

### CONTENTS

<b>EDITORIAL</b>	248
<hr/>	
<b>L'ÉGLISE ENTRE EN ÉCONOMIE</b> Pierre-Henri Chalvidan	249
<hr/>	
<b>STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN: CRITICAL CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN MISSION</b> Bryant L. Myers	256
<hr/>	
<b>BEING CHURCH IN ASIA: JOURNEYING WITH THE SPIRIT INTO FULLER LIFE</b> (FABC International Theological Colloquium, 10-16 April 1994; Pattaya, Thailand)	260
<hr/>	
<b>LETTRE AUX COMMUNAUTÉS ECCLÉSIALES DE BASE</b> Conseil permanent de l'épiscopat brésilien	267
<hr/>	
<b>SISTERHOODS AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN CENTRAL AND EAST AFRICA</b> Beverly Lacayo, MSOLA	270
<hr/>	
<b>MISSION MOMENTS</b> Sharing - Africa ● How Slavery Continues - Pakistan	276
<hr/>	
<b>COMING EVENTS</b>	278
<hr/>	

## EDITORIAL

*In our first article of the October Bulletin, PIERRE-HENRI CHALVIDAN shows us that the 'World Economy' has established itself as a dominant reality and for this reason the Church is called to enter the domain of economic relations and to contribute with a constant discernment of the values dominating economic realities.*

*BRYANT L. MYERS tells us "who" the world's children are, where they live and why the Church must make a clear option for them.*

*The final statement of the FABC International Theological Colloquium of last April is certainly an important document from and for the Asian Church. Because of its actuality, we would also like to offer it to readers in other continents.*

*In their letter to the CEB's, the Council of the BRAZILIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE deliberates on the new challenges these communities have to meet in the modern Brazilian society.*

*In her contribution, Sister BEVERLY LACAYO, MSOLA, elaborates on the positive evolution of the role of religious and lay women in Africa, especially in Zambia and Malawi.*



## NEW BOOKS

Casadei Rodolfo / Ferrari Angelo:  
***Ruando-Burundi,***  
***Una tragedia infinita, Perché?***  
EMI, Bologna

Casaldàliga Pedro / Vigil José-Maria:  
***A Spirituality of Liberation***  
Orbis Books, Oct. 94

Wallis, Jim:  
***The Soul of Politics***  
***A Practical and Prophetic Vision for Change***  
Orbis Books, Oct. 94

Sobrino Jon:  
***The Principle of Mercy,***  
***Taking the Crucified People from the Cross***  
Orbis Books, Oct. 94

Elliot Neil:  
***Liberating Paul***  
***The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle***  
Orbis Books, Oct. 94

Kroeger, James H.:  
***Living Mission:***  
***Challenges in Evangelisation Today***  
Orbis Books, Sept. 94

## NEW SUPERIOR GENERAL

*Religious of the Society of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ)*  
***Sister Patricia García de Quevedo***  
*from Mexico*

## PRESIDENT OF SEDOS CONTINUES

*In the General Chapter of the Marist Mission Sisters, SMSM., at present being held at Generalate, Sister Patricia Stowers was elected as Superior General for another term. That means, she will be able to continue her service as President of SEDOS. Congratulations, Sr Patricia.*

# L' ÉGLISE ENTRE EN ÉCONOMIE

Pierre-Henri Chalvidan

Un des principaux acquis de la réflexion engagée depuis longtemps sur la légitimité de l'intervention de l'Église en matière sociale est que celle-ci s'est convaincue et a convaincu de cette légitimité. Si l'on met à part quelques positions attardées de catholicisme libéral ou de piétisme, rares sont les catholiques qui contestent la pertinence de la doctrine sociale de l'Église, même si cette pertinence doit évidemment être relativisée suivant les temps et les lieux. Comme le notait récemment P. de Charentenay à propos des cent ans de doctrine sociale: "Les valeurs d'action et de travail priment sur celles de la fête ou des relations humaines. Ce système de valeurs est-il capable d'entraîner l'adhésion des croyants et des non-croyants dans d'autres continents? Il représente en fait un type de sensibilité qui reste très européen, très proche du monde occidental. L'Afrique peut-elle se reconnaître dans cette image? L'Amérique latine trouvera-t-elle son équilibre dans ces mêmes lignes?" Paul VI lui-même avait relevé dans *Octogesima adveniens* la difficulté, face à des situations aussi variées, de prononcer une parole unique ayant valeur universelle.

Mais aujourd'hui, ainsi que s'est attaché à le faire valoir E. Poulat, la question rebondit: l'Église peut-elle en rester là? Autrement dit, l'enseignement social de l'Église peut-il encore aller sans réflexion économique, l'Église doit-elle entrer en économie? Telle est bien la question décisive qui émerge aujourd'hui. La perspective ici esquissée va dans le sens d'une réponse positive: si la route de l'Église est l'homme, sa nouvelle frontière devra être l'économie.

## L'ÉCONOMIE, NOUVELLE FRONTIÈRE DE L'ÉGLISE

Pour plaider la nécessité de l'intervention de l'Église dans le domaine économique, observons d'abord qu'elle en a déjà pris le chemin, provoquée par le sous-développement, la crise

économique et les nouvelles formes de pauvreté. On pourrait ajouter qu'elle n'a pas hésité à faire des interventions précises, soit sur des questions ponctuelles, comme celle de la dette, soit par la proposition de concepts critiques, tel celui relatif aux 'structures de péché'.

Mais cela ne saurait suffire et si l'on veut solidement argumenter, il faut simplement, comme l'a suggéré E. Poulat, reprendre la méthode de l'Action catholique "Voir, juger, agir", autrement dit effectuer un double travail:

- d'abord un travail de ressourcement pour confronter une telle perspective aux enseignements de l'Écriture et du Magistère;
- ensuite un travail de discernement pour analyser de façon concrète les réalités contemporaines et en dégager les signes des temps auxquels on est tenu de répondre.

### Les enseignements de l'Écriture et du Magistère

En ce qui concerne l'Écriture, il ne fait pas de doute - sans que ce soit ici le lieu de développer ce point - qu'une attention plus soutenue pour les choses de l'économie trouverait sa place dans la logique d'incarnation et de transformation du monde qui y est inscrite. Du Deutéronome aux textes patristiques en passant par la parabole du bon Samaritain ou l'évangile du Jugement dernier chez Matthieu, on serait bien en peine de fonder l'amorce d'une dissociation, contre nature, entre l'économie et la société.

Quant aux enseignements du Magistère qui se développent par une référence menée au contact des situations historiques changeantes, sous l'impulsion de l'Évangile comme source de renouveau, il est également clair que, même s'ils se sont jusqu'ici - et il faudra voir pourquoi - principalement situés dans le domaine social, leur orientation ne saurait fermer les

portes à un dépassement vers la chose économique.

On pourrait au contraire y relever maints signes indiquant que l'économie est d'ores et déjà inscrite dans les réalités qui doivent faire l'objet des préoccupations de l'Église. Pour s'en tenir aux textes les plus récents, rappelons l'insistance de Paul VI, dans **Evangelii nuntiandi**, sur le fait que l'homme à évangéliser n'est pas un être abstrait mais qu'il est "sujet aux questions sociales et économiques" et qu'il est "impossible d'accepter que l'oeuvre d'évangélisation puisse ou doive négliger ces questions extrêmement graves" (EN, 31).

Bien plus, on peut aisément constater comment, de **Gaudium et Spes** à **Centesimus annus**, le Magistère a progressivement évolué d'une optique prioritairement axée sur le social à une ouverture de plus en plus sensible aux problèmes économiques. L'encyclique **Sollicitudo rei socialis**, en dépit de son titre, est tout-à-fait représentative de ce mouvement: si elle insiste en effet sur l'idée que l'Église n'a pas à proposer de systèmes économiques (IV, 41), elle n'en affirme pas moins qu'elle a une parole à dire, des actes concrets à poser (IV, 43) et une réflexion attentive à développer (III, 16). Ce nécessaire retour aux sources étant effectué, il faut vérifier que les réalités du monde contemporain justifient bien que le pas soit franchi.

### Les signes des Temps

Sous cet angle, il est évident que nous sommes en train de vivre une mutation radicale qui bouleverse le contexte des interventions de l'Église. Jusqu'ici en effet celle-ci était appelée à se positionner par rapport aux deux blocs idéologiques qui risquaient d'opprimer l'homme en tant que reposant sur deux erreurs anthropologiques qui s'étaient en quelque sorte dialectiquement engendrées:

- d'un côté, le libéralisme qui, en surévaluant la liberté individuelle, interdit de penser la collectivité
- de l'autre, le marxisme négateur de l'autonomie de l'individu.

Ce qui conduisait le Magistère à sans cesse réaffirmer et approfondir une position de 'ni-ni' face à ces deux modèles erronés de société.

Or, désormais, nous devons nous situer dans une logique de libéralisme dominant sans que fonctionne la diversion d'un système social

antagoniste. Il y a là d'évidence une innovation essentielle qui a pour conséquence de porter l'économie au premier plan de nos préoccupations: pour la première fois depuis *Rerum novarum*, il ne s'agit plus de se confronter à deux idéologies, deux projets de société, mais à la réalité brute de l'économie. Comme l'écrit E. Poulat, le principe de réalité triomphe et c'est à une nouvelle traversée du désert que nous sommes appelés. La nécessité de l'engagement ecclésial sur le terrain économique s'impose avec encore plus de netteté lorsqu'on essaie d'envisager les modalités et les conséquences immédiates de cette universalisation du modèle libéral.

A première vue, en effet, elle semble s'effectuer par une diffusion équilibrée de toutes ses composantes: composante sociale avec l'individualisme, composante politique avec la démocratie parlementaire, composante économique avec l'économie de marché. Mais en réalité, tous les bons observateurs semblent d'accord pour convenir que c'est bien la dimension économique qui est dominante dans le processus en cours. Ainsi Stanley Hoffmann, analysant ce qu'il dénomme la 'diffusion de la puissance' à partir des trois facteurs qui, chez Kant, sont au centre de la philosophie de l'histoire, distingue-t-il trois niveaux ou 'terrains de jeux' dans la situation actuelle:

- le niveau mondial de la civilisation des affaires qui joue comme force unificatrice dominante;
- le niveau des États encore engagés dans le jeu politique traditionnel - celui de Thucydide et non pas d'Adam Smith - et qui se trouve, pour cela même, affecté d'érosion;
- et enfin le niveau des peuples, celui de l'exigence d'un droit à la parole et d'un désir de plus en plus directement revendiqués.

Si donc l'économie mondiale s'affirme comme réalité dominante, il y a tout lieu de penser que cela va se traduire par une fuite en avant dans la logique de 'privatisation' qu'elle a d'ores et déjà installée au coeur des sociétés modernes:

- privatisation croissante de la religion de plus en plus cantonnée dans les strictes limites de la sphère privée;
- privatisation croissante de la politique avec le dépérissement des espaces de délibération collective ou leur accaparement par les égoïsmes

- individuels, corporatistes ou ethniques;
- privatisation enfin de la culture et du savoir avec une focalisation sur l'opérateur, la spécialisation, la technicité, au détriment d'une culture générale pourtant indispensable à une réflexion ouverte.

Et on voit alors ce qu'il advient, tout particulièrement sur le plan économique, de ce 'principe de solidarité' dont Jean-Paul II rappelle qu'il est "un des principes fondamentaux de la conception chrétienne de l'organisation politique et sociale" (CA, 10). Mais on voit aussi que si cette idée de 'privatisation' permet de résumer le sens de la logique qui risque de prévaloir, le sens de la mission de l'Église peut lui aussi se résumer en un mot: 'dé-privatiser'.

### UNE MISSION DE 'DÉ-PRIVATISATION'

Si en tous lieux risque en effet de s'imposer une logique de repliement, l'Église se doit de promouvoir une stratégie tous azimuts de redéploiement. Pour nous en tenir au terrain économique, cette stratégie devra se développer au moins selon deux axes: crée d'abord des espaces pour penser la solidarité économique et, ensuite, en assurer, au plein sens du terme, 'l'animation'.

#### Promouvoir des espaces pour penser la solidarité économique

Ainsi qu'on l'a précédemment évoqué, une des plus grandes conséquences de cette logique prévalante de privatisation des savoirs et des activités est le dépérissement des espaces de réflexion collective ou, lorsqu'ils subsistent, leur accaparement par des préoccupations étroitement opératoires et catégorielles. Dès lors, la première mission, en quelque sorte objective, de l'Église - parce qu'elle reste un des rares grands espaces de socialité et d'universalité - est de provoquer des lieux pour penser la solidarité, des lieux d'interface.

Le colloque a bien fait ressortir l'urgence de cette mission par la confirmation même de la gravité de la rupture entre les différents niveaux qui avait servi de constat initial. Un de ses principaux enseignements a été de révéler: - qu'il y a bien un niveau macro-économique affirmant sa rationalité, sa prétention à l'universalité, voire à l'absolu, "une macro-économie en amont du bonheur des peuples", dira le représentant du FMI, M. Falcone: l'imposition, la monnaie

saine, la rigueur des finances publiques ne sont pas des questions de cultures. Non pas que celles-ci soient ignorées, mais elles sont surbordonnées à ces impératifs catégoriques; - et qu'il y a bien, à la base, tout un foisonnement d'initiatives locales, oeuvrant efficacement à la prise en compte des réalités culturelles, réduisant les pesanteurs de l'économie globale mais, en même temps, les prenant trop peu en compte: ce que l'un des intervenants, représentant la Banque mondiale, M. Dufour, a appelé "les incohérences de la dynamique projet".

