

# JAPAN VICE PROVINCE

## MEETING

SECULARIZED SOCIETY

Input

Desmond O'Donnell, OMI

Ernest Piryns, CICM



## Kochi

## July 2-7, 1990

MISSION IN A SECULARIZED SOCIETY

July 2, 1990---July 7, 1990

PROGRAM



Saturday, July 7, 1990

6:45 A.M.	Morning Prayer
7:00 A.M.	Presentation and consideration of paper
8:00 A.M.	Breakfast
9:00 A.M.	Daytime Prayer
9:05 A.M.	Consideration of written comments
	Anyone talking in regard to a written comment will be asked to limit their remarks to 1 minute
10:00 A.M.	Coffee
10:15 A.M.	Continuation of above if necessary
11:00 A.M.	Closing Mass
12:00 Noon	Final lunch

Thanks to each and every one of you for your patience and forbearance with the limitations of the Kochi house. We'd be delighted to see all of you here again in less busy times.

Tom Maher  
Ed Williams  
John Mahoney



# SECULARIZATION & OUR MISSION

1. TO SAY THAT THERE IS NO GOD BUT GOD
2. THE HUMAN PERSON IS CREATED IN GOD's IMAGE & LIKENESS
3. COMMITMENT TO BE SECULAR
4. RENEWAL BY INVOLVEMENT
5. THE CHURCH NO LONGER THE SOLE INTERPRETER OF MEANING
6. TECHNOLOGY & LEGISLATION ARE INADEQUATE
- 7 REFLECTION & TIME APART ARE HUMANLY VITAL
8. A RENEWAL OF THE LANGUAGE OF FAITH
9. AN NEW APPRECIATION OF SYMBOL
10. PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE NEW POOR
11. CHRISTIAN HOPE LIVED AND PREACHED
12. CHRISTIANITY AS AN HISTORICAL MOVEMENT





MISSIONARY OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE

2-1-33 Takajō-machi  
Kochi-shi  
780 JAPAN

オブレート会

〒780  
高知市鷹匠町2-1-33  
電話(0888)72-3658番

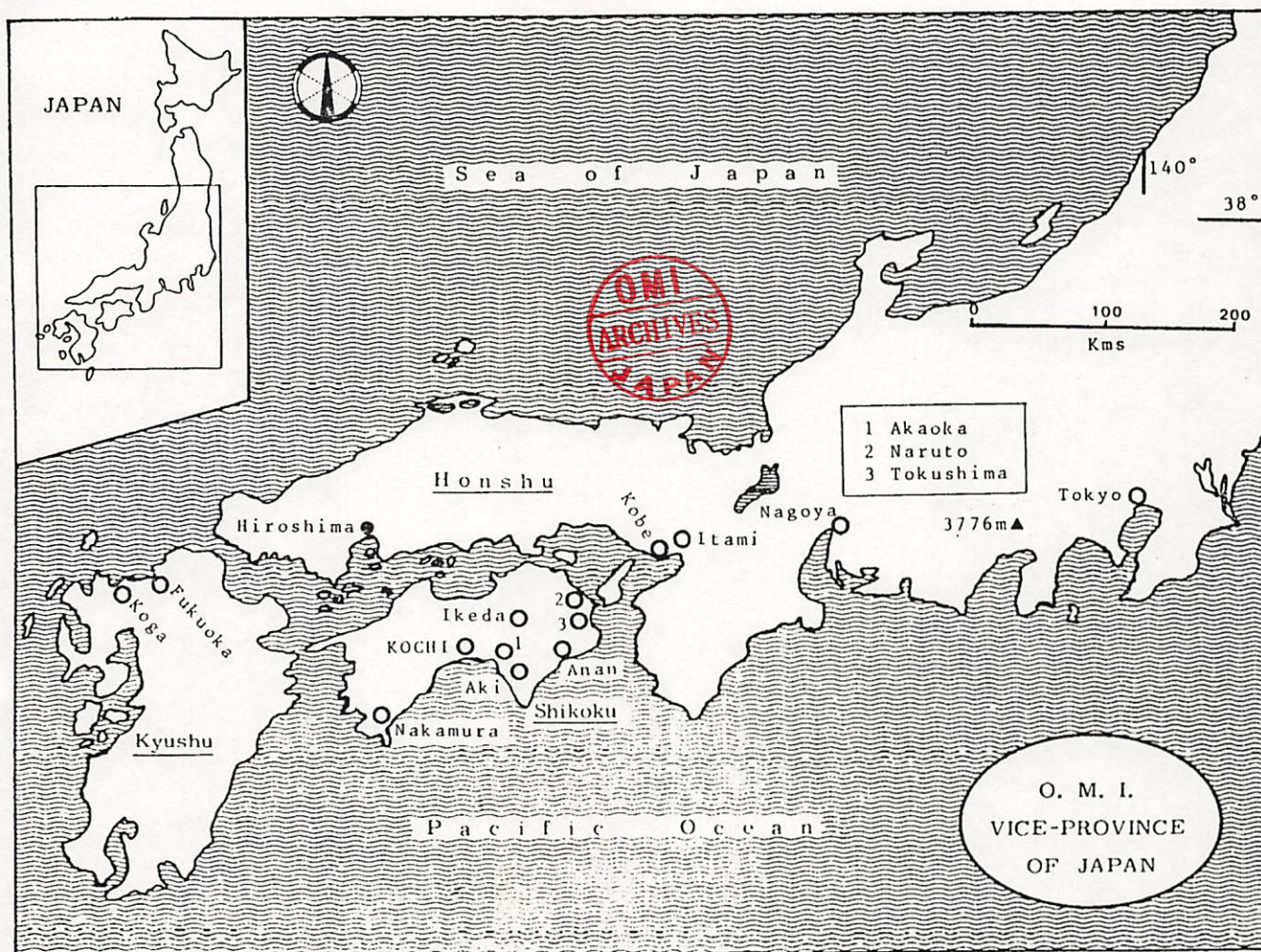
TOWARDS A RESPONSE from the participants

1. How do we perceive the reality of  
Secularization ?
2. The application of this reality to  
the situations in our Region.
3. How Secularization may be touching  
our personal Oblate lives.
4. How critical awareness of Secularization  
can influence our missionary activity
5. What changes are needed in our understanding  
of mission ?
6. What changes may be necessary in our  
missionary methods ?



WE RECOMMEND:





## VICE-PROVINCE OF JAPAN

- 14.12.1946: The Apostolic Delegate for Canada asks the provincial of the Canada-East Province to accept to work in the missions in Japan.
- 08.01.1947: The General Council in principle accepts missions in Japan.
- 21.01.1948: An official request from the Holy See to send Oblates to Japan.
- 25.01.1948, the General Council accepts and 27.01.1948 an affirmative answer is given.
- 31.01.1948: Letter from the S. C. of the Propaganda entrusting to the Oblates one of the four civil districts of the island of Shikoku, an Apostolic Prefecture.
- 05.04.1948: The district is entrusted to the Oblates by the Bishop of Osaka, Apostolic Administrator of Shikoku, district of Kochi.
- 04.06.1948: The Oblate mission of Japan is entrusted to the First USA Province. (Eastern Province); Provincial Vicariate.
- 29.11.1948: Arrival of the Oblates at Osaka. Responsibility for Kochi accepted in 1948 and of Tokushima in 1949.
- 1952: Opening of a novitiate in Aki, transferred to Tokyo in 1961.
- 1961: Opening of a scholasticate in Tokyo.
- 04.08.1967: The Oblate Provincial Vicariate of Japan becomes a "VICE-PROVINCE."; under the sponsorship of the Eastern USA Province.
- Foundations:** Itami 1950, Aki 1952, Fukuoka 1953, Koga 1955, Naruto 1959, Ikeda and Nakajima 1962, Akaoka 1963, Anan 1966, Nakamura 1970, Nagoya 1987.

Present status: 20 Fathers; 1 Brother; 2 Scholastics. Total: 23 Oblates.

### Provincial Office:

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## MODERNITY

describes what takes place when an unprecedented flow of information is transferred into human experience through technology.

TECHNOLOGY then affects the human experience

- ecologically
- economically
- politically
- culturally
- demographically
- genetically
- socially
- religiously .... this is loosely called Secularization.



## SECULARIZATION

There appears to be FIVE kinds -

1. INSTITUTIONAL....when institutions previously under church control (hospitals, schools etc) come under secular government.
2. ETHICAL (or NORMATIVE)....when religious values have less or no influence on the daily life of society, especially in legislation.
3. COGNITIVE ..... when religious meanings lose ground in favour of other meanings....less religious(or ideological) legitimization of life in general.
4. EXPERIENTIAL.....when less people seem to have an experience of God....or people in general have it less clearly.
5. POLITICAL .... when a secular government succeeds in 'hijacking' the influence of the church in support of its policies.

Note: Secularization is not atheism. It is an attempt to describe a fact....something taking place....it is a challenge to find a new or deeper presence of God.

## SECULARISM

This takes place when the divine or the sacred no longer influences people's lives in a real way. It can exist side by side with church-going and other 'religious' behaviour in people's lives.

## FUNDAMENTALISM

When through apparent fear or discomfort with the experience of Modernity, people choose to focus on one aspect of religion....to emphasize one behaviour, stress one doctrine etc. They avoid questions and usually use scripture simplistically.

## MODERNITY

leads to

## SECULARISATION

which leads to

## A DEEPER FAITH, A PURIFIED FAITH

& a NEW MISSION - This is the new ecclesial & Oblate agenda.

or to

## FUNDAMENTALISM

or to

## SECULARISM

which can lead to

## ATHEISM.

- Des O'Donnell omi



**- Secularization.**

- Secularization - has become A UNIVERSAL PHENOMENON
  - touches EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE
  - creates A NEW PERSON
  - questions ALL RELIGIONS & IDEOLOGIES (MTW 31)
- Secularization is a POSITIVE REALITY (MTW 33)
- Secularization is in effect a recognition of the legitimate AUTONOMY OF THE WORLD - basically present but always being accomplished - which we call SECULARITY. God created the world and 'he saw that it was good'. He then gave it to men & women saying 'subdue the earth'.
- The process of Secularization is ACCELERATED today by the much wider phenomenon called Modernity, especially by technology.
- Secularization is growing not only in the industrialized world, but EVERYWHERE.
- Through the autonomy which it brings in the area of thought and choice, Secularization RELATIVIZES VALUES, leads to pluralism and becomes a call to dialogue between individuals and groups. This, in turn, increases personal responsibility.
- SECULARISM in denying the sacred, is a perversion of Secularity. It often leads to religious, ideological & atheistic intolerance or to indifference. It also leads to increasing the gap between the poor and the rich.
- SECULARISM, through the vacuum & insecurity which it creates, often leads to a RETURN TO RELIGION in an ambiguous way; this is a fresh challenge to us as missionaries.
- Secularisation as it increases, becomes for each individual Oblate and Oblate communities, a challenge for their personal lives and for their mission.
- Generally speaking, Oblates are not yet well aware of the phenomenon of Secularization and many of those who are aware, remain partially confused.

**Note: Other possible calls can be found in MTW 41-51.**

Religion + Modernity = SECULARIZATION  
 Religion Modernité = SECULARISATION

A. INSTITUTIONAL: Institutionnelle

B. NORMATIVE: Normative

C. COGNITIVE: Cognitive

D. EXPERIENTIAL: Expérientielle

- AN APPARENT WITHDRAWAL OF GOD: Un retrait apparent de Dieu
- LOSS OF RELIGIOUS LEGITIMIZATION: Perte de la légitimation religieuse
- PLURALISM OF BELIEF & PRIVITIZATION: Pluralisme de croyances & privatisation
- SELECTIVITY IN MORAL BEHAVIOUR: Selectivité dans le comportement moral
- THE CHURCH NO LONGER SOLE INTERPRETER OF MEANING: L'Eglise n'est plus le seul interprète de sens
- RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE IN PUBLIC SECTOR DECLINES: L'influence religieuse dans le secteur public décline
- 'RELIGIOUS' SOCIETIES DISSINTEGRATE: La société "religieuse" se désagrège
- VARIETY OF THEOLOGIES & SPIRITUALITIES: Une variété de théologies et de spiritualités.
- PRAYER OF PETITION PROBLEMATIC: La prière de demande devient problématique
- GROWTH IN SECULARISM & FUNDAMENTALISM: Croissance du sécularisme et du fondamentalisme
- A SEARCH FOR A NEW PRESENCE OF GOD: (Purify faith.) Recherche d'une nouvelle présence de Dieu  
D.O'D.omi



## SOME QUESTIONS

C.I.

The word SECULARIZATION is being used to describe the effect of the modernity-process on people's experience of God.

SECULARIZATION is experienced - sometimes unconsciously - as an apparent gradual withdrawal of God when explanations of life previously attributed to mythical or religious sources, are shown to have rational ones.

