

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

I. OUR BEING AS A PEOPLE

Somebody said during the pre-General Assembly seminar, when we were dwelling on the tribal values, that the Grail was a tribe for her. I guess it is that for me too. It is going home. It is having some rites. It is sharing, celebrating.

Nobody can be part of a people in a vacuum. Often a people is equated with a common past and history, with a cultural ~~people is equated with a common past and history, with a cultural~~ identity. I don't deny that but <sup>there are other elements which are as important</sup> it seems to me that a people is formed, a people happens around events. Just two examples:

- I was here when Senator Robert Kennedy was assassinated. I witnessed the awakening of a people conscience. Now we can talk about it in social terms as Elaine mentioned yesterday, but this was an event which helped a people to become more a people. Feeling of getting to know the people better, to have entered in their intimacy.

2) - A people <sup>future</sup> needs a purpose. What makes the "new" countries appear in our midst so conscious of their identity, <sup>it is</sup> - because they have before them a realizable, urgent, imperative goal. <sup>3/</sup> God liberated a group of slaves, made of them a people who would be "his very own" (Ex. 19, 5). Once settled in Israel, having got into the routine of life, this people disintegrated into an agglomeration of individuals,

enslaved by other gods,

by apathy,



It is in that situation that the angel of the Lord tells Mary to name her son Jesus "because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins." (Mt. 1, 21).

Paul describes in his letter to Titus how Christ saved his people:

"He sacrificed himself for us in order to set us free from all wickedness and to purify a people so that it could be his very own and would have no ambition except to do good." (Titus 2, 14)

If we are called to be a People, if we want to help mankind to become the People of God, we have no other way. Every time that a People is born anew - out of many situations, tongues and nations - it is the re-enacting of the death and resurrection of Christ that is present.

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If we want to be part of a people, it is only by the identification with ~~the event~~ Jesus Christ, with the event of his death and resurrection, that a new togetherness can be born. This is why fundamentally we want to celebrate his death and resurrection until He comes. It is there in that event-eternally present in the Lamb of God who is worthy to break the seals of the book of life.

- that we are renewed, reformed and reborn as a people; to be a community centered in the Eucharist.
- and isn't the cup central in our *symbolism*? - is above anything to be open to be part of this people.



There are many things that can be said about the People of God and about us, as part of that People. I think, however, that the "signs of the times" present in the issues Eileen developed yesterday point out to a degree of communal existence which man has never experienced before. Socialization, internationality, world revolution, the youth phenomenon --- in fact all speak of a new solidarity among men.

What will be different in such a solidarity? It seems to me that solidarity is not anymore a question of generosity, good warm heart, moral attitude. Solidarity is the basis of human existence, is the soil in which we are immersed and from which we spring forth.

Teilhard had the understanding of this new condition of man to the highest degree. He describes mankind as part of a noosphere. His assumption is this: if we, human beings, come out of (complexity) the complexification of the world, if we share in the biological laws of life (~~as Nicoletta said~~) we do constitute, as it were, a layer enveloping the earth which is as real as the biosphere or the atmosphere. The young people today, living in a gregarious way, Clothes, passing on to each other the bottle of Coca-Cola from which all drink, reveal in a naive but recognizable way, this basic human feeling.

It has been often pointed out that the first community of Christians expressed that ontological solidarity. The events that had made of them a new people were so recent that the bonds between them were unbreakable and beyond words. Their life was brought to the roots of their being Christians.





The Acts describe this communality of existence in a radical way:

"they remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread and and to prayers" (Acts 2, 42)

(Congar considers this passage the best description of a Christian life. I do too!)

I would like to stress here this brotherhood as it was experienced in the apostolic times.

It is my experience that whenever a community of believers has not yet discovered that Christian community does encompass economics and the sharing of goods such a community has little chance to survive; the sharing remains on the level of ideas and opinions , the pluralism is thus threatened by an individualistic, even <sup>it</sup> generous, approach; the individual contributions neutralize each other.

To enter into a total brotherhood implies deep down that you are ready to risk in laying down your life for your brothers.

I would add another aspect to complete this one. The pilgrim condition of the People of God gives a new power to this type of brotherhood.

The challenge is today to jump out of security, to join into a "band of pilgrims," without too much power or possessions, and to reveal the fundamental condition of a people, made free - free from systems and dominations and exploitations of all kinds - to be God's own people.

