

CONTEXTUALIZING SPIRITUALITY AND WORK IN AFRICA

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This article tries to contextualize the spirituality of work in Africa by recalling first of all the the social and religious history of the continent and the present challenge of inculturation posed to the African Church. The situation of work in Africa is then considered with particular reference to the persistent intrusions into Africa's life which alienated Africans from their work. This impingement seems to be presently enduring through the phenomenon of globalization. Having clarified the understanding of spirituality in general and of spirituality of work in particular, the article elaborates on African culture as the context within which to place such spiritualities. This contextualization is effected through inculturation but attention to acculturation is equally needed. The conclusion is that the journey of African spirituality needs to move, by its very nature, beyond known frontiers and outside trodden paths in an atmosphere of unlimited solidarity.

Africa is vast and diversified. The focus of this article is on the Sub-Saharan region often regarded, in practical terms, as the typical expression of the entire continent.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical background to the spirituality of work in Africa is given by the interrelated development of religious and political events generally grouped in three periods: the beginning of the African Church (1st-14th century), the evangelization of the Sub-Saharan coasts (15th-18th century) and the penetration into the entire continent (19th-20th century).

The Early Church: 1st-14th century

The spread of Christianity in Africa began in the first century extending into Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia and the rest of North Africa and flourishing with, among others, the *Didascaleion* (Catechetical School) of Alexandria, synods and councils and a vigorous monasticism. These early Christian origins justify, in the judgement of several African historians, referring to Christianity as being an African and a traditional religion. It is to this beginning that they encourage African Christians to refer in their present search for identity.

A remark could be made here concerning the relation that could be established between the monasticism of the early African Church surviving today in Ethiopia and the monasticism of the early European Church particularly that of St. Benedict (480-547). This latter monasticism contributed "the single most decisive postbiblical influence" on Christian spirituality acting as the catalyst in the transformation of Western culture. It shaped communities by prayer and work, a formula that penetrated into the forms of Western Christian spirituality that had the greatest impact on culture. The Rule of St. Benedict offers an example of a Christian spirituality that considers work as one of the many things to be attended in life. At the same time, the Rule states, "all things are to be done with moderation," including one's work.

From the middle of the 7th century, the early African Churches had to sustain the impact of Islam lasting seven centuries and finally eliminating most of them. They survived in Ethiopia where Christians are 55% of the population and in Egypt where they are 5%.

Trade and Slavery: 15th-18th century

The second period of evangelization in Africa started with the journeys of the first Portuguese explorers on the coasts of Sub-Saharan Africa (1482). These explorations prepared the commercial activities in which most European nations became increasingly involved with the result that the competition among them and the exploitation of Africans escalated. In 1492 Europe "discovered" America and in 1510 the first African slaves reached that continent. Over the next 400 years, 12 million Africans would have been taken as slaves to the Americas. Trade had climaxed in slavery.

The evangelizers of this time were caught, in some way or other, in the commercial interests they were operating in. They lacked a clear vision and a common methodology, and their activity was generally uncoordinated. In the resulting weakness and need of security, they tended to accept the protection offered them by the European governments. Consequently the religious purpose of their mission was confused with political and commercial interests. Though commercial exploitation and political violence contradicted the activity of evangelization, nevertheless evangelization was drawn into their sphere and, in some cases, it was identified with them. Even the practice of segregation in dealing with Africans succeeded to find some kind of theological motivation preparing the ground for colonialism.

The evangelization of this second period was superficial and the Christian communities that derived from it were weak, eventually disappearing.

Colonization and Evangelization: 19th-20th century

The third period of evangelization that established the contemporary Church in Sub-Saharan Africa began last century with a sustained missionary movement aiming at the penetration of the entire continent. The founders of this movement were motivated by the universality of the Christian message and by the dignity of every African. They contested slavery and segregation, combining evangelization with development. The prophetic

vision of these founders was soon curtailed by a situation which developed after the Berlin Conference (1884-85) that sanctioned colonialism. Colonialism fostered an equivocal environment within which missionaries found themselves operating. This ambiguity led a number of them to think of colonialism as a beneficial *Pax Romana* facilitating evangelization. They failed to perceive the true nature of colonial coercion on African society and cultures.