1. At what point is the process of Secularization evangelically valid & beneficial towards a deeper experience of God?
2. In the midst of Secularization, what should the Church in mission to announce Jesus Christ, cooperate with and what should it criticise?
3. In secularized societies what are some of the changes in the life of the Church itself and what forms of inculturation should faith institutions take to be both true to the faith and also credible to the society in which they evangelize?
4. What is the possibility of direct proclamation of Christ in a secularized society and how might this be done...what symbols and what language?
5. What changes in people's mindset and capacity for belief, takes place as a result of technological advances?
6. When technology changes patterns of living in a culture, what can a missionary do to help his people profit from the benefits of technology without total disruption of their beliefs and of the religious context provided by a more traditional culture?
7. What ministries should missionaries and all pastoral ministers favour in a modern or modernizing society?

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- Desmond O'Donnell omi

# A SPIRITUALITY FOR MODERN PERSONS

- "All day long I am taunted, where is your God ?"(Ps.42)  
 UNE SPIRITUALITE POUR L'HOMME MODERNE: "Tout le jour on me harcèle: Où est ton Dieu?"

1. A GOD WITHIN: (cf. Ac.17.27,8) Un Dieu intérieur
2. DEEP INTERIORITY: (Ga.2.20.) Une intériorité profonde
3. CRITICAL AWARENESS:(I Jn.2.15-17) Une conscience critique
4. CONSTANT DISCERNMENT:(Col.1.9+) Un discernement constant
5. SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT:(Lk.16.19+) Un engagement social
6. COMMUNITIES OF EXPLICIT FAITH:(Ro.1.11,12) Des communautés de foi explicite
7. UNIFYING & INTEGRATING(Co.1.18-20) Unifiant et intégrant
8. PROCESS-PILGRIM:(Hb.11.8) Pèlerin du processus
9. PERSONAL DISCIPLINE:(I Co.9.24-7) Discipline personnelle
10. EMPHASIS ON HOPE:(I Co.15.24-8) Insistance sur l'espérance



CF. CONFÉRENCE SUR LA SPIRITUALITÉ + CONFERENCE ON SPIRITUALITY

- 1- UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THE MODERN PERSON - Comprendre et accepter la personne moderne
- 2- WITNESS TO URGENT HUMAN VALUES - Témoigner des valeurs humaines urgentes
- 3- WORK WITH AND ENCOURAGE HUMAN VALUES EVERYWHERE - Travailler avec les valeurs humaines partout et les encourager
- 4- ADULT EDUCATION IN FAITH - Education adulte dans la foi
- 5- A NEW LANGUAGE OF FAITH - Un nouveau langage de la foi
- 6- CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT - Des communautés chrétiennes de soutien
- 7- LAY WITNESS AND LEADERSHIP - Leadership et témoignage laïques
- 8- DIALOGUE OF LIFE WITH OTHER FAITHS - Dialogue de vie avec d'autres fois: communautés  
Human communities humaines
- 9- THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE OF DEATH BEFORE RESURRECTION - Le message chrétien: la mort avant  
la resurrection
- 10- NEW PRESENCES OF THE CHURCH - Nouveau mode de présence de l'Eglise
- 11- STRESS ON THE NEED FOR REFLECTION AND TIME APART - Insistance sur le besoin d'un temps  
de réflexion et de séparation
- 12- PATIENCE WITH PLURALISM, SELECTIVITY & GROWTH - Acceptation patiente du pluralisme, de  
la sélectivité et de la croissance
- 13- CONSTANT REJECTION OF SECULARISM & FUNDAMENTALISM - Rejet constant du sécularisme et du  
fondamentalisme
- 14- HELP THE 'BREAK-THROUGH' & 'BREAK-DOWN' PEOPLE - Aider ceux qui ont réussi et ceux qui  
ont été brisés
- 15- A NEW TYPE OF ECCLESIAL LEADERSHIP - Un nouveau style de leadership ecclésial

# FORMATION

- IDENTITY - IDENTITÉ
- INTERIORIZATION - INTÉRIORISATION
- COMMUNITY - COMMUNAUTÉ
- EDUCATION FOR CHOICE - EDUCATION POUR UN CHOIX
- RATIONAL UNDERPINNING - ETAYAGE RATIONNEL

- D. O'D. omi

Karl Rahner offers several examples of when we experience this Holy Spirit in our lives:

1. When a single sustaining hope enables us to face courageously both the enthusiastic highs and the depressing lows of our daily earthly existence.
2. When a responsibility, freely accepted, continues to be carried out.
3. When a human being willingly accepts the last free choice of his death.
4. When we no longer have any proof of the total value of our life's actions, and yet have the strength to view them as positive in God's eyes.
5. When the fragmentary experiences of love, beauty and joy can quite simply be experienced as a continued promise of love, beauty and joy.
6. When one dares to pray in silence and darkness and knows that he is being heard.
7. When the bitter and disappointing and trying events of everyday are endured serenely and patiently.
8. When falling can truly be called standing.
9. When one has reached the point of entrusting all his certainty and all his doubts to the silent and encompassing mystery that he now loves above his personal achievements.

## MEETING GOD:

"God is the one we meet; even though without naming him & unconsciously,  
 when: - we dare to be foolish for moral reasons  
 when - we avoid conflicts & power-struggles we had a chance of winning  
 when - we love without the initial certainty of being loved in return  
 when - we remain true to our convictions even to our disadvantage and  
       that disadvantage is not merely an episode in a battle we  
       are sure to win in the end  
 when - we are true to our conscience and no longer confuse its demands  
       with the claims of that obvious material utility announced in  
       everyday morality"

- KARL RAHNER in 'Meditations on Hope & Love'

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SEVEN SINS OF THE MODERN WORLD: - when we avoid meeting God. *1st march 1961*

"Wealth without work/ Pleasure without conscience/ Knowledge without character/ Trade without morality/ Science without humility/ Worship without sacrifice/ Politics without principle/ - GANDHI.

**XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX**



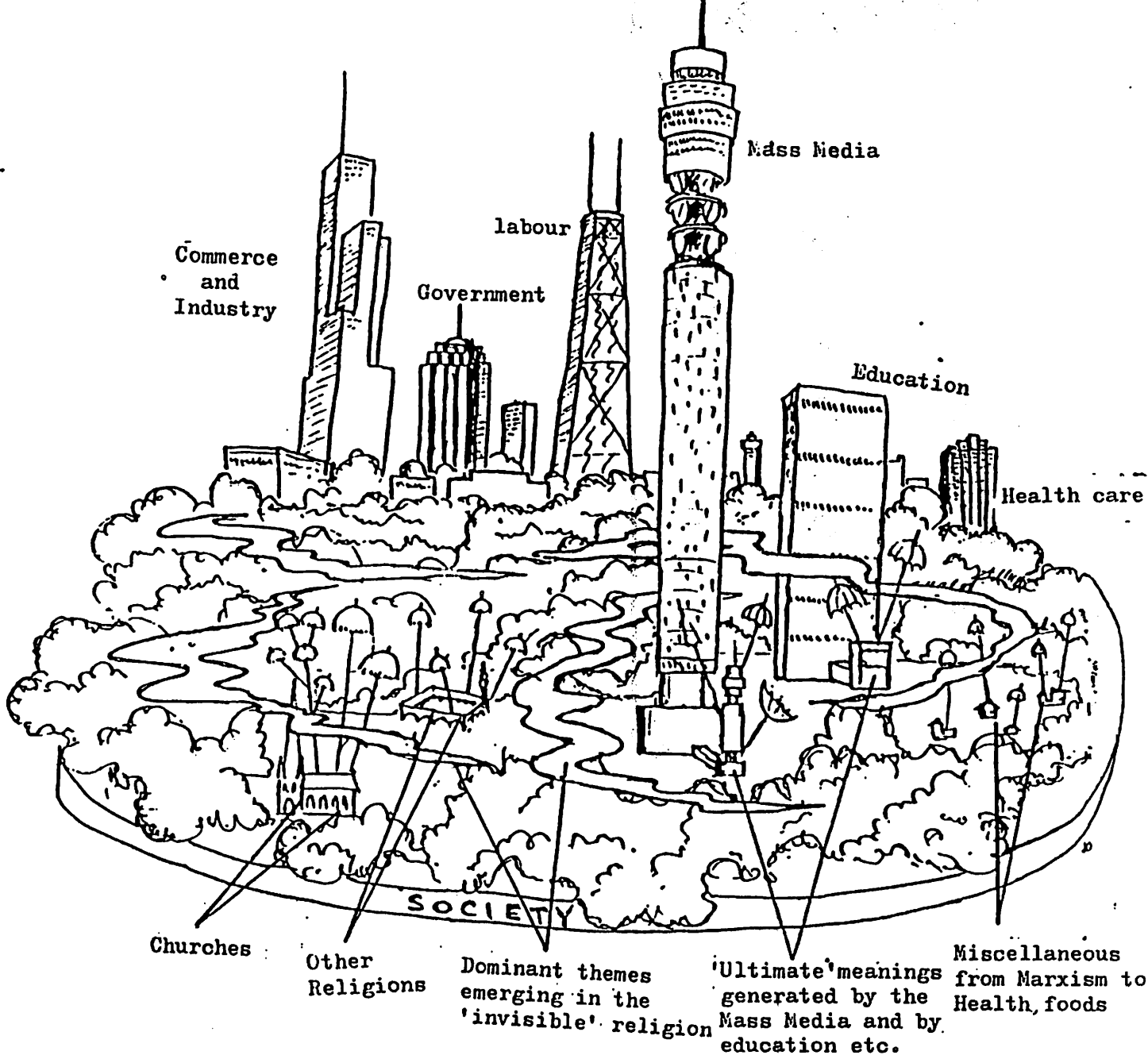
# MINISTERING TO ONE ANOTHER

1. Prayer for one another - Rom. 1:9-11
2. Hospitality for all - Rom. 12:13, Heb. 13:2
3. Carry each others troubles - Gal. 6:2
4. Share spiritual gifts - Rom. 1:11
5. Kind in speech to all - Eph. 4:31, 1 Pet. 2:1
6. Encourage the apprehensive - 1 Thess. 5:14
7. Pull out of danger - Jude 1:23
8. Encourage one another in the faith - Rom. 1:9-11
9. Forgive one another - Col. 3:13, Eph. 4:32
10. Care for the weak - 1 Thess. 5:14, Rom. 15:1-2
11. Respect for each other - Rom. 12:10, 1 Tim. 5:1-2, 1 Thess. 5:13
12. Share each others hurts - 1 Cor. 12:26, Heb. 13:3
13. Teach and advise others in wisdom - Col. 3:16, Jas. 5:19-20
14. Rejoice with those who rejoice - Rom. 12:15
15. Sympathise with needs - Rom. 12:13
16. Enjoy success of others - 1 Cor. 12:26, 13:4
17. Correct one another in spirit of gentleness - Gal. 6:1, 1 Pet. 3: 8-12
18. Warn idlers - 1 Thess. 5:14
19. Reassure when in doubt - Jude 1:22
20. Be humble in service of others - 1 Pet. 5:5, Phil. 2:3-4
- 21- Practise tolerance - 1 Pet. 3:8, Phil. 4:5, Rom. 15:5
22. Be friends - Rom. 15:7, Eph. 4:32
23. Do good to all - Gal. 6:10
24. Live in unity - Eph. 4:3-6, Phil. 2: 1-2
25. Pray together - Eph. 5:19-20, 6:18, Co. 4:2, 1 Thess. 5:17

# MODERNIZATION, SECULARIZATION

- Des O'Donnell omi.

MODERNIZATION: Dominates all cultures....shakes traditional values  
ambiguous in its results....moves from 'fate' to 'choice'  
changes human consciousness...affects religion and  
atheism,....increases rich-poor gap ....Rapidation ....  
shakes traditional institutions....disintegrates symbols.  
gives power to the few....causes SECULARIZATION.



