

*Ennio Mantovani SVD\**

## **MY JOURNEY OF FAITH IN THE NEW PARADIGM OF EVOLUTION**

*Looking back at a missionary life, the author takes stock of some major developments in the world of sciences and subsequently in theology. The change from Europe into the world of Papua New Guinea and later on to Australia has forced him to reconsider his perspectives. This reflection on his journey of faith evolves around theological conceptions like incarnation, redemption, sin, and love as well as around the notions of science, paradigms, evolution, and secularisation and their mutual influences.*

### **1. Introduction: Before Setting Out**

I need to put the story of my journey of faith in the New Paradigm of Evolution into perspective. This is only one chapter in a long and on-going journey.

As a missionary in Papua New Guinea (PNG) living among the digging stick cultivators I entered into an inner dialogue with their cultures and religions and allowed myself to be challenged by the same realities, by the way they had perceived and answered the Logos revealing God's love in and through their environment.<sup>1</sup> Their figure of the Dema helped me to deepen my understanding of God's love and the role of Jesus Christ in communicating God's love.<sup>2</sup>

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\* Ennio Mantovani SVD (\*1932, Italy) worked for forty years in PNG as a missionary and scholar at the Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Cultural Services, Goroka. He has published widely on topics relating to faith and culture. After retiring, he edited his letters from PNG (*Sent to Baptize or what?*, 2011), the chronicle of Yobai parish (*Mission: Collision or Dialogical Encounter?*, 2011) and *The Dema and the Christ* (2014). He lives in Melbourne, Australia.

<sup>1</sup> Regarding Logos theology see: Ennio Mantovani, Divine Revelation outside the Bible? Revelation According to the New Testament, in: Id., *The Dema and the Christ. My Engagement and Inner Dialogue with the Cultures and Religions of Melanesia*, Siegburg: Verlag Franz Schmitt 2014, 139-141.

<sup>2</sup> Id., The Dema Complex and the Christ Event, in: *The Dema and the Christ*, 226-240. The present article is a further step from my articles Musing on Evolution and our Faith Today: An Exercise in Religious Dialogue: *The Australasian Catholic Record* 83:1 (2006) 3-14. Who Do You Say I Am? My Jour-

In my own Western culture, I continue my inner dialogue with my own culture and once again I allow myself to be challenged. The Logos is revealing God-self also in our Western cultures and the darkness in them cannot overpower or put out that light (Jn 1:5).

In my PNG journey I needed to leave the security of my Christian tradition to listen to the Logos speaking in and through the cultures of the digging stick cultivators. Back in the Western cultures, I need to do the same. Western cultures have changed and the Logos is revealing God's love today, in today's context, in a context influenced by the theory of evolution. The language will be that of evolution, quite different from that of the tradition in which many of us grew up. But once again, it offers a chance of deepening our faith in God's love today and of better understanding the role of Christ in the process of evolution.

### 1.1 Terminology

Before beginning this chapter of my journey, I need to spell out what I mean by paradigm, paradigm shift, and evolutionism.

#### Paradigm

The concept of *paradigm* goes back to Thomas Kuhn<sup>3</sup> and to Hans Küng<sup>4</sup> who applied it to the history of Christianity, but it was in reading David J. Bosch's *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*<sup>5</sup> that I saw the relevance of paradigms for my work. Basically, people feel that the existing models, be they in the field of sciences, or in that of theology, are riddled with anomalies and unable to resolve emerging problems. They begin to search for a new model, a new theoretical structure, a new "paradigm" to replace the old one.<sup>6</sup>

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ney of Faith as a Missionary: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 112-125. Born Bad? Culture, Religion, and Sin: *Australian Journal of Mission Studies* 10:1 (2016) 26-31.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Küng/David Tracy (eds.), *Theologie – wohin? Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen Paradigma*. Zürich-Cologne: Benziger Verlag 1984; Was meint Paradigmenwechsel?, 19-26.

<sup>5</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1992.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

A *paradigm shift* in the field of theology will necessarily question what we know as our Christian Tradition and this will not happen without a struggle. The community supporting their understanding of the Tradition will try to explain away the anomalies of the old paradigm to safeguard it. This is to be expected.

