

COMMITMENT OF CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETY

Loyola, 30 July 1991



"Everything I know is there already,
but not my footsteps, nor my arms.
So I walk and walk,
because there is a gap between everything and me,
and in that gap I walk and find my way.
But between me and my footsteps
there is also a gap;
so I invent my footsteps and my way."

António Ramos Rosa
(contemporary Portuguese poet)

1. Your life, our lives as Christians,
are like the route you have followed in this pilgrimage:
"EVERYTHING IS THERE ALREADY, BUT NOT MY FOOTSTEPS NOR MY ARMS".

The commitment is, first of all,
to what is there already:
the world and the time in which we live.

My footsteps try to find the way;
once they discover it, they carry on,
sometimes with lightness and enthusiasm,
at other times with sheer determination.

We know that there is a continuous process of adjustment,
rather, of discovery, between "what is there already"
and my own destiny.

It is because I try to fill the gap between everything and me
that I am able to walk and to find my way.

It is because I try to discover the meaning of my own being,
now, in this place, at this time,
that I am able to pursue my route and to find my way.

1.1 You may have asked (we all ask throughout our lives)
the key question:
we are so many ... what difference does it make
if I go or if I don't go?

Then you noticed that, as you walked,
the way itself changed before your eyes..
The stone on the road and the line of the horizon,
the animals running through the woods
and the fields laying in peaceful bliss,
the weather wrapping you up and the birds singing,
the trees that give you shelter and the house down the road,
the faces perceived in a glimpse ...

Everything so intense to your eyes.
 And then you realized that the way had suddenly changed in its configuration.
 That instant, that moment you heard the birds,
 watch the fields, saw the people,
is unique, won't be again in the infinite of time.

*Though I follow the route
 many have followed before me,
 or others are following with me,
my itineray is unique.*

1.2 As we go through our itinerary,
 we feel sometimes that our footsteps are separated
 from our inner being,
 as if somebody else would be walking and we would be there,
 as spectators ...
 As the poet said: "There is also a gap between my footsteps and me."



So suddenly we discover that the path, the way,
 the itinerary outside is not enough.

My unity as a human being, mu fulfilment as a Christian,
 asks for another path,
 asks for another process:
the itinerary to the center of my being.

This is why my itinerary is not only an acknowledgement
 or what is already there:
 it is also a continuous process of invention
 of what there will be.

(One I watched a pathetic interview of Woody Allen. He was explaining to the journalist that though he liked very much doing his movies he felt that he had not yet really produced the work of his life. To the journalist's question: "why?", Woody Allen, in that movingly funny way of saying the most important things, answered: "The greatest obstacle between myself and my goal is myself.")

2. Commitment to what is there already

2.1 The commitment of the Christian
 is a commitment to what is there already ...
 but HOW do we know it?

By a very keen attention to reality.

By a feeling of interest of the heart,
 of delight in what exists.

By an attitude of the mind,
 being alert to all signs of life,
 asking the right questions,
 bringing everything to the level of consciousness.

Many years ago, the French novelist Simone de Beauvoir describing her long walks with Sartre through the fields and mountains of France said: "I cannot wait and not climb that hill because it is my presence there that gives for me the existence to what is there already."

Again and again, in every generation,
at every moment of history,
we are called "to name all things".

Our attention to reality makes things visible.
We can awake things, nature, people, situations,
out of their sleep of not being aware,
not being seen or heard,
not being acknowledged,
and bring them to life.

2.2 The world we see and listen to is a composition of elements:

- nature: geography, continents and seas,
given to us to be lived in, to be looked at, to be enjoyed,
to help them to be taken up in the redeeming work of Christ;
- places: lived by men and women, shaped by history,
connecting people to each other (460 million people this
Summer),
obliging us to face new cultures and to ask anew old questions
(look at the map of any airline company ... everything so
connected, so close to each other ...)
- society: organisation of life together,
of modes of living, of producing, of exchanging,
of communication of learning,
and, in order to make it all viable,
political power systems designing goals and strategies;
- history: the succession of events,
the inter-relatedness of facts,
institutions and currents of ideas
in a process of both conflict and cross-fertilization.