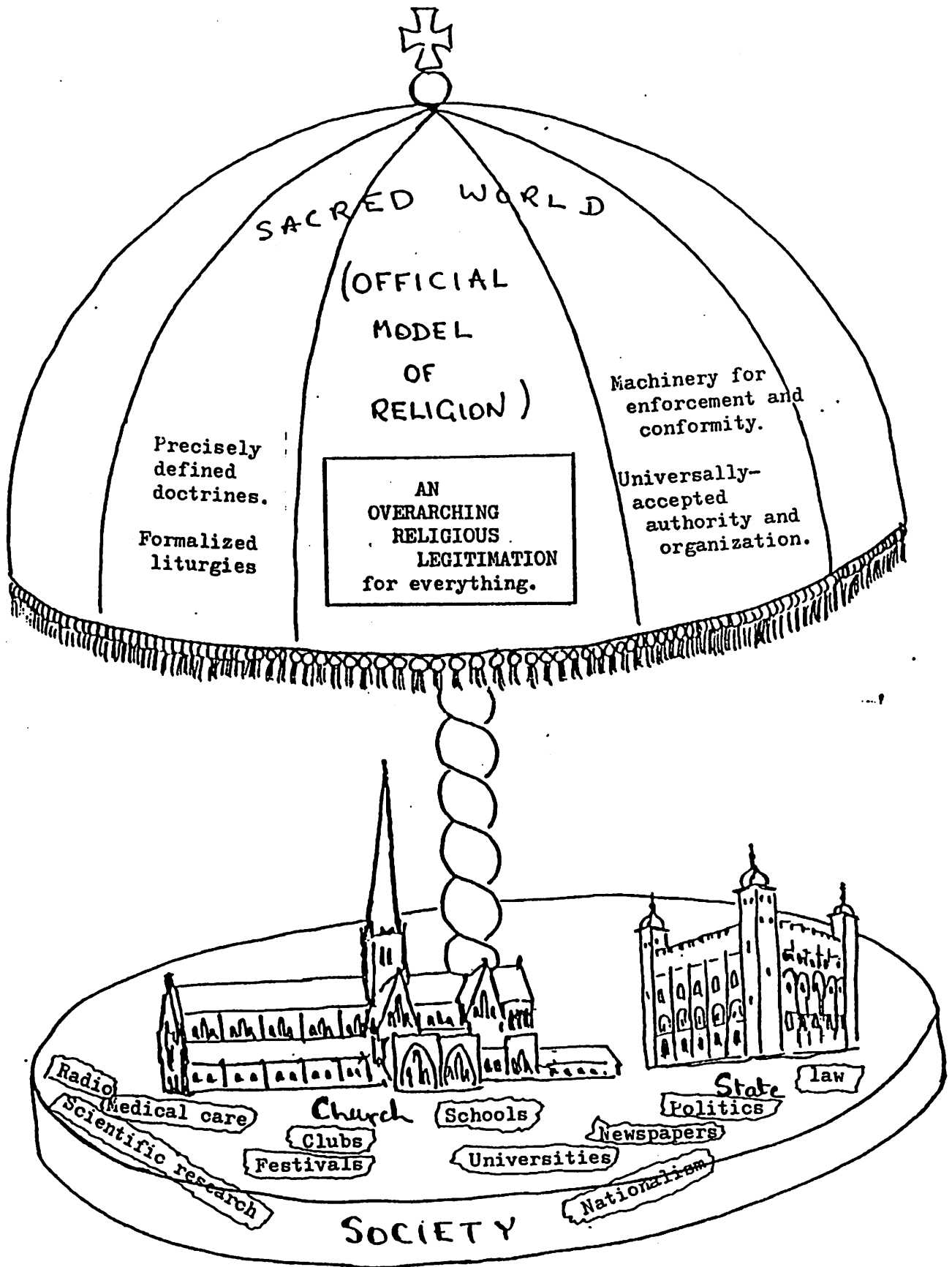
SECULARIZATION:

- The quantum of the sacred decreasing ... secular increasing...
- The apparent withdrawal of God.....SECULARISM /v/FUNDAMENTALISM.
- Religious influence declines in the public sector....
- Pluralism and privatization of belief and practice..selectivity.
- Variety of theologies and spiritualities.....
- Loss of overarching 'religion'....disintegration-feeling...
- The Church but one interpreter of meaning.....
- Search for new symbols....new presence....of God.

EDUCATION causes, increases Modernization and Secularization.....  
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS are challenged .....

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A SEMI-SACRAL SOCIETY



- Des O'Donnell omi

P.T.O.



## MEGATRENDS 2000

In "Megatrends 2000," John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene present these trends as major influences in our lives during the 1990s:

■ *The Global Economic Boom of the 1990s:* Contrary to popular doomsaying scenarios, we are bound for a period of unprecedented prosperity.

■ *A Renaissance in the Arts:* The arts will permeate mass culture as never before, replacing sports as our dominant leisure activity.

■ *The Emergence of Free-Market Socialism:* From the turmoil in the Eastern Bloc will spring a new and unprecedented economic and political ideology.

■ *Global Life Styles and Cultural Nationalism:* Big Macs and Esprit sportswear may be ubiquitous, but the growing similarity of life styles around the world is producing a backlash against uniformity and a desire to assert the uniqueness of one's culture and language.

■ *The Privatization of the Welfare State:* The burning social question of the '90s will be how to help the poor without bankrupting the national treasures. From the Third World to the West, the shift from government control to private enterprise is the first step.

■ *The Rise of the Pacific Rim:* The focus of the world economy will shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with America's West Coast states as well positioned as Tokyo.

■ *The Decade of Women in Leadership:* Well-suited to the new humanistic requirements of institutional leadership, women have reached a critical mass in the white-collar professions and will attain leadership positions in significant numbers.

■ *The Age of Biology:* Biotechnology will provoke the greatest ethical and intellectual debates since the days of Darwin.

■ *Religious Revival of the Third Millennium:* Although the ways of seeking it will differ, from fundamentalism to New Age, spirituality will play an ever-expanding role as the millennium approaches.

■ *Triumph of the Individual:* A new regard for individual achievement and integrity will underlie global changes. Telecommunications will liberate creative and self-employed people to live and work in quality-of-life locales.



# THE WORLD NOW

Desmond O'Donnell, O.M.I.

This is a chapter of a book written for laypeople. It situates what I will speak about at our Kochi meeting.

## Introduction

## CHANGE AND AWARENESS

## TECHNOLOGY



- Morally neutral
- Present everywhere
- Self-propelling
- Addictive
- Useful
- Directionless
- Unpredictable
- Centralizing
- Widening choice

## THE HUMAN CHALLENGE

- Ecology
- The family
- The media
- Travel
- Education
- Marriage
- Rich-poor gap
- Advertising
- A new language
- Use of time

## THE RELIGIOUS FAITH CHALLENGE

- Secularization
- Secularism
- Fundamentalism
- Unbelief

## DOES FAITH CHANGE ?

Change has always been part of the human experience but it has never come as quickly nor as intensely as it has in the last fifty years. Nor is there any indication that it is going to slow down. Information travels faster, people move more often, and inventions - from kitchen mod-coms to sophisticated weaponry - follow one another with surprising speed.

If the last 50,000 years were divided into lifespans of 62 years, there would have been 800 such lifespans. 650 of these were spent in caves. Only in the last 70 lifespans has communication by writing from one lifespan to the next been possible and only during the last 6 have most people seen a printed word. Electricity came in the last 2 lifespans and most of the material goods we use came within the present lifespan.

Many of us remember the discovery of plastics in the 40's, of transistors in the 50's of microtransistors in the 60's, and all adults among us have seen the first computers. Now in the 80's and 90's we all take genetic engineering for granted. And none of this - moving from cave to condominiums, from stone hatchets to sophisticated rocketry, from candles to coloured neon and from inter-village to inter-continental air transport - is just 'out there'. Not all of us can speak clearly about its effects upon us, but we know that effecting us, it is. At least we know its benefits and suspect its less helpful contributions to human living.

Because - as we shall see - its effects upon each of us are deep and wide-reaching. The necessity of awareness, of knowing and thinking about it is imperative. It can easily be a question of our health, physical or mental. More often still, the effects of rapid change on our family life and our relationships must be thought about and it surely - even if unconsciously - can undermine the very meaning of our lives.

For those who are missionaries, these changes have brought about a crisis - in the form of a problem and an opportunity

## CHANGE AND AWARENESS

Let us reflect on some of the more obvious changes which effect and challenge us. Despite the comparative ease of travel today, many people feel alone and lonely. Most of us were born into a town, neighborhood or at least into a web of family relationships which gave a comfortable feeling of belonging even if it limited our privacy. But now many feel less neighborliness and some feel painfully isolated from adequate human support.

Life was once a lot more pleasant in some ways because it was predictable and there seemed to be less competition. But even the near future seems unclear now, while local and inter-group conflict is never far away. It was far from ideal when authority made it clear that everyone had a place with built in limits. But the liberty to 'be yourself' today can easily be experienced as loneliness and even loss of identity.

Work hours have become shorter and some would say more human. But it is not clear that we are enjoying the leisure that should be present because of that. The advertisements help us to find what we need. But maybe we are fulfilling our smaller needs and forgetting our deeper ones. Pleasure can easily take the place of deep enjoyment.

In most developed countries, bigness - the supermarket for instance - and efficiency - the telephone etc. - have made life better in many ways. But the quality of life is not always and obviously improved. Updating a system and streamlining a process can be both helpful and harmful at the same time, as when groups and governments increase their contact and control of our lives.

And yet, it does not seem that we can go back; we cannot stop the world and get off, nor sail off

to a deserted island off the coast of the modern world. Nor is it clear that individuals - as distinct from groups - can influence the speed of change. But we can certainly increase our awareness and control our response if we take the trouble to understand what is happening. Let us try.

## TECHNOLOGY

The story of Adam and Eve reminds us that the human person has always sought more knowledge, while the libraries and the data-banks of the world confirm it. Until comparatively recently in history, this knowledge remained in libraries and in centres of academic learning, but now it is being dynamically transferred into technology and from there into the lives of people everywhere. The knowledge of how sound travels was of academic interest until it was transferred into the technology we call a telephone.

Other pieces of technology are cars, computers, airconditioners and aeroplanes, factory farming and FAX, radio, TV and video, hairdryers, electric blankets, microwaves, computers. Each of these is affecting the human experience and apparently changing it in some ways all the time.

Technology effects the human experience **ECOLOGICALLY** by controlling pests and damaging the ozone layer, **ECONOMICALLY** by facilitating trade and by causing unemployment, **POLITICALLY** by diffusing information and centralizing power, **CULTURALLY** by challenging unjust traditions and undermining meaningful symbol systems, **GENETICALLY** by curing prenatal defects and experimenting with human embryos and **RELIGIOUSLY** by answering old questions scientifically and causing an apparent withdrawal of God in people's experience.

In the past thirty years we have seen more technological change than in all recorded history.---It took 112 years for photography to go from discovery to commercial product; 56 years for the telephone; 35 years for radio; 15 for radar; twelve for television; but only 6 for the atomic bomb to become an operational reality; and only 5 for transistors to find their way from the laboratory to the market. Nowadays a product can be invented, produced, packaged, marketed and bypassed by another similar invention very quickly. However, before each invention has been obsolesced, it has touched the human experience and changed it in some way. Let us reflect on technology.

## REFLECTING ON TECHNOLOGY

### ● Morally neutral

Let us reflect still more on technology. It is **MORALLY NEUTRAL**; in itself, it is neither good nor evil. A helicopter can bring food to a starving village or it can be used to bomb it. A telephone message can commence a lifelong friendship or plan a murder. The biotechnologies can help childless couples or kill an unborn baby. Technology usually demands that we know the cost of everything but the value of nothing because values are not in its vocabulary.

### ● Present everywhere

As it expands into all countries and cultures, it seems to be a culture of its own and tends to reduce all other cultures to its own image and likeness. Uncomplicated people who dress with little but a lap-lap now wear Walkmans, and obscure villages have instant communication and instant challenge to their ways of life through the transistor. Heretofore closed systems like Communism are questioned as their youth choose disco-dancing, and busy Westerners move into meditation after a visit to India.

### ● Self propelling

Technology appears to have its own momentum; it is self-propelled as the news media moves information almost instantly anywhere. Scientists can compare and combine their discoveries and inventions for good or for evil by visiting one another quickly or even without doing so.

### ● Addictive

Then because most modern inventions appeal to our need for instantcy, efficiency, comfort and control, they sell themselves; they are almost addictive, almost irresistible. The 'new model' is always 'better'. It is for this reason that many consider Modernity i.e. the result of the technological revolution, to be primarily a moral problem and only secondarily a problem of/for faith. As Jesus said - "Life does not consist in possessions, even when someone has more than he needs" (Lk. 12.15) Even in - and perhaps, especially in - poorer countries, this might be a deep missionary problem.

### ● Useful

Technology says "I am useful" and it usually is. However, many people are prepared to wonder about this now or distinguish between short-term and long-term usefulness. In general, technology responds to immediate and measurable needs. It is functional. It is not concerned about higher manifestations of human life, like truth, beauty, nobility, loyalty or faith, since these cannot be measured in functional terms.

### ● Directionless

Technology thrives on the word PROGRESS, a high quality of which it often delivers, but it is not in the business of defining what is meant by the word. The technology revolution knows - at least in the short run - what it is about to do, but it does not know what it is about.

### ● Unpredictable

It seems to encourage so much that is good, like information-openness, better communication, mutual respect among the various branches of learning, but in itself it is unpredictable. Because it is more or less mindless, it does not know where it is going; in this way, it is UNPREDICTABLE. It tends to forget any future beyond the next invention.

### ● Centralizing

One of the most interesting and serious qualities of technology is that it helps people to come together in large cities, thus increasing efficiency and employment in some cases but causing pollution and unemployment in others. More seriously, it enables the centralization of money and of power because of fast communication and of modern weaponry, thus increasing the gap between the poor and the rich at an increasing speed.