The new paradigm that I will present and which is also supported by my interest in social and religious sciences is helping me in my faith, especially in dealing with the Hebrew Testament and its influences on the Christian one.

I will use the term *evolutionism* to denote a model of theology based on the scientific theory of evolution.

### *1.2 My Journey*

I do not intend to write a theological treatise but to share a stage of my journey of faith in the context of evolution, in what I regard as a changed paradigm. I will add from time to time my reflections on the various steps of the journey. One cannot embark on such a project without needing to justify to oneself and to the others the steps one has taken.

The old paradigm for much of theology is that of biblical theism, in which God created everything and was regarded as the cause of everything, good and bad; the good as a gracious gift of his love and the bad as a just punishment for human sin. God as creator was believed to be free to intervene at any time in his creation and stop the sun in its track and turn it back (Isa 38:7), stop the flow of a river (Ex 14:15ff) and then let it flow again, etc. God could send pestilences and stop them at will (1 Chr 20:10-15). The One who was believed to have given the laws to creation could change them at will.

In the old paradigm, God had to change the original plan of creation because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Eden was terminated and the “valley of tears” began. Suffering, sickness, and death became part of the “restructured” creation. This is what St. Paul seems to affirm. Another correction was that God’s Son had to incarnate to fix the situation by taking away that sin.

In the new paradigm of evolutionism, it is suggested that God created by providing creation at the “Big Bang” with all the potential needed to evolve to life, to consciousness, to the capacity to perceive and to respond to God’s self-communication in creation. God provided the potential to be able to open up to that offer of divine love to the point of uniting with the eternal Love in the beatific vision; to the point that a human person could be so open to God’s self-gift that he

becomes the face of God on earth; truly God among us. The God of evolution respects the dignity of creation-in-evolution and does not interfere in its processes.

God's love never changes; it is the human response that varies. The potential to respond is given, but so is also the liberty to choose.

The understanding of revelation in the new paradigm I envisage is more nuanced than in the old one. Every human being can perceive God's self-revelation through creation, so much so, that creation becomes revelation (Rom 1:19-20). Creation, however, is always seen through the tinted eyeglasses of culture and is expressed through the cultural symbols of the people who have perceived it. There cannot be a "pure" revelation; it can be only cultural. A person belonging to the gatherers and small hunters<sup>7</sup> will never see creation like a person belonging to the cultures of herders and even less of the planters of tubers. The way they speak of that perception, the way they respond in rituals to it will be as different as the cultures to which they belong.

Israel represents no exception. God's revelation has been perceived and expressed by Israel in its cultural way. We Christians have our roots in their religion. We must be aware of the cultural aspects of it and distinguish the message from the necessary cultural wrapping.

Israel in its specific culture as herders, who had settled among farmers, experienced God's care in their history. Because of their sins, God had punished them, but the prophets assured the people that the God of their fathers would never abandon them, that a son of David would come to free them and establish God's kingdom. This expectation influenced the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ.

Theism, as exemplified by the faith of Israel, is not the only cultural way God could reveal God-self. It is in no way an absolute. Theism is a witness to the intelligence and religiosity of Stone Age people. Paraphrasing what Paul states in Romans (Rom 1:19ff), from their environment, they were able not only to discover its Creator, but also that Creator's goodness and generosity.

To think that God stopped revealing God-self after the Stone Age and did not communicate God-self in the cultures of the planters, herders and farmers, is contrary to our faith, as expressed by St. Paul. However, it is equally questionable to believe Paul when he

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<sup>7</sup> People prior to the discovery of planting lived by collecting what nature provided in fruits, roots, fish and animals, hence the term gatherers and small hunters.

says that all the peoples knew God, however, they refused to honour him as God. Years later Matthew, as a matter of fact, seems to go out of his way to prove that pagans—Roman legionaries—had such a faith that Jesus affirmed, “In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this” (8:10).