Hence, evangelization and colonization came to be confused and even identified, also because the evangelizers themselves were not always clear, in practical terms, about the difference between the two. Colonialism dwarfed the vision of the missionary founders who had envisaged Africa becoming soon missionary unto itself. Their original objective of africanizing personnel and structures became gradually dimmer. The association of Christianity with colonialism extended to western culture as well, resulting in the three of them penetrating as a unity into the life of Africans.

The outcome was a Christianity "blended with western culture and materialism and still estranged to the depths of African societies." Christianity had called Africans out of their traditional environment instead of redeeming them within it. Its spiritual message was not grafted on the spiritual vision of the converts. Christianity was expanding but not penetrating.

According to Mbiti, the missionaries and their African helpers "were devout, sincere and dedicated men and women. But they were not theologians; some of them had little education, and most of the African evangelists and catechists were either illiterate or had only little formal learning. These workers were more concerned with practical evangelism, education and medical care, than with any academic or theological issues that might arise from the presence of Christianity in Africa. Mission Christianity was not from the start, prepared to face a serious encounter with either the traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place in Africa. The Church here now finds itself in a situation of trying to exist without a theology." And yet, having balanced the assets and the liabilities of the Church in Africa, the same author concludes, "I see mission Christianity, therefore, as making a real contribution and progress in Africa, in spite of criticisms that could rightly be laid against it."

The Challenge of Inculturation

Today, in the words of Adrian Hastings, "it is absolutely inconceivable to think of Black Africa as distinct from the presence of Christianity, presence that a couple of generations ago would have been rightly dismissed as a marginal reality." It is a Christianity with its contrasts and achievements, facing the technological, ecological, political and economic challenges common to the other continents, only that in Africa such challenges assume unique proportions. The continent is undergoing an unprecedented process of social and cultural transition: from traditional to modern culture, from ancestral to electronic technology, from a personal to a mechanical concept of time. These and similar antinomies prove extremely difficult to reconcile, while the same time they are alienating.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church in Africa has had highly significant moments. Among them, the message *Africae Terrarum*, 1967, of Paul VI had a wide repercussion and even more so his first papal visit to modern Africa in 1969, when he told Africans in Kampala, "You may and you must, have an African Christianity". Important landmarks were also the visits of John Paul II to various African countries and the celebration of the centenary of their evangelization in many of them. It was above all the celebration of the African Synod, 1994, concluded by the exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995, by John Paul II, that offered a unique opportunity to the Church in Africa to evaluate its present situation.

On the eve of its celebration, a group of African theologians expressed concern for their Church which appeared to be still foreign in many of its features. Its dioceses depended heavily on foreign aid. The outlines of its spirituality, pastoral planning and priestly formation tended to be borrowed from abroad. It was a Church admired more for its conformity than for its creativity. African theology was still at an initial stage and its theologians were not sufficiently sustained.

The Synod answered these and similar issues with one word, *inculturation*. As the Synod was about to start, it had already been realized that, "Listening to the various segments of the African Church in connection with the Synod, it emerges that the theme of inculturation encounters the overwhelming consensus of the Episcopal Conferences, theologians, laity and missionaries who work in Africa." Summarizing the contributions to the Synod, Card. Thiandoum of Dakar reiterated, "It can be said that inculturation has emerged in this Synod with great concern. The universal Church should continue to grant to the Churches in Africa and Madagascar, the freedom and the trust needed to accomplish this important task."

WORK AND ALIENATION

Impingement

Africa has had two particularly devastating experiences in its history: slavery and colonialism. They have impinged on her freedom undermining her ethics and consequently distorting the African attitude to work.

The negative impact on work started with slavery which proved particularly destructive of Africa's traditions of voluntary work in a collective context. The collective collaboration was further devastated by the introduction of guns into Africa by the slave trade. The traditional bow and arrow were weapons to which everybody had access and in case of need they could effectively maintain a balance of power assuring peaceful coexistence. The indiscriminate introduction of guns gave a disproportionate amount of power to some individuals and groups, availing them with tempting and dangerous shortcuts to obtain what previously had to be achieved through common assent and voluntary collaboration. Collective activity diminished as individual violence increased.

