

THE STUDENTS AT THE XXIst CENTURY

(Joel 2: 28-29 and 1Timothy 4:11-16)

The 21st century pictures itself as a sum of changes, scientific and technological progress, and social sciences. All these evolutions and revolutions brought as many solutions as problems to the man, the society and the environment. Therefore, the violence, wars, selfishness, injustices, desertification, threatening climatic changes and other dangers expose the human lives to the destruction. They mortgage the future of the humanity as well as the whole creation.

Listening to the word of God and moved by the Spirit of God, the Christians realise that the threats that press on our world come from the fact that humans moved away from God's project toward his creation. It is therefore necessary to act in order to bring back men and women to work for justice, peace, respect of human rights and of peoples, fight against the big curses that threaten the humankind, animal, and plant species. They can and are called to use the sciences of all kind to solve the problems in life, achieve more just and harmonious relations between men and between peoples, and seek for the protection of the environment.

We take into account the fact that the students are our sons and daughters and are indeed in big number very young. We intend to see how in action, as Christians for a world set according to God's heart, we will be able to allocate more space to listen to them, to justify and encourage their involvement in the research and the suggestions of appropriate answers to the problems and the change of our world. Here the objective will be to move from the adage according which: «**Youngsters must wait for tomorrow so as to act in their world** » to «**With the young, let's live today and prepare the world of tomorrow together**».

In order to reach this objective, we will interrogate the Bible on the room the young have and their prophetic ministry before seeing how the young, particularly the students, can become the prophets of the 21st century. It is from Africa that we will verify how the African student, along with the others, can get involved in the construction and the reconstruction of a world to all and for all.

I–GOD'S SPIRIT TO ALL

The world, creation of God, is neither a chance nor an accident. In the beginning, when everything is still chaos, God covers the world with his Spirit. At the centre of his creation, God places the man to manage it while cultivating and preserving it. In spite of the man's failure, God promises to pour out his Spirit on all human beings. He will do it in a more manifest manner in Christ, Word of God that became human being. By this one, all Christians, including the students, will receive the Spirit for working with God in the restoration of his creation.

1 - From particular to togetherness

Until the time of the prophet Joel, God's spirit was reserved to some privileged people that God chose. They were invested then by God as his spokesmen and his envoys to transmit his message to a person or to a group of people or to the whole people of the alliance. They could also become intercessors as Moses (Exodus 10 :19-20); intermediates as Abraham (Genesis 18 :22-32); Samuel (1Samuel 7 :5-12); defenders and priors for the small remaining of the faithful to God (Amos 7 :2-5); (Esaïe 37 :3-4), exposers of cults to the idols, formalists and hypocrites (Amos 8.5; Esaïe 1 :12-17& 58 :1-8).

The message that the prophet Joel proclaimed is a promise that God will turn into reality in the future. It will become efficient at the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2.17). For sure it is necessary to highlight that it's the same Spirit poured out on the Messiah (Esaïe 11:2-10). Indeed, Jesus promised to all his disciples to send them this Spirit so as to make them his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8; 2:1-12). There is then a need to understand that it is given to everyone who waits for it and especially to those who believe, recognize, accept, and confess Christ as their Saviour, the one by whom God brings a regenerative transformation in our world. The young are part of those this Spirit is promised to.

2 - GOD'S SPIRIT ON THE SONS AND GIRLS

Receiving the Holy Spirit was never intended to selfish ends, but for serving God. It is always in view of a responsibility, a mission that God entrusts to someone on whom this spirit is poured out. The Sons and Girls of the people of Israel, people of the alliance with God, will receive God's Spirit and will become prophets.

The precision «Your Sons » and «Your Daughters» confirms God's will to have all social categories involved in his mission. He doesn't make any discrimination. Nor does he disqualify or exclude anyone because of his/her gender or his/her age. But he brings each person to be responsible in what s/he is and with what s/he has, say man, woman, boy and girl. To the old as well as youngster, God gives them the mission to prophesy.

