



**POWER, GOLD, OTHERNESS
AND THE GOSPEL
THE PAST AND THE FUTURE
OF EVANGELISATION**

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N. B. The present booklet contains the substance of a paper presented by the author in Brazil on the fifth centenary of the evangelization of Latin America, as seen from the European perspective.

In the present redaction, the first part contains a lecture given by the author in a Seminario on Latin America organized by *Fundación Común* in September-October 1992. This explains that most allusions are to the reality of Latin America.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE MANNER IN WHICH THE CURCH IN EUROPE EVANGELISED

In the history of the Church, except in the earlier centuries, Europe has been till now the main evangeliser, one could say the only evangeliser. To speak of “new evangelisation” could mean that it must not be done in the “European way”. Or, at least, that we may learn from the accumulation of *experience and of responsability* in Europe. Of experience, because the history of European evangelisation goes beyond the limits of Latin America and the last five centuries, and almost coincides with the history of Christianity. Of responsibility, because Europe invaded and colonised, not only America, but also Asia and Africa, and many times saw evangelisation as a fruit of, or an excuse for, its conquests.

In this tract our aim will be to reflect on the parameters of the “old” European evangelisation from this double point of view -of experience and of responsibility- in order to understand which are the obstacles that we must avoid in the “new” evangelisation¹.

The Church in Europe did often evangelise from a position of power, or at least, a positicon close to power.

* In the first centuries, the behaviour of Christians and the word of the apologists, were decisives factors in evangelisation.

* From the time of Constantine and Theodosius, things changed: the Franks, the Goths and a good part of the empire are evangelised *through the conversion of their kings*.

It is not our business to judge or condemn these ways, but it is surely necessary to be clear about them. Today, when we live in a secular and pluralistic society, it is difficult for us to understand the role of the religious dimension in achieving social cohesiveness in those days: perhaps the Islam of today can give us some idea of this *social necessity of religion*, as also of the grave dangers attending such a situation.

2. THE MODEL OF EVANGELISATION FROM THE POSITION OF POWER (AFTER THE TIME OF CONSTANTINE)

Having said this, we can add that in such a model, two options for evangelisation can be taken into account: from the position of power, one can *destroy* and substitute; but also one can *transform*. Both ways exist in the old style of European evangelisation, and I shall limit myself to quoting two texts which might serve as examples of each model.

2.1. THE POWER TO TRANSFORM

Pope Gregory I's letter to the monk Augustine is a clear example of an evangelisation that intends to transform rather than to destroy. It is quite possible that some of its expressions repel us today (like the description of the primitive religion of the English as a "demoniac cult"). But, all the same, many other expressions in the letter are a model of the desire for inculturation and respect for the other:

"let the least possible number of pagan temples be pulled down... let relics be placed in them so that only the object of culte is changed... Let nothing be changed in their customs on feast days... and on such days let them place branches around the church as they used to do around their pagan temples, and let the feast be celebrated with religious banquets..."

St Gregory wants to preserve whatever can be preserved, and transform (rather than destroy) what to him appears unacceptable. The reasons that he puts forth for this are not, properly-speaking, theological (like, for example, the possibility of the presence of the Spirit outside the institutional frame of the Church), but rather pedagogical and pastoral: "by being allowed to express their joy in their own way, they will *more easily* come to recognize the inner happiness that fills them...; it is impossible to bring about changes at one stroke in souls so weak: since nobody can climb a mountain by jumping, but slowly, step by step"².

But this desire to be pedagogical is not a simple "strategy", but a profound understanding of the soul and of the situation of the other, as well as of the freedom intrinsic to faith. The papacy does not as yet have secular states and is therefore free from the conservatism associated with power. This freedom makes respect for others possible.

2.2. THE POWER TO DESTROY

A simple comparison of this text with another which historians categorize as a "hagiographical cliché" (on account of its frequent repetition), and which has been taken from lives of Saints Julius and Julian d'Horta, will prove the point:

"to knock down the images of the gods, to destroy the sacred groves, to set fire to temples and sanctuaries and to erect on the same spot some churches and chapels...and proceed to baptize the multitudes."³

Within this mentality that destroys instead of entering into a culture to transform it (and today we would add be transformed by it!), the words of a legal text of emperor Charlemagne (*Capitularium*), around the year 785, do not surprise us: “Any Saxon who is not baptised and tries to dissimulate among his people and refuses to be baptised will be put to death⁴.”

2.3. A SHORT OVERVIEW

I repeat that it is not my intention to criticise from the outside, but to inform, because this is the need of the hour, if we want to understand ourselves and learn. *The model of the evangelisation that there has used in Latin America* (and we shall presently say that it had its crisis) *is a model of evangelisation from a position of power*. And, even though this model may include elements for going beyond (as in the case of the pastoral zeal of St Gregory the Great), Church historians agree that there have been throughout history two important obstacles:

a) The first is that the civil power controls the Church with the excuse of helping her to evangelise: CAESARO-PAPISM was the toll which the Church in Europe had to pay for a long time to pursue her evangelising goals. I will cite just one example of this Caesaro-Papism because we still suffer its consequences: the appointment of bishops which in the early Church used to be done by the Christian communities, would gradually pass into the hands of monarchs, despite the long and persistent opposition of the local churches. For, as saint Remigius, bishop of Rheims, wrote: “To king Clodovis the Church can deny nothing.”

b) The second limitation in this model is that the people, evangelised thus from outside, work out their own syncretism and remain SUPERFICIALLY CHRISTIANISED. I wish to underline the *general* nature of this consequence because often it has been presented as a particular defect of Latin America. The Latin-America religiosity, one hears in Europe, is superstitious, syncretist and superficially Christian. Well now, according to John Delumeau (one of the most profound historians of the Church in Europe), the same thing can be said of the evangelisation of Europe: Europe was superficially Christianised, preserved many hidden levels of superstition, and this is one of the factors that can explain her rapid dechristianisation⁵.

3. THE CRISIS OF THIS MODEL IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Despite the brevity it was necessary to recall the facts mentioned above in order to place the second thesis on solid ground: the thesis is that this model of evangelisation is the one used in Latin America and that it met its crisis there.

3.1. THE CRISIS IN LATIN AMERICA

I wish to make a triple distinction about the evangelisation of Latin America:

- evangelisation from a position of power,
- evangelisation from a position of superiority (which at least does not impose by force and which wants to protect the better part of Gregory I's pronouncement quoted above),
- and an evangelisation "against power".

