

## *After Recife: The Province of Southern Italy reflects during a Course of Ongoing Formation*

Savino Cannone, scj

- 1 At Sant'Antonio Abate (Naples) from the 8th to the 11th of October 2001, the Dehonians of the South asked themselves: How has the Christian message been enculturated into Southern Italy? The course of ongoing formation dealt with taking the theme of globalization into serious consideration, endeavoring to emphasize the technical aspects of the phenomenon, and identifying possible means of getting out. Approximately 30 of the 58 brethren who attended the course became the protagonists.
- 2 The preparation was entrusted to the commission of Justice and Peace. They were given the task of putting into action what the last General Conference, which took place in Recife (Brazil) - on the theme "Economics and the Kingdom of God" - had requested of the individual religious Provinces.

### FROM *DUC IN ALTUM*

- 3 The theme of the course, proposed by this writer and immediately accepted by the commission for Justice and Peace, aimed to tackle globalization starting from the viewpoint of faith. The Gospel text which inspired the reflection is that which contains the *Duc in altum* (Cf. Lk 5:1-11). Fr. Edoardo Scognamiglio, O.F.M. Monastery, professor at the Southern Italy Pontifical Faculty of Theology at Naples, desired to place the centrality of the text not on the *Duc in altum* but on the Primacy of Listening to the Word of God: a listening which becomes possibility, which opens to a future of hope after an evident experience of failure on the part of Simon and his friends. "At your command" is Peter's answer and, in the same way, this can

become the response of every man of our current generation. After that fateful September 11, 2001 - said the speaker - our way of perceiving God has also changed, as well as that of living our religious experience. The meeting which is the advent of God into our history is no longer a necessity, it is now a possibility.

**4** On the second day we had a difference of opinion of the technical aspects of globalization, from the point of view of faith and from the point of view which the Gospel suggested. The report of Professor Rosario Sommella of the Istituto Universitario Orientale, in Naples, was titled 'The Geography of Globalization' and delved deeply into the historical, geo-political, economical, social and ethno-cultural aspects of the phenomenon. The question at the beginning was: "Is globalization recent or has it existed for a long time?"

**5** Some people were surprised when the professor's thesis showed the remote origins of the phenomenon. While it is true that the various older powers, such as the British, were already living a form of globalization, the Second World War had taken the first real step towards globalization. What happened, in fact, was the end of colonialism, the beginning of America's superpower and other events of that nature. Shortly afterwards there was the birth of GATT, with its intention of eliminating the barriers of international trade.

**6** From the geo-political point of view the world was divided into two poles: communists on one side and liberals on the other. But approximately ten years ago this bipolarity disappeared. By an irony of fate the Russians became the first allies of the U.S.A. Then Post-Fordism, which proposed a reduction of working hours and an increase in salaries, progressed through the economic environment; but from the social point of view homologation became the dominant process. After the crisis of Fordism things moved towards the recognition of differences and towards open competition: I will take what I have that is different and try to sell it on the market.

**7** But where does the Church place itself regarding all this? According to Scognamigno the Church does not have an official ruling but bases its practice on principles, on solidarity, on justice and on the dignity of man. The Church must therefore become, in the opinion of some brethren, a critical conscience in our society. Since the fact that the Church itself lives within the world makes it so that the effects of what is happening involve it to the full, it must seek to create an opinion in the younger masses and must face globalization from within. Sommella also draws attention to the effects of globalization and warns us to open our eyes in order to react against that cultural homologation which is currently making progress. Discernment of the dangerousness of this progress may be the key to understanding the

conflicts and the active resistance of peoples who come from cultures which are different from ours.

## THE SOCIAL ACTION OF THE RELIGIOUS IN SOUTHERN ITALY

**8** After this careful analysis of the problem, the essential question emerged loud and clear: “How is the Christian message being enculturated in Southern Italy?” A provocation was suggested by Professor Antonio Gentile, who teaches at the Naples School for Specialization in Clinical Psychology. His contribution, in fact, sought to delineate the presence of the religious in the social fabric of Southern Italy. He tackled the question from three points of view: knowledge of the territory, the religiosity of the clergy and their sensitivity. He emphasized that things cannot be put into prospective if one does not have sufficient knowledge of the territory. Unfortunately the South, historically speaking, has not had a great deal of attention paid to their territory. Here lies the challenge for a religious province: to work on obtaining a knowledge of and a sensitivity to the territory. In close connection with this comes the subject of religiosity. Contrary to what is commonly thought, often nostalgically, it is necessary to declare that the much declaimed popular religious feeling has come to an end. It is clear to all that what remains are the remnants of a holiness which are not congruent with true Christian thought. A divorce has been created between popular religious feeling and the Christian message. What can be done? First and foremost - answers Professor Gentile - one must become aware of the process of secularization present in our society. It is, however, fundamental to emphasize the fact that secularization in the North has been thought out, one need only think of the geographical area of the Northeast, whereas in the South it has been imposed. Genuine popular religious feeling, in fact, used to have a high quantity of information, which has today disappeared. The rediscovery of values is a must, but even more important is the rediscovery of the language through which the message can be communicated. Some religious have suggested the possibility of evaluating, in community, the act of preaching itself. In this way they hope to visualize their community as a participator in evangelization and as a promoter of languages which are more appropriate for those who are the receivers of the Christian message.