Theism, however, has an inbuilt weakness: how to defend the Creator’s goodness and providence in the face of suffering and death? Humankind struggled to find an answer to this problem and human sin was one of the intents for an answer. The Creator remains the cause of everything, the good things as a sign of his generosity and care, the bad ones as the just punishment for human sin, for human disobedience of the Creator’s laws. *Theism needed sin to defend the Creator’s goodness.* Revelation is about the goodness of the Creator; sin is just a cultural rationalization for the presence of evil in creation.

What for theism was a defect in creation is in evolutionism the pain connected with evolution itself. Stars had to die to make life on our planet possible. Today, sciences not only help us to understand creation as being in evolution, but enable us also to answer the question of its origins, of its laws, of its inner makeup, of the way to manipulate it. It is in this context that we must perceive God’s revelation, the expression of God’s love and providence. Paul reminds us that it is in creation *as we experience it* that we need to perceive God’s revelation. The new paradigm is an expression of my experience of God’s love and care in the world of evolution and the sciences.

### 1.3 The God in Whom I Believe

Before sharing my journey of faith, I need to clarify the foundations of my faith. Who is God for me? Who is Jesus Christ for me? Who is the mother of Jesus for me?

The God in whom I believe is the God of my Christian tradition, the Eternal Love (“God is love”: 1 Jn 4:8), the Father, the Caring One, the one Jesus called *abba*, dad. *The God in whom I believe is relationship; the most powerful of them all; that of love. We have love, God is love, is agápe*, a selfless love, a love that is passionately committed to the well-being of the other. It is this God, this *agápe*, who created and is sustaining creation-in-evolution. This God is in relationship with the whole creation. What in the catechism was predicated of God as “*being* in heaven, on earth, and everywhere” I translate as one “who is *in relationship* with the whole creation; keeping it in existence.” There is nothing as real and powerful as love and as mysterious.

As already stated, this is not a theological treatise. It is how I see the God of my faith, the One who gives meaning to my life.

*1.4 The Jesus in Whom I Believe—  
A Few Basic Statements of Faith*

“Who do you say I am?” asked Jesus.

In this new paradigm Jesus’ life and death and resurrection are not a correction of the original divine plan of creation gone wrong because of human sin. They are an integral part of creation-in-evolution.

Jesus’ role does not regard only the eternal salvation of humankind, but also the present humankind and its environment. It has not only an eschatological dimension but a present-day one as well. Jesus in his ministry was concerned for the poor and marginalized; the option for the poor is integral to Christianity.

The Gospels tell us what the risen Christ is not—not having the former physical body—without telling us what he became. His resurrection proves that the way he showed us was the right one; it led to the full life.

**Incarnation**

As already mentioned, God, at the “Big Bang,” gave the potential to creation to evolve to life, to consciousness, to the capacity to perceive and respond to God’s self-communication in creation, and even to open up to God’s self-communication to the point that a human person becomes the face of God for us, God with us; God who walks with us. This is what happened with Jesus, fully human, as we are, who became God with us.

Such Incarnation presupposes the free human consent not of a moment but one that is growing with the consciousness and maturity of the subject.

For Jesus, it might have been the Baptism experience that sealed it. The fact that Jesus did not marry, that he “became eunuch for the Kingdom” (Mt 19:12), because of his commitment to the realization of God’s plan, might show his opening to God’s self-communication. The fact that after the baptism experience he went into the desert and “was tempted” means that as fully human he had to make choices; he had to decide how to carry out his mission which had to do with the Father’s plan for the world.

Reducing Incarnation to God's substituting the Y chromosome in Jesus,<sup>8</sup> which is absolutely necessary to be a fully human person, in my opinion diminishes its greatness. Even if that were the case, it would have happened at conception and not at birth—not at Christmas. Such an understanding presupposes the God of biblical theism, which is based on the experience of a culture that is long past.

### Redemption

Jesus is our Redeemer by showing us with his whole life the only way to the full life (paraphrasing "I am the way, the truth, and the life": I am the true way to life [Jn 14:6]). The full life is the union with the eternal Love in the beatific vision; however, Jesus shows us also the way how to live in our present life; shows us the way to peace.