### ● Widening choice

When the supermarket began to eliminate the corner shop, people's choice of material goods increased, even if the supermarkets can gradually capture, control, and raise the cost of most things. Urban planners are faced with choices and decisions which may last a long time, and scientists working on the DNA have a constant demand for deep decisions also. Technology has moved much of life from fate to choice and very often calls for fairly instant choice too.

## THE HUMAN CHALLENGES

Many thinkers are of the opinion that humankind is now at a significant hinge in its history; they are already talking about the post-technology or the post-modern era. The changes brought about by the technological revolution and the speed at which they have come and continue to come demand an individual and collective response. Modernity - the marriage of an unprecedented flow of



knowledge and an ever advancing technology, can contribute to a better world for all of us or can dehumanize or even destroy us very suddenly. We must decide which it will be.

At first technology facilitated what was already being done, as tools increased precision and production. Then it began to transform what was already being done as when transport moved into steam, electricity and nuclear power. Now it seems to be almost creative, as plant, animal and human life are being manipulated at their very centre. This movement from being facilitative to being transformative, to being almost creative, calls for deep awareness by every responsible person.

### ● Ecology

Ecologists have been telling us for a long time that technology can both help and harm our environment. Social scientists show us that it is favouring the growth of powerful multinational companies who can do so much to help or hinder whole countries and smaller companies. The concentration of political power leading to its easier proper and improper use gives us all a deep moral challenge. The growing disintegration of cultures, especially small ones is facilitated by technology, leading to less feeling of personal and collective identity for all of us.

### ● The family

Families can travel to meet more easily than before and the telephone can be a great opportunity to 'meet' more often: all thanks to technology. But it is the same technology which leads to redundancy, demands harder work, keeps parents away from children they love, insists on early retirement and puts students under great pressure. Tension and tiredness seem to be by-products of modern life for most people and this in turn has profound effects on how we relate to one another - another challenge.

### ● The communication media

Few things indicate the presence of the technological revolution as clearly as the mass media of communication - print, radio, TV and video. So much of these are helpful to educate, to relax, and amuse us. Again they are morally neutral, depending on how they are used. However, one of the obvious results is that they set up a dependency on themselves; they steal our time. Many programs make us think, but overall the media does not encourage us nor even allow us to reflect. Packaged messages are given and momentary stimulation appears to be the purpose of most programs and even of many items of 'news'. So the information media call for a stance, a response and a discipline, unless we are willing to be passively moulded by them.

### ● Travel

Technology gives us much with which to fill our time - notably travel to show us the world and to keep us busy. There is also less time for meaningful communication among family members and friends. Perhaps we see more people and maybe we work with more, but do we touch them with time to pass on care and concern or the pleasant and painful moments we like to share. Once we knew our neighbors and maybe their parents; now because of fast mobility we often do not know who lives next door, and distrust is never far away in modern life.

### ● Education

Teachers are doing their best to prepare our children for the future and technology like overhead projectors help in this, but the same technology has made the future of our children very unclear. The future now is equally full of promise and of threat and so education is often modelled on the scientific and technological model. Many educationalists say that we can educate children today only for choice, as the unknown future races into their lives.

## ● Marriage

Few wives and mothers are not grateful to technology for a dishwasher, a hairdryer, a fridge and a microwave oven. It gives them time for another job and maybe a second career when children have left home. They can be out and about. But it is the same technology in the form of computers which have forced retirement on their husbands who are then ready to 'come home' as their wives move into the market place. Result: two people going in opposite directions and increasing the likelihood of a divorce.

## ● The Rich-Poor Gap

There seems to be no country in the world where the gap between the rich and the poor is not increasing. While this is primarily due to selfishness, technology makes it easier. It need not be so of course, and so the time has come for moral people to think about it, maybe to speak and even to do something about it.

## ● Advertising

Advertisers are actively engaged in selling good products and bad ones. Constant survey results fed into computers are sharpening the battle for our minds and for money. The per capita consumption of advertising in the United States is \$200 per year, but it is money that returns to the company - your money; otherwise they would not be doing it. The medium for this process is print, radio and TV - all gifts of modern technology. The process is worth thinking about.

## ● A Language

Nor is there any sign that the march of technology can be stopped or reversed - even if we wanted to. One cannot disinvent a TV set nor force the world to stop buying videos; nor should one. Technology constantly offers more control - or the illusion of it - just a button away. Even if not always spoken aloud, its language is something like this; "More is better than less; now is better than later; faster is better than slower; sound is better than silence; more control is better than less; doing is better than being; care of self is better than concern for others." No wonder it moves forward quickly.

## ● Time

To sum up - Technology promises us more time, but in fact we seem to have less of it. One magazine recently tells how some parents put a card under a child's pillow, which tells him "I wish we were here to tuck you in." The explosion of information means that most of us have more of it than we can handle usefully, with peace of mind. The speeded up schedule of modern life can lead to hypertension, ulcers, heart disease or dependence on drugs. Many thinking people have climbed down or stayed put on the promotion ladder for the good of their families and their own; some things are not worth the price.

## THE CHALLENGE TO RELIGION AND FAITH

Faith is in our hearts - like love. Like love again, it will manifest itself visibly; it will show itself and be seen. Good manners, kind deeds, gentle words, gift giving are usually the signs of love present. Faith usually shows itself too in altars, candles, ritual, personal and organized action for others; this is RELIGION - faith on the outside. Faith itself is basically a deep trustful obedience to God's Word based on the experience of being personally loved by him.

## SECULARIZATION

1. Technology touches both religion and faith more or less in four ways. In a highly technological society, governments and civil authorities gradually take over institutions like hospitals and schools which were previously under control by churches. These religiously high-profile places - external presences of the church - cease to be signs of faith, even if they still hold the original saint's name for a long time.

Another example might be the movement of marriage ceremonies from churches to secular settings. It's not just that these external signs of the church's presence gave it more influence in society - which it did - but the church was free to choose the type of people who controlled and served each institution. But most importantly, these buildings and their work were usually a reminder of the church's faith and a visible support for those who had faith themselves. Their movement out of church control is inevitable and perhaps one less obvious sign and reminder of God's presence in the world. We call this INSTITUTIONAL SECULARIZATION.

2. For people of faith, their religion helps them to make sense of life, to put life together. It gives them overarching meaning, helping them to hold all life's bits in a meaningful whole. Faith gives many people the assurance that the world is in God's safe hands, that the cosmos is sacred and that he or she has a place in this overall God-ordered universe. It may be oversimplifying it to say that for many, God was like a great clockmaker, clockminder and even clockwinder above and outside of the world. Technology makes this position less easy to maintain, as science continues to explain previously unexplained facts about which we then said - "God does it." There appears to be less and less need now to explain the work of nature, as science pushes the frontiers of human knowledge back further with each new discovery. As we gain more and more control of the universe and of nature, the area of the sacred appears to be decreasing and that of the secular increasing; God seems to be withdrawing.

Notice that this is not atheism - a deliberate, 'rational' decision that God does not exist. It is very often an experience in good people's lives that despite their best efforts, the God they knew or the influence of God which they thought they experienced, appears to be slipping away. Accelerated education as in tertiary institutions today, seems to favour and to facilitate this process.

We have all read books and recall our grandparents tell us stories about elves, mermaids, fairies and ghosts. Many large groups of people still believe in similar myths. The world of technology kills myths like these very easily. Similar large groups have made their lives meaningful with great overarching ideas, like Communism, and others, but again the technological revolution - especially the communications media - has forced people to question their every idea and the ideologies which sustained them.

As a result of this - which we call COGNITIVE SECULARIZATION - people are forced to find a more private and personal meaning to hold their lives together, and to find faith within themselves. There was a time when church leaders were expected to say something final about most things and they often tried to give overall umbrella-answers to people's search for meaning. They cannot do it now, since every science has its own answers with few points of reference to one another.

3. For many of us faith and the church offer guidance about how we act; the church for many is still teacher of the law. But science or technology have taken over all or part of this role in the lives of many sincere people. Science gives answers to many questions once answered by religion

and so, guidance is being sought there too. People's values and guiding principles for behaviour are becoming less religious today; or at least the religious guidance comes from individual consciences alone, not from religious institutions. The other possibility is that society loses all moral direction while personal ambitions and desires become its sole motivation. This is **NORMATIVE SECULARIZATION**.

4. Finally, the scientific revolution could have the effect of lessening people's personal experience of God. It is difficult to know if this is happening and there is no clear evidence that it is. Perhaps men and women are still meeting God in the fast world of technology too. We have not enough evidence on this very private matter to be sure one way or another. If it is true that less people meet God in their hearts today, then **EXPERIENTIAL SECULARIZATION** is taking place.

As Missionary Oblates, we are challenged to discover:

- In what way **MODERNITY** touches our personal lives ?
- Which form of **SECULARIZATION** is present in our country ?
- What does this mean for our **MISSION** to proclaim Christ ?
- What kind of **NEW PERSON** is emerging as a result of Modernity ?  
( in another talk I will address this topic.)
- Where is the **BLOCKAGE** for the transmission of the Gospel ?

In Modernity ?

In one or all forms of Secularization ?

In our concept of mission ?

In our image of Church ?

In the situation ?

In ourselves ?

- Is **SECULARIZATION**, in whatever form, a hindrance or a help,  
an advantage or a disadvantage for mission ?

## RELIGION WITHOUT FAITH

The challenge to purify our faith which the world of technology gives us, is not an easy one. We have to let go of earlier images of God. Instead of doing this, many Christians live with a shallow or absent faith but still keep up the outward signs like churchgoing and other rituals. Their daily lives are lived as if God did not exist even if they still practice some religious behaviour once a week or oftener. In a way it is practical atheism without claiming or naming it.

One person put it this way - "The main danger to religion is not unbelief but shallow belief - a religion without challenge and without depth, on the margin of life." Another danger today is that conflicting values - religious and secular - be held by the same person. This is a sort of split-level life, one of "faith" and the other the real life. In this case it is not real faith, since it is isolated from one's day to day existence as Jesus warned - "It is not those who say to me Lord, Lord, who will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father." (Mt. 7.21) The word **SECULARISM** is often used to describe this.

## FAITH WITHOUT DEPTH

The technological revolution, as we saw, questions our faith and forces us to purify and deepen it. This is not easy because there is a lot of change, uncertainty or at least ambiguity which confuses. Everything seems to be moving and questions pile up upon us. Many people take a conscious or subconscious decision to close their minds to the confusion and settle for a simplistic faith and for a naive belief in the immediacy of God. They are tired of struggle and they reach for stability that makes them comfortable. In a way they are saying that without religion, there are no answers and that with religion, there are no questions.

This position must be distinguished from a solid and simple faith which is usually far from rigid and which is able to hold deep certainties but can live with less than total certainty in the details of religious belief and practice. Due to discomfort with change, some people seek certainty in everything and they almost identify God with a devotion, an apparition, the bible, a medal, a saint, a church leader or one doctrine. This is called **FUNDAMENTALISM** as we find in the sects and occasionally within the church too. These people believe more and more in less and less, while Secularism believes less and less in more and more.

## UNBELIEF

One must not, too readily, accuse oneself of loss of faith or unbelief just because the age of technology may call for a new kind of faith, a deeper one. A feeling of unbelief is often just an honest acceptance that one cannot believe in the way one believed before. Or it may be just facing the fact that one cannot bubble with faith as some others - especially Fundamentalists - seem to do.

Or it may also be lack of awareness that faith is as varied as people. Your faith is uniquely yours and yours at this time. Because it is not what it was some years ago, or not like your friends' is no reason to accuse yourself of atheism.

Faith is never a comfortable certainty; to have faith is to have doubts. Only the Secularists and the Fundamentalists have no doubts. To have faith is to have doubts but to live and act in faith just the same. God's hiddenness is part of Christian faith and even to feel the pain of his apparent absence is an act of faith in itself. We all have occasional religious experiences, when we 'meet' God, but this is not every day. A religion that does not affirm God's hiddenness is not true - "Truly, you are a hidden God: (Is.45.15). The prophet is clear about this and in fact, the original Hebrew for 'hidden' is 'self-concealing'.

God is to be found and known in his symbols and yet he is not his symbols. The world of technology does not limit God's ability to symbolize his presence to us, as we will see in a later lesson. But his symbols reveal him as incomprehensible mystery in the sense of something which is so deep that it is endlessly rich. We must learn to accept therefore that every symbol or sacrament of God's presence is also a symbol or sacrament of his absence. Every encounter with God's word is also an encounter with silence. St. Paul reminds us of this - "Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face." (1 Cor.13.12)

Our knowledge of God is never a possession; it is always a searching in "living hope" (1 Pet.1.3) and



a willingness to be taken hold of by God (cf. Ph.3.12). Perhaps technology teaches us these deeper truths in a new way and is a blessing in that it makes us find God :more deeply than we had before. A long time ago, St. Augustine said that when we say we know God, it is not God we know. Before the true God, we need a deep respect for his utter incomprehensibility and a healthy healthy hesitance in approaching him. It is only on our knees - metaphorically - that we can meet him and in willingness to be loved by and to love him that we will know him. We will look at ways in which the modern person can do this fruitfully in a later talk.