D'où l'importance des lieux d'articulation. Et c'est là où le rôle de l'Église devient fondamental: dans cette structure duale du monde contemporain, elle peut représenter un des ultimes espaces de rencontre du particulier et de l'universel, de l'économie réelle et d'une économie générale qui s'est laissé gagner par la formalisation mathématique, perdant ainsi tout contact avec le concret.

---

*...si la route de l'Église est l'homme, sa nouvelle frontière devra être l'économie.*

---

Jean-Paul II n'envisageait pas autre chose lorsqu'il affirmait que de même qu'existe une responsabilité collective pour promouvoir cette paix dont le développement n'est que l'autre nom et "qu'il faut donc consentir un vaste effort de compréhension, de connaissances mutuelles et de sensibilisation des consciences; c'est là la culture désirée qui fait progresser la confiance dans les capacités humaines du pauvre et donc dans ses possibilités d'améliorer ses conditions de vie par son travail ou d'apporter une contribution positive à la prospérité économique" (CA, 52).

Mais une fois assumée cette nécessité de créer des lieux de réflexion au sein desquels, en matière économique comme en tout autre domaine, se puisse penser et développer la solidarité, la question rebondit encore à un niveau supérieur: l'Église doit-elle s'engager encore plus loin et animer elle-même la réflexion et l'action économique?

#### Animer la réflexion économique

Face à cette interrogation, la position traditionnelle de l'Église consistait jusqu'ici à

faire valoir que, de même qu'elle n'a pas de modèle politique à proposer, elle n'a pas de doctrine économique à élaborer mais seulement une exigence à défendre: celle de la dignité absolue de la personne. Au demeurant, ajoutait-on, l'Église n'est nullement experte en ces questions. Autrement dit, l'Église se positionnait au niveau d'une éthique générale en se refusant - sauf à la marge - d'intervenir dans les mécanismes et les rouages spécifiques. Or, là encore, les réalités du monde contemporain plaident pour une évolution: si la promotion d'une éthique de l'économie est de plus en plus indispensable, celle-ci ne peut désormais aller sans une prise en compte plus serrée des données exactes de la vie économique. L'argument de la non-expertise en ce domaine ne paraît guère convaincant. Si l'Église, en effet, se veut 'experte en humanité' elle doit l'être pour tous les aspects de l'humanité, économie comprise. Certes doit être prise en considération l'objection selon laquelle l'économie, tenue pour science exacte, aurait ses lois propres à prendre comme telles. Mais outre que là se cache peut-être la plus grande

---

*Pour la première fois depuis Rerum novarum, il ne s'agit plus de se confronter à deux idéologies, deux projets de société, mais à la réalité brute de l'économie.*

---

ruse de l'économisme dominant, la question demande pour le moins à être débattue. Au demeurant l'Église est-elle à priori beaucoup plus experte dans les questions de désarmement ou de bioéthique sur lesquelles elle intervient pourtant de façon très serrée?

Il y a là un hiatus dans la position ecclésiale souvent relevé mais qui risque de devenir insoutenable: comment l'Église pourrait-elle laisser en friche le champ de la liberté économique alors qu'elle laboure inlassablement le champ de la vie privée? A vrai dire, on perçoit bien le fondement d'une telle distinction: celle-ci repose sur l'idée qu'en matière économique ou politique, il existe des espaces de médiation pour l'exercice de la liberté, qui n'est ainsi pas abandonnée à elle-même dans la solitude du passage de la décision à l'action; alors que de tels espaces n'existent pas en matière de bioéthique et qu'il faut donc promouvoir les médiations nécessaires.

Et, certes, la conviction que pour s'exercer la liberté a besoin d'un espace de médiation est bien fondamentale, mais précisément le colloque a fait apparaître que l'existence de ces espaces en matière économique et politique tend à devenir de plus en plus problématique parce que ceux-ci sont érodés par la logique de la privatisation.

### **Cinq niveaux d'application**

Ceci posé, il est donc incontestable qu'il y a nécessité de promouvoir une éthique de l'économie: la demande éclate de tous côtés et, si l'Église n'y répond pas, on peut craindre que d'autres y répondent de façon réductrice. Encore faut-il bien mesurer toutes les implications de cette exigence éthique. De ce point de vue, on peut distinguer cinq niveaux d'application.

#### **1. Faciliter la rencontre et la réflexion**

Observons, tout d'abord, que le simple fait, précédemment évoqué, de provoquer des lieux de confrontation et d'ajustement est déjà, en lui-même, une démarche authentiquement éthique; Si, comme le disent les théologiens, la morale suppose que soient tenues ensemble la dimension singulière, la dimension particulière et la dimension universelle, c'est bien, en effet, une démarche profondément éthique que de convoquer de tels lieux de rencontre.

Mais, sauf à partager la conviction qu'une éthique de la discussion est à même de résoudre pleinement les graves problèmes moraux que soulève l'économie, l'intervention de l'Église ne saurait en rester à ce premier stade. Certes, promouvoir cette culture de la connaissance et de la confiance est un premier palier indispensable mais, sur le plan précisément de la culture l'action de l'Église doit trouver un second champ d'application.

#### **2. Redécouvrir l'importance de la ressource humaine**

De nos jours, en effet, la logique de la croissance économique, avec les échecs rencontrés, conduit à redécouvrir la dimension culturelle et l'importance de la ressource humaine. Et il y a là également un défi majeur pour les chrétiens, en raison même de l'anthropologie qui est la leur: c'est de tout mettre en oeuvre pour que l'homme et sa culture ne soient pas également broyés dans une logique purement instrumentale et asservis à un développement toujours pensé en termes économiques.

Autrement dit, ainsi que se sont forcés de le proclamer les animateurs du colloque dans leur précédent travail, il s'agit de faire valoir que la culture n'est pas 'une' dimension englobante, en tant que lieu où l'homme effectue ses choix, c'est-à-dire se réalise en tant qu'homme dans la plénitude de son caractère transcendant.

### 3. Faire un inventaire critique des valeurs

Mais cela n'est pas suffisant: il reste encore à préciser ce que l'on met dans ce concept de culture, dont on prétend faire le socle du développement. Et l'on atteint là vraisemblablement un des problèmes cruciaux pour les temps à venir. Au cours de ces dernières années, on a fonctionné, en effet, sur la base d'un concept de culture très ouvert conduisant à valoriser la multiplicité des expressions culturelles et leur diversité. Ce qui se comprenait aisément dans un contexte de décolonisation et de rejet de tout impérialisme. Or on commence désormais à réaliser qu'une telle approche, à trop se vouloir accueillante et généreuse, finit par devenir inopérante et incapable notamment de représenter un levier efficace de développement. Car si la culture a bien une dimension large qui inclut la totalité des comportements humains dans leur diversité, elle a aussi un contenu axiologique porteur d'unité et d'universalité. Ce qui structure une culture, c'est un système de valeurs - l'axe vertical du système de valeurs - l'axe vertical du sens recoupant l'axe horizontal du réel - et c'est ce système qui dicte au développement ses modalités et ses finalités, en même temps - nombre de ces valeurs étant universelles - qu'il est susceptible de fonder la plus large solidarité.

Et - paradoxalement seulement en apparence - ce sont désormais des intellectuels du Sud - pourtant principal destinataire de la précédente acception 'oecuménique' - qui commencent à affirmer que le développement est d'abord une question de valeurs et que la travail culturel à opérer prioritairement est un inventaire critique des valeurs afin d'isoler celles susceptibles de "fournir une base solide à tout projet de développement cohérent"; point de vue qui fut développée, par exemple par Maître Wade, ministre d'Etat du Sénégal, au cours du colloque.

Cette thèse ne va certes pas sans soulever de nombreuses interrogations relatives à la pos-

sibilité effective et, plus encore, aux éventuels aboutissements d'un tel inventaire. On retrouve là un vaste débat qui traverse, de longue date, la problématique du développement et rebondit aujourd'hui à propos de la démocratisation. Il s'agit donc de savoir s'il existe effectivement, dans les pays du Sud, des systèmes de valeurs spécifiques susceptibles de fonder un 'autre' développement ou une 'autre' démocratie ou bien si une telle affirmation ne relève que d'un culturalisme exacerbé qui n'est qu'un paravent de l'immobilisme. La question reste ouverte, mais avant même d'ébaucher quelques éléments de réponse, on peut d'ores et déjà relever que - quelle que soit finalement l'issue qu'on lui donne - elle pointe l'urgence qu'il y a à opérer autour des valeurs un resserrement du concept de culture. Faute de quoi, en effet, l'homme ne sera jamais placé au centre du développement, tant il est vrai, comme ne cesse d'aller le répétant l'Église, que c'est bien là que réside sa part essentielle: une liberté de choix en fonction de valeurs.

---

***- ce sont désormais des intellectuels du Sud - pourtant principal destinataire de la précédente acception 'oecuménique' - qui commencent à affirmer que le développement est d'abord une question de valeurs.***

---

Ceci posé, quant au fond, l'inventaire ci-dessus évoqué peut, à priori, déboucher sur trois issues:

- soit l'invention - la mise à jour - de valeurs radicalement spécifiques susceptibles de fonder, en effet, un 'autre' développement;
- soit le constat inverse d'une universalité radicale des valeurs justifiant un modèle unique;
- soit enfin une position médiane alliant universalité et particularité qui paraît, à vrai dire, la seule vraisemblable.

Adopter une telle position n'est pas, pour autant, renoncer d'avance à l'inventaire comme frappé d'inutilité, car c'est bien en explorant le particulier que l'on dégagera à la fois sa part propre et sa part d'universel.



#### 4. Effecteur un travail critique de discernement

On parvient ainsi au quatrième cercle de l'intervention ecclésiale: non seulement provoquer des lieux de confrontation culturelle, puis oeuvrer pour que la culture soit la dimension englobante du développement et travailler à un resserrement du concept de culture autour des valeurs; mais encore effectuer, au sein même de ces systèmes de valeurs, un travail critique de discernement au service de l'homme dans sa plénitude. Autrement dit faire prévaloir - exemples concrets et instruments conceptuels à l'appui - ce que l'on pourrait appeler la prééminence anthropologique dans toute conception du développement.

L'Église fait-elle autre chose, au demeurant, lorsqu'elle constate que si le communisme a échoué, c'est parce qu'il reposait sur une anthropologie erronée? Mais il devient clair que, désormais, l'interrogation critique doit se reporter sur d'autres champs, à commencer justement par celui du libéralisme triomphant: l'anthropologie sous-jacente au libéralisme a-t-elle vocation à l'universalité comme reposant sur une idée indépassable de l'homme et de son devenir?

Il suffit de poser la question pour entrevoir la réponse et donc le sens dans lequel il faut oeuvrer. Non que puissent être niés les progrès quantitatifs apportés à la condition humaine et même les progrès qualitatifs dans l'épanouissement de la liberté et de l'individualité, mais au prix de quels déséquilibres et de quels asservissements! Faut-il les considérer comme inéluctables, ou bien ne doit-on pas admettre, comme y invitent les échecs cumulatifs, sinon qu'un 'autre développement' est possible, du moins un développement 'autre', parce que, précisément, la plupart des pays du Sud partagent une vision de l'homme en partie différente? Contribuer à révéler cette vision à elle-même et au monde après des siècles d'exclusion, telle est bien alors la première tâche d'une éthique du développement, tâche qui concerne par excellence une Église qui se veut 'experte en humanité'.

L'anthropologie occidentale, profondément influencée par la modernité, comporte de nombreux aspects positifs dont la source doit se chercher dans la liberté de la personne et dans sa dignité. Cependant cette anthropologie occidentale (de laquelle participait aussi le marxisme) est une anthropologie prométhéenne à

l'excès. L'homme s'y réalise, selon la formule de Malraux "en cultivant sa différence", sur le mode de l'opposition et de la distinction:

- opposition à l'autre avec une affirmation de l'antériorité et de la priorité de l'individu sur la société et la séparation rigide du privé et public;
- opposition au cosmos, à la nature, qu'il s'agit de dominer et de maîtriser par la raison technicienne: "L'homme en tant qu'homme s'oppose à la nature et c'est ainsi qu'il devient homme" écrivait Hegel. Ou bien, autrement formulé: "Dieu n'a pas planté les arbres pour qu'on les honore mais pour qu'on les abatte".

Ainsi la pensée occidentale est-elle foncièrement agonistique. Elle fonctionne par rupture, séparation, analyse, dualisme [...] toutes opérations intellectuelles indispensables pour une maîtrise rationnelle de l'univers. Et, partant, elle pense le monde en termes d'abord quantitatifs. Autre sur bien des points est l'anthropologie partagée par la plupart des pays du Sud. L'homme ici se réalise en "cultivant sa communion", sa participation:

- l'individu existe par "con jonction amoureuse avec l'autre", "il prend naissance au carrefour des multiples réseaux sociaux auxquels il appartient". La société est ainsi constitutive de la personnalité: c'est parce qu'elle ne s'oppose pas que la personne s'enrichit;
- et de même en va-t-il par rapport à la nature. L'homme ne saurait prétendre à la domination radicale d'un cosmos dont il n'est qu'une partie: "L'Africain voit dans tout ce qui est donné à ses sens autre chose que ce qu'il voit - il déchiffre l'Autre c'est-à-dire le sacré, à travers le minéral, le végétal ou l'animal. Ce n'est pas la parole d'homme qui signifie et circonscrit les objets, ce sont les objets ou les choses qui sont paroles".