Jesus is an integral part of God's creation in evolution. As the stories of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel tell us, humankind lacks trust in God and his care, hence it is forced to be self-centred, to care for its survival by all means. This is a recipe for violence and wars. Given the evolution of the human mind and the progress of science and technology, the future of humankind and its environment is at risk.

On the other hand, God respects human freedom, and if a radical change is needed in humankind for peace to take hold, it has to come from within. It is at this moment in history that I see the role of the God with us, of Jesus the Christ our brother who shows us the only way to the reign of love and peace, to God's Kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

He begins his ministry by calling for *metánoia*, for a radical change of the way we think; from no trust in God to trust in God and from self-centredness to being for the others, especially the marginalized, those deprived of all the rights, the poor. No violence but forgiveness.

Jesus begins a movement and calls for co-workers to continue his mission. He tells his co-workers that it is not enough to love one's neighbour as we love ourselves (Lev 19:18); they need to love one

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<sup>8</sup> Jesus, according to our Christian tradition, was a "true man" and was a "son of David." In both cases Jesus needed the Y chromosome to make him biologically a true man and to link him genetically with his male ancestors; with David. The Y chromosome comes only from the biological father. In a virginal birth God had to intervene both in making Jesus biologically a true man and linking him genetically with his ancestors.

<sup>9</sup> Given human freedom evolution can make disastrous mistakes.

another as he has loved us (Jn 15:12). He demands *agápe*; selfless love.

Church history, however, shows that Christianity has a poor record as an agent of peace. There has been, however, a remarkable record in terms of the peace achieved by many saints in their lives down through history. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherine of Siena are two of those.

The Holy Spirit, nevertheless, was not at work only through the saints. We can discover that action also in our daily life, in the signs of the time. There have been people who trusted and followed Jesus' teaching and performed the "miracles" of our times. Mandela was able to make peace in a South Africa torn by apartheid not by trials as after World War II at Nürnberg hanging the criminals, but by trials where those who killed and maimed were forgiven, as Jesus had asked. Chile found peace forgiving the former oppressors, as Mandela did, following Jesus' teaching.<sup>10</sup> The Berlin Wall tumbled because Pastor Führer, trusting in Christ's teaching, was leading the pacific movement that not even the East German army could stop.<sup>11</sup> These are the signs—in a Johannine sense—for our time of the Spirit at work in our world today. The seeds are growing while we sleep (Mk 4:26-7).

Jesus, our Redeemer, does not save us through miracles, but by showing us the only way to peace, and inviting us to follow him.

### 1.5 *The Mother of Jesus*

What is the role of the Mother of Jesus in the new paradigm?

In the Gospel of Luke we find the scene of the Annunciation. What matters in the event is God asking for the consent of Mary to become the mother of Jesus and Mary consenting to it.

In the new paradigm, God respects the freedom of people. Mary had a very important role to play in God's plan as mother of Jesus. It was fitting for her to be asked. The greatness of Mary is her response: "You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said" (Lk 1:38). The young maid trusted in God's plan, without understanding much of it.

<sup>10</sup> Zenon Szablowinski SVD, *The Dynamic Relationship between Roman Catholic Reconciliation and the Processes of National Reconciliation in Chile and South Africa* [thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Theology, Catholic University, Melbourne 2005].

<sup>11</sup> See: BBC Religion & Ethics – Did a prayer meeting really bring down the Berlin Wall and end the Cold War?



Mary becomes the model of the Church; of every Christian: total trust in God's plan, and total obedience; total commitment to God's plan.

### Reflection

*My understanding of Jesus is based on the new paradigm that shapes my life. This is my way of rethinking the mystery that makes me a Christian and that gives meaning to my life. It would be naive to think that Christianity will easily embrace this new thinking. On the other hand, is the exodus from the Church in the Western world perhaps a sign that traditional faith does not pull anymore?*

*Looking at the future, the community of those who follow Jesus will need to accept to be united in diversity. The uniformity envisaged in the past is both illusory and oppressive.*

## 2. The Beginning of the Journey

I began this journey of faith as a missionary in PNG in a newly opened area of the South Simbu.<sup>12</sup> It was the encounter with these people who wanted to become Christians that challenged me to reflect on my own faith, to question some of our Christian traditions, to go new missionary ways. Their key mythological figure, the Dema,<sup>13</sup> died to give them the possibility to acquire what was still missing in creation. That's how they had perceived God's revelation as planters. What a vision: a Saviour who dies not to atone for the sins of the world, but to bring creation-in-evolution to its goal—to the full life.