2.3 What is NEW in our time

is the interpenetration of all the elements that make the world,
the world becoming one,
and therefore all issues becoming global.

However limited may be the tasks we have in hand,
however localized and circumscribed may be the place we are in,
everything is interdependent with other issues
and interdependent with a global reality.

We cannot act meaningfully in our concrete, local reality,
if we don't think about and understand the global reality,
rather, if we don't think globally.

There is no escape from this given.



However, often we tend to think the global realities far away from us, from our daily tasks.

The demand put upon us is to make that link, to discover what we can do where we are, and by doing it, to contribute to the solution of the global issues.

The consequences for us, as Christians, are very important.

We belong to a universal Church. Today this means encompassing the global reality.

For the Christian the call is not "to serve" the Church or the world, as if they were two separate entities, "alien to each other", obliging the Christian to an option.

Between the Kingdom of God and the world "there is a unity of purpose" and the factor of unity is the Christian and his (her) action for the world.

Because the Kingdom of God is the reconciliation "from within" of all things of this world.

The commitment of the Christian is a commitment in the Church and, because it is in the Church, ("Lumen gentium", light of nations and peoples), the commitment of the Christian is a commitment for the world.

The spirituality is not alien to this condition. It is the expression of the presence to the world, it is an experience, it is equated with praxis. - therefore, it cannot be outside the history of the world.

Indeed, the Christian spirituality attempts to answer the questions of our time. Because they are the questions of all humans, they are the questions the Christians have to answer too.

3. The world we live in

3.1 The questions raised are born out of the acceleration of transformations and of our incapacity to absorb them.

We live in an over-populated universe of impressions, with the media pouring out information which cannot find an active receptor, no personal answer, no critical attitude.

Hence the awareness of new zones of ignorance, of a new type of illiteracy, because we cannot decodify the events and give meaning to them.



- 3.2 Let us think for a while about the events that are shaping the world today.

The Cold War is over but somehow there is no agenda for the period ahead.

(I won't go here into the security questions and very especially into the paradox born out of the end of the nuclear threat - namely, the fact that the disappearance of the precarious equilibrium of deterrence the nuclear threat maintained in the different zones of influence has given room to strong ethnic antagonisms and nationalistic rivalries.)

Two major questions should be addressed to by the Christians.

- 3.3 First, there is the widespread conviction that the collapse of communism brought with it the end of ideologies.
As Christians, we have to challenge that assumption.

In the name of justice we have to do so.

Because the major change that has occurred is the fact that the "Order of Force" has been replaced by the "Order of Money".
Because a new ideology has taken over
- the ideology of the market in all its blind strength.

The market ideology without regulatory and distributive mechanisms (or social safety nets) is the equivalent of an institutionalized injustice carrying with it the destruction of the weak by the economically strong.

This market has become in the developed countries a renewed attempt to produce more, to sell more, to be more competitive.

In the countries which had centrally planned economies, the market is considered as the magic mechanism that will answer all basic needs.

A massive movement of desire for consumption dominates all attempts for reform everywhere in the world.

The consumption patterns existing today are leading humanity and the earth to their destruction.

This is not just a political question in the hands of the political power. There is no neutral fields of activity; whatever your field, whatever your occupation, you are supporting the prevailing ideology.

The orientation of research, the technological achievements, the health services, the educational system, the organization of the city or the neighborhood where you live, the code of behaviour and relationships
- all are conveyors of ideology.



Nothing is neutral.
 All tasks, all professions,
help or hinder
the freedom-and-justice equation
 on my place of work and life,
 in my country, in my region, in the world.

- 3.4 The second question I consider vital for Christians to deal with is a consequence of the first one:
 How do we act in relation to the disorder of the world?