Ainsi la pensée africaine, sans renoncer à l'analyse, est-elle fondamentalement unitaire, synthétique, une sorte de connaissance par participation qui sait intuitivement que rien n'est isolable. Et, partant, elle pense le monde d'abord sur le mode qualitatif. Sur ces bases, il ne s'agit pas d'en revenir aux affirmations



hégéliennes sur ces civilisations prétendument anhistoriques et inaptes à toute mutation - l'homme n'y est pas donné dans la nature, même si elle est tenue pour lui être fondamentalement ordonnée - et il ne s'agit pas de méconnaître leur pesanteur, à l'égard des femmes et des jeunes en particulier, mais il s'agit de faire apparaître qu'il y a là le germe d'une problématique de développement susceptible d'infléchir dans le bon sens les modèles occidentaux.

Et il s'agit aussi de faire apparaître comment on entretient l'échec si l'on ne détermine pas les voies et les moyens. Ainsi que l'expose clairement V. Cosmao, les civilisations ne fonctionnent qu'à l'évidence et n'imposent leur organisation que comme allant de soi: "Pour l'organisation de sa vie collective, tout homme est orphelin".

### 5. Créer de nouveaux moyens

C'est la cinquième étape. Car une fois les données anthropologiques correctement repérées, il doit devenir possible de jeter un regard qui soit simultanément éthique et pratique sur les moyens du développement. L'éthique ne saurait désertier le terrain de la réalité: une éthique abstraite ne serait d'aucun secours. Au contraire, selon D. Goulet, l'éthique doit devenir "un moyen des moyens", émettre un "rayon moral" illuminant les valeurs qu'ils recèlent, sinon c'est un exercice trompeur que de parler de façon purement rhétorique de la dignité de l'homme.

Est-ce à dire, dès lors, qu'il s'agit de bâtir un modèle économique chrétien? Assurément pas, mais l'Église peut certainement, non seulement élaborer - comme elle s'y est déjà essayée - un corps de principes et de directives guidant la réflexion, mais aussi et mieux encore, soutenir un travail permanent de proposition d'idées et de concepts permettant d'exercer une fonction de critique constructive et évitant de se laisser happer par la logique dominante du système, ce que fait par exemple le Centre Lebret avec sa recherche d'une "clef de lecture des indicateurs de développement humain".

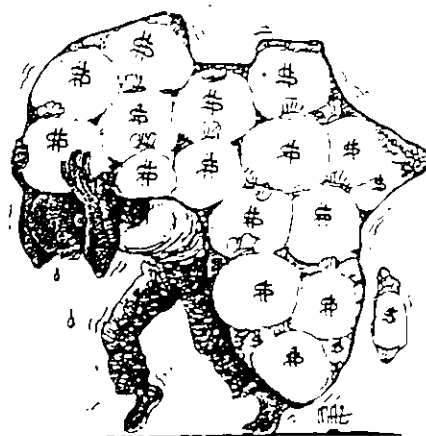
D'autres voies sont possibles. L'économiste P. Lavagne évoque à ce sujet la nécessité de rechercher des 'concepts-hélice'. Ainsi, par exemple, le concept de 'structure de péché', quelles que soient ses faiblesses, est d'évidence un instrument adapté de déconstruction de la logique privative. Il en est sûrement de multi-

ples autres qui pourraient utilement servir, par une réflexion appropriée, d'instruments éthiques: sans avoir de compétence économique particulière, on peut par exemple songer au concept d'échange sur lequel il serait surprenant que la religion trinitaire n'ait rien à faire valoir: doit-il être centré sur les objets ou sur les sujets? Ou bien encore à celui d'épargne dont le contenu en 'valeurs' fut à maintes reprises évoqué au cours du colloque.

Quant aux principes, les précédents acquis de la doctrine sociale - tel celui de la destination universelle des biens ou du juste salaire - offrent des points de départ qui ne demandent qu'à être poursuivis sur le terrain proprement économique.

L'essentiel étant, encore une fois, - sous peine de prendre toute crédibilité - de ne pas rester dans une perspective déductive et abstraite mais de penser l'éthique comme une praxis. Il ne s'agit là évidemment que d'ébauches mais elles suffisent à faire pressentir l'immensité du champ qui est ouvert à l'action de l'Église et aussi la compétence qu'elle a pour y intervenir. Car si le développement économique est d'abord affaire d'anthropologie, d'éthique, de culture, alors l'Église y est particulièrement à sa place, ainsi d'ailleurs que toutes les religions en tant que productrices de sens. Au cours de la séance de clôture, le professeur Arkoun, intervenant au nom de l'Islam, observa combien cette fonction des religions était encore peu explorée et plaida pour le développement d'une "anthropologie religieuse généralisée".

Ref. *Euntes Digest*  
Vol. 27-n°1, March 1994  
Zavelstraat 60  
3010 Kessel-Lo, Belgium



---

# STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN: CRITICAL CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN MISSION

---

Bryant L. Myers

This essay examines in broad strokes the state of the world's children from the perspective of Christian mission. My thesis is that understanding the situation of children and youth in the world is a significant blind spot in Christian mission. If children and youth are as central to the mission task as I believe, then our way of thinking about mission and contextualising the Gospel today will be seen to be inadequate.

## Why Are Children and Youth Important?

First of all, children and youth are important because there are so many of them. One-third of the world's population, 1.8 billion people, is under the age of fifteen. Eighty-five per cent of these children, or 1.5 billion, live in the Two-Thirds World (*World Population Data Sheet*).

The population pyramids for the developed and developing worlds reveal a stark contrast. In the so-called developed world the bulge - such as it is - represents the twenty-year-olds. Compare this to the Two-Thirds World, where almost half the population is under the age of nineteen. This is not our experience in the West. When Western folk walk down their streets, they see roughly equal numbers of children, youth, adults, and older folk. But in the Two-Thirds World, every other person one encounters is under the age of nineteen. We in the West need to recompose our mental image.

When we examine the number of children and youth in the countries of the world as a proportion of their population, Africa stands out. More than 45 per cent of its population is under the age of fifteen. The disproportionate number of youth will intensify as Africa's high population growth rate increases the number of

young people, at the same time that their parents are dying from AIDS. The Middle East, Mexico and Central America, Bolivia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan also stand out.

If we examine the absolute number of children and youth in the world, there are many countries with large numbers of young people. Countries with more than 25 million children under the age of fifteen include the United States, the former USSR, most countries of South Asia, China, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Brazil.

The second reason children and youth are important from a missiological perspective is that by far the great majority of people, at least in the North American context, become Christians between the ages of four and fourteen. According to information in Lionel Hunt's *Handbook on Christian Mission*, important, life-shaping decisions are made when people are young. This has been confirmed by informal research done by Frank Mann of Child Evangelism Fellowship and by Evangelist, Harry Trover.

The third reason children and youth are important is that, according to MARC estimates, 78 per cent of the world's young people - 1.4 billion of the 1.8 billion - are growing up in non-Christian settings. This situation reflects two factors:

- 1) A substantial portion of the children in nominally Christian countries live in non-religious families, and
- 2) over the last twenty years the growth rate of Muslim and non-religious populations has out-paced the growth rate of the world population as a whole.

The expanding number of non-religious is largely a Western phenomenon. A recent Church census revealed that of the 1,000 people leaving English Churches every week, 700 were under the age of twenty-one. We do not have far to look for the reasons. A Catholic study on family values and transmission of values in Europe showed, not surprisingly, that "in the majority of cases, children adopt the religious attitude of their father and mother". A Church of England study recently concluded that "the nominal Christians of yesterday beget the non-Christians of today".

### Who Are These Children?

*Many of the world's children are dying.* Every day almost 40,000 children under the age of five die. If we examine child mortality rates around the world, children are in danger in Africa, Brazil, the Andean countries of South America, the Middle East, South Asia, Cambodia, and Indonesia. Looking at children whose lives are at risk from another perspective, half of the world's 36 million refugees and displaced people are children.

*Most of these children are living in cities in the Two-Thirds World.* Everyone is aware of the phenomenal growth anticipated in the cities in the Two-Thirds World. Of the 600 million people living in urban slums today, 74 per cent are children and young people under the age of twenty-four. Mexico City has a population of over 17 million and is heading toward 25+ million early in the twenty-first century. Some estimate the median age of Mexico City as being fourteen and one-half.

*Many are unwanted.* Two important indicators point toward this sad conclusion. Abortion is one. For every five live births in the world today, there are two induced abortions. In much of the world, largely in the West, the number of abortions exceeds 200 per 1,000 live births. It is ironic that comparable rates for deaths of children under the age of five are considered unacceptably high and evidence of Third World under-development. Apparently countries are "developed" if children are killed before they are born, but "underdeveloped" if they die during the first five years of life.

The second indicator that many children are unwanted is the number of street children around the world. Although accurate estimates are hard to come by, some believe that 100 million children - 18 per cent of all children under fifteen - live or work on city streets.

Latin America has the greatest number of street children; Brazil alone has as many as 7 million.

*Many are exploited child labourers.* The estimate of the number of children under the age of fifteen who are being exploited for their labour ranges from 90 million (ILO) to 145 million (UNICEF). These children are being exploited in the very same ways that we in the West thought had ended in the last century. Just last year Peruvian authorities discovered 6,000 children working under slave-like conditions in a jungle gold mine. Asia has the largest number. A recent report from Thailand revealed that as many as 5 million Thai children between five and fourteen are working and not in school.

Child labour within a family reflects tradition and necessity. Child labour for an outside employer reflects acute poverty. The ultimate cost of child labour is high. When children are working, they are not going to school. In addition, child labourers are often treated as expendable parts, easily replaced by the next young child with good eyesight and nimble fingers. Uneducated, sometimes handicapped, these children grow up to be a permanent drain on their economies.

*Many are exploited as sex objects.* Global figures are impossible to come by, but some estimate that as many as 10 million children are caught up in the sex industry - specifically in child prostitution, sex tourism, and pornography. A Norwegian Government report to the UN Working Group on Slavery estimated that one million children a year are forced into the sex market. Although most severe in Asia, the problem is known to be widespread elsewhere. It is estimated that there are 500,000 prostitutes under the age of twenty in Brazil and 150,000 in the United States.

Poverty is the pimp. Of Thailand's estimated one million prostitutes, 80 per cent are under the age of sixteen. In his book *From Peasant Girls to Bangkok Masseuses*, Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit demonstrates with case after case that the decision to become a prostitute was an economic decision. "These women were not fleeing from family background or a rural society which oppresses women in conventional ways. They left to help their families survive".

*The worst off are girls.* The saddest part of the story of the world's children is the fact that the girl child is significantly worse off. Two-thirds of the estimated 130 million children in the world with no access to primary schools are

girls. When we examine survival rates, the girl child comes up significantly short. Other things being equal, girls have a slightly better chance of surviving the early, vulnerable years. But things are not equal. In the Two-Thirds World, female children consistently get less food, less health care, and less education. The actual survival rates in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan reveal that as many as one million fewer girl children survive than do boys. They die because they are female. In another example, China's population-control policy - allowing only one child per family - resulted in 500,000 "missing" girl babies per year in 1985, 1986, and 1987.

### The Missiological Implications

The state of the world's children is not good. Children are growing up in an ugly and hostile world. If they survive, they are being forced to become premature adults. Furthermore, adults are the primary cause of the problem. There is not much good news if you are young.

In the faces of these children we can see the pain caused by society's shortcomings. Because the world's children are in no way to blame for what they have to endure, they represent a mirror to us of the evils the world otherwise tolerates, accepts, or excuses. In many ways there is still no room at the inn. How should we respond?

First, these children need to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They need to learn that there is Good News for them. They need to hear the liberating word that God hates what is happening to them and that his love extends to each and every one of them. They need to know Jesus Christ weeps for them and has finished the work that forgives anything they have done or been forced to do.

To stop at this point, however, is not enough. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is about the emergence, slowly and quietly, of the kingdom of God on earth. This means we cannot be satisfied with saving the disembodied souls of children with promises that things will not be this way in the next life.

Advocates for child rights say that the cornerstone of change must be laid in the hearts and minds of individual adults. Until a society provides the caring and the will to rescue children from neglect, abuse, and oppression, change will never come, they say. They are right; this is what is needed. The problem is

that secular societies cannot deliver this kind of change. This kind of change does not come from laws or even economic incentives. It comes from another source altogether - a source that can change hearts of stone, one that has the authority to drive the demonic from the corridors of power and from the comfortable offices of the marketplace.

Second, the Christian Church must demand its rightful place in the public arena and announce the Good News that the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls the actions of society into account. The framework of societies must be rebuilt if growing up is not to be a life-damaging ordeal. This means values must change; radical transformation is required. Ethical and moral standards that value children and life must be reintroduced into Governments, Churches, and the businesses of this world. Greed that justifies working six-year-old children sixteen hours a day without a meal must be exposed and called to repentance. Lust that justifies abusing young boys and girls must be publicly denounced and ended. This means that poverty so acute that families are driven to treat their children as economic assets to be sold must be eradicated. These actions are driven by the Gospel. They are the business of Christian mission.