There are two defense mechanisms which I would like to denounce and which prevent us from becoming a People. They both derive from the fact that we equate People of God with Church.

One is ~~one~~ the psychological level - there is a kind of Oedipus complex not resolved towards the Church, the Holy Mother the Church easily transposed to any group which would have <sup>had</sup> in our lives that nurturing role.

The other is a "theological myth." It is the old myth of the Church as "perfect society," a rather inexact transposition to the times of the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem. Hence the scheme action - reaction. Hence criticism made and resentments built up in reference to that ideal society. I guess that these two mechanisms are not completely out of our experience as a group.

I just said that normally we equate People of God with Church. So far, I only spoke of the People of God, on purpose. There are six different ~~meanings~~ meanings for Church in the Vatican II documents which subordinate its concept to the one of People of God:

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- 1) Catholic Church - Catholic teaching, sevenfold sacramental liturgy, papal and collegial authority;
- 2) <sup>Local</sup> Church - restoration of the meaning of Church, the Universal Church being a family of local churches;
- 3) the community of all that have been baptized - a sacramental fellowship created by faith and baptism;
- 4) the people of the Old Covenant with whom the Christians are in continuity ("the entire Abrahamic community");
- 5) the entire family of men in as much as they are touched and transformed by God's saving grace;



6) the "ecclesia domestica" so often referred to by St. Paul. --- This I equate with what Dorothy said yesterday, that the Grail in U.S.A. had to cope with the integration of many forms of religious search.

A challenge from the Gospel today will be to discuss in each circumstance, how many types of "church" can the Grail encompass.

There are, however, several general consequences:

- the Church has no intention of being co-extensive to the whole society;
- the participation in the Church is varied and diverse in circumstances;
- the Church is altogether believers and searchers, a Church of the Threshold, a church where everybody is catechumen, the faith being for all the process of <sup>learning how to be</sup> ~~leaving~~ that church.
- the center is not in authority but in the celebration of life (the Grail IS this!)
- the "base community" takes a new force.

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II. THE PERSONAL RESPONSE THAT THE GOSPEL DEMANDS OF US

Within this people, each human being emerges as a singular event. Within the wider call to the people, to the community, there is a call to each one of us personally.

The Gospel of yesterday's Mass said the main challenges: Christ was sent "to bring the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to set the downtrodden free." (Luke 4, 18)

There is here a call to poverty and a call to freedom. Of these, I would like to say something.

There is no better way to speak of poverty than recalling the beatitudes. They do express the echo of the personal attitude with which everyone can remain part of the network of solidary relationships. There is in them a kind of turning the world upside down at first sight and, yet, they seem to convey and to crystallize the aspirations of our own age. Aren't the poor blessed? And what is the attempt behind the forms of collectivism but the desire to share this condition of the poor? It would be interesting to re-read the story of the "crafty steward" (Luke, 16) and to realize that there is there a total despising of the sacrosanct value of money and property in favor of another set of values. Being a man without great honesty he could have solved the problem in another way, but he preferred to use another means: he trusted into human relationships, into friendship. He made a qualitative choice and it is that choice that Christ praises as being much more important than mere legalistic views of how to deal with material goods.







I don't pretend to praise dishonest behavior but I think that one of the challenges of the Gospel is very much linked with our basic freedom in relation to things (collage, Paulo Freire, ~~exploitation related with things mainly~~). In other words, in order to be himself, man needs an open relationship with the world. "The world, life and death, are your servants, but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God," says Paul (I Cor. 3, 23). It is up to man to release in the world the powers of goodness, justice, peace, love.

Thus the beatitudes don't cut man away from the world but situate him in the condition he shares with Christ: power over the world. Of course, the more the world becomes complex, ~~it~~ in its interwoven relationships of technology, economical power, political rules, the more subject to risk is this power. But isn't the risk part of the condition of the poor?

I would like to stress also, that the man of the beatitudes is the man who tries to communicate with others and live for others up to the point of being persecuted. Man who can be gentle, merciful, pure in heart, peace makers. Persecution is the last beatitude, supposes that one has somehow gone through the whole wide range ...

The poor in the beatitudes are also those who "hunger and thirst for what is right," Well, this is for me one of the most inspiring things in the Gospel. Here we are faced with the basic desires of man: to eat and to drink. This is, so to speak, the symbol of man's psychological make-up: we are, each one of us, a conglomeration of diversified and contradictory desires; what often happens is that we are unslaved by the multiplicity of



our desires or by the frustration of not fulfilling many of them. There was a time when to be Christian was understood by some people as the power of will over desires. The beatitudes say that the man who desires what is right is happy - the contradictory desires will have been made one.