As a bush missionary, I subscribed to several theological and mis-siological publications, but the support I received was only indirect, in the sense that sometimes the authors confirmed ideas that I had already developed. My academic preparation in social and religious sciences, on the other hand, positively helped me in challenging my Christian traditions and in beginning this journey of faith. I was alone and going against my previously understood Christian traditions.

<sup>12</sup> Ennio Mantovani, *Sent to Baptize or what? Letters from Papua New Guinea 1962-1977*, Ballan, VIC: Modotti Press, Connor Court Publishing 2011; Id., *Mission: Collision or Dialogical Encounter? A Chronicle of St. Paul's Parish, Yobai, Papua New Guinea*, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 2011; Id., *The Dema and the Christ*.

<sup>13</sup> See: id., *The Dema and the Christ*, Chapter 17: The Dema Complex and the Christ Event.

My life among the people and the growing knowledge of their mythology convinced me that the churches completely misunderstood both their culture and religion, and even St. Paul, in his first chapter to the Romans, either did not consider the religion of the people among whom I was a missionary, or, worse still, was talking out of cultural bias towards the gentiles.

The journey that I began in PNG is continuing and now I feel it is time to look back and see where I stand. As stated at the beginning, I do not write a theological treatise, based on thorough and extensive library research, but I simply present the journey of a missionary who *in dialogue with other cultures and religions* has deepened his faith in the eternal Love and keeps doing so in the encounter with the Western world.

### ***3. Change of Paradigm***

I am convinced that we are witnessing a paradigm change moving away from the biblico-theistic paradigm towards one based on evolution.

Change of paradigm does not mean abandoning one's faith in God's love and care, in God's justice and mercy, in the church and her sacraments. It means rethinking one's faith in the light of the insights of the new paradigm. It means strengthening one's faith, expressing it in terms of our present culture, and integrating it into our present daily life. *It is an aspect of the on-going process of inculturation.*

#### *3.1 Process of Secularisation*

The change of paradigm did not come overnight. In my opinion, it was helped by the process of secularisation, by the coming of age of modern man and of sciences. Sciences claimed independence from the Bible. Galileo had to accept the verdict of the Bible but his "*eppur si muove*" ("and yet it does move") shows the beginning of this process of secularisation.

Modern people defend their right to freely use their own intelligence to judge. In secularism the process progresses and one doubts or even denies the supernatural. In my opinion, people often do not deny God, but only the God of creationism; the God they learned about in childhood.

### 3.2 Evolution

With Darwin we witness the beginning of present-day theory of evolution. As is often the case, the first reaction of the then-understood Christian tradition was to deny and condemn the theory as contrary to the faith in a creator God, who created out of love.

Eventually the churches accepted the evolutionistic theory but with reservations. A well-known one is the *Intelligent Design* theory, namely that the universe shows such a regularity and complexity that it suggests that it might have been designed this way by the Creator. The *aspect of randomness*, which is basic for Darwin's theory, is being denied.

The official position of the Catholic Church is that expressed by Pope John Paul II who states that evolutionism is more than just a simple theory and we need to take it seriously.

Today, more than a half-century after the appearance of that encyclical (*Humani Generis* of Pius XII), some new findings lead us toward the recognition of evolution as more than a hypothesis. In fact it is remarkable that this theory has had progressively greater influence on the spirit of researchers, following a series of discoveries in different scholarly disciplines. The convergence in the results of these independent studies, which was neither planned nor sought, constitutes in itself a significant argument in favour of the theory (#4).

The Pope defends, however, the position that the soul is directly created by God:

Pius XII underlined the essential point: if the origin of the human body comes through living matter which existed previously, the spiritual soul is created directly by God (#5).<sup>14</sup>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* goes further defending the historicity of monogenesis, of Adam and Eve and of the original sin that Christ came to atone for.