Third, responding to the needs of the world's children calls for a holistic Christian Gospel. The Good News of Jesus Christ must be about proclamation and prophecy, the personal and the social, about saving and liberating. Many children do not believe adults have any Good News. The pain, alienation, and lostness of children is inseparably part of who they are and how they perceive themselves. The call for repentance must be directed at everyone - the children, their parents, the rich and the powerful, even those who abuse the children. Working for justice, social welfare, education and literacy, empowering development - all must find their place in Christian mission. Anything less than a whole Gospel is not enough.

Finally, responding to the needs of the world's children demands that we re-examine our strategies for mission. We need to be sure our strategies make sense for a world of children who live as just described. Six areas of strategy need to be examined.

1. We need to rethink the strategic mission tool, the people group concept. In mission today, "people group" almost always means a linguistic or geographic unit. Descriptions of

majority of children and youth will be missed. Furthermore, relationship evangelism, "earning the right to be heard", will take on a different and more poignant meaning when dealing with children who spend their lives selling their bodies for sex or are living by their wits on the streets.

6. Finally, we need to come to grips with the importance of women. This is because it is right to do so and because we will not be as effective if we do not. In recent years, there has been an explosion of data from many countries and across different socioeconomic groups showing that education of women is associated with the lowering of child mortality rates, improving child care and nutrition, reducing average family size, increasing literacy in succeeding generations, and improving family income. On the basis of anecdotal evidence, some speculate this may extend to improving the acceptance of the Gospel. In most places in the Two-Thirds World, women are the keys to change and have the most impact on the lives of children.

### Summary

What is the state of the world's children? First, there are an awful lot of them, most in the cities of the Two-Thirds World. Second, they are not doing very well. The world's children are often hungry, sick, and brutally exploited. Third, a huge proportion of them are growing up in homes or settings where it will be hard for them to hear the name of Jesus Christ. If the kingdom of God belongs to children, and if the children of this world are not doing well, then Christian mission needs to rethink its priorities, strategies, and methods.

Ref. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*  
Vol. 18, No. 3, July 1994.



people groups often reveal that we are really talking about adults. When so many millions of children are working and living on the streets, or are labouring in factories or sexparlours, or are separated from family and clan because they are refugees, our understanding of people groups may need to change to remove its adult bias.

2. We need to rethink our understanding of contextualising. Traditionally, the Gospel was contextualised in order to communicate more effectively in a particular culture or people group. We have tended to do so however, by viewing these groups through the eyes of adults (ours) and by listening to adults (those in the group). We need to ask some new questions. What does it mean to contextualise a Gospel that children can understand, particularly children who have been forced to become pre-mature adults? How do we present the Good News to damaged children in a way that both saves and heals? What does it mean to have adults as the carriers of the message meant for children and youth?

3. We are going to have to learn a lot more about mission in the city. A large proportion of the world's unreached are found in the slums and squatter settlements around and in major urban centres; most of them are poor. Enormous numbers of these unreached people are children, living on the streets, struggling to survive in the informal economy with its crime, drugs, and prostitution. There is a Macedonian call for effective urban mission to youth. Who is ready to respond?

4. Mission agencies will need to rethink their assumptions about who should reach children. Most missions focus on people groups and send adults to reach other adults. Child and youth evangelism is left to child evangelists and campus ministries - the experts on youth. There are so many youth and children in the world today, and there are so many more on the way, that this division of labour needs to be re-examined. In the future, no mission is going to be able to avoid developing expertise for ministering to children.

5. We need to rethink our understanding as to how best to encounter children and youth. In Western societies, the great proportion of children and youth are in schools or on university campuses. This is not true in the Two-Thirds World. In the Two-Thirds World, campus ministries may be effective among those rich enough to go to school, but the overwhelming

---

# BEING CHURCH IN ASIA:

## JOURNEYING WITH THE SPIRIT INTO FULLER LIFE

---

*(Final Statement of First FABC International Theological Colloquium, 10-16 April 1994; Pattaya, Thailand).*

### Introduction

1. Life. Vibrant life pulsating in the fecundity of Asia. The promise and hope of full life in our Sacred Scriptures. Life in the Kingdom of God. What Jesus came for - that we might have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10). Life as gift and task. The journey into this Life, the struggle for this Life was the overarching theme that integrated our discussions at the International Theological Colloquium sponsored by the FABC's Theological Advisory Commission at Pattaya, Thailand, from 10-16 April 1994.

2. Gathered by the Spirit of God, we prayed and discerned by the Spirit; worked, reflected, resolved and celebrated in the same Spirit. It is by the Spirit that we, coming from various races, languages, existential situations and cultures of Asia, grew into a unity of heart in our concern for Asia and for the Church. Life comes in the Spirit. Life is refreshed and renewed - reborn - in the Spirit.

3. With this faith in the Spirit of Jesus, we dared to explore difficult questions. How can we as Church be truly of Asia and be truly of Jesus? What is the face of Jesus in Asia? How can we, in a palpably minority situation, fulfill the mission of announcing to one and all that Jesus gives life, that He is Life? What service can our theology provide to promote a more just and loving life? What can we do to promote a life more human in a vast suffering continent of widespread marginalisation and deprivation? How must we be as Church at the service of life, radiating hope to our Asian peoples?

4. We know that we may have posed the questions inadequately and even inappropriately. We know that our answers hardly touch the mystery that is Asia, much less

the mystery of Jesus and of ourselves as His followers. But we offer the fruit of our reflection at the service of the Church in Asia, so that all may know Life and rise to Life.

### PART I

#### NEW PHENOMENA IN ASIA AS CHALLENGE AND POSSIBILITY

Our reflection begins with an overview of the Asian reality.

5. As Asia moves into the 21st century, new and exciting developments are overtaking Asian countries. The phenomenon of the technological age has truly made our whole world a global village. The emergence of freedom and justice in one corner of Asia catches the attention of countries in the other continents in a matter of seconds through the communication media. This vast world has become a village where encouragement, inspiration and hope can quickly be communicated to people who suffer disasters. Knowledge is exploding beyond our imagination. The secrets of the universe are captured in small electronic gadgets that make learning more accessible, serving and loving others more readily given. The phenomenon of women's movements is yet another positive development. They are increasing in Asia, making women aware of their own potential resources, challenging centuries of subordination to men, enabling them to claim their rights - such as their right to land, property, equal wages, equal opportunities - and full participation in public life. The Spirit of God is present in these developments (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 26). From a Biblical point of view of ongoing creation, we could attribute all these wonders to God and exclaim with the Psalmist: "How marvellous are your works, O Lord!" (Ps 139:14)

6. Developments in science and technology and economics are facilitating various movements that past FABC assemblies (see FABC V, Bandung) have noted: the movement toward community in various Asian countries, the movement toward participation and the striving toward a deeper sense of the divine. Hopeful, living movements that speak of Asia's struggle toward a fuller life.

7. Yet our optimism has to reckon with the undeniable ambivalence of the changes that are taking place. Let us, therefore, look more deeply into the Asian reality.

### **Economic Growth and Industrialisation**

8. The phenomenon we read or hear about almost everyday is in the economic field, the dream of economic growth.

9. An inexorable process of industrialisation is taking place in Asia. It is strongly linked to and dependent upon a process of economic globalisation. The flow of foreign capital both from the West and the more developed East Asian countries allows for methods of production and the introduction of technologies way beyond the present capabilities of some of our Asian countries to absorb without trauma. Neo-colonialism becomes more entrenched.

10. Fundamental changes in work patterns, in the basic structure of our economies, and in the very nature of relationships among individuals and communities are occurring. People become a mechanical part of the production process and as a result work becomes exploitative, dehumanising. This is especially true of women workers. Atrocities committed on women, their lives, their work and on children are intensified. Women are often the first to feel the impact of economic retrenchment and inflation. They are often the last to be protected and cared for.

11. Although the majority of our economies are still rural and agricultural, the gross neglect of this sector has an obvious negative and devastating impact on the lives of individuals and communities. The rural sector remains stagnant.

### **Modernisation, Secularisation and the Media**

12. Together with the process of industrialisation has come the need to modernise the commercial sector. The process strengthens the consumeristic lifestyles into which even now the poor are being initiated. Through the commercialisation of education and control of the mass media, economics has become the dynamo

of all aspects of life. Just as there is no "value-free" technology, there are no value-free media. Through dissemination of information and entertainment, the media are creating values both good and bad, and promoting a whole new way of looking at life. A serious discernment is needed on this. The children and the youth of Asia are the most exposed to these "alien" notions of the meaning of life itself. The image of women as portrayed in the media maintains and reinforces the view of women as inferior to men and objects of pleasure. Accompanying the thrust of modernisation is secularisation. The traditional close-knit relationships within Asian families are beginning to erode, but new forms of intimacy are being explored and fostered. The deep religious and community sense that characterises most Asian peoples is, indeed, disintegrating.

### **Politics and Peoples' Participation**

13. We perceive the dominant role of industrial and business conglomerates that virtually control major portions of the economy and especially those closely related to traditional oligarchies, modern industrialists with political connections, as well as those closely affiliated to the military in most of our countries. A subtle repression of the rights of individuals and communities to participate meaningfully in processes of decision-making is tragically taking place. On the pretext of national security and political stability, human rights are being curtailed. Sadly, politics is for power to dominate and not for service to the vast majority. Religious resurgence is taking place in many countries of Asia and is often a very positive movement. But the merging of religious fundamentalism and narrow ethnicity is creating new forms of violence, hatred and division.

### **The Impact of New Phenomena**

14. Expected changes in almost every facet of life in the 21st century, concomitant with and perhaps because of developments in the sciences, technology and communication media, will surely have a significant impact on the cultures and peoples of Asia for good or ill. People need to be rooted in the deeper meaning of life if they are to be truly human. Should these roots be weakened (or worse destroyed) cultural dislocation and dehumanisation take place.

15. Mass production made possible by high technology will democratise the availability of a bewildering multiplicity of goods and services. Sophisticated means of communication will offer new possibilities of sharing and coming



together of peoples of different cultures and religions. But the formation of a mass society will most likely be also characterised by the dissolution of traditional links, by anonymity and marginalisation. This needs to be critically assessed in the light of the freedom and cultural identities of peoples.

16. In Asia the politically-powerful elite, who are usually in the minority, are the bearers of a dominant sub-culture. Popular sub-cultures are those of the poor and politically marginalised majority. The foreseen societal changes leading to globalisation in the 21st century will probably impoverish and further weaken the sub-culture of the poor.

17. The above projections are now being confirmed. In our view, progress and advancement of the few have created false hopes among people who believe that "abundance" will trickle down to the whole of the Asian community.

18. The once self-sustaining economies and rural communities, both traditional and tribal, are the most affected by these trends. The depreciation of the rural economy and the decreasing dependence on the primary commodities of foreign exchange have depressing implications for the future of rural communities.

19. Even as individuals and entire communities become victims of this process, so also the environment and nature. The destruction of the rain forests and the pollution of the environment are just two of the negative consequences.

20. The nature of work in the modern industrial sector has also affected family life and health. New patterns of work relationships are attacking the unity and stability of the family. Women and children become the most obvious victims. Already the victims of the myth of male superiority, women are subject to new forms of violence and cultural alienation.

21. The obsessive drive toward economic and material achievement, the quest to satisfy needs created by the media and the new technological culture are subtly leading people to a life without moral and religious roots.

### A Fundamental Perspective and Option of the Church in Asia

22. In light of the above context, the Church in Asia will have to reformulate its role. This requires a renewed Vision and a revitalised sense of Mission, a deeper awareness of its human resources. Among these resources are:

- a) **The human person:** gifted with a God-given dignity from the first moment of life and endowed with boundless potential to promote fuller life, is the first resource.
- b) **Family:** the Asian family is traditionally close-knit, caring, serving, hospitable, religious. It is the hope of the Church at its most basic level.
- c) **Youth:** energetic, filled with idealism, highly capable of committing themselves to the cause of justice and freedom, are the untapped resources for mission and life.
- d) **Women:** in partnership with men, are at the heart of the Asian family. Enduring symbols of compassion and caring, harmony and love; life-giving and life-nourishing, in mutuality with men, they are even now at the forefront in the struggle for justice and freedom.

With these and other human resources, the Church has to challenge the ambivalence of Asian realities, harness their positive elements toward human development.

23. In the midst of massive changes in Asia, the Church has to announce with greater renewed vigour the God-given meaning of life and an alternative way of life and existence, through its Word, Deed and Being. The incarnation of the Gospel calls for a new quality of life that consists not just in "having more" but in "being more" and sharing more.

24. This means for us in the context of Asia a deeper awareness of the meaning of Church. We are a little flock in Asia. We are but one community among a vast multitude journeying to full life. Our special contribution in this journey is our striving toward a "Communion of Communities" beginning with the family, a New Way of Being Church that brings the new face of Christ into the workings of Asian society.

## PART II THE FACE OF JESUS IN ASIA

25. How the Church responds to challenges posed by the new phenomenon depends fundamentally on how it understands discipleship. But to answer that question, the Church first has to understand who Jesus is in the Asian context.

### Jesus the Lord

26. If Jesus were to ask us today in Asia, "Who do you say I am?" we would boldly confess as did the early Church: "You are the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (cf. Col 1:15). You are the Messiah, the Saviour, the Lord! "You are the Word in

the beginning, You are with God, You are God" (cf. Jn 1:1). Ours is the faith of the Apostles in the Risen Christ.