### DOES FAITH CHANGE ?

Most adult Catholics can recall when the object of our faith was regarded as a collection of 'revealed truths', written in the bible and taught in the church. If this were faith, then it could never change. However, faith is much more beautiful than this. Because it is multifaceted, it is impossible to express all its aspects in one phrase. It is basically the way in which we accept and the quality of our acceptance of God's love. This can and does change and is different in each person, even in the same person at different times. In a time when technology revolutionizes human experience, we must expect that faith might undergo a revolution too. If this is so, than Mission is deeply challenged.



## IN SEARCH OF A UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY - A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

The belief in the omnipotence of material science has resulted in the neglect of moral and spiritual values during the last two centuries of human history. It has now become evident that science and technology alone <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ insufficient to promote a stable and harmonious social order or a feeling of security and contentment among mankind. We have entered into an era in the history of mankind in which certain claims about the possibility of constructing a perfect society on the basis of alleged scientific theories of the nature of society, disregarding all traditional wisdom contained in the religious and spiritual heritage of mankind is being seriously challenged. The truth appears to be dawning on an increasing number of intellectuals that excessive faith in the potency of material science to solve all our problems is utterly misconceived and that there is a great need today to draw inspiration from the wisdom of the past, from the great spiritual and religious heritage of mankind which has retained its vitality despite the many challenges that it has faced throughout the past centuries of human history. However the benefits that could accrue to mankind from a return to traditional wisdom appears to be largely hindered by sectarian interests and the inability to identify a common core of spiritual and moral values which transcend a narrow dogmatism. Adherents of all major faiths that have a substantial moral content, and propound a way of life which accords with the belief in the perfectibility of man and the attainability of a goal which is qualitatively far superior to the life of sensuality should have no reason to feel threatened by other believers who share in common with themselves the belief in the importance of the spiritual life. The common threat to all those who value the notion of a higher life, or *brahmachariva* as the Indian spiritual traditions described it, is the current outlook based on materialistic scientism. The philosophy of life which has been conditioned by this materialistic scientism has created a spiritual and moral vacuum in the minds of many people of the present generation giving rise to a variety of new social and moral problems. It is in view of this situation that I shall attempt to examine what contributions Buddhist thought and culture can make in the identification and adoption of a universal spirituality.

With the growing knowledge of alternative religious traditions, and the increasing appreciation of the common core of moral values and insights in these traditions, there is a tendency among the religious enthusiasts of the Western world to

abandon the old Christocentric view of the nature of religion. However, it appears that there is yet some difficulty on the part of those who adhere to theistic forms of religion to appreciate the possibility of contemplating a spirituality free from theocentric considerations. This is a matter which requires attention when we talk of a universal spirituality in the context of the religious tradition of a Theravada Buddhist Culture such as that of Sri Lanka. If there are any truths of a spiritual nature they should be non-sectarian and universal. I wish to propose a term which has the advantage of being neutral as regards sectarian identity in situations in which we desire to explore the possibility of discovering a universal spirituality suppressing the customary tendency to be restricted by sectarian interest. That is what I would propose to call the dharmacentric approach. In other words I wish to raise the question as to whether there are spiritual truths which can be universally acknowledged without conceptualizing them in terms of the dogmas of any particular religious tradition or culture. There are certain elements in the teachings of the Buddha which appear to have been supportive of such a tendency. The cardinal aspects of spirituality in a Buddhist culture can easily be considered in terms of such an approach.

In the context of contemporary global culture religion in general has a very important role to play. Religion is considered as an ancient component of human culture. While religion inclusive of its ideological systems, rituals, and patterns of behaviour forms a major part of human culture it has through the ages provided the principal ideological basis for the creation of human culture. Culture in its broadest definition refers to that part of the total repertoire of human action (and its products) which is socially as opposed to genetically transmitted. E.B. Tylor defined culture or civilization as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. In dealing with culture we deal with man's social heritage. Learned behaviour which in its specific aspects is common to a group of people transmitted by the older generation to its offspring, or transmitted in some portion by any member of one group to a member or members of another group is called culture. Men are not only the carriers and creatures of culture, they are also creators and manipulators of culture.

Among the diverse factors that influence the cultural behaviour of man religion appears to have been the predominant one in most societies until very recent times, and there is



little doubt that it still exerts a considerable degree of influence over the behaviour of social groups. From ancient periods of human history it has been one of the most important, if not the strongest and most decisive factor in governing the behaviour of groups and societies. It has dominated virtually all peoples and the direct influence of it upon their lives, customs, ways of thinking, patterns of behaviour and attitudes is easy to see. This is very clearly exemplified in the case of the Sri Lankan society.

As regards Sri Lankan society there is no doubt that Buddhism was the greatest single influence which guided its destinies. Buddhism became the common denominator of all aspects of Sri Lankan culture, such as the peoples' religious and moral beliefs, education, literature and art. When the first European Christian missionaries came to this Island their understanding of the moral and spiritual values of our people was utterly inadequate. They looked upon our people as a community of superstitious and idolatrous men wanting in religious, moral and spiritual values. It was thought that without their intervention the souls of these people could not be saved from eternal damnation. However as more and more intellectuals of the West became acquainted with the Wisdom of the East, a substantial number of them realized the richness of the moral values and the spiritual wisdom of the East. We have now reached a stage in which the emphasis is on interreligious dialogue, mutual understanding and benefit from whatever is of universal value in each other's belief system. Any individual or group engaged in the task of inculcating religious or spiritual values requires an understanding of the cherished values of the particular culture in which he intends to work. Today's need appears to be not a kind of sectarian religious imperialism but a common effort to facilitate the attainment of man's spiritual potential. The familiar forms of traditional religious proselytism could only add to the divisive influences that are found to involve human societies in conflicts and antagonisms.

Let me briefly enumerate the principal aspects of the Buddhist ideology which can be said to have influenced the communities which professed Buddhism as their faith. Doctrinally, Buddhism conceives its ultimate spiritual goal as a deliverance from suffering by means of the moral perfection of man through a total transformation of his traits of character. This transformation involves replacing greed, hatred and delusion, considered to be the three roots of evil, with non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, or expressed in more positive

terms, with charitableness, compassion and wisdom. The ultimate spiritual goal of Buddhism is defined as the eradication of these roots of evil. Man is believed to suffer and create suffering to others around him as a consequence of the intensity of these roots of evil. Associated with this ideal of spiritual transformation Buddhism introduced a scheme of spiritual training consisting of *sila* (moral training), *samadhi* (training of mind), and *panna* (training of wisdom). The same path is formulated more explicitly in the form of the Noble Eightfold Way of Buddhism. As aids to this spiritual transformation Buddhism extolled the four sublime abidings (*brahmavihara*) which are to be cultivated both contemplatively and actively in one's actual dealings with fellow members of the society in which one lives. They are loving kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkha*). To this may be added the four bases of benevolence (*sangahavatthu*) which are considered to be paramount values cherished in a Buddhist society: They are liberality (*dana*), pleasant speech (*piyavacana*), benevolent action (*atthacariva*) and impartial or equal treatment of all (*samanattata*). These virtues are recognized in Buddhist societies as the moral foundation necessary not only for progression in the individual's attainment of his personal spiritual goal but also for the promotion of a peaceful and harmonious social environment.

Buddhist ideology helped people to live in harmony with nature encouraging them to cultivate the virtue of contentment. Buddhism encouraged people to reduce their wants while recognizing the necessity to follow righteous means in the satisfaction of their needs. The development of the inner sources of joy rather than servile dependence on material possessions is characteristic of the Buddhist way of life. Buddhism warns against the natural tendency of the human mind to find no limit to its cravings and desires. The frustrations and anxieties of life are judged in Buddhism to be due, to a considerable extent, to man's inability to be contented. Buddhism has a very important message to contemporary man especially of the scientifically and technologically developed West, who is making use of his technology to satisfy unlimited desires in a world in which the available natural resources seem to be subject to certain limitations giving rise to environmental problems of a global nature.

The Noble Eightfold Way of Buddhism places right view (*samma ditthi*) at the head of the path of spiritual progress. An essential component of this right view is the rejection of nihilism and materialism and the acceptance of the spiritual

potential of man. There is admission of a world beyond, and a reality transcending that which is confined to the ordinary senses. Buddhism does not consider it possible to have a notion of a noble life, or a higher life (*brahmacariya*) if man is believed to be merely a product of biological processes and individual life is believed not to continue beyond physical death. A mechanistic and deterministic conception of human nature, leaving no room for the exercise of free will and individual initiative to change human destiny is considered in Buddhism to be a wrong outlook which hinders the realization of man's spiritual potential.

Some of the common misconceptions about Buddhism are that it promotes a life-denying otherworldliness associated with an extremely pessimistic view of life. It has sometimes been characterized as an asocial religion having nothing to do with social concerns. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is said to have no bearing on the social life of the community, and is looked upon as an ideal sought after by those interested in a self-centred escapism. However, such observations on the implications of Buddhism on the social life of the people of a culture who professed to be Buddhists are seen on closer examination to be very superficial. In Buddhist societies the ultimate goal of the religious life was conceived to have a very direct social relevance. The Buddha himself considered the existence of a spiritual community consisting of those who have cut off all conventional bonds with society, and devoting themselves entirely to the pursuit of truth and goodness to be an essential component of a healthy society. According to the *Singalovada sutta*, which lays down the moral principles which should form the basis of any healthy and harmonious society, the spiritual community is needed to give moral direction to society. They perform the function of moral exemplars, the models of moral and spiritual perfection. Even rulers who determine the destinies of the entire community are expected to heed the moral advice and direction of the spiritual community. It is important to note that the Buddha, in this sutta avoided speaking in sectarian terms, and spoke in general of the spiritual community (*samanabrahmana*) distinguishing it not in terms of its sectarian identity, but in terms of its spiritual quality. A spiritual community, according to the Buddhist definition in this context, is one the members of which devote themselves to mental culture, to the elimination of the roots of evil and the cultivation of the wholesome traits of mind such as nonviolence, loving kindness, compassion and equanimity. From the Buddhist point of view it is people who have cultivated a perfectly pure heart and overcome all delusions that are capable of performing the greatest service to society. This



is evident in the Buddha's request to the first sixty disciples who attained sainthood. He pointed out that both he and those sixty saints were free from all defilements and egocentric bonds, and urged them to wander for the welfare of others. Persons who lack spiritual culture are unfit to engage in any form of social service. As the Buddha remarked, one who is stuck in the mud cannot pull out another who is stuck in the mud. Social commitment can be meaningful only when it is coupled with a high degree of self-understanding and a desire for a perfection of one's own character through one's social involvement. This is expressed very effectively in the Buddha's statement that a person who cares for others cares for himself and a person who cares for himself cares for others. From the point of view of the Buddhist there could be no conflict between a person's social commitment and the desire for personal salvation. It is to be noted that it is customary among the Sri Lankan Buddhists to relate every good and benevolent action they perform to the progress they make in attaining the ultimate goal of their spiritual life.

Suffering within the individual as well as suffering in society is viewed in the Buddhist ideology as a consequence of the operation of the roots of evil, namely, greed, malevolence and delusion. Actions which proceed from these dispositions are harmful to the agent as well as the fellow members of the society in which he lives. The aim of the religious life is to overcome this suffering. It has both an individual and a social relevance. Sila is a very important aspect of a Buddhist society. There is nothing particularly sectarian about the Buddhist notion of sila. For it involves refraining from those activities which involve the violation of the Golden Rule or morality, namely, or inflicting upon others what one does not want others to inflict upon oneself. Sila is taken as the foundation of spiritual culture in Buddhism. The minimum required of the lay Buddhist is to keep the five precepts. These precepts are meant to change certain unwholesome patterns of physical and verbal behaviour. Human behaviour as the Buddhists see it is an expression of the dispositional traits of an individual. Dispositions are created and strengthened by repeated patterns of behaviour. The way to eliminate them is to exercise one's will and effort in altering one's verbal and physical habits. With this foundation in moral practice the Buddhist is expected to develop mental composure and through it the insight that cuts off all unwholesome dispositions at their root. Such a religious ideal does not seem to be in conflict with any conception of human spirituality which is concerned with the wellbeing and happiness of man.

✓ A Buddhist strictly following the example of the Buddha does not have to worry about the sectarian identity of a person at all. One does not become a noble person merely because one calls oneself a Buddhist. One who does not call oneself a Buddhist may lead a life which is more in keeping with the noble principles of the *dhmma* than one who calls oneself a Buddhist. The Buddha once showed how one could avoid sectarian conflict without compromising the noble ideals for which one stands. In preaching the *dhmma* to a wandering ascetic called Nigrodha, a leader of a religious group the Buddha assured him that the primary motive of the teaching is to guide others in the path of wellbeing, but not to make converts.