The account of the Fall in *Genesis* 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place *at the beginning of the history of man* [italics in the original]. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that

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<sup>14</sup> Message delivered to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 22 October 1996.

the whole of human history is marked by the original fault committed by our first parents.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.3 *The Paradigm of Evolution*

Creation by evolution shows the greatness of God to a mindboggling point. The on-going evolution shows the potential God had given at the beginning and that billions of years later continues to come to fruition; the breakthroughs in modern medicine show a Love, that while respecting the dignity of creation, while respecting human liberty, cares for God's children in ways that just a few years ago we could not even imagine. A God, who intervenes when something goes wrong in history, might be almighty, but a God who at the beginning gave the potential for creatures to help themselves, is beyond imagination; it is awe-inspiring.<sup>16</sup> To know that we are the loved ones of that Creator is what gives me—and I hope not only me—my deepest identity and my greatest security and peace.

Of course, there is evil, of course there is abuse of the potential; given the respect God has for God's creation and for human liberty, it has to be expected. The fact that after billions of years, in spite of unimaginable cataclysms and in spite of the randomness of evolution, creation still exists; this is another sign of the greatness of the One who created by giving the potential to existence, and the drive to survive.

#### **Reflection**

*Evolution brings for me a change of paradigm. For me as a Christian believer, evolutionism shows in a clear way the cultural, hence limited, nature of biblical creationism. The new paradigm helps me to rethink God as Love who creates by giving the potential to creation to evolve towards life, consciousness, to the discovery of the laws of nature and of biological life, the capacity to manipulate these laws, making possible not only their destructive power but also their positive use, for instance, in medicine.*

*I believe, as St Paul in the letter to the Romans states, that it is in creation that we can discover the Creator:*

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<sup>15</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1994, n° 390.

<sup>16</sup> If humankind had invested human intelligence and economic funds in medical research and technology instead of weaponry, medicine might have been much further in its achievements.

*What can be known about God is perfectly plain to them, since God has made it plain to them: ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things (Rom 1:19-20).*

*Creation is revelation. As already stated, revelation can be perceived only through the tinted eyeglasses of one's culture.* Evolution and modern sciences are an integral part of my culture today and it is there that I experience and need to keep experiencing God's love and care.

### *3.4 Evolution and My Faith*

Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel are basic myths not only for our faith but also for our social and political life, revealing our relationships to God and to one another. There is a tendency in us not to trust in God and this necessarily forces us to care for ourselves.<sup>17</sup> The survival instinct leads us to put our wellbeing at the centre and to use everything and everybody to suit that purpose. Trust in God and self-centeredness stand in inverse proportion to each other. The more trust in God the less egoism and vice versa.

This is why Jesus, given his trust in the Father, could become the "Man for others" and also why he began his ministry by calling for *metánoia*, for a radical change from the no trust in God to trust. That trust would free the person to care for the others, for the poor and the needy. This altruism is not something a ritual can give; only continuous efforts and prayer can help us to grow in it.

All the socio-political programmes, which put the cause of evil in society down to economic or political causes, are bound to fail. They base their cure on the wrong diagnosis.

The biblical writer of Genesis who recorded the creation myths and those of the fall, wanted to highlight the undeserved love that created us; he also wanted to defend that love from the possible accusations of having created evil as well, hence the stress on human sin as the cause of all the evils. *Sin, that is written so large in the Bible, is not essential to God's revelation.* Given the limited scientific knowledge of those days, it was a necessary cultural element to defend God's love for us. *Love is and remains the centre of God's revelation and our faith.* The original sin was a necessary accessory in the biblical time. It is not necessarily so for us today.

<sup>17</sup> See: Ennio Mantovani, *The Dema and the Christ*, Human Response to God's Revelation, 147-150.

As according to this new paradigm there was no original sin, there was no need for Christ to die for our sins. The death of Christ is not a sacrifice in the sense of reparation given to God for our sins. As already mentioned, biblical creationistic theism needed human sin to safeguard God's love and perfection. Evolutionism can explain evil in other ways.