### **Jesus and the Poor: Preferential Option**

27. Yet when we reflect on the harsh underside of suffering Asia, the image of Jesus that captures our imagination is His human portrait in the Scriptures. Born of woman (cf. Gal 4:4), He is the God who pitches His tent among us (cf. Jn 1:14). He empties himself to be in solidarity with the little ones, those treated as non-persons - the poor and deprived, the outcast and marginalised, the oppressed and downtrodden, the sick, those who do not count, children and women. He strikes at the natural upward mobility of humankind and goes down to the downtrodden, walks among them, lives with them, takes up their burdens, calls them His friends (cf. Lk 4:18; 15:2). This predilection for the poor we now call his preferential option.

### **Breaking Down Barriers**

28. He breaks down social barriers encrusted in customs and traditions and entrenched in social structures. He challenges religious exclusivism that divides Jew and Samaritan, and announces a radically new worshiping of God "in Spirit and Truth". He dares to touch the untouchables, calls women as His close Disciples. His love touches, the miserable lives of the outcast, unshackles their chains of non-dignity and insecurity, and leads them into the freedom and joy that He shares with His Father. He speaks to them of His Father, "our Father", who cares not only for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field but, even more, for persons (cf. Mt 6:25-32; Lk 12:22-30). He forgives and reconciles. He is the person of harmony. He is peace (cf. Jn 14:27; 20:21-23; Eph 2:14).

### **The Kingdom of God**

29. He speaks confidently and authoritatively about God and his reigning. The Kingdom is here, in your midst! (cf. Lk 17:21) He is most compassionate over the multitude. He weeps for an individual (cf. Jn 11:35-36), he weeps for a whole city (cf. Lk 19:41-44). He wants to give them life. He calls the poor blessed, the Kingdom of God is theirs! (cf. Lk 6:20). The homeless, the hungry, the naked - the little ones - bear his face. Uncompromising in defending the little ones, his healing touch, forgiving words, signal the compassionate irruption of the King-

dom of God into our space and time.

### **Bold Prophecy**

30. For their sake He boldly confronts the powers that be and denounces their greed, their hypocrisy (cf. Mt 23:13-36; Lk 12:1), corruption and oppression, their leadership, their forgetting the weightier matters of the law, like justice, mercy and faith (cf. Mt 23:23). Bold and daring, thirsting for justice, the prophet of the ages, His words and actions subvert the values of this world. He speaks of reconciling with one's enemies, praying for them, loving them and forgiving them (cf. Mt 5:43-48; Lk 6:27-36). Such a radical love beyond all telling!

### **A Countersign in Economics and Politics**

31. He enters the realm of economics, relativises wealth, places all material possessions at the service of the Kingdom, condemns slavery to mammon, the greed and the selfishness that characterise the idolatry of wealth (cf. Lk 12:13-21; Mt 6:24). He is the Way (cf. Jn 14:6). As Master, He serves. He shows what power is for, not to dominate and oppress but to serve (cf. Jn 13:13-15; Lk 22:27; Mk 10:45). He does not hesitate to confront the powers that be. It is by serving that one rules. As Teacher, He lives by His words. He is authenticity, transparency, credibility, the Truth. He is killed because His view of truth runs counter to religious claims and the ruling elite's idea of the common good.

### **The Cross and the Eucharist: Love and Life**

32. The free giving of His own self to death by the cruel and brutal execution on the cross demonstrates what loving, sharing and serving mean. Because He loves, He dies for our sake. Because He loves, we live.

33. The Eucharist that He celebrates with His followers on the night before He dies sacramentally memorialises this total love (cf. Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-20; cf. Jn 13:1-5). This is what it means to be the Anointed, the Christ, the Person who by dying gives life to humanity. The bitter cup of suffering he accepts (cf. Mk 14:36; Mt 26:39, 42; Lk 22:42). Absurd, yes, but in this most cruel and most total vulnerability, in this most irrational of human experiences, is the power and the wisdom and the love of God (cf. I Cor 1:24).

34. By His suffering and death, Jesus conquers death, restores life. His rising from the

dead makes of Him "the Victory of Suffering Humanity". This is part of the Easter joy that has to pervade our struggling and hoping. He is the bread and the drink of life, life-giving water (cf. Jn 6:51; 4:10, 13; 7:37-38). He is life. He fulfills the deepest aspirations of humanity for full life, a person totally for others and totally for God.

35. This is the Jesus we have heard, have somehow touched and looked at in the mysteries we celebrate (cf. I Jn 1:1). This is how we see Jesus with an Asian face.

36. He is then the Word of Life (cf. I Jn 1:1) that we must share with our fellow Asians. For as He was Good News to the poor of His time, so today He cannot but be Good News to the "teeming millions" of Asia. This human image of Jesus, born of woman, God-made-poor, God-with-us, our peace, teacher and prophet, healer, a person of harmony, suffering servant-leader, liberator, life-giver, is one that powerfully resonates with Asia's situation of servitude, with Asia's struggle toward justice and harmony - with our struggle for life.

### THE FACE OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA

37. And if the Master, so the disciple-community, the Church. Only when our words, actions, lifestyle flow from what we believe in Jesus can we invite people to "come and see". The face of Jesus will attract the peoples of Asia in and through the face of the Church.

### The Disciples of Jesus the Lord

38. The confession "Jesus Christ is Lord" (cf. Phil 2:11) gives birth to a community of Disciples. As a community that recognises Jesus as Lord, our very *being* as disciples is marked by service, a being turned toward the other. This makes us continually seek, contemplate and behold the face of the living Lord. We, the disciples of Jesus *the Lord*, are invited to present to Asia the face of a confessing, serving, discerning and contemplating Church.

39. But even as we say this, we are also aware of our sinfulness both as people and as institution. It was Peter the Disciple who, facing the Lord, confessed, "Lord, depart from me for I am a sinner" (cf. Lk 5:8). Triumphalism, discrimination, clericalism, domination, exclusivism, accommodation at the expense of truth and justice are but a few of the attitudes that may have been built into our structures. A confession of sinfulness leads to conversion, and a deeper discipleship.

### The Disciples of Jesus the Poor

40. As the human portrait of Jesus attracts the peoples of Asia, especially its suffering and marginalised masses, our community is being called upon to assume a truly human face: a Church that does not resist being incarnated in weak humanity; a Church that will not turn away from the crosses of history; a Church that does not hold back in emptying itself; a Church that is not scandalised in being poor; a Church that dares to be the Church of the Poor. Through this Church, the face of the Jesus who loves the poor with predilection will shine forth in Asia.

### The Disciples of the Jesus of Communion and Harmony

41. In Asia the face of Jesus as reconciliation and peace has a special appeal. As a Church community, we are called to be the sacrament, the sign and instrument, of the communion with God and with humanity that Jesus brings (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1). Because our inner life as Church community is the Spirit of communion, we can ignore our mission of breaking down all barriers only to the negation of our own identity.

42. We are not only called to communion as individuals. We are also called to a communion of peoples and of ecclesial communities, and to overcome the divisions of Christian Churches. Thus we emphasise that the disciple-community is, indeed, God's own people.

43. In the context of religious fundamentalism, inter-religious violence, societal fragmentation and ecological destruction, we affirm the validity of the FABC's insights into being a Church of dialogue. Dialogue is the primary mode for the Church of Asia in the promotion of harmony. But like our Master, we will be able to foster harmony only by taking the path of a love of preference for the poor.

### The Disciples of Jesus, Servant of the Kingdom of God

44. As Jesus expended his whole life for the Kingdom of God, we are being invited to deepen our relation to this fundamental vision of our Lord. It requires the stripping of all triumphalism in Church life and structures, because the Kingdom is greater than ourselves. It urges us to glory only in being the humble servant of the Kingdom, since apart from it we lose the meaningfulness of our community. It impels us to be truly missionary, for the life

that the Kingdom promises must be discovered in and shared with others. It subjects us constantly to the judgment of the Kingdom because the values of the kingdom will ultimately unite us to our Lord.

### **The Disciples of Jesus, Prophet and Countersign**

45. Jesus served the Kingdom of God primarily through prophetic counter-witness. There is no other face that the Church of Asia can take. Through our proclamation, lifestyle and presence, we must expose the false values so easily embraced by the Asia to today and their dehumanising effects, particularly on the poor. In the midst of manipulation, we have to proclaim truth and freedom. In the midst of gross consumerism, opulence and materialism, the symbol of evangelical simplicity and moderation. In the midst of grinding poverty and destitution, the advocate of justice and liberation. In the midst of obsession with prestige and power, the embodiment of compassion, caring, mercy, selflessness and love.

46. To project such a face, we must be willing to strip ourselves of mentalities, categories and human structures that blur the face of the Prophet and Sign of Contradiction that we call our Lord.

### **The Disciples of the Crucified Lord**

47. The face of the naked Jesus on the cross does not fail to attract the peoples of Asia. The darkness of faith in the midst of abandonment felt by our Crucified Lord is sometimes our own experience as disciples. For us, the face of the Crucified Lord means total and selfless love of God and neighbour. The face of the Church must be the face of pure love, especially in the darkness of unloving. But we know that the cross is a symbol, too, of the Risen Christ. Our love then has to help fill our world with joy and hope, with great optimism in the midst of suffering.

## **PART III**

### **THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA**

#### **A. Theology at the Service of Life**

48. We see the work of theology in Asia as a service to life. It has to reflect systematically on themes that are important: to the common journey of life with other peoples in Asia, to the life of Christians and their Churches in Asia,

and to the work of the Asian Episcopal Conferences.

49. To do this service in a way that is pastorally relevant and fruitful to the life, spirituality and mission of the disciple-community, theology has to start from below, from the underside of history, from the perspective of those who struggle for life, love, justice and freedom. The life-long experience of living the Christian faith by the various Churches in their Asian context is the starting point for each. Theologising thus becomes more than faith seeking understanding, but faith fostering life and love, justice and freedom.

50. It is in this way that theology becomes a dynamic process giving meaning to and facilitating the Asian journey to life. It becomes part of the process of becoming and being Church in Asia.

#### **B. Pastoral Orientations**

51. Discipleship is a new paradigm for understanding the Church. It requires that the Church be missionary. The Church is therefore called to a renewed evangelisation, as the proclamation of Jesus. In the Asian context, renewed evangelisation requires new expression, renewed methods and renewed fervour. Pastoral creativity is needed for this.

52. Discipleship within the Church calls for a radical conversion from death-dealing ways and structures toward a life-giving praxis, a conversion which presupposes the change of mind-set. This means creating an inclusive community that does not discriminate in terms of culture, social class or gender when it comes to the question of equality and mutuality within the Church. It implies the promotion of a genuine sense of belonging, whether this be in the form of facilitating reflection on the Word of God in small groups or communities, taking concrete steps to make the liturgy meaningful for a variety of groups, strengthening the sense of being Church among families where values of the Kingdom are first handed on, empowering the laity toward their participation in the Church's life and mission which is theirs by right of baptism and confirmation, promoting mutuality and partnership between men and women in every sphere of family, of society and of Church life. As a disciple-community, we will have to explore more deeply the question of the place and role of women in the Church.

53. Other pastoral implications include the rectification of unjust or discriminatory prac-

tices, particularly toward women within ecclesiastical structures; the acceptance of youth as equal partners in mission and as worthy of respect; the implementation of a serious theological education programme for the laity and clergy that communicates to them up-to-date developments and helps them to respond more effectively to the challenges posed by daily life.

54. Discipleship in the promotion of life also calls for engagement in social transformation. Today this is to be expressed through a committed solidarity with all those who are deprived of life economically, by grappling with the issues of justice and peace, struggling with them and creating programmes geared toward economic uplift. It also means a respectful acceptance as the Church's own of the culture of the people with whom it searches for what is truly life-giving.

55. To this end, the Church initiates and develops a process of inculturation that makes it confident to draw up its own Pastoral Letters and Synodal Documents and to share them with other Local Churches.

56. As a community of Disciples, the Church will work with Churches and other Christian communities and other people of good will, even those whose religious vision differs from its own by involvement, particularly through the laity, in secular movements that promote life. To be credible in the area of economics, not only is the Church to promote economic literacy through critical examination of economic models and government policies, but it must also encourage viable alternatives as well as adopt a simple lifestyle. Relationships with others are to be person-oriented on the part of Church leaders rather than office-oriented. There is a serious need to rectify the image of pomp and power, of authoritarianism within the Church that are contrary to the image of a Church of the Poor and a Church of Dialogue.

57. Because the Church is communication (of the Gospel), it must cultivate good relations with media professionals and become more aware of the power of the media, understand its processes and gain real competence in the discerning use of them.

58. In its search to be responsive to the Gospel imperative, the Church is to make sure that its human structures are created "from below" in tune with the demands of the time and in harmony with the culture of the people. Through these diverse ways and in solidarity with one another, the Church can reflect the

face of Jesus in Asia for Asia.

## CONCLUSION

59. We are witnessing the birth of a new world in Asia. This great, massive continent, rich not only in cultures and faiths, but also with limitless possibilities, yet battered by incredible degradations of her lands and peoples, is groaning with the pangs of childbirth. From out of the division, conflict and violence, environmental destruction, innumerable injustices and cultural erosion that wrack the soul of Asia comes a cry of deep anguish. It is the anguish of the poor. The millions of Asian poor are groaning for a re-birth, a re-creation, which only the Spirit of Jesus can achieve.