Colonialism introduced forced labour further undermining work as a process of self-fulfillment. Such coercion was not always overt. A covert form, for instance, proved to be the tax system. Taxes meant having to acquire money as a wage from those to whom the same money had to be returned as a tax. It was a sort of unremunerated and forced labour, outside the genuine needs of the workers. It was an alienating experience.

Colonial education with its emphasis on literacy and non-technical disciplines compounded the categorization of labour and the debasement of manual labour. Many Africans came to regard school education as a way to graduate out of physical labour. Even the subsequent introduction of practical and vocational courses did not redress the deep rooted and negative attitude to manual labour. Moreover, the school practice of using manual labour as a form of punishment confirmed the negativity of work.

The differentiation between servile and liberal work was further stressed by the way colonial masters tended to occupy themselves in leisurely activities delegating physical work to the local servitude, thus indicating that physical work was a burden of servitude for the under privilege and for the lower classes.

Alienation

Generally speaking, the legacy of slavery and colonialism left a persistent and widespread uneasiness vis-a-vis a manner, a rhythm and a pressure of work which dissociated from real needs, was devoid of fulfillment, fostered disregard for people and for the environment, appeared to be exclusively material and promoted an unlimited competitiveness and possessiveness.

In traditional Africa, as elsewhere, work was designed to satisfy human needs, particularly the primal ones like survival, propagation, security, knowledge, progress and fulfillment. As such, it was a free and fulfilling activity with communal and voluntary dimensions. Slavery and colonialism alienated from that traditional relationship to work. People were forced to work outside their needs and beyond them. It was a work "forced" on them overtly and also covertly.

As Marx had envisaged, Africans were driven into a situation of alienation by which they lost control over the process and the product of their labour, becoming things. Such alienation became powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation. Not all workers were clearly conscious of this problem which nevertheless affected them anyway.

African workers eventually organized themselves to redeem their work. In fact, the labour movement in Africa had a big role in the struggle for national independence. But after independence relations between the government and the trade unions deteriorated. The political elites reasserted their authority over the labour leaders and the labour movements, a move facilitated by the fact that union leaders were competing for positions of privilege, not only against the political elite but also against each other. Political elites had thus a reason to intervene to control the situation in keeping with their policy to centralize national authority.

Globalization

The reform of the working conditions and the reorganization of effective trade unions is presently compounded by globalization. Globalization requires competing for investments from multinational companies by offering them, among other things, the guarantee of a "tame" labour force. One of Africa's assets is its labour force. Faced with the alternative of safeguarding the rights of workers or of creating opportunities for their employment, the choice is usually for a "disciplined" employment that may guarantee maximum productivity and high returns to one's Country.

Another problem arising from globalization is the latter's emphasis on economic privatization and competitiveness, an "ideology" which is presently sweeping across Africa and it is believed to be as inevitable as globalization itself. This trend enhances private interests preventing the return to the voluntary and communal dimensions of work, once part of the African heritage, and jeopardizing the development of the gift economy, the counterpart of the market economy. The market economy involves buying and selling, production and consumption, and similar exchanges. The gift economy is less obvious. It stems from the awareness that much in life is gift and that life cannot be deprived of its gift component. Gifts are to remain in circulation and passed on. Both the market and the gift economies are needed as the world cannot operate on market forces alone nor rely simply on voluntary contributions.

The above are some of the factors that confirm globalization to be the fourth major encroachment on Africa from outside in the "logical" sequence of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. Africans see themselves valued, not for who they are as humans, but as what they have to become to fit into the plans and expectations of donor countries and UN agencies. Many people in Sub-Saharan Africa consider globalization as the latest form of expansion and consolidation of a "world order" that has the western political and economic powers as its driving force. "Globalization is not working for the benefit of the majority of Africans today." Whether globalization be viewed as positive or negative, the fact is that it moves across boundaries of all kinds: national, social, political, financial, educational, etc. One of them is the cultural boundary which is usually added to the others as if it were just one of them. In actual fact, globalization is not *also* cultural but it is *mainly* so. "Globalization is essentially an encounter of cultures." Globalization becomes a problem when the crossing of the above mentioned boundaries is an intrusion trespassing on cultures rather than a friendly meeting among them.