The reality was undoubtedly more complex than I know it (I ask myself if in this scheme of things there is place for a person like Motolinia - "the poor brother" - who loved the Indians as much as Las Casas did, but in a different manner, and was the enemy of the conquistadors but not of the conquest.) But these names or labels, though they are only approximate, provide important material for a theological reflection.

(a) Evangelisation from the Position of Power

This model is represented by the theology of Ginés de Sepúlveda, the adversary of Las Casas. It can be summarised in these words of Sepúlveda in his *Democrates alter*:

"Saint Augustine assures us that the fact of a soul dying without baptism is a greater evil than the slaughter of any number of people even if they are innocent."

That is to say: *Religion -and the eternal salvation which it brings- are so important that one can allow any material evil in order to free the Indians from idolatry.*

It does not matter whether the intention is good or bad - it seems clear that the conquistadors had in this argument the justification for almost all their evil deeds, and this theology is responsible for, or is at least the accomplice of, many atrocities of the conquista. For this reason Las Casas protested against it, calling it not Christian but Islamic (this is -he says- "the religion of Mohammed"). His famous expression against it was that an Indian pagan and living is more valuable than Christian and dead. This means that *Christianity considers human freedom and dignity so great that religion has no value if it does not respect them.*

(b) Evangelisation from the Position of Superiority

Before passing on to the position taken by Las Casas, it is important to mention an midway position, *which does not intend to impose but to convince*, and in which therefore one finds important elements for inculturation.

From a Christological viewpoint, I would say that this implies an “incarnational” theology but not totally “kenotic”: it lacks the Christological element of “assuming the image (or at least the cause) of the Servant” (cf. Phil 2,6ff). This attitude seems to be represented in the *Book of Colloquies* by Bernardine de Sahagún, who describes the dialogue between twelve Franciscan friars and the leaders (or “satraps”) of various regions in Mexico.

It is not our interest to discuss now the accurateness and historicity of the text: Bernardine was not the participant in these dialogues, and he wrote about them a few years after they occurred. But if the colloquies did not take place as described, they are still important because they reflect an ideal of evangelisation, and so it is worth studying them. We cannot present here as extensive an analysis as the document merits. But certainly it seems possible for me to offer a short resumé of its main characteristics:

The Book of the Colloquies

1. In the first place, the book radiates a *cordial and dialogal spirit, but is not free from triumphalism and superiority*. The twelve do not depend on the power of the conquistadors, but neither are they enemies of this power⁶. Personally, they are humble, asking of their partners in dialogue not to take them for “men other than mere mortals like you; we are not gods, neither have we come from heaven; we were born on this earth, are created... like you”⁷. But in their mental framework of Christendom they think that the pope has authority even over pagans⁸. And they (the friars) are representatives of this power.
2. In the second place, and as a consequence, the book contains *important elements for inculturation* and tries to find God within those religions and in line with Paul’s “unknown God”⁹. However a doubt persists: is their evangelisation geared to a respectful conversion or to a simple imposition of a substitute?¹⁰ The later visceral opposition of Sahagún to the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe, precisely because it was said that she had appeared in the colony of Tepeyac where an Aztec goddess (Cihuacóatl or Tonantzin) was venerated, provides ground for this doubt.
3. Precisely on account of this, the “apostles” *do not come to value the goodness of others*, though they realised its existence. Our text charmingly describes the goodness of the “satraps” (“we are a lowly people with little knowledge..., and although it is true that we have charge over the kingdom and republic, we do not have your knowledge or your prudence”:86); it excuses their idolatry, contrary to what the conquistadors were doing (“the reason for your unwillingness to abandon your gods... is no other than that you have not heard the words and teachings of God and do not have any of his scriptures”:90). Despite this, our text does not seem to recognise the seriousness of the conscientious objection of the pagans, and the moral imperative which they feel being faithful to their own religion, even though this was described with accuracy; for it is not just a question that “it does not seem to us to be just that the customs and rites given to us by our ancestors... we should frivolously destroy” (86), but something far deeper: that they believe they have a valid religious experience, and that, even though they have authority, they cannot impose “apostasy” upon their subjects¹¹.

4. And this deficient attitude to evangelisation (notwithstanding its merits), was connected with a *content of evangelisation which was also deficient*: the God announced by the “apostles” is a God of victories and not of the Cross: the chief argument in their exposition seems to be that “their gods could not deliver them from the hands of the Spaniards because they (the spaniards) are servants of the all-powerful God who did help them” (sum and substance of chapters 16 and 19: pg 76). The conquistadors justify themselves in this way. This contentious war-like concept of God extrapolates the celestial drama (angels v. devils) which is loudly present in our text, and makes evangelisation on the earth into a reflection of the heavenly conflict¹². the Kingdom of God which is the object of all evangelisation is identified totally with belonging to the Church, and from this stance everything else must be seen as demoniac.

The later ecclesiology of Sahagún

Thus our “apostles” place the Church, before the Gospel¹³, and doubtlessly also Spain. Their argument that God is the source of their military success, reflects a theology of imperial Spain which attributes her greatness to God’s favour, and not to its greed -this is typical of all empires (President Bush has sought to reaffirm this in our twentieth century!). The argument also reflects the theology of “the most pious” Columbus for whom -as the German joke has it- *Gott and Gold* sound the same... We do not deny that even there one can indeed find some religiosity. But the question remains: Is it the religion of the one who said: “You can not serve God and mammon” (Mt 6,24)?

In any case, this mentality (apart from the good-will of the “twelve friars”) is the one which gives the occasion to the conquistadors to say later on that God had given gold to the natives, so that might barter it... for the Christian faith.

I have said already that it is not for us to condemn anyone from our modern viewpoint. The little appreciation that these good people (the friars) received at the end shows that even their moderation was a source of conflict. It is important moreover to stress the extraordinary evolution that took place in Bernardino de Sahagún. His dealings with the natives changed him into loving them, and from this love arose an understanding that made him open to the ‘otherness’. In the beginning he taught them Castillian and Latin. But soon these “trilingual” natives became his faithful assistants in the preservation of the nahuatl language (whose grammar Bernardino composed), and in the impressive collection of native texts, customs and prayers that make him the father of modern ethnography. His history of the conquest is qualified by León Portilla as “the vision of the vanquished”. All these attempts explain the ostracism the official V.I.P.s practised towards him: from a Provincial who brought up reasons of “poverty” to forbid him to publish his investigations, to the politicians who took away his papers which could not be published till the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Well then, in this whole process there arose the first crisis of “evangelisation from the position of power”: today, one can say that America believed because of men like these, *in spite of the conquistadors* and of those who preached in their favour. This is the the great merit of the second model.