God had already confided such a service to certain young people like Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-21) and Jeremiah. The latter describes the circumstances of his vocation in these terms : **« The word of the Lord came to me, saying: before I formed you in your mother's womb, I knew you and before you were born, I had set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. "Ah! Eternal Lord," I said, I don't know how to speak, because I am a child. But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am only a child,' because you must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me: "Now I have put my words into your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and**

kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, and to build and to plant. »¹

We have this young Jeremiah made responsible as an example of the mission of the young people as prophets. Every young can identify her/himself in a position of prophet:

- a) When he becomes aware that God knows him and moves him with His Spirit;
- b) When he knows that God is with him by his Spirit and help him in taking up the challenges by virtue «that he is child » or « that he does not know to speak » ;
- c) That he is sent to those people that God wants him to see and tell everything that God commanded him to say, and this, with insurance and serenity;
- d) His mission will consist in denouncing the evil, idolatry, corruptions and all kinds of ruptures of relationships of men and peoples with God, as well as the disharmony between the men or between the peoples and with the environment. He warns about consequences of these situations once men and peoples don't change their mentality and lifestyle by coming back to God. He **counsels** and **works** with those who listen to **God's call to repentance**. He **works with them** with regard to the **new project** meant for the man and the world with God.

But the one who will be the bringer of this Spirit and God's word in order for men to be saved and for the fundamental and ultimate transformation of our world in its relationship with God; this is Jesus Christ from God.

3 - JESUS BRINGER AND DISPENSATOR OF THE SPIRIT

Jesus says he is God's Word that became a human being, « *and lived among us, full of grace and truth, and we saw his glory, the glory of the one and only begotten Son who come from the Father* »². Word and man of God, Jesus identifies himself with the Messiah (the anointed from God) as the prophets had announced³. As the one who brings God's spirit, Jesus gives the programme of what he intends to do by and with this Spirit. He says: «*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to heal those with broken heart, to proclaim freedom to the captives and the recovery of the sight to the blinds, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim a year of the Lord's grace ... Today, this passage of the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*»⁴. We note that God's Spirit dwelling in Jesus pushes him to address a speech by proclaiming in words and actions the good news that allows men to renew their relationship with God, with themselves and with the others.

¹ - Jeremiah 1 :4-10

² - John 1:14

³ - See Is.61:1-3, cf. also Is.11:1-10

⁴ -Luke 4: 18-19, 21

He is sent by God:

- a) To take care of the offended and the frustrated in life ;
- b) To work for the deliverance of the victim or perpetrator prisoners who repent from violating the laws and structures of the sin that deprive them of the divine, human and social liberties ;
- c) To help men getting out of the blindness, the obscurity or the ignorance vis-à-vis the realities of the world, taking position in relation to the truth and having the knowledge that comes from God ;
- d) To work for the liberation of the oppressed ;
- e) To start a new era of forgiveness, debts cancellation, reconciliation, justice, recognition of the rights for all to participate in the construction and the management of a new world under the protection and guidance of God.

This Spirit of liberating word and action comes from God and reach out to all those who followed Jesus. The latter promises to send the spirit to them so that they may be animated by the same spirit in order for them not to be orphans, but rather his witnesses into the world: **« If you love me, you will obey my commandments. And me, I will ask the Father and he will give you another comforter, so that he stays with you for ever. He is the Spirit of truth that the world cannot receive, because it cannot see him or know him; but you, you know him, because he remains with you, and will be in you. I won't let you orphan; I will come back to you»**⁵. And after his resurrection and just before his ascension, he promises to his disciples: **«You will receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth»**⁶.

It is this Spirit that the disciples received at Pentecost, and which brings each one in the multitude that was gathered in Jerusalem to hear God's marvels, each in his/her mother language⁷. Peter finds in this event of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the accomplishment of Joel's prophecy of which we want to get the meaning today.

4 - THE CHRISTIANS AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD

With the Pentecost movement, God's Spirit comes and is poured to those who opened up themselves to Jesus, to his message, repented, and accepted him as their Lord and it is the one for their children (sons and daughters). To the question: **«Brothers, what shall we do?»** from those who followed the predication of the apostles, Peter replied:

⁵ - John 14:15-18

⁶ - Acts 1:8

⁷ - Acts 2:1-21

« Repent and each one of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, because the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, for all whom the Lord our God will call »⁸.