Globalization perpetuates the problematic challenges of slavery and colonialism to work. The answer to such challenges requires that globalization be addressed, as already indicated, from a cultural perspective. It is the same perspective from which a genuine spirituality of work needs also to be effected, as it is going to be explained below.

SPIRITUALITY

The history of spirituality has been beset by the "spiritual-material" dichotomy related to spirituality in general and by the "creative-punitive" dichotomy related to the spirituality

of work in particular. Although these two issues have been presently clarified, at least in theory, their practical implementation has not yet been fully effected. These dualisms related to spirituality and to work have been problematic also in the history and in the life of the Church in Africa.

Spirituality in General

Christian "spirituality" refers to *spirit* as used by St. Paul. He opposes *spirit* to *flesh* or *animal*, not to *body* or *matter* (Gal 3:3; 5:13; 16-25; 1 Cor 2:14-15; 3:1-3; Rom 7:14-8:14). The spiritual person is one whose life is ordered by the Spirit of God, whereas the person who is carnal (fleshly) or animal is one whose life is opposed to God's Spirit. St. Paul does not confront incorporeal and corporeal or immaterial and material, but rather two ways of life such that the body can be spiritual if led by the Spirit, and the spirit can be carnal if opposed to the Spirit. Later developments in meaning, opposed spirituality to corporality confusing the former with disdain for the body and for matter. During this century, the relation between spirit and body was clarified by reference to their Pauline meaning, reversing the tendency that restricted spirituality to the interior life or to the inner dimension of the person. Spirituality has been again extended to the entire span of human existence.

Today, a holistic approach to spirituality considers not only the inner religious *experience* of God but also the *expression* of that experience in one's relationships with God, self and others. Spirituality is thus understood as the experience of God, of his will and work in one's life and in the world, expressed in one's existence, in one's relationship with others and society. Experience and expression are thus the two essential dimensions of spirituality.

Christian spirituality in particular is concerned with everything that constitutes Christian experience of God and its expression in the life of a Christian. Christian spirituality is the life in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

Today spirituality is thus understood to be relational, comprehensive, pervasive and concrete. Spirituality is relational in the sense that it focusses on the relationship with God which is brought to bear on the relationship with oneself and with others. It is comprehensive as it involves the full spectrum of those realities that constitute the Christian life at every stage of its development. It is pervasive namely it extends beyond the confines of specific religious practices pervading one's work, business, recreation, and every other aspect of one's activity. It is concrete as it goes beyond concepts finding expression in actual religious experience.

Contemporary spirituality needs thus to be ecumenical, interreligious and multidisciplinary enriching itself with the fruits of ecumenical and interreligious dialogues and with the insights from a variety of disciplines that relate to spirituality.

Spirituality of Work

The Christian understanding of work has been for a long time dominated by the Fall (Gen 3:1-24) rather than by Creation (Gen 1). The Fall portrays human work as a curse, a punishment. This negative vision has tended to prevail and it still nourishes modern thought and attitudes related to work. Considering work as if it were just a curse or a punishment overshadows its creative function preventing a wholesome spirituality of work.

The account of Creation has been less influential in the spirituality of work. Yet, the creation gives the original and ideal condition of work highlighting the work of God himself as creator, humanity co-creating with him, and work being completed in leisure.

The work of God is a creative process which is good. Humanity is the culmination of that process. The implicit invitation and challenge is for everyone, made in God's image and thus sharing God's creative power, to be co-creator and co-worker with God. God's creative process finds completion in the Sabbath rest thus establishing an essential interconnection between work and leisure with the latter being as necessary as the former.

The encyclical *Laborem Exercens* harmonizes the accounts of the Fall and of Creation by reminding Christians of their call to be co-creators with God and co-redeemers with Christ in their work. The full spirituality of work is in the Paschal Mystery, within which work as punishment and death is redeemed to become resurrection and life. "The Christian finds in human work a small part of the cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his cross for us. In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the resurrection of Christ, we always find a glimmer of new life, of a new good. On the one hand this confirms the indispensability of the Cross in the spirituality of human work; on the other hand the Cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself."