The importance of this is still more evident when we compare it with what happened in Peru where we do not find the separation between conquest and evangelisation, and Pizarro presented himself to Atahualpa as the Pope’s ambassador (to whom Atahualpa replied that “this Pope must be mad, since he distributes lands which are not his”). For this reason, inculturation, started in Mexico by people such as these with all

their limitations began in Peru much later. The moving lamentations of the Inca Huaman Poma de Ayala who as an exception had been made a Christian in Spain and later returned to his native Peru, can be better understood against this background.

Although we cannot pass an absolute judgement, we can surely today make comparisons and learn. To do this, we have a point of reference which we cannot ignore, which is the existence of yet another (at least theoretical) model, reflected in the theology of Bartolomé de las Casas.

(c) Evangelisation in Opposition to Power

If up to now we have spoken about evangelisation from the position to power, and evangelisation from a position of superiority, we can speak of Las Casas's stance as "evangelisation in opposition to power". One could discuss the errors and exaggerations of Fra Bartolomé as a man of action. As a theologian he is a very impressive figure.

I will offer a comment on an arbitrarily chosen text out of many that could be chosen. Las Casas speaks above all against the attitude of men like Ginés de Sepúlveda. But he brings out factors which suggest some points of comparison with the position of Bernardino de Sahagún.

As the climax to this argument, Las Casas cites the text of Mt 5,45: God is not a god of victories, but "one who makes the sun shine on the good and the bad, makes the rain come down on the just and the unjust." Consequently, we cannot do any harm to the pagans with the excuse of evangelising them, since it is the same God that has given them "the heavens and the earth... common inheritance of all people without any differentiation and who has made them all the natural lords of everything and not some more than others."

Hence to try to evangelise from a position of power or by threats, is an enormous "blindness of Christians". In this matter, there is only one way, the one of the "Master and Guide, Jesus Christ" which consists in "inviting and attracting to the faith and winning them through peace and love and humility, and the example of a virtuous life"¹⁴. Consequently, Las Casas applies to evangelisation the golden rule of the Gospel: "Whatever we would like others to do to us, we should do to them, and that wherever we go the first impression we give them by words and deeds should be peace; and in this there is no difference between Indians and gentiles, Greeks or barbarians, since there is only one Lord over everyone, who died for all, without distinctions."

Christ's sovereignty being universal prevents Las Casas from making the devil a key to explain the existence of non-Christians. (The "Book of Colloquies" is not free of this temptation.). He therefore protests against those who hold that "it is not by the mere fact that some people are not Christians... we should believe and accept as true that it is licit for us to invade their kingdoms and lands and proceed to cause unrest and conquer them." And then he ends with a very strong conclusion: "I believe and even know for certain that Christ in his Gospel condemns the one who initiated this manner of winning pagans for Christ bringing them to know Him and incorporating them into the sheepfold of his universal Church" (*History of the Indies*, I,17).

Consequences of this mentality

This mentality has very important consequences. Another time, in reply to Sepúlveda, Las Casas makes two declarations with reference to evangelisation which also touch upon two points of the book “The Colloquies”, which I have indicated as unsatisfactory.

(a) *The respect due to conscience*: “Since the idolaters esteem and consider their idols as the true God... it follows that they are obliged to defend their God or gods as we Christians have to defend our true God and the Christian religion.”

(b) “And as *the Church has no more power than had Jesus Christ as a man* to meddle and punish the transgressions of the pagans, it would be an offense against God, to usurp His power which He reserved for Himself for the day of judgement” (pp. 178, 189: *Obra indigenista*; J. Alsina, Madrid 1985).

It is important to add that for Las Casas this did not remove the possibility of evangelisation; it rather gave it its identity: evangelising consists not only in the content of the proclamation but also in *the manner* of proclaiming it just as it was in the Word of God that is Jesus.

If earlier I spoke about “evangelisation in opposition to power”, it is because, besides Las Casas, I wish to say here a word about the Reductions of Paraguay, which today may be seen as the nearest realisations of the ideals of Las Casas. This is not said in order to idealize anything; and it is quite probable that some of the modern criticisms of the Reductions are pertinent to us *today*¹⁵. But I have made reference to the Reductions because, beyond their human shortcomings, they challenge radically much of the theology of the book of the Colloquies.

The reductions of Paraguay

In effect, its primary significance (indicated already in the very use of the word reduction), is that *it is necessary to escape from the conquistadors in order to be able to be Christians*. We should not forget that the first idea of the Reductions was not proposed by the Jesuits but by the Dominican Fray Pedro de Córdoba, Superior and supporter of Antonio de Montesinos in “La Española” when the latter gave his famous sermon. Just after the incident, Fray Pedro redacted a draft about this form of evangelising for Ferdinand, king of Spain. The first attempt (carried out by the Dominicans along the coast of today’s Venezuela) failed because one fine day (against royal orders) a Spanish ship arrived in the village and caught some Indians and took them away as slaves. Those who managed to escape felt betrayed by the missionaries and sought vengeance by knifing them up.

This fact puts into relief how *in order to evangelise it is necessary to run away from the conquistadors*. It also makes it clear that the conquistadors are bad despite their victories and their successes: God does not favour them simply because they are believers; their victories are just a sample of the biblical scandal of the prosperity of the godless.

On the other hand, if the conquistadors were real devils despite their being Christian, it is clear that *it was not the pagan gods that made people demoniac*. The struggle between good and evil so biblical indeed takes place inside each human being (also within the Church!), and can not be identified with the distinction between Church and the ‘world’ outside.

With this, two fundamental pillars on which the theology of the “Colloquies” rests, collapse: the god of victories and the demonization of the world outside the Church. It seems to me that we have here the main lesson from the Reductions for our topic.

My analysis could end here. Still it seems to me important to comment that this same crisis of the model of “Evangelisation from the Position of Power”, which happened in full strength in Latin America, seems to appear also in the spiritual journey of Francis Xavier, at the other end of the world.