60. Impelled by love, the love of the peoples of Asia and the love of Jesus, we have no option but to heed the cry. New life is aborning. And the form and quality of the new creation cannot be left to the machinations of political and economic forces. Like the prophet of old, the Church today must answer: Send me, Lord, I am your servant.

61. We take up this mission, not alone, but with the peoples of Asia themselves, the various faiths and cultures, their enduring values that come from the Spirit and the Word of God breathed and spoken from the beginning of time. It is ultimately the God of all peoples that calls the disciple-community, and it is the same God in Jesus who accompanies us. Led by the Spirit we embark on this mission.

62. *Loving and Life-giving God, at the beginning you called us in Asia into life, enriched us with an astonishing variety of cultures, ways of living and believing. As sisters and brothers in your one Asian family, we thank you and praise you for your gifts.*

63. *Among us are the poorest of the poor, millions who seek not only a better life but the full Life that only you can give. We hear your call to serve them, the way your Son, Jesus, served others in total love, in utter selflessness, eucharistically.*

64. *Send us your divine Spirit that we may respond, together with other communities, to the anguish of our sisters and brothers with courageous and generous love, and with them come to the Life that never ends.*

65. *May our Mother, Mary, the voice and Mother of the Poor, who announced the liberation of the lowly, be our companion, leading us to the Way, the Truth and the Life in your Kingdom forever and ever. Amen.*

---

# LETTRE AUX COMMUNAUTÉS ECCLÉSIALES DE BASE

---

Conseil permanent de l'épiscopat brésilien

## Frères et soeurs des communautés ecclésiales de base

1. Comme évêques de l'Église catholique, réunis à Brasília dans le cadre du conseil permanent de la Conférence nationale des évêques du Brésil (CNBB) du 23 au 26 novembre 1993, nous vous saluons en Jésus-Christ, Jésus-Christ qui est le même hier, aujourd'hui et toujours (Hébreux 13, 8).

2. Nous tenons à vous manifester notre soutien et notre estime. Vous êtes une lettre du Christ dont nous avons été l'intermédiaire. Une lettre écrite non avec de l'encre, mais sur des tables de chair, sur vos coeurs (cf. Corinthiens 3, 2-3). Les communautés ecclésiales de base sont un grand don fait à l'Église catholique au Brésil.

### Pourquoi nous vous écrivons?

3. Aujourd'hui la société rend difficile la vie en communauté. L'individualisme pénètre toutes les fibres de l'être des créatures. Il est difficile de faire sienne la dimension communautaire. Aussi certains se laissent-ils aller au découragement, aux accommodements, voire à l'abandon.

4. On note également toute une tendance à exclure Dieu de la vie et de l'activité des gens. Cette mentalité ambiante est un grand défi pour nous tous, en particulier pour les communautés ecclésiales de base. Aller à contre-courant suppose toujours beaucoup de courage et de persévérance. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous voulons vous adresser des paroles d'encouragement et d'espérance. L'espérance qui vient de Dieu et qui ne trompe pas (cf. Romains 5,5).

## Comment les Communautés ecclésiales de base vont-elles?

5. Les communautés ecclésiales de base sont toujours en bonne santé, même s'il peut y avoir ici ou là une certaine fatigue. Des enquêtes récentes du Centre de statistiques religieuses et d'investigations sociales (CERIS) ont montré la vitalité dans notre pays des communautés ecclésiales catholiques, entre autres les communautés ecclésiales de base. Pour sa part la conférence de Saint-Domingue ratifie la validité des communautés ecclésiales de base. Elle demande qu'y soient encouragés l'esprit de la mission et la solidarité, qu'elles soient toujours intégrées à la paroisse, au diocèse et à l'Église dans son ensemble. La communion ecclésiale doit être, aujourd'hui encore, la caractéristique des ces communautés.

6. Jésus lui-même avait souligné la valeur des communautés ecclésiales de base: "*Là où deux ou trois sont réunis en mon nom, je suis au milieu d'eux*" (Matthieu 18, 19-20). Voilà leur force et leur vitalité. La présence du Christ est synonyme d'action salvatrice et transformatrice. Elle est toujours salvifique.

7. Le pape Jean-Paul II, dans l'une de ses récentes encycliques traitant de la mission du Christ rédempteur, dit que les communautés ecclésiales de base sont un point de départ valable pour une nouvelle société fondée sur la civilisation de l'amour.

### Que faut-il attendre d'une communauté ecclésiale de base?

8. On lui demande que, en tant que communauté, elle intègre les familles dans d'étroites relations interpersonnelles sur la base de la foi.

En tant que communauté ecclésiale, qu'elle soit une communauté de foi, d'espérance et de charité; qu'elle célèbre la parole de Dieu; qu'elle se nourrisse de l'Eucharistie; qu'elle mette en oeuvre la parole de Dieu dans la vie par la solidarité et l'engagement de fraternité; qu'elle rende présentes et agissantes la mission ecclésiale et la communion visible avec les évêques et avec notre Saint-Père le pape. En tant que communauté de base, qu'elle soit constituée d'un nombre restreint de personnes; qu'elle permette une vie plus fraternelle entre ses membres. La communauté ecclésiale de base doit être le noyau ecclésial premier et fondamental, responsable en même temps de la richesse de la foi et du culte qui en est l'expression. Elle est la cellule initiale de la structuration en Église et un foyer d'évangélisation. Elle est également un élément essentiel de promotion humaine et de développement. C'est ce que Medellín et Puebla disent d'elle.

---

***Un autre défi c'est l'ouverture à la religiosité et à la culture populaires. Toute une modernisation de l'existence est en marche. Une modernisation technique et économique. Des valeurs et des comportements d'hier sont remplacés par des valeurs nouvelles et par de nouveaux modèles de comportement. Le plan de Dieu est remplacé par le plan des hommes.***

---

9. Saint Domingue, à son tour, rappelle que la communauté ecclésiale de base est une cellule vivante de la paroisse comprise comme communion organique et missionnaire. La communauté ecclésiale de base sera animée par des laïcs, des hommes et des femmes dûment préparés à la vie de communauté. Ces animateurs seront en communion avec leur curé respectif et leur évêque.

10. Les communautés ecclésiales de base sont aujourd'hui la continuation de la communauté chrétienne primitive de Jérusalem, dans l'assiduité à l'enseignement des Apôtres, à la communion fraternelle, à la fraction du pain, à la prière (Actes 2, 42), et dans le souci de tout mettre en commun afin de n'être plus qu'un seul cœur et un seul esprit (cf. Actes 2, 32). On voit par là combien les communautés

ecclésiales de base sont importantes et indispensables pour la vie de l'Église et de la société.

### **Et les défis?**

11. Vous faites dans votre chair l'expérience de la grande mutation du monde actuel. Cette mutation soulève des problèmes très sérieux. Vous savez et ressentez à quel point l'appauvrissement augmente. Nous voyons de plus en plus de gens, rejetés aux marges, exclus de la société. De moins en moins de gens trouvent leur place dans la société.

12. Voilà quel est le premier grand défi auquel vous êtes confrontés. Comment les communautés ecclésiales de base rejoignent-elles ces masses d'exclus? Comment rejoignent-elles les plus pauvres parmi les pauvres? Le nombre des personnes vivant en dessous du seuil de la dignité humaine augmente jour après jour: elles sont victimes de conditions économiques, politiques et sociales extrêmement dures et tout à fait insupportables. Ces frères et ces soeurs n'arrivent pas à vivre une vie de communauté de façon continue et cohérente. C'est à eux et à elles que Jésus s'identifie tout particulièrement: "Tout ce que vous avez fait à l'un de ces plus petits de mes frères, c'est à moi que vous l'avez fait" (Matthieu 25,40).

13. Un autre défi c'est l'ouverture à la religiosité et à la culture populaires. Toute une modernisation de l'existence est en marche. Une modernisation technique et économique. Des valeurs et des comportements d'hier sont remplacés par des valeurs nouvelles et par de nouveaux modèles de comportement. Le plan de Dieu est remplacé par le plan des hommes. Par exemple, la terre faite par Dieu pour être à tous est en fait de plus en plus concentrée entre les mains de quelques-uns. Les richesses de nos forêts, de nos fleuves et de nos mers sont extraites et emportées au loin. A mesure que les jours passent l'emploi devient de plus en plus difficile et compliqué.

14. Cela demande de la part des communautés ecclésiales de base une bonne capacité de discernement critique et une préparation évangélique en profondeur pour pouvoir faire face aux situations nouvelles qui sont destructrices de la vie. Vous pouvez par là mieux percevoir combien la spiritualité chrétienne est importante dans la vie et dans l'expérience de la foi. Il s'agit de rechercher quelle est la volonté de Dieu, quel est le plan de Dieu et comment suivre le Christ dans la vie d'aujourd'hui. Deux



ou tel groupe humain aux objectifs purement humains. Les communautés ecclésiales de base se nourrissent de la foi en Dieu et de l'espoir de voir se réaliser le Royaume du Christ. Ce n'est pas parce que ce dont on rêve ne se réalise pas dans un court espace de temps qu'il faut pour autant se laisser aller au découragement. Nous vivons dans l'espérance que vont germer les semences de nos rêves. Viendra le temps, dans l'histoire en marche, de la récolte: "Un seme, l'autre moissonne" (Jean 4,37). La récolte ultime sera pour la fin des temps. L'engagement dans le monde d'aujourd'hui se vit en fonction de demain: "Nous n'avons pas ici-bas de cité permanente, mais nous recherchons celle de l'avenir" (Hébreux 13,14). C'est pourquoi nous devons mettre en oeuvre les talents et les capacités dont Dieu nous a pourvus pour faire de la cité terrestre une habitation digne, ouverte à tout un chacun, et où règne la justice pour la satisfaction des besoins de tous.

19. Cherchons, dans la lecture et l'approfondissement de la parole de Dieu, à garder présente à l'esprit la pédagogie de Dieu et de Jésus. C'est de Dieu et de Jésus que nous avons à apprendre comment faire avancer l'histoire.

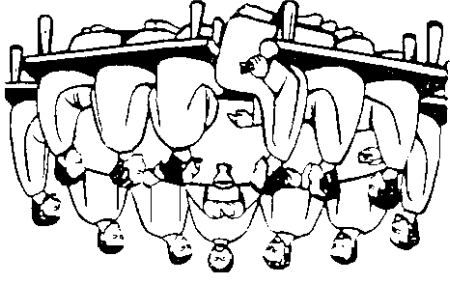
#### A titre d'au-revoir

Nous avons commencé cette lettre en disant que c'est vous qui êtes notre lettre, la lettre du Christ dont nous avons été l'intermédiaire. Il nous reste maintenant à souhaiter que votre chemin, et le nôtre tout autant, puisse être une lettre du Christ pour notre société d'aujourd'hui.

Nous demandons à Dieu, par l'intercession de la Très-Sainte Vierge Marie, Notre-Dame de l'apparition, qu'il répande sur vous ses abondantes bénédictions et récompense vos efforts de généreuse persévérance.

Ref. Dial

No. 1860; 24 mars, 1994  
43 Ter, Rue de la Glacière  
75013 Paris  
France



choses sont nécessaires: la prière et l'action.

15. Un autre défi encore est celui de l'articulation entre vous et les autres parties de l'Eglise. Le risque permanent est de s'isoler, de se fermer sur soi. La communication est très importante. La communication d'expériences, surtout en matière de solidarité. La planification pastorale et sa mise en oeuvre supposent des critères techniques. Mais ce n'est pas suffisant. Il faut la participation effective de tout un chacun. La transparence et le dialogue sont une nécessité. Il faut également s'être préparé pour dialoguer avec d'autres Eglises et d'autres religions.

#### Des questions à approfondir?

16. Nous aimerions que vous continuiez à approfondir certains aspects importants de la vie des communautés ecclésiales de base. Nous pensons ici à la dimension ecclésiale des communautés de base, à la nouvelle façon d'être Eglise que vous représentez, à l'exercice des divers ministères et charismes, aux célébrations liturgiques, aux relations avec les autres dimensions de la pastorale et mouvements d'Eglise, à vos rapports avec les mouvements populaires, syndicaux et politiques, ainsi qu'aux "rencontres interecclésiales" proprement dites. Nous nous efforcerons de poursuivre le dialogue sur tous ces points avec des représentants des communautés ecclésiales de base. Notre but c'est de faire que ces communautés soient toujours plus présentes dans l'effort de nouvelle évangélisation.

#### Comment agir?

17. Veiller à la communion entre vous, à la communion avec la paroisse, le diocèse, l'Eglise dans son ensemble et selon ses directives. Nous ne nous trouvons pas seulement devant une réalité humaine et sociologique. Ce dont il est bien d'avantage question, c'est de vivre la communion commencée au jour de notre saint baptême. Ce jour-là nous avons été plongés dans la communion intime du Père, du Fils et de l'Esprit-Saint. C'est de cette communion dont parle Jésus quand il demande au Père "que tous soient un comme toi, Père, tu es en moi et moi en toi, qu'eux aussi soient un en nous" (Jean 17,21). C'est cette communion qui sera le levain de la transformation de la société dans laquelle vous vivez.

18. Cette communion ecclésiale qui caractérise les communautés de base montre bien qu'elles ne sont pas à confondre avec tel

---

# SISTERHOODS AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN CENTRAL AND EAST AFRICA

---

Beverly Lacayo, MSOLA

"We experience setbacks in obtaining adequate professional training and sometimes we lack the support of a genuine team spirit of partnership in mission... Moreover in some parts of this continent and specifically in Eastern Africa, it is still believed that women may be seen but not heard in public! In some rural areas they appear as beasts of burden due mainly to poverty, ignorance and illiteracy".