AFRICAN CULTURE

In the light of the above clarifications, it emerges that a genuine spirituality can only exist incarnated in a culture.

Culture

Culture refers to the characteristic manner in which humans relate to their environment. They consider and interpret it, developing explanations and elaborating values that reorganize and, to some extent, re-create their environment. Human beings relate with it through the set of elements that they have placed between it and themselves, elements that constitute the new universe in which they live. This universe moulded with language, art, religion, behaviour, ideas, values and other elements is the universe of culture. Culture is thus the network of human behaviour, ideas and relations created in accordance with the human interpretation of the reality surrounding human beings as the objective "other".

Culture is thus a humanly created realm distinct from the order of nature. One does not dwell directly in nature but in a cultural realm of mediated meaning. Culture could also be regarded as a "second nature" that mediates one's relation to the world.

As spirituality translates one's relationship with God into concrete relationships with others, as it involves the whole span of Christian life, as it extends into every aspect of human activity, as it is expressed in the factual dimension of religious life, it has necessarily to be cast and operative in the realm of mediated meaning constituting culture. The ecumenical, interreligious and multidisciplinary dimensions of spirituality also need the same cultural context.

Culture varies as humans relate to different environments creating different realms of mediated meaning. The resulting diversity of cultures gives rise to a corresponding variety of spiritualities, each of them dependent from and characterized by the culture within which it is operating. "Spirituality is the way in which the divine enters into a culture to assume and transform its patterns of personal-communal existence." The same can be said of religion, inferring from this that every religious tradition has its unique spirituality, from the vast traditions of the great world religions to the specific traditions within each particular religion.

It should however be noted that although religion is "the normal habitat of spirituality", spirituality goes beyond any specific structure or framework that may delimit it. Organizational set ups may help spirituality but they are not to be identified with it. This calls, among the rest, for greater attention to African spiritualities as there have been several studies on African religions but less on African spirituality.

With regard to Christian spiritualities, they may be said to constitute the models of personal and social existence formed by Christians in response to divine revelation. Such models represent the various ways in which the word becomes flesh in the ecclesial community within particular cultural times and places.

An authentic Christian and African spirituality will emerge as a result of the inculturating dynamics within the African Churches. The relationship between Africa and other cultures, once rather weak and somewhat hesitant, is now more convinced and effective. But the inculturating process has still a long way to go and Paul VI's words to Africans in Kampala (1969) are still poignantly relevant: "Indeed, you possess human values and characteristic forms of culture which can rise up to perfection so as to find in Christianity, and for Christianity, a true superior fullness and prove to be capable of a richness of expression all its own and genuinely African."

Inculturation

Christian spirituality in Africa means inculturation. P. Arrupe explains: "Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements

proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation'."

The proclamation of the Christian message promotes an encounter between the Good News and a people. It is the people who receive the Good News and who make it bear fruits in their life and society. The people are the real agents of this inculturating process which is both hermeneutical and creative. It is hermeneutical because the community which receives the Good News has to constantly interpret it in order to make it relevant to its life situation. It is creative because the encounter of the Good News and the people is not for the purpose of re-creating the primitive Church or perpetuating the contemporary Church, but for building something new: a new culture, a new people, a new community.

African Spirituality

An inculturated spirituality bearing on work in Africa has not yet been thoroughly addressed. The issue is compounded by a vision of work that is still prevalingly punitive. Colonialism transmitted a compulsive dimension of work and Christianity gave, though unwittingly, some support to it by leaning on a spirituality of work that drew prevalingly from the fall of humanity.

Such negative contribution adds to the task that Christianity has of clarifying and redeeming the attitude to work in the practical context of African life and African culture.

When referring to culture for contextualizing the spirituality of work in Africa, one has a considerable amount of material related to this exercise such as, for example, the African vision of God, of the ancestors, of the community and of nature.