3.2 THE CRISIS IN ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

3.2.1. How Xavier began

To start with, let me state that, in the beginning, Xavier shares the same “imperialistic” Theology as Ginés de Sepúlveda and the model of evangelisation which it provides. This produces the earlier Xavier, sent to India by the king of Portugal, going to a world religiously so rich as India, entirely ignorant of it, engrossed only “baptising” indiscriminately. The root of this manner of proceeding seems to be the prayer attributed to him:

“Eternal Lord of all things, remember that it is you who created the souls of the pagans in your own image and likeness. Look, Lord, how in ignominy against you, hell is filled with them.”

A cruel theology (as it ultimately is a theology of ecclesiastical power), impeded Xavier from discovering, in this divine image which Xavier acknowledges, the freedom by which God relates Himself to human beings: all pagans are unknowingly condemned. Here we can pick up an attitude similar to the one of Ginés de Sepúlveda: all that can be done to baptise the pagans (even supporting the conquests of the king of Portugal) must be good.

3.2.2. In Contact with Reality

This conception enters into a crisis when it clashes with the reality (something which Sepúlveda never experienced!). According to the version of Jean Lacouture, Xavier did not leave India on account of some kind of “divine impatience” à la Pemán, which in truth would be a very “human urgency”; but he did so because of a conflict with the system of colonisation-evangelisation such as is reflected for example in this letter of January 1549 to John III of Portugal:

“This king (of Ceylon) is a favourite and does as much harm as he can with Your Highness’ favour. This is the truth and it pains me to write to you about it... may Our Lord... give you grace to comply with His holy will as you would like to have fulfilled it... when you will account before God for all your past life, which hour is now closer than what Your Highness thinks; and so, may you be ready, because kingdoms and lordships must some day cease to be. It will be a new thing, something which Your Highness never experienced before, to see yourself despoiled at the hour of your death of your empire and lordship, and to enter into another which for you will be something new, where you will be under orders of others and, God forbid, outside of paradise.” (*Cartas y Escritos*: BAC, 304-305).

Xavier is now ready to put up a fight, precisely against a person who was his main protector. It matters little that this protest is couched in the language and with arguments of the time. What is important is the awareness that the way of strategic alliance with colonial

policies, does not constitute exactly what Paul VI termed “the initial gesture of evangelisation.”

3.2.3. To Japan: A Xavier who Dialogues

From now on Xavier is a changed person¹⁶: he will appear in Japan, freed from the imperial trappings, more ready to dialogue than to baptise; unarmed against a warlike people, decided to refrain from eating meat or fish, since the religious masters in Japan did not eat them, and with the determination to encourage *personal and responsible conviction in place of a mechanical sacramentalisation*: in the letter of 20 January 1548, he comments on the reply he had received from Anjiro (his Japanese tutor) about the possibility of conversions among the Japanese. Three things stand out in this reply:

- Patience (Anjiro had said “that they wouldn’t be to be Christians in a hurry),
- An adaptation that leaves the initiative to the other (they would question him greatly, and later examine his answers), and finally
- The witness of life (they would observe “if he lived according to what he proclaimed... and they found nothing with which to fault me). (*Op.cit.*,234).

Here we have another instance of this “initial gesture of evangelisation” of which *Ev.Nun.* speaks.

This change makes possible something very important the *capacity to learn*. In future, Xavier manifests an admiration for Japan and China which, strangely, he does not seem to have felt when facing the riches of India. About China he will write that according to his information “It is a country far surpassing all Christian countries in the matter of justice.” And about the frugality of the Japanese he writes these enlightening words on which I like to comment in this mad and never satisfied consumerist of our Europe: “In the Japanese we see how our nature can be sustained with few things, although nothing satisfies it” (*op.cit.* 381). Although these two statements appear today obvious, they were subversive for those times because they contain an implicit criticism of the feeling of superiority in Christianity: there are pagans better than Christians! at least in some things. And therefore, the evangeliser can also learn, and evangelisation is no longer an imposition: and it becomes a dialogue. The evangeliser will be able to say with Dom Pedro Casaldáliga: “I give you all that I have -which is more that what I am.” What he cannot do is impose on others what he himself is.

To conclude

Xavier remained alone and misunderstood. The crisis of evangelisation from a position of power took place, properly speaking, in Latin America model: in the tragic and prophetic dimensions of evangelisation there. But in Latin America conquest and colonization were the victors and Las Casas and the Reductions suffered defeat. Therefore, I would see the fruit of this crisis symbolised more clearly in what happened in the East in the next two centuries: I am referring to the controversy concerning the evangelisation of China and the so called “Malabar Rites”.

The objection might be raised that both José de Acosta in Peru and J. de Anchieta in Brazil, are a parallel of Ricci of whom they are almost contemporaries. Unfortunately I am not familiar with Anchieta. Acosta, I believe, is inferior to Ricci because he is forced by an already irreversible *colonial situation*, and by *the system of patronage and the imposition of levy*, as well as by his conception of salvation similar to the one entertained by the earlier Xavier, which forces him to be a “possibilist”: Acosta faces the dilemma that there cannot be evangelisation in America without the Spaniards, but with them evangelisation is extremely difficult. This makes him opt for what he considers as “the lesser evil” which is an example of what I often repeat when speaking of structural sin: that evil masks itself by making itself necessary.

Nevertheless, it is true that from both, Acosta and Anchieta, the idea of inculturation as the result of Christian love can be brought out, and this can be considered as a motive of credibility (or in the language of Acosta: as “the miracle necessary for faith”).

Leaving aside these Latin American figures, let us turn our attention to the East.

4. POINTERS TOWARD A NEW “EVANGELISATION FROM THE OTHERNESS”

4.1 RICCI AND NOBILI

Mateo Ricci and the missionaries who came after him, maintained that pagan China was a people “privileged by God”.

Ricci himself writes from China, at the beginning of the 17th century, that “the canonical books of Confucionism are not inferior to any of our rational philosophers, even to the extent that “we may hope that many of these ancients were saved by observing the natural law, with help which God in His godness has given to them”¹⁹.