2)

There is no better way of speaking of freedom than to say with Paul: "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (II Cor. 3, 176).

"You will learn the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8, 32).

I would like to stress the importance of this learning the truth for the personal freedom. This means the awakening of conscience in front of the depth of a situation; in order to become free, man must know that he is not free. The normal tendency is to see the freedom from some power outside us. But we do know how strongly man is shaped by interiorized images, by an oppressor within himself. This is particularly true in relation to his condition of sinfulness. We can say with Paul that we do the wrong we don't want and don't do the right we want. The forces of evil are really within us. We need to have a sharp perception of our objectified situation in order to come to a process of liberation.

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We have discussed about the forces that exploit men from outside. They are real. The Christian man is also suffering from these forces. But, somehow, he must have a personal answer to the question "how to stop exploitation." In other words, the Christian man, because he has been freed from sin, can situate himself in life in a free way. Somehow he should be able to be in the cultural communities to which he belongs as the kind of



"symbolic man," source of wisdom and hope "awakening in people the realization that they can be free" (Page 6, Peg)

I sense among the Christians today a desire to renew the churches which leads further and further away from this role. For a simple reason belonging to social pathology: every institution as soon as it exists brings with it the germ of an anti-institution, a source of corruption which enters into dialectical collision with the new-born institution. The question is then always: how much inner dynamism has the new institution got to be all the same "conquering" as it were the anti-institution? Most committed Christians are concerned with the reform of anti-church. I can only see that concern leading to what I call, in my under-developed world, the neo-capitalisation type of Church. In fact to live from the Spirit is to be all the time building the Church and helping to renew the anti-church by the wayside.

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III - FUTURE

This basic process of freedom brings with it another element. Time is part of the structure of freedom. It is only in time that you can pass from slavery to freedom. As the liberation of the whole People of God and our own in her liberation are never fully accomplished, the future appears as something intrinsic to the process.

I would like to stress a few features of this concept of future. We have been brought up, most of us, ~~in~~ with the idea that out of a history, of a past, emerges the present and a possible future. Or, in fact, it is not the past that illuminates and determines the future.

Rather, it is making the future that we can interpret better the past, it is there that we can understand better the dimension of future contained in the past. (Eileen's reference to world issues leading to Fr. van Ginneken's force).

"By making the future we give to the past a new physiomy. In this sense, the future does condition the past." (Schillebeekx)?

Metz goes as far as saying that "the future and, more especially, a planned or plannable future is not today an arbitrary, but a central theme and problem of the <sup>christian</sup> responsibility."

From one side, future is the ultimate aspect in acknowledging the process of secularization. Because the world is autonomous, because man can master the world and have power over it, man can relate to the future in an operative way. He doesn't need to undergo the future as a fate.



From another side, hope not being equated with optimism or the illusion on which the optimism is based, its affirmation by a community of faith implies "the knowledge that by all realistic calculations human history is ultimately tragic" (Sam Keen, P. 87)

Why can we speak about the future?

Because, as Paul says, "we are waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearing of the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2,13)

The task of "making the future" seems essential to me in terms of the understanding of Revelation. "The community of believers" contains in itself the possibility of being the manifestation, the incarnation and the expression of the Faith. But, from another angle, the action of that community is source of faith. It is at the core of its act that the People of God is able to discover more clearly and in a more dynamic way the successive steps of its earthly pilgrimage. In other terms, the demands of the covenant with God are perceived by the People in its very pilgrimage; it is against this background that we can perceive better the crucial relevancy of the witnesses to Faith lived communely or individually by Christians.

Another way of putting it is to say that Faith is made explicit in a "praxis" in the "shaping of truth."

The ground for the making of the future are God's promises. We have only one way to respond to that: hoping for what is-not-yet.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~



This hope is not to be equated with:

- cool calculation of a future that would be clear for us....making the future implies the probability of everything turning out to be different....we know that we live in a world of mere probabilities.... to hope is basically to leap into the unknown and to risk;
- neither is it to be equated with an idealizing of situations and possibilities.

Patience with this "not-yet" .....

"We must hope to be saved since we are not saved yet - it is something we must wait for with patience"

(Romans 8, 24)

Sharing with others the hope Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

"Have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope you all have." (I Peter 3, 15)