May be. Nigrodha, you will think: the samana Gotama has said this from a desire to get pupils; but you are not thus to explain my words. Let him who is your teacher be your teacher still. May be Nigrodha, you will think: the samana Gotama said this from a desire to make us secede from our rule; but you are not thus to explain my words. Let that which is your rule be your rule still... But O Nigrodha, there are bad things not put away, corrupting,...and it is for the putting away of these that I teach the *dhmma*, according to which if you do walk the things that corrupt shall be put away, the things that make for purity shall grow and flourish, and ye shall attain to and abide in, each one for himself even here and now, the understanding and the realization of full and abounding insight.

There are many instances in the life of the Buddha which show that he was not interested in converting people to a religion, but to religiousness. He did not want others to follow his path unless they were absolutely convinced of its efficacy. When some followers of other religious views expressed the desire to follow his path he advised them to investigate further before they committed themselves to the Buddhist way. This reflects an attitude which is very different from what is found in some forms of contemporary missionary activity. We find that in some countries like Sri Lanka there is a tendency to exploit the poverty of the people to make religious conversions by foreign missions who have the advantage of financial means behind them. This practice leads to many undesirable consequences. It becomes a conversion to what I called a religion, but not to religiousness. A conversion to religiousness must come from a deep conviction and understanding. Besides it creates unnecessary ill feelings and antagonisms in a multireligious community like ours.

At the doctrinal level Buddhism has condemned dogmatic attitudes. The Buddha has not favoured ideological conflicts. He has described the truly spiritual man, the real sage as one who does not enter into conflict with others. What matters, from the Buddha's point of view is not the perfection of the theory one holds but the actual transformation that occurs in spiritual terms. What counts ultimately is the extent to which one has achieved success in eliminating the unwholesome traits of mind and cultivating the wholesome ones. The quality of a person is to be judged not in terms of what he believes to be true, but in terms of how he conducts himself. One does not become pure by reason of the view one holds, the rules or rites that one conforms to but by an effective transformation of one's inner nature. The Buddha warned his disciples against using the *dharmma* for purposes of self-aggrandisement. It should not be dogmatically grasped but should be put to effective use to achieve a certain specified goal. It is to be used as a raft to cross over, but not to be carried as a burden on one's back. He does not encourage the study of the *dharmma* to exalt oneself and to disparage others. This spirit of tolerance is a much needed virtue today when narrow identities seem to be creating much conflict and disharmony in many societies.

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2- In the Buddhist tradition we have a concrete historical instance of an attempt by the Buddhist emperor Asoka to put into practice the ideal of a universal spirituality and the virtue of tolerance which goes along with such an ideal. Asoka emphasized through the edicts he set up throughout his empire that there are certain universal principles of *dharmma* which everyone should try to follow irrespective of one's sectarian identity. In Rock Edict VII Asoka says that he wishes that all sects may dwell at all places because they all desire self-restraint and purification of heart. He does not approve of honouring only one's own sect and disparaging the doctrines and practices of others. He points out that a person who honours another's sect honours one's own sect while a person who disparages another's sect harms his own. He says: "Concourse is therefore commendable...in order that they may hear and desire to hear one another's *dharmma*." Inter-religious dialogue as a means of discovering the inner affinity of religious doctrine, promoting mutual understanding between religious groups and working towards a common goal of moral perfection is therefore not entirely new to the Buddhist tradition. There is unmistakable evidence to the effect that the Buddhist emperor Asoka attempted to put it into practice.

While recognizing these humanizing and wholesome influences of Buddhism on the cultural behaviour of Buddhist societies, instances can also be found when institutionalized Buddhism has exhibited the tendency to deviate from these values. This happens to be the fate of all ideologies. For it is imperfect men who formulate the institutions for the purpose of propagating and maintaining those ideologies. Institutions are necessary for any ideology to create any kind of socio-cultural effect. But under the vicissitudes of history all institutions are corruptible. This is why it is always necessary to revitalize the original values advocated by religious teachers like the Buddha, whose moral vision was in no way circumscribed by the times in which they lived.

It is clear that an essential unity can be discovered in the tenets of all higher religions with respect to the spiritual and humanizing impact that they can have on the life of a community. As I pointed out earlier, the challenge that each religious tradition faces today is not really from a different religious tradition, but from the materialism and nihilism based on certain epistemological and ontological assumptions derived from the modern scientific outlook. It has evidently led to a universal counter-culture with the associated evils of violence, consumerism, loss of human values, and environmental problems of a disastrous nature. It is to meet this trend that all religious enthusiasts should disregard their differences at the metaphysical level and work towards the common goal of rehabilitating the spirit of man.

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12/6/1990

Talk given at the 1<sup>st</sup> South Asian  
Olele Forum's meeting at Kandy  
SRI LANKA



## A P P R O V E D O M I C R I T E R I A

### 1. FOUNDATIONAL CRITERIA

Foundational criteria can be defined as: A set of criteria found at the root and heart of our charism, criteria based on the values which moved the Founder to gather that group of men which, in time, became the Missionary Oblates. Because these criteria are so basic, they must be reflected in any evaluation of our ministries. They are the following.

#### 1.1 A mission whose aim is the evangelization of the most abandoned.

By this we understand that our mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ to those groups of peoples marginalized from the dominant society, victims of systems of a social, economic, cultural, educational, political, religious or judicial nature. They are those who have no voice in those systems which decide their future. (Constitution 5)

#### 1.2 A mission that is carried out in and through apostolic community.

In order to effectively accomplish our primary task of evangelization, it is necessary that Oblates form an apostolic community wherein the members can come together to pray, to share, to plan and to evaluate their ministry as well as gather mutual support and encouragement. (cf. Constitution 3 and "Missionaries in Today's World," Chapter 3)

### 2. CONSTITUTIONAL CRITERIA

Constitutional criteria can be defined as: A set of criteria based on the values found in our Constitutions and Rules. Some of these criteria have been part of our tradition from the beginning; others have evolved over the years and have been adopted as corporate values through the acts of one or the other of our General Chapters. They need to be given serious consideration when we are evaluating our ministries. They are the following:

#### 2.1 A mission that is in response to the unmet urgent needs of the Church.

We were founded to preach the Gospel to the poor because our Blessed Founder felt that this was the way to respond to an urgent need he perceived in southern France. Historically, the Congregation spread outside of Provence to all corners of the globe in response to needs perceived as urgent. This continues in our tradition today.

This criterion helps us to choose those milieux where the Church is not established or not fully developed or where her continued existence is not guaranteed, where isolation is a factor, or where there is no one else able to fill the need for pastoral leadership.

2.2 A mission in which Oblates, as members of a prophetic Church (Constitution 9), collaborate in changing all that is a cause of oppression and poverty.

"Action on behalf of justice is an integral part of evangelization" (Rule 9). In opting for the poor, our Oblate mission must be attentive to the creation of a society based on the rights and dignity of the human person. Because our mission is to the poor, such action has to be part of our mission (nos. 12, 14, 27-30 "Missionaries in Today's World").

2.3 A mission that enables lay collaboration and the development of lay leadership.

The notion of collaborative ministry is implied in our call to apostolic community. By extension, that collaboration is to be applied also to lay people as stated in Rule 6. Further emphasis is placed on this value by chapter 4 of "Missionaries in Today's World."

2.4 A mission that is in collaboration with Bishops and other pastoral agents according to our charism.

We recognize that our mission is the mission of the Church. It is in this spirit that Constitution 6 calls us to fulfill this mission in communion with its pastors. Just as we seek a collaborative approach among ourselves, we also seek to exercise our ministry in this same spirit in our relationships with Bishops and those participating in the "overall pastoral plan of the local Churches" (Constitution 6).

2.5 A mission that is attentive to the traditional and modern cultural context and the specific needs of the people to be served.

Our mission is to a particular people rooted in a situation specified by the many factors that impact on their reality. Rule 7 calls us to proclaim the word "in a language adapted to our hearers" and Rule 8 demands that "we be sensitive to the mentality of the people, drawing on the riches of their culture and religious traditions."

### 3. CONTINGENT CRITERIA

These criteria can be defined as: A set of criteria based on the concrete history and lived experience of one of our missionary units. These will need to be specified and acted upon in as much as they are pertinent to the life and experience of the province doing an evaluation of its ministries. These criteria can be divided into two categories.

#### 3.1 Criteria of circumstances.

##### 3.1.1 A significant historical connection with the Congregation.

At this moment in the history of a province, a specific ministry has a special significance. It may happen that a particular place was started by

the Oblates many years previously. That commitment may have helped define to some extent the identity of a group of Oblates or may have given the place such an identity that it could not be considered as anything other than Oblate.

3.1.2 A mission of a particular strategic value for the Church and/or the Congregation.

Because of its location or relationships to developing trends in the Church's contemporary understanding of her mission, a place or mission may be said to be of strategic value for the Church and the Congregation.

3.1.3 A mission that has a specific missionary significance at this time.

In today's modern society as rapid change takes place, the marginalization of persons also increases, calling for immediate and creative approaches which the standard ecclesial structures are not yet able to give. An Oblate presence in such areas can be of missionary significance both to the Church and the people it serves.

3.2 Criteria of convenience.

Given the special circumstances in which a particular Oblate Province finds itself, it is quite possible that these criteria may be applicable in choosing priorities. It may choose a particular mission because:

- it can enable the continued missionary activity of some Oblates.
- it serves to attract new candidates;
- it can be a source for gathering needed funds for works of the Oblate community.

A FINAL WORD

The above criteria need to be incorporated into an evaluation/discernment process. We hope to make available to you in the future models of evaluation and discernment processes into which these criteria can be usefully incorporated. Meanwhile, let us know if we can be of any assistance to you in this area.

Rome, December 12, 1989

## I. MISSION, POVERTY & JUSTICE



- a. Have you been touched in your own ministry by this 'ever-widening gap between the rich & the poor ?' How ? (10)
- b. Who are the 'newly poor' in this country ? Are we focusing on them ? (10)
- c. Is 'ignorance of the Gospel' growing or declining in this country ? (10)
- d. Have you any experience of 'loss of all religious hope' among those to whom you minister ? (10)
- e. How far is the system here 'embued by materialism rather than by authentic humanism ? Are Oblates affected ? (11)
- f. In what way are the Oblates joining with local 'organizations & Churches' helping the poor 'to take hold of their lives ?' Are you satisfied with this ? (12)
- g. Do any local Oblates 'identify themselves with the poor, sharing their life & commitment to justice ?' (12)
- h. Where among the suffering do you personally best find Jesus in your ministry ? (13)
- i. Do you think that in general you 'witness well to the Good News & motivate actions which might transform individuals and society' ? How ? (14)
- j. In your ministry, how do you find yourself being evangelised by the poor to whom you minister ? (16)
- k. In general, do you think the Oblates you know 'bear witness to Gospel detachment before the world' ? (17)
- l. Do you experience 'liberation' as a 'living fact' in your community ? (18) How ?
- m. How do B.E.C. in your experience 'live out the link between their faith and their lives ? (21)
- n. Do you ever question yourself in prayer about your 'call to serve the poor & the most abandoned ?' (23)
- o. How would you begin to 'evaluate' your lifestyle in order to give 'a Gospel witness to poverty' ? (24)
- p. Do you think the Province is moving towards the establishment of 'communities in poor areas' ? Are you satisfied ? (25)
- q. Are you happy that we share enough with the poor ? (26)
- r. Have you any experience of what happens when you 'invite Christians to - act on behalf of the poor' ?  
- ask if they might be the cause of poverty ?  
- study the structural & other causes of poverty' (27)
- s. Have you any experience of such 'study with the poor and other involved Christians, of the structural causes..... and moral aspects' of poverty ? (28)
- t. What is your attitude towards local groups seeking 'the right...to self determination' ? (28)
- u. Could we link up or improve our links with other Oblate groups in this 'focus on justice issues' ? (30)

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### III. MISSION AND INCULTURATION

- a. Can you describe some experiences of cultural variety in your pastoral experience ? (52)
- b. If you have contact with minorities in your pastorate, how do you think they are 'poor' ?(52)
- c. What 'dramatic change in the way we understand ourselves or the world', might influence the way we should evangelise?(52)
- d. How is 'a challenge hurled at the Gospel' in your own pastoral experience ? (53)
- e. Do you think we are 'establishing christian communities rooted in the local culture' ?(55) Where ?
- f. How do you personally experience the 'seeds of the word' present outside the visible church ? (53)
- g. Have you any experience of the Gospel becoming 'a new treasure' for a convert ? (53)
- h. Can you recall ever having discovered 'new aspects of the inexhaustible riches of God in the hearts of people with whom you work ? (55)
- i. How do you generally recognise 'God's Spirit working within the hearts of people of differing beliefs and cultures ?' (56)
- j. Have you any thought to share on how our Religious Life could have a new local cultural expression ? (56)
- k. How are the word OBLATE and the example of Mary supportive of attitudes for evangelization of cultures ?(57)
- l. Have you any experience of being led by 'the local people themselves' in inculturation of the faith ? How ? (59)
- m. How do you think we are or should be dealing with our 'historical commitments' in this province ? (63)
- n. Do you think all Oblates have the opportunity to 'feel completely at home' in the communities of this province ? (63)
- o. Has the Province a need to study Parallelism, Syncretism or Faith-healing ? (64)
- p. When it is necessary & appropriate, are local Oblates encouraged to 'specialise in issues touching upon inculturation ? Any ideas ? (66)
- q. If it appropriate, is the Province encountering the cultures of the great religions and the new Western culture in a 'meaningful way' ? (63)

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## MISSIONARIES

in

### TO-DAY'S WORLD

"This document will be worthwhile only if it serves as the beginning of a reflection process" - Conclusion (no. 167)

Reflection Process

on

#### MISSION AND SECULARIZATION

- A. Ideally the points to be discussed should be announced and prepared personally beforehand.
- B. Each point to be discussed could usefully be read aloud before the discussion.
- C. The sections or the points may be followed systematically or otherwise.
- D. If the number of Oblates present is large it seems advisable to appoint a chairman.
- E. Try not to preach, give advice, interrupt or argue.
- F. Share slowly and listen reflectively.
- G. Begin and end with personal or shared prayer.