It is very probable that in these lines is hidden the real reason for the condemnation of the Chinese missions, more than in concrete points of dispute. Both sayings, once again, *undermine the feeling of superiority of Christianity* (not for nothing the Jansenists called the first expression Pelagian!). If one compares Ricci’s words with Xavier’s prayer quoted earlier, one can see how it is against the ecclesiastical mentality of “exclusivism of salvation” which appears to justify an evangelisation by imposition and without respect for the other. The curious thing is that the Church had already accepted the position of Ricci in the context of the ancient Greek or Latin pagans from whom it felt now no fear of the other. But she could not unaccept to apply the same criterion to the people of her time, because it would appear to question the evangelisation carried out from the position of power. This unconscious lack of coherence is what the text of Ricci unmasks. It helps us understand the conflict arising from the attempts made in China and in India.

There is no time to tell you the whole story here. We can only mention its initial success and offer a brief comment on the abortion of the process by the intervention of Benedict XIV in his bulls of 1742 (in the case of China) and 1744 (in the case of India). An intervention, which two centuries later (in 1949), Cardinal Tisserant would describe as “the darkest days in the history of the missions”.

4.2. THE ABORTION OF BOTH PROCESSES BY ROME

I had the patience to read through both the bulls. I believe that the following approximate balance can be drawn out:

4.2.1 As regards the CONTENT, there is some fine discernment on what today we call “social”. For example -in the case of India- that baptism should be denied to anyone who considered the pariahs to be rejected by God (*Bullarium Romanum XV*, 432); or the mandate to visit the pariahs (*ibid.* 438,440); or the rejection of the ban refusing the sacraments to women during their menstruation, arguing on this point that Jesus had touched the woman with the issue of blood (442,443).

4.2.2. On the other hand, in the matter of what we would term CULTURAL or HERMENEUTIC, the Bulls make us laugh: the secular nature and not strictly religious, of

the many ceremonies to the dead (as for example offerings of tablets in their homes, or the offerings at the time of the equinoxes) was accepted by Pius XII when lifting the excommunications in 1940, alleging that “the meaning of these ceremonies had changed”, with the secularisation of society. But this same secular character was already proclaimed by the Chinese emperor and his counsellors two centuries earlier, on whom the missionaries had based themselves. Benedict XIV recognises that they say this but cannot believe them. I think these Bulls are in marked contrast with the teaching of Gregory I whom we cited at the beginning of this article. They constitute a good example of what it means to absolutise one’s own way of living the Christian religion, and to impose it on others from a position of power²⁰.

THE MANNER OF EXERCISING AUTHORITY

For me, *what is most surprising is not what concerns the content, but the manner in which authority is exercised*, which is reflected in the points which follow:

(a) The Pope recognises in the Introduction that “the Christian faith has made a *giant progress in China.*”

(b) Nevertheless, in spite of this, he imposes his decision with *shocking harshness* (oath, excommunication, and a return to Europe of the missionaries who do not accept it); and against the opinion of the local Hierarchy (the Archbishop of Peking had permitted many more things that were declared invalid by the pope, and “as never existent” - pg. 228).

The reason for this harshness is found, I believe, in the following observations:

(c) It is surprising that in both Bulls, the Pope defines the mission of the Holy See with the formulation -so contrary to the teaching of Jesus to his apostles- about “*removing the darnel by the roots*”²¹. Today we can simply see how in both cases, Jesus’ prediction was fulfilled and the wheat was also uprooted.

(d) This obsession to uproot the darnel arises out of a *false conception of the unity* of faith, which is confused with uniformity and, in this manner, one’s own particular way of believing is imposed as the fulness of faith. In the introduction to the Bull against the Chinese, Benedict XIV expressly laments that a “non-uniform” preaching has taken place, and a plurality of “discipline and way of proceeding” arisen, and proposes that “all say the same thing... and that God be glorified in one single voice”. One cannot but think here of the teaching of Paul regarding the food consecrated to idols, and his defence of plurality, thus safeguarding love rather than uniformity. What a contrast between Paul and Benedict XIV!

Let us pause for a moment to reflect on these two points. The new evangelisation (which was to be launched again on the occasion of 1992), *can in no way be an evangelisation that will uproot violently and prematurely, nor one that will confuse unity of the faith with uniformity of one particular universalised Church*²².

e) Finally, showing a certain apprehension or a certain consciousness of the seriousness of the decisions he imposes, Benedict XIV asks the missionaries “not to be afraid that on account of this *the conversion of the infidels will be delayed*, since this must be hoped for above all from grace of God” (p. 230). This type of “ecclesial monophysitism” -which expects God to act when man does not do what is expected of

him- has been given the lie by the happenings and deeds of the nearly three centuries that followed.

The reaction of Benedict XV

The encyclical *Maximum illud* of Benedict XV, in 1919, is a mournful and very serious recognition that this form of evangelisation -which does not respect the other and is uniformist- ends up by converting evangelisation into an imposition of things hardly evangelical, as for example the evangelizer's geography and the feeling that his culture is superior. To conclude this first part it will be good to recall what Benedict XV said:

After greatly eulogising Las Casas, "honour and glory of the Dominican Order", Benedict XV is not afraid to call "lamentable" the lack of indigenoussness of the churches; he bemoans that in regions where Catholicism has existed for centuries "the indigenous clergy enjoys an inferior reputation;" also that peoples "who by the light of the Gospel have overcome barbarity and become civilised, and have produced men of renown in the fields of the arts and the sciences, for centuries have not produced bishops to govern them." From this he infers that "it is necessary to recognise that there is something wrong and defective in the education imparted up to this day to the clergy in mission lands;" and he complains that the local clergy often "shows less interest in the things that pertain to the Kingdom of God, than to their own country." He then emphasises that the evangelist is in no way evangeliser of his country but of Christ, and draws this conclusion:

"He must deport himself in such a manner that whosoever approaches him will have no doubt in recognising him as a minister of a religion that is not foreign in any country, since in it...there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, neither barbarian nor Scythian, neither slave nor freeman" (cf *La Siège apostolique et les missions*, I, 34ff; and in COMBY, *op.cit.* II, 165).

Much advance has been made in this matter all through the present century, although not without great difficulties which still remain. It may therefore be good to recall these words so that the new evangelisation does not become as imposition of one way of being Christian, respectable perhaps, but not quite the only one, and perhaps even (let it be said with no intention to be hurtful) less evangelical than others. Now then -to end this article- only one thing remains which is for us to articulate some questions which arise from this whole historical study.

5. QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

As is already known, the European viewpoint has become old and worn out. We ask ourselves if the epoch of mass evangelisation of the peoples has, historically speaking, come to an end (with perhaps the exception of Africa, so much ill-treated and anthropologically less settled). The reasons for these questions are more or less the following:

1) *The cultural consolidation and unity of the world.* Perhaps in the past, historical opportunities were lost: God alone can make up for them. The values of Christian (or simply human) Europe are covered up by a certain “bad conscience” about its past role as invader, and this translates itself into a new wish to respect and not to impose itself anymore²³. (Of course, the worst elements of the First World continue to invade, destroy, dominate, now no longer under the excuse of evangelising but, at best, of “civilising”). *Is this still the time to “evangelise peoples”? Or has this historical epoch clearly passed away?*

2) *The rediscovery of the freedom of religion:* the “conscientious objection”, presented by the satraps to the twelve apostles (and which was already defended by Thomas Aquinas) is today very alive among us. In this context it is necessary to distinguish between a false proselytisation which mostly produces only apostasies (as is evident today in the practices of some sects), and a true evangelisation which produces authentic conversion precisely because it proceeds from it²⁴. *Is the difference between proselytisation and evangelisation clear in our minds?*

3) *Let us also refer to the rediscovery of the universal salvific will of God:* the motivation of the earlier Xavier is no longer valid. (It is interesting to note that G. Gutiérrez, in his *Theology of Liberation*, starts from what he calls “a change from the quantitative to the qualitative” on the theme of salvation).

This does not at all mean that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must no longer be proclaimed: Christ will not be Christ until he attains his plenitude (Eph. 1,23). But motives must certainly be changed, and therefore also the modalities and the objectives of proclamation. *What is it that must be proclaimed to the non-Christians about Jesus Christ, and how, and why?*

4) Finally, we must take note of the *loss of social plausibility of European Christianity*. In Europe, Christianity is not a *faith* anymore, it is only a cultural element. Although there are still magnificent and shining examples of *personal faith* here and there, we must admit that, *as a social belief*, what happened to socialism in the final years of the U.S.S.R., is now happening to Christianity: as a social creed, it is no longer functional. The Church is kept after as an adornment of the old life, and not as a ferment of a new life; and often the Church accommodates itself to such a demand to avoid the feeling of being irrelevant. This contrasts with the fact that in other countries of Asia and Africa (India, Korea, Japan, Egypt...) the Church has a socio-cultural presence and influence much superior to her numerical proportion. I am not aware if this is due to the fact that these are younger Churches, or that their minority status makes it easier for them to accept their mission of being a leaven, while in Europe, the superiority enjoyed in the past makes us home-sick, so to say, for Christiendom. *Can we, Europeans, be agents of a “new evangelisation”?*

5) Consequently with what we have said, in Europe (Church and World) react by *looking more into the speck in the other's eye than to the beam in one's own*: the Church (above all the Roman Church) seems to be convinced that the *entire fault* of her irrelevance is due to secularisation and modernity, and that she continues to be perfect and above all criticism (which, basically, is a reaction born out of fear or of "little faith"). One of my favourite authors (the great Spanish poet Antonio Machado) used to say prophetically that the Church of his time was remarkable both for of her formidable organisation and the poverty of her spirituality. (It is obvious that the present inward-looking reaction aggravates this situation, because it makes her aggressive only to preserve, not to evangelise, and her spiritualism shows only an impoverished spirit, totally incapable of falling "on all flesh"). *Has the proclamation of the Gospel to become a fight, even when one has the feeling of being persecuted and illtreated? Does not this proclamation include love for one's enemies?*

6. CONCLUSION

These questions are offered here for each one's reflection. But perhaps they may help us to understand why the Latin American Church (and other Third World churches) is for Europe a beacon of hope. We think that in Latin America the change from proselytism to service is a reality -this is what the new evangelisation must be like, because this is the mission of the Church. This change becomes concrete is an option for justice or for the poor, and in interreligious dialogue, both expressions of brotherhood and *absolute demands* of the Christian faith. They are really the two sides of evangelisation today, needed if we do not wish that Gandhi's criticism about Christians be true: that, in order to announce Christ we have renounced living like Christ.

This does not imply that we absolutely reject an explicit proclamation of Christ (one who truly loves will agree with Bonhoeffer's assertion that we must not give anything less than Christ to our brothers and sisters). But it does certainly imply that we proclaim also that which is Christ's first gift (so often forgotten!) and his mark of identity par excellence: *the gift of the Holy Spirit "poured out upon all flesh"* (and with it a theology of dialogue with the duty to learn from all); and "the Good news to the *poor*" (and with it a theology of liberation).

To conclude, we sum up this two intuitions from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* about which Paul VI himself says that they can be termed either pre-evangelisation or evangelisation, concepts which have repeatedly appeared throughout my exposition: they are what Paul VI calls "evangelisation of cultures (EN 20), and "the initial gestures of evangelisation" (EN 21).

The evangelisation of cultures does not consist in "baptising" nor substituting them, but in reanimating them (EN 20) by the encounter with the values of the Kingdom, and not just in the interest of ecclesiastical power. The option for the poor in the sense of Jesus (i.e., as a sacrament of God's gratuitousness) is in this way an essential factor for every cultural or interreligious dialogue.

The first gesture of evangelisation can also be termed (using Dom Pedro Casaldáliga's expression) a "ministry of credibility". In the future of the evangelical praxis of the Church will have to be the motive of credibility, as Puebla pointed out when it said that the Church evangelises above all by the example of her life (no. 272). This means that the Church must become *evangelical* in order to be *evangeliser*. And this is easily explained. Ev. Nun. speaks of the example of the personal lives of Christians, that raises questions the answer to which is the announcement of the Gospel. But the Church as such, because of her public dimension, does not need to await for the questions: if her manner of proceeding is source of hope, she can - and must- complete her testimony by giving "the reason for this hope", as so often Monsignor Romero did for some of his actions (refusing police protection, etc.). Here are some samples of what the real meaning of evangelization could be:

- a) Right now, there are some churches engaged in building great cathedrals, in places of alarming poverty. Great sums of money are needed for such big buildings, -in our world- they can only have a doubtful origin, and at the expense of other works. Let us suppose that a Church gives up the human satisfaction of having a big cathedral. Following the suggestion of John Paul II in his *Sollicitudo*