The Holy Spirit will thus come upon to all those who repented, were converted and baptized in the name of Christ and who live their faith and accomplish their mission of witness so as to allow their children and other persons and peoples to receive it also and to be moved by it.

The Spirit transforms, sanctifies, makes of those (men and women) that it touches God's children, those who don't live anymore according to the human nature, but according to the Spirit of God (Romans 8 :12-19). Mobilized, illuminated and controlled by the Spirit, any Christian, woman or man, girl or boy, old or young, unemployed person or worker, student or researcher, each shows his/her faith by his/her involvement in Christ's mission in the world. All are at work; each according to his/her given spiritual gifts. Paul makes it known to the Christians of Corinth: **« Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says: “Jesus be cursed!” And no one can say: “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.**

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit; diversity of ministry, but the same Lord; diversity of operation, but the same God operates in all people.

However, to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Indeed, to one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom ; to another, a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit ; to another the gift of healings by that one same Spirit ; to another, the prophesy ; to another, the discernment of the spirits ; to another, the diversity of tongues ; and still to another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, distributing them to each one, just as he determines »⁹.

The Christian students are part and parcel of all Christians who received from God the gift of his Spirit for the common good. As students, children of God, heirs of God and coheirs of Christ (cf. Romans 8:16-17), they are called to witness God's action wherever they are studying. They will do it in their language, according to their mood and with their own tools. Therefore, the students of the 21st century will be called to witness to their faith as Christians where they live, along with other Christians and for a world that should be heading in the direction of God's project.

⁸ - Acts 2:37-39

⁹ - I Corinthians 12:3-11

II - THE STUDENTS AT THE 21ST CENTURY

These will be Christian students among other students in general, i.e. the African Christian students in the future of Africa in particular. Our concern will consist in seeing that which they can do as prophets in Africa in order to allow this continent to actively participate in achieving God's project for the 21st century along with the other continents.

1 - THE CHRISTIAN STUDENTS AMONG THE OTHER STUDENTS

The student (he or she) is the one who is enrolled in the courses at a University or a college in respect of the regulation and the orientations of such an institution.

Studies generally consist in making some intellectual and practical efforts of observation, analysis, understanding, conception or experimentation in view of the certification of a given knowledge and the faculty to use the acquired skills, sciences and techniques. At this point, the Christian student is no different from all other students. He/She pursues the same courses, lives in the same worldview, the same researches and gets the same results as expected from all students.

What makes him/her different from others is the adjective «Christian» that adheres to him as a student and a human being.

In his relationship with God in Christ, a Christian student has a spiritual dimension of his being and in the finality of his studies as well as the results of his research. In his thought, reflection and practice, he integrates the idea according to which «*All is done for the glory of God; all depends on one's use*». The Christian student endeavours to be, to act as a Christian in what he/she does as student.

The adjective «Christian» that differentiates the Christian student from the non Christian can and must also become a link, a lamp that one can light, the salt for a good use, a puff of oxygen, a bell push, a passage and a possible meeting point between the Christian and the non Christian, the realm of God and the academic circle, the call to a dialogue between God and the student, God and the man, the man of God and the man of the science or of the technique.

By his/her presence in the academic circle, the Christian student can combine the Christian life and the knowledge of sciences, philosophy, technical and technological skills for a more just, more human, more interdependent world and for the safeguard of the creation. The Christian student doesn't have therefore to hang up his/her faith outside of the door before entering the research laboratory. Nor does he/she need to take the language of sciences for the language of faith, but rather to look for the motives and the finality of scientific and technical research for the welfare of living beings, for the good

of the meetings, exchanges and possible coexistence between the peoples, the social groups and the environment. In this regard, Christian students can play a prophet's role in the academic circle and bring this latter to become a lever of direction change. This means knowing how to pass from violence, wars, destructions and death to higher development, less misery and more life and happiness for all men, all peoples and all continents.

Living among and with the other students and the academic circle the Christian students in the 21st century can give new incentives and usages of the results from the research. The uplifting of the levels of knowledge for the scientific and technological attainments can also serve to a reorientation in the light of God's project that is geared towards a world of life, justice, peace as the book of Revelation describes it to us: **«And I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: now God's tabernacle is with mankind ! He will live with them and they shall be his people, and God Himself will be with them and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, and no more grief or crying or pain, because the old things have disappeared. »**¹⁰

With regard to God's project for a more just, more human, more interdependent and more respectful world for the creation, all students in the 21st century are challenged and maybe more so the African students.