Note: Questions generally refer to the reader's Province, Delegation or Mission.

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## POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- a. Why is SECULARIZATION a subject of concern for the 'apostolic man' ?
- b. Can you mention some of the ways in which SECULARIZATION has challenged your own faith?
- c. Do you think SECULARIZATION is an advantage or a disadvantage for the work of evangelization ? (34)
- d. Can you say at what moment the process of SECULARIZATION becomes Secularism in a person's life ? (33.)
- e. Have you any examples from your own experience where 'traditional value systems are greatly weakened' (35.a)
- f. Why do some Christians 'adapt well' and other become 'disoriented' (35.b) when faced with SECULARIZATION ? (35b)
- g. What appear to be the 'repercussions even for religious life' (32) in your province? (32)
- h. Have you any thoughts on how as apostolic men in this country, we Oblates might 'abandon what is pseudo-sacred' (35.e) ?
- i. Do you think the Oblates in this country are finding an evangelising stance 'within structures which no longer belong to the Church' ? How ? (35.g)
- j. Are we in touch with 'organizations concerned with fundamental problems' (35.h) in this country ? (35h)
- k. What do you think are the 'positive values of the secularized world' (36) ?
- l. How have you noticed 'God nevertheless present in the hearts of all who work for the good of humanity.' (38) ?
- m. In what ways do you think you personally 'are constantly influenced (by the world) for better or worse' (37) ?
- n. How do you show 'Christ's compassionate love & availability...to the secularised world' (39) in your personal apostolate ? (39)
- o. What do you consider the best ways to 'lead people, especially the poor, to a full awareness of their dignity as human beings & as sons & daughters of God' (40) ?
- p. What means do you find best to build and maintain 'a life unified in Jesus Christ' ? (41)
- q. Do you think we give 'love & solidarity' to Oblates in 'professional or technical work' (44) ?
- r. Can you recall any act of 'simple, open friendship with people' which was 'more effective than words' in your apostolate ? (45)
- s. Is it time to recover or restress some 'traditional signs & symbols' for the secularising person ? (46) Which ones ?
- t. How, do you think, our communities could become a more effective 'protest' & 'challenging symbol' (47) to the modern-world ?
- u. Have the 'special works' (49) of this province been effective for 'the formation & deepening of faith' ?

#### IV. MISSION WITH THE LAITY

- a. Is there any growing sense of mission among the laity you know ? What is contributing or hindering this ?(68)
- b. If you agree that 'many of the young no longer find in the Church...meaning...challenges..', why is this so?(69)
- c. Can you share about women's involvements in ministry in your own 'mission' (69)
- d. Are you satisfied that 'the voice of the poor' is being 'heard in the Church where decisions are made ? Why ?(69)
- e. Do Oblates in this province generally exercise power & authority in a Christ-like way ? (69)
- f. How could we 'secure for the laity their rightful place' where it does not exist in the apostolates of the Province?(71)
- g. How far do these three Oblate values influence the pastoral practice of this Province ?(72)
- h. How could we 'share power & responsibility with the laity' more than we presently do ? (74)
- i. Are you comfortable with the renewed emphasis on 'our specific contribution to the world - word & sacrament'?(75)
- j. Have you any ideas on 'new ways to associate laity with the mission of the Congregation' ? (76)
- k. Have lay people ever given you ideas about 'new forms of evangelization' ? (77)
- l. Are you satisfied with the role and contribution of women in your field of apostolate ? (79)
- m. How could we support women's 'participation in decision-making in the areas of pastoral ministry & mission' ?(79)
- n. Do you know of any former Oblates or laicized priests serving the Church fruitfully ? Share your experience.(80)
- o/ Can you speak about any good apostolic experiences with or through 'organizations which are actively engaged in the transformation of society' ? (81)
- p. Could this Province make more use of the Mass Media for evangelization ? (82)
- q. Have you found that 'community life will be enriched by working, sharing & celebrating with the laity' ? (84)

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## V. MISSION WITHIN THE CHURCH

- a. Can you mention some ways in which your 'life & ministry' have changed since your ordination/profession. (86)
- b. In what way most of all, do you experience that Vatican II has 'profoundly modified the life of the Church?'(86)
- c. Do you think that we have this 'clearer understanding' yet ? (86)
- d. Which of these three 'tensions' do you experience more than others ? (87) Explain.
- e. Are any of your pastoral options taken 'with great risk and anxiety' ? Which ones ?
- f. Which 'social change' most affects the people you serve?(88)
- g. Is there any situation which calls you to 'evangelical confidence' in a special way ? Why ? (89)
- h. Would you like to speak of your 'love for the Church'?(90)
- i. Where do you most experience 'the cross of Christ' in the tensions which confront you ? (91)
- j. How far do you think we are establishing 'Christian communities responsible for their own growth ?"(92)
- k. Do you think that the ministries of priests & brothers are well integrated in our mission ?(93)
- l. Is this Province/Delegation 'open to new ways of being missionary ?" Why do you say this ? (94)
- m. Have we taken any 'critical stands....constructively and with respect ?' Where ? (97)
- n. Have we or are responding to the Bishop in fidelity to these three aspects of our charism ? (99)
- o. Which of these 'serious problems' are most present where you minister ? How ? (100)
- p. How do you think we measure up to this call for 'missionary priorities', 'precise criteria' and making 'decisions'?(101)
- q. Measured by these four criteria, do our parishes 'preserve our missionary spirit" ? (103)
- r. What do you think about the 'spirit of availability to new ministries' in this Province/Delegation ? (104)
- s. Are we becoming 'more involved in ecumenical dialogue' as we are called to here ? (105)
- t. What is your personal pastoral response to the 'multiplication of the sects' ? (106)
- u. What are your thoughts about submitting your 'apostolic projects to the discernment of the community' ? (107)
- v. Have you any suggestions how this 'theological reflection' might be done among us ? (108)

## VI. MISSION THROUGH AN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

- a. How do you experience community to be 'an essential dimension of our vocation' ? (I09)
- b. How do you understand the statement that 'Community life..... is itself mission; ? (I09)
- c. Why, do you think, Community life is.....a qualitative sign of the mission of the whole Church', ?(I09)
- d. Do you think community in your Province/Delegation is 'in danger of losing its vigour & the mission its support' for the reason given. (II0)
- e. Do you experience this 'separatio-n between ministry & prayer' in your own life ? How ? (III)
- f. Do you think 'our credibility and our life witness are diminished' by 'a comfortable lifestyle ? (II2)
- g. How would you rate these five 'obstacles' to community life in your Province/Delegation ? What can be done ? (II3)
- h. What can be done with them 'in the light of the Gospel'? (II4)
- i. What are you thoughts about the idea that 'its the community which sends' ? (II5)
- j. How do you experience your missionary work as 'spiritual worship' ? (II7)
- k. How would you measure yourself against each of these five 'characteristics of the apostolic man' ? (II8)
- l. What are the symbols of Oblate identity at present operative in your Province/Delegation ? (II9)
- m. Do you think that the 'older Oblates & those who are infirm' among us are aware that they 'share in the work of evangelization' ? (I24)
- n. Do you find that meditation on the Constitutions & Rules to be a 'source of life & bond of unity' ?(I25)
- o. Do we 'share our spirituality with the members of M.A.M.I. satisfactorily ? (I27)
- p. What do you think about the quality of 'reflection during community & district meetings' ?(I28)
- q. What are your thoughts on the value of such a 'common apostolic project' for your Province/Delgation ? (I29)
- r. Do you think the Provincial feels free to challenge most of the local Oblates in this regard ? Why ? (I30)
- s. Are you happy with the opportunities in your community, to 'share its faith, its prayer and its apostolic experience on a regular basis' ? (I34)
- t. What are your thoughts about this periodic review of your community's lifestyle ? (I35)
- u. How do you think this community scores on hospitality as described here ? (I36)
- v. Would you like to share about your 'own program of ongoing formation' for community discernment ?(I37)

## VII. OUR MISSION AND ITS FUTURE

- a. In what ways do you think 'the Congregation is showing more confidence in its mission' ? (138)
- b. How seriously is this 'need to be renewed continually', taken by most of the Oblates you know ? (140)
- c. What, in your opinion, are the main elements of 'a spirituality adapted to our situation as missionaries' ? (141)
- d. How effectively are we using these four elements as 'indispensable for renewal in our ministry' ? (142)
- e. In what way do you experience this 'mutual evangelization' and 'Oblate formation' in your present community ? (143)
- f. If you are in the first years of ministry, are you receiving this 'guidance in order to integrate' your 'new and varied experiences' ? (144)
- g. If you are an 'older Oblate' have you thought about 'the need to be retrained for new ministries' ? (144)
- h. How valid do you think these four reasons for calling others to join us' are ? (146)
- i. Do you think that in general we 'pray and ask others to pray' enough for vocations ? (148)
- k. Are our local communities welcoming, open and ready to share our life and ministries with the young ? (149)
- l. In general, do you think the local young people 'meet men who live what they preach', in the Oblates ? (151)
- m. Are you satisfied with the quality of vocational discernment in this Province/Delegation ? Why ? (153,4)
- n. Have you any experience to share of having nurtured a vocation ? (155)
- o. If 'modern youth are attracted to the common life' what does this say about the future of vocations here ? (158)
- p. From what you know of the local Oblate formation program, do you think it meets these four standards ? (159)
- q. Are you happy about how young Oblates are initiated to ministry and evaluated in their performance ? (161)
- r. What do you think about the ministry of formation in your Province/Delegation ? (162-4)
- s. Do you ever encourage, support or offer constructive suggestions to the men in the formation ministry ? Do they seek it ?
- t. Is this 'priority' of preparing men for this formation apostolate being pursued faithfully ? (165)

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# MISSION IN A SECULARIZED SOCIETY

Ernest Piryns, C.I.C.M.



1. Mission/evangelization is an encounter process of the message of Jesus Christ about the Kingdom-of-God-for-us with the total human situation. Its goal is to promote and to strengthen the ideal of the realization of this Kingdom of which Jesus Christ was the prototype through his life, death and resurrection.
2. Therefore, mission/evangelization has two foci:
  - the message of Jesus Christ
  - the total human situationBetween the two foci, a real dialogical encounter process has to take place so that the message can enter into the total human situation and can re-unfold itself from within that situation.
3. In mission/evangelization: through Jesus Christ God and man encounter each other; therefore mission has first of all a theocentric character; then it becomes christo-centric and anthropocentric. This encounter process can lead to the formation of a togetherness around the Risen Lord. God comes first; then Jesus and we ourselves and only then the Church.
4. There are still a lot of people who have an ecclesiocentric view of mission and evangelization. Some examples:
  - Right before the NICE meeting two Japanese Bishops wrote a note about the goal of mission in response to the opinion of some influential laypeople; who said that the mission aims first of all at the building up of the Church in Japan; therefore, the Church should be organized like an industrial company so that a greater number of conversions could be realized.
  - BIMA 1982 (Chuang Hua-Taiwan): mission was seen by many Bishops as a means for the numerical and geographical expansion of the Church; a Chinese Bishop said that one of the goals of the celebration of the Ricci-year was to come to an increase of 30,000 baptisms in one year!
  - Many expatriate and native evangelizers still consider the mission field as being outside Europe and N. America; for them mission is not in "six continents".
5. Mission/evangelization is holistic (see Paul VI: The Evangelization of the Man of Our Time -Evangelii Nuntiandi) and reaches out to all levels of life and has to be done with all means possible.
6. One of the priorities of mission in Asia is: the non-christians in their relationship with the message of Jesus. How? Asia is the fertile womb of the world religions . It has the smallest number of Christians. Though the goal of mission is not to conquer the world through a great number of baptisms, we must have the courage to ask



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Ernest Pinyan, C.I.C.M.



