

Globalisation of Christianity is a fact.

Isn't it a good news?

by Card. Joseph ZEN, SDB

Globalization of Christianity is a fact, in this fact Professor Philp Jenkins chooses to emphasize a particular phenomenon: the shift from it being predominantly white and Europe-American, or Western to a astonishing growth into a christianity with a majority now located in the global south, the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The figures in the two tables, even if we admit some over estimate in them, are eloquent enough to prove the fact.

In the emergence of newer churches Prof. Jenkins sees not only a geographical fact but notices that "the kinds of christianity that are emerging and growing have very different characteristics from what the old church regards as familiar or mainstream, these characteristics are:

- a charismatic faith,
- emphasis on deliverance and spiritual warfare (an accentuated acquaintance with demonic forces)
- keen interest in healing and miraculous cures
- disappearance of familiar etiquettes or labels, which

used to differentiate left from right, conservative from liberal, so that today the same community can be qualified as evangelical, liturgical, catholic and charismatic.

— Finally in the global south christianity emerges as a minority against the background of ancient ~~and~~ and deeply established rival faiths. Particular mention is made of Islam.

The text of Prof. Jenkins on which I prepare this my response bears the title: "Bible in an changing Christian World". His thesis is that the Bible and biblical stories have found a congenial home among communities who identify with the social, economic and political realities it portrays. It is particularly the Old Testament world that speaks in contemporary tones to many African and Asian (but especially African) Christians.

I find all this true and interesting. But when I read the "words of welcome" from those who sponsor this conference I asked myself a question. Christianity has become a global reality, in its becoming it has, of course, acquired new characteristics, but it has also a basic identity which remains fundamentally the same irrespective of time and place.

This permanent core identity, by which christianity is christianity has it not more to say to answer our worries about our common future, the future well being of mankind?

The "words of welcome" reminds us that our worries come from the realization of the danger of an unchecked growth. They ask questions about the impact of new scientific and technical achievements, about the role of international institutions, religious movements and non-governmental organizations.

Now, christianity as such and already present everywhere in this our global village, claims to have answers to such questions.

I confess I am aware that I am being very uncharitable to Prof. Jenkins. I am inviting you to divert your attention from his line of thought, which focuses on the particular characteristics of present day globalized christianity, to reflect instead on the essential and permanent content of christian faith and to find out what this faith has to say about the common future of our mankind.

First of all I insist that there is such an essential and permanent content of christian faith.

For this you may have to forgive me (or those who have invited me) for my being of a particular brand of christianity which is catholicism. As catholics we are unrepentent optimists, believing in the possibility of knowing the truth, a truth which is universal and perennial. We believe that the church is one, catholic and apostolic. We believe that Christ's message has come to us unchanged through the Apostles and their successors.

Then have we no sense of history? Surely we know that christianity as a living reality undergoes changes and needs reforms, but true development must be omogeneous as blessed John Henry Newman puts it and true reform must be in continuity with the past as Pope Benedict reminds us.

Even Prof. Jenkins's words ^{in some way} seem to come to my aid, when at the end of ~~his~~ ^{his} article she recommends a strong sense of history saying: "After all, so many of the new questions that will face the churches in coming decades are anything but new".

History is important but there is something meta-historical in history: Jesus Christ yesterday,

today and forever.

What is this perennial message of Christ? Pope Benedict XVI (made in Germany) has wonderfully summarized it in his 3 Encyclical Letters:

"Deus Caritas est" God is love, out of love He has created us in this marvellous universe

"Spe salveti" beyond and above the daily petty hopes let us confidently have that big hope: our salvation and eternal happiness.

"Caritas in veritate" to practice charity with a solid foundation in the truth, both by natural Reason and from divine Revelations.

What are the answers to our questions?

In his most recent Encyclical "Caritas in veritate" The Pope deals extensively with all these problems, he agrees that they must be solved by an interdisciplinary wisdom, but they need also the light which comes from Christian faith.

→ to the question: "What are the limits and limitations of political and economic power?"

There is always the danger that people limit themselves within the narrow scope of their selfish interest: individual, family and national, while they

must remember that we are all children of God and each one deserves to be respected, served and loved. The two principles of subsidiarity and solidarity are paramount. The f. of subsidiarity allows for participation the soul of democracy and the f. of solidarity goes beyond the mere demands of justice.

→ to the question: "What impact will new scientific and technical achievements have on our future?"

Science and technical achievements are precious and deserve our admiration but not our worship, they are in the order of means, instruments, they are ambivalent, without a direction which comes from spiritual values they can harm or even destroy mankind, too often instruments of life have become instruments of death, while we believe that human life must be respected from its beginning to its natural end.

→ to the question "what is the role for international institutions, religious movements and non governmental organizations?"

Every has a role and all must collaborate.