2 - THE AFRICAN STUDENTS AND THE AFRICAN CHALLENGES

We spoke generally about the students and what they will ably do in the future of the world on a global level. Let's take here a concrete case, the one of Africa and its students. What can these do for the future of Africa in the world? After the Afro-alienation, the Afro-pessimism and the Afro-enthusiasm, it is necessary for us to talk about Africa and its students. This is all about seeing the students making Africa the motive, the object and the goal of studies concerning Africa and its challenges.

But how to do it when already most of African students don't even know why they go to the university or in colleges! On the other hand, for those who come to the end of their studies, they enlarge the ranks of the unemployed persons or emigrate to other continents. One can note that a big number of the African students behave as uprooted or strangers at home and very often the future of their people is not necessarily their preoccupations. A few years ago Achille MBEMBE made a report that remains a piece of actuality today in this 21st century: **«every year thousands of students are pushed to become dependent and foreign men to their own peoples and to the cultures they identify themselves to. The initiative and the creative liberty are absent from the fundamental assumptions of the pedagogy of the so-called African academic institutions. The life non-learning process that takes place through the African academic institutions puts the students in such situations that it becomes difficult to**

¹⁰ - Revelation 21:3-4

them to initiate their own means of subsistence and to cater for their existence regardless of any paternalism. In actual facts, dependent model fantasies channelled by the university limit the capacities of invention that could constitute some answers to the basic needs of Africa's people. Today the contribution of the university in the creation and invention of means of existence in Africa proves to be chancy. »¹¹

We realize that one of the biggest challenges that African students have to overcome in this 21st century is first of all their interest and love for Africa, the effort to know what her capacities are in order to know how to reach out for her needs and to participate in a responsible manner and with other shareholders to the future of our world.¹²

It is only at this level of knowledge that from her capacity Africa can itself be able to participate in a common march along with other continents and other peoples, and that Christian students can play their role as prophets in Africa.

3 - STUDENTS, PROPHETS IN AFRICA

The African Christian students tend to be and to work as the other African students. Many of them think that they are Christian by «**proxy**» and that Africa only exists as a «discovery» by the other peoples who can use her the way they want. And for those who happen to be Christian in Africa don't mind by virtue they are just «passing» on the earth. The prophet students in Africa are reminding Africans and other peoples that:

- a) God loved the world and gave his Son for the salvation of anyone who believes, including the Africans (cf. Jean 3.16) ;
- b) God gives us his Spirit so that we listen to his word in order to abide in him and Him in us. His Spirit and his word edify us and give us confidence. The Spirit moves us and give us courage to become the witnesses of Christ in Africa and in the world for the salvation that God offers to all nations, including the African nations (Acts 10 :34-43) ;
- c) In their confidence in God the Christian Africans can help other Africans in understanding that God loves Africa with the same love as the other peoples and has for her and her peoples « the plans for peace and no for misfortune, in order to give them hope and a future » (cf. Jeremiah 29 :11-13) ;

¹¹ - J.A. MBEMBE, Les jeunes et l'ordre politique en Afrique noire. (The young and the political order in black Africa). Ed. L'Harmattan, Paris, 1985. p.65

¹² - On challenges to Africa, see : AFRICAN UNION: Report on the millennium declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Toward an African Common Position - Executive Council, 7th ordinary session, Syrte (Lybie) 2005. /Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The South Commission: **Challenges in the South. Report of the South Commission**. Ed. Economica, 1990- Axelle KABOU : **What if Africa refused the development**. Ed. L'Harmattan, 1994. ; Anne – Cécile Robert : **Africa in help of the Occident** Ed. de l'Atelier, Paris

- d) It is with love in recognition to God for their salvation in Jesus-Christ that the African students, moved by the Spirit, will bring their lives and their studies to the service of the liberation, the education, the justice, the peace and all the sciences that will allow Africa to be heading in the direction of God's project and to participate in the quest for the solutions to the problems and challenges that our world is facing.

