the Good News is that the Kingdom of God has arrived, *on earth* of course . . . To believe in Jesus as the Christ is to believe in the imperative of love of neighbour" (Fr Cyprian Tirumanywa: *Magisterium, Theology and God's Word. Service* No 3, 1980, p 9).