Rei Sociale, the large sums set aside for the cathedral could be diverted to some other purpose in favour of the poor, e. g., a fund for the victims of unemployment or earthquakes, etc. This gesture so contrary to the logic of this world would, undoubtedly need an explanation. The Church will then be in a position to say that the true God does not need temples, that we can come together in simple places where the inner dispositions of the community will give greater glory to God than the external magnificence of buildings; that in the Incarnation, God erected his one and only temple in a man, and that the worship he wants is the assistance given to those in need (cf Is 58). And that the greatness of a bishop and of a lord Church is not measured by the size of the cathedral, but by the greatness of service... Here we would have an excellent evangelisation.

b) Let us suppose the Magisterium, facing a theologian under suspicion or who is causing concern, purposely sets aside authoritarian measures by administrative action (like the deprivation of a professorial chair, the imposition of silence or exile...). This gesture, so contrary to the logic of human authority, will also have to be explained by saying that for the faith of the Church the Word of God is above all a world of acceptance rather than of definition or of imposition and that -for this reason- the Christian truth is arrived only in love (cf Eph 4,15), and that, when God respects human freedom, it does not thereby mean that God approves of our irresponsibility or compromises with the truth of the Gospel, and that people must know this... Here is another kind of evangelisation.

c) Not too long ago, in Santo Domingo, the Latin American Catholic Hierarchy dared to “beg pardon” from the indigenous peoples of Latin America for the sins committed in the past 500 years. The most outstanding aspect of this request for forgiveness is that the Church is the only entity that dared to do so. At about that time a similar suggestion was made both to the Spanish civil authority (which reacted contemptuously and reaffirmed the merits of its history) as also to the British authorities (with reference to the bombardment of Dresden) and to the Japanese for her dealings with China (the latter -for commercial reasons- made a declaration that “they were sorry for the damage done”, which was not a petition for pardon but which -also for commercial reasons- was accepted as adequate). What is puzzling is that, in the case of Latin America, the Church has a history much more positive than the civil authorities: Las Casas, Sahagún, Zumárraga, Valdivieso, Toribio de Mongroviejo, Vasco de Quiroga... contrast sharply with the names of Cortés, Pizarro, Oviedo and other criminals who were America’s historical conquerors.

Well then, I do believe that this unique gesture of asking for pardon is an evangelising gesture which the Church can and must explain. For, only when we experience ourselves accepted and pardoned by God are we capable of facing ourselves, and the risk involved in hoping for the other’s pardon. Without God’s forgiveness, everything, absolutely everything, will force us to claim desperately that we are right. Only in mutual forgiveness can we, human beings build up a brotherhood and peace and be truly human. Without forgiveness and acceptance, we can only promote war or commerce, wherein the stronger or the more astute always wins.

A final reflection on this point before I end: It is not true that for the unbelieving European Christianity has no interest: Latin American Christianity does awaken interest, not ours. I am the first to recognise that there may be an element of fashion (everything human has its impurities) or that it can happen to us what Jesus said about the seed: that it germinates in the soil but cannot grow because the soil is rocky or because the soil is choked by the thorns. But I do not think that what is happening here is only this: rather, the Latin American Church presents to us an example of a ministry with credibility.

What remains is a long process of inserting ourselves into the world, to see how Christianity sounds from within this world (and not from our own personal circumstances); to try to live according to this committed Christian faith; to offer this mode of life that may raise questions; and to know to give a reason for it. The effectivity of this testimony by God's will must escape our full control, because it is God who gives life and growth, and we can only plant the seed, recognising ourselves as unprofitable servants.

A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DIALOGUE

Latin America as well as the old Europe need today a *new evangelisation*.

New in so far as in many areas of the old Christendom we find ourselves imbedded in a new paganism, and *new* in so far as it would have to be realised in a manner different from the previous one by, inculturating itself in a new culture.

This booklet in its first redaction had in mind Latin American groups that wanted to reflect on evangelisation for their countries.

I think it will be helpful for the neo-pagan old Europe, to reflect on the kind of *new evangelisation* we need.

1. After reading the booklet, and in an informal manner:

- *State your impressions.*
- *What do your first reflections suggest to you for a new evangelisation of the old Christian lands?*

2. We place ourselves in the centuries of Constantine and Theodosius when Christians came out of hiding and the era of martyrdom to form the official religion of the state. In those days, as pointed out above (pgs 5-7) there are two different styles of evangelisation:

- *Evaluate the two styles*
- *What consequences can be drawn from them?*
- *What lessons could we learn from them for today?*

3. We move now and place ourselves in the 16th century, the era of the great geographical discoveries (pgs 8-16). Imagine the scenes of evangelisation in the new lands (surely you have seen films, pictures...):

- *Describe the three models of evangelisation mentioned above*
- *Evaluate them: The positive and the negative elements for each model.*
- *What consequences can be drawn from them?*
- *What lessons would you draw for our new evangelisation?*

4. What was needed to evangelise rather in the style of Las Casas, or at least in conformity with the *Book of Colloquies*?

- *Hold a debate on whether a “more evangelical” evangelisation was viable.*
- *How would you translate that today?*

5. After answering the previous question, pay attention now to the *Reductions of Paraguay* (pg. 15). It may help to remember the movie *The Mission*:

- *Evaluate this model of evangelisation.*
- *Also draw lessons for today.*

6. Let us place ourselves now in Asia (pgs 16-19) in the time of Xavier:

- *Identify the three stages indicated above in the mission of Xavier.*
- *Why does Xavier change his attitude?*
What lessons could we draw for today

7. We move now to the China of Ricci (pgs 20-23):

- *Take note of Ricci’s lines of evangelisation.*
- *Evaluate the reaction of Rome vis-à-vis this new evangelisation*
- *What conclusions could we draw from Ricci which will throw light on our actual evangelisation of Europe and Latinamerica?*

8. Chapter 5 (pgs 25-27) has in mind the dialogue partners in Latin America. Give your answer to some of the five questions proposed there. But above all, in view of those questions:

- *Draw up the questions which we would put ourselves today, faced with a new evangelisation in Spain and Europe. (You may find it helpful to refer to pgs 28-30)*
- *Think over the relationship between faith as experienced, doctrine (or theology) and Christian practice: a) in your own faith*
b) in your desire to communicate it.