The "organized world disorder" that this ideology reinforces manifests itself in several fields:

- the growth of wealth in the Northern hemisphere goes hand in hand with growing under-development of most of the South so much so that the flux of capitals is nowadays South/North oriented;
- the protectionist measures from all the three big economic spaces (Japan, EEC and USA) do prevent the producers of raw materials to enter freely in the international market and provoke their economic collapse;
- financial credit is accompanied by such fierce conditions that many countries are losing all possibility to provide the minimum for their people.

Out of this picture, a "new Berlin wall" is rising gradually, dividing those who have from those who have not.

When we look at the continent of Africa
 - as the continent in despair -
 what do we see?

More than 170 million people among the 300 million who are living in starvation are not able to make the slightest effort to reach out for food, their physical energy totally exhausted.

Its GNP per capita has decreased of 25% since 1987, its debt has multiplied 20 times, being equal to the GNP.

(If I am stressing this structural injustice, it is because it is very much connected with my fundamental motivation as a Christian in politics.)

I have been fighting all my life for an economy at the service of men and women.

For me, it is the human person - and all human persons - who are the center and the goal of all development processes.)

The "order of Money", the reign of the market, will be determined by the consumer desires.
 Indeed, "new consumer products" (like the car or the washing machine before them) will be developed to satisfy the rising demands of hyper-individualism.

Is that true?
 Is it what people, what we, what the Christians



are aiming at, hyper-individualism?

This is the heart of the matter.

Don't we say that "God is reigning over the world"?

What does it mean for us:
"Seek first the Kingdom of God"?

Where do we meet God in this world and time?

Such are the questions we have to ask ourselves.

4. The time we live in

Let us come back to the sense of time we are living in.

Often there are two divergent clocks:
the one that indicates my time,
the other that indicates the time.

(However the new clocks tend to be more and more "world clocks":
your time now is a different time elsewhere;
and the meaning of your time is found in the fact
that at the same undefinable time
we all are living the same saga.)

There is no commitment without the sense of belonging to a time.

The true presence to history is the result of the movement
that leads to the blending of my time with the time I live in,
as captured and perceived
in my own place and in the world.

Incarnation is the capturing of a segment of history
as one's own time.

The call to commitment
is the acute sense of time taking shape in my own life,
in the time given to me.

The awareness of the "kairos" is present as a thread
in the whole of Revelation.

(Jesus coming as the fulfilment of time,
the overwhelming notion that "the time is near",
and is echoing in the Tradition.

The great movements in the history of the Church
are born of the sense of time
both as immediacy
and as presence of the "after-time" in history today.

To follow the revelation supposes a sense of urgency,
of response to the present times,
of immersion in the flow of time.



"If we have to meet a kind of eternity,
it will be at the heart of our experience in time."

"The fear to live fully in our time
leads us away from eternity,
while the will to live the time in its density
roots us in eternity."

5. An era of complexity

Out of the picture of the world and of the sense of history emerges
a feature of our time: the era of complexity.

We move more and more towards what Teilhard de Chardin called the "noosphere",
all human beings relating to each other around the planet,
not only in a mystical way,
but in very concrete ways
- cultural, economic, political.

As part of that "noosphere",
we become aware of many more elements in our personal lives.

The complexity of the issues may lead to a desire
to withdraw to a simpler world
- but that world doesn't exist!

It may lead to a limitation of the issues,
reducing at the same time the scope of the vision.

It may cause fear
- indeed, who are we, to dare facing such complexity?

There is the challenge.

Aware of our own limited situation,
of our weaknesses and shortcomings,
to dare to embrace the globality, the time we live in.

Not very far from here there is the city of Burgos.
Its cathedral is breath-taking.

Once, a Portuguese poet wrote these three lines about it:

"The cathedral of Burgos is 30 meters high
and the pupil of my eye just 2 millimeters across.
Do I dare to look at the cathedral of Burgos who is 30 meters high!"

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