GOD. African culture and spirituality give a prominent place to the Creator, Father and Mother, transcendent and immanent, imbuing all existence, giving and sustaining life. African culture and spirituality identify life as the prime gift of the Creator which is to be received gratefully, to be safeguarded and enhanced as the main purpose of human activity. This explains why traditional healers hold the highest place in the value system and in the practical consideration of the African community.

ANCESTORS. Ancestors are those members of a community whose lives have left a significant heritage to the living and who continue to influence the community from beyond the visible world. Theirs is an operative presence ever bearing on human activity. The ancestors, who are the "living dead", remain an integral part of community life. The veneration of ancestors in African life resembles the memorial of the communion of saints. Their memory is invoked in ceremonies and rituals. They are intermediaries between God and the people in continuation of their earthly function which combined headship of their families with ritual leadership. In this connection, elderly people are accorded special respect in African society as they are believed to be in special communion with the ancestors because of having lived and worked with them for a long time and because of being now close to joining their company.

COMMUNITY. A vital link exists between a person and the other members of the same community. The life of a person is lived in participation with other community members. This community system demands the promotion of the life and well-being of others making people particularly attentive to hospitality. This social sensitivity is highest on the scale of African values, higher therefore than attention to work. Work is set aside when persons need to be attended to. While work in most of Western society tends to be all absorbing and sometimes addictive and obsessive, in the greater part of Africa work is considered as just one of the many elements of life. Another value related to the community and to work is leisure. Leisure is cherished as it preserves and restores, if necessary, the ability to control oneself and one's work which is an extremely important trait in the intense social life of an African.

UNITY. For the African, divinity and humanity are not seen in isolation. The sacred and the profane, the visible and the invisible interact, and the divinity indwells our world. All the beings in the universe and beyond exercise influence over one another. The world of spirits participates in the human world. Spiritual needs are as important to the body as bodily needs are to the soul. All are part of human experience, just as life and death are.

NATURE. Africans see the presence of the divine in creation. Nature and the environment, visible and invisible, bear the mark of goodness and godliness. Secular society is largely unknown in African societies in which a sense of the sacred dominates the daily life of most people. The African world is deeply spiritual and harmonious vis-a-vis the rest of reality. "Africans are notoriously religious. ... Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. ... (For Africans) to be is to be religious in a religious universe." This is a basic premise of the African notion of the environment. It is for this reason that human activities are generally considered from the religious point of view. Africans mould the environment but they could not do so by a work that is deprived of its spiritual dimension, namely a purely material activity.

Today, this sacredness and spirituality of nature is best manifested in African art. Asked about the typically abstract and symbolic nature of African art, Ugandan artist Godfrey Banadda explained, "There is much symbolism in African art because there is much spirituality in African life. In Africa, practically every object is a medium of communication to God as the "Ultimate" or the "Extreme" point of arrival of everything: persons, thunders, insects, water, sounds, forests, snakes, events, anything is a medium of communication to God, everything leads to that "Extreme". The minds of Africans, our artistic minds, are rotating in abstract and symbolic interpretations because the world we live in is spiritual, abstract, symbolic of God. Today, the Western scientific mind is undoing this mysticism. There is no spirituality in this kind of science. For those aspects of nature that this science has demystified, we artists cannot create any abstract image. For African art to continue, the spiritual dimension of nature must continue, beyond the demystifying forces of science and also of Christianity telling me not to believe in the powers that are in the things of nature and that lead me to God."

The Present Scene

Today life in Africa is obviously no longer "traditional" in the sense it used to be. Africans are "tradition oriented" but they are equally "situation oriented". They are realistically aware that, as the past remains the term of reference for values and identity, the present time is when such values and identity are enacted vis-a-vis a social reality that differs in many ways from that of the past. Consequently, one strives to establish harmonic relations with the situation in which one lives and operates at present.

Africa is experiencing the transition from traditional to modern society, from a past when work was fairly uniform to a present when work is highly diversified. Africa has also been passing from traditional religion to Christianity, the expansion of which has not been always matched by penetration. The incarnation of the Christian message, and specifically of the Christian spirituality of work, has not yet imbued the ordinary life of Africans and of African workers in particular.

The contextualization of African spirituality needs to be effected within this changing present.