In order to fulfil their prophet's mission in Africa and in the world, the advices from the apostle Paul to the young Timothy can serve as a big help to the students of the 21st century: *«Indeed we struggle and work hard because we put our hope in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe. Declare these things and teach them. Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young; but set an example for the believers, in speech, in conduct, in charity, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to reading of the scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching. Don't neglect the gift that is in you, and that was given to you through prophecy with the imposition of the hands of the body of the elders. Practise these things and devote yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and your teaching closely; persevere in these things, because if you do, you will save both yourself and those who hear you. Don't rebuke an old man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat the young men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. »*¹³

III - WHAT CAN THE STUDENTS DO IN THE XXIST CENTURY?

We talked about the students in general and the Africans in particular. By focusing the attention on the African students we wanted to place the sons and girls of Africa in face of a first and crucial challenge to take up. It is about the challenge for Africans as the very first and last persons who are responsible of the Africa's future. Other peoples and continents can intercede before God and can bring aids to our continent and to our peoples. And they do it. But their prayers won't replace those that the Africans must themselves offer in their particular communion with God in their recognition and their preoccupations regarding their presence in the world and their involvement in the gradual change of the world.

Aware of the fact that along with other Christians they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, the African Christian students must be actively involved in the vision, the reflection, the research, the studies and the clarifications of all technical and technological sciences that can help Africa and the Africans themselves to take up in hands their destiny and their involvement in the gradual change of the world. They will be able, through their studies and research, to help us pass, as KAMANA says, *«from the*

¹³ - I Tim 4:10-5:1

passive social conscience to the creative conscience »¹⁴. They will be able to be the other students' facilitators and researchers who will involve themselves in making the «*declaration of the millennium on the millennium development goals (MDG)* »¹⁵, a project to achieve effectively in a way to eradicate the extreme poverty and the hunger, to reduce the sufferings of all kinds, to achieve the education and health for all, to promote the equality of genders and the equipping of women as far as the formation is concerned, to reduce the infantile mortality and so on.

Together with worldwide students, the African students should involve themselves in the studies, researches, answers and suggestions by which we will be able, as Peter LANARES tells us, to «face the worldwide disorder»¹⁶. This world disorder comes as a result of anguishes, pollutions, selfishness, moral and economic perversions, competitions in massive destruction arming, terrorism, and other threats to life, health and peace of individuals, peoples and our earth.

For our sons and our daughters to prophesy or to show new things to our young in the 21st century, on behalf of God, this consists in using all intellectual faculties, spiritual gifts, means of communication and possible legal instruments in order to denounce the deviations and the deadly or pernicious risks to which our epoch is dramatically exposed, to participate in search of alternatives within the perspectives of God's project, to counsel and educate in view of a culture of peace, justice, human and people rights, sustainable development of the beings and the environment. It also deals with seeking, studying and finding tools of training individuals and peoples to the culture of intercultural meetings in which the presence of the other person challenges me and prepare me to giving and receiving, and to the possible dialogue.¹⁷

The students in the 21st century will therefore be able to work with God towards a better world of life, the use of the skills and science to the benefit of the welfare for man and peoples in view of the awareness of dangers from possible perverse effects of a man's non reflexive action and the strengths as well as the opportunities of the services that the science offers to a world of life in a safe environment through a sustainable development.

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¹⁴ - KAMANA in For Life in Abundance. The experience of the international circle for promoting the creation (CIPCRE) Ed. CIPCRE.Faith and Action Collection, N° 1, Bafoussam 2002 P 171)

¹⁵ - African Union: Fundamental Document (Op cit.)

¹⁶ - Pierre LANARES : Facing the world disorder, Ed. IMA, Yaoundé – Cameroun and Ed. Life and Health, Dammanie Lèslys, France 1993

¹⁷ See Florence GIUST-DESPRAIRIES & BURHAND MÜLLER: Acquiring training in a context of intercultural meetings, Ed. Economica 1997. Lucette COLIN and BURKHAND MÜLLER : Pedagogy of intercultural meetings, Ed. Anthropos-Economica 1996. Philippe d'Iribarne, et al.: Cultures et Globalisation. Managing beyond the frontiers. Ed. du seuil, Paris VI^e, 1998.