

under the press of bureaucracy, who are bound to their living-places for their lifetime, without any hope for the decent pension, all of these are ready for changes – no matter in which direction. They are ready to hold onto any alternative...

...At about 6 p.m. new prisoners are brought to our floor. Cells opposite us fill up with 10 people each. We hear the cops talking – they are bringing prisoners to the third and fourth floors already. Riot policemen appear – they probably brought the arrested. They look into each cell – stone faces, empty eyes. They spend especially long time in front of the girls' cells. They take out their cell phones, take photos through the peep-holes in the door, send SMSes. We tighten our teeth and fists...

...The evening comes and the riot policemen are gone. The soup is

water with pieces of potatoes. The tea tastes the same as it did in the morning; I take a sip and spill it away... We calm down, the mood is slowly lightening. Prisoners in different cells begin to communicate by knocking. In one cell, guys begin to sing the N.R.M. (Independent Republic of Dream) song "Three Turtles" and the rest of cells clap their hands...

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...I begin to pack my things. I found a pink balloon, which by some miracle was not confiscated. We blow it up and throw it from one to another. The time runs unbelievably slowly and every minute is longer than the previous one. 18.10 – they come after me. Finally, I can breath fresh air! The cops in the new building, the cops in the old building, everyone asks the same

thing, "Will you go to the square again?" Though I fight the temptation to actually commit the crime I was sent to prison for 7 days for, the wish to be set free is stronger. They return my things and I tie up my shoelaces. Off we go! I haven't even checked if they returned everything. Checkpoint – passport – open doors – everything is calm and I am being met. Freedom!

EPILOGUE

These are just my personal observations. But everything which was written during these days, proves that today the regime in Belarus is not alive – it is a poorly animated corpse, which may fall into pieces at any moment. The only goal of the resistance movement now should be to prevent our country from drowning under a thick layer of pus when this corpse falls apart.

Miriam Diez BOSCH

Spain: The Ambivalence of a "Catholic" Country

Spain is a complex country that, from a popular perspective, easily fits into the category of a "Catholic place." It would be easy to state that Spain is a Catholic country, but this does not give us a complete picture. In reality, for many analysts, Spain is seen as a "modern and progressive country" in which Christian values and principles are no longer applied.

THE DIFFERENT FACES OF SPAIN

In a certain sense one could still claim that Spain is Catholic, but such a statement requires some clarifications. Spain's Catholicism is very different from, let's say, Italy's Catholicism. It is not a pan-Catholic society: you do not find the Crucifix all around. In Italy where I live, in my bank, my post office and my favourite restaurant, the Crucifix is always there on the

wall. In Spain, people do not go to mass on Sundays as they used to do. There is still a sharp feeling against clerics, as seen in the existence of "comecuras," literally meaning "someone who eats clerics."

The Church in Spain is forced to dialogue, and this dialogue is not always balsamic. The Church has been accused of being a factor in the retarded modernisation of the country. It has also been connected historically as a collaborator with Francisco FRANCO's dictatorship, which ended in 1975.

Popular Catholic culture—clearly Marian and devoted—continues to be present in society, but not in the same capillary way it used to be. Some of the traditional religious feasts have more cultural value than religious significance.

From a political perspective, Spain has special agreements with the Holy See, the so-called

"Acuerdos," that since 1979 have regulated the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Spanish government. All Spanish governments have to deal with this reality, even though it is no secret that the present administration does not approve of the resulting "privileged" status of the Church. But still, the "Acuerdos" are treaties to be respected.

Having said this, I would like to try to explain some of the concerns of the intricate situation of Church-State relationships in today's Spain. My aim is to present some issues that can help explain the current relationship between the Church and the government that, at this moment, is in socialist hands of Mr. José Luis Rodríguez ZAPATERO.

CATHOLIC POWER?