**9** The sensitivity of the clergy was the last point to be addressed. The clergy which has emerged is afraid and complaining. Most of the time it is paralyzed when faced with the complexity of the South. There is also another delicate problem: it seems that the clergy look down with disdain at the religious, perhaps from a lack of osmosis or because of the homologation of the parishes. The problem is not unimportant and arouses in the religious a careful reflection to discover the true causes of the phenomenon. One of the

authorities of the diocesan clergy, who is in charge of the ministry to the workers, liked to repeat with conviction: “I ask that the religious give a spirituality to social commitment, a backbone”. I think that it is in this aspect that we should seek our direction: seeking concrete ways to create paths to incarnate spirituality. In order to proclaim a Gospel of hope which is also capable of changing the social fabric, enculturation must, of necessity, start from a capacity to listen to people and from an interest in the real problems which beset the life of ordinary people. Enculturation is incarnation, it is “being in history with love” as the Ecclesiastical Conference of Palermo reminded us.

**10** This is the starting point of the reflection presented by Don Rocco D’Ambrosio, diocesan priest of Bari and Professor of Political Ethics at the Gregorian University and at the Theological Institute of Puglia at Molfetta. Since he is Director of the Office of Social Ministry of the dioceses of Bari, he spoke to us of making concrete the social action of the Italian Church in the South: the Policoro Project.

**11** This concept is born from the conviction that one must be in the world in order to convey a Gospel which is also an activity of salvation. It is a project which is based on the collaboration of the three CEI offices: the youth ministry, the workers’ ministry and Caritas. It is a project based on the creation of work by and for young people and concentrates on the evangelization of unemployed youth. It is a possibility offered to all, so that they may develop this same ministry attitude within the Church.

## BROADENING OUR HORIZONS OF THE WORLD

**12** The last stage, reached in the final day, was the meeting-witness of don Gino Battaglia, Associate Vicar of the parish of Santa Maria in Trastevere and member of the community of Sant’Egidio. He made the evangelical message even more positive by telling us what was happening in his own community. This community is present in over 60 countries and was born about 33 years ago. It is a movement of fraternity which embraces various communities and different ways of living one’s faith. He considers the essential support structure to be the united prayer of the community: an instrument of liberation from politicizing, from individualism, from resignation and from war. He has a special love for the poor, arising from the conviction that nobody is so poor that he is not able to help another person. He recognizes his life plan in the statement of Pope John XXIII: “The Church of all, and particularly of the poor”. He moves on various fronts, from ecumenism to interreligious dialogue and to dialogue between parties in conflict. He believes firmly in the value of evangelical simplicity, following the example of St. Francis of Assisi.

## FATHER DEHON: *DUC IN ALTUM*

**13** “At your command I will lower the nets” is Peter’s response and it becomes the response of every disciple who follows the Lord. We Dehonians too, children of the same Catholic Church, must perform this great act of trust and hope. We must trust in the Lord of history and hope for a future of liberation”. In this way, approximately a century ago, Fr. Dehon concluded his first Roman discourse, entitled ‘The Current and Social Economic Crisis in France and in Europe’.

**14** “Faced with the present wretchedness, which exists for men without faith, without courage and without generosity, all that remains is discouragement and pessimism; while the courageous, the noble of soul, the apostles, take action. “When a ship is in danger in sight of the port, the weak and fearful helmsmen prays, weeps, complains; the courageous man, without making a show of it, runs to the sea to save them. This is simply what is natural for him.

**15** “Let us run to save people... with action and legal means. But let us not forget that the savior pilot is Peter. Let us listen to him and follow him; it is he who will show us the way to salvation. “At the Lake of Gennesaret Jesus saw two boats in front of Him, but He boarded Peter’s and from Peter’s boat He taught: it is from this boat that truth comes.

**16** “And after He had finished speaking, Jesus said to Peter: *Duc in altum...* and to the other apostles He said: ‘And you, lower your nets for a catch’. “It is Peter who captains the boat: the others throw in the nets where Peter directs them. A marvelous symbol! “Let us be directed: let us throw in the nets and the catch will be good...”.

**17** May our founder illuminate our path, may he fill us with zeal and drive us to “come out of our sacristies”, not to homologate ourselves with the world, but to bring it that message of hope which we are the first to desire, to receive and to live.

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*Fr. Savino Cannone, S.C.J., is a Dehonian religious of the Southern Italian Province. He has been a priest since September 2000 and is part of the community of the International College, working towards a diploma at the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome. He is a member of the Commission for Justice and Peace of his own religious Province and has participated in the organizing of the ongoing formation which was held at the Sant’Antonio Abate (Naples) after Recife.*

*(Translated from the Italian by Mrs. Frances Nacman)*