The woman saying this was neither ignorant nor illiterate and she was both seen and heard by the 75 Bishops of East Africa who invited the East African Sisters' Conference to send representatives to their triennial meeting last October. Catherine Asomugha, a Holy Rosary Sister from Nigeria, was delegated by the more than 14,000 Sisters in East Africa to tell the Bishops, politely and respectfully that they were experiencing problems in being accepted as full partners in ministry. Their own Conference had addressed the problems of war, hunger and refugees. But central to their being able to work and give their full potential to Church ministry were some very serious problems. Problems which a generation of religious in a previous century would have not dared to raise, assuming they were even conscious of them.

## QUESTIONS POSED BY THE SISTERS TO THE BISHOPS

How would they receive adequate education for their task in today's world? They asked the Bishops to give the needed approval to their requests for external aid.

How would they earn their daily bread? They asked for fair wages for sisters in pastoral

work, wages adequate for living, transport, updating and medical expenses.

How could they function in parish ministry if they experienced rivalry from priests who were asked to accept them as co-workers. They asked the Bishops to ensure that priests received adequate formation in Spiritual direction, in sexuality and in human development. How would they care for their aging and invalid sisters? They put the responsibility squarely before the Bishops in whose dioceses they were working to a ripe old age.

Many of these same sisters are obliged to take on secular work which is salaried in order to be financially viable. Bishops sometimes complain about the large number of sisters going into salaried positions in Government schools and hospitals and no longer available for pastoral work or Catholic schools. But the sisters have put the ball back in their court, saying: "give us a living wage, and tell your priests to respect us as partners in ministry".

Such a level of assertiveness would hardly have been possible for an African woman a few years back. Yet, today, it is happening all over Africa. In spite of their meager resources African Sisterhoods have been producing women who are leaders, resourceful leaders who reject a socialisation which encourages submission and passivity before male leadership.

Many African Bishops, cognizant of the strength and gifts of women in ministry, have been asking greater participation of women religious in the work and decision making of the local Church. An answer in part to the request

of the sisters at the East African Bishops' Conference was given by the Bishops of East Africa in their published message after the Regional Conference which they had invited the Sisters to attend.

"We acknowledge the important contributions which laymen and religious women make to our Church and to our society", the Bishops said, adding, "and we urge that they be given greater respect and a wider role in decision-making".

A smaller but significant number of African Bishops have over the years placed women religious in charge of developing parishes through the formation of small Christian communities. They stress the empowerment of the laity within these neighborhood communities and realise that women religious, as members of the laity, can do this more effectively than many priests, who have been trained in an authoritarian role - vis-à-vis the laity and whom the laity also treat as an authoritative figure more than as a pastor.

Because of the grass roots women's movement, religious and lay women working together, which is widespread throughout the continent, the Bishops elected by their peers to come to the Synod on Africa this year were far ahead in their thinking on women's issues than the lay women appointed by the Vatican as official observers. The final message of the Bishops from the African Synod contains support of women's right to decision making roles in the Church that go far beyond previous Church documents.

### **TRADITIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN AFRICA**

In fact the African woman is traditionally a strong partner, being responsible for supporting her children and growing the food for the family. But recent history, which includes the introduction of currency and wages to the economy, have made African women increasingly powerless and marginal in the affairs of their society. In Zambia, customs such as the traditional caring for a widow by the deceased husband's relatives, have been perverted into a pillaging of the goods of the family, leaving the widow penniless. Woman's work, which contributed greatly to the health and well being of the tribe, has been more and more relegated to producing children and serving the husband, while he goes out to earn, then treating the money as his own.

How have the East African women religious been able to surmount this adverse turn of recent history? It has not been easy. One of the helps has been a concerted effort on the part of their religious sisters in other countries to give them the necessary secular education, religious formation and psychological and spiritual support.

A concerted effort is needed because the celibate woman in African society lacks a certain status. The whole idea of an unmarried or childless woman is foreign to their self-concept. Not that it was any different in our own society a few years back, but African women, for whom approval in the community context is still very strong and needed, an equally strong community context had to be created in order to give them the courage to assert themselves. This community context has been partially provided by their national Sisterhood associations to which both local and expatriate (missionary) congregations belong.

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

In the sixties, the heady years of independence for many African countries, many local sisters were sent abroad to study in order to give them the training needed to hold leadership positions within their own groups. Financially and culturally this could only be a limited and temporary solution.

Soon the local congregations, began sending their sisters to the new national universities and colleges, to be trained with their peers. This brought about a big opening in outlook and self-confidence for the ones who had the experience and remained faithful to their calling. But there was still a lot of cultural alienation within the local groups, and a lack of self-confidence among the sisters within their society.

### **CHANGES IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF SISTERS**

In Zambia and Malawi, the two countries I visited recently, I saw tremendous strides in the empowerment of women religious. Former missionary Sisterhoods had relinquished the running of schools and hospitals and their successors were often local religious women. As they felt their power to achieve and to serve their communities, the African sisters also felt the need to look within and understand what

was happening in their changing relationships to society, to their families, to the men with whom they were working in the Church. The local and national associations, which they formed originally in order to communicate and coordinate among themselves, became increasingly a means of better and more thorough formation in theology, spirituality, psychology and ministry. On the eve of the Synod on the consecrated life they are poised for inculturation and renewal from a position of strength.

### ZAMBIAN ASSOCIATION OF SISTERHOODS

Sister Luzia Wetzel, a German Missionary Sister of Africa, is one of a series of sisters who have been appointed as Secretary to the ZAS for three year contracts. I asked her why a Zambian Sister was not doing her job? Her answer revealed the genuine support being given to our African Sisters by their sister congregations: "The Sisters are qualified and they have held the position of Secretary before. Unlike the

---

***In some parts of this continent  
and specifically in Eastern Africa,  
it is still believed that women may  
be seen but not heard in public!***

---

other leadership positions, however, secretary to the National organisation is a full time job. The local sisters are fully involved in ministry and in building up their own membership, as well as assuring leadership within their congregations. Asking one of them to take on the job of secretary would mean taking a very competent and skilled woman out of circulation, so to speak. Since many of us have been involved in founding these local congregations, and most of us are missionary, we think this kind of support is normal until they have sufficient numbers to cope with both types of service".

In their most recent Annual General Meeting the ZAS reviewed their excellent record of training formators and decided it was time to move on to the crying needs in the field of ministry: hunger, refugees, AIDS, pastoral work with small Christian communities, as a focus for their attention. (Was this a SEASC decision?) "My work, after the A.G.M., which is predominantly Zambian in composition", says

Luzia, "is to follow up and help to implement the resolutions taken at the meeting. This is done sometimes at diocesan level, sometimes at national level".

The 1992 meeting decided that the growing scourge of AIDS, though not a problem which usually affects religious directly, was of sufficient importance nationally that they should join their married sisters in creating awareness, prevention education and care for the patients. This called first for raising awareness among the sisters themselves, the leadership conference had decided. Luzia organised a two-day diocesan workshop in AIDS awareness and education for sisters together with local women's groups, which were already involved. Featured prominently were Zambian medical personnel, Zambian women leaders who had started awareness groups among teenagers and pre-teenagers, and women who were working through their neighbourhood Christian communities to visit and care for the sick in their homes.

Sisters involved in pastoral work, education and medical work were moved by the testimony and suffering of the lay women and motivated to join in the struggle to lift the burden of AIDS, which was being disproportionately shared by their sisters. The lay women in turn were emboldened to go further in their push for justice through the forum given them by the religious. The lay women complained that the question of AIDS was never spoken about from the pulpit. Often women received help in understanding, prevention and coping, but the men who brought the disease home were not given workshops or moral direction. A billboard depicting the crassness of this attitude could be seen all over Lusaka. "Your family needs you. Use condoms!" Many women felt that, "Your family needs you, stay home!" would be more appropriate.

The Christian men needed their consciousness raised with regard to what their casual sex was doing to their families. The women needed support in refusing their husbands when they were HIV carriers. All these questions were openly discussed in the small group and general sessions, a very striking departure from the traditional reticence on sexual matters, especially with several men present. Why should not laws be enacted which would protect partners once HIV was diagnosed? The women wanted to know. The whole question of AIDS had to be brought out into the open among middle class

Christian families, the women decided, and it was them who needed to get their heads out of the sand.

Present at this unusual meeting between religious and married women, was the newly appointed pastoral coordinator of Lusaka. The first thing he did when he left the meeting was to organise a deanery\* workshop on the subject of AIDS education and prevention for the priests and laymen of the Archdiocese.

### **WHY STOP HERE? TAKE IT TO THE PRESIDENT!**

The women and sisters passed a resolution to ask for a meeting with Zambia's President, Frederick Chiluba, to push for a more vigorous and high profile public policy on AIDS prevention, stressing self-discipline and education for men, women and children. A meeting with the President of the country is not impossible, since President Chiluba himself has told religious groups he is available for feedback on issues of importance to the nation as a whole. Zambia's Bishops obtained a meeting with him concerning the impact of Structural Adjustment on the poor. Though no concrete changes in Government policy have resulted from this meeting, there is a growing awareness in Government that they are accountable to the electorate. The Sisters' letter to the President received a response and the women's delegation (religious and lay) got their hearing.

### **PASTORAL WORK AND THE LINEAMENTA**

In Zambia eighteen religious congregations answered a questionnaire based on the *Lineamenta* for the Synod on consecrated life.

The results will probably come as a shock to the leadership. Pastoral work was still mostly in the "handmaid of the priests" stage. Sisters in this ministry felt definitely second class. Most sisters involved experienced a lack of training for their work: theology, scripture, catechises, parish administration. There was also a felt need for development in prayer, self-understanding and self-esteem based on competence. In answer to the open question on needs most of the suggestions centred on the gender issue within the Church. The need to accept women in decision making; financial support (for education and just recompense for

work); and ordination to all ministries, including priesthood. The same issues were mentioned repeatedly in a recent questionnaire answered by more than 700 lay and religious women all over the continent in a SEDOS Survey (SEDOS Bulletin, Jan.94).

Some recommendations coming from a national workshop for sisters involved in pastoral work were telling in their forthright exposition of the problem: "Superiors should be made aware of the high demands of pastoral ministry". "Sisters should be sent into pastoral work only if they like the work and have an aptitude for it, not just to fill a gap". "Make sure that sisters are prepared for such work".

But preparation costs money, which the sisters are often not given in pastoral ministry; and "liking" or "disliking" pastoral work may depend on the job description and limitations given by the parish priest. "The fact is that pastoral ministry in a parish, including the development of Small Christian Communities, is a difficult and demanding ministry for which

---

***Woman's work, which was a big contributor to the health and well being of the tribe, has been more and more relegated to producing children and serving the husband, while he goes out and earns the money, treating it as his own.***

---

much skill and preparation are required," says Luzia. "If the Sisterhoods are serious about undertaking this in greater numbers, and thus putting their womenpower at the service of the local Church, then they need to choose pastoral workers carefully and ensure competence through adequate training".

Adequate preparation of the Sisters will go a long way in addressing problems of self-esteem and equity. But it is not the whole story. Sisters in East African countries are waiting to hear concrete proposals for seminary training and on-going priestly formation which will enable the priests to enter into healthy partnership with religious and lay women in ministry.

Meanwhile another aspect of their outreach, empowerment of women, is being carried on in

direct and indirect ways. The very fact that a woman can choose celibacy and still retain status and influence in the community goes a long way in helping a single women make free choices about life style and commitment in African society. African women religious have a high profile because most of them wear a habit. They can be seen as heading schools, facilitating workshops, training leaders in Christian communities. These are not easy tasks, given the context, but they are being done, and well. Direct empowerment is also given to groups of uneducated women in the rural and urban areas through self-knowledge and training in assertiveness.

The Bishops of East Africa were bold in their promotion of women in the Church the "African Synod". Sr Celine Namalambo, chairperson of the Zambian Association of Sisterhoods, is one of four African women religious present at the Synod on the consecrated life this month. Knowing their Bishops have given them a vote of confidence in April, we expect their voices to be heard.

### SISTERHOODS IN MALAWI

In Malawi, a country only recently opened up to uncensored outside influence, due to political reasons, the effort at empowerment of women is not as far advanced. But even there simple things like training rural women to read in Church, to lead a meeting in the presence of

---

*Sisters in East African countries are waiting to hear concrete proposals for seminary training and on-going priestly formation which will enable the priests to enter into healthy partnership with religious and lay women in ministry.*

---

men, to express their opinions in public on matters of common concern, are part of the action of sisters engaged in pastoral work.

At the level of self-formation the Association of Religious in Malawi (ARIMA) has been carrying out intense programmes in Biblical studies, self-awareness and self-understanding for Malawian Sisters. This is no mean task as

they reach out to some one thousand sisters in thirty-two religious congregations. The recent opening up of the country to democratic influences is also having an impact on the work of the sisters.