Even though the common back-ground of the population in Spain is



Catholic and the “Catholic power” and influence is high in some aspects of daily life, the values of the Gospel are not the main criteria for the nation. Faith is seen by most politicians as something to be kept in private. In this atmosphere, the growing awareness of other Christian denominations and other religions—that also have institutional relations with the State since 1992—is helping to balance this trend. Faiths are made legitimate in the public sphere and religions create alliances to defend their human values. It is easy to see initiatives involving different religious traditions uniting to defend the immigrants, national conferences about the women’s role in society and religion, or other kinds of activities (prayers for AIDS victims, conferences on environmental issues, symposia on human rights, etc.).

Despite these actions, however, something still prevents the Church’s message from spreading, and in Spain, the “Church” refers to the Catholic Church. When I speak about other Christian denominations, I address them as “Churches” in a plural sense.

The Spanish Catholic Church is not able to attract faithful youth, in part because its organisation is still very clerical. Bishops show their unity of opinions, but at the same time they give evidence of their inner tensions. Some defend the “unity of Spain” as a “moral good.” Others, especially from the autonomous regions such as Catalonia and the Basque region, differ from this opinion. In addition, there is still a lack of confidence in lay ministries, a tendency that is being corrected by a significant number of associations and civil foundations which, by organising themselves, are mobilising the civil society from a Catholic perspective.

Even though Spain has made huge efforts over the past forty years to modernise and democratise, the Church seems to follow from a long

distance, with a slow perception of the need to broaden their view about the involvement of lay people in their activities.

TERRORISM

Spain suffers under the huge problem of the ETA’s terrorism. In December 2006, this terrorist group, which seeks to obtain by force the independence of the Basque Country, killed two immigrants from Ecuador outside of the Madrid Airport. When talking about this tragedy, the head of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Ricardo Blázquez, publicly prayed for a real peace in Spain. He suggested that threats and terrorism stop, but the terrorist group ETA is not willing to adopt a ceasefire.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference has issued a large number of statements against all types of terrorism. There is a debate, however, among the Catholics themselves about the way to treat the problem: dialogue at all prices? Should concessions be given to prisoners, such as placing them together and nearer to their homes in order to allow their families to see them? The different Catholic groups vary in their opinions and have different views on this issue also. Overall, however, it is positive that it is possible to face a global problem at the level of faith communities and not only from political and somehow often radical views. Here the roles of new movements such as Saint Egidio are very important.

MUSLIMS, A NEW REALITY?

In Spain, Roman Catholicism has been, for centuries, one of the most central factors shaping the society. Names, cultural practices, and most of all language and ideas were forged in a Catholic cultural environment. But now things are changing. The proximity with Africa—only 14 kilometres away—has turned Spain into a natural

entrance point to Europe. Mobility is also higher. For this reason, immigration has become a resource and blessing for Spain, but at the same time, also a huge problem for the government and challenge for the Churches. Spain is not a country with a high percentage of Muslim citizens, but this does not change the reality that the Muslims in Spain want to live there: in Spain Muslim immigrants now reach to the fourth generation. Obviously, the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid did not help their process of integration. But generally speaking, most Muslims in Spain do not recognize the organisers of the terrorist attacks to be true “Muslims”.

We must remember that Muslims invaded Spain in the VIIth century, and for some newcomers, Spain is still a place to re-conquer. A governmental survey from November 2006 concluded that Muslims in Spain are liberal, open and satisfied with their place in the society. This picture of an open Islamic community is backed by figures: 80% of Muslims in Spain believe that there is no problem in being Muslim and Spanish at the same time, and 83% encounter no problems while practicing their religion.

THE MISSION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SPAIN

One of the main goals of Roman Catholicism in Spain could be to make a serious contribution to the pacification of the country, particularly with respect to the terrorist problem. The Church alone cannot solve the problem but it could propose a tone and a style of doing so. Very often the Church’s language, style and propositions have been too hard: a smooth, calm and serene language might help to diminish tension. This is not easy, since the Spanish character is normally “black” or “white,” and is

Suggested reading

BRASSLOFF Audrey, *Religion and politics in Spain: the Spanish church in transition, 1962-96*. New York 1998.