In this connection, a point needs to be clarified with regard to the way in which African spirituality is expressed. In Africa today there are frequent and public manifestations of a spiritual nature. People gather in large number for prayer and healing at the end of their working days and sometimes through the night. This phenomenon seems to be expanding and some analysts consider it a typical instance of spiritual revival in Africa. In actual fact, spirituality in Africa has never really subsided. The spiritual undercurrent sustaining African life has been enduring in one way or another and therefore these instances of apparent revival are not to be interpreted as being *per se* indicative of a spiritual resurgence. What was wanting in the past was not the spiritual experience as such but rather the spiritual expression of it. The onslaught of the fast changes that affected African life have left many people bewildered as to which expressive forms were available for their spirituality. Of late, Christianity has realized this mounting need for endogenous forms to express one's spirituality and it has tried to encourage them. New forms have emerged but they are still in the process of being absorbed into the ordinary life of the Church and into its liturgical action.

A significant instance of this spiritual search, though involving a vaster problem, is the multiplication of an estimated 10000 Independent African Churches that are having far more converts in Africa per year than all other Christian groups combined. They have inculturated the Good News blending it with African values and giving it an African expression.

ACCULTURATION

Besides inculturation, there is another process related to the encounter of cultures namely acculturation, a phenomenon by which cultural elements pass over from one culture to another, giving rise to new cultural features in both cultures.

Today acculturation has intensified as cultural pluralism is extending to every society. In the case of Africa, acculturation has helped to dispel the colonial belief in cultural monism by which culture was considered to be fundamentally one and identified with Western culture. This latter posed to be the ultimate term of reference for the rest of humanity. Such illusory expression of cultural imperialism has now lost credibility although it may still be found lingering on under some different guise as that of globalization, for instance.

The experience of Africans in their meeting with other cultures, particularly with the Western one, has made them rightly cautious. They have experienced Western culture in its possessive, domineering and also destructive aspects which are, according to E. Levinas, characteristic of this culture and which need to be overcome by the principle of otherness. Otherness means moving out of oneself to the others, but to the others in their total otherness, namely moving beyond one's possessiveness. "We are called to love the others before understanding them and without the need to understand them. It is a love without concupiscence." One should approach otherness, not capture it.

When considering the history and development of cultures and societies, there is a tendency, particularly in Western culture, to consider such history and development as being fundamentally the same in all cultures, and such "sameness" to be tallying with one's culture, history and development. In line with this assumption, historical events and developments in Africa tend to be equated with similar events in other societies, drawing from the latter paradigms, reasons and explanations to assess the former.

In the light of this, as one comes into contact with the African spiritual world in acculturation, one should refrain from trying to capture it, to order it, to manage it within given paradigms. It is, in simple words, the advice of an elderly missionary to a younger one: "Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on another's dream. More serious still, we may forget ... that God was there before our arrival."

Beyond Frontiers

As spirituality is opened to the transcendent, spiritual experience has unlimited possibilities. Although the expression of such experience is theoretically limited by culture, being culture the result of human experience, intelligence and creativity, the cultural area is practically very extensive and difficult to limit. Consequently, the possibility of spiritual expression, notwithstanding cultural limits, is immense. One should therefore be open to a spirituality that moves beyond boundaries in both its experience and its expression.

Spirituality is ultimately a personal experience. The person on a spiritual journey tries to discover the way as he or she moves along. Such person does not ask for answers but for a way to them, not what but how to believe. The spiritual traveller seeks a friend to live with rather than an expert to be taught by. With a spiritual traveller, one must respect

needs rather than frontiers. What such a traveller needs is, above all else, solidarity. It has to be a solidarity supportive of the person who may be moving beyond known frontiers or outside trodden paths. Given the limitless possibilities of spirituality in both its experience and its expression, the solidarity being offered needs to be likewise unlimited. Such solidarity is deeply felt particularly in Africa where "the individual is conscious of himself in terms of 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am'."

Acculturation may be considered to be offering a potential solidarity. But for such solidarity to become humanly effective and significant, people must become conscious of it, converting it from a "conventional" to an "intentional" dimension of life, as human solidarity cannot be a mere given. It has to be an acquisition.