NOTES

1. See the text quoted below, cited in n. 3.
2. *Letter XI*, PL 77, 1215-16.
3. Quoted in *Nueva Historia de la Iglesia*, I, 332.
4. Quoted by P. Comby, *Para entender la Iglesia*, I, 129.
5. This is a thesis often articulated by its author. Let me only refer as an example to his *Le christianisme va-t-il mourir?* (Paris 1977) o *Un chemin d'histoire* (Paris 1981).
6. When Hernán Cortés come to know that the friars had come “he was very much consoled and the gave orders that they be treated well and brought soon to this city of Mexico... For the space of some days the most Illustrious Governor welcomed and feasted the afore-said religious who arrived weak and some of them sickly because of both the long sea journey and the harsh track overland. These days he met them and came to know and was very fond of them, as he saw from their words and deals that they were servants of God (p. 73 N.B. I quote from the edition of the Universidad Nacional, México 1986). Today we have no doubt that the friars would have needed this rest. But we remain with the doubt whether Hernán Cortés was the right person to help them. But we must add that some time later Cortés became disappointed with them and asked Spain to send him “true” missionaries.
7. This confession must not be assessed in the abstract but in the light of the fact that Hernán Cortés’s victory was largely due to the fact that he was believed to be the god Quetzalcoatl who, according to the Aztec mythology, had to come to take revenge against the established religion of Huizilopochtli.
8. “We bring with us the great embassy of that great Lord who has spiritual jurisdiction over all who live in this world and who is called the Holy Father” (p. 79). “This great Priest, the Holy Father, hold superiority and preeminence over all the kings of the earth, and also over the Emperor, and now he has sent us here for this” (85).
9. “This is the true *ypalnemoani* whom you invoke but have never know” (91).
10. “What great fervour the religious learned this mexican language... , and taught the boys to read and write and count... , and with great fervour they busied themselves in destroying the temples of the idols and building up... churches” (75). The question of the language must not be overlooked today in the light of history: the *Consejo de Indias* in Sevilla decided that the indigenous languages were not apt to articulate the Christian faith.
11. “You tell us that what we adore are not gods. Your words seem to us very strange and quite shocking... Our parents and ancestors... left us these ways we have of adoring our gods and they believed in them and adored them all the time they were on earth... , and they told us that through them we live and exist, and that through their grace we are theirs and serve the through numberless symbols... How can our poor old men and women abandon that with which they have grown throughout their lives? See to it that we do not draw the anger of our gods on ourselves, see that the people do not rise up against us if we tell them that they are not gods what they have so far considered them to be” (88.89).
12. “I do not want you to serve me in any other way than that you keep and protect people so that my enemies the devils don not catch them (words by God to the faithful angels after the fall of the devils: p. 94).
13. “This universal God and Lord, redeemer and creator Jesús Christ has a kingdom here on earth, called the kingdom of heaven, wish has another name the Catholic Church, and it is called the kingdom of heaven because nobody will go to heaven to reign unless one is a subject of this kingdom here on earth.
14. It is worth noting the similarity of the attitude proposed here to what Paul VI called in *Ev. Nun.* “the first approach to evangelization” (cf, n. 21).
15. They have been accused of being theocratic, and of building an “iron curtain”. However, we should not forget the enthusiasm for them of men like August Comte or the Voltaire of *Essai sur les moeurs*.
16. J. Lacouture describes this change in these words: “From a critical attitude to experimentation; from dialogue to a will to share; from an attitude of judging to a desire for equality and truth... He understood that to convert means before anything else to discover and respect the other.” (Jésuites, Paris 1991, I, 134, 156).
17. 29.I.52; *op. cit.* 418. To understand how subversive this sentence is we must remember that according to many historians. When St. Thomas More wrote his *Utopía* he was thinking of the social organization of some pre-colombian peoples, but he did not there to name them to avoid problems with the Inquisition for saying that the pagans were better than Christians. This is only he placed the vision in “no-place” (u-topía).

18. *De procuranda indorum salute*, Madrid 1984, I, 320. About the virtues and ambiguity of Acosta see the article of P. Trigo, “*Evangelización en la colonia*” in *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* (May-August 1990) 163-168. The author says what I am trying to say in these words: “The gospel is handed over in the evangelizer hands himself over”.

19. Reference in Lacouture, *op. cit.* 272.

20. I cannot refrain from citing another quotation: “Any one who believes that blowing or saliva are not apt elements for a sacramental celebration is not fit to receive baptism. And whoever baptises any one who thinks this will not be free from a great punishment” (*Bullarium XV*, 439).

21. “Cum Sancta Sedes id maxime caveat en zizania in agro Domiico radices agant aut si forte egerint ea quam cito fieri potes evellantur” (*Ex quo singulari*). “Industria ut ex recens coalescentibus praedictorum regnorum ecclesiis, zizania radicitus evellerent” (*Omnium sollicitudinum*).

22. I have commented on both points in two articles, “*Evangelización e inquisición*” and “*Evangelización e Iglesia*” published in the *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 1991.

23. In this booklet I write exclusively of Latin America and the Catholic Church. But it is worth remembering, at the end of this work and after 1992 that the model of “invading to evangelise” is not the exclusive invention of one country or one Church, but it sums up the darker aspects of European history. Even in the nineteenth century (therefore three centuries after the Spanish colonization when the American nations were already independent) Sir Joshua Marshmann kept invoking this model for the presence of the U.K. in India in a work whose title appears today ridiculous: *Advantages of Christianity in promoting the establishment and prosperity of the British Empire in India*. There he wrote that “the indians by the weakness of their character, which not even Christianity can overcome will always be a subject people. They may feel happy if Providence keeps them always under the gentle, soft and at the same time demanding cloak of Great Britain”. These arguments have been repeated again and again some time with reference to Africa, others to America, and others to Asia. Then we can understand Gandhi’s criticism of Christianity, quoted below in the conclusion, which is really a criticism of European Christianity. We then understand the universal significance of men like Las Casas, in spite of his historical limitations.

24. In this sense to speak truly of a new evangelization we must keep in mind the meaning of the following words of a Brazilian theologian: “Before being proclamation, evangelization is discipleship. It is an obedient learning at the feet of the master... It is an exercise of listening that tries to be ever more open and available to receive the Word... Evangelizing is today, therefore, a mission received and not an self-sufficient decision that one takes on oneself” (María Clara Bingemer, -; Petropolis 1991, p. 158-159).

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