Patricia Kent, a British Missionary Sister of Our Lady of Africa, is just finishing her term as Secretary to the Sisterhood Association. She is being replaced by Sister Mairead Butterly of the Medical Missionaries of Mary. "ARIMA has three committees", says Pat, "Justice and Peace, on-going formation and finance. This last is one of those essentials, without which all others grind to a halt", she remarks. This is why her last year on the job has been spent writing project proposals to international donor groups. Malawi has suffered several set backs recently which made this necessary. One was last year's drought, another was the aid cutoff which was used by the international community to pressure the Banda regime into more democratic structures. Last but not least, the Structural Adjustment rules imposed by the International Monetary Fund have made poverty more widespread.

In the climate of daring created by the Pastoral letter on justice promulgated by Malawi's six Bishops in 1992, the Justice and Peace Committee of ARIMA also livened up. Communications networks were created. Drama groups were formed for awareness education. Confidence was instilled in Christians to register to vote in spite of the very frightening attempts at intimidation by the ruling and only political party. Meetings educating workers on their human and political rights sprouted all over the country. The committee has also involved Sisters in the care of the more than one million Mozambique refugees which have been living in Malawi for almost eight years, waiting to go back.

Another phenomenon, only now getting off the ground, are training for transformation workshops, a method whereby community based groups are helped to become conscious of their socio-economic conditions and empowered to change their situation through their own group action. Sister Revocata Kabahuma, a Ugandan MSOLA missioned in Malawi, was part of a Training for Transformation team which circulated throughout the country, including sessions at the national major seminary. The Sisters' training in democracy for themselves and their compatriots continues as the newly elected Government also struggles with it.

Sister Kent believes that, "Probably the most exciting development at a personal level is the self-discovery and self-awareness that the more mature sisters are making. The committee for on-going formation has given hundreds of workshops, weekends, two-week seminars, month-long sessions during school breaks, you name it!" Most of these are in the area of individuation or learning to experience self-awareness apart from the group consciousness.

According to Sr Doris Gastonguay, MSOLA, from Brockton, Maine, who gives Enneagram, MBTI, and Progoff weekends adapted to the local groups' needs, "This learning to experience their own inner processes and direction is something only they can do for themselves, but it is essential if they are to be able to hold their own in their society. Often an inner conflict is expressed in a dream or an irrational fear. Through 'dream workshops' sisters learn to rationalise what is going on in their imagery and thus to cope better with an externally difficult situation".

### THE BIBLE THROUGH NEW EYES

Another side of formation is Biblical knowledge, beyond the mere reading of the New Testament texts in liturgy and prayer. For those who have not yet had a good course in Biblical theology, Sister Viviane Lafreniere, MSOLA, from Northern Ontario, Canada, offers formation workshops in reading the Bible from a faith perspective. "It is hard to overestimate the value of the Swiss based 'School of Faith' method of scripture study", says Viviane. "We take themes, such as 'the ancestors of Jesus'. We look up all the Biblical references on Abraham, Moses, David, etc.... thus developing for ourselves a historical consciousness and context for Jesus' revelation of who he is.

The Sisters learn how to cross-reference a text to see how a certain image was used traditionally in the Jewish scriptures. This gives them a more objective understanding of what the text is supposed to mean, and helps them to hold their own among the many fundamentalist interpretations which are constantly thrown at them by confused lay people. "But far and away, the most gratifying 'payoff'", says

Viviane, "is the deepening of their own spiritual experience as the word of God hits home to them. An understanding of social justice, which is so clearly revealed in the Old Testament, becomes part of the fabric of their faith experience".

Just recently Sister Lafreniere developed a theme dealing with women in the Bible. She has already started it with some groups. "Reading the Bible with Malawian women is as enjoyable as watching a good film" she says. "So much of the Old Testament society is similar to their own and they enter right into the human reality of the situations. Once when we read how Abraham allowed his wife, Sarah, to be taken to bed by Pharoah (out of cowardice he introduced her as his sister), the whole group of sisters burst into boos and hisses. Needless to say, when Pharoah got sick after bedding Sarah, there were cheers!"

### SIMPLE EMPOWERMENT TASKS

#### Learning an International Language

More than half the women religious in Malawi and Zambia are local women at this point. The expatriate missionaries remaining are engaged in pastoral work, but often in the formation and support of local congregations through various means. Sister Christal, (Birmingham Diocese in England), a retired missionary who throughout her forty year career in Malawi taught almost every conceivable subject in Teacher Training Colleges and Secondary Schools, now teaches Malawian Poor Clares English, so they can listen to the BBC world news and pray for our needy planet. Elizabeth Zadnik from Alberta, Canada, spends her free time helping the Superior General of a local congregation understand the complexities of English in the International Union of Superiors General journal.

There is no doubt that the Malawian women are becoming aware of their situation. How much they will be able to do about it in this new climate of political and social freedom remains to be seen. It is safe to say, however, that in both Malawi and Zambia the Sisterhoods represent a hope and a challenge to the Church and to all women on the continent.





## mission moments

### SHARING

#### (AFRICA)

Dear friends. The wonders we see the Lord is accomplishing before our eyes, have no other explanation but the unflagging goodness of God - of God's immense desire for the salvation of all.

#### Mission is Everywhere

We have all fervently experienced in our parishes World Mission Day on 18 October and we will soon be celebrating the feast of Christ the King of the Universe. This day is of utmost significance for us! Yes, the situation of the Church today is very different than that at the beginning of the century. With the approach of the year 2,000, the Church is universal and Catholic in fact. Certainly, it is so by its nature from its origins, but today it is more visibly so in practice.

Formerly, it was confined within the borders of a few countries and the other countries were called «mission territories». Today very vital nuclei of the Church are spread throughout the whole world, and... so is Mission! Mission belongs everywhere. What a triumph! An immense «Alleluia» should burst forth from our hearts. The Pentecost has worked to the full. The power of the Resurrected Lord has become manifest. "We exult with joy in God our Saviour!"

This does not mean that evangelisation has ended. We could say, on the contrary, that everything

«begins today», that we are going to re-experience a new departure, «a new Pentecost». Today, the basic nuclei of evangelisation are everywhere, not only in Jerusalem or Rome, but absolutely everywhere, and «it is our Basic Christian Communities,» linked to our parishes, all «Pentecostal nuclei, which are bringing the power of the Holy Spirit.» But also the mission is everywhere, in Europe as well as in Africa or in America...

Yes, the mission «abroad» is pursued and will be pursued to the end of the world. But we must also absolutely understand now that the Mission is also more than ever in our hands, no longer (only) «in the hands of missionaries coming from elsewhere, but in the hands of all those who are vitally attached to the Resurrected Jesus» in His Spirit, in the Church, here!

#### Kinshasa: An Immense Mission Territory

Kinshasa, criss-crossed by hundreds of parishes and their branches, and by millions of Basic Christian Communities, is a well-established «Church», with its bishops, priests, religious and sisters, its dynamic faithful... Kinshasa has for a long time no longer been a mission «territory» in the former sense of the term. Kinshasa is a Church which is living, which is pursuing the Mission at home (in the interior) and abroad (the exterior), which receives, which sends and which shares! Kinshasa is in fact still an immense Mission «territory»!

Each parish, each Basic Christian Community is like a star which shines in the sky. However, among

the stars, there is an immense space of «night»! Each Basic Christian Community brings together a little nucleus of fervent and well-formed Christians. It is visible and so rejoicing. However, all around it are «the people of Kinshasa» who continue to live more or less outside of the Spirit of Christ, people who are so nice and rich in potential, but seriously ill with raw paganism. And this too is glaring. And if we say that these spaces of profound «night» still cross each of us, whom we can globally call «stars» because of our Faith, we discover there too an immense mission territory, as far as the depths of our hearts.

We must admit that our Christian nuclei are still not sufficiently «missionary». We must live the Gospel more fully so that each parish, each Basic Christian Community becomes aware of its missionary responsibility in its space of the «night» and consciously takes charge of the missionary sector of its neighbourhood, its family, its parish.

#### The Missionary Service of Kinshasa

It is in the context of the «mission in the interior» that the small team of the «Kinshasa Missionary Service» would like to be a dynamic nucleus of missionary spirit through the Basic Christian Communities for the people of Kinshasa, a people who are so loved by God. To help the fervent Christians of Kinshasa to have the concern which is the major concern of Jesus today, in the glory of His Resurrection: that all may participate in the Life of the Resurrected!

Some people ask us: why are you always full of joy? We reply: it is not because of what we do, but because we discover the wonders of the Lord everywhere: this mother, this father, this young person, this home... 1992 is over. We had so hoped to no longer be only three in the Missionary Service, but 30 or even 300... such is the size of the harvest! No one joined us in 1991, nor yet in 1992. Perhaps 1993 will be the decisive year?

In this regard, have you already seen our set-up in St. Timothy? When will you visit us? Three small rooms have been furnished to receive candidates for the priesthood at the Missionary Service of Kinshasa! Madness? They will certainly come! Will we soon find candidates for lay missionaries? A second Papa Kongolo, a second Mama Esale? And sisters? We believe as strongly as iron... Yes! Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Ref. *CHRONICA*, CICM  
No. 7, Sept-Oct. 1994  
via San Giovanni Eudes 95  
00163 Roma

---

## HOW SLAVERY CONTINUES

(PAKISTAN)

---

Brick-kiln workers often baffle the Christian community. This age old slavery goes on unhampered due to politicians, landlords, proprietors and social workers. Rough estimate shows there are 10,000 brick-kilns and ten million brick-kiln workers, and among whom 60 per cent of these are under fourteen years of age. Reliable statistics indicate that over 70 per cent of these workers are Christians.

A brick-kiln can be established in a place that has (a) good clay (b)

adequate supply of labour. These conditions are essential for the success of a brick-kiln. After installation, the Master of the brick-kiln brings a number of families to the vicinity of the brick-kiln. These families leave their familiar place and settle down in miserable, so-called quarters provided by the paternalistic Master. Around the brick-kiln there are no schools, Churches or Mosques, bazaars or shops. Day to day minimum provisions are supplied by the master of the kiln under certain conditions.

So the labourers hardly move from the place of work. Their salaries are abysmally low and the working hours are unduly long. Before 1988 the rates were as low as thirty rupees (U.S. 90 cents) per thousand. After much struggle this rate was raised to seventy or eighty rupees per thousand. With the increase of labour rates, the price of bricks too rose from 700 rupees to 1,200 rupees per thousand. So the proprietor or the Master of the brick-kiln is left with over 300 per cent profit. In 1993 the Minimum Wage Board Act set the rate at Rs 130 per thousand bricks. This has not been implemented yet, due to lack of approval of the Governor.

The proprietor of a brick-kiln has the capacity to produce ten lakh bricks in one round. Excluding the rainy months which are mainly June and July, he produces about one million bricks a year. For a year keeping in mind all the losses, wages and the expenditure of all items, the proprietor's annual income comes to over 50 lakhs. However good the profits, the financial situation of the labourers deteriorates unimaginably daily.

The labourers are at the mercy of the proprietors. They borrow and their debts accumulate daily. It is a real trap for the labourers, and as time goes on they find it difficult to extricate themselves. Labour Laws in Pakistan are highly ineffective. The corrupt bureaucracy manipulates things to its advantage often at the expense of the poor labourers.

Despite various laws such as, Employment of Children's Act 1991, the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act 1992, the Factory Act 1970 and the Industrial Relations Ordinance, the plight of the brick-kiln labourers remains the same.

Almost hundred per cent of the labourers remain illiterate. As they are clustered together near a brick-kiln, they hardly have any contact with civilized people. Their vision seldom lifts beyond the muddy field in which they work. The whole family works. Therefore there is no question of schooling for children. Sometimes wives and the daughters of the labourers are kidnapped or abducted for immoral activity or a ransom is demanded to set them free. In no way is there redress for these down-trodden labourers.

This slavery to which the brick-kiln labourers are subjected, is actually worse than the Egyptian slavery of old. This situation goes on from generation to generation without any ray of hope for their uplift or emancipation. As the labourers work for long hours in a highly restricted position, many become unhealthy or disabled after a few years. Today these labourers are in such a mess socially, morally, educationally, religiously and financially that it is almost impossible for them to get away from the clutches of the rapacious brick magnates.

So far the efforts of Mr Anwar Arthur Bhatti, the Justice and Peace Commission officer for the welfare of the brick-kiln workers' remain very insignificant. The question must be tackled but it must start from the grass-root level. As the labour laws are often enmeshed in a corrupt bureaucracy, those that come from above for their uplift hardly remain effective. They must be shown a process to lift themselves up by their own boot straps.

Ref. Bro Osmund  
Catechists Training Centre  
Khushpur, Chak 51 G.B  
Distt. Faisalabad, Pakistan.

94/278

## COMING EVENTS

---

### WORKING GROUPS

October 28 Philippines

November 3 Haïti

Place: SEDOS Secretariat; via dei Verbiti, 1

---

December 6

Morning: 9.30 - 13.00 hrs. (For everybody)

**2 PARTICIPANTS OF THE SYNOD ON RELIGIOUS LIFE:**

### TO BE 'RELIGIOUS AND MISSIONARY' AFTER THE SYNOD

Fr Marcello Zago, OMI., Superior General  
(Special Secretary of the Synod)

### NEW PROPHETIC ROLES IN A MODERN WORLD

Br John Johnston, Superior General, FSC  
(Assistant Secretary of the Synod)

Afternoon: 14.15 hrs.

### SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(For Delegates of Member Congregations)

Place: Brothers of the Christian Schools; via Aurelia, 476

---

### SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 1995

PHILIPPINES - INDONESIA - PACIFIC ISLANDS

May 30 - June 3, 1995 - Divino Maestro (Ariccia)

---