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6. One of the priorities of mission in Asia is: the non-Christians in their relationship with the message of Jesus. How? Asia is the fertile womb of the world religions. It has the smallest number of Christians. Though the goal of mission is not to conquer the world through a great number of baptisms, we must have the courage to ask

this question: why this small number of christians? The reason is that we presented to Asians western Christianity over against the Asian religions instead of presenting the message of Jesus as related to the message of the Buddha, the Hindu sages, etc. We did not approach Asia through an encounter process; we did not approach Asia as it is sitting in its own context; we forgot the second focus of mission/evangelization, namely the total human situation.

7. The need to see Asia in its own context: the phenomenon of secularization. Secularization is a western term and covers a western reality. In the west it is defined as follows; it is the withdrawal of the domains of life and thought from the religious (sacred) sphere and in the long run from metaphysical control; at the same time, secularization is trying to understand the domains of life and to live them in terms of what they are in themselves. It is thus a farewell to a world where religion, Church and Christianity have the last word. Before, world and life were shrouded with the divine mystery. Man, standing before this mystery, was unable to handle many domains of life all by himself. Thus, he naturally entrusted everything to the goodwill of God. Today, many domains of life are no secrets anymore and can be mastered by man himself, because he has acquired power over them, especially through technology. He does not need anymore to expect the solution of everything from a powerful God who speaks through the Church and Christianity. Man has become truly man.

This view of secularization goes back to the dualistic view of former western philosophy and theology that made a sharp distinction between God and man.

Mission today faces the question whether this western definition of secularization can be applied indiscriminately to a non-western but Asian situation. Is secularization in Asia the same phenomenon in essence and development as in the west? It could be very useful and much better to start the other way around from the non-western side and ask: how does the non-westerner react in his own culture and his religious insights to the spreading of western technology? Has he his own insights enclosed in his life- and world-view, different from the western ones, that help him to integrate in his own way the world-wide technological phenomenon? Or does he not have in his life- and world-view these insights so that he is compelled to reject western technology or digests it so badly that it dislocates him and his culture, including his religion?

The same is valid for terms like atheism, materialism, amorality, etc.

Examples:

-the Japanese case; Japan is sitting in a shinto-buddhist and confucian background; the modern day Japanese religious view is in continuity with this background; f.e. the religion of the emperor, nationalism, the New Religions; the contribution of the message of Jesus would be emphasizing the transcendental dimension in human life.

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-the case of Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism: development of an appreciation for matter as contribution of the message of Jesus (counterpoison to underdevelopment).

-the case of Islam: the refusal to accept a theological reflection on Allah's powerfulness and man's potentialities and partners in the modernization process leads to a fundamentalism full of dangers for the islamic religion.

The need to see Asia in its own context brings up the necessity to redefine other aspects of the missionary activity.

#### 8. The need of redefining inculturation in Asia

Inculturation is not the acceptance of small innocent Asian religious elements in the structure of western Christianity; that would be adaptation.

Inculturation is not the dropping of essential elements of Christianity in order to bring full agreement with the other religions; that would be relativism.

Inculturation is not the mixing up and the equalization of the essentials of Christianity with those of the other religions in order to one world religion (illegitimate syncretism).

Inculturation is the penetration of the basics of the message of Jesus into each culture so that this message re-unfolds from within each culture; in that way the message of Jesus becomes a principle that animates, regenerates and recreates the cultures; a tertium quid is produced: a way of being Christian that is totally Christian and also totally Asian (African, Latin American, etc) and Japanese, Thai, Chinese, etc.

#### 9. The need of redefining religion

Religion always expresses itself through the screen of culture. Religion in Asia is an inner experience of transcending the I-Thou dichotomy between the subject and the object. This experience is basically cosmic; the sacred and the profane are still unconsciously felt as one by the Asian; religion is not seen first of all as institution, organization and structural systems. In Asia a religious truth is not that much a mental reality but the reality of being; truth is not discovered that much by rationalization but is a way of being.

Mission is more the radiation of Jesus' experience as the way of life than the proclamation of words, catechesis, liturgies full of phrases, explanations, etc.

#### 10. The need of redefining the reality of being Church

The Church is a togetherness of people who try to experience and have experienced Jesus as being the truth, the life, the light, the way. It is not the juridical titles of authority, conferred upon a person, that entitles him/her to be a Church leader (structure) but his/her inner experience of Jesus.



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11. The need of redefining conversion

Conversion to Jesus is not a total break with the past (like in exclusivistic and evangelical protestantism) but is a translation to Jesus Christ in view of the Kingdom-of-God, bringing into this transition all the values one possesses already.

12. The need of redefining "what is a Christian?"

Many people of Asia follow Jesus without becoming a member of the official Church. For too many among us a christian is somebody who is fully incorporated into the structured Church. It is a question of either/or. Is this correct?

13. The need of redefining theology

The need of redefining theology as a systematic reflection on the content of the message of Jesus in the Asian context. This has serious consequences for catechesis, homiletics, liturgy, etc. Up to now, christian theology is mainly expressed through one kind of cultural screen: the western one. Asia has many religions and cultures, different from the West. There is a serious need for different Asian theologies. There is no need for a universal catechism.

14. The need for redefining mission/evangelization in Asia

The need for redefining mission/evangelization in Asia as encounter process of the message of Jesus Christ with the total situation of human beings (see nr. 2).

An encounter process: presenting the values of Jesus' message to people of other faiths and accepting the values of their messages. When evangelizing we become evangelized; religious messages encounter each other; religious persons encounter each other; they do not exclude each other but include each other; religious experiences, messages and religions do not exclude each other but are related to each other.

15. The need of redefining the focus of mission

Around the year 2000 more than 65% of the world population will be living in the megapolis and practically the whole world population will have a megapolis-mentality. Are we preparing a mission-theology of the megapolis?

Questions:

-Is the city the supreme place of secular human liberation that makes the individual responsible for his own fulfillment?

-Is the growth of the city a phase in the divine plan that teaches people how to live in harmony with each other?

-Can the city be a curse because it is the place where human beings claim to be able to live without God and where they also fail as human beings?

-Are the supercities potential places of incarnation where the local Church will be required to give shape and form to the redeeming plan of God, because the city will proclaim the reconciliation of humanity with itself?

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# Report on Mission in a Secularized Society Meeting

Kochi, Japan

July 2, 1990 through July 7, 1990



## Introduction

We wish to express our appreciation and gratitude to the Major Superiors of Asia-Oceania for giving us the opportunity to come together to share on this theme in a spirit of Oblate fellowship and collectively plan an Oblate response for this region.

We express our appreciation to John Mahoney, Provincial of Japan, to Ed Williams who coordinated the meeting, to the whole Oblate Community of Japan for their warm hospitality and hard work.

In response to the following questions;

### 1. How do we perceive the reality of secularization?

Firstly, we spent time trying to understand the reality of modernity in our region by means of talks from Des O'Donnell, O.M.I. and Ernest Piryns, C.I.C.M. and through our group sharing. Here we came to realize the impact of modernity on our religions (Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Shintoism, Christianity) cultures, politics, economies, ecologies and biogenetics. We also came to understand that there is a Western way and an Asian way of comprehending the reality of secularization. From the small group sharing the following are some of the main perceptions gathered. (MTW 31, 37)

- A. Modernity can purify our concept of God and our sense of the sacred while increasing our respect for the autonomy of secular reality. (MTW 34)
- B. It can also lead to the development of the deeper aspirations of people, their potentialities and responsibilities.
- C. It can lead to a clearer understanding of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God here and now.
- D. WE also came to realize that secularization in the Japanese context is rooted, consciously or unconsciously, in their sense of religiosity (Shintoism).
- E. Furthermore we came to understand that terms like modernity and secularization could have different meanings in different cultural contexts. For the purpose of our discussion we accepted that modernity takes place when an unprecedented flow of information is transferred into human experience through technology. Secularization is the effect of modernity on religions and ideologies.

2. Application of the reality of secularization to the situations in our region.

A. On the one hand, people in the remote areas of our region have now access to transistors, T.V., video and thus obtain more information; we see changes in behaviour patterns of women in general and of Muslim women in particular in some of our regions, for example, going out of their homes to work in the factories and also to taking part in national affairs; (MTW 31, 51) more people have more money and there by have more opportunities to acquire more goods and have a better life style; due to mass-media and communication, some people are beginning to have an international dimension in their lives and thus develop a concern for world environment, peace, justice and a new sense of international solidarity. (MTW 35h)

On the other hand,

we also observe that long-cherished cultural and religious values such as respect for life, respect for elders and close family ties are being eroded and alienating people from their traditional societies, and values. (MTW 35a) there is also a new spirit of consumerism which breeds possessiveness and superficiality of life. (MTW 35c)

B. Modernity also seems to facilitate the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. There is a growing sense of anxiety, restlessness and fragmentation of individuals, families and societies. A search for new meanings, new relationships and spiritual experiences emerge due to modernity. (MTW 10, 35b)

3. How secularization may be touching our personal Oblate lives.

Modernity has affected our Oblate way of life and ministries. In some areas it has lead to an individualized life style and ministries. (MTW 113) It has also in some cases challenged us to question our way of life and ministries. For instance, it has enabled some of us to deepen our concept of God and to recognize man and women as God's image. It has also challenged some to re-examine the quality of their relationships and community life. Again it has enabled others to become more aware of their human potentialities and responsibilities to create a world that is more human. (MTW 110)



4. How critical awareness of secularization can influence our missionary activity.

We also came to realize that consciousness-raising regarding modernity and its effects is imperative for the members of this region. Unless we develop this critical awareness of what is taking place in our modern society one of two consequences will eventuate:

Individuals being swayed into

a. fundamentalism

b. secularism. (MTW 33, 35b)

In order to avoid these two extremes we feel deeply convinced of the need for on-going education and formation about this reality.

5. What changes are needed in our understanding of mission.

In understanding our mission in a secularized world, we felt that what is being done although praiseworthy is inadequate. Therefore, a shift of emphasis is necessary in the following areas:

a. the Church IS mission. (MTW 86)

b. recognize in all others all that is good, true, noble, beautiful, especially in other living faiths, cultures, and ethnic groups in our region. (Phil. 4:8) (MTW 38, 45)

c. understand the need for everyone's continuous conversion to the Reign of God.

d. work towards a community of people gathered around the Risen Lord. (MTW 47)

e. become co-workers with the laity in building up Kingdom of God.

f. work not only for people but with people in order to experience the Paschal mystery in the journey of life.

(NTW 40, 87)

6. What changes may be necessary in our missionary methods?

We record with a sense of joy the great efforts made and being made in our region to bring the Gospel to the poor, employing various methods and approaches. However, understanding that change has become a permanent reality in our region, and because of the effect of secularization, it is all the more urgent that our Oblate formation become more inculturated and contextualized. We also strongly felt the need for an clearly articulated mission vision at all levels of our provinces/delegations and to utilize the social sciences and other methods to exercise our ministry more effectively. We also felt the need for Oblate presence in various human environments, for our Christian communities

become real signs of human care and truly missionary in order to serve the victims of this secularized society and for greater awareness of the structural causes of poverty and injustice. (MTW 11) We must help people to move from a state of dependence to a state of self-reliance and also to help people have a much deeper understanding of the message of Jesus Christ. We need to employ all modern means of communication in transmitting the Gospel and the values of the Kingdom.

#### Recommendations

1. That the process already begun in our coming together to reflect on our mission in the A/O region should be sustained in the coming years and that measures be taken to set up mechanisms for this purpose in the provinces-delegations.
2. We recommend that periodic provincial/delegation congresses and/or meetings be held to reflect on mission and to explore new avenues to reach out to the poor with their many faces. (MTW 35c)
3. Justice and Peace committees already in existence in the region link up to analyze, reflect and act vis-a-vis factors that are dehumanizing peoples of this region, harming the environment etc. etc.
4. We recommend that a team of resource persons be made available in the region to accompany the Oblates in understanding and responding to the rapidly emerging demands of mission in this region which encompasses almost 60% of the world's population.

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July, 13, 1990

To all the Oblates in Japan and Korea,

On the seventh of this month we ended the meeting on Mission in a secularized world here in Kochi. As far as can be determined all went well. It was wonderful to have all the Oblates from around Asia and the men from Rome, but it was also good to have the house empty of visitors after they were all gone.

A semi final report was issued. It will be worked over for language and the like by one of the participants from Australia and then issued in final form. Until that is done I am sending out a copy of the report as it is so far. Also for those who were not able to attend the meeting I am enclosing a paper or two that were given out in the course of the five days. If it proves interesting or helpful for anyone I will consider it well worth the effort.

Have a nice summer.

Ed Williams, O.M.I.