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VIDAL FERNÁNDEZ Fernando, GONZÁLEZ-CARVAJAL Luis, *Medios de comunicación y religión en España. Una investigación sobre el estado de la comunicación mediática Iglesia-sociedad*. Boadilla del Monte 2005.

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not used to nuances or diplomatic ways of thinking and speaking.

The “Catholic” Spain has to learn to live in a pluralistic society where other Christians are raising—legitimately enough—their voice, and their voice is not always in the line of the Roman Catholic Church. There are also a growing number of people who are not interested in Church issues at all. Dialogue is urgent with non-believers, especially with the younger generations. Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue appear to be other paths that favour the co-operation of Church and State as partners: indeed, the present Government is willing to listen to different religions. It is an opportunity that

should not be missed. The Alliance of Civilizations launched by the United Nations was first proposed by the Spanish Prime Minister and this clearly reveals that there is a possibility to work in this direction. Dialogue with Islam, apart from the daily co-operation at the local level, has become stronger thanks to the work of *Caritas* and other Christian NGOs working with Muslim immigrants, especially in the Canary Islands and in the border areas of the Mediterranean.

The internal interests of the Roman Catholic Church—such as education, economic, family and bioethical issues—seem to follow a good path of negotiation with the Government. If the Catholic Bishops

were able to involve lay people and also non-believers in their pro-life campaigns, their struggle against poverty and in other activities, their actions may be more successful. In a global situation of alliances and co-operation, the Catholic Church in Spain knows that she needs to work together with the civil society, with the State and also with people who believe themselves to be far from God, faith and Church structures.

In this lies a big challenge which concerns not only the bishops but the whole community of faithful. Dialogue and co-operation must replace the ancient attitudes of condemnation or ignorance. This is not just a human duty—it is also an Evangelical precept.

Jovanie Serge TANKEU KEUSSEU

Youth - Empire: Our Crisis... Our Mission!

“We are not orphans because we have lost father and mother, but because we have lost hope.” This African saying brings us to cruel consideration of our actions as youth, and especially as Christians, confronted with the decisive question of the Empire. Thinking about empire today implies presenting the world forces and dynamics that are ruling the current practices in our societies and their prospects for the future. This crude reality in our societies results in happiness for the minority at the expenses of the miserable majority.

The present reflection originates from my formal and informal exchanges as youth leader of the Protestant University Chaplaincy network of Cameroon and from international exchange meetings with other youth from Africa and abroad. Within this purview, we will glance at our conscious or unconscious complicities with the ruling order, but above all, we will make proposals likely to transform our state of passivity into mission.

OUR CRIMES

A careful glance at the general situation worldwide as a whole and that of Africa in particular makes it difficult not to picture the despicable state of women and men, as well as the increasingly rapid growth of misery in some of our countries.

1. OUR POLITICAL MISTAKES

The international geopolitics is seemingly trying to convince us that if we, as Africans, want the advent of a peaceful planet, then we are not going the right way about it. This same reality leads us to think that fighting for energy resources (gas, oil, gold, diamond, copper, etc.) is sufficient and the ultimate security for the future of nations.

According to figures, the battle for an African policy for Africa and Africans seems to be lost. Rebel movements are present here and there, from the north to the south and from the east to the west, always fiercer, and always trying to grab power only to reproduce

the same rule as their predecessors. Powerful multinationals, “ex-metropolis” in connection with some of our fathers, mothers, grand-fathers and grand-mothers, are still using our divisions, tribes, and religious denominations as means to monopolise the power, crush resistance and interposition forces. We are all conscious of the fact that the West is using our internal potentialities and wealth to position their “tramps” at the helm of our states and their international “experts” at the bedside of our governments’ structures.

The infernal cycle of power seizing through arms in Chad, as from the beginning of the 1980s, testifies of the way our leaders and their barons understand the ruling in Africa. Nowadays again, instead of figuring out deep questions within themselves as concerns the source of their disagreement and strife, they spend most of their time travelling abroad to explain why they are still holding the power or how they intend to rule once home. Yet, so far in the reality, our leaders’