Already the Book of Wisdom 2:12-22 describes how the Just had to die, not to take sin away, but because of his challenging teaching and life.

Duns Scotus had already defended the thesis that Incarnation was not a necessary correction of the original divine plan of creation but an integral part of it. His thesis was never condemned by the church.

If the death of Christ is not a sacrifice in the classical sense, there is no need of a priesthood in the church, and therefore of priests, but only of "shepherds" to guide the flock.

When the document on the laity appeared during Vatican II many a priest was challenged or even lost his identity as I witnessed in PNG. He had to step down from the pedestal and share his responsibilities with all the Christians. The document states:

For by its very nature the Christian vocation is also a vocation to the apostolate (AA 2).

The laity derive the right and duty with respect to the apostolate from the union with Christ their head. Incorporated into Christ's mystical body through baptism and strengthened through confirmation, *they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself* (AA 3). [My emphasis]<sup>18</sup>

I found a new identity as the one who reminded the baptised of their dignity and responsibility, who in the spirit of subsidiarity challenged them to go as far as their gifts allowed them and in solidarity supported them when in need. I saw my role in creating pastoral structures that would allow the lay ministries to function and that supported them. I never doubted my vocation. I still preside at the Eucharist, though I would prefer to do it around a table—which remains very problematic given the big congregations—but my identity has been enriched, my responsibility has grown and I feel very much at home as the leader of the ministers of the local missionary community.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott, SJ, New York: The America Press 1966.

The Eucharist is then not a sacrifice presided over by a priest on an altar in this new paradigm but should be a meal around a table. It is the memorial of the last meal of Jesus with his friends before he died because he stood up for the poor and marginalized. He showed us the way how to live and how far one should go. He freely died for our salvation.

The instinct of self-preservation, as history shows, justifies violence; more yet, it helps to make violence the way to survival and security. On the other hand, God respects human freedom and hence, God cannot manipulate humankind. If God wanted to save humankind, God needed to convince it to freely change its way of thinking. It is here that I see the role of Jesus Christ, who opened up completely to God's offer of God-self, who became God with us. He lived only for God's kingdom; he set in motion a movement of *metánoia*, going to the cause of present-day evils, to the lack of trust in God that opens the way for egoism, for all the aspects of the fight for survival.

The church is the community of those who continue this mission of Christ, who accepted to live his ideal, as healthy cells that help from within to change the human family, which is sick with consumerism and egoism, with hatred and violence.<sup>19</sup>

The sacraments are the official rituals of the church, which, on the one hand, express our consent to the invitation to continue the mission of Christ, to collaborate with him in the healing of human society and, on the other hand, pledge the needed help by the Spirit.

### Reflection

*This faith puts me at odds with traditional Christianity, which is based on creationistic theism. Will Christianity be able to accept the change? I am sure that the Spirit is working towards the deeper understanding of the eternal Love made possible by the new paradigm. Believers like me might share their journey, as a personal one, theologically poorly expressed, but it might enable others to reflect on or begin a journey of faith in the world we live in.*

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<sup>19</sup> Christ called for co-workers and we Christians are those who heard that call and accepted it. It makes us different but not superior. We have a special role among God's children, among the various religions. We invite them to work together for peace as John Paul II did at Assisi, the home of St. Francis.

## 4. Science, Gaps and Faith

### 4.1 Gaps

The new paradigm is based on testable sciences but there are many realities that defy scientific testing. There are gaps in our knowledge.

Sciences keep advancing at a rapid pace in the knowledge of matter and life and in the application of this progress to technology. Psychology has made great progress in the field of the human psyche. However, there are many very important realities that escape our present testing techniques. It is the field of human relationships like love, friendship, hatred, etc. These relationships can release unbelievable energies. We see their effects when they enter into action but the realities that caused them are still rather mysterious. We know the organs that are involved, but these realities transcend them.

We experience the power of love in our daily life, moving us to action, giving us direction, preventing us from taking certain decisions. In a way, often without us being aware of it, it limits our freedom but we gladly accept it. God is love and respects human freedom; however, what can the eternal Love achieve in our daily life while fully respecting our freedom?

There are healings that science cannot explain as yet. Are the laws of nature being bent, or are we facing the mystery of the energies released by relationships? Are the released energies affecting only the human psyche or can they influence the human body as well? Fix a broken bone? Faith is a relationship. When Jesus says “your faith has healed you” is it just a way of talking or is he indicating a source of energy we do not know much about?

It is a fact that there are people who possess healing powers. I am sure of one such person in PNG whom I checked out with regard to the healing he performed.<sup>20</sup> Jesus was such a person. He possessed healing powers. According to my experience in PNG the one who has the power to heal can harm as well. Is this the only type of power that humans possess?

### 3.2 Spirit

God who is love will do everything to prevent evil from harming God’s children. It also remains a fact that God respects the dignity of God’s creation, especially our human free will; God does not manipu-

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<sup>20</sup> Ennio Mantovani, *The Dema and the Christ*, 214-219.



late our human will or the laws of nature. However, given our basic ignorance of what is spiritual, especially of what belongs to the field of human relationships, one cannot exclude happenings that look miraculous, that seem to break what we regard as the laws of nature; however, they might be caused by the energies released by divine and human relationships. They might be “natural” after all.

### **Reflection**

*My journey is based on tested sciences; however, I am fully aware of my limited knowledge of these sciences and of the gaps in our present sciences. However, I prefer the insecurity of these tentative steps to ignoring the revelation coming from the world around me. The Catholic Church has a mixed record in dealing with sciences. The Spirit has been active not only in the past, in what we respect as our Tradition. The Spirit is being active in the present as well. We should dare to see and to follow the Spirit “leading us towards the full truth” (Jn 16:13) by using the insights of the new paradigm. We are on a journey towards the full truth; we do not have it as yet.*

### **Conclusion**

Revelation takes place through creation as we cultural beings experience it. The core of that revelation is the eternal Love. The expression of that experience and the response to it, namely the various religions, are cultural, hence they vary greatly.

We need to accept and respect this diversity engaging in dialogue for a mutual deepening of our relationship to the Mystery. I as a Christian am not superior to my brothers and sisters of other faiths.

As a Christian, however, I am different because I have accepted to continue the mission of Christ, living it as a witness, inviting our brothers and sisters of other religions and all the people of good will to work together for non-violence, for dialogue, for forgiveness, for altruism, caring for the poor and marginalized in our societies today.

The goal of creation-in-evolution for all children of God is to be eternally united with the Love that gave us the potential to be, to perceive and to respond to that Love. Our life is a journey towards the union with the eternal Love.

**ABSTRACTS**

Im Rückblick auf sein Missionarsleben untersucht der Autor einige der Hauptentwicklungen auf dem Gebiet der Wissenschaften und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Theologie. Der Wechsel von Europa in die Welt Papua-Neuguineas und später weiter nach Australien verlangte von ihm jeweils, seine Sichtweisen zu überprüfen. Diese Reflexion eines Glaubensweges dreht sich um theologische Begriffe wie Inkarnation, Heil, Sünde und Liebe sowie um die Begriffe Wissenschaft, Paradigmen, Evolution und Säkularisation und wie sie sich gegenseitig beeinflussen.

Revisando su vida de misionero, el autor discute algunos de los más importantes desarrollos en el mundo de las ciencias y después de la teología. Cambiar de Europa al mundo de Papúa Nueva Guinea y más adelante hacia Australia lo obligaban a revisar sus perspectivas. Esta reflexión sobre su camino de fe gira en torno a las concepciones teológicas como encarnación, redención, pecado y amor al igual que sobre las ideas de ciencia, paradigmas, evolución y secularización y sus mutuas influencias.

Dans un regard rétrospectif sur sa vie missionnaire, l'auteur prend acte de quelques développements majeurs dans le monde des sciences et donc en théologie. Le passage de l'Europe au monde de la Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée puis en Australie l'a forcé à reconsidérer ses perspectives. Cette réflexion sur son itinéraire de foi tourne autour de conceptions théologiques telles que l'incarnation, la rédemption, le péché et l'amour ainsi que des notions de science, paradigme, évolution et sécularisation, avec leurs influences mutuelles.